

## “Multilinguals’ Resources: Using Spanish in English Language Spaces”

**Maria Isela Maier**, University of Texas at El Paso

While there has been research that examines the translanguaging practices of multilinguals in academia, there is limited scholarship dedicated to studying multilinguals in sites where multilinguals are the majority. Universities, in which the majority of the student population is predominantly Hispanic, are unique research sites to examine how students negotiate their language varieties to achieve effective communication in the academic environment.

**Scholarship:** Studies show that multilinguals use their language varieties as resources for effective learning (Canagarajah 2011 and Horner et al. 2011). Studies also demonstrate that one language doesn’t necessarily negatively interfere in the use of another (Canagarajah and Wurr 2011). Studies also show that adopting codemeshing in the classroom offers insight to students’ choices to make meaning (Canagarajah 2011 and Lee 2014). The goal of this project is to identify how students’ Spanish language is used as a resource. The findings will help advance the scholarship in adopting a multilingual approach in the teaching practices in writing and composition.

**Research Methods:** This is a qualitative study which will use ethnographic methods concentrating on observation of human social activities. The focus will be on the negotiating strategies students rely on when they have two languages available. The data collected will include interviews, participant observation, and artifact collection. This means interviews with students, classroom observation, observation of the course through Blackboard (e.g., discussions, messages, and all course assignments), as well as analyzing the student guide handbook and textbook. The goal of using ethnographic research methods is to use thick description (Geertz, 1973) to understand people’s ideologies, identities, attitudes, values, perceptions and emotional experiences. The product of ethnographic research is “an interpretive story, reconstruction, or narrative about a group of people (a [classroom] community)” (LeCompte and Schensul, 2010).

**Site/Participants:** The site for data collection is at The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP). Located on the border with Mexico, UTEP is a large research university with a primarily Hispanic student population. This study will be conducted in two separate sections offered in the spring of 2017 of RWS-1301 Rhetoric and Composition. This composition course is required for undergraduates attending the UTEP. Each section of RWS-1301 has a limit of 24 students per class.

**Participants:** Participants consist of two FYC instructors and up to 48 students. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with instructors and select students from each class section of the course. The selection criteria for students includes: a) Being on the continua of bilingualism; b) Representing a mix of genders and c) 18 years of age or older. Current number of student participants: 24.

**Theoretical Concepts/Conceptual Model:** I will use the theoretical framework from Suresh Canagarajah and his conceptualization of translanguaging. In addition, while there are numerous advocates for language diversity that have influenced my perspective for addressing students' linguistic resources, I will draw from the works of scholars such as Bruce Horner, John Trimbur, Melissa Lee, Adrian Wurr and Min-Zhan Lu among other proponents of language diversity. These authors recognize the value in adopting a more multilingual approach in teaching writing and composition and their scholarship has played an instrumental role in redefining the educational landscape for multilinguals and instructors alike. I will also address language ideology drawing from the works by Kate Mangelsdorf and Scott Lyons to name a few.

**Research Questions:** The overarching research question that I will explore is:

1. How do multilingual students, in specific Spanish dominant bilinguals or English dominant bilinguals, move between languages in sites where Spanish is common and is encouraged by their instructors.

In addition, I am hoping that my data will help explore these questions:

2. When bilingual students in English writing classes are encouraged to use Spanish, are they prompted to use translanguaging?
3. What are students' language ideologies in reference to translanguaging?

**One to three questions** to direct discussion of your project; and project materials on which you'd like feedback, for instance, excerpts from coded or uncoded fieldnotes,