

# Translanguaging in the Classroom

By Isabella Murk

Translanguaging is the process of using multiple languages to learn or communicate with others. In my fourth-grade bilingual classroom, my students are constantly translanguaging (García & Wei, 2014). I teach my students to use their bilingual brains to support their learning in Spanish and English. I do this in several ways, primarily by teaching cognates, cross-linguistic connections, and allowing students to respond in either language. For teachers who may not know their students' native languages, these strategies still support your students. While some languages have more cognates or cross-linguistic connections than others, these can be used whether the teacher fluently speaks the language or not. These strategies allow multilingual students to feel empowered by their multilingualism at school.



## Cognates

### What are cognates?

Cognates: words that have the same or similar meaning and orthography in different languages, such as geography and geografía.

### Examples:

- teacher-created anchor charts
  - Libro de cognados/Book of Cognates - a book for students to keep track of their cognates found independently
- Pictures included on the next page.

### Rationale:

Using cognates encourages students to recognize that their bilingualism supports their second language development. Because English and Spanish use Latin roots, you can use cognates to support student learning of academic language in math and science. These will support your students' language development across languages rather than focusing solely on their first or second language.



## Cross-Linguistic Connections

### What are cross-linguistic connections?

Cross-linguistic connections: how Spanish and English conventions are similar or different, such as verb endings or grammar rules.

### Rationale:

Teaching students to make these connections supports their language development in both languages. These connections allow students to recognize similarities and differences between two languages. Students strengthen their understanding of these conventions by learning how the concept works in a different language.

### Examples:

- Syntactic awareness: word order in sentences - luz solar vs. sunlight
- Morphological awareness: prefixes and suffixes - trans- in English vs. tras- in Spanish
- Adjective and noun order - tectonic plate vs. placa tectónica
- Verb tenses: English -ed ending and Spanish -ado ending, such as "it is abandoned" vs. "está abandonado"
- Verb tenses: English -ing ending vs. Spanish -iendo



## Student Response

### Rationale:

In many multilingual programs, teachers follow specific language time allocations. While teachers should aim to use the assigned language, students benefit from using both languages all day. When students respond in the opposite language, they show you that they understood the task in the original language. This is part of the language learning process. Using translation apps or websites allows teachers to translate student writing in their native language into the language they understand. Even if teachers do not know the language, their students can write, and they can translate their response to understand how well they can complete the academic task after removing some language barriers.

### Examples:

- Students write in both languages to complete assignments
- Students verbally use both languages to respond to questions
- Students using their native language to respond to texts in English

# Classroom Examples

**Cognados de ¡Supervivencia! Desierto**

desierto	desert
importante	important
abandonado	abandoned
paraliza	paralyze
urgencia	urgency
resultado	resulted
situación	situation
Sobrevivir	survive
actitud	attitude

A list of cognates that students remembered before WIDA ACCESS testing to remind students how their Spanish brains can support their reading in English

**Cognates**

circuit	electricity	chocolate	super	office	hotel	battery	dinosaur	music	galaxy	animals	analyze	computer	million	banana	fiction	celebrate	investigate	capybara	fractions	color	map
circuito	electricidad	chocolate	super	oficina	hotel	bateria	dinosaurio	música	galaxia	animales	analizar	computadora	millón	banana	nonfiction	celebrar	investigar	capibara	fracciones	color	mapa

Cognates found in a specific informational text highlighting the differences between the languages

Student writing example - the first two sentences were completed as a class in English, but the third was completed independently in their preferred language.

Directions: Complete the sentences using because, but, and so.

- Playing in the sand is fun, because you can build a sandcastle
- Building a snowman is fun, but you need gloves so your hands don't get cold
- At the beach there is a lot of sand, so puedo jugar la arena

**Fraction Vocabulary**

**Numerator:** the number above the line in a fraction  
 numerador

**Denominator:** the number below the line in a fraction  
 denominador

**Unit Fraction:** a fraction whose numerator is 1  
 fracción unitaria

**Equivalent Fractions:** two fractions that are the same size  
 fracciones equivalentes

Math anchor chart with Spanish vocabulary words underneath the English words

After reading articles about a tropical rainforest and a desert, students completed a quick write about the living and nonliving factors in each environment.

English	Español
idea	idea
castor	castor
robot	robot
favor	favores
moment	momentos
animals	animales
rest	resto
chocolate	chocolate

**tropical Rainforest**

the desert is hot and hay is lot of sand and captus and camayos and animales maybe some coyotes and burros yo no se pero aveo que elefantes me in the fotos thers of los of sand and worm animos nonliving things are so not thers the Rain forest is

Student's Libro de Cognados after reading part of Robot Salvaje (The Wild Robot). Some of the cognates are not correct, but it allows for more targeted vocabulary instruction while reading the book.

**Carnivoros**  
 Carnivores

Polar bear eat seals. Seal eat arctic cod. Arctic cod eats krill. Krill eat algae.

**Wolverine**

**LEON Chita Rhino**  
 Lions and Wolves

**OTCA**  
 Bull Ege Tiger

Fact: Most of the animals are Carnivores

all animals i could

Spider, Wolf, Squid, White Shark, Polar bear, Seal

Group activity for a science reading listing as many carnivores or omnivores as they could allowing students to use English and Spanish.

**Omnivoros**  
 omnivores

Los omnivoros comen plantas y carne de animales o de humanos los sos comen carne y caldo es fito es van a o tro paisi

**OSOS, MaPaches,**

chipmunk, racoon, brown rat, crow, laboon

Los muhos comen banana!!

Reflection to reading I Survived the Great Chicago Fire. This student chose to write primarily in Spanish, even after reading the text in English, but she uses a few English words, specifically with proper nouns, and uses emojis to show her feelings about her writing.

Write at least one paragraph about what you would do if you were Oscar in I Survived the Great Chicago Fire.

- How would you try to get your suitcases back?
- Would you save Jennie and Bruno? Why or why not?
- Describe your feelings at the beginning, middle, and end of the fire.

Si yo estuviera en el chicago fire yo ya estuviera muerta porque yo nunca sobrevivir en el fuego pero si yo sobribiere el great chicago fire yo primero salvaria a jeeny y bruno y agaras un bote y ir ala casa de ms baros porque la casa de el sobribio y fueron pa la casa para que sobribir si no nos morimos pero no nos murimos no ceremos murir bueno ya salvamos a jenny y a bruno

## A few reminders about these examples:

- All of the students in my classroom come from Spanish-speaking households, so their linguistic repertoires all include English and Spanish.
  - 30% of their school day is spent learning in Spanish, and 70% is in English.
  - Many of these strategies work with other languages, but it may be more challenging to put them into practice with some languages.
  - Allowing students to draw, insert photos, or add emojis to their writing provides them with additional opportunities to communicate in another language.
- Multilingual children's brains constantly use translanguaging to make sense of the world around them. Their multilingual brains are powerful assets to their lives now and in the future. These strategies empower students through their multilingual identity rather than limiting them to an "English Learner" identity at school.

## Reference

García, O., & Wei, L. (2014). Translanguaging: Language, bilingualism and education. Palgrave Macmillan.