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Methodological Insights From a Qualitative Case Study in a Migration Context: Translingual Writing Practices Among Emergent Multilingual Children

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Abstract

This article examines the methodological challenges and opportunities of researching translingual writing practices among emergent multilingual children in South Korea. Drawing on a four-month qualitative case study involving three focal participants, the study explores their translingual writing across school, home, community, and a specially designed after-school writing program. A multi-sited, multilingual research design combined classroom observations, interviews, writing artifacts, and digital traces produced in English, Korean, and/or Russian. The multilingual nature of the dataset required sustained attention to translation, interpretation, and shifting ideological meanings across research contexts. Ethical tensions and power asymmetries emerged in decisions surrounding transcription, translation, and voice representation. While participants actively mobilized diverse linguistic resources during composing, this diversity was only partially visible in the final products due to institutional language norms. The findings underscore the need for flexible, reflexive, and context-sensitive methodologies for multilingual research in migration societies.

Keywords

Koryoin students; multilingual education; multilingual learners; multilingual qualitative research; translingualism

1. Introduction

Schools often operate under a tacit monolingual logic, even as they accommodate students with complex transnational and linguistic biographies. For researchers seeking to understand how emergent multilingual students navigate such environments through translingual practices, the methodological endeavor is equally

complex. Although translingual practices are integral to students' everyday meaning-making, they are often excluded from formal assessments or final products due to institutional language norms (Choi, 2022). Capturing translingual processes, therefore, requires more than traditional observation or translation; it demands methodological approaches that recognize language as dynamic, relational, and politically charged.

Against this backdrop, researching translingual writing among emergent multilingual children in a nominally monolingual system presents both empirical opportunities and methodological challenges. Prior work on classroom translingual practices (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; García & Kleyn, 2016; García et al., 2017; Li, 2018) has shown that young learners fluidly mobilize their full linguistic repertoires during meaning-making, even when final products must conform to dominant language standards. Yet, documenting these practices often remains limited to surface-level translation of final products rather than the dynamic processes through which multilingual meaning emerges. As a result, scholarship has tended to privilege multilingual outcomes over the situated, multimodal processes that sustain them.

Matsuda (2014) cautions that without critically engaging with language and translingual issues, research risks merely presenting "examples of visible differences" (p. 483) and obscuring the processes of multilingual meaning-making without substantive argument (Gevers, 2018; Gilyard, 2016; Kubota, 2016). By contrast, Lu and Horner (2013) and Jordan (2015) argue that the expressions and negotiations of emerging multilingual learners themselves constitute the content of multilingual research, providing an essential starting point for translingual inquiry. This perspective suggests that, through the critical exploration of language differences and situated resources, researchers can illuminate learners' language and literacy processes as achievements in their own right. Such practices represent legitimate and creative forms of knowledge-making that depart from standardized norms (Cushman, 2016).

Recent methodological scholarship further underscores that cross-language qualitative research is never a neutral technical practice. Decisions regarding who translates, when translation occurs, and how meaning is rendered actively shape what counts as knowledge (Temple & Young, 2004). Extending this concern, Zhao and Carey (2023) propose bilingual analysis as a decolonial practice that resists the premature Anglicization of meaning, while Schumann et al. (2023) describe cross-language data work as containing epistemological icebergs—often-unseen challenges related to translation timing, fidelity, and voice. Together, these studies call for sustained researcher reflexivity and transparent analytic procedures that keep participants' linguistic repertoires visible throughout the research process.

This orientation aligns with broader debates on multilingual research ethics and practice, including translation timing (Santos et al., 2015), ethical transparency in multilingual interviews (Schembri & Jahić Jašić, 2022), and bilingual analysis strategies (Zhao & Carey, 2023). While this study draws on a larger translingual research project (2018–2024), it focuses specifically on the project's methodological dimensions. Accordingly, this article addresses the following research questions:

1. What methodological challenges arise in a multilingual qualitative research project that investigates the translingual writing practices of emergent multilingual children, particularly during data collection, translation, and analysis?
2. How do power relations and institutional language hierarchies shape the research process and influence the representation of participants' multilingual knowledge and agency?

By addressing these questions, this article aims to extend street-level and school-based scholarship on linguistic diversity (Holzinger, 2020; Scheibelhofer et al., 2021; Thoma & Draxl, 2023) into the realm of multilingual qualitative research. Drawing on a four-month translingual study, it offers concrete strategies—such as shared authority in data interpretation—for producing ethically sound and analytically rich accounts of translingual writing practices in migration societies.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Epistemological, Ethical, and Methodological Challenges in Multilingual Qualitative Research

Multilingual qualitative research confronts a range of epistemological, ethical, and methodological challenges, particularly in contexts shaped by institutional monolingualism, such as in South Korea. Specifically, in Yoon's (2023) ethnography of a Russian-speaking preschool community in Korea, multilingual children are often evaluated against dominant Korean language norms, and non-Korean repertoires are positioned as deficits rather than resources. The structural biases are not only reproduced in classrooms but also affect how researchers design studies, engage with participants, and interpret data. To ethically engage with the participants' multilingual realities in monolingually structured environments, Yoon triangulates video recordings, field notes, and participant observation while continuously reflecting on her positionality as a monolingual Korean researcher.

Similarly, Choi's (2022) case study of her own multilingual child extends methodological discussions by foregrounding the complexities of conducting insider research in a multilingual household. As a mother scholar, Choi employed longitudinal ethnographic methods to trace her child's literacy development across Korean, Farsi, and English. Her detailed data collection—balancing observation notes, multimodal compositions, and informal interviews—demonstrates the depth of insight that can emerge from sustained, intimate engagement. At the same time, Choi candidly reflects on the ethical tensions in her dual roles, as her desire to document sometimes disrupted daily life and her assumptions as a parent-researcher required ongoing reflexivity. These methodological dilemmas—of access, representation, and researcher influence—resonate beyond her context, raising critical questions about how positionality affects what can be known, shown, and shared in multilingual qualitative research.

Additional challenges emerge in cross-language translation practices. For example, Santos et al. (2015) caution that the timing of translation in cross-language research—whether during transcription, coding, or analysis—can significantly shape data interpretation. Extending this argument, Schumann et al. (2025) warn that unexamined translation practices often conceal deeper epistemological tensions around authorship, fidelity, and voice. Ethical concerns are further amplified by power asymmetries in multilingual fieldwork as translation must be treated as an ethical and positional practice rather than a neutral technical procedure (Flores, 2024; Schembri & Jahić Jašić, 2022).

Together, the body of work calls for flexible, reflexive, and ethically grounded methodological approaches in multilingual qualitative research. Rather than treating language as a barrier, these approaches view multilingualism as a generative site of knowledge production—albeit one that demands critical attention to how voices, meanings, and identities are mediated through data collection, translation, and analysis.

2.2. Challenges in Researching Translingual Writing Practices

Translingual writing emphasizes the fluid negotiation of meaning across languages, resisting monolingual norms and often occurring in informal, multimodal, and socially situated contexts (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Li, 2018). However, the complexity of participants' linguistic repertoires and the non-linear, multimodal nature of translingual composing make such practices difficult to capture through conventional qualitative approaches (Crane et al., 2009; Sun & Lan, 2021a).

One core challenge is the tension lies between the situated, process-oriented nature of translingual writing and the epistemological assumptions of dominant academic traditions, which often privilege stable products over emergent meaning-making processes. As Sun and Lan (2021b) argue, studies on translingual writing tend to focus on writing products rather than the creative, semiotic, and embodied processes that shape them. It risks reducing complex translingual practices to observable artifacts rather than attending to their emergence through affective, material, and discursive entanglements. Additionally, institutional language ideologies often compel researchers to translate or clean multilingual texts into dominant languages for peer review, limiting the visibility of translingual practices and reproducing linguistic hierarchies in the very act of research dissemination (Crane et al., 2009; Ticheloven et al., 2021).

As illustrated by Choi (2022) and Yoon (2023), researchers' positionalities profoundly shape access, interpretation, and ethical decision-making in studies of young multilinguals. In her mother scholar case study, Choi (2022) wrestled with how to ethically represent her child's translingual compositions while maintaining critical distance and minimizing disruption to family life. Yoon (2023), working in a Korean preschool classroom, recognized how her identity as a native Korean-speaking adult might influence children's language use and her interpretation of their interactions, especially when she lacked proficiency in the children's home language, Russian. Both studies call for reflexive, situated methodologies that account for the embodied, affective, and relational dimensions of working with young multilinguals.

Finally, epistemological assumptions about what constitutes legitimate data—such as fixed linguistic forms, coherent narratives, or articulated intent—often stand at odds with the emergent, affective, and multimodal nature of translingual writing. Building on this perspective, MacLure (2013) urges researchers to reconsider the status of data, not as static representations awaiting interpretation, but as incitements—events that invite affective and intellectual engagement. Data, she argues, hold the capacity to provoke wonder not merely because of what they contain, but because of how they resonate materially and virtually—through bodies, objects, moments, and potentialities. For researchers working with young multilinguals, this means resisting premature closure and instead experimenting with ways of seeing, sensing, and representing that allow the complexity of translingual practices to emerge—often unexpectedly—as knowledge-in-the-making.

3. Methodology

3.1. The Study: Translingual Writing Practices Among Emergent Multilingual Children in South Korea

This article is part of a larger research project conducted between 2018 and 2024. For the purposes of this article, the data specifically draws on materials collected between May and August 2020, which overlaps with the data collection phase of my doctoral research (Jang, 2021). During this period, a specially designed

after-school translingual writing program (TWP) was implemented at a Korean middle school that had experienced a growing enrollment of Russian-speaking ethnic Korean migrant students since 2018.

The program was proposed in response to the students' restricted use of their first language (Russian) in school, despite their need to learn both Korean as a second language and English as a foreign language. The TWP was designed as a pedagogical space where students could draw on their full linguistic repertoires and reconceptualize their L1 not as a deficit but as a resource for multilingual learning. Participation in the program was voluntary.

The program was designed as a seven-week blended course, offered in both online and offline formats. I conducted the program three to four times per week, with each session lasting between one and three hours. During each session, students engaged with assigned readings while simultaneously working on three main writing projects (see Table 1). During the first two weeks, students introduced themselves, shared their language learning experiences, and read *Amy Tan in the Classroom: The Art of Invisible Strength* (Shea & Wilchek, 2005) and *Mother Tongue* (Tan, 1990) as anchor texts for developing autobiographical narratives.

In week 3, students engaged in a translation activity and read Lin's (2010) *English and Me: My Language Learning Journey*, while preparing interview questions for parents, teachers, and peers to explore their language learning processes. These interviews allowed students to use multiple languages and reflect on their own learning strategies through others' experiences.

Table 1. Overall TWP plan & student participants' writing products.

	Lesson	Readings	Students' writing products
Week 1	Let Me Introduce Myself	Shea and Wilchek (2005)	*My Life Map/Story*
Week 2	The Trials and Triumphs of My Language Learning (1)	Tan (1990) Visson (2013)	Brainstorming Memoirs/turning points Written comments on the stories shared by peers
Week 3	The Trials and Triumphs of My Language Learning (2)	Lin (2010, chapter 16)	Individual students' interview questions for their interviewees (e.g., parents, teachers, peers)
Week 4	The Trials and Triumphs of My Language Learning (3)	Gladkova (2007, chapter 11)	Written reports on their interviews Rough draft of my success story of language learning Peer feedback on a rough draft Written response to peer feedback
Week 5	The Trials and Triumphs of My Language Learning (4)	Gladkova (2007, chapter 11) Ulman (2007, chapter 4)	First revision of my success story of language learning Peer feedback on the first revision Written response to peer feedback
Week 6	The Trials and Triumphs of My Language Learning (5)	Ulman (2007, chapter 4)	Second revision of my success story of language learning
Week 7	Future Me		Final draft of *My Success Story of Language Learning* *A Letter To My Future Self*

Weeks 4–6 focused on translation activities based on Visson's (2013) *What Mean? Where Russians Go Wrong in English* and selected chapters from *Translating Lives: Living With Two Languages and Cultures* (e.g., Gladkova, 2007; Ulman, 2007). These texts guided students in identifying how multilingual writers construct meaning across contexts and informed their own essays, titled *My Success Story of Language Learning*. Following peer review, students revised and presented their narratives in class.

In the final week, students reflected on their learning trajectories and outlined their last project, Future Me, by envisioning themselves five years ahead. Using this outline, they composed letters to their future selves as a culminating reflection on their multilingual learning journeys.

Following Yin's (2018) principles of multiple sources of evidence and chain of evidence, data were collected through (a) classroom, home, and community observations; (b) semi-structured interviews with students, parents, and teachers; (c) pre- and post-program surveys; and (d) the collection of educational artifacts and student writing (see Table 2). These multiple sources produced a rich, triangulated dataset enabling an in-depth examination of students' translingual writing across contexts (Durdella, 2019).

Table 2. Data sources and collection methods.

Method	Data source	Frequency
Observation	Video and audio recordings in classrooms	3–4 times a week
	Field notes in classrooms	3–4 times a week
	Video and audio recordings in home and community contexts	1–2 times a week
	Field notes in home and community contexts	1–2 times a week
Collection of Students' written responses and educational artifacts	Writing artifacts/documents	3–4 times a week
	Screen capture/recordings	3–4 times a week
	Literacy logs	5 times a week
Surveys	Pre- and post-student survey	At the beginning and the end of the program
Interviews	In-process composition interviews	Once a week
	Interviews at home	Once a week
	Final interviews in school	End of the program
	Interviews with parents and teachers	3 times during the data collection period

The study was conducted as a four-month multiple case study with three focal participants—Leo, Sandra, and Alex (pseudonyms)—all Koryoin middle school students. Participants were selected based on sustained engagement in the program and willingness to participate in interviews. Prior to the study, detailed study information was shared with the students and their parents. Both parental and child consent forms were distributed, and families were asked to return the signed forms if they agreed to participate in the study.

At the time of data collection, Leo was an eighth-grade student who was fourteen years old. Ambitious and academically driven, he aspired to work at Google in his twenties and devoted considerable effort to achieving

strong grades in his Korean school. Leo spoke Russian as his primary language but also had some knowledge of Uzbek and Koryomal. Koryomal, a Korean variety widely spoken by Koryoin communities in Russia and Central Asia, differs from standard South Korean language in that it exhibits North Korean intonation and incorporates early twentieth-century Korean and Russian vocabulary. Leo's multilingual background stemmed from his family: His mother is Uzbek, and his father is Koryoin. However, Leo reported that his proficiency in both Uzbek and Koryomal was limited to basic comprehension and conversational ability. His English learning began during his fifth year at an elementary school in Uzbekistan, where he also received three years of private tutoring. Additionally, he acquired basic Korean expressions while staying temporarily in Russia before migrating to South Korea.

Sandra was a fifteen-year-old ninth-grade student who had migrated to South Korea earlier than Leo. I first met her in late 2018, when she was a seventh grader at a regional middle school I visited for the initial phase of the study. At that time, she appeared quite confident in speaking Korean and frequently assisted both Korean teachers and her Russian-speaking peers with communication. Like Leo, she possessed some knowledge of Uzbek, as she attended an Uzbek school where Uzbek was the medium of instruction, although Russian was predominantly spoken at home and in her community in Uzbekistan. Sandra had learned English as a foreign language in Uzbekistan, but had little or no exposure to the Korean language before her migration.

At the time of data collection, Alex was a fourteen-year-old eighth-grade student who had migrated to South Korea at the age of nine. Energetic and expressive, he often shared his thoughts actively—both through speech and written messages—throughout the program. Having spent more years in South Korea than the other participants, Alex demonstrated greater confidence in Korean while showing comparatively limited proficiency in Russian and English. Interestingly, although his Russian ability appeared to be at an elementary level, he enthusiastically used and displayed his Russian knowledge during the program, seemingly taking pride in Russian as his first and mother language.

Using video-stimulated recall, interviews, field notes, and trilingual data analysis (Korean, Russian, English), the study examined how translingual spaces afforded agentive language use. While students' multilingual practices were robust during the composing process, their full linguistic repertoires were rarely visible in final products due to dominant school language expectations. Accordingly, rather than centering analysis on final written outputs, this study foregrounds the writing process itself to capture students' translingual meaning-making in greater depth—an aspect explored in detail in Section 4.

3.2. Researcher Reflexivity and Positionality in the Study of Translingual Writing

Qualitative inquiry, especially in multilingual contexts, requires the researcher to continuously interrogate their own role in shaping the research process and the knowledge it produces. In this study, my positionality as a Korean-English bilingual researcher who previously tutored one of the focal participants and later designed and implemented the after-school TWP generated both relational affordances and ethical tensions. My embeddedness in the field fostered trust and enabled sustained engagement, allowing me to observe students' evolving multilingual literacy practices across home, school, and community contexts. At the same time, as a teacher-researcher with limited proficiency in Russian, I remained vigilant about how my linguistic repertoire, institutional affiliations, and pedagogical authority could influence participants' responses, the framing of interview questions, and my interpretation of multilingual artifacts. This dynamic reflects broader

concerns in multilingual qualitative research regarding the researcher's shifting role from facilitator of learning to interpreter of meaning.

To address these concerns, I employed multiple reflexive strategies throughout the research process. They included maintaining detailed field notes with regular memos documenting moments of interpretive uncertainty; inviting participants to review and comment on translated excerpts and preliminary analyses; and explicitly surfacing moments when my own language ideologies or pedagogical intentions may have shaped the data generation process. Additionally, with the support of Olga (pseudonym), a professionally trained trilingual translator (Russian–Korean–English) who was hired for the research project and had assisted from its earliest stages in 2018, I approached my role not as a neutral observer but as a co-participant of meaning-making practices within a shared linguistic and cultural space. Reflexivity thus functioned not as a discrete phase of the research but as a sustained methodological stance embedded in every layer of design, analysis, and representation.

3.3. Navigating Insider/Outsider Dynamics Through Trilingual Collaboration

As a Korean researcher working with Russian-speaking ethnic Korean children in South Korea, I occupied a complex position of being both an insider and an outsider. While I shared ethnic and cultural affiliations with the participants, I remained an outsider to their Russian linguistic repertoire, migration trajectories, and lived experiences. This dual positionality shaped my epistemological stance and methodological decisions throughout the research process.

To bridge the linguistic and experiential gaps and co-construct meaning more equitably, I worked closely with Olga. Rather than treating translation as a neutral conduit of meaning, we approached it as an interpretive and relational act (Temple & Young, 2004; Zhao & Carey, 2023). During data analysis, we engaged in repeated cycles of translation and discussion: Olga first produced a literal translation of a student's Russian utterance in both Korean and English, after which we collaboratively examined cultural connotations, affective tone, and pragmatic nuance before finalizing the English version for analysis. In one case, a seemingly simple Russian phrase used by a student carried a strong idiomatic sense of sincerity, which required several rounds of negotiation to render accurately in Korean and English. As a Koryoin who was born and raised in Russia and had lived in South Korea for nearly 15 years, Olga was uniquely positioned to interpret students' intended meanings with cultural and linguistic sensitivity. Her mediation extended beyond technical translation, functioning as a cultural interpretation that ensured participants' nuanced voices were faithfully represented in the findings. In this sense, collaborative translation operated as both an analytic and ethical practice (see also Section 4.2). Olga's role extended beyond technical translation; she functioned as a cultural mediator and interpretive co-participant. Our collaboration allowed for more nuanced and contextually grounded interpretations during interviews, member-checking, and data analysis, aligning with Flores's (2024) call for translator transparency and co-reflexivity in cross-cultural research.

Additionally, to ensure accuracy and deepen interpretation, I conducted member checks, soliciting participants' feedback on emerging findings to identify potential misinterpretations and better represent their perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As Maxwell (2013) emphasizes, member checks can minimize "the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do," allow researchers to revisit "the perspective they have on what is going on," and help identify "one's own biases and misunderstandings of what was observed"

(p. 161). Throughout data collection and analysis, I used member checks in weekly interviews and in follow-up discussions at the end of the research project. Participants' comments were treated as valuable contributions and were incorporated into the findings to strengthen the credibility and interpretive depth of the study.

This sustained partnership enabled a research design that resisted premature Anglicization and maintained the visibility of participants' linguistic repertoires throughout the study (van Nes et al., 2010; Zhao & Carey, 2023). In line with Schumann et al. (2025), this study adopted staggered and iterative translation strategies to avoid submerging participants' voices beneath researcher assumptions. Working reflexively with Olga revealed the ethical and analytical tensions inherent in multilingual research (Schembri & Jahić Jašić, 2022) and enabled me to approach data representation as a shared responsibility. Ultimately, my position as an insider-outsider—mediated through a trilingual translator—became not a limitation, but a methodological asset that enabled richer and more ethically grounded understandings of translingual writing practices among multilingual youth.

3.4. Collecting, Transcribing, and Reporting Data in Russian, Korean, and English

Working with Russian-speaking ethnic Korean children in South Korea required a multilingual research design that could accommodate the fluid and hybrid nature of participants' linguistic repertoires. Data were collected through a combination of semi-structured interviews, video-stimulated recall sessions, classroom observations, and written artifacts across school, home, and community contexts. Interactions were conducted primarily in Korean and Russian, with occasional use of English depending on participants' communicative purposes and comfort levels.

Given the trilingual nature of the data, transcription and translation were recursive, interpretive processes rather than linear steps. As emphasized by Temple and Young (2004) and Santos et al. (2015), translation in cross-language qualitative research is never neutral—it shapes whose voices are heard, whose meanings are preserved, and whose identities are foregrounded. In collaboration with Olga, I adopted a layered approach to transcription and translation. Initial transcriptions were done in the source language, followed by collaborative translation sessions where we engaged in iterative discussions to ensure semantic, affective, and contextual accuracy.

In reporting the data, I prioritized maintaining the visibility of participants' multilingual repertoires rather than collapsing them into a single dominant language. Following Zhao and Carey (2023) and Schumann et al. (2025), excerpts were presented in the original language alongside English translations, enabling readers to engage with the linguistic texture of the data and interpretive decisions made during data collection and analysis. This multilingual reporting functions not only as a methodological strategy but also as a decolonial gesture that resists premature Anglicization and preserves the sociocultural conditions under which meaning was produced. Across all stages of data collection, transcription, and reporting, sustained attention to ethical transparency, reflexivity, and the politics of language remained central to the research process.

3.5. Data Analysis

To investigate the methodological challenges and power dynamics embedded in multilingual qualitative research—particularly those arising in data collection, translation, and analysis—I employed an inductive and comparative analytic approach (Glaser & Strauss, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data analysis began

concurrently with data collection and continued throughout the research process, allowing iterative cycles of reflection, coding, and interpretation across Korean, Russian, and English. Following the constant comparative method, incoming data from interviews, observations, field notes, and students' writing artifacts were systematically compared with earlier data to identify emerging themes and patterns.

Transcriptions were first produced in the original languages, after which I, together with the trilingual translator Olga, engaged in recursive translation and collaborative coding to ensure semantic and cultural accuracy. Coding proceeded inductively at three levels: (a) descriptive coding to document actions and events across school, home, and community contexts; (b) interpretive coding to generate conceptual categories related to translingual writing practices, agency, and positioning; and (c) analytic memoing to trace reflexive responses, interpretive shifts, and theoretical insights over time. Together, these layers of analysis produced a nuanced account of how participants navigated multiple linguistic, relational, and institutional spaces in their meaning-making.

In addressing the first research question (RQ1) regarding methodological challenges in researching translingual writing, I constructed an individual-level logic model (Yin, 2018) to map the conditions, processes, and outcomes shaping students' engagement in translingual writing across contexts. This model illuminated how institutional language norms, school expectations, and participants' linguistic repertoires shaped their writing practices.

For the second research question (RQ2) concerning power relations and institutional language hierarchies, I conducted a cross-case analysis (Miles et al., 2020) across the three focal participants (Leo, Sandra, and Alex). This analysis enabled the identification of both shared and divergent trajectories of translingual engagement and traced how researcher–participant–translator interactions shaped the construction and representation of multilingual knowledge. Cross-case synthesis enhanced the interpretive depth and analytical transferability of the findings by contextualizing individual experiences within broader institutional and sociolinguistic conditions.

Throughout the analysis, reflexive memos and member checks functioned as key strategies for analytic rigor and credibility. Transcripts and coded excerpts were regularly revisited with participants and the translator to verify interpretations, surface alternative readings, and minimize researcher bias (Maxwell, 2013). In addition, multilingual analytic memos—written alternately in Korean, English, and occasionally Russian—supported the preservation of linguistic nuance while deepening theoretical interpretation.

Through this iterative analytic process—integrating constant comparison, logic modeling, and cross-case synthesis—the study captures both the methodological and ethical complexities of researching translingual writing among emergent multilingual children. It also foregrounds the interpretive negotiations through which multilingual voices are translated, represented, and become legitimate within qualitative inquiry.

4. Findings

The findings are organized into three themes. First, capturing students' translingual practices requires methods that go beyond gathering final products to trace multilingual meaning-making across contexts. Second, ethical and epistemological challenges in translation and analysis—particularly in cross-language

research—necessitate transparent, collaborative approaches that resist researcher dominance and honor participants' voices. Third, this study argues for an expanded notion of translingual writing as a multimodal activity shaped by affect, situated resources, and spatial practices, calling for research methods that attend to these dimensions rather than focusing solely on linguistic output. Taken together, the findings contribute a set of practical guidelines for researchers exploring emerging multilingual students' translingual writing practices by: (a) prioritizing data collection methods that capture drafting processes across multiple languages, (b) incorporating collaborative translation with transparent researcher and translator roles, and (c) adopting analytic frameworks that accommodate the full multimodal and socio-emotional scope of translingual writing.

4.1. Documenting the Translingual Writing Processes of Multilingual Children Within Institutional Language Norms

The findings address how the process–product gap complicates the documentation of emergent multilingual children's translingual writing practices. While students engaged in translingual practices fluidly in informal settings—using Russian, English, Korean, and/or semiotic resources to brainstorm, scaffold, or express meaning—their school-based written outputs largely reflected rigid monolingual norms. Although their final assignments rarely displayed multiple languages, their composing processes revealed frequent and strategic use of diverse linguistic and semiotic resources, including their heritage languages. Nevertheless, much existing translingual and multilingual research has focused primarily on multilingual traces in final products, often overlooking the dynamic, situated processes through which multilingual meaning-making unfolds. This limitation also reflects conventional data collection practices, as artifact-based analyses and one-directional classroom video recordings often fail to capture these invisible dimensions of practice. Responding to RQ1, this section demonstrates how process-oriented, multimodal methods are essential for documenting translingual writing as it unfolds across contexts.

Even when students were explicitly encouraged to compose in their preferred language(s), they consistently completed their final work in Korean and/or English, with little to no use of Russian. Even during the program, students remained reluctant to include Russian in their final drafts. Some Korean-proficient participants explicitly stated that using Russian might interfere with their Korean language development, which they perceived as critical to their academic success. This pattern aligns with prior findings showing that students are unlikely to take up one-time opportunities to use their full linguistic repertoires unless such practices are regularly integrated into the curriculum. Their resistance appears to stem, in part, from their swift socialization into monolingual norms within school environments (Choi, 2022; Edelsky, 1982).

In such contexts, students' full linguistic engagement cannot be adequately captured through writing products alone. To address this, multiple data collection methods were employed, including screen recording on laptops and mobile phones, and video recording of students as they worked on their writing. Following the observations, students participated in video-stimulated recall interviews using a set of guiding questions provided 1–2 days in advance. This multimodal design enabled closer examination of their real-time translingual writing processes.

Leo's case illustrates this dynamic clearly. Despite his proficiency in Russian, Korean, and English, Leo consistently completed academic tasks in Korean and/or English during the program. For instance, when

completing a graphic organizer after reading, his final product contained English, Korean, and other semiotic resources, but no Russian. During the composing process, however, Leo drew extensively on his full linguistic repertoire, particularly Russian. Although he was provided with English, Korean, and Russian versions of the same reading text, he selectively read the Russian version (Figure 1) and used his mobile phone to look up corresponding Korean or English expressions through dictionary and translation applications (Figure 2). This strategic but invisible multilingualism became evident only through real-time observations of his writing sessions and screen-recordings of his mobile-phone use; the final written product alone concealed it.

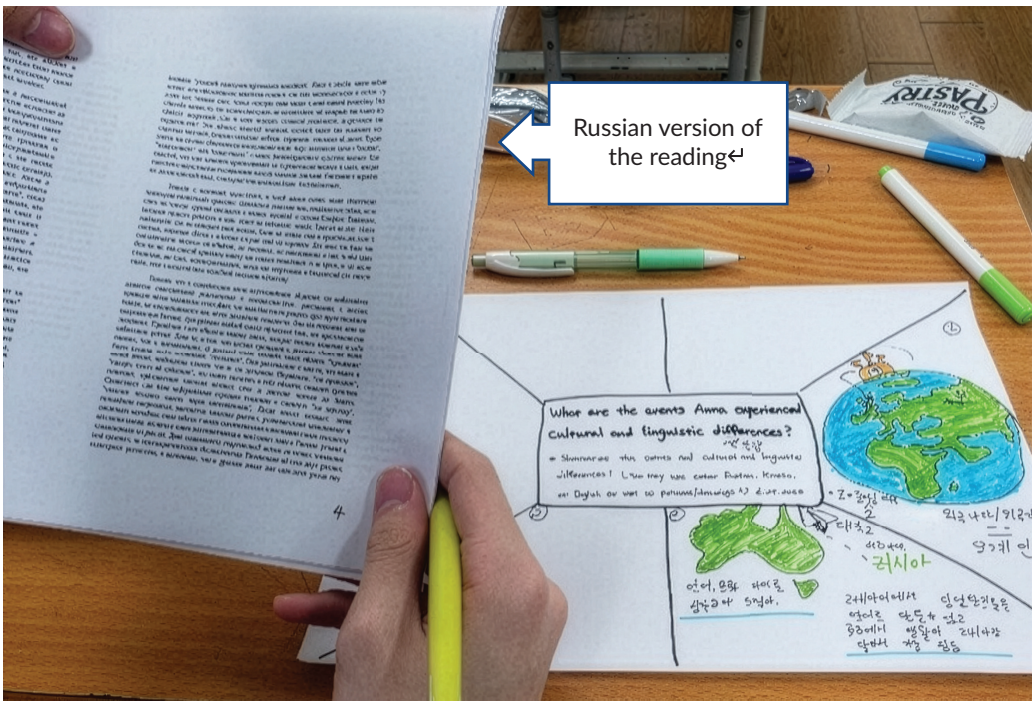

Figure 1. Leo's academic task in English, Korean, and other semiotic resources.

Figure 2. Sandra's and Leo's use of their cell phones while working on the writing task.

Similar to Leo's writing practices, Sandra also used her cell phone while working on her writing tasks after reading (see Figure 2). As she was fluent in Korean, she tended to complete her tasks in Korean until Week 5. However, in Week 6, for the first time during the program, she asked if it would be acceptable to complete her writing in Russian (see Figure 3). When submitting her work, she commented: "It has been a while since I used Russian in school" (originally in Korean).

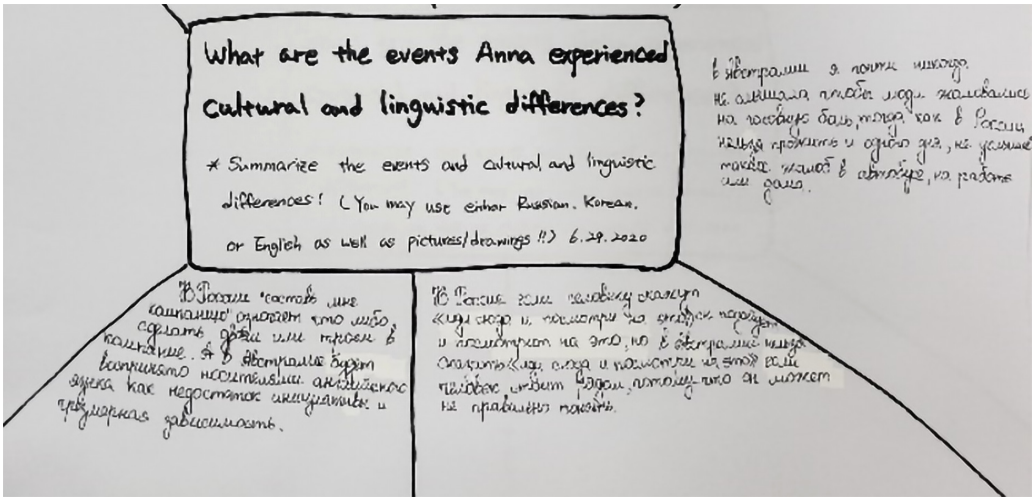

Figure 3. Sandra's writing task, written in Russian for the first time in school.

Notably, although students were repeatedly informed that they could use any languages or visual resources while developing and completing their writing tasks, they generally chose not to use—or even ask permission to use—their first, mother, or heritage languages, particularly in their written products when physically situated at school. Nevertheless, throughout the writing process, they drew on multiple, dynamic linguistic and semiotic resources.

Leo's and Sandra's cases exemplify how emergent multilingual writers "consciously tune themselves toward language dynamism" to articulate meaning (Lorimer Leonard, 2014, p. 243), when such practices remain invisible in submitted texts. Consequently, rigorous investigation of translingual engagement requires methods that capture the composing process itself, enabling researchers to trace students' fluid and flexible deployment of multiple semiotic resources rather than relying solely on final written artifacts.

4.2. Trilingual Collaboration: Embracing Translator Transparency and Co-Reflexivity

This section foregrounds the ethical and epistemological challenges that arise in cross-language research, particularly when translation is treated not as a neutral act but as a socially embedded and interpretive process (Temple & Young, 2004; Zhao & Carey, 2023). As the research unfolded across Korean, Russian, and English, such challenges emerged not only in the translation of participants' utterances but also in the broader politics of representation—whose meanings were preserved, whose voices were made audible, and how interpretive authority was distributed among the researcher, translator, and participants. Addressing RQ2, the finding illustrates how researcher–translator collaboration and member-checking practices mediated ethical and epistemological tensions in multilingual qualitative research.

Collaborative translation functioned as a central methodological strategy. Working closely with Olga, the study departed from a researcher-dominant model of translation and instead positioned her as a cultural and linguistic co-participant throughout data collection, transcription, and analysis. As a third-generation ethnic Korean who had migrated from Russia to South Korea, Olga brought not only linguistic fluency but also a deep understanding of the cultural and affective nuances embedded in participants' communicative practices. Through iterative translation discussions, we jointly negotiated semantic meaning, affective tone, and cultural reference, while identifying instances in which Korean or English translations risked misrepresenting participants' intentions.

The analytic value of co-reflexive translation became especially visible in one illustrative episode. During an online TWP session, I asked students to reflect on the concept of *promise* and to discuss linguistic and/or cultural differences between Korean and Russian understandings of the term. Alex responded in the Zoom chat in Russian: обещание это когда ты даешь слово человеку. как это на русском "даю зуб" (see Figure 4). A literal translation ("A promise is when you give your word to someone; in Russian, it is like saying 'I give you my tooth'") initially puzzled me, as I could not grasp the pragmatic force of the final expression. Through collective meaning negotiation with the students, it became clear that даю зуб functions as a strong idiom of assurance in Russian, comparable to an emphatic "I swear" in English. I later revisited this exchange with Olga, who further enriched the analysis by offering the culturally resonant Korean equivalent: 거짓말이면 손에 장을 지진다 ("If I am lying, I will burn the palm of my hand"). This layered interpretive process—first with student participants and then with the trilingual translator—revealed the affective and cultural density embedded in Alex's seemingly simple utterance. Without such collaborative translation, the idiom's rhetorical force and its significance for understanding students' translingual meaning-making would have remained invisible.

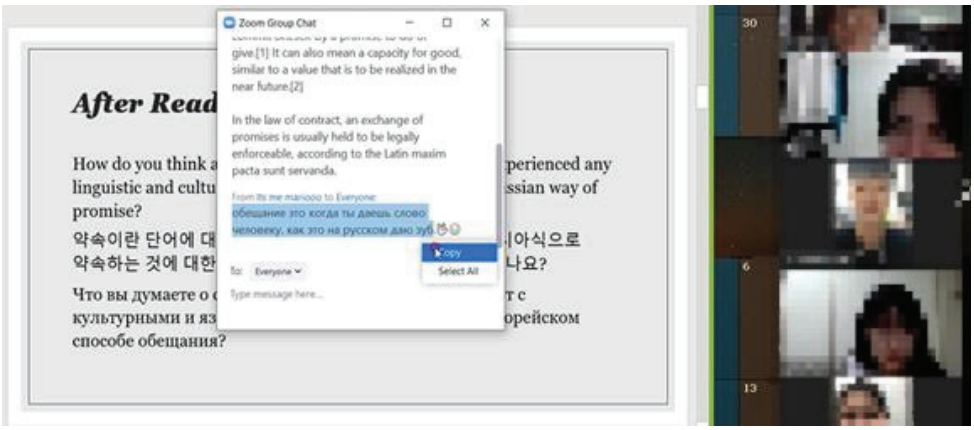

Figure 4. Alex's written response in Russian and its embedded cultural meaning.

In a follow-up interview, Alex explained that he chose to respond in Russian because all program participants understood Russian, while knowing that I, as the instructor, did not. He anticipated that I would use Google Translate and, therefore, felt comfortable expressing himself more precisely in Russian. When asked whether he would have done the same in his regular Korean classroom, he responded unequivocally that he would not, given that most classmates had no knowledge of Russian. He was initially surprised that his response could be translated literally, but agreed that a freer translation was necessary for Korean speakers to grasp the idiomatic meaning of даю зуб ("I give you my tooth" in English). These exchanges illustrate how institutional language hierarchies condition students' linguistic choices and shape the interpretability of their voices.

Member-checking further extended the collaborative ethos. Participants were invited to review selected excerpts from interviews and written reflections, not only to verify factual accuracy but also to express discomfort, offer reinterpretations, and propose alternate translations. This recursive process enabled students to reclaim interpretive authority and disrupt the hierarchical norms embedded in academic knowledge production. In this way, the study responded to Flores's (2024) call for translator transparency and to Zhao and Carey's (2023) critique of epistemic extraction in multilingual research.

This co-reflexive approach also functioned as a methodological response to my insider-outsider positionality. As a Korean-English bilingual with limited Russian proficiency, my reliance on Olga was not treated as a limitation to be concealed but as a site of reflexive methodological engagement. Our collaboration underscored how shared authority could enhance—not dilute—the trustworthiness and depth of qualitative interpretation. Following Schumann et al. (2025), staggered and layered translation strategies were used to maintain the visibility of participants' original language practices in both analysis and reporting, resisting the flattening effect of premature Anglicization. In presenting excerpts in their original languages alongside English translations, the study made transparent the interpretive decisions that shaped the final narratives.

Ultimately, this trilingual collaboration illustrates that ethical multilingual research requires sustained commitment to relational accountability, translator visibility, and iterative reflexivity. The findings demonstrate that embracing translator transparency is not merely a procedural concern but an epistemological stance—one that challenges the extractive tendencies of cross-language research and honors participants as co-constructors of knowledge. In so doing, the study contributes to a growing body of work advocating for decolonial and ethically responsive methodologies in research with emergent multilingual populations.

4.3. Capturing the Multimodal and Affective Dimensions of Translingual Writing

The findings demonstrate that capturing translingual writing processes requires attention not only to the strategic use of multiple named languages but also to the multimodal, embodied, and affectively charged dimensions of meaning-making. While the participants mobilized Korean, Russian, and English during writing, their meaning-making extended well beyond linguistic choices alone. Students frequently drew on gesture, bodily movement, spatial positioning, and material artifacts—such as personal notebooks, translation applications, and even family photographs—as integral components of their writing practices. These semiotic resources enabled them to access personal memories, scaffold comprehension, and express ideas that might not have surfaced through verbal language alone. Such observations underscore the importance of process-oriented, multimodal documentation for capturing students' translingual writing practices. Accordingly, this section primarily addresses RQ1 by extending the methodological discussion to the multimodal and affective dimensions of translingual writing and demonstrating how process-oriented, multimodal data collection enables a more holistic understanding of students' writing practices.

The multimodal nature of meaning-making was particularly evident when students composed texts closely tied to their lived experiences. For instance, when Sandra drafted a life narrative tracing her experiences from birth onward, she repeatedly drew on images embedded with affective memories as anchors for her written reflection (Figure 5). She used both Korean and English to describe her entrance into Korean elementary school and her graduation, incorporating a photograph of her school and her classmates' rolling paper filled with

farewell messages. This illustrates how emotional resonance, along with spatial and material contexts, shaped the flow of her composition. Her engagement exemplifies what MacLure (2013) refers to as the emergent, affect-laden quality of qualitative data—one that resists neat categorization yet reveals the relational and embodied nature of learning and expression.

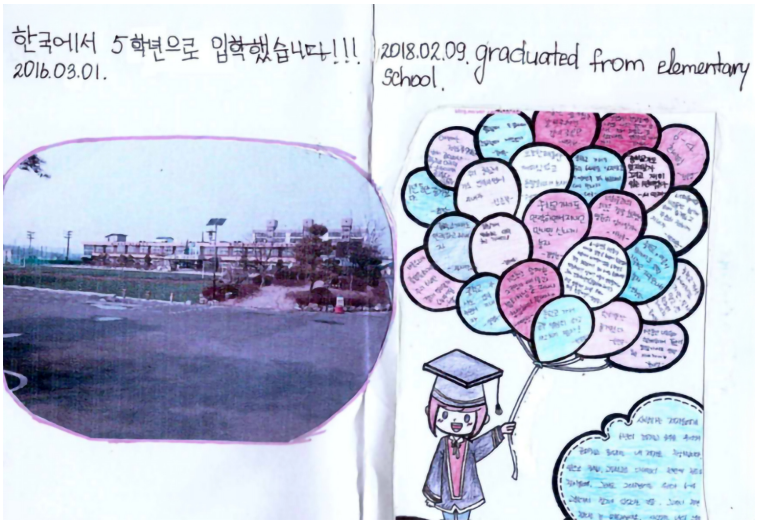

Figure 5. Sandra's integration of a school photograph and her classmates' rolling paper into her written task.

Another example underscores the importance of documenting emergent multilingual children's writing processes through multiple sources of data. As illustrated in Figure 6, Sandra used her cell phone to document and share her ongoing work during the program through an online Reel. The reel captures a pre-meeting held before the official start of the program, which she titled the meeting Мини-конференция ("mini conference" in English) and accompanied it with a photo and two emojis expressing her affective stance toward the meeting.

Figure 6. Sandra's use of Russian and visual symbols in an online reel during the pre-program meeting. Text in the image reads, in English: Mini conference 🤓🎨

Notably, Sandra did not use Russian, images, or emojis in her onsite activities, as far as my observations indicate, whereas her online writing practices displayed the opposite pattern. She thus operated simultaneously across two communicative channels—one onsite and the other online—demonstrating how her writing practices shifted across spaces. Without the real-time capture of the Reel, I would not have recognized that she was participating in the meeting exclusively in Korean onsite while concurrently posting in Russian online. This instance underscores the methodological value of collecting multimodal digital traces, as such real-time recordings reveal parallel dimensions of participation that conventional classroom observations alone cannot capture.

From a methodological standpoint, this example highlights the necessity of multimodal and process-based data collection strategies in multilingual qualitative research. Capturing participants' linguistic and semiotic practices across different communicative spaces enables the identification of dimensions of translingual engagement that would otherwise remain invisible in conventional classroom observations or textual analyses. Importantly, these multimodal practices were not peripheral but central to how students negotiated meaning across languages, modes, and contexts.

More broadly, recognizing and documenting these multimodal enactments expands what counts as data in multilingual qualitative inquiry. Translingual writing cannot be fully understood through text-based or language-focused analysis alone. Instead, it must be situated within the broader ecology of semiotic practices, affective orientations, and spatial arrangements that constitute students' literate lives. Accordingly, these findings call for research frameworks that move beyond linguistic code-switching to include the full spectrum of children's communicative repertoires. Such an approach affirms that multilingual children are not only language users but multimodal meaning-makers whose writing practices are deeply entangled with emotion, identity, and place. Multimodal documentation, in turn, enables researchers to access affective and spatial dimensions of literacy that are often overlooked in traditional text-based analyses.

5. Conclusions

This study contributes to ongoing methodological debates in multilingual research by demonstrating the value of process-oriented, ethically responsive, and multimodally attuned approaches to investigating translingual writing among emergent multilingual children. Drawing on an extensive, multi-source dataset—including classroom observations, screen and video recordings, writing artifacts, and participant reflections—the study foregrounds the complexity and richness of children's translingual practices as they navigate Korean-dominant school contexts while maintaining multilingual repertoires shaped by migration and community life.

Addressing RQ1, the findings show that emergent multilingual children's writing processes are deeply embodied, affective, and spatial, often extending beyond what is visible in final written products. Across online and offline contexts, Russian, Korean, and English were mobilized in context-sensitive and purpose-driven ways for comprehension, expression, and affective connection. These findings demonstrate that understanding translingual writing requires multimodal documentation that traces not only *which* languages are used, but *how* and *why* they are mobilized across contexts. The study thus proposes methodological tools—such as screen-recording, video-stimulated recall, and cross-context observation—to capture multilingual writing as a dynamic, relational process rather than a static product.

In response to RQ2, the study also reveals how power relations and institutional language hierarchies shape both participants' language use and the researcher's interpretive stance. Despite engaging fluidly with multiple languages during the writing process, the students' final texts often conformed to Korean-only norms—a reflection of institutional monolingualism and internalized linguistic hierarchies. Through sustained trilingual collaboration and member-checking, the research process itself became a site of negotiation, where meanings were co-constructed, translated, and ethically validated. This methodological stance—rooted in translator transparency and shared interpretive authority—demonstrates how multilingual qualitative inquiry can resist extractive tendencies and more equitably represent participants' voices.

The study's key contribution lies in its methodological synthesis: It shows that capturing translingual engagement demands multimodal, multilingual, and reflexive approaches that foreground process over product, collaboration over control, and representation over reduction. By attending to the interplay of language, affect, materiality, and institutional power, this research advances methodological frameworks for multilingual qualitative studies that aspire to both analytic rigor and ethical integrity.

However, this study is not without limitations. First, it focused on a small group of participants in a specific institutional and cultural context—a Korean middle school and its surrounding community—during a fixed time period, which limits broader generalizability. Second, while the collaboration with a trilingual translator substantially strengthened the analysis, the researcher's limited proficiency in Russian may still have constrained certain layers of cultural interpretation. Third, although writing was the primary analytic focus, other forms of meaning-making (e.g., oral storytelling, artistic expression) emerged but were not examined in depth.

These limitations open up valuable directions for future research. Longitudinal studies could trace how students' translingual practices evolve across grade levels, institutions, and national contexts. Comparative studies across schools with differing language ideologies could further illuminate how institutional support or constraint shapes multilingual meaning-making. Future research might also move beyond writing to explore translingual practices in multimodal domains such as art, digital media, and performance. In addition, involving youth as co-researchers in the design and interpretation of studies may further democratize knowledge production and challenge hierarchies of voice and authority in research with multilingual populations.

Ultimately, this study affirms that translingual writing among emergent multilingual children is not merely linguistic but relational, spatial, and political in nature. To fully recognize and support such practices, researchers and educators must adopt methods that are not only inclusive in scope but ethically and reflexively attuned to the complexities of students' lived experiences.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article; further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

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