

8 Translanguaging as a Pedagogical Resource in Multilingual Classrooms in South Africa: Influence of Home Language on the L2/L3 Academic Writing of Preservice University Student Teachers

Verbra Pfeiffer

‘We die. That may be the meaning of life. But we do language. That may be the measure of our lives.’

Toni Morrison (2019)

Introduction

Research over the last two decades has shown that many second/third language (L2/L3) speakers of English have learnt to use their home language (L1) repertoire when engaging with English (speaking/writing). In light of this, academics in South Africa are creating curriculum content to accommodate the multilingual student population. Associated with the complex nature of teaching English are the informed theories and beliefs about writing and how people learn to write ([Canagarajah, 2011](#); [Carstens, 2016](#); [García, 2009](#); [Hyland, 2020](#); [Ivanĭc, 1998](#); [Matsuda, 2015](#); [Pfeiffer, 2019](#)). What we know about writing and how to teach it can assist us in reflecting on our ‘assumptions and enable us to approach teaching methods with an informed and critical eye’ ([Hyland, 2020](#): 1). Against this

backdrop, I focus on experiences with and the influence of the home language on writing in a university with multilingual students in South Africa.

During the apartheid era in South Africa, university students (Black, White, Coloured and Indian) from more ‘privileged’ rich and working-class backgrounds studied in either English or Afrikaans and only students who achieved a certain aggregate in English or Afrikaans at school could attend university. However, in the postapartheid era, some universities began to reduce their admission standards to accommodate students from all backgrounds, including those from underprivileged backgrounds who may not have the proficiency in English or Afrikaans.

To address this, lecturers have to create course material that can assist these students to understand the content. Accordingly, lecturers are cognisant of the fact that ‘underprivileged’ students often lack cognitive academic language proficiency which is one of the biggest stumbling blocks to achieving academic success (Pfeiffer & Van der Walt, 2016; Van der Silk & Weideman, 2007; Weideman 2003). However, some scholars argue that the reason students lack cognitive academic language proficiency has to do with the fact that they do not master English for academic purposes early on when learning the language (Carstens, 2016; Pfeiffer, 2019).

In the past, some universities, such as the University of Pretoria, Stellenbosch University and the University of Free State, were Afrikaans-medium institutions. However, currently 24 of the 26 universities in South Africa are English-medium, putting pressure on students to master English to succeed academically. Currently, there is no possibility for the students to use home languages such as isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sepedi and Setswana in lectures or in academic writing. In light of this, in some bi/multilingual education contexts in South Africa, institutions such as the University of KwaZulu-Natal and Stellenbosch University offer lectures and study material in more than one language, allowing students to exploit their bi/multilingual proficiency without having to focus on one language only (Pfeiffer, 2019; Van der Walt & Dornbrack, 2011). Some universities, such as Stellenbosch University, the Cape Peninsula University of Technology and North West University, have developed a multilingual app called Mobilex, which students can use in lectures when they do not understand a word used by the lecturer (Van der Merwe, 2016). Using this app, students can look up the unknown words in their home language (isiXhosa, isiZulu, Afrikaans) (Van der Merwe, 2016).

Globally, there are two issues surrounding multilingualism. Firstly, ‘Should we allow only the target language (English in the South African context) in the academic literacy classroom?’; secondly: ‘Should we create space for students to draw on their L1 or strongest language as a social, linguistic and cognitive resource?’ (Carstens, 2016: 208). Carstens (2016) posed these questions to highlight the importance of deciding whether to

allow students to use only their target language or to allow them to draw on their L1. Today, lecturers are encouraged to allow students to draw on their L1 in the classroom to help them better understand the course material.

Currently, lecturers in South Africa are allowing students to use their strongest languages (usually their L1) in the classroom, especially when discussing difficult concepts or compulsory reading such as academic articles. As lecturers, we endeavour to help students understand the principles of good writing, including sentence structure and organisation, and to understand the importance of developing this skill. In a multilingual classroom, student communication often involves ‘multilingual discursive practices’ (García, 2009: 45), which implies that they may switch between languages. This can be a challenging process. This study aimed to investigate the extent to which students engage in translanguaging, where they write in one language but think in another, often their home language.

According to [Palfreyman and Van der Walt \(2017\)](#), translanguaging is a strategy that involves using the available languages to make academic content, such as techniques, assessments and practices used in class, more understandable for the student. They assert that translanguaging, as a strategy, can be viewed as both a way individuals communicate and a pedagogy. When applied to writing, translanguaging enables students to draw on their linguistic resources and experiences with writing practices ([Kaufhold, 2018](#)). In my view, translanguaging is an internal process that allows students to use their home language as a tool to assist them in their academic writing process.

In this chapter, I discuss the data collected at a university in Cape Town during the first and second semesters of training for preservice student teachers. In the first semester, students’ opinions were gathered on what they thought good writing is and whether their home or community language has a role in this process. It should be noted here that although most South African students have more than one community language, their language repertoire includes just 1 of the 11 official languages which they speak at home ([Pfeiffer, 2019](#)).

In the second semester, data collection took place after the preservice student teachers had completed a period of teaching practice at schools. During this phase, the students were asked the same questions again to find out whether their views on what good writing is had changed. It is important for future teachers, who use English as the language of learning and who teach learners with English as their second or third language, to develop a nuanced, multilingual perspective on academic writing.

I then focus on various translanguaging pedagogies that can assist future teachers when teaching writing in the classroom. It is important to raise awareness of the advantages of translanguaging strategies in writing, and teachers should encourage learners to use these strategies when planning, structuring and revising their writing. By understanding the

value of good writing and the role that translanguaging can play in it, future teachers will be more likely to encourage their learners to use these strategies.

The research questions addressed in this chapter are the following:

- (1) How can translanguaging pedagogy be employed in academic writing courses?
- (2) How does the home or community language play a role in the writing process?

This research comprised a long-term study, which contributes to an area of translanguaging that we know little about so far, namely academic writing.

Literature Framework

Second language writing in a multilingual classroom.

According to Hyland (2020: 2), the term ‘second language writing’ (L2) is ambiguous because it embraces writing in any language other than the writer’s ‘native’ language and encompasses writing where the target language is dominant outside the classroom. In this regard, Hyland argues that it is not only the writing that is complex and interesting, but the writers themselves (Hyland, 2020). What Hyland points to is that various factors, like the writer’s background, their language proficiency, their purpose for writing and any previous writing experiences that may have been drilled into them by their schoolteachers, are all connected to the writers themselves. These factors are addressed in the discussion section of this chapter.

In light of what Hyland implies above, Casanave notes the following:

The field of L2 writing is as much about people who write (including ourselves) as it is about texts. People are idiosyncratic, all steeped in our own histories of L1 and L2 literacy and our own shifting contextualised practices. (Casanave, 2012: 297)

Casanave’s view is particularly relevant, especially in relation to multilingual learners, whose histories of their L1 affect their writing process. I discuss this further in the discussion section of this chapter.

Writing may be regarded as marks on a page or screen, a ‘coherent arrangement of words, clauses and sentence structured according to a system of rules’ (Hyland, 2020: 3). If L2 writing is conceptualised in this way, we will have to direct our attention to writing as a product, thus promoting a focus on the grammar and formal units of the text. In reality, learning to write in a foreign or second language involves more than this; it requires ‘linguistic knowledge, vocabulary choices, syntactic patterns and cohesive devices that comprise the building blocks of texts’ (Hyland, 2020: 4).

Writing is often viewed as a matter of imitating and manipulating models provided by the teacher, focusing on grammatical and lexical knowledge and writing development (Hyland, 2020: 4). In South Africa, this approach is perpetuated due to the pressure on teachers by the education department to complete the curriculum, leaving little time to focus on the writing process itself (planning, writing, revising, editing). Teaching writing in this way means that learners are often only taught to write 'well enough' to pass English.

I argue that the main criteria of good writing are accuracy and clarity, as learners should be able to express themselves clearly when writing in English. I agree with Hyland (2020: 5) that if we teach writing by developing learners' skills to produce fixed patterns, 'then correcting problems in writing will be under the control of the student's language system'. This approach can also reduce the pressure on learners, especially those for whom English is not their first language, as they will not be overwhelmed by the need to master multiple aspects of English grammar, syntax and semantics simultaneously. Next, I look at various studies that demonstrate how L2 learners require a higher level of linguistic and cognitive resources to coordinate their range of writing processes and achieve writing fluency.

In a study conducted by Wang and Wen (2002) with Chinese learners of English, it was found that the L1 was frequently used during three processes: generating ideas, organising ideas and process controlling. In a study also conducted with L1 learners, Van Weijen *et al.* (2009) examined L1 use by Dutch learners of English during four L2 writing tasks. Both studies found that besides the regular use of the L1 in generating ideas, providing self-instructions and making meta-comments, the researchers also observed that the quantity of the L1 fluctuated considerably for individual writers across the writing tasks. They discovered that these differences were not due to the students' target language proficiency, but rather to their general writing ability. The research team regarded this as evidence that writing ability is a stronger predictor of L1 use than target language proficiency (Payant, 2020; Van Weijen *et al.*, 2009; Wang & Wen, 2002). In a study conducted by Pfeiffer in 2015, where expressive writing was used to improve students' academic writing, Pfeiffer found that the expressive writing exercises, which were originally used with psychology patients, helped first-year second language students at a university in South Africa to improve their academic writing (Pfeiffer, 2015). Pfeiffer's aim was not only for the students to gain confidence in writing in English but also to become proficient in their target language, which was achieved through the use of expressive writing. In view of the three studies shown above and the findings of the current study in South Africa, I maintain that these studies reflect the possibility that an L1 student's writing ability may be stronger than that of a student with target

language proficiency. For this reason, I look at ways that lecturers can assist multilingual students to improve their writing ability. For this purpose, I include a translanguaging pedagogy that students can use to improve their writing skills.

Translanguaging in the classroom

Translanguaging is defined as ‘the ability of multilingual speakers to shuttle between languages, treating the diverse languages that form their repertoires as an integrated system’ (Canagarajah, 2011: 401). This implies that bi/multilingual learners can ‘transfer literacy, problem-solving, abstract thinking, and content developing across the integrated system of languages the learners have developed’ (Ali, 2021: 17). Translanguaging pedagogy has subsequently been developed using these features.

In two case studies conducted by Carstens in 2014 and 2016, students at a university in Pretoria, South Africa, were divided into groups with others who spoke the same language, such as isiXhosa, isiZulu, Afrikaans and English (as the home language). As part of the study, the students were asked to work with a questionnaire about their field of study (economics) and to answer questions on translanguaging. However, many privileged Black students were hesitant to engage in the translanguaging exercise, claiming that they had spent most of their nine years of schooling learning in English and found it difficult to convey the discussions in their home language (isiXhosa or isiZulu). Nevertheless, a few groups of Black South African students managed to hold discussions in their home language (isiXhosa or isiZulu). Notably, the privileged Black students preferred to discuss the questionnaire with each other in English. The Afrikaans-speaking students benefitted from the translanguaging exercises, as they had attended Afrikaans-medium schools and were now attending an English-medium university.

Carstens’ observation during the study was that, as the lecturer, she faced difficulties communicating with the groups of Black students who chose to discuss the questionnaire in their home language (isiXhosa or isiZulu). She realised that mixing the groups would have facilitated better translanguaging. Carstens concluded that, as lecturers in South Africa, we are at a disadvantage in such situations, making it difficult to embrace translanguaging in the classroom (Carstens, 2022).

García *et al.* (2017) offer three framing concepts for translanguaging pedagogy: (1) stance, which refers to the way bi/multilingual learners use their entire linguistic repertoire when learning; (2) design, which emphasises the fact that translanguaging strategies should be designed deliberately before using them in class; and (3) shifts, which describe the results of incorporating translanguaging pedagogical practices in the classroom to encourage learners to use all their linguistic resources.

These four translanguaging concepts mentioned suggest that learners can leverage their linguistic repertoires to acquire English (Conteh, 2018; Wang, 2022). In addition, translanguaging pedagogy can be viewed as a teaching strategy that ‘provides concrete foundations to re-examine the roles of teachers and the parts of students and revisit the goals of pedagogy and the process of classroom learning and teaching in the multilingual era’ (Wang, 2022: 2). In the following sections of this chapter, I explore various translanguaging pedagogical techniques that can be used effectively in the multilingual classroom.

Multilingualism in navigation between languages in the South African context

Researchers have found that multilingualism is influenced by ‘the range in individuals’ learning trajectories, age of acquisition, context of study, and language (psycho)typologies’ (Cenoz, 2003; De Angelis *et al.*, 2015: 6; Jessner, 2006). Payant (2020) argues that over the past decade, there has been growing interest in the study of multilingual learners (De Bot & Jaensch, 2015), with a focus on how they navigate and use their linguistic resources to communicate and create meaning (Canagarajah, 2011; García & Orteguy, 2020). It has been established that multilingualism entails navigating between languages where learners draw on all their resources. Today, this is conceived of by some researchers ‘as being joined by soft rather than hard boundaries in the mind’ (Gunnarsson *et al.*, 2015: 2). This implies that multilingual learners are no longer bound to the strict grammar and language rules of English but may draw on their full range of linguistic resources, including their home language. From a pedagogical perspective on multilingualism, educators are advocates for teaching methodologies that reject monolingual approaches to language learning (Cummins, 2017). As a result, teachers are ‘increasingly examining the potential for approaches that bridge learners’ languages and foster greater overall language awareness’ (Ballinger, 2013; Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Cummins, 2017; Dault & Collins, 2016; Galante, 2019; Garcia *et al.*, 2017; Payant, 2020: 313).

In a study conducted by Cenoz and Gorter (2011), the writing practices of multilingual learners of English were examined. Their exploratory study was conducted with 165 high school students who had either Basque or Spanish (or both) as their L1 and were learning English (L3). The participants completed a picture description task in each language. The findings revealed that if scores in one language task were high, they tended to be high in the other language(s) as well, regardless of target language proficiency. In addition, they found that all linguistic systems were activated and that cross-linguistic influence was multidirectional, especially for lexical functions.

Van Rooy's (2021) study, conducted at a university in South Africa, required students to complete a questionnaire and a self-portrait of the languages they knew. Although most of the South African (White, Black, Coloured, Indian) students acknowledged the languages that they could speak or knew, most of them felt that they were more comfortable speaking English even though it was not their home language. When the students were asked about the importance of diversity in South Africa, all the students thought that it was important that we (South Africans) embrace the various cultures and languages and that it would be a good idea for South Africans to learn an African language. From a multilingual perspective, [Van Rooy \(2021: 99\)](#) argues that in the 'African context, English and other colonial languages generally exist in the presence of intense multilingualism at the individual and societal levels'. She found that with the spread of English in the African context, there was relatively close contact between English home language speakers and the indigenous populations which extended over periods of time.

In South Africa, the history of colonial occupation and settlement led to limited contact between the White population and the indigenous populations until the late 20th century ([Van Rooy, 2020](#)). However, since 1994, there has been an increase in contact between English native speakers and the growing Black middle class. It was expected that the social changes brought about in South Africa would lead to the language repertoires of English home language South Africans becoming more bi- and multilingual over time and that this societal change would result in changes to the varieties of South African Englishes ([Van Rooy, 2021](#)). South African scholars were concerned that English would replace the indigenous languages ([De Klerk, 1999](#); [Kamwangamalu, 2003](#)). However, 'more recent work indicates that the African home languages remain important in the repertoires of multilingual South Africans and that English does not seem to replace the home languages in the domain of cultural identity' ([Van Rooy, 2021: 100](#)). In South Africa, being multilingual is seen as valuable, allowing individuals to show respect and build friendships by communicating with people in their home languages ([Van Rooy, 2021](#)).

Methodology

The data used in this study were taken from a longitudinal study conducted between 2016 and 2019. [Table 8.1](#) gives the number of participants per year who were included in the study.

This study involved a total of 427 preservice student teachers at a university in South Africa. Over the 4 years I collected data by asking them to complete a written questionnaire that aimed to raise their

Table 8.1 Years in which the study was conducted and the number of students who participated

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019
Participants	62	74	214	77

awareness of the importance of good writing and the potential role of their home language in strengthening their academic writing skills. The questionnaire can be found further on in this section. Globally, it is acknowledged that academic writing can be challenging, especially for the multilingual students in South Africa, who are L2 or L3 English speakers attending English-medium universities. Every year, I asked the students to reflect on what constitutes good writing and why it is important. Many of them admitted that they had never considered these questions before. By doing so, they gained insight into not only the importance of good writing, but also how they could use their home language when writing in English.

As both the primary investigator of this study and the lecturer of the participants, I was easily able to obtain responses from the students, who were comfortable cooperating with me in this study. The data were collected in both semesters of the academic year. The participants' home languages included Afrikaans, English, German, IsiXhosa, IsiZulu, Siswati and Iritrean. Before completing the questionnaire, which was in English, the students signed a consent form, granting me permission to use their responses. I chose to use English for the questionnaire because it is the only language that I speak and write well, making it easier for me to analyse the data. The university provided ethical clearance for the study, and I ensured that the students understood that their participation was voluntary and that their responses would remain anonymous. Thankfully, my students were willing and eager to complete the questionnaire.

The questionnaire students had to complete in the first semester of the academic year included the following questions:

- (1) What is good writing and why is it important to develop that ability?
- (2) For English FAL students: do you use your home language when you write? If so, how do you do it?
- (3) When does writing in English become challenging for you?
- (4) What is the most challenging part of writing for you (home language and FAL)?

In this questionnaire, I focused on what constitutes good writing and its importance, as well as the challenges students face when writing and how they used their home language when writing.

In the second semester, I administered a follow-up questionnaire to the students after they had completed a term of teaching practice at various schools. This second questionnaire contained the following questions:

- (1) Was there anything specific that you noticed about the learners' writing?
- (2) After your practice teaching experience, has your view on what good extended writing might be changed?
- (3) If you observed both HL and FAL classes, what differences did you notice between the English HL and English FAL learner?

They were also asked whether their views on good writing had changed and to name some of the trends they noticed in learners' writing when teaching English language.

Some examples of the students' responses to the second questionnaire appear below. The names of the students provided are all pseudonyms.

I did not mark writing assessments, however, I did realise that in learners' answers, they struggled with spelling and sentence structure mostly in both Home Language and First Additional Language classes. (Susan)

Learners struggled to formulate good arguments. What I mean by this is that when writing in response to a topic, they struggled in answering the essence of the essay. They would write a surface level response, which was correct, but did not manage to get to the 'heart' of it. (Peter)

Learners tend to stray from the topic they were given. They initially answer the question correctly, but when I compared the first and last paragraph in an essay it wasn't coherent. (Jonas)

Yes. I am more aware of what is considered good writing and weaker writing. (Colin)

Yes. Being the person assessing the text changed my view as I knew what the teachers expected and exactly what I need to mark. Being exposed to different levels of writing also helped. (Samantha)

Yes. It is very subjective to each learner's personal ability in writing. (Unathi)

Home Language and FAL learners had a difference in vocabulary. HL: learners also spoke more fluently and with confidence. 'Higher', 'posh' English was used by HL learners, there wasn't a big difference. I could do the same exercise (an old FAL exam question) with both Gr. 10 HL and Gr. 9 FAL learners and they could answer more or less the same questions and analysed it somewhat the same. They also struggled with stereotypes and metaphor questions. (Nikki)

FAL learners tend to write more informally on their writing whereas HL learners do not have this problem. HL also tend to write better in the sense of sticking to one idea per paragraph and no rambling and not going over the word limit. (Tony)

HL learners pay more attention when reading their questions whilst FAL learners, who were confused with some terminology, tend to rush to finish their papers. For example, if the question is made up of two sections, they forgot to address both parts. (Trudy)

In this study, I mainly used a qualitative methodology comprising a typical three-tiered analytic process (Miles & Huberman, 1994) whereby I prepared the datasets and checked for completeness, analysed the information and identified themes and categories and synthesised the data by abstracting possible trends and linking the data to other research insights.

To ensure trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), I identified themes in the data and then refined them. These are presented in the discussion section. All the text in italics, as seen in the examples above, are verbatim quotes from answers given by the students.

Data Analysis and Discussion

I used several strategies to analyse my data, including word frequency counts to support my identification of themes and categories (Pfeiffer, 2019). The first question asked in the questionnaire was ‘What is good writing?’ Some of the students’ responses are given in italics below. In recognition of the subjectivity involved in identifying themes and subthemes, I supported the coding process with word frequency searches, relating words or phrases in their context to particular themes. The focus of this chapter is mainly on the questionnaire administered in the first semester, with just one question taken from the second semester questionnaire. Some of my questions have two parts, in which case, I focus firstly on the first question and then on the second part of that question. My intention is to give the reader an idea of some of the data I analysed on good writing and the challenges experienced by students writing in a language that is not their home language. For example, I did a search of the word ‘flow’ and its co-text, which subsequently indicated that it appears in two senses, thus describing writing from two perspectives:

Mary: It engages the reader and flows effortlessly (from the perspective of the reader).

Johan: Sentences must be coherent; must flow from one sentence to the next (from the perspective of the writer).

By identifying these two perspectives, I could identify overarching themes with particular subthemes. Next, I created a word cloud using the students’ responses to the question ‘What is good writing?’ from the first semester questionnaire of 2016 to visualise the most frequently used words. These include ‘translate’, ‘think’, ‘understand’, ‘writing’ and ‘explain’. The other words seen in the word cloud are also words that appeared frequently in the students’ responses. While I do not go into detail about the other words that appear in the word cloud, I would like to mention that the word ‘Afrikaans’ is also prominent in the word cloud because many of the students that took part in the study were Afrikaans

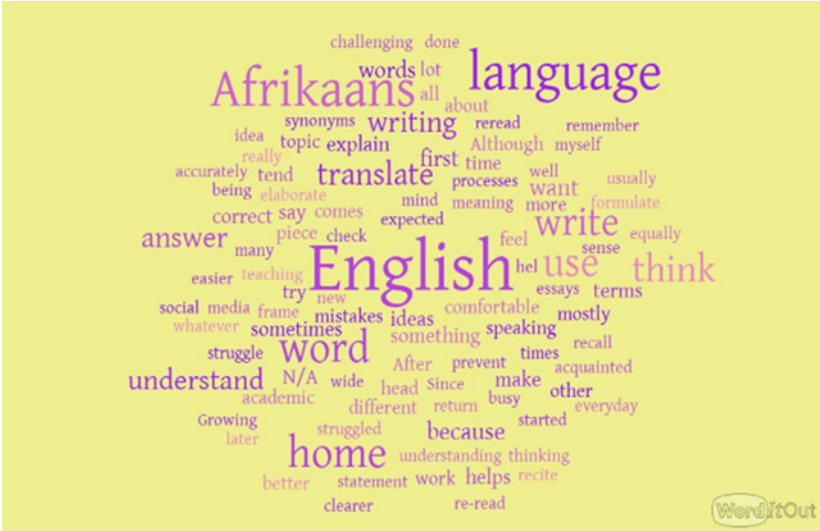


Figure 8.1 Word cloud

home language speakers and thus referred to Afrikaans in their responses. For example, ‘Afrikaans is my home language and the sentence structure in Afrikaans is different than in English’. Using the word cloud (Figure 8.1), I could search for the prominent words in the Word document for each year group and ascertain how many students used those words.

Table 8.2 below displays the number of students who used the words they associated with good writing over the 4 years. The number of students who participated in the study is indicated for each year, and the words used by them are displayed under each year.

Table 8.2 Example of word counts

Words	2016 N = 62	2017 N = 74	2018 N = 212	2019 N = 77
Clear(ly)	25 (40%)	38 (51%)	121 (57%)	38 (49%)
(In)correct(ly)	8 (13%)	62 (84%)	80 (38%)	62 (80%)
Easy, easily, ease, easier	0	1 (1,3%)	34 (16%)	12 (15,5%)
Grammar/grammatical(ly)	16 (26%)	71 (96%)	99 (46%)	71 (92%)
(ideas sentences) flow	35 (56%)	14 (19%)	17 (8%)	14 (18%)
Effect(ively)	10 (16%)	18 (24%)	27 (13%)	18 (23%)
Structure of text	9 (14%)	20 (27%)	63 (30%)	20 (26%)
Cohesion/coherence/cohesive(ness)	26 (42%)	71 (96%)	16 (7%)	71 (92%)

Table 8.2 indicates the various prominent words that I focused on, as these were the ones that appeared in most of the answers given by the students over the years. It should be noted that in 2018, I had my largest class, and for that reason, I had more responses to the questions. We can see that words like ‘clearly’, ‘grammar’, ‘effect(tively)’ and ‘cohesion/coherence/cohesive’ were the most common words that students used in their understanding of good writing. Students’ responses included ‘good writing should be easy to understand’. I am not certain why they saw that as part of good writing because they never went into detail about that choice of wording. It is possible that their own writing was not always clear enough for their lecturers to understand and, therefore, they had to focus on making sure that what they wanted to convey to the reader was ‘easy to understand’. I found it interesting that, in 2018, many students mentioned that the structure of the text was important for good writing; however, in the other years structure was referred to by only a few students. The reason for this could be that the 2018 participants regarded the structure of a text as important. It may be that in their previous years of studying, they might have lost marks in their assignments/tests because their texts were not structured correctly.

I applied a qualitative content analysis to my data. Subsequently, various themes emerged, which are discussed in more detail. The reason for just choosing a few data examples over the years to bring my point across (which will be addressed further on) was that students’ responses were all fairly similar.

One of the themes taken from the first question on what constitutes good writing was surface features, with a focus on words like ‘spelling’, ‘punctuation’ and ‘grammar’. The excerpts give the students’ responses in this regard:

Koos (2016): *Good writing should also be grammatically correct in order to be understood.*

Anita (2016): *Good writing is when: You have good grammar, You have good spelling,*

Another theme I noticed in my data was the ‘transparency’ of language, where the students’ used words like ‘clear’ and ‘makes sense’.

Frans (2017): *Good writing conveys the message of the writer clearly and succinctly.*

Andre (2017): *Good writing is writing that is grammatical correct, make meaning and sense and has a good spelling.*

An additional theme I came across was correctness/accuracy of language use.

Dezlin (2017): *Good writing makes use of punctuation, correct grammar, figures of speech, correct spelling*

According to Hyland (2020) control over surface features is crucial, and students need an understanding of how words, sentences and larger discourse structures can help them express the meanings they want to

convey. For this reason, I noticed that the students focused on spelling, grammar and punctuation. When considering the students' responses, I am of the opinion that their responses refer to and include linguistic knowledge, vocabulary choices, syntactic patterns and cohesive devices, as Hyland suggests.

Another prominent theme that emerged from their responses was that good writing flows. This theme focuses on structure at the sentence level and above the sentence level.

Sandra (2018): *flowing from one sentence to the next;*

Marlene (2018): *It must be logical – have a beginning, middle and end.*

Coherence/cohesion was another feature that the students regarded as very important for writing a good sentence.

Joe (2018): *Good writing is writing that is coherent, meaning that it is unified. It has to have flow so that reading is easy and natural.*

Tommy (2018): *formulate sentences coherently and effectively*

In regard to the students' responses, I believe that although students identify certain aspects of good writing, their own writing could not be considered 'good' according to their definitions. I assume that the students want to achieve this level of writing, but their confidence in themselves or their L1 might be a stumbling block. My assumption arises from some of the students' written comments, which stated that they would not have so much difficulty in writing in English if English were their home language. I agree with Hyland (2020: 4) when he argues that perhaps if students saw writing as a combination of lexical and syntactic forms, they might view 'good writing as the demonstration of knowledge of these forms and the rules behind them'. If multilingual students did not view writing in English as a rigid, all-or-nothing task, as often taught by teachers, they might perceive academic writing as an enjoyable language experience. This would especially be true if they were allowed to incorporate their home language into their English learning process. When the quality of their writing is assessed, they would be less likely to feel anxious about meeting the expectations of academic writing as set by the lecturers. A recent study at a South African university by Campbell and Prinsloo-Marcus (2022) explored this theme of student insecurity when writing in English and how the students also felt out of place at university. The study suggests that when lecturers share their own experiences and insecurities with university and English, the students feel more at ease. By opening up to the students about their own challenges, lecturers can help students to transition from school writing to academic writing at university level. Table 8.3 below indicates the way the students use their L1 when writing.

Table 8.3 presents the use of quantification in my data analysis, similar to Table 8.2, which involved using a survey questionnaire, comprising 'sampling questionnaire, questionnaire design, questionnaire

Table 8.3 Multilingual writing: Do you use your L1 when you write?

	2016 N = 62	2017 N = 74	2018 N = 212	2019 N = 77
Yes	22 (35%)	22 (30%)	22 (63%)	27 (36%)
No answers or yes/no	25 (40%)	8 (10%)	124 (58%)	37 (48%)
No	15 (20%)	45 (60%)	25 (12%)	13 (17%)
Combination of missing responses and responses with both Yes and No	25 (40%)	8 (40%)	124 (58%)	37 (48%)

administration’ to gather information about the group/population that took part in my study (Sukamolson, 2007: 3). This enabled me to analyse the behaviour/characteristics of my participants. This table indicates that most students used their L1 when writing. However, this response seems contradictory, as the second part of the question asked how they use their L1 when writing. Many students who claimed not to use their L1 when writing in English proceeded to answer the second part of the question by stating things like: ‘I will write the entire text in my home language, then translate it into English’. This inconsistency has to do with the fact that students were not supposed to answer the second question (How do you use your home language?) if their answer was ‘No’, yet they still provided a response. There were many similar responses to the second question. I am not certain whether they misunderstood the question or had other thoughts, but I did not pursue further clarification.

I now focus on the students who confidently wrote that they use their L1 when writing in English. According to these students, the most common technique is that of translation (also called ‘reword or convert’ from one language to another), as seen in the excerpts below:

Vanessa (2016): *I read the sentence in English and try to reword it in Afrikaans (or figure out what it should be in Afrikaans) in order to get a better understanding of it. I will then re-write it in English.*

Janet (2017): *I first think what I want to say in Afrikaans, then translating it to English.*

Marlene (2018): *for academic purposes, I use English, but I do make use of Afrikaans translations in my head, while writing*

Max (2019): *in my language [isiXhosa] ... in order to make a point you must use a series of words, however when I think I think in my language and quickly translate into English.*

We notice a definite shuttling between languages, as mentioned by Canagarajah (2011) and García (2009), which is defined as translanguaging. This may also be seen as movement taking place within the inner ‘self’. This constant inner shuttling between languages can be tiring for students, as they first have to write an entire text in their home language before translating and rewriting it in English. In South Africa, this translation has become ‘natural’ for students, as it is something they have been doing

since they were at school (Pfeiffer, 2022). Some students have been shuttling between languages since Grade 1, while others have only been doing so from Grade 4 onwards. Nevertheless, it is more challenging at university level, as they now have to use their home language at a higher level than at school, as the lecturers’ expectations are much higher.

Some students mentioned that if they do not know a word or sentence in English, they look it up in a dictionary or thesaurus, or use Google Translate (Pfeiffer, 2019). Another method mentioned that assisted them when writing in English is planning in the home language.

Gloria (2016): *I first get my thoughts together in Afrikaans...*

Jappie (2017): *I spend most of my time speaking isiXhosa and when I’m required to write anything in English, I first have to mentally prepare myself.*

Saartjie (2019): *I think then first in Afrikaans and then switch over to English when I know what I want to say or answer.*

Students’ writing often involves a process whereby they first start to think about what they want to say in their home language and how they want to say it in English, and then tackle the academic writing. During this translanguaging process, where the students first think in their home language and then switch to their L2, they make use of their entire language repertoire (García, 2009). However, this process can be time-consuming, especially considering the time constraints when writing in exams and tests.

Another method that assisted the students when writing was an awareness of the fact that direct translation is just part of the process:

Dewald (2016): *I will say it in Afrikaans and then try to capture the spirit of it in English.*

Thabo (2018): *I often use metaphors from my home language to write in English or just translate them. The general idea is being able to express oneself (IsiXhosa).*

Here, we see that the students tried to capture ideas in the way they would be written in their L1. However, they are aware that this is not always possible, as a direct translation does not always work in English.

In the second semester, once the students had returned from their teaching practice, they completed the second questionnaire. The question I asked was whether their perceptions of what constituted good writing had changed after

Table 8.4 Views on good writing in the second semester

Semester 2	2016	2017	2018	2019
Participants	14	39	N/A	29
Change in views on good writing	6	5	N/A	7

their practice teaching. Before the students completed the questionnaire, a class discussion was held about their experiences at the schools.

Table 8.4 indicates how many students participated in the study in 2016, 2017 and 2018, and how many of them changed their views on good writing. Note that no data were gathered in the second semester of 2018. My observation while talking to the students was that some were confused or unsure as to whether their perceptions of good writing had changed. Most of the students said that they were shocked at the poor writing skills of the learners in the school they had visited. I found this response interesting, as it did not answer the question of whether their perception of good writing had changed. It appears the students' awareness of learners' poor writing skills made them reflect on their answers regarding what constitutes good writing. They then realised that the learners clearly had no understanding of good writing.

Some of the students' responses to that question included: 'No, it hadn't, but I now realise...', 'I need to lower my expectations...' and '...it matters what level the student is as well...'. These were some of the factors that the students noticed while teaching the learners. The students noted that not all learners understood English well. Some students also felt that they had to lower their expectations of the learners and that they had to consider the English level the learner was at. From the responses, I gathered that the students' experiences at the schools had led them to consider that many of them also do not have English as a home language and that they should have more empathy for their learners. The students' responses tended to refer to how they use their L1 when writing in English, which they also saw in their learners. As a researcher, these responses gave me something to ponder on when I teach my own classes. Often, as lecturers, we ramble on in front of the class, assuming that all the students are following or know what we want to convey to them. We do not realise the frustration this brings for our multilingual students.

The problems students noticed with extended writing at school level were the same as they experienced at university level:

- (1) Problems pertaining to surface features such as spelling, punctuation and grammar (although many of them said grammar does not seem that important anymore).
- (2) Poor structure, limited vocabulary, wandering off topic and plain, weak language use.
- (3) Limited imagination and creativity.

As future English teachers, it is beneficial that the students were aware of the challenges they observed in schools. By acknowledging these issues, the students will be able to empathise with their future learners' struggles and reflect on their own struggles with writing. This will enable future teachers to develop various teaching strategies to assist their L2/L3 learners to improve their English writing skills at school level.

Implications for Writing Instruction in Multilingual Contexts

Although much of my discussion has not focused on translanguaging but rather on the data analysis, I maintain that my findings point to the effectiveness of translanguaging pedagogy for lecturers and teachers, particularly with regard to the first research question, which dealt with the way in which a translanguaging pedagogy could be employed in academic writing. For multilingual students in a tertiary academic context, the lecturer's use of a translanguaging pedagogy could possibly 'direct their instructional targets toward L2 vocabulary, L2 reading, and general knowledge, which are teachable goals' (Kim *et al.*, 2021: 13). To support students to develop the necessary knowledge to improve their academic writing, it might be helpful for teachers to focus on topic-specific vocabulary and background readings. By addressing these factors, teachers will assist students to improve their academic writing.

With regard to the second question concerning the role of the home or community language in the writing process, incorporating translanguaging in class will encourage students to embrace their home languages and refrain from viewing them as a handicap (Pfeiffer, 2019). As discussed in the previous section, students take on board the superficial and mechanical features of writing that teachers and lecturers focus on. When considering the studies discussing translanguaging pedagogy, I noted a striking similarity between my study in South Africa and the Basque/Spanish study. In both cases, the students' linguistic systems were activated, allowing them to draw on their full linguistic repertoire. Similarly, in the questionnaire responses from my students, I observed a significant cross-linguistic influence, where they would use their home language when writing in English. This influence of their L1 was multidirectional, with students moving freely between languages.

To better support students in their writing development, lecturers could enhance the features of writing above the sentence level (e.g. 'flow'), which many students indicated as important in their responses. While it is important to include formal elements in our courses, we should ensure that students learn how to apply grammatical knowledge for real purposes in real contexts (Hyland, 2020). Educators should be more tolerant of translanguaging in writing, especially when students use words from other languages, even in tests and examinations. By applying translanguaging strategies, we can open up spaces that will allow students to engage in the recursive process of writing, freely moving between the languages they speak (Valesco & García, 2014).

I support Hyland's (2018: 395) view:

As teachers we need to distinguish ourselves in understanding how students experience their lives, their studies and their disciplines while privileging TEXT above PRACTICE can sometimes lead us to treat language, and in particular writing, as primarily a linguistic, and perhaps even an autonomous, object rather than something which is socially embedded in particular lives, disciplines and contexts.

As mentioned earlier, a study conducted at a South Africa university by [Campbell and Prinsloo-Marcus \(2022\)](#) emphasised that lecturers should find a balance between assisting students to develop the academic language needed to be successful in higher education, and recognising and valuing the linguistic skills that students bring to university. My findings suggest that students acknowledge the value of drawing on home languages during the writing process.

Final Thoughts and Recommendations

It is important that language be understood from what speakers do with it, rather than its formal structure ([Makalela, 2019](#)). Previous research has found that bilinguals find the L1 an important resource for generating ideas ([Van Weijen *et al.*, 2009](#); [Wang & Wen, 2002](#)). More recent research with multilinguals with L3 has reached similar conclusions ([Cenoz & Gorter, 2011](#); [Gunnarsson *et al.*, 2015](#); [Tullock & Fernández-Villanueva, 2013](#)). In the case of L2 writers, ‘the L1 is the only other language that they can turn to; but for multilingual learners, they can turn to multiple language systems to reflect on their ideas’ ([Payant, 2020](#): 328). In this regard, multilingual individuals may draw on a subset of their languages to create meaning and communicate ideas ([Payant, 2020](#)). In the context of a multilingual South Africa, English may be viewed as being part of a bilingual framework, but with a multilingual mindset ([Van Rooy, 2021](#)).

[Jessner \(2008\)](#) argues that multilinguals have skills and knowledge that their monolingual counterparts do not possess and that multilingual learners can take advantage of the knowledge gleaned from prior language learning experiences. Therefore, in additional language writing instruction contexts, providing learners with a specific genre (e.g. argumentative, narrative) written in multiple languages may warrant greater attention, even in settings where educators do not share their learners’ linguistic heritage. Greater awareness of genre conventions across languages would offer new opportunities to gain insights into the target language but could also potentially influence how learners view writing in their additional languages. This is a hypothesis supported by the observation that knowledge is multidirectional ([Cenoz & Gorter, 2011](#); [Cummins, 2017](#); [Payant, 2020](#)). In addition, [Carstens \(2022\)](#) emphasises the benefits of lecturers in multilingual classrooms learning one of the other African languages spoken in South Africa. As lecturers, we should recognise the advantages that translanguaging strategies offer. These strategies present a distinct advantage that teachers should foster in learners so that they use them when planning, structuring and revising their writing.

Translanguaging may be viewed as offering alternative ways of viewing languages in the classroom, allowing resources to be fully exploited in constructing knowledge to open up rather than restrict opportunities to learn ([Probyn, 2019](#)). Such pedagogical translanguaging

practices can include transferring knowledge across languages (e.g. morphology, phonological awareness), transferring learning strategies, providing input in multiple languages and facilitating cross-cultural discussions (see e.g. Ballinger, 2013; Cummins, 2017; Galante, 2019). Teachers should encourage learners to focus on communicating meaning (rather than focusing on the language itself) in order to use their entire repertoire (García & Otheguy, 2020; Payant & Kim, 2015). Teachers should also raise learners' awareness of linguistic and cultural differences and similarities (Galante, 2019; Payant, 2020).

In regard to multilingual students, it is evident that they often turn to their L1 to help them meet their objectives (Canagarajah, 2011). I agree with Payant (2020) that there is a need for pedagogical practices that support and encourage the integration of languages. In addition, learners should be given opportunities to read, discuss and write about a given topic in multiple languages (Luk & Lin, 2014). Further, in the multilingual classrooms of South Africa, it is important for teachers to consider that content and argumentative foci should be inter- or multi-disciplinary, rather than being confined to a particular field of study (Eybers & Paulet, 2021). This chapter highlights the fact that multilingual students are inclined to shuttle between languages, even when writing.

Furthermore, I concur with Carstens (2013: 109) that 'collaboration [i]s the key to integration of language and content in academic literacy interventions'. By embracing this approach in our classes, we can create a more engaging and collaborative environment where students can freely engage with language and content.

In conclusion, I argue that lecturers should encourage the use of a translanguaging pedagogy in the classroom. The findings of this study suggest that multilingual learners translanguage independently in their writing process and that translanguaging is both a tool and a resource. With reference to the home and community language, I argue that teachers should endeavour to understand their students and where they come from. By adopting this mindset, teachers may treat language as a linguistic object rather than something which is drilled into the students 'parrot fashion'. Hence, translanguaging would break down barriers in the classroom. Accordingly, teachers/lecturers should avoid putting students who speak the same language in the same group when completing tasks. This chapter offers a useful signpost for practitioners seeking to enrich their repertoire with translanguaging pedagogy. Specifically, the research highlights the way students draw independently on their home language to organise and generate ideas and texts in the academic English writing process.

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