

# Translanguaging Practices in Language Classroom

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**Abstract:** Translanguaging, as a pedagogy in language classrooms, has been drawing much attention from scholars and teachers. Four types of translanguaging practices, namely bilingual label quest, simultaneous code-mixing, cross-language recapping, dual-language substantiation, are elaborated in this essay.

**Keywords:** Translanguaging; Language Learning; Teaching Practices

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## Introduction

English has been gradually shared by bilinguals and multilinguals instead of only native speakers throughout the world. With the development of multilingual turn, education is the main area being affected. Translanguaging emerging as a new pedagogy in the classroom has been favoured and applied by many teaching practitioners. In this essay, I will discuss the translanguaging practices in language classroom from three aspects. The first section is about current issues and debates on translanguaging. The second one focuses on empirical studies on translanguaging practices. Then the last part will discuss a real-example of translanguaging and implications for languages, society and education.

## 1. Relevant Theories

Monolingual teaching approach has been dominant in the field of second language acquisition for years. Monolingualism means that languages are distinctive and separate entities which should be focused alone in the classrooms (Constant & Guadalupe, 2019). However, in the trend of multilingual turn, the term translanguaging has drawn much attention from researchers and scholars with the advancement of SLA in recent years. According to García (2009, 140), translanguaging is 'the act performed by bilinguals of accessing different linguistic features or various modes of what are described as autonomous languages, in order to maximize communicative potential'. This refers to the practice that bilinguals or multilinguals tend to draw on and switch their diverse language resources based on a given discourse. Besides, translanguaging not only is a simple process shifting between different language repertoires but also challenges the boundaries between language and cognitive systems in terms of meaning construction (Li, 2016). In a deeper sense, translanguaging could transform the form and function and also create a space for language users by integrating their experience, ideology and environment into a meaningful performance (Li, 2016). Besides, there are many advantages of translanguaging. The benefits of translanguaging could be identity performance, content access and confidence improvement in class (Creese and Blackledge, 2010). Li (2011) points out that language learners' creativity and criticality could be developed because translanguaging may enable learners to use languages and evidence appropriately and express views adequately.

Translanguaging is an umbrella term where translanguaging as a pedagogy in language classrooms is on the rise. Translanguaging pedagogy was originally used in a bilingual school in Wales (Lewis, Jones, & Baker, 2012). Baker (2011) claims that translanguaging involves making meaning, shaping experiences, gaining understanding and knowledge by using different languages. In this sense, both teachers and learners could adopt their linguistic resources across languages at their disposal to achieve successful communications and learning outcomes in diverse contexts. Being influenced by translanguaging ideology, many EFL countries have gradually incorporated Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and English Medium Instruction (EMI) into the educational system (Lin, 2016; Thompson & McKinley, 2018). These two concepts focus on the content learning and language proficiency in the classroom, which may form a fashion trend in the education field. Based on the study from Wang & Curdt-Christiansen (2018), Chinese-English bilingual education (BE) was proposed by the Chinese Ministry of Education (MOE 2001) in response to this trend. However, the implementation of BE is not very satisfactory due to the lack of qualified bilingual teachers and guidance in practice. Also, some research conducted may indicate the deficiency of EMI. For example, some learners may find it difficult to understand the content due to the learning anxiety from the low self-perceived English proficiency (Huang, 2015).

## 2. Empirical Studies

There are some empirical studies on translanguaging practices. Some of studies show that language learners could build up their diverse identities through translanguaging (Canagarajah, 2013). Some illustrate that translanguaging would engage students in more activities in the classroom and encourage them to express (Palmer et al., 2014). The following three studies also explore translanguaging practices and will be discussed in more details.

First, the article “Translanguaging in Chinese foreign language classrooms: students and teachers’ attitudes and practices” (Wang, 2016) investigate teachers and students’ attitudes towards translanguaging practices in China’s universities. The research is divided into three parts: The first part is a questionnaire survey to learn about students’ attitudes and the second one is an interview to investigate teachers’ attitudes, followed by an observation to translanguaging practices in class which is the third part. The results present that about half of the students support the multilingual form of instruction to make meaning negotiation. Some teachers feel it hard to use multilingualism while others could apply the translanguaging pedagogy in class with an open mind. It is noted that translanguaging strategy could contribute to creating communicative atmosphere and friendly teacher-student relationships in class. At the ending of this study, teachers are suggested to enrich knowledge in language learning and improve translanguaging strategies in the future.

Second, “Translanguaging pedagogy in teaching English for Academic Purposes: Researcher-teacher collaboration as a professional development model” (Liu, Lo & Lin, 2020) demonstrates the advantages of translanguaging pedagogy in the programme of English for Academic Purposes (EAP). In this study, a teacher collaborates with a researcher in an EAP course in a Chinese university to help teachers develop translanguaging competence. Many methods are adopted in the study, such as classroom observations, co-planning meeting and sharing sessions. The finding of the research is that research-teacher collaboration model could benefit teachers in transforming monolingual beliefs and improving the ability to apply translanguaging pedagogy. As for implications for future explorations, teachers should reflect on their practices regularly and communicate more with researchers when having trouble in translanguaging use.

Finally, the essay ‘Using all English is not always meaningful’: Stakeholders’ perspectives on the use of and attitudes towards translanguaging at a Chinese university (Fang & Liu, 2020) explores how students and teachers from a university use translanguaging and their attitudes on it. There are five types of translanguaging practices (e.g. concept/language point explanation, comprehension check) being observed and analyzed with specific examples in the essay. The constraints which contain language policy from school and the concern about students’ overuse in L1 may prevent teachers from participating in translanguaging practices. Based on the results, students tend to maintain neutral-to-positive attitudes towards translanguaging and most teachers could recognize the merits of translanguaging in the aspects of content understanding and classroom management. Also, the writer proposes that parents’ attitudes towards translanguaging may be a key element in students’ language learning and worth studying in depth.

## 3. Applying Theories in Practice and Implications

### 3.1 Applying Theories in Practice

The article “Translanguaging in a Chinese–English bilingual education programme: a university-classroom ethnography” (Wang & Curdt-Christiansen, 2018) examines the translanguaging practices in higher education classes. The study focuses on teachers and students in the Business Management undergraduate programme of a Chinese key university. All teachers and students are Chinese native speakers and English is their second language. Most subject courses in this programme are taught bilingually, namely Chinese and English.

During the first stage of the study, four types of translanguaging could be seen in the bilingual classroom (All excerpts below are cited from Wang & Curdt-Christiansen (2018)).

The first one is bilingual label quest, as shown in Excerpt 1.

**Excerpt 1**  
 (1) T: 首先我们介绍 The Classical Theory. The Classical Theory?  
 First of all, we will introduce The Classical Theory. The Classical Theory?  
 (2) S: 经典理论。  
 The Classical Theory.  
 (3) T: ... the price level 价格水平 and the Unemployment Rate 失业率...

Bilingual label quest means that terminologies and concepts are introduced by the teacher in one language and explained by the learners in another language to make teaching “accomplished bilingually” (Martin, 2005, p. 83). Sometimes teachers would raise the bilingual label quest and also self-answer (Creese & Blackledge, 2010) such as the price level 价格水平 in excerpt 1. In this way, teachers could check comprehension and teaches new expressions appearing for the first time (Kouti, 2012). Students would notice the new words being highlighted and acquire them in both languages explicitly and efficiently.

The second type is simultaneous code-mixing, as shown in Excerpt 2

**Excerpt 2**

(1) T: ...Communication flows at the same organizational level, 对吧? 就是首先这个 communication 在同一个级别上。同时呢, 你还要注意它们这两个沟通的这个 sender and receiver 它们俩是什么呀? in different departments, 一定在不同的部门...

Code-mixing refers to the blend of two grammatical systems and shows the grammatical competence of bilinguals (Meisel, 2001). In excerpt 2, teachers tend to explain abstract concepts using simultaneous code-mixing. Then full messages could be understood by students with the grammar knowledge in the two languages. Furthermore, simultaneous code-mixing integrates the linguistic forms and concepts from two languages (Celik, 2003). Therefore, it would help students facilitate linguistic transfer and enhance their bilingual learning (Jiang, et al., 2014). In this sense, teachers and students may be encouraged to use the simultaneous code-mixing skill in diverse contexts.

The third type is cross-language recapping, as shown in Excerpt 3.

**Excerpt 3**

(1) T: ...Classical conditioning is based on the classical, the early classical approach, you know Operant conditioning is based on the behaviourist theory...  
 (2) T: ...第一个, 我们首先要介绍的经典条件反射理论是基于早期经典的研究, 第二个 operant conditioning 操作性条件反射是基于行为主义的理论...

According to Wang & Curdt-Christiansen (2018), the term cross-language recapping refers to the same content of the subject that is taught in one language and then repeated in another language. They further explain that the contents in the two languages are sometimes identical and sometimes more detailed in one language than another one. Therefore, it seems that different languages could make up for the deficiency and complement each other. Besides, students will review the same content from various perspectives in cross-language recapping, which would help students to consolidate understanding of the content and experience cultural differences.

The fourth type is dual-language substantiation, as shown in Excerpt 4.

**Excerpt 4**

(1) T: Markets can be divided into international or local markets. Such as Wuhan's 热干面, it is a local market product. Maybe people in Wuhan like to buy it, but other people in our country may know little about Wuhan 热干面. So Wuhan 热干面 is focused on the local market.

In the Business Management programme, many theories and notions often derive from western contexts. Teachers would tend to present disciplinary knowledge in English and provide examples or materials from Chinese contexts, which makes it easier for learners to understand and keep in mind. For example, Wuhan热干面 in this excerpt is known as a kind of local food which learners would feel familiar with.

### 3.2 Implications for language, society and education

In this business management program, students have access to translanguaging in bilingual classes. Students generally are exposed to technical English vocabulary and absorb the disciplinary knowledge in both languages, which would prompt students to manipulate linguistic resources and establish academic literacies (He, Lai, & Lin, 2017). Besides, learners are required to complete English assignments, attend English lectures and join in discussions. This provides more opportunities to apply English in use. During the learning process, translanguaging involves the overlapping of languages, which would simultaneously make links for learners between culture, society, community and language of their lives (Creese & Blackledge, 2010). Therefore, the students' habit of translanguaging developed in this program would have a positive influence on their improvement in terms of English proficiency, academic subjects and cognitive system. As for teachers, translanguaging can be considered as a great pedagogy to enhance class efficiency and accomplishment. Teachers should take responsibility to raise students' awareness of translanguaging and reflect on teaching practice to achieve better learning outcomes.

Although many teachers come to realize the importance of translanguaging, there is a lack of theoretical guidance and structured translanguaging strategies for teachers engaging in the process of trial and error (Wang, 2016). If received professional training and practice on translanguaging use with the help of researchers and educators, teachers could be more competent and confident in facing challenges in multi-lingual language classrooms. To this end, setting up appropriate training model like "researcher-teacher collaboration" (Liu, Lo & Lin, 2020) could be advocated and put into practice on a larger scale. Other kinds of model will be explored further to adapt to different contexts and student type. In addition, some teachers should enrich their knowledge on teaching theories and pedagogies by reading the latest research and communicate with peers, which may transform the monolingual ideology rooted in translanguaging with broader perceptions.

In the field of education, there is still few studies on English language teaching from the perspective of translanguaging in the context of Chinese higher education (Fang & Liu, 2020), despite some studies on translanguaging in complementary school in the UK or the other. The research areas like English as a medium of instruction (EMI) and English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching programmes remain unexploited (Paulsrud et al., 2021). To have a more comprehensive and deeper understanding of translanguaging practice, researchers may need to design and conduct more experiments in view of different educational stages and school types across nations. Additionally, hot topics in the pedagogic areas including EMI, EFL and CLIL could be worth exploring intensively and extensively.

The business programme finally proves to be a success in language proficiency and subject learning. This could imply that other programmes like engineering and arts at the university are highly possible to achieve learning progress using translanguaging pedagogy purposefully and strategically in class. At this point, universities would be proposed to consistently launch translanguaging programmes of different majors, give instruction and feedback if necessary. This would not only improve students' entire language repertoire and school performance (Cenoz, 2017) but also win social recognition and competitiveness for the university. Furthermore, the existence and implementation of translanguaging practices in class generally depend on the support from schools and education departments. Specifically, relevant educational policy and school curricula could be made and modified to maximize the advantages of translanguaging in real contexts.

#### 4. Conclusion

Translanguaging involves using different linguistic resources in the communication process. Many researchers have put lots of efforts into the investigations on translanguaging practices through questionnaires, interviews and class observations. The findings tend to indicate the sufficient benefits of translanguaging in class in terms of language proficiency, content understanding and positive communicative atmosphere. Through intensive analysis of a real-example in a study, four types of translanguaging practices, varying from bilingual label quest, simultaneous code-mixing, cross-language recapping, dual-language substantiation, have been elaborated in the combination of theory and research data. Based on the analysis, implications may involve an improvement on translanguaging skills of teachers and students, the broader research perspectives on translanguaging studies and feasible policies made by authorities.

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