



THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TRANSLANGUAGING PRACTICES IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the concept of translanguaging and discusses how EFL students can benefit from the coordination of languages by flexibly and concurrently deploying all the available linguistic resources in class. The empirical part examines whether and how EFL teachers in the higher educational context, where students and teachers come from a homogenous linguistic and cultural background and share the same L1, challenge the educational norm of English-only use in the classroom. The main objective of this paper is investigating teachers' attitudes toward intertwining the L1 and L2 and other semiotic resources in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom and attempted to determine to what extent translanguaging practices are implemented. To this end, literature reviews of translanguaging, pedagogical aspects of intertwining languages, advantageous features of implementation, students attitude toward translanguaging in the duration of sessions, the change of language aptitude and how this practice can effect to teaching process of ESP students and some minor issues emerging while switching between L1 and L2 were thoroughly examined.

Translanguaging challenges the notion of languages as distinct entities, i.e., static, separable systems of grammatical structures and pragmatic rules, and their traditional compartmentalization (Canagarajah, 2013, 2018; Creese & Blackledge, 2010). Its proponents consider the linguistic skills of bi-/multilinguals as one single unified entity with different linguistic features (Garcia & Li Wei, 2014) and languages as a type of co-occurrence patterns in certain contexts (Berthel , 2021). Translanguaging integrates diverse

linguaging, i.e., meaning-making in an ongoing debatable process and practices to leverage communicative potential of an individual (Tian, Aghai, Sayer & Schissel, 2020). Scholars (Garcia & Li Wei, 2014; Otheguy, Garcia & Reid, 2015) expound that translanguaging by definition transcends code-switching, i.e., shuttling between named languages, allowing bi-/multilingual individuals to construct and employ original and complex interrelated discursive practices with a view to gaining and constructing knowledge, making sense,



articulating and communicating their thoughts and performing their identities. Translanguaging in the context of learning a foreign language, embraces flexible learning through two or more languages ([Lewis, Jones & Baker, 2012](#)). It is argued that when learners employ their full linguistic resources they can better acquire new linguistic resources ([Garcia & Li Wei, 2014](#)).

In [Li Wei's view \(2018\)](#), individuals deploy a range of linguistic and semiotic resources creatively and critically - creativity involves crossing the boundaries of language use and making something new, i.e., new grammars and meanings beyond separate structures, whereas criticality refers to attempts "to question and problematize received wisdom, and to express views adequately through reasoned responses to the situation" ([Creese & Blackledge, 2015](#), p. 28). An individual's capacity to translanguage is "subject to the size and strength of one's linguistic pool" ([Wang, 2019](#), p. 146).

A translanguaging approach is premised on the holistic view of bilingualism and [multilingualism](#) - the conviction that all the languages an individual possesses form integral parts of his/ her total linguistic system, are equally valid and intertwined. Thus, EFL learners are considered to have one "multicompetence that functions symbiotically for the different languages in their repertoire" and should be considered not as "acquiring a new second language, but adding to the integrated linguistic system of which their L1 is already a part" ([Turnbull, 2018](#), p. 1044). As stated by [Selzter and Garcia \(2020\)](#), p. 28), students are not simple speakers of the L1 and the L2, but they "use their unitary repertoire dynamically to interact with the

world. (...) They add new features and foreground some features, and no others, as they interact with different interlocutors and tasks". Translanguaging is not marked or unusual, but "a natural skill", i.e., bilinguals use features which best suit the social and linguistic situation ([Garcia & Li Wei, 2014](#)) or sometimes they just seek recourse to another language to fill gaps in their repertoire.

A translanguaging lens "allows learners access to the cognitive tools of their L1 in order to better acquire the TL" ([Rabbidge, 2020](#), p. 23). Students are encouraged to use fluid language practices in the classroom to complement their TL knowledge and their transgressive performances are considered natural communicative acts. Over the years, translanguaging as a central theoretical concept in the multilingual turn in TESOL and EFL has proven to be an effective pedagogical practice in a variety of educational contexts ([Tian, Aghai, Sayer & Schissel, 2020](#)). Albeit translanguaging can work with a range of approaches, from content-based instruction, to English for Academic Purposes or task-based language teaching, it should not be reduced to a method. It is rather "a set of related strategies that embodies the principles of flexible multilingualism" ([Sayer, 2020](#), p. 371). Fusing and integrating spontaneously languages in the EFL classroom can help motivate students' cognitive engagement with learning activities and thus, improve their linguistic performances. As a supportive scaffold for understanding a lesson, translanguaging can save time and help maximize students' linguistic resources in the process of problem-solving, meaning- and sense-making and



knowledge construction ([Sembiante & Tian, 2020](#)).

Contrary to multilingual students for whom it is “natural” to translanguage at home and in their community contexts, EFL students need to be taught how to intertwine their linguistic resources ([Canagarajah, 2018](#)). To that end, teachers should show students how to translanguage in a functionally integrated manner to construct meaning, organize understanding, speaking and learning. In the classroom teachers should generate opportunities enabling students to demonstrate their understandings and abilities through their diverse linguistic repertoires, select from their prior knowledge and linguistic resources hinging on the situation, and perform bilingually in a range of intermodal ways. This should help students engage in cognitively powerful learning experiences and facilitate their higher-order, creative and imaginative thinking, leading to generating new knowledge ([Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018](#)).

In [Garcia's view \(2010, p. 4\)](#), in the EFL classroom where students are regarded not only as learners but also “speakers and writers who use their agency to shape English language forms in creative and critical ways” ([Tian, Aghai, Sayer & Schissel, 2020, p. 13](#)), translanguage has to be recognized as practice allowing for the acceptance of “a bilingual discursive norm”. In a translanguage EFL classroom, an English-only, monolingual approach is abandoned and learners are not perceived as deficient, non-native speakers of English, defined by what they lack, but as resourceful agents with multilingual repertoires, abilities and talents. They are spurred to use all their linguistic resources and facility, sustain their cultures and identities while expanding their repertoire

by learning English features. As stated by [Aghai, Sayer and Vercellotti \(2020, p. 357\)](#), “teachers should know when to allow their students to draw upon their linguistic repertoire and when to redirect their attention to the TL”. Depending on the fluid, communicative context, students will be required to use simultaneously a hybrid of two or more languages/ modalities or stick to one language or modality ([Llanes & Cots, 2020](#)).

It is noteworthy, however, that practicing translanguage in the EFL classroom raises some serious issues which have to be considered. One is connected with treating errors or mistakes. If we assume that mutual influences from the languages in students’ repertoire are creative and enabling, not impeding communication, students should be assessed against more practice-based instructions rather than any pre-conceived norms or existing language forms as it is currently. Another obstacle is the EFL curriculum which predominantly utilizes a monolingual, native speaker teaching model and promotes a [linguistic competence](#), focusing on accuracy. However, despite the unnumberable impediments within which teachers operate, they always, to a certain extent, exercise agency that permits them to make their own choices.

Researchers have pinpointed a range of advantages that translanguage brings into bilingual and multilingual contexts. First, translanguage is likely to lower the affective barriers of those who lack confidence in the L2 use and reduce the feeling of alienation, anxiety and tension ([Ortega, 2020](#)). Second, it may improve students’ agency and plays an identity-affirming function, allowing students to fully express their voices, ([Lin](#)



& He, 2017). Third, translanguaging can give students deeper insight into the subject matter discussed in the classroom and has the potential to promote higher-order thinking and fuller understanding (Baker, 2011).

Furthermore, translanguaging can contribute to students' engagement in content of the curriculum (Infante & Licon, 2021). Fourth, utilizing the L1 along with, not in place of the TL, translanguaging can enhance classroom communication, allows for better participation between weaker and stronger learners and can transform teacher-student relations. Last but not least, experience in translanguaging can help students build their linguistic tolerance and flexibility that should enable them to learn additional languages throughout their lives (Garcia, 2009).

Though it has not yet been determined to what extent translanguaging practices may facilitate multilingual students' language learning, as well as academic achievements, research has shown tentatively that translanguaging can be beneficial. For example, Chen, Tsai and Tsou (2019) demonstrated that translanguaging contributed to college students' ESP better writing by helping them improve in three domains: content, literacy and style. First, students who translanguaged enriched the content of their drafts by leveraging their prior knowledge in the L1 to convey more information and express more ideas. Second, their literacy improved - the number of correct sentence structures in their final drafts increased. Third, students achieved a more professional style by using general, academic and idea words correctly.

Nikula and Moore (2018), in turn, analyzed translanguaging as discursive

practice in the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) context, in high schools in Austria, Finland and Spain, showing its highly contingent nature. The extract from a biology class, for example, revealed how the teacher habitually provided L1 equivalents for key terms, thereby demonstrating readiness to translanguage with a view to supporting learning. The teacher encouraged the learners to "play language detectives" (Martin-Beltran, 2014) to look for and discuss similarities and differences, i.e., cognates and false cognates across languages. Since the terms which were used in class were etymologically related, it can be assumed that this useful translanguaging technique could reinforce students' acquisition of the L2. Additionally, translanguaging, as a pedagogical scaffolding strategy, allowed for making the meaning-making process much more inclusive. Translanguaging helped high school learners in English-medium instruction engineering classes communicate the science concepts in focus and thus, explore the meanings of key concepts and topics.

However, positive influence of translanguaging on L2 proficiency should not be taken as a given. For example, Llanes and Cots' research (2020) at the tertiary level has shown that only a few significant differences favored the translanguaging group of Business English students who intertwined languages in class - their sales pitches and business letters were assessed significantly higher by the examiner. The researchers presupposed that the higher gains may be contributed to practicing translanguaging in the classroom, which increased those students' self-confidence and consequently,



the effectiveness of their communicative performance in the L2. Yet, their overall EFL development, measured in terms of fluency, lexical complexity, grammatical complexity and accuracy, was comparable to the language gains of the group taught in a strictly monolingual manner.

The studies uncovered the pedagogical potential and rationality of practicing translanguaging in the EFL classroom, providing arguments for softening the boundaries between languages and liberating both teachers and students from the constraints of the TL-only ideology. However, more research is needed to confirm the aforementioned results and to demonstrate empirically translanguaging as effective pedagogy in an EFL context.

Conclusion

the article tries to explain the theoretical aspects for the concept of Translanguaging. As it is emphasized Translanguaging is not merely a descriptive label for the kinds of Post-Multilingualism practices that one observes in the 21st century, although descriptive adequacy is crucial in theory building. Translanguaging offers a practical theory of language that sees the latter as a multilingual, multisemiotic, multisensory, and multimodal resource that human beings use for thinking and for communicating thought. The Translanguaging perspective challenges the received and uncritical view in some quarters of the applied and sociolinguistics communities that bilingualism and multilingualism are about the protection of individual languages and, since language and sociocultural identity are postulated to be intrinsically linked, maintaining one's language means maintaining one's identity. It is the fact that the labelling of languages is largely

arbitrary and can be politically and ideologically charged, and there is often a close relationship between the identity of a language and the nation-state. But in everyday social interaction, language users move dynamically between the so-called languages, language varieties, styles, registers, and writing systems, to fulfil a variety of strategic and communicative functions. The alternation between languages, spoken, written, or signed; between language varieties; and between speech, writing, and signing, is a very common feature of human social interaction. It constructs an identity for the speaker that is different from a L1 identity or a L2 identity. Moreover, language learners as well as educators use L1 to shape the knowledge in L2 especially in ESP contexts. The transdisciplinary consequences of re-conceptualizing language, language learning, and language use, and working across the divides between linguistics, psychology, sociology, and education.

The study documented only the perspective of teachers. Future research should attempt to garner additional data sources and utilize a multi-perspective approach that would help solicit evidence from students who should be asked to analyze and report on their own translanguaging practices, and explain the reasons behind their applications. Finally, additional studies with a broader multinational perspective, focusing on translanguaging in multilingual EFL classrooms are needed. Such future studies could document the constructive use of translanguaging and how it might contribute to students' TL development. Only triangulation of methods and sources will help further pursue and investigate the



matter thoroughly, and eventually allow for enhanced insight into the investigated

topic, giving reliable answers to the research questions.

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