

## Translanguaging: A New Pedagogy in EFL classes

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### Abstract:

The present study explores translanguaging both as a concept and as a practice through different experiences and practices in EFL contexts. It also attempts to investigate the possible opportunities for instructors to use this strategy into English language teaching pedagogy. Though many researchers have backed up translanguaging as a theoretical and pedagogical approach to language education due to its potential cognitive, behavioural, and social benefits, it is still lagging behind in our language classrooms. Therefore, EFL teachers should be sensitized about the utility of translanguaging theory not only in teaching and learning the foreign language, but also in innovating language policies and language planning. The findings reveal that it is high time our schools and universities invested in this new area, benefiting from the insights provided by many studies and projects in other parts of the world.

**Keywords:** Translanguaging, EFL contexts, English language teaching pedagogy, language policies and language planning.

### Introduction

Lewis, Jones and Baker (2012) mentioned that “Translanguaging” is a new Welsh term that was first created and used in the 1980s by Cen Williams in the field of education, and that it refers to the use of two languages in terms of function to facilitate understanding, speaking, literacy, and learning. In addition, the main concern of translanguaging is communication and language production.

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According to Williams (2002), in this same line of uncovering its origin, “The term *translanguaging* is a relatively recent one used in line with code-switching in the literature. Translanguaging is similar to code-switching in that it refers to multilingual speakers’ shuttling between languages in a natural manner. However, it started as a pedagogical practice, where the language mode of input and output in Welsh bilingual classrooms was deliberately switched (Cited in Park, 50: 2013).

## **2. Translanguaging vs. Code-switching**

Nikula and Moore (2019) uphold that when it was coined in the 1980s by Williams, the term “*trawsieithu*” or translanguaging (today) was meant to indicate a teaching /learning strategy that is based on intentional switch from English into Welsh and vice versa (exchange of input and output). This strategy aims at promoting the learners’ bilingual linguistic competences. Nikula and Moore (ibid) employ Baker’s (104-105: 2000) to fully explain this point as follows:

It is possible in a monolingual context, for students to answer questions or write an essay without fully understanding the subject. Whole sentences or paragraphs can be copied or adapted from a textbook without really understanding them. This is less easy in a bilingual situation. To read and discuss a topic in one language, and then to write about it in another, means that the subject matter has to be properly ‘digested’ and reconstructed.

Vogel, Hoadley, Ascenzi-Moreno and Menken (2019) explain “in a single interaction, people may use words from multiple languages, gestures, and even emoji and other resources from the environment and technology to make meaning”. Prada and Turnbull (2018) illustrate “learners could read a text in Welsh and discuss it in English or listen to a passage in English and write about it in Welsh” (p. 13).

Code-switching (CS), however, “refers to the mixing, by bilinguals (or multilinguals), of two or more languages in discourse, often with no change of

interlocutor or topic. Such mixing may take place at any level of linguistic structure, but its occurrence within the confines of a single sentence, constituent, or even word, has attracted most linguistic attention” (Poplack, 2062: 2001). Al Heeti and Al Abdely (2016) observe that “CS is used when the speakers of certain communities have more than one language to communicate with. They use these languages periodically for many reasons which make them shift from their first language to other languages available” (p. 10).

The main difference between Translanguaging and Code-switching, based on the above quotations, is that in Translanguaging bilinguals or multilinguals seek to understand topic in a language (input) by using another; the ultimate aim of translanguaging as a pedagogic strategy is to improve the learners’ linguistic competence in both languages. In contrast, Code-switching bilinguals or multilinguals substitute a sentence, a constituent, or even a word in one language with its equivalent in another language; the role of Code-switching is more social than pedagogical. To understand the social role of CS, one should observe, discover and record the social conventions as they are used in everyday situations. This effort requires identifying the speech community in question and characterizing its social structure in terms of language knowledge and language use. In addition, samples of discourse including CS must be obtained to detect recurrent patterns of speech behaviour so as to have a clear image of the community profile, or "social meaning" of CS (Poplack, 2004: 592).

### **3. Translanguaging and Pedagogy**

At the very beginning of its emergence, Translanguaging was confined only to the context of Welsh-English bilingual education. “It refers to a pedagogical practice that alternates the use of Welsh and English for input and output in the same lesson. The idea is to get information in one language and to work with that information in the other language. It is important to consider that translanguaging has its origin in a context of bilingual education that aims at developing balanced bilingualism both in Welsh and English” (Cenoz and Gorter, 311: 2017). But, “Nowadays translanguaging refers to a linguistic practice with sociolinguistic implications as well as an innovative approach to teaching” (Facciani, 1: 2019).

Cartens (2016) indicates that from the 1990s onward, translanguaging in education has gone beyond the traditional association of Welsh and English and gained international popularity. This is due to an emerging conception of

Bilingualism/multilingualism as an advantageous trend where translanguaging assists learners in developing different linguistic features in the languages which they know in order to ease the teaching learning process. Sayer (2013) considers translanguaging to be a label which describes discursive bilingual practices used by students and teachers for both academic and non-academic purposes (Cited in Rivera and Mazak, 124: 2017), and the integration of translanguaging practices, according to García and Sylvan (2011), has been recommended as a way to advance instruction (ibid). To illustrate some of what research has identified as translanguaging practices, Karlsson, Larsson, and Jakobsson (2018) indicate that:

some studies (García, 2011; García and Wei, 2014) found that children who enter school, at five to six years of age, use all semiotic resources to mediate understanding among each other and to co-construct meaning of what others are saying. In another study, García and Kano (2014) found that students who were beginners in a new language naturally tend to use different resources as a support for expanding their opportunities for understanding. Further, Baker (2011) addresses the advantages and the potential of a translanguaging practice as, for example, a tool for deeper and fuller understanding of the subject content, and a faster development of a subject-related language (p. 5).

In a similar vein, Baker (281-282: 2011) identified four benefits of translanguaging as follows:

- \* It may promote a deeper and fuller understanding of content.
- \* It may help students to develop skills in their weaker language.
- \* It may facilitate home-school cooperation.
- \* It can develop learners' second language ability concurrently with content learning (Cited in Yuvayapan, 680: 2019).

He asserts that teachers can solve any problems arising where this pedagogy is implemented if they plan their lessons based on the use of two languages in the

classroom. That is, they should utilize variegated situations (in both languages) in the class to give to their students the opportunity to develop their cognitive abilities (ibid).

### **3.1 What Skills could be taught through Translanguaging?**

Hungwe (2019) conducted a study in which paraphrasing as a strategy was combined with a translingual approach to enhance students' reading and understanding of texts. The main impulse for carrying out this study was that the large number of studies which aimed at finding solutions to help students at the tertiary level to comprehend texts did not really cater for practical strategies. The findings revealed how translanguaging can be used as a scaffolding approach to help lecturers to enhance their instruction in reading classes. The findings also indicated that translanguaging can be used jointly with other strategies such as paraphrasing to create in learners reading metacognitive strategies.

Other studies on the utility of translanguaging in describing academic content in different courses and contexts at the university level were described by Caruso (2018) as follows:

Adamson and Fujimoto-Adamson (2012) studied how the use of translanguaging at a self-access language centre in a Japanese university has changed the students' language learning; Andersson et al. (2013) and Kagwesage (2013) analysed the use of translanguaging in work teams at the University of Rwanda; Madiba (2013) explored the use of translanguaging in an online glossary tool used by students at a South-African University; Mazak and Herbas-Donoso (2014, 2015) focused on the study of translingual practices in science courses at a Puerto Rican University; Kyppö et al. (2015) analysed a university course at a Finnish University designed to develop the multilingual and multicultural competence of the students, including the use of translanguaging; and then there is the recent Mazak and Carroll (2017)

which presents studies on translanguaging in various higher education institutions around the world, claiming to fill a gap in research studies (pp.68-69 )

Another study conducted by Kabir (2019) tried to outline the confused association of translation and L1 through a review of different language teaching methods and approaches, their place in bilingual settings, and their current role in translanguaging literature. The study claimed that translation and L1 can be used through translanguaging practices that call for reviewing the existing approaches and methods of language teaching based on a more flexible view of language. The core reason behind conducting this study was the increasing demand, by many ELT practitioners in Bangladesh, for the use of translation and L1 in language teaching. In the conclusion, the author suggested that all traditions relevant to curriculum innovation, materials production, and teaching and learning in Bangladesh should be reconsidered from a translanguaging perspective in order to expand the scope of successful and effective language education. In other words, some space should be left for the use of the mother tongue in bilingual classrooms because of certain tasks and activities' requirements. For example, in this study, “... translation does not mean conversion or transfer of meaning from one language to another, but from the language users' existing dynamic linguistic repertoire consisting of different linguistic features, to the targeted set(s) of linguistic feature(s), required by other users e.g., academia, corporate, community etc.” (ibid: 42).

### **3.2 Bilingual Education: A difficult shift**

Bilingualism, or the combination of two independent languages in language pedagogy, has been opposed for a long time in the Western Context. Monolinguals have always thought that bi/multilingualism which refers to the alternation between two or more languages was an ineffective strategy; it was refused as an approach to bilingual education until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This referred to the belief that a safe acquisition of a new language would result from separating the two languages; i.e. the first language and the additional one (Hassan and Ahmed, 25: 2015). In this same line of difficult development, Garcia (303: 2009) argued that teachers and students in bilingual

classrooms equally suffer from monolingual beliefs and practices, and thus fail to apply translanguaging. Garcia (ibid) stated that:

Too often bilingual students who translanguage suffer linguistic shame because they have been burdened with monoglossic ideologies that value only monolingualism. . . . And too often bilingual teachers hide their natural translanguaging practices from administrators and others because they have been taught to believe that only monolingual ways of speaking are “good” and “valuable”. Yet, they know that to teach effectively in bilingual classrooms, they must translanguage (Zein, 37: 2018).

In addition, Mwindi and Walt (2015) pointed out that translanguaging (or rather bilingualism) was problematic in the past. The aim was to develop native-like competency in both languages in learners; based on this ultimate goal, there must be a separation of the two languages which can be in terms of time, classroom, teacher, and so on. But, recently it has been shown that both languages can be kept active when one of them is used by bilinguals; i.e. the two languages are not used separately.

#### **4. An Additional Precept: Teacher- Student Interaction**

Participation in the classroom is a required behaviour because it helps students to understand the lecture’s material and decreases their reluctance to speak. But, students’ in-class participation may be impeded by such factors as the teachers’ behaviour or students’ personality traits. In a study conducted by Ganji and Dabbaghi (2014) on this issue at the tertiary level, the findings revealed that the students’ fear of making mistakes in front of their classmates and the tense classroom atmosphere were the most crucial obstacles. It was, therefore, suggested that teachers, especially those who stress classroom participation and consider it to be an activity on its own should implement more practical methods and strategies in order to motivate their students to interact with each and one another, creating an effective classroom discourse. This is only because

Every classroom is an institutional context, and language classrooms are not exceptions. The participants come together to achieve the desired goals of learning and teaching. Thus, classroom discourse is a form of institutional talk and therefore has some certain characteristics. The turn taking system in the classrooms is mostly teacher-fronted, highly constrained, and the relationship between teachers and learners is asymmetrical (38: *ibid*)

Rezaee and Farahian (2012) see that there are two types of interaction in the classroom: interaction between the teacher and students and interaction among students, but they emphasize the former “since there is a teacher who initiates by asking questions and there are students who answer” (p. 1237). According to Yanfen and Yuqin (76: 2010), in this type of interaction there is “The exchange of thoughts, feelings or ideas, between two or more people in a cooperative manner. Through interaction with the teacher, students can increase their language store and so, improve their knowledge of language as much as possible” (Cited in Rezaee and Farahian, 1237-1238: 2002).

### **5. Fostering the Additional Precept**

Al-Zahrani and Al-Bargi (2017) claim that classroom interaction does not only involve far the students’ capacity to speak and express themselves, but it also covers other types and instances of classroom participation such as teacher-student, student-student, and group discussions. Among other advantages, classroom interaction helps students to engage socially outside of the classroom and facilitates for teachers the task of measuring student progress (p. 136). To foster classroom interaction, Al-Zahrani and Al-Bargi (138: *ibid*) proposed the following strategies:

\* Encourage students to negotiate meaning when they do not understand what is required of them. Negotiation of meaning is a central aspect of classroom interaction, where learners actively involve themselves in interaction. Negotiation of meaning is defined as the verbal exchanges that occur when speakers seek to prevent the breakdown of communication (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005).



\* The use of scaffolding. Scaffolding is an instructional technique in which the teacher models the desired learning outcome or task, and then gradually shifts responsibility to the students. Teachers can use reformulation, extension or modeling to increase students' interaction and encourage their output.

\* Feedback can also be used to promote classroom interaction (Mackey, 2007). It can be written or verbal to indicate approval or disapproval of students' responses. Feedback can be used to encourage or criticize student output performance. Feedback supports learning and allows students to produce additional language during the process.

Taking into account the belief that there are various strategies to promote language teaching and, at the same time, consider effectively course or lesson objectives, Reyes-Chua and Lidawan (2019) state that "Teachers should conceptualize an instruction that can connect learners into their real world. It is believed that through the use of games, favorable outcomes on students' language performances may be generated" (p.112). Reyes-Chua and Lidawan (ibid) argue that "Games are useful in language teaching when they are manipulated pedagogically. Nowadays, teachers need to change and adapt to the new learning environment. Students need new and different pedagogical immersions in order to learn and through the aid of games, students can understand the lessons easily and interestingly" (p. 114).

In addition, in a classroom setting there are roles to be played by the teacher and students. Teachers ask questions (act) and students answer the questions (react); teachers' questions are very important tools for classroom interaction. Ononye (2015) explains that "The context of classroom interaction requires that teachers introduce or present information in conventionally structured ways, while learners respond or react to the information, especially when invited to do so. This is largely achieved through one important aspect of classroom interaction, namely, teachers' questions" (p. 370).

## **Conclusion**

All the above literature which involves multilingual experiences and practices (i.e. translanguaging instead of code-switching), does not provide a concrete set of teaching strategies that are applicable to all our EFL classrooms. That is, it gives hints and suggests, though indirectly, ways which may facilitate multilingual students' language learning and academic achievement. Nevertheless, active and

intelligent teachers and students can play their roles in promoting the use of two or more languages in the classroom. Because students not only need, but love to talk (Fisher and Frey, 2014), teachers are required to foster students' discussions with their classmates and their exchange of ideas and questions about various issues. Nagy (2018) came up with the conclusion that to employ translanguaging practices in the classroom necessitates adopting a new mindset to teaching that permits the use of many languages in class and, in the meantime, encourages the learners to hold their entire linguistic potential.

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