

Chapter 3

Translanguaging as an Enactment of “Changjinglu” With a Chinese Satellite Baby in a Head Start Classroom

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ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on three-year-old Emma, a “satellite baby” who was born in the United States (the U.S.), spent her earlier years in China, returning to the U.S. to begin public schooling. The authors drew on a framework of culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP), translanguaging, and intersectionality to reveal and analyze Emma’s school-based literacy practices using English and one of her heritage languages, Mandarin, with two research questions: How did CSP and translanguaging take place in Emma’s everyday classroom practices? How did CSP facilitate translanguaging spaces in the early childhood classroom? Data analysis revealed that CSP was used as a gateway for Emma’s translanguaging practices as she gradually adjusted to the contextualized and situated nature of the classroom with the facilitation of her special education teacher. The authors recommend CSP-informed literacy practices with young emergent bilinguals to sustain their transnational linguistic repertoires and to enact translanguaging pedagogy in early childhood education.

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It was the first day of preschool for Letao. She just had a long-awaited reunion with her mother, after living with her grandparents in China for over one year. Letao’s first day of school was full of tears. As soon as the classroom door was closed, she escaped from the classroom teacher and fled to the exit, punching the door and crying out in Mandarin Chinese: “Let me out! Let me out!” ...When Letao’s mother came back to pick her up, Ms. Wanda, an older lady who served as the assistant teacher in Letao’s classroom asked how to say “Mom will come back!” in Mandarin. After hearing the phrase “Mama hui hui lai. (Mom will come back.)” from Letao’s mother, Ms. Wanda jotted down the pronunciations word by word. The next day when Letao was dropped off, Ms. Wanda held Letao in her arms and repeated: “Mama hui hui lai. (Mom will come back.)” Letao began to calm down and waved goodbye to her mother.

Three-year-old Emma was sitting on the edge of the carpet, leaning on the bookshelf, while the rest of the class listened to the teacher reading the classic children’s storybook *Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed*. “Who can tell me how many monkeys we have now?” the classroom teacher Alicia asked. Many children raised their hands while shouting out, “Three! Three!” “Emma, we had four little monkeys jumping, then one fell down, how many monkeys are there right now?” Emma looked terrified and clung to the bookshelf tightly. “Come on, Emma! I know you can do it!” the teacher added. Emma hid her face behind the bookshelf and started sobbing.

INTRODUCTION

The above classroom vignettes provide snapshots of two Chinese American toddlers who experienced transnational separations from their parents and struggles moving from a non-English-speaking household to a completely new English-speaking environment. Both toddlers were raised in China then returned to their immigrant families in the U.S. as “satellite babies” (Bohr & Tse, 2009). The practices of transnational “satellite babies” have been documented in North American Chinese, Mexican, South Asian, Caribbean, and Filipino communities (Aulakh, 2008; de Guzman, 2014; Dreby, 2010; Glasgow & Ghouse-Sheese, 1995; Kwong et al., 2009). Although this experience is not restricted to Chinese immigrant families, *satellite babies* or *astronaut households* are terms often associated with working-class Chinese immigrant families (Aye & Guerin, 2001; Bohr & Tse, 2009; Kwong et al., 2009; Schweitzer, 2016; Skeldon, 1997; Wang, 2018; Waters, 2002). Specifically, Chinese immigrant families had to make such decisions when they faced severe financial difficulties providing childcare and other unforeseen life obstacles as they struggled to settle in a new country. As a result, many Chinese immigrants decide to have their children remain behind in the care of their family during their initial adjustment period to a new life in another country (Bohr & Tse, 2009). Another factor in their initial decision to have their young child stay in China is related to the cultural norm of trans-generational childcare that supports having multiple family caregivers for their children (Bohr & Tse, 2009; Kwong et al., 2009; Sengupta, 1999).

In this case study, we focus on three-year-old Emma, a “satellite baby” who was born in the U.S., spent her early formative years in China, returning to the U.S. to begin public schooling. We draw on the theoretical tenets of *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy* (Paris & Alim, 2014), *translanguaging* (García et al., 2017; Li Wei, 2018), and *intersectionality* (Cresshaw, 1991; Collins & Bilge, 2016) to reveal and analyze Emma’s school-based literacy practices using English and one of her heritage languages, Mandarin. Emma was enrolled in a Head Start program in a large urban school district and was soon identified as an emerging bilingual learner with special needs. Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) and translanguaging assert that learners utilize their culture and language resources along a continuum through

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