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A (dis)play on words: Emergent bilingual students' use of verbal jocularity as a channel of the translanguaging corriente

Mitch Ingram

Texas State University, 601 University Drive, ED 3044, San Marcos, TX, 78666, United States



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ABSTRACT

This study demonstrates how 3rd-grade Latin@ emergent bilingual students employed the use of types of *juegos de palabras*, or wordplay, within and across named languages to engage around the site of humor. Based on observations from their academic year, I employed ethnographic methods to delve into how these students created, participated in, and mobilized linguistic resources to implement intra- and inter-language play manifesting as multiple-meaning words, syllable reordering and punning within their mirthful interactions. By using a translanguaging *corriente* (García et al., 2017) framework to understand how this developed, I aspire to render visible their jocular practices of verbal adeptness with those in their classroom community. The implications that I suggest are that instances of mirth are a legitimate locus of Latin@ bilingual students' linguistic and cultural expression as well as a promising form of communication worth our attention as theorists and practitioners.

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1. Introduction

Student: What did the Mexican chicken say to her baby?

Researcher: ¿Qué? [What?]

Student: Ven pa'cá! (mimicking chicken noise) [Come here!]

Both: (laughter)!

Humor and translanguaging— two linguistic phenomena that are known to frequently play around with language and content. Both are readily at the disposal of any multilingual speaker and can serve as channels for creativity, often with the intent of relational connection. The two also provide ample space for speakers to express themselves unfettered by linguistic register or boundaries of named languages. The above example, which will be discussed below in detail, demonstrates how a bilingual student's linguistic and cultural assets converge via a joke presented in two languages to establish an affiliative bond with classmates. In this article, I delve into the everyday conversations of 3rd grade Latin@ Spanish-speaking students to highlight instances of verbal jocularity to analyze how these emergent bilinguals played with language and how it provides a vantage point to observe the translanguaging *corriente* in action.

By observing twenty-two students throughout a yearlong case study, I gathered data about how they created, participated in, and

mobilized linguistic resources in different ways through playful interactions. The purpose of the study was to understand how humor provided a locus for their intelligent and relational linguistic dexterity. This article draws on data collected ethnographically from classroom observations and audio/video recordings designed to capture students' creation of jaunty exchanges. The following question was constructed as an exploratory guide to the inquiry of these linguistic phenomena: In what ways do emergent bilingual students employ their use of wordplay around the site of humor?

Using a translanguaging *corriente* (García, Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017) framework to understand how this occurred, I aspire to render visible the ludic and linguistic practices of these students as they demonstrated verbal adeptness through classroom interactions. This centers attention on what is discoverable through everyday language practices amongst Latin@ youth engaging in humorous discourse. While many of these phenomena occurred in Spanish-to-Spanish utterances, additional instances in English to English, English to Spanish, and Spanish to English occurred as well. Indeed, as Hadi-Tabassum (2006) discovered about students in a similar dual language classroom, the students in this study “situate themselves in that fluctuating, fluid third space, where they could transgress overt linguistic borders and boundaries” (p. 28). Because humor has been well researched as a phenomenon that also crosses boundaries linguistically (Martínez & Morales, 2014; Chávez, 2015) and culturally (Muehlmann, 2008; Kuipers, 2009), it stands to reason that examining it as a site for translanguaging might be insightful.

E-mail address: mi1014@txstate.edu

Minoritized emergent bilinguals invisibly carry important language skills with them throughout their days, often into English-dominant environments that are unaware of their existence (Zentella, 2003)—which is precisely why this research matters to the education of bilingual students. What I am suggesting here is that young emergent bilingual students play with the complexities and demonstrate linguistic elasticity of their own accord within, between and across languages. By foregrounding the ways that bilingual students enact their full linguistic repertoire around playful exchanges, we gain insights about how they are often already demonstrating the very skills and practices they are expected to perform under education standards such as the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills. If this skillful form of language can be linked to state-required standards, the question remains as to how to channel this *corriente* towards the confluence of an established curriculum. If students are already regularly displaying this linguistic production without being solicited, creating lessons and activities around humor would be a natural way to fulfill state requirements while exhibiting a culturally sustaining practice. These implications assume that when bilingual children display a witty sequence or respond with a clever remark, authentic language use¹ will be made manifest and, truly, at play.

2. Literature review

2.1. Playing in *La corriente*

The concept of translanguaging is associated with terminology such as code-meshing (Canagarajah, 2011), polylinguaging (Jørgensen, 2010), linguistic hybridity (Gort & Sembante, 2015), or code-switching (Montes-Alcalá, 2015), among others. All these monikers, with their concomitant subtleties and ideological ramifications, attempt to account for the phenomenon of how multilingual individuals contextually and intentionally draw from their complete linguistic repositories. Communication within and between languages, dialects, or registers foments the potential for unique forms of expression. For the objective of this study, I employ the definition of translanguaging offered by Otheguy, García, and Reid (2015), which speaks to the language of emergent bilingual individuals not as mere grammar swap, but as a “deployment of a speaker’s full linguistic repertoire” (p. 281). More specifically, García, Johnson, and Seltzer’s (2017) articulated the concept of the “translanguaging *corriente*” [current] that provides a lens through which we can observe multilingual individuals fluidly maneuvering linguistically and culturally to “create something new” (p. 61).

Martínez and Morales (2014) have conducted similar work regarding how nondominant Latin@ youth employed their linguistic prowess to demonstrate creative ways of communicating that crosses the borders of Spanish and English in humorous and covert ways. Similarly, Chávez (2015) explored the cross-border usage of Spanish and English to discover how playful language reframed and lent figurative resilience to migrant individuals in east Texas. The participants in Martínez and Morales (2014), Chávez (2015) and this study have three things in common: 1.) they are Latin@s in the southern/southwestern United States 2.) they employ linguistic creativity to generate something singularly humorous 3.) they demonstrate that their repertoires of Spanish and English mingle freely as linguistic tools exhibit this creativity. The present research seeks to extend this scholarship into the context of elementary education of Latin@ emergent bilinguals.

¹ I differentiate authentic language use from compulsory language that students produce under the expectations of teachers in a classroom. The language reported here is from unsupervised conversations recorded as students interacted throughout their regular school day.

The *corriente* metaphor describes languages (such as Spanish or English) as “separate riverbanks” when seen from the surface (p. 71). As the observer deepens their inquiry, however, the underlying faculty of human language consists of one integrated river bottom that connects both banks. In a similar sense, I submit that humor is an example of such a riverbed—one that is connected to both banks (Spanish and English) and that underlies the changing communicative *corriente* that expressively flows on the surface. In a monolingual speaker’s repertoire, the use of verbal humor traverses the boundaries of different registers (Attardo, 2010). Playful communication artfully flows between categories of appropriate/inappropriate, formal/informal, safe/risky as intentional strategies employed by speakers. In a bilingual speaker’s repertoire, though, negotiating boundaries happens not only between registers, but also between languages. Sharing Spanish as their first language and having Latin-American backgrounds as their starting social locations (in varying degrees and origin), as well as being situated in a central Texas school that prioritized English, these students found verbal coalescence of topic and style through their idiosyncratic banter.

3. Methods

3.1. Participants and positionality

The data reported here originates from a yearlong ethnographic study about the communicative practices of a group of 23 emergent bilingual² Latin@ students conducting everyday life in a central Texas elementary school. The vivacious group of 8–10-year-old students (12 girls and 11 boys) came from a diversity of backgrounds ranging from Guatemala, Florida, Colombia, Honduras, Mexico, and Texas—all sharing Spanish as their primary home language. Because the majority had family origins in Northern Mexico, the Mexican form of speech was unquestionably the prestige dialect of the group, with Honduran, Guatemalan, and Colombian following respectively based on numbers of students from these backgrounds. Mexican words such as “*chambear* [to work]”, “*chido*” [cool], and “*chorro*” [a great quantity] consistently populated conversations. In one instance, a Mexican student told his Honduran friend, “*Habla mexicano, no hondureño.*” [Speak Mexican (Spanish), not Honduran]. Beginning in August of 2018 and finishing in June of 2019, I observed these 3rd grade students every week as they maneuvered through their daily routine. The majority of my data collection transpired during their English/Language Arts block, Math instruction, and Recess.

Having worked as a bilingual educator at this school for 14 years, I was well acquainted with the context and already had established many relationships with families over the years. This made my entrance as a non-Latino adult male into the educational surroundings of largely Latin@-dominant children a more natural process. Upon entering the classroom for this research, my role varied according to what made sense for the teacher and students at the time. To make my presence more familiar, the teacher, a wonderfully jovial Mexican-Honduran American and former coworker, would sometimes invite me to teach a lesson to integrate more into the community as opposed to being an observer on the outside of activities. My presence as an adult (and former teacher) in the room with the students undoubtedly shaped interactions and, as discussed below, the recording device used to capture conversations merely punctuated this. When I observed laughter or a humorous interaction across the room, I would sometimes (as naturally as possible) smilingly ask, “¿De qué te ríes tanto?”

² “Emergent bilingual” is a contemporary term in US bilingual education meant to center bilingualism as the long-term goal in lieu of merely the objective of learning English (García et al., 2008).

[What's so funny?], to which students would often respond in full laughter as they recounted the source of their joviality. By taking an interest in what they found funny, I created a sense of shared *confianza* [≈trust] as a fellow learner in their class. Having spoken Spanish for almost 40 years through innumerable and diverse contexts and conversations, I was able to adapt my way of speaking to theirs with ease. True to how I interacted relationally and linguistically as a bilingual teacher (Henderson & Ingram, 2018), I put a high value on the ways students spoke and adapted both my phonological and lexical choices. One instance is when I asked students if they brought their *lana* [Mexican slang for “money”] or *pisto* [Honduran slang for money] to attend the field trip. By constantly asking them questions and positioning them as the experts of their Spanish dialect, I hoped to redistribute the weight of inevitable power asymmetry between us through our interactions. Additionally, by allowing students to poke fun at me as I jointly laughed at my non-Latino-ness with them, we established relationships built on mutual trust and the ability to laugh with each other and at ourselves. The novelty of me and my recording device faded as I became another member of their learning community.

Throughout my years as a fully bilingual speaker of Spanish and English and as a teacher, I witnessed and participated in countless conversations with Latin@ students based on humorous turns of phrase or wordplay. Passing comments of brilliance would flow from my students' mouths and, while I was deeply impressed by their linguistic dexterity, I also found myself disheartened knowing that the system within which we worked would never create a rubric that would give them “credit” for such nuanced intelligence. My hope is to document how their language prowess flourished through the channels of humor to later create tools to highlight and appreciate via policy and pedagogy.

3.2. Setting

The observation site of this study, Erwin Elementary School (pseudonym), was an urban public grade school (Pre-kindergarten to 5th grade) in Central Texas with a total of 412 students at the time of data collection. Forty four percent of the students were “English Language Learners”, with different varieties of Latin-American Spanish as their first language. While the school seemingly was a late-exit bilingual program (slowly moving L1 Spanish-speakers into English instruction), the de facto policy in Texas bilingual education remains that 3rd-grade is the transitional year where students are pushed into English-only instruction (Palmer & Snodgrass Rangel, 2011). This means that even though there are a prevalence of bilingual and dual-language programs where the end goal is purported to be bilingualism, English still reigns as the dominant language in the classroom (Palmer, 2009). To be sure, English was the lingua franca of the third grade at Erwin Elementary, yet it did not prevent production in and through both of the students' languages.

3.3. Getting it—how to observe humor

By understanding the translanguaging *corriente* as a display of unscripted, non-contrived language, capturing naturalistic language production was paramount. The data collection for this study took place in two phases. The first was understanding the environment, which entailed making weekly observations, taking fieldnotes, and interacting with the students and teachers through their daily rotations of subjects. Additionally, I obtained audio and video recordings of the students in whole group, small group and individually during regular school hours and through daily activities. The second phase centered around focal students whom I selected as I observed certain students trending towards more laughter and

humorous interactions with peers at their table groups. Interestingly, this group was Spanish dominant in their speech. The most prominent source of this data reporting was captured by strategically placing a small audio recorder amidst a group of students and intentionally walking away. Initially considered a form of entertainment (a source of humor in and of itself), students gradually became accustomed to my consistent and unpredictable placement of the device throughout the year.

After ensuring that I captured instances of humor from the focal groups, I placed the recorder randomly amongst groups who did not appear to be interacting humorously (but that sometimes surprised me while subsequently listening to recordings). I realized that after a few weeks in the classroom, they seemed desensitized to the recorder as they seldom performed for it or spoke directly into it. My assumption is that from that point on I began to gather more authentic data because some students would even make self-incriminating statements including vulgar language or transgressive behavior choices that they themselves had made. Because the teacher of their homeroom class framed me as “*un maestro que va a estar con nosotros durante este año*” [a teacher who was to be with them throughout the year], and they knew that I was placing the recorder around the room, logic would dictate (even among third graders) that using transgressive language might lead to them getting into trouble. I positioned myself as neutral as possible to increase the chances of capturing non-performative language. For instance, when I asked a Honduran student what he was laughing at after a Mexican-American student whispered something in his ear, he gigglingly whispered to me using a Mexicanized accent, “*Me dijo, ‘pinche güey’*” [“He called me a ‘f*cking dumb*ss”] and I merely chuckled without reproach. By establishing this trust, I felt that students were not typically holding back as the recorder sat in their midst. To avoid bias through group selection and to increase reliability, I varied the placement of the recorder throughout the process. At times I recorded whole-group interaction (i.e., a lesson), but most data here came from focus table groups of two to five students.

3.4. Operationalizing humor within translanguaging

By being in the field for an academic year, I gathered a robust picture of how students fashioned language around their jovial exchanges. Following subsequent data analysis based on Saldaña's (2015) categorizations, I created over ninety total initial coding categories in accordance to over 3700 instances of marked data. Because this study was highly exploratory, I began with descriptive coding to establish topics from the data. Codes ranged from general categories such as references to “immigration” or “food/drink,” to more specific groupings such as “Honduras mention/connection” or “Spanish as power.” After my first cycle of descriptive coding that looked for patterns in all observable behavior, the second cycle narrowed my focus to scenarios around which there was humor or attempts at causing mirth, such as “Dito humor” (pseudonym) or “class wide laughter.” To properly operationalize and define humor, I referred to the research literature about how to make sense the students' daily conviviality. In alignment with what Bell (2007) has discovered, identifying humor is a “notoriously difficult task” in that it is both ubiquitous and fleeting. On one hand, there is a focus by humor scholars, such as Norrick (1993), to capture paralinguistic phenomena such as laughter, voice, smile, and marked lexical choices. On the other hand, Davies (2003) concentrates on a discourse-analytic approach to situate interpretations of humor as a *speech activity*” (p. 1362). I merged the two ideas (paralinguistic features and speech activity) as criteria to determine how I would implement my last step in coding. This third and final cycle allowed me to distill data into what my interest was—observing naturalistic humor

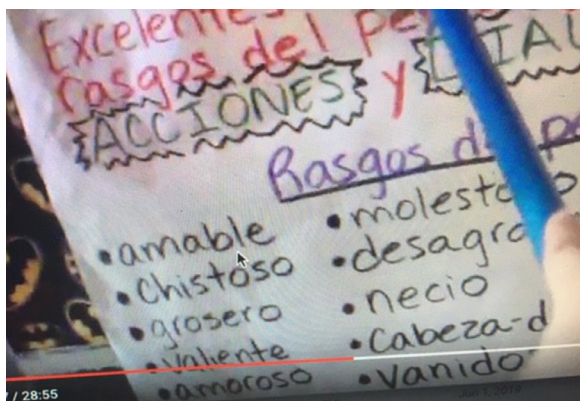


Fig. 1. Students list "chistoso" [funny] as their second favorite character trait.

as a site for languaging. A flowchart of the different cycles is as follows:

- 1st cycle: initial descriptive codes (patterns of all behavior)
 ↓ ↓ ↓
 2nd cycle: provisional codes (patterns of humor that was generally present)
 ↓ ↓ ↓
 3rd cycle: verbal exchange coding (patterns of humor with language)

Throughout the process, comparison of information from different data sources and interactional exchanges amongst students served to establish or disconfirm substantive categories from my analyses. To increase validity of my codes, I consulted colleagues, teachers, or the students themselves to better understand them. Because the emergence of humor is unpredictable, I additionally ensured validity through the quantity of data and time spent at the research site.

Even in formal scenarios, such as teacher-led discussions where students were often expected to be still and quiet, humor was explicitly acknowledged in lessons. On one occasion, I observed an anchor chart (a student-generated visual resource in classrooms to support taught subjects) hanging in their classroom and discovered that the students themselves had developed a list of fifteen *Rasgos de personajes* [Character Traits] (Fig. 1) based on stories they had read. As I reviewed their valued attributes of characters, listed right below their first trait *amable* [friendly] was *chistoso* [funny]. As might be expected from 7 to 10-year-old children, being funny was a prioritized feature. Interestingly, *grosero* [crude or transgressive] followed on the list, which was a substantive source of humor in the data. Instances that I coded as "transgressive humor/cussing" ($n = 45$), "potty/lavatorial humor" ($n = 26$), and "anatomical/sexual humor" ($n = 16$) could easily be filed under "grosero." Outweighing these discrete categories, though, I found examples of humor related to "wordplay/doble sentido/communicative competence" ($n = 117$) and "translanguaging/bilingual environment" ($n = 65$) that spoke to unique ways in which these emergent bilinguals interacted around the site of jocularity.

Throughout the piece, the reader will see how the speakers achieved the lexical effervescence of their *juegos de palabras* [wordplay]. The first is through homophony, in which a speaker finds a similar sounding word with a different meaning and re-inserts it into the context of a conversation. The second is through polysemy, which is expressed through the multiplicity of meanings of a word. The former is based chiefly on phonological variation while the latter is founded on semantic variation. Both inevitably affect

the meaning of an utterance which in turn creates a novel and often amusing reimagining of a scenario.

3.4.1. Data analysis with the translanguaging corriente

During and after data collection, I sought a contextualized understanding of comedic classroom dynamics. Based on the raw data, or moment-to-moment "divisions of [students'] interactional labor" (Erickson, 2004, p.5), I searched for consistency (or lack thereof) throughout. Having selected García, Johnson, and Seltzer's (2017) translanguaging *corriente* as my analytical framework, I explored instances that demonstrated how students played within, around, and between languages or that included features of their L1 (Spanish), their L2 (English), or their L1-2 (both languages). As aforementioned, I am using the definition for translanguaging set forth by Otheguy, García, and Reid (2015) as "the deployment of a speaker's full linguistic repertoire" (p. 283). The use of "Spanish" or "English" in my analysis are to display the recreation within and across these well-established categories. To define this framework more fully, I wanted to understand how students interacted around spaces of laughter based on the following presuppositions: To generate something humorous they would: 1.) access their full linguistic repertoires with less focus on boundaries of *which* language or topic was used 2.) demonstrate linguistic fluidity 3.) exhibit linguistic maneuverability 4.) bridge social phenomena to language codes 5.) create something new in the process. Because students were exposed to Spanish at home and English was the chief form of communication at school, they were fully accustomed to accessing their full semiotic repertoire to create and make meaning. Indeed as Vaid (2006) posits the question regarding the use of humor among bilingual speakers:

Just as early mastery of two linguistic systems is known to confer increased flexibility, creativity, and agility, might one expect that it may also confer a keen sensitivity to ambiguity, intertextuality, and irony, elements that underlie the perception and expression of humor? (p. 177)

It is an extension of inquiries such as this that the present study addresses around language use and playfulness. The translanguaging *corriente* was a helpful heuristic to identify and discuss how the creation of something linguistically new was often found in the presence of someone linguistically playful.

3.4.2. More than a pun

In lieu of the generalized term "pun", I employ the term "*juegos de palabras*" [lit. playing/games with words], understood epistemologically in the same way that Martínez & Morales conceptualize humor of Latin@ youth as coming from "at least two different sets of different words and worlds" (2014, p. 337). According to Hempelmann (2014), a pun is concisely described as "a type of joke in which one sound sequence (e.g., a word) has two meanings and this similarity in sound creates a relationship for the two meanings from which humor is derived" (2014, p. 612). While technically the following examples might be classified as puns, the scenarios here are more complex due to a number of factors: (1) these students were minoritized emergent bilinguals in a diglossic situation where Spanish was not as prioritized as English in the classroom/school (2) there were different language expectations from their work environments/teachers (i.e. during Math, Science, and Art, English was dominant) (3) the students were at different points along the bilingual continua (Hornberger, 2003), meaning that some were new arrivals to the country while others were born in the US. By extension, students pulled from a diverse range of sociocultural references that may (not) be known by their classmates, implying that humorous interaction either had to be highly immediate (local) or there had to be an awareness of general content that would be understood by their interlocutors. For these reasons,

there was wordplay that drew from their entire linguistic repertoire, including features of their L1 (Spanish), their L2 (English), their L1–2 (both languages). Because students were emerging bilinguals, they lived in a continuous state of translanguaging as they made meaning, even if their utterances fell within the criteria of a named language. As Seltzer (2019) points out, “at times, bilingual speakers may sound like monolingual speakers of a named language, but always at work, albeit suppressed, are myriad other linguistic features.”(p. 5).

4. Findings

Though “using one’s full linguistic repertoire” is often articulated by selecting instances of speakers toggling back and forth between languages (i.e. Spanish and English), it is important to remember that as bilingual speakers communicate, they possess a metalinguistic awareness that help them know what their interlocutors will understand (Durán, 2017). At times, translanguaging as a practice means staying within the phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics of their L1, L2, etc. In other instances, translanguaging as a practice means weaving between these domains in each of their known languages, dialects, and registers to achieve communicative competence with their audience. If a multilingual individual is speaking at length within the boundaries of a set language, they never stop employing tools from their full linguistic repertoire. The point of these findings is to show how both humor and translanguaging often “create something new” (García & Wei, 2014, p.61).

Findings here are discussed in two ways. The first features *intra-language play*, which considers instances drawn from the students’ knowledge *within* the language of Spanish or English exclusively. To the casual reader of these snippets, one might erroneously conclude that the children were monolingual speakers. The students, with varying degrees of knowledge of both languages, implemented lexemes necessary to create the moment. The second finding discusses *inter-language play*, which displays their “dipping into” the full *corriente* through the production of or interaction with language that humor catalyzed. Both findings include spontaneous conversational jocularity, canned jokes, and different forms of lexical ambiguity, all of which point to the skills wielded by these young emergent bilinguals. Within these categories, I found that wordplay was based on phonological (homophonous), semantic (polysemic) or both features of utterances. Either way, students were recreative through their choices to impart fresh life or recreate the use or understandings of language.

4.1. Finding 1: intra-language jocularity

At first blush, intra-language jocularity (wordplay within the constraints of one language) might be a challenging argument to make using a translanguaging-*corriente* lens. However, when considering non-monolingual students in a complex linguistic environment, the task is less formidable. A student speaking in one language may appear tethered to the limitations of that language. However, for the emergent bilingual, real-time decisions were made for what was linguistically acceptable, comprehensible, and comical amongst her/his interlocutors. When the potential for a humorous event arose, students exhibited verbal elasticity to produce mirth. While previous sentences may have flowed *between* English and Spanish, for a speech event in question, they might have chosen to utter something *within* a named language.

4.1.1. Spontaneous use of juegos de palabras in Spanish

This section demonstrates how these students demonstrated their skills within the linguistic features of their L1 (Spanish). In contrast to canned jokes that many believe is the extent of studies

around humor, most instances of *juegos de palabras* were improvisational. *Juegos de palabras* sometimes used the sound similarity of words that were a short phonetic distance to other words to create humor (Attardo, 2017). Inevitably, the subtle shift in sound or usage could lead to a big jump in meaning. In Table 1, there are eight cases of *juegos de palabras* in Spanish that transpired within the classroom. I provide a few vignettes below to give proper context and to demonstrate how their witty languaging changed meaning and created humorous interactions.

In an example that transpired early in the year, I witnessed the use of wordplay as a way of defusing the verbal attack of potential aggressors. Waldo, one of the few Hondurans in the Mexican-dominant environment, was derisively called *cochino* [lit. “hog”, colloquially “slob”] by some Mexican-origin classmates after lunch. Consistently quick on his verbal feet, the stout Central American reformulated the insult into a quick rhyme by replying, “*Cochino pingüino*” [Hog, penguin], which successfully forced the original utterance (meant by the Mexican students to mean “slob”) to a more innocuous interpretation (a barnyard animal) by rhyming it with another word in the animal category (penguin). The student who hurled the original cutdown laughed and retaliated using a similar rhyming strategy by countering, “*Cochino, marrano, pingüino, pito*” [hog, pig, penguin, “wiener” (penis)]. Since I happened to be sitting nearby when this dialogue transpired, Waldo quickly turned to me and grinningly explained (in earshot of his interlocutor), “*En Honduras, ‘pito’ significa uno de esos. También significa lo que usan en las bicicletas, y también los carros.*” [In Honduras, “pito” means one of these (as he pointed to the whistle on my lanyard). It also means what people use on their bikes and in their cars]. Waldo’s verbal dexterity triumphed yet again, but this time not by finding another rhyming word as his joking assailant did by one-upping the initial raillery and reduplicating the notion of “pig” by saying it in two different ways (*cochino, marrano*) and adding the slang term for penis (*pito*). Waldo linguistically engineered a way to joke the jokester by selecting three separate, more benign meanings of the polysemous word *pito*, as well as appealing to me as an authority by referencing my whistle,—an event which left both students smiling during the exchange. Like the translanguaging *corriente*, where boundaries can be transgressed and re-established contextually, humor offered the space for such relational work to be achieved.

Another instance of *juegos de palabras* based on phonological variation occurred when a student adeptly redefined the semantic profile of a word. While speaking with a group of students about Matamoros (a city in Tamaulipas, Mexico) one of them erupted into laughter because of the compound word. His follow-up statement was, “*Así llaman a los niños en México. ¡Mata el morro!*” [That’s how they call children in Mexico. Kill the child!]. While the original name of the city means *Mata*-[killing] of the *Moros* [Moor (a Berber conqueror of 8th-century Spain), the student interpreted *moro* as the Northern Mexican “*morro*,” meaning “boy”—which resulted in the notion of a “child/boy killer.” In addition to the homophonous and semantic connection to the words “*moro*” and “*morro*”, perhaps by engendering levity, the student was able to disempower the nefarious notion of a “boy/child killer.” Such a trans-semantic leap from the connotational innocence of a child to that of the barbarous idea of murder was expressed in a brisk turn of phrase, resulting in laughter.

On another occasion, two Honduran students told me about a humorous occurrence that transpired the previous day. “*Ayer yo le dije a Waldo que me prestara el color. eh, no, me das el café?*” [Yesterday I ask Waldo to let me borrow a crayon...uh, no, ‘Will you give me the brown’ <a polysemous word for “coffee”>?]. Waldo responded, “*¿Quieres cappuccino o café?*” [Would you like a cappuccino or just regular coffee?]. The three of us shared a laugh about the instance and Waldo followed up, “*Es que inventé una broma,*

Table 1
Spanish to Spanish *juegos de palabras* [wordplay].

Flow (<i>corriente</i>) of language	Original utterance	Improvised language <i>juegos de palabras</i> [wordplay]
Spanish	Matamoros [city in Mexico]	mata morros [child killer]
to	café [brown]	café o capuchino [coffee]
Spanish	aeropuerto [airport]	aeropuerco [airpig]
	cerdote [large pig]	sacerdote [priest]
	parecido [similar to]	fallecido [deceased]
	vaso [cup/glass]	balazo [gunshot]
	pachorra [slovenliness]	pancha→panza dura [hard stomach]
	Yo quisiera [I would like]	que hiciera [that it may be]

Table 2
English to English *juegos de palabras* [wordplay].

Flow (<i>corriente</i>) of language	Original utterance	Improvised language <i>juegos de palabras</i> [wordplay]
English	cirrus	cereal
to	Are you kidding me?	Are you killing me?
English	DiMaggio	Di-meow-ggio
	Mr. Ingram	Mr. Instagram
	Kentucky	Ken-turkey
	exercise	explode
	The Milky Way	The Monkey Way
	perimeter	poo-rimeter

Digo, ¿Quiero café? ¿Me prestas el café? [I came up with a joke, I mean, ‘Do I want coffee? Will you let me borrow the brown?’. This metalinguistic and meta-humorous awareness was demonstrated through a spry exchange around the polysemous word in Spanish “café” while the students did schoolwork on a February morning.

The boundaryless nature of additional topics in Table 1 via proximal phonetic distance allowed full permission to recreative semantic transformation. As such, a barnyard animal (*cerdote* [pig]) was converted into a religious figure (*sacerdote* [priest]), a household object (*vaso* [drinking glass]) was reshaped into a firing weapon (*balazo* [gunshot]), and a common descriptor of similarity (*parecido* [looking like]) was transfigured into a mention of death (*fallecido* [deceased]). While the content of these phenomena could be a stand-alone study to analyzing some of the weighty topics presented here in relation to the students’ life experiences (i.e. some of them speaking of gunplay they had witnessed on their immigration journey from Mexico/Honduras), the present point is to highlight the site of humor allowing full access to their semantic and semiotic resources through interactions around instances of verbal play.

4.1.2. Spontaneous use of *juegos de palabras* in English

The students also demonstrated similar verbal/semantic dexterity around comedic phonological shifts in English (see Table 2). Often found in an environment where the teacher spoke only/primarily English, students instantiated ludic expressions of lexical prowess in their second language. In mid-October, students began to familiarly change my name “Mr. Ingram” to “Mr. Instagram.” Described as one of the criteria of the code of *confianza* [≈trust] in Mexican culture, nicknames “maximize the ability to joke (among other metapragmatic possibilities) and highlight the inclusion of personal and intimate talk.” (Covarrubias, 2002, p. 102). I was amused to observe the creative iterations of the name evolve from “Mr. Ingram” to “Mr. Instagram” to “Mr. Insta” to “Insta” as the year advanced. In addition to jocular homophonous switches during Science class (“cirrus” to “cereal”), Physical Education (“exercise” to “explode”) and talk while playing a game in Math class (“Are you kidding me?” to “Are you killing me?”), much of their clever metapragmatic banter played off of official names. As students were allowed to bring a stuffed animal one day, one brought a plushy cat, whom he named “Joe Di-meow-ggio” (after the American baseball player Joe DiMaggio). In another example,

a Colombian student concocted the notion of “Ken-turkey” out of Kentucky” as the teacher read about Abraham Lincoln’s birthplace. This same student in Science class giggled with his Mexican classmate, “*Iba a decir ‘The Monkey Way’*” [I was going to say ‘The Monkey Way’] in lieu of “The Milky Way.” These verbal acrobatics embodied the use of language situated in wittiness to flex their muscles around the connective tissue of mirthful interactions.

4.1.3. Canned jokes within the features of two languages

As students discovered that I was investigating humor, for the first few visits I was often approached with the sequential organization that Sacks (1974) analyzed decades ago as the classic setup and punchline. Witnessing them come to me with their jokes was indeed comical on a multiplicity of levels as many returned proudly with the same recycled script. A less frequent occurrence than spontaneous conversational humor, I observed the presence of canned jokes in Spanish, English, and both together. Because their first language was Spanish, the sequences based on wordplay in their L1 flowed freely throughout the year. That being said, and largely because their environment was in English, students also shared jokes in their L2. The following examples display homophonous and polysemous play characteristic of these types of interactions.

Example 1: (Spanish)

- ¿Qué le dijo un pollo policía al otro pollo policía? [What did one chicken police officer tell the other?]
- ¿Qué? [What?]
- Necesitamos apoyo (a pollo) [We need support, playing off the homophone “pollo”]

Example 2: (Spanish)

- ¿Qué le dijo la silla rica a la silla pobre? [What did the rich chair tell the poor chair?]
- ¿Qué? [What?]
- ¡Pobrecilla! (pobre silla) [Poor little thing!]

Example 3: (Spanish)

(told entirely by one speaker)

Tengo un chiste, tengo un chiste. A ver si lo entiendes.. [I have a joke, I have a joke. Let’s see if you get it.]

- Me mordió una serpiente [A snake bit me.]

- ¿Cobra? [Was it a cobra?/Did it charge you money?]
- No, ¡gratis! [No, it was free!]

Example 4: (Spanish)

Student: Lana sube, lana baja, ¿qué es? [Wool goes up, wool goes down, what am I?]

Researcher: ¡La navaja! [A knife!]

Student: ¡No...! (laughing). Es una oveja subiendo y bajando el ascensor [Nope, a sheep going up and down on the elevator!]

Example 5: (English)

- What did the mom tomato say to the baby tomato?
- What?
- Catch up (Ketchup)!

Example 6: (English)

- Hey, y'all wanna hear a joke? Why are you "killing me" instead of why are you "kidding me?"

Example 7: (English)

- I have a joke. Are you scared of number 8?
- No
- Get it? 'Cause 8, 9, 10?
- Yeah (slight laughter)

In the first two examples, the students exhibit their wordplay based on the phonological comparison of the two-word groups. *Pollo* [chicken] shares the analogous *apoyo* [support] and *pobrecilla* [poor little thing] sounds identical to *pobre silla* [poor chair], which demonstrated homophonous language around the site of humor. A similar phenomenon occurred in the English examples 5 and 6. The first followed the standard question-question-punchline, playing with the homophones (catch up/ketchup). Example 6 represents a student who stumbled upon wordplay between kidding/killing in that moment and formulated the minimal pair into a semi-joking frame ("Hey, y'all wanna hear a joke?"). This awareness of polysemous meanings intersecting within a humorous space is further demonstrated in example three, as a Mexican student shared the playfulness of the word *cobra* to mean either a snake or the idea of charging somebody money. By understanding the categorical ambiguity of the word (noun versus verb), the semantic equivocation invited his audience to participate in this deeper deciphering of what he meant. Another wonderful instance is in example 4, as a Colombian student tricked me with a variant of a traditional *adivinanza* (riddle). The conventional exchange of this *adivinanza* occurs based on a phonological awareness of the words spoken. As the speaker articulates, "Lana sube, lana baja, ¿qué es?" [Wool goes up, wool goes down, what am I?] the hearer often catches the hidden word in the statement (lana baja → la navaja, the knife) and ascertains the riddle. The notion of "wool" and "knife" do not share an immediate semantic relationship, but one of close phonology in Spanish. In this case, the astute student was aware that the "correct" answer to the riddle was "la navaja", but purposely exchanged the *phonological expectation* to a *semantic explanation* as he revealed a more logical answer of "wool going up and wool going down" as a sheep ascending and descending on an elevator. As Henderson & Ingram (2018) point out in a study on bilingual classroom metalinguistic conversations, the telling and comprehension of jokes implies that an individual marshalls their full linguistic repertoire while also possessing metalinguistic awareness. Beyond this, students negotiated meanings of the words to make sense relevant to the statements produced.

In the cobra example, more than just seeing if his interlocutors recognized the words of his question-answer format and joke genre of his speech, he challenged them to understand the *dual*

meaning of the words in the punchline. In Attardo's (2017) explanation of the General Theory of Verbal Humor, the words, "No, gratis! [No, for free]" served as the *logical mechanism* to resolve the polysemous "cobra." In addition to the semantic piece of the interaction, the speaker must possess an audience awareness that his listeners would understand the logical mechanism in the joke. For that to transpire, a social consciousness on the speaker's behalf must be in place. The speaker knew that his audience would have access to the comprehension of both words to unlock the potential humor via the resolution of the seemingly disconnected concepts. When *juegos de palabras* [wordplay] occur(s), it becomes a metalinguistic endeavor by assuming a speaker understands the joke being told. In addition to the student's phonological awareness of the words sounding alike and their semantic awareness of the meaning incongruity, a metapragmatic awareness of audience understanding is also required. By sharing what Fine and De Soucey (2005) discuss as the *idioculture*, the students do not just know each other, "but they share a history and an identity and can understand joking reference" (p. 4).

When a joke-teller does not give the impression of understanding the joke being told, the verbal sequence goes through the motions of the genre without the meaning intact. In example 7, for instance, a student poses the question, "Are you scared of number 8?" Because the question is foregrounded by stating that she had a joke, the frame was set, but in her zeal to share the mirth with others, her question is off by one number. The canned joke that emerged several times that year was typically stated, "Are you afraid of 7? Because 7 8 (ate) 9." The speaker began within a frame of humor, the homophone eight/ate was stated correctly, but the semantic context (seven being a number to fear because it "ate/8" nine), was lost. Nonetheless, the site of humor provided a context where the awareness of language play was present and self-propelled by the students.

Because jokes are not bound by rules (grammatical or otherwise), they dovetail nicely with the notion of humor being an excellent site to better understand the translanguaging *corriente* and appreciate fully bilingual students' linguistic abilities. As aforementioned, despite an emergent bilinguals' utterances appearing to be monolingual, cognitively speaking, they survey their entire linguistic repertoire to make meaning through verbal agency. This linguistic appraisal of their context and deployment of humorous language transpired within not only their known English and Spanish, but also everywhere in between.

4.2. Finding 2: inter-language jocularity

Verbal play between named languages lends itself readily to the framework translanguaging *corriente*. As abovementioned, proponents of the theory (García et al., 2017) examine how multilinguals embody the *corriente* while fluently navigating linguistically and culturally to "create something new" (p. 61). García and Wei (2014) argued similarly that translanguaging is a "dynamic process whereby multilingual language users mediate complex social and cognitive activities through the strategic employment of multiple semiotic resources to act, to know, and to be" (p. 22). Although I maintained that the same principle applies to the intra-language jocularity above, perhaps it will be more apparent as the examples demonstrate this "flow" between the designated languages of Spanish and English.

4.2.1. Spontaneous use and canned jokes of juegos de palabras between English and Spanish

Students were not limited to creating language or humor within the constraints of either Spanish or English. The information in Table 3 displays a sample of how the students employed inter-language *juegos de palabras*. As with instances above, speakers

Table 3
Juegos de palabras between named languages.

Flow (<i>corriente</i>) of language	Original utterance	Improvised language <i>juegos de palabras</i> [wordplay]
English to Spanish	Pennsylvania Zachary	lápiz [pencil] masacre [massacre]
Spanish to English	Ms. Quiroz blend from teacher "/tch/"	mosquitos Te echo, papá [I kick you out of here, dude]
Spanish to English	moco, loco, y foco [booger, crazy, and light bulb]	loquacious

applied the phonological or written rules of one language to springboard across for access to other facets of their linguistic repertoire around the site of humor.

The first example takes proper nouns (names) and stretches the phonology to reach a new semantic. In one instance, the students held the voice recorder as class was being dismissed from the boisterous gymnasium. As students waited to hear their name called, a spontaneous conversation between three boys erupted with the question:

Example 8:

- Student 1: ¿Cuál es la figura de Pennsylvania? [What is the shape of Pennsylvania?]
 Student 2: ¿Cuál? [What?]
 Student 1: Un lápiz because "Pennsylv" en inglés [a pencil because "Pennsylv" in English]
 Student 3: ¡¡Oh, sí!! ¡Es cierto! [Oh, yes! That's right!]

A few minutes later, a Colombian-American student began the joking sequence with a newly arrived Honduran who was still beginning to learn English.

Example 9:

- Student 4: What do you call...qu...(considers his Spanish-dominant audience) ¿Qué dices cuando hay muchos cohetes y yendo muy arriba? [What do you say when there are a lot of rockets/fireworks and they are going high in the sky?]
 Students 2 & 3: ¿Qué? ¿Qué? [What?, What?]
 Student 4: ¡Estoy teniendo un blast aquí!! [I'm having a blast here!] (laughter)

Lastly, a vivacious student who loved "interviewing" the class with the handheld recorder surprised me when out of nowhere she asked:

Example 10:

- Student: What did the Mexican chicken say to her baby?
 Researcher: ¿Qué? [What?]
 Student: Ven pa'cá! (mimicking chicken noise) [Come here!]

These seemingly simplistic instances of student humor serve as terrific examples of how *translanguaging* intersects with humor to facilitate *meaning-making* and to produce laughter.

In example 8, a Colombian-American student, well versed in English and Spanish, created a joke as he made the homophonic connection between "Pennsylv" and "pencil." While this joke would have made sense completely in English, the young emergent bilingual was metalinguistically aware of his audience (two Spanish-dominant classmates) and their levels of comprehension. The student understood the following: (1) what "the shape of Pennsylvania" meant (2) the Spanish words in his question (3) how to frame the joke in both languages (4) the homophony of the English dyad pencil/Pennsylv (5) that his listener's would grasp the inter-languaging *corriente* (flow) of the speech event. Because his audience mainly interacted in Spanish, he framed the entire setup and punchline in the language that they would access the potential to

laugh alongside him. The only English word that they would need to know for his humorous setup to make sense was "pencil." To ensure full comprehension, he didactically told them that "Pennsylv" is "un lápiz...en inglés" [means pencil in English]. Having begun in Spanish and resolved in English exemplifies how humor and languaging innovatively harmonize to create something new.

Example 9 follows a similar structure with a slightly different result. Beginning the sequence in English and suddenly realizing one of his listeners was a Honduran monolingual Spanish speaker, he seamlessly accesses an alternate route to create a humorous moment. While approaching the punchline, he tailors the utterance (Estoy teniendo un blast aquí!), to which two of his three listeners reacted mirthfully. The joke did not elicit laughter from the Honduran student, however. Presumably the listener had not yet encountered the English verbal phrase "to have a blast" and the equivalent in Spanish does not include the word "tener," as used by the jokester. By concluding his witticism with the operative English word "blast," the Colombian-American student created a punchline available to those whose semantic pool contained the meanings of both "*cohete*" [rocket] and "having a blast". This opportunity to be humorous amongst a multi-lingual audience inspired him to create new language from his full linguistic repertoire to maximize accessibility, comprehension, and ultimately, laughter.

In the final instance, a shrewd Mexican American student approached me about a "Mexican chicken" and her baby. As I did not know the punchline to the joke, she jumped at the chance to answer me by squawking hilariously (like a chicken), "¡Ven, pa'cá!" [Come here!] Although the phonological quality of her delivery was enough to induce laughter, closing the circle between the "Mexican chicken" and "¡Ven pa'cá!" [Come here!] demonstrates another example of the translanguaging *corriente* flowing through the phonological sequence of a humorous interaction. This joke could have been completely told in Spanish and made total sense as well. However, the speaker intensified the punchline by beginning the sequence in English, planting the two seemingly unrelated concepts (Mexican chicken and baby), and then answering dynamically in Spanish. This form of inter-language jocularity was particularly effective in that the punchline has a strong phonological effect because the simultaneous mocking sound of a chicken and unexpectedly saying something in Spanish. Additionally, her audience awareness was accurate because her listeners all understood the joke because they were bilingual.

Other instances, less scripted than the canned jokes mentioned here, can be seen in Table 3 as the students' language coursed through jovial interplay. Like example 8, names or proper nouns were splendid targets for humorous *juegos de palabras*. A Spanish-inflected pronunciation of "Zachary" was deftly transformed into the Spanish "masacre" [massacre] while the English phonology of "Ms. Quiroz" morphed into English/Spanish pronunciation of "mosquitos/mosquitos." In a written example, a newly arrived Honduran saw "USA" on a map during Art class. Knowing the letters represented the United States of America, he comically drew from his own cultural and linguistic repertoire while laughingly stating, "Usa y bota" [Use and throw away, an expression found on plastic containers of consumable products in Latin America]. He displayed this quick-wittedness throughout the year. During

a lesson only in English, he and a friend responded comedically to questions regarding words in English formed from consonant blends.

Teacher: Now we have /te/. What sound? (students repeat).
 With those two letters together, [we have] what sound?
 Student from Mexico: (singing reggaetón song): Te boté, te boté...[I kicked you out, I kicked you out...]
 Student from Honduras: (laughing): Teta [titty (US vernacular for breast)]

In a later instance, as emergent bilinguals wrestled with the tri-graph /tch/, a student created, “Te echo, papá” [I’ll kick you out of here, daddy!]. In both cases students were undoubtedly engaged with the content being taught, though perhaps not in the way the teacher intended. We find again that humor served as a locus by which meaning-making through translanguaging practices manifested in an alternative conversation regarding such background knowledge as popular music and language. As a final example, a Mexican student conversed with his classmates and began to rhyme words. As a friend suggested one of the new vocabulary words that they learned in class, it’s assonant first syllable was not enough for his classmate to accept it.

Student A: Moco y foco y loco y coco riman” [“Booger” and “light bulb” and “crazy” and “coconut” rhyme]
 Student B: ¡Y loquacious! [and loquacious]
 Student A: ¡Nooooo! (both students begin to laugh).

While we cannot be certain as to why student A rejected student B’s insertion of the word “loquacious” into his rhyming list (perhaps because it was a word associated with school), what we can observe is how student B amusingly extended his compatriot’s inventory to include their newly acquired word in English. This fluidity surrounded by humor is an embodied example of how verbal play and translanguaging are close companions. The language(s) communicated were merely a vehicle for students to achieve the objective of merriment. Students brought to bear all they linguistically and culturally possessed to find connection within the familiar sanction of humor.

5. Discussion

By observing the findings of this data, takeaways fall roughly into two larger categories—semantic and metapragmatic. Semantically, bilingual individuals maneuvered verbally through the creation of something novel by adeptly engaging in humor that included homophonous and polysemous aspects of language. Creatively finding words that sounded like others and then either recycling them into the same context (i.e. “Are you killing me?”) or refashioning them risibly into new ones (i.e. “mata morros”), these students displayed their semantic wealth as real-time communication flowed freely. Similarly, they exhibited proficiency with multiple-meaning words (i.e. “cobra”) that were nimbly arranged at the conversational scene of playfulness. Interestingly, this wordplay was detected in several different “pools” of their full linguistic repertoire. Ludic utterances and speech events in the emerging bilinguals’ L1 (Spanish), L2 (English), L1/2 (both) were present as they were in different registers of formality. Within the bounds of Spanish, for instance, “aeropuerto” [airport] was re-categorized semantically into “aero-puerco” [air-pork/pig]. In English, the “Milky Way” mutated into the “Monkey Way.” Between the two, “moco” [booger] flowed into “loquacious” and “USA” developed into “usa y bota” [use and throw away]. These streams of ebullient language represent an iteration of the translanguaging *corriente* as students created and interpreted meaning with others.

The second finding is one based on the students’ adroit application of metapragmatic communication. As the bilingual students

in this study attempted humor with those around them, they possessed a strong audience awareness of what their listeners would “get” as a joke. Consequently, they incorporated appropriate languaging skills to do the work of creating joviality. The desire to connect around banter and get the point across superseded any preoccupation with grammaticality or adherence to typical language sequences or boundaries. Even so, they spoke in ways that they knew their interlocutors would comprehend. This integrated deployment of semiotic resources used as communicative competence rose to the surface through the innovative conduit of the students’ expressed merriment. Another iteration of metapragmatic awareness was the good-natured playfulness with people’s names. “Ms. Quiroz” was metamorphosed into “mosquitos”, “Zachary” turned into a “masacre” [massacre], and “Mr. Ingram” upgraded to “Mr. Instagram”, and later to “Insta.” Students openly christened students and teachers with these nicknames and used them amiably to rib the individuals openly, which implied a strong relational connection, or, *confianza*. The first example, “Ms. Quiroz” slid on a scale of different pronunciation variations from full Spanish phonology to full English phonology and several stops in between. The name “Zachary” caught the ear of a Spanish-dominant student who retailed it into his more familiar “masacre” [massacre]. Students also jokingly modified my last name Ingram to the prominent technology application “Instagram” and later clipped it to the endearing diminutive “Insta.”

Some research suggests that bilingual students may struggle with the understanding of polysemous words and their usages. For example, in a study about emergent bilingual students from various backgrounds, researchers proposed that bilingual students have a more difficult time learning academic vocabulary and require an extended processing time with words possessing more than one meaning (Crosson et al., 2020). Similarly, as the researchers suggest, “when words carry multiple meanings that map onto both discipline-specific and colloquial meanings, the challenges may be considerably greater (p. 86).” This “ambiguity disadvantage” proposes that when emergent bilinguals understand many meanings corresponding to one lexical item, there may be a “negative impact on word learning.” (p. 85). This is an understandable predicament common with all students due simply to not having experienced meaningful exposure to all possible senses of a word. However, based on the data above, students exhibited not only an interest in the idea of *juegos de palabras* (wordplay), they also showed an adeptness for it. The majority of the examples that I have shown here went undetected by the teachers and were discovered within the conversations of the students themselves. There was a *propensity towards* and *connection between* wordplay around humor that is inextricably linked to some form of meaning-making. As Axelrod and Cole (2018) stated in their study of 4th/5th grade emergent bilinguals and their conscious and competent dexterity with translanguaging, “The sophisticated humor displayed by these students demonstrates the cognitive and linguistic complexity, and it illustrates the rich ways even young emergent bilinguals fluidly employ linguistic resources.” (p. 130). This same fluidity was reflected in the interactions of the bilingual students from this study as they coursed through their entire linguistic repertoires using humor as the source of their creativity.

6. Conclusion

The investigation of translanguaging around sites of humor is worthy of our attention both as scholars and educators. In the theoretical sense, this research contributes to the discussion of how we can highlight the linguistic proficiency of emergent bilinguals. By enhancing our understanding of how linguistically dexterous emergent bilingual students can be through verbal joviality, we foreground what they *can* do, to contrast possible structures

around them that define them for what they *cannot*. We counter deficit framings of them by allowing others to understand these minoritized students as being “gifted sociolinguists” (Flores, 2016). Specifically regarding translanguaging, these instances of communicative mirth allow us to observe a channel of the flowing *corriente* that displays how young emergent bilinguals fluently wield *recreative tools* to bring old words and phrases new life. Because humor is often based on novelty (Morreall, 1983), these bilingual students displayed a great measure of linguistic (and often cultural) content from which to brandish their agility in the seconds it takes to create or respond to humor.

The pedagogical implications of these findings are quite practical and speak to both the early literacy development and creation of classroom community among elementary students. The state standards of Texas, or TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills), outline desired competencies that overlap with these students’ dexterity. For example, in the domain of reading, literacy standards call for students to “demonstrate phonological awareness by manipulating phonemes within base words” (Texas Education Agency, 2020, p. 5). By employing linguistic elasticity, within and between languages, these third graders exemplified more than just an “awareness” of phonological choice. They often manipulated sounds to showcase their understanding within the context of conversations, both casual and school related. While there are different takes in literacy scholarship on whether whole language instruction or the explicit teaching of discrete skills (such as graphophonics, phonemic awareness, etc.) is better for students’ learning, observing how these emergent bilinguals played around language captures the best of both systems. On one hand, the alteration of phonemes within syllables, syllables within words, and words within sentences across Spanish and English exhibited such student-generated attempts to highlight discrete skills that are part of phonological awareness. On the other hand, their contextualized placement of witty word creations in specific conversations speaks to the importance of potential lessons formed within a balanced literacy approach, which prioritizes the comprehension of a topic more than an isolated skill. This is connected to other pertinent state standards such as those that call primary students to “...distinguish among multiple meaning words and homographs” and “identify and apply playful uses of language” (Texas Education Agency, 2017, p. 3). Both of these objectives are wholly exhibited as students readily employed polysemous (i.e. *café*) and homophonous (i.e. *pobrecilla*) languaging in meaningful ingenious ways around humor.

Through their conversational fluency and translanguaging, these students not only attended to the cues of the meanings of words, but also how they integrated into the social context. Establishing strong classroom environments that promote culturally sustaining practices (Paris, 2012) is fundamental to a solid education. If students are fostering this type of language play unprompted by teachers, imagine what kind of learning could transpire if lessons were geared to harnessing these creative types of translanguaging intelligence. While the use of humor specifically has not yet found its way into subsequent iterations of “funds of knowledge” (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2006) or “cultural capitals” (Yosso, 2005), what indeed is present in both of these frameworks of cultural schema is the unique knowledge, employment and creation of language. In this case specifically, the students’ artful formations of words that reoriented the sense of utterances through language play displays how humor can indeed act as a channel of the translanguaging *corriente* designed to create and connect with others.

By placing a premium on and creating environments where students can positively co-create language and meaning, particularly with humor as a vehicle to do so, inevitable relational ties would strengthen in the classroom. As research has shown regarding mi-

noritized youth in US schools, cultivating joviality can assist in fostering group cohesion (Dávila, 2019), reducing anxiety and lowering affective filters for language learning (Tarone, 2000), making metalinguistic connections (Henderson & Ingram, 2018), as well as establishing ethnic solidarity and constructing bilingual identity (Martínez & Morales, 2014). This and previous scholarship suggest, therefore, that foregrounding the intersection of language and humor possesses both pedagogical and affiliative benefits for emergent bilingual students.

In closing, I submit that the levity and pervasiveness of humor constitute a potential heuristic for us to appreciate and harness the quick-witted verbal prowess and use of translanguaging used by many Latin@ students in diglossic contexts. By analyzing the agency, artistry, and engagement with their interlocutors, we observe how humor allows space for these young minority-language individuals, whose diversity of knowledge often go unnoticed and untapped in the US (Zentella, 2005). Our challenge is whether we will acknowledge the importance of this discursive practice as a legitimate locus for study as we integrate it into our academic conversations, curricular planning, teacher preparation programs, professional development, and pedagogical decisions. By understanding this through the appreciative lens of a translanguaging *corriente*, I hope to render its significance perceivable as a notion worth more than just a smile.

Declaration of Competing Interest

None.

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