
Translanguaging as a disruptive pedagogy in language education: An analysis of metacognitive reflections of second-year undergraduate students

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ABSTRACT

Debate on whether the use of translanguaging is disruptive of monolingual ideologies and practices that predominate global tertiary education seem to be still in its infancy. Contemporary research in the area focuses on what appears conflicting though lucid discourses on eliminating boundaries between codes or languages, resulting in no ‘named’ languages. This study adopted a qualitative case study approach in which second year undergraduate students taking a literacy course were purposively sampled. The data was collected through analysing the participants’ course related interactions on the virtual space, WhatsApp. The efficacy of WhatsApp as an instructional tool in the

teaching and learning context has escalated the interest among researchers in exploring its potential benefit in a multilingual setting. The paper reports on the crucial role language plays in the comprehension, participation, motivation, and consequent ameliorated academic performance of multilingual students. The findings attest that translanguaging, where languages of input and output are consciously alternated, proves to be an indispensable pedagogy and recommends its incorporation in daily instructional practices.

Keywords: epistemic access; language learning; literacy; monolingualism; multilingualism; translanguaging

1. Introduction

Contemporary research suggest that it is crucial for educators and policy makers to pay attention to multilingualism and multiculturalism in educational settings, to enhance consciousness and acknowledgement of linguistic and cultural diversity at individual, institutional, and societal levels (see for example Garcia, & Otheguy, 2020; Iversen 2020; Stroud & Kerfoot, 2021; Zano, 2020). They also need to take historical, ideological, social, and economic factors into consideration, as well as respective language policies and the diverse linguistic practices of educators and students (Stroud & Kerfoot, 2021). Multilingual education involves not only the educators' and students' proficiency in multiple languages, but also their knowledge and understanding of language acquisition processes, theoretical and pedagogical models, strategies aimed at the development of multilingual competence, and language policies and ideologies associated with language teaching and language use (Kerfoot, 2020).

University students' linguistic capabilities have been validated basing on the language policies of the Global North, which regard language knowledge in connection with the market, customisation and entrepreneurial skills (Mazak & Carroll, 2016). In present day universities, not all instructional approaches support minority language students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, as they view their multilingualism and multiculturalism to be a hurdle to effective teaching and learning. Rather, some of these universities implement exclusionary instructional approaches and policies for minority students using monolingual pedagogies in which the medium of instruction differs from the students' home language (Barakos & Selleck, 2019).

2. Literature review

Multilingualism, translanguaging and education

Recent research on multilingualism and language education detail significant academic benefits when students use more than one language simultaneously in the same lesson (see for example Garcia, & Otheguy, 2020; Kerfoot, 2020; Zano, 2020). A one-year ethnographic study by Poza (2019) suggests greater understanding of concepts amongst students in America who used their linguistic repertoire during lessons compared with when monolingual pedagogy was used. The study recommends that educators should capitalise on multilinguals' language skills. This shows how as an instructional strategy, translanguaging disrupts linguistic power structures and the philosophies of race, and nationhood (Poza 2019).

Similar to the study by Poza (2019) is a study conducted in Mankato by Infante and Licon (2018) shows how multilingualism can be valuable in framing and supporting epistemological access across the curriculum. Their study suggests superior academic performance amongst students who used more than one language during lessons. The researchers encourage

educators to recognise and accept multilingualism since it enhances academic performance, boosts students' self-esteem, confidence and sense of belonging (Iversen 2020).

A similar recommendation was also made by Mazak and Carroll (2016). The two researchers (Mazak and Carroll) examine the didactic practices of three professors at a university in Puerto Rico, construing their practices as one ratifying a fluid multilingual pedagogy. Mazak and Carroll (2016) deduce that the pedagogy employed by the three professors studied sets up benefits for student engagement across their full linguistic repertoire and has the capability of supporting both content development, as well as development of English and Spanish academic language.

Another researcher, Caruso (2018) explores translanguaging practices among a university professor and multilingual students who are Portuguese, French, and Italian, in a Language and Communication Policy course at a Portuguese university. The professor encourages the multilingual students to completely use their entire linguistic repertoire to co-construct a collective understanding of academic content, which is often in English, resultant in the building of a co-learning classroom environment (García & Wei, 2014). This study signifies the function of open institutional language policies in expediting multilingualism, academic engagement, inclusion, equality, and equity and has findings similar to those presented by Goodman (2016).

A study by Goodman (2016) reviews how translanguaging at a Ukrainian university is a political struggle for minoritised language recognition, on the part of both minority students and the institution. Goodman's study provides examples of multiple semiotic resources of visuals and languages, in both formal and informal learning spaces within the university and suggests deeper comprehension of concepts when several languages and modes are used.

Another study at a higher institution of learning was conducted by Kong, He, Lai and Lin (2017). At a university in Hong Kong, He et.al (2017) explored translanguaging in multimodal presentations with tertiary students who were speakers of Mandarin, Cantonese, and English. The sample also included students who were readers of complex Chinese characters, simplified Chinese characters, and English. Their study documents how the professor navigated a translanguaged and trans-semiotised space (that is; a space where the three languages are unified with numerous other semiotic patterns such as visuals and gestures) during the meaning-making process (Lin, 2019). Their study shows how students who did not share the same elements of the academic repertoire of communicative forms were accommodated through translanguaging in multimodal presentations.

WhatsApp as a virtual learning space

A growing body of research has been documented on the use of WhatsApp as a teaching and learning platform in educational settings (see for example Chipunza, 2013; Cetinkaya 2017; Gasaymeh, 2017). WhatsApp is a Smartphone application for instant messaging. It was initially

designed as an online social networking platform, however, researchers and educators who continuously reflect on their pedagogically practices realised that this virtual space can be used as a learning platform as well mainly because of its convenience for students. In many educational institutions which offer contact classes, WhatsApp became a popular platform to facilitate teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic times where all learning moved to online platforms (Mulenga & Marbán, 2020; Haron, Al Abri, & Alotaibi 2021; Budianto, & Yudhi, 2021). However, research on the use of WhatsApp especially in language classrooms dates back to the pre-COVID-19 era (Chipunza, 2013; Alqahtani, Bhaskar, Vadakalur Elumalai, & Abumelha, 2018; Gachago, Strydom, Hanekom, Simons & Walters, 2015; Cetinkaya 2017; Gasaymeh, 2017).

In South Africa, lecturers and students of many institutions of higher education, preferred to use WhatsApp as an extended teaching and learning platform in addition to their institutional online teaching and learning management systems (TLMS). This was mainly because it is easily accessible, easy to use, no training is required and the platform does not consume much data, a challenge for many students in developing countries. Embedded within the mobile application, are features such as text messaging, phone or video call, voice note (audio), links, location, document, and the use of images and *emojis*, all vital for communication.

Education practitioners world-wide have adopted the use of WhatsApp as a teaching and learning platform for varied reasons and the reported findings have been positive. For example, Annamalai (2019) used the WhatsApp platform with a group of undergraduate students in Malaysia to extend learning in a blended classroom environment. Findings from the study showed that students expressed their preference for WhatsApp as an extended learning platform. A similar study conducted by Manan (2017) with English second language students at a university, found that WhatsApp as a mobile tool can improve students' communicative skill in English language learning, motivation and positive attitudes to learn.

In addition, a study with university students who were learning English as second language conducted by Binti Mistar and Embi (2016) found that WhatsApp helped students to learn the language better and enhanced their proficiency in using the English language. La Hanisi, Risdiyany, Dwi Utami and Sulisworo (2018) study highlighted the use of WhatsApp for educational purposes. They argue that WhatsApp is beneficial to students' knowledge of the language. It is a platform which supports collaborative learning and the co-creation of knowledge. During the COVID 19 pandemic, educators found it difficult to assess and monitor students' engagement, thus, in their study Ferreira-Meyers and Martins (2020) argue that WhatsApp can also be used to assess student's participation. Finally, in Nuraeni and Nurmalia, (2020) study, WhatsApp was used by both teachers and students to support English Language Learning (ELL) .They reported that WhatsApp was significant in helping students with ELL related activities since teachers were also on the same platform.

Despite the notable advantages of the use of WhatsApp as a teaching and learning platform, few studies have addressed the aspect of diversity, inclusion and multilingualism particularly

in diverse institutions of Higher Education in the context of South Africa. Considering these concepts on online platforms will lead to meaningful interactions, enhanced access by all students to course related information, engagement and participation from all the students regardless of their language background (Charamba & Nkomo, 2021). Hence, this study adopted a case study approach to analyse students' WhatsApp chats (conversations) where a translanguaging pedagogy was applied.

3. Theoretical framework

This paper hinges on the Technological Pedagogic Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework by Koehler and Mishra (2013) and the Funds of Knowledge theory, by Moll, Gonzalez, and Amanti (1992).

Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK)

Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) is a viewpoint that rises from linkages among content, pedagogy and technological knowledge. It is the fundamental and foundation of effectual instruction in which technology is incorporated in constructive ways. These are used in the delivery of content, knowledge of what presents concepts as being difficult or easy to master and how technology can be used to assist in redressing some of the difficulties that students face, knowledge of their prior knowledge and theories of epistemology and knowledge of how technologies can be used to scaffold existing knowledge to develop new epistemologies or strengthen old ones (Zano & Charamba, 2021).

TPACK focuses on how instructional practices can change when specific technologies are used in certain ways. This entails the knowledge of pedagogical affordances and limitations of a wide array of technological tools as they relate to disciplinarily and developmentally appropriate pedagogical designs and approaches. To develop TPACK, a comprehensive understanding of the limitations and benefits of technologies and the disciplinary contexts within which they function is necessary (Koehler & Mishra, 2013). An acknowledgement and comprehension of the advantages of technology and how they can be capitalised on respectively to changes in context and purposes is an important part of understanding TPK as most popular software programs were not developed for instructional purposes.

To maximise benefits that can be derived from the use of technology, educators need to repudiate functional rigidity and nurture skills to transcend the most common uses for technologies, redesigning them for tailor-made instructional purposes (Koehler & Mishra, 2013).

Funds of Knowledge

Another opportunity would be the incorporation of the theory of Funds of Knowledge in academic academics. Funds of Knowledge are an assemblage of knowledge-based in corresponding cultural practices that are part of a family's inner culture, work experience, or their day-to-day schedule. This is the knowledge and expertise those students have on account of their roles in their respective families, communities, and culture.

The theory of Funds of Knowledge acknowledges the possibilities associated with the knowledge that arises from these students' active participation in their multicultural, multilingual, and multigenerational households and/or community activities (Gonzalez, 2005). Students, irrespective of gender, race, language or socioeconomic background, do not enter the classroom as blank slates (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005). Through that lens, the funds of knowledge theory posits that education should be linked to students' lives, and the details of effectual pedagogy need to align with local histories and community contexts with regards to language, culture, and socialisation (Gonzalez et.al, 2005).

The theory advocates for a social approach to learning, in which there is a kind of academic apprenticeship, enabling students to bring their own prior experiences into the classroom and to build on these experiences in a way that accepts them as distinctive individuals, with individual funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et.al, 2005). In drawing up instructional activities using the funds of knowledge theory educators will develop at a curriculum which seeks to connect homes, classrooms, and communities. In light of the funds of knowledge, language and learning is considered a process situated in a historical, cultural and social context irrespective of the learning area.

The Funds of Knowledge theory seeks to make learning 'real' (McKinney & Tyler, 2019), by disregarding the existing deficit model through paying attention to the academic process, rather than just measure the student's shortcomings against the intended destination. Kiramba and Smith (2019) advocate for a conceptual space that connects the space between marginalised funds of knowledge such as students' languages and academic knowledge. In this space, various discourses between home and academic contexts are explored, and daily knowledge is integrated with academic learning to develop new ways of knowing (Gonzalez, 2005). Ingrained in the students' funds of knowledge is their home language which should also be incorporated in the academic space.

4. Methodology

The study is a qualitative interpretative case study with a group of 60 undergraduate students in an institution of higher education in South Africa. According to Merriam (2009) a case study offers a greater understanding of the event being investigated as it focuses on describing the process, individual or group behaviours and provides an intensive in-depth description and analysis of a single bounded unit placed in a specific context. In this study, a case study

approach was employed to gather in-depth information on how students used language on the WhatsApp platform. Specifically, the study aimed at investigating the effect of adopting a translanguaging pedagogy on the students WhatsApp group for a particular course. It is hoped that this study will offer guidelines for further research and hypothesis creation on this subject.

Site and participants

The study was carried out at a university in Johannesburg, South Africa. Johannesburg is the largest city in the country with a population of over five million people from all continents of the world (Statistics South Africa, 2019). By virtue of its populace, it is estimated that more than 100 languages are spoken in the city. The university has an enrolment of linguistically and culturally diverse students necessitating the need to revise the language policy which in the past favoured English only as a language of teaching and learning. The change in student demographics has also contributed to a change in the size of mixed language classrooms found at the university, hence the need to adopt multilingual pedagogies for purposes of effective teaching and learning.

The participants of the study were 60 preservice teachers in their second year of study of a Bachelor's in Education programme. As a way of facilitating learning during the pandemic, a WhatsApp group was created by students registered for the literacy course. Although being part of this online group was voluntary, as the University has approved teaching and learning platforms, all 60 students accepted the group invite, including the two course lecturers. Acknowledging the diversity of their students, the lecturers encouraged students to utilise their linguistic and cultural repertoires to construct knowledge, develop their academic skills and interact amongst each other through translanguaging within the online platform. All 60 students were briefed on the purpose, the nature of the study and its ethical considerations. All ethical considerations were followed, and researchers sought clearance from the responsible gate keepers.

Data collection and analysis

The qualitative data collected and analysed included archived WhatsApp chats and interviews with the students. However, for this paper, we focus only on the data collected from the archived WhatsApp chats to show how translanguaging was successfully incorporated in the particular course WhatsApp group. When teaching and learning moved from face to face to online platforms due the COVID-19 pandemic, students decided to create a group on the social media platform they were comfortable. The students opted for WhatsApp, although other platforms such as Facebook, Google docs and Canvas, the Learning Management System offered by the university, were available. The reason for their choice was because all students were familiar with it, they used it regularly and it was easily accessible and cost effective.

These students were given the flexibility to discuss any course related matters such as content, instructions, feedback on written tasks and revision in preparation for examinations. Everyone

was assigned the role of a group administrator (group leader) so as to share the group link with other students and also add members in the virtual space. Students were encouraged to use any acceptable language they are comfortable with. The WhatsApp group was active from May to November, during which the two lecturers interacted when necessary. In some issues raised by the students, the lecturers observed and did not intervene as they wanted the students to assist each other and work collaboratively. The lecturers consistently encouraged the students to be flexible in their language use and choice as shown in the screenshots in Figure 1.

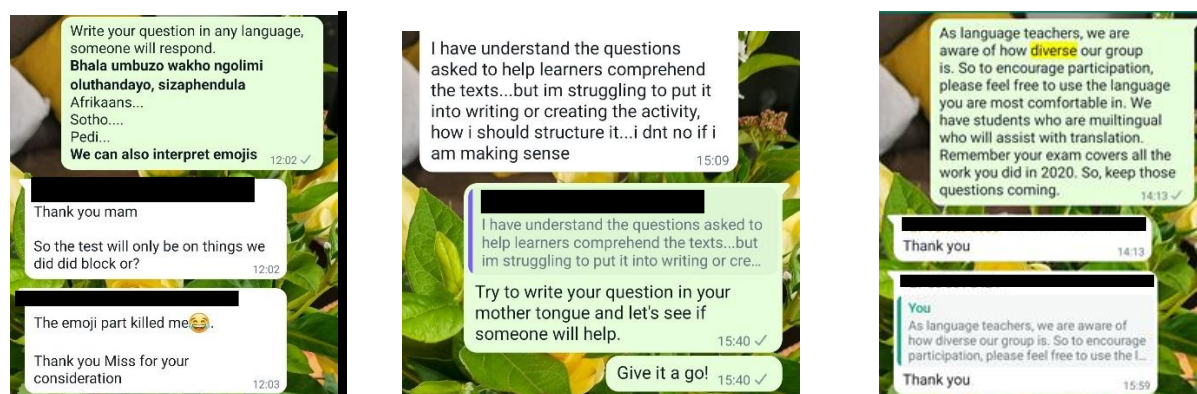


Figure 1: Lecturer encouraging students to make use of their varied language repertoire

Data reported in this study was collected in term two and four of the academic year in 2020 when all teaching and learning moved to online platforms at the university under study. We did not collect data in term 3 as students were on Work Integrated Learning (WIL) in schools, a component of their course as per the requirements of the Bachelor's in Education course.

Students were instructed to make use of the WhatsApp group for any course related issues. Rules of engagement were set by the lecturers together with the students. Students were encouraged to use any form of language they were comfortable in expressing themselves which includes the use of memes, signs and symbols as long as it was acceptable language. In addition to the WhatsApp chats, interviews were held with the students where they were asked to reflect on their engagement in the WhatsApp group to complete the course. The interviews were transcribed for later analysis. However, data collected through interviews will not be presented in this paper.

Students' archived chats were analysed in an iterative manner as suggested by Akerlind (2005). To analyse data, four phases of thematic analysis provided by Braun and Clark (2006) were followed which are:

- 1) familiarisation with the data;
- 2) coding;
- 3) searching for themes; and
- 4) reviewing themes.

5. Findings and discussions

As previously mentioned, a WhatsApp group was created for second year students at a certain university in South Africa. Data reported in this study was collected from the archived WhatsApp chats. In analysing the chats, we found that allowing students to be flexible in their language use on the platform, resulted in students taking ownership of their learning, increased participations, expansion of learning and the use of multimodal strategies which increased students' interaction, excitement and collaboration.

Emergency of agentic actions

Students taking ownership of their learning

Analysing the archived WhatsApp chats, we noted that there were instance where all 60 students, instead of directly contacting their lecturers, took the responsibility of interacting amongst each other to get clarity of important course information. The translanguaging approach implemented on the online platform facilitated the students' engagement as shown in the screenshot Figure 2. The students fluidly alternated between their African languages, English, the use of emoticons and audio recording tools. As the students' full linguistic repertoire was accepted and utilised on the virtual space, interaction was increased. All 60 students reported enhanced confidence to initiate discussion, thus the platform became more student oriented.



Figure 2: Students' interactions when they had challenges with accessing course material

In the example provided in Figure 1, the student who could not access the lecture recording and the one who struggled with logging in could have contacted the lecturers privately or the University technicians for assistance. However, they relied on each other, with the other student sending a voice note assisting her peers. Similarly, in their study, Harona, Al Abri and Alotaibi (2021) observed that their students became active learners. Our students worked as a team on the WhatsApp platform sharing strategies they would later use in their essays. We argue that allowing students to utilise their linguistic and cultural repertoires on WhatsApp created a positive atmosphere for learning which facilitated academic growth and self-efficacy among students.

Enhanced participation

A key affordance of the WhatsApp group that was created was its flexibility for students to interact without space and language constraints. According to Andujar (2016: 63) “WhatsApp constitutes a powerful educational tool to encourage second language interaction among participants and its tremendous potential to activate students' involvement remains one of the least exploited functionalities of mobile phones”. We argue that, for this platform to be more effective for teaching and learning, issues around language, diversity, multilingualism and inclusivity should be also considered.

Thus, in their study Kirsch and Seele (2020) observed that translanguaging and multilingual education, included all learners in the classroom which enhanced communication and improved learning of concepts and language learning. In this study, we considered the use of translation as an approach to facilitate participation. The lecturers were aware that in their classroom they were bilingual and multilingual students who could assume the role of translators. Hence, all 60 students were free to use any other form of language knowing that they would get assistance from their peers.



Figure 3: Students' use of translation on the WhatsApp group

Guzula et.al (2016) explored the effectiveness of a TL pedagogy in two established third spaces. TL through translation enhanced learner participation, facilitated inclusiveness, activated the learners' prior knowledge, empowered learners and was utilised as a resource for storytelling.

Reinforcement of knowledge and consolidation learning

The WhatsApp group became a space where students could share what was discussed in the class and revise and prepare for tests, assignments and examinations. Their discussions basically expanded their learning. The WhatsApp chat example provided in (Figure 4) are interactions related to the examination revision. The students' chat responses written in English were a response to a student who needed assistance on how to define comprehension. The students were free to ask questions and share the knowledge they had, thus taking ownership of their learning.

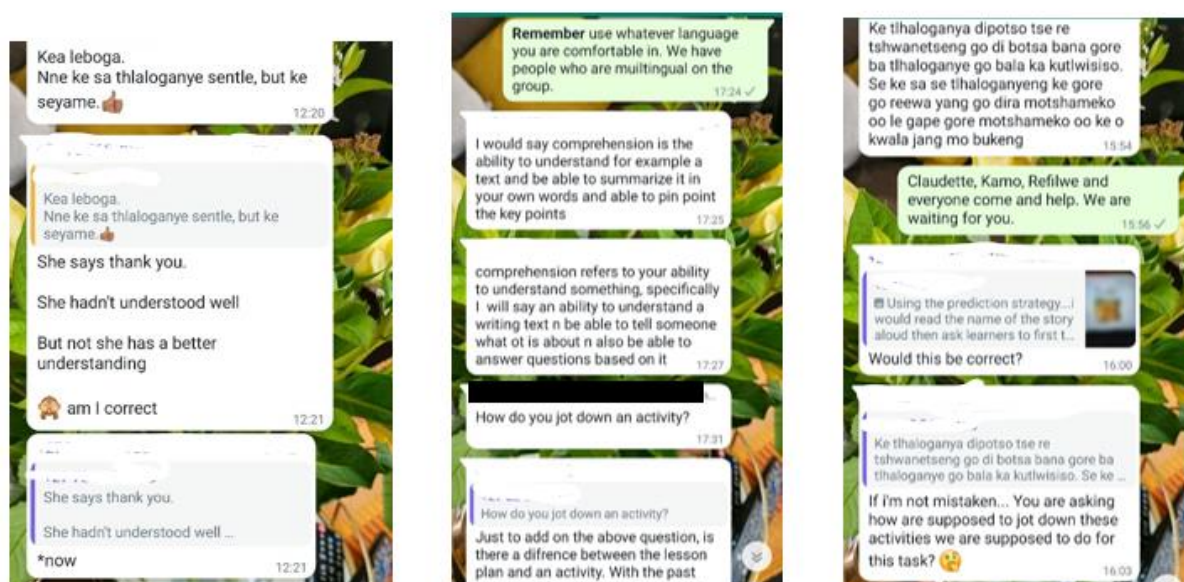


Figure 4: Illustrates the interactions related to the examination revision.

In Figure 4, student A asks her peers to help her understand what comprehension is. Students B and C provide explanations in English based on their understanding. Student C responds in Setswana, thanking her peers for the explanation. Student D who is a Zulu speaker, tries to translate the text, uses emoticons to show that she is not confident with her translation. Screenshot 3 is another example of a student asking in Setswana about how to respond to a certain question. The lecturer alerts some multilingual students to this question. The question is later translated by one of the students to English.

The translation strategy that was used on this platform enabled the student to intersect between the languages, to transcend meanings beyond the language of input and to promote deeper

digestion of the content and concepts taught. Students interacted in their preferred language and alternated the language of input and output. As a result, they were more engaged. Similar findings were reported by Vaish and Subhan (2015) who adopted the translanguaging strategies by using the learners' dominant language to enhance comprehension and teach vocabulary during reading sessions and the use of translations to introduce new vocabulary.

As also noted in the study by Vaish and Subhan (2015), the teachers and the students utilised more English than other languages. In our case, this is understandable as English is the target language, a language that is used for teaching and learning. However, the translanguaging approach we adopted was a way of preparing our students for multilingual classrooms, as they are aware of the importance of accommodating a diverse group of learners, and how they can do it.

Increased interaction, excitement and social relations

The Covid-19 pandemic changed the teaching environment which saw teaching activities moving from offline to online. Having taught the same group of students, offline and online, we noted differences in their classroom interaction, their excitement about learning and the relationships that were formed. We noted that with face to face large classrooms, students were not so well connected, appreciative and open with their lecturers and their peers.

However, analysing our group WhatsApp chats, we noted that student's learning moved to autonomous learning, where they took control of their learning by establishing positive relationships amongst themselves and their lecturer. Analysing the chats, we noted they had fun moments, shared jokes in the process of learning and assisting one another. This was facilitated by the fact that students were able to express themselves in languages they were comfortable in, which included the use of emoticons, memes and audio recordings. According to Guzula et.al (2016), the students' use of multimodal strategies during their interactions is called trans-semiotising, which means "the use of various semiotic resources to make meaning (p.222).



Figure 5: Students’ use of multimodal strategies

Our overall analysis of the WhatsApp chats revealed that translanguaging and multimodal strategies used by the students in their interaction resulted in powerful learning opportunities and meaningful collaborative participation. Guzula et.al (2016) state that being a bilingual student is a resource as the student is flexible to use their entire linguistic and semiotic repertoire which are effective strategies of translanguaging and multimodal meaning-making that enhance learning. Throughout the students’ interaction, the role of the lecturers was that of facilitators. They participated on the WhatsApp group to make important announcements and when students were not able to provide answers on certain issues.

6. Recommendations

The study recommends the adoption of multilingual pedagogies for meaning-making amongst university students. Today’s educational spaces have become more and more linguistically and culturally diverse, putting into question the need for educators to continue with monolingual pedagogy. Through multilingual pedagogy, university students make use of a single meaning-making system, in which multiple discursive practices are used to understand the multilingual

world and to develop spaces conducive to the use of their entire semasiological and semiotic repertoire in the higher education space (García & Otheguy, 2020). With the advancement of technology, educators should see this as another golden opportunity to embed multilingualism in education through development of technologically- oriented multilingual pedagogies.

7. Conclusion

This study has proven that WhatsApp is a social networking tool for education and learning, including language learning. The acceptance and use of multiple languages on WhatsApp will help generate excitement and enthusiasm towards learning leading to academic achievement, mainly when it caters for difficult course content. Findings of this study show that students learned more effectively being part of the course WhatsApp group. They received immediate feedback from their peers and every opinion was valued. Of importance is that the platform offered a collaborative learning and student centred learning environment where multilingualism and diversity was acknowledged.

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