

Developing Critical Language Awareness Through the Evaluation of Multilingual Children’s Literature

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Despite the increased availability of multilingual literature within children’s literature as a whole, there remains a lack of high quality options. Existing research documents issues that can occur within translated materials, but this has not been converted into concrete tools individuals can use to analyze this literature to specifically critique the gaps. In order to provide this type of tool, the key criteria described in the existing research has been synthesized into a rubric which can be used to analyze texts. Strengths of the three main types of multilingual texts (translated, dual language, and translanguaging) are described, along with the unique elements which need to be considered when evaluating each form. The role of linguistic analysis in developing critical language awareness in teachers is discussed, along with developing community partnerships in order to expand linguistic resources.

“My students loved this book in English, so I bought it in Spanish too. Unfortunately, I had to get rid of it because the translation was so bad it was confusing students when they read.”

Elementary bilingual teacher

“I wanted to show my student that rhyming happens in every language, so I found a bilingual version of my favorite English rhyming text. I don’t speak her language, but just looking at the ends of the words, I realized that the translation didn’t actually rhyme. Why would they leave out that key element of the text?”

Primary grades literacy specialist

These quotes reflect common themes that have emerged during workshops focused on developing

critical language awareness in classroom teachers. These are teachers who, in general, are seeking to support and encourage the usage of their students’ full linguistic repertoires in the classroom, but who have either become frustrated by the variability in the quality of bilingual texts, or were not even aware of the pitfalls occurring in some texts. While many teachers have engaged in evaluating their classroom libraries for culturally responsive and diverse voices, they feel less equipped to do so when it comes to linguistically responsive texts.

Developing Critical Language Awareness

Teachers need to develop a critical eye for the examination of the texts they select for their students (Riley & Crawford-Garrett, 2016). Providing the skills and tools for evaluating multilingual texts starts with deepening teachers’ understanding of the role of language. Lucas, Villegas, and Freedson-González (2008) express the complexity of this well:

Because language is integral to almost all human endeavors, the majority of people do not attend to it at all. It is transparent. We look through language rather than at language. However, because language plays a central role in learning... it is imperative that teacher[s] cultivate... the willingness and skills for looking at language, rather than through it (pp. 367-368).

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It is important for teachers to develop a critical awareness of linguistic ideologies and their literary representations in order to serve all students, but especially those from non-dominant language backgrounds (Ghiso & Campano, 2013).

Alim (2010), defines critical language awareness as “interrogat[ing] the dominating discourse on language and literacy and foreground[ing] the examination and interconnectedness of identities, ideologies, histories/herstories and the hierarchical nature of power relations between groups” (p. 214). By developing critical language awareness, teachers can be further equipped to examine the linguistic practices occurring within the texts they use. Likewise, guided examination of bilingual texts can be a tool for developing critical language awareness. To engage in this type of guided examination, the use of rubrics and other evaluative tools is common (Dillon et al., 2018). However, there is not a widely available rubric for the assessment of multilingual books. In my teaching role within an undergraduate teacher preparation program, I direct a student research group. As a result of researching critical language awareness and its development in teachers, the students desired to create a concrete tool that they, and others, could use to increase their linguistic awareness and ability to evaluate the multilingual texts.

Value of Multilingual Books

Research on the value of bilingual books has grown exponentially in the last twenty years (de Jong & Gao, 2019). There is strong support within the biliteracy and broader literacy communities for the use of multilingual texts with students who are emergent bilinguals, but also with students across the board (Naqvi et al., 2013; Zapata & Laman, 2016). The provision of books in languages other than English establishes them as official materials within the curriculum that can be used in students’ multilingual development (Malsbary, 2013). Instead of simply being supplementary for emergent bilinguals, multilingual books become curriculum for all students (de Jong & Gao, 2019; Lotherington et al., 2008). The use of multilingual texts in both formal and informal ways serves to leverage both students’ own linguistic

knowledge and the knowledge and practices of their communities (Martinez et al., 2017; Stagg-Peterson & Heywood, 2007).

There are a variety of formats within bilingual children’s literature. Daly (2016) identifies them as Simultaneous or Sequential Publication, Parallel Texts, and Interlingual Books (p. 11). These are texts which a) are produced as separate books in two or more languages b) are designed with two languages side-by-side (commonly called Dual Language Books), and c) those which translanguage, or intermingle words and structures from multiple named languages. Each of these categories comes with its own strengths and cautions.

Simultaneous or sequentially translated monolingual books provide access to literature in multiple languages and can serve many functions. Students can use the two books together in ways similar to how they would utilize dual language books. However, separate texts can provide resources to support minority language development in contexts where it has been strongly suppressed (Daly, 2016). Creating separate texts is also a strong option for languages which have distinctively different written structures, such as directionality of text. Separating the languages allows for each language to follow its own written patterns. These books also fit the needs of language programs with policies which require the separation of languages. However, they fail to show the integrated way in which bilingual individuals function and limit the opportunities for comparative linguistic analysis that can occur with dual language texts (Alamillo, 2017).

The benefits of dual language books, or texts which provide the story in two languages within the same book, are equally documented. While there are critiques that these books allow students to focus on their stronger language and skip reading in their less proficient, there are key benefits as well. This specific structure allows students to see both languages and linguistic patterns represented in one text and supports the language practices of immigrant and indigenous communities, serving as a bridge between home and school (Daly, 2016). Children also use dual language texts to help develop their languages by identifying

cognates and developing other vocabulary strategies, using the more proficient language to support their holistic reading comprehension, and developing metalinguistic awareness – conceptual understanding of how language works – for both languages (Edwards et al., 2000). Bilingual children are not two separate entities but one whole individual possessing one linguistic repertoire and dual texts allow them to celebrate that. These books can also be a way for monolingual speakers to see other linguistic patterns and understand that those are just as valid (Riojas Clark et al., 2016).

The use of translanguaging in children's literature reflects the home practices of multilingual students and their communities (Alamillo, 2017; Riojas Clark et al., 2016). It allows students to see their common ways of communicating validated within a formal literacy setting. The use of additional languages can also give cultural authenticity and create connection when included in texts. However, it can also be done inappropriately and do a disservice to the story and its readers when used to simply "spice up" the text without a strong understanding of the practice as lived out in bilingual communities (Barrera et al., 2003, p. 146).

While one would hope that large, national publishers could be relied upon to put in the work to develop strong translated materials and also authentic language materials, that is too often not the case. Issues have been found across many languages and cultural backgrounds: Spanish/English (Alamillo, 2007; Barrera et al., 2003), Arabic/English (Dillon et al., 2018), Māori/English (Daly, 2016), Chinese/English (Huang & Chen, 2012, 2016), French/English (Van Coillie & Verschueren, 2014), English translated into Japanese, Chinese, and Korean (Jeong & Han, 2014), and Turkish/German (Ertem, 2014). From more discrete points to broader concepts, the main categories identified in the literature are: grammar and usage, language use, flow of text, presentation of languages, language integration, and cultural representation.

Within grammar and usage, the focus is on the correct usage of language and writing conventions within the translated text. This includes the proper use of diacritics (special symbols above the text, such as accent marks and umlauts) (Daly, 2016) and other phonetic indicators, such as vowel markers in Arabic (Dillon et al., 2018). Punctuation should also be correct, such as the inverted exclamation point in Spanish, or various ways of indicating dialogue. Translation should

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Explosion of Interest ≠ Explosion of Quality Books

While changing childhood demographics and research on the use of bilingual texts has increased the interest in multilingual books, the publishing industry hasn't always responded in quality ways. As Naidoo states in her book *Celebrating Cuentos* (2011):

In an effort to exploit the market, publishers sometimes allow quantity to replace quality, resulting in stereotypical images, poor translations, and cultural inaccuracies. Books that were originally created with the best intentions have often paved a rutty road, misrepresenting the very people they were intended to carry forward. (p.64)

be comprehensive and conceptual, not a word for word rendering, which often leads to incorrect syntax in the translated text (Dillon et al., 2016; Huang & Chen, 2012). Jeong and Han (2014) and Dillon et al. (2018) also highlight how properly translated titles are key to maintaining and conveying the essence of the book. When considering the flow of text, language should be evaluated for its maintenance of rhythm, cohesiveness, and additional literary structures such as rhyme, where possible (Jeong & Han, 2014). Within language use, the formality level of the original text should be maintained, therefore maintaining the author's voice and more aligned reading levels (Huang & Chen, 2016; Walker et al., 1996). Alamillo (2007) and Dillon et al. (2018) stress

the need to represent various dialects of the presented language correctly, not rely solely on formalized, academic language, or mismatching story context and dialect.

For dual language books, the presentation of languages is highly important as it signals the statuses of the languages (Daly, 2016). Presentation includes the location of the various text and the font formatting for each language (Daly, 2016; Dillon et al., 2018; Huang & Chen, 2016). It also includes directionality of the text, and entire book, for languages that have opposite script directionality, like Arabic and English (Dillon et al., 2018). The final aspect of presentation is how the text interacts with the visuals – whether it appears integrated or more as an add-on (Kümmerling-Meibauer, 2013; Walker et al., 1996). Connected to presentation is the completeness of the translation. All the additional front and back matter should also be translated in order to convey equal status among the languages, but is often not (Daly, 2016; Dillon et al., 2018; Huang & Chen, 2016). The category of language integration is focused on evaluating texts that translanguage. Barrera et al. (2003) and Mendoza and Reese (2001) stress the importance of examining language use literarily and not solely linguistically or orthographically. Translanguaging within the text should serve to further the story in some way. For example, it can be used to provide deeper characterization, reflect the setting, or inject humor or word play (Alamillo, 2017; Barrera et al., 2003; Ghiso & Campano, 2013; Mendoza & Reese, 2001). Barrera et al., (2003) note the ways in which translanguaging texts make moves that allow for comprehension by monolingual readers, such as direct translation following a word or phrase, or embedding contextual clues. In contrast, Alamillo (2017) stresses that translanguaging's main goal should be to reflect bilingual community practices.

The final category, cultural representation, is one that applies in various ways. When texts are selected to mirror students' cultures, there are certain aspects to consider, such as how well they allow students to connect (Alamillo, 2007). However, there are other times where texts are acting as mirrors for students to understand additional cultures (Mendoza & Reese, 2001). In both contexts, the presentation of

cultures, especially historically marginalized cultures, should be examined for stereotypes in portrayal and language (Ertem, 2014; Mendoza & Reese, 2001). Cultures need to be portrayed in their full complexity and nuance.

Existing research has documented key issues within bilingual children's literature, but unfortunately that has not resulted in a widely available tool for use in text selection. Dillon et al. (2018), building off of Huang and Chen (2016), do include a five criteria checklist for analyzing bilingual books: Text Appearance (font format), Language Effects (arrangement of text), Book Information (front and back matter), Translation (overall quality), and Cultural Relevance. However, their checklist does not include specific points for analysis within the area of translation, therefore assuming the user knows what elements lead to a quality translation. The checklist also only applies to dual language texts. There remains a need for an assessment tool that goes deeper into the issues identified in the research above and can be used to evaluate any of the three multilingual formats.

Rubric Development and Usage

As mentioned above, the development of the rubric was a collaborative effort in the undergraduate research group of preservice teachers that I oversee. To create the rubric, we collaboratively summarized the evaluation criteria and key areas of difficulty noted in the research above, paying close attention to both the aspects that were repeated across articles and specific outliers, such as text directionality, mentioned in articles focusing on lower incidence languages. This summary was then used to develop an in-depth rubric for evaluating the three types of multilingual texts. Below, key items for evaluation for each type of text are highlighted. The full rubric is included in Appendix A. The rubric, in its current version, serves as a draft to further ongoing dialogue between researchers, teachers, and parents.

Translated books (either stand-alone or the translated portion of dual language books)

- Font design
- Translation process
- Grammar
- Flow of text
- Language use

Dual language books (either originally designed as such, or with translation added)

- Equality of presentation of languages
- Full translation of all sections, including front and back matter

Translanguaging books

- Language use for authentic purposes and reflects community practices.

The group then analyzed sample picture books. For a dual language book, *Caperucita Rosa/ Little Red Riding Hood* by Luz Oriduela and translated by Esther Sarfatti was chosen. It was assessed as meeting expectations for all the sections of Grammar and Usage – especially noted were the use of varying punctuation forms and conceptual translation word choices. Figurative language and complexity were both judged as meeting, with dialectal representation deemed not applicable as it was not seeking to match a specific dialect within the story context. Flow of Text was also deemed meeting in all areas, with specific focus on cohesiveness. In the key area of Presentation of Languages, the book scored meeting in all applicable areas. The font differed between Spanish and English only in that italics was used for English. This served to distinguish the two and did not give more prominence to one over the other. The fact that Spanish was presented first was noted as valuable for elevating its status in the text. As the text is fully a dual text, the section on Language Integration was not scored, as it is for translanguaging texts. For Cultural Representation, the overall score was approaching. This is due to the text being a retelling of a well-known fairy tale, that originated in Europe, but is presented in this text without deep cultural context. Therefore, while it does not reflect student culture, it also does not exclude them from accessing the text.

Abuela by Arthur Dorros was selected as a translanguaging text. As the text is not translated, but intersperses Spanish within the predominantly English text, the first four sections of the rubric can be skipped. For Language Integration, it is meeting for Authentic Purpose because the Spanish used is for the dialog the grandmother speaks to her granddaughter, therefore furthering her characterization in a way that reflects many individuals and relationships within Spanish-speaking and bilingual families. While the group eventually settled on meeting for the aspect of Systematic Usage, there were those who felt that the flow was a times stilted due to the consistent immediate translation that was provided by the granddaughter. This linguistic move seems most geared toward the goal of providing Linguistic Access to readers who are not proficient in Spanish, as is the inclusion of a glossary of terms and phrases at the end of the book. For Cultural Representation, the text was assessed as meeting all items. The text provides a vibrant look into the relationship between a grandmother and her granddaughter. It integrates a positive perspective on family relationships and portrays the grandmother as adventurous, knowledgeable, and deeply connected to her granddaughter.

After using the rubric within our group, it was then presented at two teacher conferences focusing on the development of literacy and language. In each context, teachers were asked to examine the rubric and, if their linguistic abilities allowed it, use it to evaluate sample children's literature. Responses from bilingual teachers highlighted the felt need for this kind of formalized assessment tool, and their frustration at the lack of resources which fully measure up to such rigorous scrutiny. The most common response from monolingual teachers, who were generally already familiar with culturally responsive rubrics, was that they had not considered the layers of linguistic nuance within translated materials.

A concern voiced by some conference workshop participants was the level of detail in the rubric. Like any assessment tool, the detail and complexity are meant to serve as an initial guide. As users become more familiar with the criteria it contains, our hope is that they are able to internalize the key

factors and will need to use the full tool only as a refresher resource from time to time. The next phase of our project is to create a simplified rubric to serve as a quick-glance tool for teachers. This follows the model of other existing resources, such as Learning for Justice's (2016) pair of complex and simplified rubrics for analysis of texts in terms of cultural responsiveness.

Partnering with Community Resources

Another concern voiced by workshop participants was how to utilize this tool for texts in languages they were not proficient in. Partnering with families and students is a key way to expand the linguistic resources teachers have to analyze the linguistic quality of their classroom libraries. While the current rubric is designed for adult use, it could easily be taught to students in middle and high school and with key supports, even to upper elementary.

When considering whether to utilize evaluative tools, such as this rubric, with students, we need to believe in their keen abilities to observe and analyze the language practices around them. Kim's (2016) study of bilingual (Korean/English) preschool children demonstrates that even our youngest students can analyze cultural and linguistic practices presented in texts. At the theoretical level, we need to remember, as Gutiérrez, Bien, Selland & Pierce (2011) state, "developing academic literacy is not simply about the acquisition of skills; it involves meaningful participation in practices in which children can extend and appropriate tools to use in the service of meaning-making" (pp. 235-236). Engaging students in a critical analysis of the language practices within children's literature not only provides a space for meaningful participation, but it sets the stage for them to advocate for themselves as multilingual beings.

In addition to the theoretical, there are strong pedagogical reasons to engage students in this process. Multilingual students often desire to incorporate all of their languages into their schooling practices when a supportive environment is created (Zapata & Laman, 2016) and text analysis provides a way for them to demonstrate a level of expertise to their multilingual and monolingual peers. Translation can be a key pedagogical tool for both language development

and metalinguistic awareness (Jiménez et al., 2015) and engaging students in the analysis of existing translations could have a similar positive impact on their linguistic development.

Families have a key role to play in their children's literacy development. This is even more true in contexts where families are working to develop literacy in languages not typically supported in schools (Stagg-Peterson & Heywood, 2007). Partnering with parents to select and analyze quality multilingual texts is imperative for teachers who are not proficient in the languages and dialects their students speak. The use of the rubric as a tool for parents to analyze materials for the classroom is a concrete way to invite parents into the education of their own children and others and leverage their expertise. The involvement of community members in the classroom can also help multilingual students to "claim their bilingualism and identities ... alongside their peers in ways that do not exoticize their heritage or their linguistic repertoires but rather recognize and leverage them" (Zapata & Laman, 2016, p.372). Extending biliteracy practices to include community members demonstrates to all students that there is value in linguistic abilities and in the individuals who possess them.

Conclusion

While there is great excitement about the increase in multilingual books available within children's literature, we need to continue to require high quality texts and translations which represent students and their linguistic communities well. Developing critical language awareness in ourselves, our students, and communities is one key step toward furthering the discussion of how languages are represented in children's literature. More research is needed evaluating specific texts and evaluating various assessment tools for their usability and application to various contexts. It is our hope that the draft rubric presented here will be a tool for furthering the dialogue.

Contribution Statement: *Sara Vroom Fick is the sole author of this article; however, an undergraduate research group completed the initial review of literature and developed the first draft of the rubric. The research group*

consisted of Bekah Dahm, Emily Heidick, and Anna James. All those listed co-presented the rubric to the first teacher workshop group.

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Appendix A: Multilingual Literature Analysis Rubric

For use in evaluating 3 categories of books:

1. Translated text which may be monolingual or translated text in bilingual books
2. Bilingual books which may have a translation added or be originally written bilingually
3. Translanguaging books which incorporate two (or more) languages throughout one text

For Translated Text within Monolingual or Bilingual Books

Grammar and Usage

Elements	Unacceptable	Approaching	Meeting
Spelling: including diacritics (accents, tildes, umlauts, etc.)	Words are frequently spelled incorrectly and/ or no diacritics are used	The majority of words are spelled correctly (including diacritics)	All words are spelled correctly (including diacritics)
Punctuation: quotation notation, etc.	Language specific punctuation is ignored	Some language specific punctuation used, other is ignored	Language specific punctuation is used
Translation word choice	Words translated based on simplest definition	Words translated based on more comprehensive definition	Words are translated based on full contextual meaning
Syntax	Translated word for word following original syntax, not according to the target language	A majority of syntax follows target language structure	All syntax follows target language structure

Language Use in Text

Elements	Unacceptable	Approaching	Meeting
Figurative Language	Idioms, metaphors, and colloquialisms are translated literally, not into the appropriate figurative form	The majority of idioms, metaphors, and colloquialisms are translated into culturally appropriate figurative language	All idioms, metaphors, and colloquialisms are translated into culturally appropriate figurative language
Language Complexity / Formality	Language complexity does not match original - either overly complex or overly simple	Language complexity mirrors original language for the majority of the time, but there are noticeable gaps	Language complexity between original and translation is correlated throughout the text
Dialectal Representation	The dialect is inaccurate to the setting or culture portrayed	The dialect is somewhat accurate to the setting or culture portrayed	The dialect is fully accurate to the setting or culture portrayed

Flow of Text

Elements	Unacceptable	Approaching	Meeting
Rhythm (including rhyme, if original language rhymes)	Text has none of the rhythm of the target language	Text has some of the rhythm of the target language	Text has full rhythm of target language throughout the whole book
Cohesiveness	Sentences are not cohesive and transitions are awkward	Sentences are cohesive but the whole work does not flow together	Sentences are cohesive and the text flows well throughout
Voice	Text has lost all voice and personality	Author's voice and personality has been changed, but text still has personality	Text maintains author's voice and personality

Appendix A: Multilingual Literature Analysis Rubric (continued)

For use in evaluating 3 categories of books:

1. Translated text which may be monolingual or translated text in bilingual books
2. Bilingual books which may have a translation added or be originally written bilingually
3. Translanguaging books which incorporate two (or more) languages throughout one text

For Bilingual Books (either translated or originally bilingual)

Presentation of Languages

Elements	Unacceptable	Approaching	Meeting
Prominence of Text: location, size, style, integration into page design	Words are frequently spelled incorrectly and/or no diacritics are used	The majority of words are spelled correctly (including diacritics)	All words are spelled correctly (including diacritics)
Readability of Text: font style, size, color	Language specific punctuation is ignored	Some language specific punctuation used, other is ignored	Language specific punctuation is used
Directionality (if differs between languages)	Words translated based on simplest definition	Words translated based on more comprehensive definition	Words are translated based on full contextual meaning
Representation in Illustration	Translated word for word following original syntax, not according to the target language	A majority of syntax follows target language structure	All syntax follows target language structure
Front and Back Matter Translation: informational pages, author/illustrator descriptions, etc.	All information about the book is in one language only	Informational pages and copyright information remain in one language, but all bios have been translated	All of the information about the book is available in both languages

For Translanguaging Books: books that mix languages throughout the same text

Language Integration

Elements	Unacceptable	Approaching	Meeting
Authentic Purpose	Language usage is not clearly related to the story, may feel disconnected	Language usage is related to the story in general ways	Language usage is clearly connected to the storyline, characters, or setting
Systematic Usage	The mixing of the languages does not follow patterns and the flow of the text is disrupted	The mixing of languages sometimes follows patterns and sometimes the flow of the text is disrupted	The mixing of languages follows patterns in the flow of the text
Linguistic Access – to be considered when selecting texts for students from multiple language backgrounds	The additional language components are not translated, nor is there a glossary or word bank	Some of the additional language components are translated, are readily understood from context, or included in a glossary	Additional language components are accessible either through in-text means or a glossary

For All Books

Cultural Representation

Elements	Unacceptable	Approaching	Meeting
Interpersonal Relations	Dialogue between characters is culturally inappropriate for the setting presented	Dialogue between characters is not culturally accurate for the setting presented	Dialogue between characters is culturally accurate for the setting presented
Character Depth and Dimensionality	Characters are two-dimensional and only interacted with on a surface level	Some characters are given depth but non-principal characters are stereotypes	Each character is given depth and not represented by stereotyping
Accuracy of Illustrations	The illustrations misrepresent the culture	The illustrations represent only the <i>mainstream within the culture</i>	The illustrations accurately represent a spectrum of the culture
Cultural Diversity	The culture is portrayed solely based on stereotypes	The culture is portrayed with narrow minded orientation	The culture is portrayed in a way that allows for diversity within it
Cultural Accessibility – when selecting texts to mirror students' backgrounds	The book does not connect readily with students' backgrounds and can be excluding	The book may not connect with students but is not excluding	The book connects with students' backgrounds in ways that is sustaining and valuing