INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SOCIETY, CULTURE & LANGUAGE

The Role of Translanguaging in Learning Culturemes

Evgeniia Bisiada[1*], Maria Dolors Cañada Pujols[1]
[1]Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Spain

Abstract While the benefits of translanguaging for language learning and teaching have been widely discussed in literature, little research has focused on its connection to learning culture. This study explores how spontaneous translanguaging supports learning Russian culturemes in Catalan-Spanish bilingual adult students taking the B1 Russian language course. Data collected through fieldwork reveal that translanguaging serves to help students clarify the meaning of culturemes and point to problems in their comprehension when translation does not help. That is due to the semiotic, paradigmatic, or syntagmatic asymmetry existing between culturemes in Russian and the languages in the students' linguistic repertoires, which confirms existing research on translanguaging and culturemes. The classroom observations demonstrate that, when translanguaging, the students draw on their native languages rather than additional languages. This novel finding extends the theory and practice of translanguaging by showing that adult students do not completely deploy all of the linguistic and cultural resources available.

Keywords: *Translanguaging, Cultureme, Culture learning, Russian language classroom, Asymmetry*

1. Introduction

Culture learning is considered to be an integrated element of a language policy. Numerous curriculum plans and guidelines developed in the EU (e.g., CEFR, 2001; MAREP, 2013; PCIC, 2006) emphasize the importance of culture promotion in language learning and teaching. For example, the CEFR gives special importance to the protection and development of linguistic and cultural diversity at the educational level "to convert that diversity from a barrier to communication into a source of mutual enrichment and understanding" (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 2).

However, learning culture is not assumed at all to be an easily accomplished task since it can be affected by the previous cultural background of learners. Language learners look at the culture of the target language through their own and/or through the prism of those cultures with which they are familiar, which might result in incomprehension or distorted understanding of the culture

***Corresponding Author:**
Evgeniia Bisiada
Evgeniia.bisiada@upf.edu

Received: March 2024
Revised: May 2024
Accepted: June 2024
Published: June 2024

© 2024 Bisiada and Cañada Pujols.
This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY).

https://doi.org/10.22034/ijscl.2024.2026363.3455

being learned. Building intercultural connections between languages is useful in this sense but cannot be regarded highly enough in learning a foreign language. Here arises the question of what modern teaching methods can be effective in this respect. Translanguaging as one such method immediately comes to mind, as it is one of the most widely-discussed methods in the theory and practice of teaching languages in recent times. Yet, the question of how a new culture can be learned through languages and, accordingly, through cultures that learners possess has not been studied so far. Even though studies on translanguaging demonstrate that a learner's cultural background is manifested through translanguaging (see below), it still remains not entirely clear how effective translanguaging is in relation to the culture of the language being studied.

This study aims to fill this gap in research by examining whether translanguaging applied in a Russian language classroom by Catalan and Spanish bilinguals is beneficial for learning Russian culturemes which make up Russian festival culture. We start with a literature review on the importance of culture in foreign language learning, the cultureme theory, and its application in a foreign language classroom. Specific attention is paid to recent studies on translanguaging, which focus on culture. Then we highlight the methodology of the study, proceed with some examples illustrating what role translanguaging plays in learning Russian culturemes and how these examples show that translation as a translanguaging practice is not necessarily an effective tool in this process and how translanguaging reveals problems in understanding culturemes. In the end, we finish the article with a discussion and some conclusions followed by further research needed to be carried out in the future.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Culture as a Set of Culturemes: The Perspective of Foreign Language Learning

The cultural dimension is as important as the linguistic dimension in foreign language learning. This is nowadays considered a major aspect of learning languages to make learners become "speakers of culture" (Ochs, 2002). However, this task is never easy since

> […] attempts to convey the linguistic and cultural material in language A with the help of language B are constantly associated with difficulties in reconstructing the entire linguistic consciousness and are connected, in one way or another, with the need to combat semantic gaps. (Jaskot et al., 2022, p. 119)

This means that the process of learning culture is associated with the constant filling of those niches that arise in the cultural knowledge constructing and "reconstructing" the previously learned linguistic and cultural picture. The issue of learning culture is also complicated by the all-encompassing nature of culture (Seelye, 1993). In this case, learning culture should be reduced to learning its smaller parts, or in other words, culturemes.

The concept of cultureme was introduced in scientific discourse by Moles (1967), who regarded culture as made up of a mosaic of culturemes (Lungu-Badea, 2009). Cultureme is a cultural information-bearing unit (Nicolae, 2015), which leads to a rather broad interpretation of what this concept represents, including the interpretation of culturemes as realia. Pamies (2017, p. 102) states that "[t]here is no direct relation between realia and culturemes" accepting at the same time that realia can turn into culturemes. However, in Russian philology, both concepts are related (Yunkova, 2019). Gak (1998, p. 142) considers culturemes to stand for cultural realia such as "все относящееся к культуре: предметы, функции, обычаи, факты поведения и т.п." ["everything related to culture: objects, functions, customs, facts of behavior, etc." – *our translation*]. This description seems similar to Saussure's theory of the sign, in that realia are the signified and culturemes the signifier.

Culturemes initially were studied in the framework of the theory and practice of translation in relation to the problems that arise when translating culturemes from one language to another (see, e.g., Oksaar, 1988; Vermeer, 1983). Indeed, culturemes in different languages, as Gak (1998) points out, can be asymmetrical in three terms: First, in the semiotic respect, "due to the absence of one of the components of the sign relation: the signified or the signifier" [*our translation*] (p. 146). Second, in the paradigmatic respect, when "in two cultures, both signified and signifier are present, but there is a discrepancy at one of the levels of sign relations: at the level of realia, meanings, or the signs

themselves" [*our translation*] (Gak, 1998, p. 147). Third, in the syntagmatic respect when, "[t]wo related phenomena that makeup parts of one process can be denoted by one term in one society and differ by different names in another" [*our translation*] (Gak, 1998, p. 150).

If the term "cultureme" is not commonly used in current translation research (Lungu-Badea, 2009), then it is less likely to find the term in research on language teaching and learning, where it is more common to come across the broad concept of "culture" in the titles of multiple publications. Perhaps the proposal by Kocbek (2021) to apply the cultureme theory to the field of foreign language teaching (FLT) is one of the exceptions. Kocbek (2021, p. 99) proposes the Cultureme Paradigm for FLT as a scaffolding tool "to systematically address all aspects involved in communication" to make learners aware of how culture conditions language use. At the verbal dimension of the text for culture learning and teaching, in particular, the researcher offers such strategies when working with culturemes to apply as translation, "rendering them with loan words", "the domestication strategy", and "building calques". Undoubtedly, these strategies can be effective in certain situations; however, it is impossible to say how effective they are in cases, for example, when a cultureme is present in the target language and the native language of a learner, but there is an asymmetry at some level of the relationships signifier-signified in the two languages according to Gak's classification (1998). Since "understanding culturemes suppose acquiring new knowledge of and insights into the target language" (Nicolae, 2015, p. 217), learning culturemes might be a challenge for language learners and result in misunderstandings due to incomplete or distorted pre-information provided about culturemes.

Thus, little research focuses on culturemes in foreign language learning and teaching. In the next section, we highlight some remarks on how culture (and, in some specific cases, culturemes, though this term is not adopted at all in translanguaging studies) is approached in research on translanguaging.

2.2. Translanguaging and Culture

The term "translanguaging" was first coined by Williams (1994), who welcomed a flexible use of the language of input and output in a classroom. Such an approach of language alteration demonstrated its effectiveness by developing learners' minor language (Welsh) through the major one (English). In subsequent years, the construct of translanguaging has undergone changes, moving away from being regarded simply as a language alteration practice towards a pedagogical practice that "places the learners at the center, values their linguistic and cultural practices, and offers them some choice over their language use" (Kirsch & Seele, 2020, p. 65). Such a learner-oriented approach allows classroom participants to link "the social, cultural, community, and linguistic domains of their lives" (Creese & Blackledge, 2010, p. 112). Consequently, every act of translanguaging implies the manifestation of a cultural component of languages since the transition between languages also entails a transition between those values and beliefs that shape the realities of languages, i.e., cultures (Aden & Eschenauer, 2020). However, the issue of culture is not widely studied in the literature on translanguaging.

Take as an example an implication of translanguaging classified by Baker and Wright (2021) in regard to concepts that do not have equivalents. As specified by them, translanguaging is resorted to if there is no corresponding representation of these concepts in the culture of another language. This, obviously, makes sense; however, it is necessary to note that out of the 14 uses of translanguaging enumerated in the classification, only one has a reference to culture. As for other classifications of translanguaging use in a classroom (see, e.g., Cenoz & Gorter, 2022; García, 2017; García & Li, 2015), the main focus is on the development of linguistic or metalinguistic awareness enhanced by pedagogical translanguaging rather than cultural development, which, presumably is implied, but not expressed explicitly.

Concerning publications on translanguaging, only a few of them approach culture as an aspect that, in the process of translanguaging interaction between participants in classroom discourse, comes out through languages. A case in point is Khote and Tian's (2019) study of an English language classroom. As is documented in some transcripts presented in the paper, 10th graders applied spontaneous translanguaging in classroom discussions when working on an essay. Through translanguaging practices, they pointed to and discussed stereotypical beliefs circulating in American

society about immigrants as criminals as well as fears about deportation, which constantly accompany the realms of their everyday lives. Hence, translanguaging provided an opportunity for school children to reflect critically about their everyday culture.

Another study addressed the use of translanguaging in the classroom to discuss cultural peculiarities (Aden & Eschenauer, 2020). The students in this study deployed translanguaging to reflect the cultural significance of a black cat based on beliefs circulating in their family cultures, after reading an extract from *Tom Sawyer* (Aden & Eschenauer, 2020). They also used translanguaging in a play about everyday cultural life in their neighborhood, which helped them grasp the cultural diversity of their classroom through their family languages. No doubt, this project shows interesting aspects of introducing translanguaging into the classroom for expressing culture; however, what is lacking in the paper of this study is that neither a deep analysis of the phenomenon of translanguaging nor details of how cultures manifested themselves is provided.

For the latter case, an ethnographical study by Canagarajah (2011a, 2011b) is more illustrative, although it deals with written discourse. The study demonstrates how the Arabic language and culture of a Saudi Arabian undergraduate student influenced her narrative and development in English. She included Arabic poems in an English essay as an inherent part of her culture. Her Islamic origin was also expressed through a motif that served to divide sections in her writing while also being an allusion to her cultural background (Canagarajah, 2011a). The participant's multilingual and multicultural identity was reflected in various other examples of the inclusion of French phrases and emoticons. Moreover, she expressed Arabic proverbs, for example, without resorting to translation, which complicates understanding for non-Arabic readers but works as a "strategy of delaying translations for her translanguaged items [which] also encourages readers to engage in interpretive work" (Canagarajah, 2011b, p. 16).

Daryai-Hansen et al. (2023) focus on translanguaging practices in the contexts of higher education in Denmark and Japan. An interesting observation was made in the elective course of Hospitality English at a Japanese university in regard to Japanese cultural artifacts. To explain the meaning of some Japanese culturemes (though this term is not used by the authors of the study), one language (English) was not enough. Here, the authors refer to a specific case of two cultural realia in Japanese, *onigiri* and *omusubi*, translated into English as a rice ball, which provoked discussion due to differences between the two culturemes. Another cultureme, *otsukarema*, which is "the Japanese linguistic act" meaning "thank you for your hard work" (Daryai-Hansen et al., 2023, p. 114), was impossible to translate literally into English; the explanation was needed to express this specific concept which does not exist in English. These examples show that, to express culturemes that do not exist in the target language, translation is not sufficient, and we need to resort to translanguaging (Baker & Wright, 2021).

Although these studies postulate that translanguaging is a means to express cultures, no studies have been done on the implications of translanguaging in the process of culture learning of a language being studied. It is unclear whether translanguaging promotes or hinders this process. Thus, further research is needed to explore how translanguaging practices facilitate, if at all, learning culture. This study addresses this gap by examining translanguaging practices deployed in a Russian language classroom in relation to learning the cultural component of the language. We will pay special attention to the role these practices play in learning about popular Russian festivals.

3. Methodology

This study adopts an ethnographic perspective and uses non-participant observation as an instrument of data collection. Below, we present the process by which we collected data, describe the participants of the study, and outline the selection criteria for analyzed extracts.

3.1. Participants and Settings

This study was conducted in one of the official language schools (*escola oficial d'idiomes*) in Catalonia over a period of seven months (October 2021 – April 2022). The group of six (four males and two females), taking a B1 level Russian course, was taught by a Catalan and Spanish bilingual

teacher, Aina, who had more than 20 years of experience teaching Russian. She was 45 years old at the moment of data collection. Apart from Russian, she also had competence in English (B2) and Polish (A2), and she had some competence in French.

All the participants signed a written consent form before the study, and they agreed to participate in it on the condition of anonymity. All the participants are referred to using pseudonyms. The participants were all Catalan-Spanish bilinguals. Before the observations, they completed a questionnaire about their personal information and linguistic repertoire (see Table 1).

Table 1
Students' Profiles

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Additional languages (CEFR level)
Rosa	F	32	English (B2), French (B2), Russian (B1)
Anna	F	22	English (C1), Russian (level not indicated)
Jaume	M	49	English (C1), French (B1), Italian (A2), Russian (B1)
Omar	M	18	Arabic (heritage learner), Russian (heritage learner)
Felip	M	49	English (B1), French (A2), Russian (A2)
Carles	M	24	English (C1), Russian (A2)

It is necessary to note that the participants of the study did not get any training in using translanguaging. Spontaneous translanguaging was observed in the discourse of classes.

3.2. Instrument

In total, nine sessions of approximately 2 hours each were observed and audio recorded. The audio-recorded sessions were transcribed, and for this study only three extracts related to learning Russian festivals, namely *День знаний (Knowledge Day), День студента or Татьянин день (The students' day or Tatyana's Day)*, and *Масленица (Maslenitsa or Pancake week),* were selected.

3.3. Procedure

The extracts were analyzed with regard to the instances of students' translanguaging use when learning Russian culturemes. The extracts (between 29 and 57 minutes long) provide evidence that popular Russian festivals are introduced in the lessons through the discussion of the text read previously. This discussion aimed to bring up all the information that the students already had about the festivals, with the help of leading questions asked by the teacher, questions presented in tasks, and a reference to vocabulary that formed the basis of the topic. Working with unfamiliar words usually involved looking them up in an online dictionary, as well as any other digital support sources. Then, the vocabulary was checked by the group and the teacher together, revealing any aspects that remained incomprehensible. This was followed by tasks that were performed while listening to an audio recording or watching a video, based on finding answers to questions, filling in missing words, etc. The discussion of tasks took place in pairs and ended with a general discussion in the group, working through the vocabulary again as a rule. The final task was always different, ranging from reading a text to watching an additional video that helped visualize the festival in a more accessible way.

Each extract mentioned above has been analyzed for occurrences of instances of translanguaging deployed by the students when learning Russian culturemes through popular Russian festivals. The instances identified in the transcripts of the extracts were coded. The coding decision was based on the theoretical approach. A provisional list of codes was created beforehand based on the classification of the purposes of the use of translanguaging by Baker and Wright (2021) and edited after reading the transcript of the whole corpus of data. Then, the codes, which included the students' translanguaging use for learning culturemes were selected and used for data analysis. The results of the analysis are presented in the following section.

4. Results

This section examines cases where non-translatable vocabulary, or ambiguous culturemes, caused students difficulty in understanding and how, through translanguaging, students pointed to a problem in order to solve it. The section is subdivided into three parts, one for each holiday.

4.1. Knowledge Day

День знаний (Knowledge Day) is an official festival in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and other ex-Soviet countries celebrated since 1984 but has a much longer history going back to the 1930s when the initiative to hold anti-war actions and peace lessons in schools in all countries of the USSR was supported by the government and the first of September was established as the first day of a new academic year.

This festival was introduced to students through the text read in the previous lesson. The text dealt with different culturemes such as *торжественная линейка* (a solemn event taking part in a school yard), *классный час* (a class that is devoted to the world peace and some organizational moments), *первый звонок* (a special ceremony when a first-year girl rings the bell thereby "opening" a new school year), акция *Дети вместо цветов* (a charity event established to help seriously ill children), to mention a few. In the beginning of the text discussion, the students dealt with unknown words, checking them in the online dictionary and guessing the meaning of the words together. They then listened to an audio and discussed the answers to the questions for the audio in pairs and then all together. In the end, they read the text and discuss the vocabulary once more.

Working with non-equivalent culturemes, students had difficulties since none of the culturemes has got an exact equivalent in Catalan or Spanish. The selection of a translation equivalent did not always give a result. For example, the cultureme *торжественная линейка* represents a ceremony organized in every educational institution in Russia on the first of September and accompanied by various activities, including a speech made by the director of the school. The teacher advised in Russian that visualization through a photo would be a better way to understand the cultureme instead of an electronic translator.

In some cases, translation leads to confusion and misunderstanding. In the first case, we are talking about *Первый звонок* (the First Bell), a school ritual usually held in the school yard or in the school assembly hall. The essence of the ritual is that during a solemn event, a school graduate puts a first-grader girl on his shoulders and carries her in a circle. She, in turn, waves a bell, thereby notifying that the new school year has come.

At first, the students looked at unfamiliar words in the text, and then they began to discuss them together with the teacher. When it came to *Первый звонок* (the First Bell), the teacher found a photograph on the Internet to visualize the cultureme without resorting to translation in Catalan, which would have been ineffective anyway due to the absence of the cultureme in the Catalan culture. She asked students to describe what they saw. The students described the photograph in detail using those concepts that they had already talked about, correctly pointing out that the photograph depicts a solemn event, where a class teacher and first-graders with bouquets of flowers are involved. And then, the teacher pointed to a girl on the shoulders of a high school student. She was ringing a bell. This image caused bewilderment in Rosa:

Excerpt 1

Aina:	Вот … Хм … Хорошо и остался первый звонок, да? Но это трудно … Тоже странно, для нас очень странно. Посмотрите на эти фотографии. Скажите, какие слова из этих вы видите на этих, на этих фотографиях … Например … Посмотрите, что это? (Here ... Hmm ... Well, the first call is left, right? But it's difficult ... It's also strange, very strange for us. Look at these photos, tell me which of these words you see in these, in these photos ... For example ... Look, what is it?)
Felip:	Это линейка…

(This is an assembly …)

Aina: Торжественная линейка, да? Дети стоят вот так, да, и там, например, директор говорит речь, да? Не знаю, читает что-то, да … Хорошо. Вот это что может быть и кто это?
(A solemn assembly, huh? The children are standing like this, and there, for example, the director is giving a speech, right? I don't know, she's reading something, yes ... Okay. What could it be, and who is it?)

Felip: Классный руководитель …
(A class teacher …)

Aina: Классный руководитель, да? И сейчас идет …
(A class teacher, yeah? And now it is going …)

Felip: Классный час …
(A class hour …)

Aina: Классный час… Хорошо… Что еще? Они… Кто они? Кто они? Как вы думаете …
(A class hour … Good … What else? Who are they? Who are they? How do you think?)

Anna: Школьни ….
(Pupi …)

Aina: Это эти дети? Школьники и?
(Who are these children? Pupils?)

Anna: Первоклассники …
(The first graders …)

Aina: Первоклассники… Хорошо. И что еще там было? Может быть, это всё… Что у них в руках? Что у них в руках?
(The first graders … Good. What else was there? Maybe that's all … What are they holding in their hands? What are they holding?)

Rosa, Felip: Букет.
(A bunch.)

Aina: Букет цветов … Да? Хм. И … А у нее?
(A bunch of flowers. Yeah? Hm. And … And what is she holding?)

Jaume: Первый звонок…
(The first bell…)

Aina: А, это первый звонок? Но это …
(Ah, is it the first bell? But this is …)

Felip: *Колокольник …
(*Bell master…)

Aina: Это *колокольник, да?… А это первый звонок … Хорошо …
(This is a *bell master, yeah? And this is the first bell … Good …)

Felip: Что это …?
(What is it?)

Aina: Странно, да?
(It is strange, yeah?)

Rosa: ¡**Qué sorpresa**!
(What a surprise!)

Aina: Молодой человек там несет девушку… девочку… да… Странно, да? Очень-очень странно… Хорошо, послушаем текст, хорошо?
(A young man there is carrying a girl ... a girl ... yes ... It's strange, isn't it? Very, very strange … Okay, let's listen to the text, okay?)

Apparently, this image surprised Rosa since she exclaimed in Spanish "*¡Qué sorpresa!*" ['What a surprise!']. This means that she discovered something new and different from what she had imagined before, which could be a result of an unsuccessful attempt to translate the cultureme, which does not have an equivalent, into Catalan.

Further after listening to the audio twice about the festival, students had to make notes or a diagram of how the first of September is celebrated in schools. Then, they had to discuss it in pairs, and at the end, the discussion was in the group. The students were able to describe the holiday without resorting to other languages. However, the cultureme *Дети вместо цветов* was unclear for Rosa. Traditionally, on the first of September, students give a bouquet of flowers to the teacher. This tradition dates back to Soviet times and remains popular to this day. However, in 2014, a charity event was established in Moscow to help seriously ill children. Thus, money that could have been spent on bouquets is sent to hospitals to help sick children. Hence the name "*Дети вместо цветов*" ("Children instead of flowers"). However, when translating into Catalan, it is quite possible that the play of Russian words can puzzle the students. This happened to Rosa:

Excerpt 2

Aina:	Завтра познакомятся … Каждый год дети знакомятся друг с другом … Да? И они общаются, да? Хм, хорошо … (Tomorrow they will get to know each other … Every year children get to know each other … Yes? And they communicate, right? Hm, okay ...)
Rosa:	**No ho acabo d'entendre**… Дети вместо цветов. (I do not understand ... Children instead of flowers.)
Aina:	Да, и потом есть вот, это… в одной московской школе придумали акцию… Подожди-подожди. Как называется акция? (Yes, and then there is this … in one Moscow school they came up with an action… Wait, wait. What is the name of the action?)
Rosa:	Дети вместо цветов … (Children instead of flowers …)
Aina:	Дети вместо цветов [correcting the stress]. (Children instead of flowers [correcting the stress].)
Rosa:	Цветов … (Flowers …)
Aina:	Но ты не поняла, что это, Роза? (But you have not understood what it is, Rosa?)
Rosa:	Нет … (No …)
Aina:	Анна, ты тоже не поняла? Ты понял, Жауме? Что это за акция? (Anna, you haven't understood either? Have you understood, Jaume? What is this action?)
Jaume:	В две тысячи четырнадцатого … четырнадцать [laughing] … (In two thousand fourteen ... fourteen [laughing] …)
Rosa:	Том. Четырнадцатом … (Teen. Fourteen …)
Jaume:	Четырнадцатом году … (Fourteen …)
Aina:	Четырнадцатом году … (Fourteen …)
Jaume:	*Один школе … (*One school …)
Aina:	В одной школе … (In one school …)
Jaume:	В *однос школе они нет покупают цветов… (In one school they do not buy flowers …)
Aina:	Цветы … (Flowers …)
Jaume:	Цветы. Они дают деньги … (Flowers. They give money …)
Aina:	Кому?

(To whom?)
Jaume: Дет … Кому? Дет … [laughing] … *детей …
(Chil … To whom? [laughing] … children)
Aina: Кому?
(Whom?)
Jaume: *Дети.
(Children.)
Anna: Детям …
(To children …)
Aina: Детям …
(To children …)
Jaume: Детям есть родителей …
(Children to have parents …)
Aina: Детям, у которых нет родителей … Или …
(Children who do not have parents … Or …)
Jaume: Или детям, которые болеют …
[Or children who are ill …)
Aina: Болеют.
(Ill.)
Jaume: Болеют.

(Ill.)

As seen in Excerpt 2, Rosa switched to Catalan when she wanted to clarify what the action *Дети вместо цветов* was. She translanguaged to express her doubt and drew the teacher's attention to the problem. The teacher asked Jaume to explain what it meant. He mainly, with the help of the teacher, explained it once more in Russian. Unfortunately, we do not know whether Rosa understood it or not because the teacher did not ask Rosa whether the meaning of the cultureme was clear to her after Jaume's explication.

What is clear in both these cases is that translation as a translanguaging practice was useless as in the majority of cases related to the culturemes of the festival Knowledge Day, but at the same time, drawing to Spanish and Catalan served for Rosa as an indicator of that one cultureme surprised her when being illustrated on the screen and another cultureme was not clear at all. Thus, translanguaging was an instrument that indicated and solved the problem for her.

4.2. Students' Day

Students' Day is a festival organized on the twenty-fifth of January. It was originally a day to celebrate the establishment of the Moscow State University. Its history goes back to the 18th and 19th centuries; it was forgotten after the Revolution and started to be celebrated again in 1995. Since 2005, it has been an official festival in Russia celebrated by students of higher and professional education institutions. This festival has got a lot of different customs too, which went through some changes over time. The students were given a text about Students' Day to work out at home. In the beginning of the discussion in class, they answered some questions following the texts and how many words they had to check in the dictionary. Then, the students were given the printouts. They read the questions and watched the online video, which described the history of the festival and its main attributes of the present time, twice. Then, they discussed the answers to the questions. During this discussion, the two main culturemes of this festival were mentioned, namely *извозчики* ('cabmen') related to the history of the festival and how it was celebrated in Chekhov's time and *медовуха ('mead')* related to today's celebration of the festival. While the first cultureme exists in Catalan and Spanish cultures and was translated into Catalan without any problems, the latter does not. *Медовуха (medovukha)* is a Russian alcoholic drink which appeared in the 18th century and became popular in the 20th century. The name itself provides a hint that it is made of honey since *медовуха* ('mead') derives from *мёд* ('honey'). According to the text and the video, it is typical for the rector of Moscow State University to give *medovukha* to students when celebrating Students' Day. However, the

absence of this cultureme in Catalan and Spanish culture provoked an interest in students to learn more about it as seen in Excerpt 3:

Excerpt 3

Aina:	Омар, ты ответил на четвертый? Но может быть, это тоже не очень трудный вопрос. Из чего готовят медовуху? (Omar, have you answered the fourth [question]? But maybe this is also not a very difficult question. What is medovukha made of)
Omar:	Из мёда. (Of honey.)
Aina:	Из мёда. Да. (Of honey. Yes.)
Rosa:	**Com, com**? (How? How?)
Aina:	Мёд. (Honey.)
Anna:	Ah! [laughing].
Omar:	**La mel**. (Honey.)
Aina:	Да, это алкогольный напиток из меда. Ты, Фелип, попробовал? (Yes, it is an alcoholic beverage made of honey. Have you tried it, Felip?)
Felip:	Нет. (No.)
Aina:	Нет? (No?)
Omar:	**I sabor?** (And the taste?)
Aina:	А? (What?)
Omar:	Вкусный? ([Is it] tasty?)
Aina:	Очень. Да. Особенно, когда холодно. (Very [tasty]. Yes. Especially when it is cold.)

This example shows that the students interact with each other and the teacher through translanguaging to learn more about *medovukha*. Rosa might not have heard what medovukha is made of; thus, she turns to Catalan to reconfirm. The teacher responds in Russian, and Omar translates the word in Catalan. Then the teacher asks Felip, a frequent visitor of Russia on business, whether he tasted this beverage and receives a negative response. Omar asks in Catalan about its taste. The teacher seems not to have heard the question as she asks him “A?” (“Ah?”). Omar asks whether it is tasty, but it is now in Russian. He could have just expressed the same in Russian from the beginning; however, his first reaction was in Catalan. Semiotic asymmetry here aroused the interest of the student who wanted to know more than was presented in the text about the cultureme, which was expressed in the form of translanguaging.

4.3. Maslenitsa

Maslenitsa is likely to be one of the most popular festivals in modern Russia, celebrated at the end of February or the beginning of March before Great Lent. It is rooted in East Slavic cultures and still preserves the main elements of Slavic mythology, which combines religious and folk traditions. This holiday was also introduced by the teacher in one of the sessions so that students could get acquainted with its customs. This festival was visualized through a video and an episode from the film “Siberian barber” directed by Nikita Mikhalkov. Some information about the festival was introduced in the previous session. The discussion started with the group trying to remember on the basis of the previously introduced text what Maslenitsa is and what it symbolizes. It is worth mentioning here one

case when at the very beginning of the discussion Jaume mentioned an English holiday called Pancake Day, which is similar to Maslenitsa. That he drew an analogy between the two holidays is explained by the fact that he is an English teacher, so for him, English culture is a daily part of his life. This is the only example of the use of English and reference to English culture that the students have used when working with festival culture and this particular festival.

Then, the group discussed the main traditions and attributes of Maslenitsa, and the similarities between Maslenitsa and the local Catalan celebration of Carnival. There were quite a lot of similarities identified by the students, like the festive period, also before the Great Lent preceding Easter, eating fatty food and burning an analog of a Russian effigy made of straw, which is called in Catalan "el rei Carnestoltes" and also burnt at the end of the celebration. The last one represents a Catalan cultureme, which is different from the Russian one. Here, there is an asymmetry between the two realia at the paradigmatic level. If the function is similar, in Russian culture, it is a figure made of straw and dressed like a woman. It symbolizes winter and burning, and it means to say farewell to the cold weather. In the Catalan culture, it is a figure of a man usually made of *papier mache* now, and in the past, it was made of straw. Omar missed the beginning of the class, which could have helped him to understand what the word *чучело* ('effigy') means. As Excerpt 4 shows, through translanguaging he reveals his incomplete understanding of what the word means. However, through translanguaging it also becomes clear that he is aware of its other meanings:

Excerpt 4

Anna [*reading*]:	Каждый день – новый обряд. (Each day is a new ritual.)
Aina:	Обряд – это как традиция. Да? Итак, встреча. (A ritual is a tradition. Yeah? So, meeting.)
Anna:	Я? (Me?)
Aina:	Да. (Yes.)
Anna [*reading*]:	Встреча – шесть: печь блины и *соорудать чучело из соломы. (Meeting is six: fry pancakes and *make a straw effigy.)
Aina:	Хм. (Hm.)
Omar:	Чучело **és com un gos**? (Chuchelo is like a dog?)
Aina:	Чучело? (Chuchelo?)
Omar:	**És un insult.** (It is an insult.)
Aina:	Что, тебе говорят: "Чучело"? (Well, do they say to you: "Chuchelo"?)
Omar:	**A mi no, però he ho escoltat de la meva mare.** (To me no, but I have heard it from my mum.)
Aina:	[laughing] Давай, Омар, номер два. ([laughing] Ok, Omar, number two.)

After watching the video about Maslenitsa and completing the tasks, students start reading the sentences one by one with the information they completed in relation to the traditions. Anna reads a sentence where two main attributes of the festival are mentioned, namely making pancakes and an effigy. It appears that Omar confuses different meanings of the word *чучело*. Therefore, Omar tries to define this word by comparing the effigy with a dog. Then, he asks whether it is an insult. This meaning is, in fact, a correct one since it can be used as a swear word. In addition, it refers to a slovenly, ridiculously dressed or dirty person and a scarecrow placed in a field to discourage birds, which in Russian has one more label as "*пугало*". The teacher asks whether someone referred to him using this word. He negates it but admits that he heard this word from his mother. It seems that he

heard this word in a figurative sense as an insult or a dirty person rather than in the meaning that the concept represents in terms of the festival Maslenitsa. The teacher laughs at that because it sounds funny, but she does not explain the meaning of the word suitable for the context discussed, which results in further incomprehension, as Excerpt 5 shows:

Excerpt 5

Aina:	Понятно? Жауме, почему? Она говорила это однов …., то есть вместе. То есть… Но это логично, тещины вечерки. Теща – это жена … а мать жены. А золовка – это сестра мужа, поэтому в субботу они пригашают сестер мужа, да? И проводы. (It's clear? Jaume, why? She said it simult...., that is, together. That is ... But this is logical, mother-in-law's evening. A mother-in-law is a wife ... a wife's mother. And the sister-in-law is the sister of the husband, so on Saturday they invite the sisters of the husband, right? And seeing off.)
Omar:	Проводы – в воскресенье. (Seeing off is on Sunday.)
Aina:	Хм. (Hm.)
Omar [*reading*]:	Собираться и … (Get together and …)
Aina:	У… (At …)
Omar [*reading*]:	У чучела. Сжигать его и просить друг друг, друг у друга прощения. (At the effigy. Burn it and ask each other, each other's forgiveness.)
Aina:	Хм. Да? (Hm. Yes?)
Omar:	**Quema… Cremen l'animal dissecat.** (Burn ... They burn the dissected animal.)
Aina:	[laughing] Чучело – это кукла. Соломенная кукла. **És un... un... com un espantaocells ...** Хорошо. Посмотрим еще раз видео. Посмотрите, да, и увидите, как и что делают. ([laughing] Chuchelo is a doll. A straw doll/ It is … a … like a scarecrow … Well. Let's watch the video once more. Watch, yeah, and you'll see what they do.)

It seems that Omar is the only one in the group who does not understand this cultureme, since further he returns once more to this concept and defines it in Catalan as a dissected animal, which is also one of the correct meanings of the word *чучело* bears but again incorrect in the context of Maslenitsa. In this case, the teacher laughs again but explains the word in Russian and provides an example from the Catalan culture, "espantaocells" ("scarecrow"), which could better construct knowledge about an effigy. Actually, referring to a native culture here can also be a good method to exemplify some concepts, or through the prism of the native culture, it is easier to construct cultural knowledge about a learned cultural reality. However, while the concepts of "espantaocells" and "чучело" like scarecrows seem to match in function and presentation, the asymmetry between чучело as a scarecrow and чучело as a Maslenitsa effigy obviously might manifest itself in wrong substitution of concepts which might be a case for a wrong understanding of a Maslenitsa effigy.

This example represents that Omar, in point of fact knows the word in two different meanings a dissected animal and an insult, but he does not know the contextually required meaning. That is why he returns to this problem, drawing on Catalan ("**Cremen l'animal dissecat**") and Spanish ("**Quema**") to clarify what exactly it meant. It is not clear if he finally understood the meaning, but what is more important is that translanguaging revealed the problem.

Therefore, spontaneous translanguaging emerged in the Russian language classroom when learning culturemes to clarify their meanings since translation does not contribute to comprehension. Even if it

is not completely clear whether the students understood the culturemes and managed to distinguish between the culturemes in their own language and the target language, at least the study shows that translanguaging served for negotiating the culturemes and pointing to the problem in comprehension when it was the case. The participants drew primarily on Catalan and less frequently on Spanish. As for additional languages, only once English was deployed by Jaume in regard to the intercultural relation between Maslenitsa in Russian culture and Pancake Day in English culture.

5. Discussion

The study has shown that spontaneous translanguaging deployed by the students on various occasions in the Russian language classroom serves many purposes when learning culturemes of the Russian festivals. Translation was applied to learn unknown culturemes that have not got equivalence in students' linguistic repertoire, which coincides with the purposes of the use of translanguaging mentioned in Baker and Wright (2021). However, it was not always an effective method as was discussed above and which confirms the observations in Daryai-Hansen et al. (2023), except that in their study, the translation did not work in relation to the culturemes existing in the native culture of students, whilst in our study it happened to culturemes of the target language learned by the students. Visualization proved to be a better way in some situations to get acquainted with culturemes, as in the example of *торжественная линейка ('solemn event')*. Translation also resulted in miscomprehension of some culturemes. In these cases, there was a need for students to clarify their doubts about culturemes, which was achieved through translanguaging. Translanguaging was also of use to point out the problems the students faced when learning culturemes.

The asymmetry between culturemes needs more clarification due to divergence at different levels (Gak, 1998). Indeed, the study provides an example when the asymmetry between such a cultureme as Maslenitsa effigy and *el rei Carnestoltes* in Russian and Catalan cultures, respectively, should have been clarified more rather than just pointing to the semblance between them. Even though the two culturemes have got a similar origin and similar functions, they represent quite different realities. That is why additional explanations or better illustrations could have made the student Omar better aware of the cultureme. An implication for teaching practice is that establishing relations between cultures through translanguaging is not always beneficial for understanding culturemes. When learning a cultureme it is not enough only to know some background information from the native culture, and additional explication is needed.

Furthermore, the students demonstrated their interest in culturemes through translanguaging, like in Excerpt 3. In Omar's case, translanguaging also served to show his awareness of other meanings of the word *чучело*, which indirectly matches with research pointing to the role of translanguaging for developing linguistic and metalinguistic awareness (see, e.g., Cenoz & Gorter, 2022; García, 2017; García & Li, 2015). Perhaps he did not benefit from it, but there is a chance that other students really did by developing their awareness of other meanings of the cultureme *чучело.* This is another implication to be taken into account by teachers.

As for languages drawn on when discussing the problems and working on unknown culturemes, the students primarily drew on Catalan; less frequently, Spanish was used. None of the additional languages the students possess in their linguistic repertoire was applied apart from one mentioning in English of "Pancake Day" when Jaume noted the semblance between this festival and Maslenitsa at the beginning of the group discussion. Thus, this study contributes to the theory and practice of translanguaging, which states that not all the linguistic repertoire is deployed by adult learners when learning the target language and culture. French and English are common for the majority of them; however, English was only once deployed by Jaume, while French never was. In future research, it would be interesting to look upon translanguaging as a methodological practice, taking into consideration other languages and cultures, maybe with more focus on typologically close languages as additional ones of the students learning Russian. This study is limited only to one group of students and one particular language school. However, the results obtained in this study can be useful for developing theoretical, practical, and methodological foundations for introducing translanguaging as a strategy in culture learning and teaching, a practice that has rarely been explored in research.

Disclosure Statement

The authors claim no conflict of interest.

Funding

The research did not receive any specific grants from funding agencies.

References

Aden, J., & Eschenauer, S. (2020). Translanguaging: An enactive-performative approach to language education. In E. Moore, J. Bradley, & J. Simpson (Eds.), *Translanguaging as transformation: The collaborative construction of new linguistic realities* (pp. 102–117). Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781788928052-011

Baker, C., & Wright, W. E. (2021). *Foundations of bilingual education and bilingualism* (7th ed.). Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/baker9899

Canagarajah, S. (2011a). Codemeshing in academic writing: Identifying teachable strategies of translanguaging. *The Modern Language Journal*, *95*(3), 401–417. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2011.01207.x

Canagarajah, S. (2011b). Translanguaging in the classroom: Emerging issues for research and pedagogy. *Applied Linguistics Review*, *2*(2011), 1–28. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110239331.1

Cenoz, J., & Gorter, D. (2022). *Pedagogical translanguaging (Elements in language teaching)*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009029384

Council of Europe. (2001). *Common European framework of reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR)*. Cambridge University Press.

Creese, A., & Blackledge, A. (2010). Translanguaging in the bilingual classroom: A pedagogy for learning and teaching? *The Modern Language Journal*, *94*(1), 103–115. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2009.00986.x

Daryai-Hansen, P., Moore, D., Pearce, D. R., & Oyama, M. (2023). Fostering students' decentring and multiperspectivity: A cross-discussion on translanguaging as a plurilingual tool in higher education. In H. Bojsen, P. Daryai-Hansen, A. Holmen, & K. Risager (Eds.), *Translanguaging and epistemological decentring in higher education and research* (pp. 100–125). Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781800410909-006

Gak, V. (1998). *Yazykovye preobrazovaniya* [Language transformations]. Shkola "Yazyki Russkoi Kultury".

García, O., & Li, W. (2015). Translanguaging, bilingualism, and bilingual education. In W. E. Wright, S. Boun, & O. García (Eds.), *The handbook of bilingual and multilingual education* (pp. 223–240). John Wiley & Sons. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118533406.ch13

García, O. (2017). Problematizing linguistic integration of migrants: The role of translanguaging and language teachers. In J. -C. Beacco, H. -J. Krumm, D. Little, & P. Thalgott (Eds.), *The linguistic integration of adult migrants/L'intégration linguistique des migrants adultes. Some lessons from research/ Les enseignments de la recherché* (pp. 11–26). De Gruyter Mouton. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110477498-005

Jaskot, M., Wojakowska, M., & Sosnowski, W. (2022). Culturally anchored lexical units in modern foreign language teaching. *XLinguae: European Scientific Language Review*, *15*(3), 114–125. https://doi.org/10.18355/XL.2022.15.03.10

Khote, N., & Tian, Z. (2019). Translanguaging in culturally sustaining systemic functional linguistics: Developing a heteroglossic space with multilingual learners. In Z. Tian & H. Link (Eds.), *Translation and translanguaging in multilingual contexts*, *5*(1), 5–28. John Benjamins Publishing Company. https://doi.org/10.1075/ttmc.00022.kho

Kirsch, C., & Seele, C. (2020). Translanguaging in early childhood education in Luxembourg: From practice to pedagogy. In J. A. Panagiotopoulou, L. Rosen, & J. Strzykala (Eds.), *Inclusion, education and translanguaging. How to promote social justice in (Teacher) education?* (pp. 63–81). Springer VS. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-28128-1_5

Kocbek, A. (2021). Using the cultureme paradigm in FLT. In S. Bratož, A. Pirih, & A. Kocbek (Eds.), *Pathways to plurilingual education* (pp. 97–110). University of Primorska Press. https://doi.org/10.26493/978-961-7055-36-8.97-110

Lungu-Badea, G. (2009). Remarques sur le concept de *culturème* [Remarks on the concept of cultureme]. *Translationes, 1*, 15–78. https://doi.org/10.2478/tran-2014-0003

Moles, A. A. (1967). *Sociodynamique de la culture*. Mouton et Cie.

Nicolae, A. O. (2015). Multicultural dialogue: Translating culturemes. *The Proceedings of the International Conference Literature, Discourse and Multicultural Dialogue. Section: Language and Discourse, 3*, 215–222.

Ochs, E. (2002). Becoming a speaker of culture. In C. Kramsch (Ed.), *Language acquisition and language socialization: Ecological perspectives* (pp. 99–120). Continuum.

Oksaar, E. (1988). *Kulturemtheorie: Ein Beitrag zur Sprachverwendungsforschung. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck u. Ruprecht* [Theory of the cultureme: A contribution to research into language in use]. Joachim Jungius Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften.

Pamies, A. (2017). The concept of cultureme from a lexicographical point of view. *Open Linguistics, 3*(1), 100–114. https://doi.org/10.1515/opli-2017-0006

Seelye, H. N. (1993). *Teaching culture: Strategies for intercultural communication* (3rd ed.). National Textbook Company.

Vermeer, H. J. (1997). Translation and the "Meme". *Target-international Journal of Translation Studies, 9*, 155–166. https://doi.org/10.1075/target.9.1.10ver

Williams, C. (1994). *Arfarniad o ddulliau dysgu ac addysgu yng nghyd-destun addysg uwchradd ddwyieithog* [An evaluation of teaching and learning methods in the context of bilingual secondary education]. University of Wales.

Yunkova, E. (2019). Peredacha kulturem v khudozhestvennom perevode povesti “Piter Pan” [The transmission of culturemes in the literary translation of Peter Pan]. *RUDN Journal of Language Studies, Semiotics and Semantics, 10*(1), 213–224. https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-2299-2019-10-1-213-224