

Implications of Translanguaging as a Classroom Pedagogy

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Abstract: Translanguaging is the action whereby learners draw upon anything from their linguistic and semiotic repertoire to facilitate learning. According to recent studies, it has various benefits in EFL classrooms both from the perspective of classroom management and the efficacy of teaching. This research aims to clarify translanguaging, discuss its benefits and challenges when it is used as a classroom pedagogy, understand its perceptions from the perspective of teachers and students, and the research gap is proposed in the end.

Keywords: Translanguaging; Perceptions; EFL Classroom; Classroom Pedagogy

1. Research Background

Globalization has accelerated the diversity of both global culture and economy, which in turn has expanded the bilingual and multilingual aspects of societies. Translanguaging, which is defined as making flexible use of linguistic and semiotic repertoires to make meanings and facilitate communication (García, 2009; García and Li, 2014), is a natural phenomenon in those circumstances. Given that it is certain to occur, this has implications for the EFL classroom and how students and teachers communicate with each other in an educational setting. Translanguaging, as a practice, is popular among students and faculties. However, there are diverse perceptions of translanguaging effectiveness ranging from those who agree that it has various benefits to those who think it is detrimental in L2 learning. Advocators of monolingualism appreciate the comprehensive exposure to the second language and perceive that any use of L1 interrupts its acquisition. The conflict between the monolingual ideology and multilingual reality is intense and highlighted in previous research. Additionally, teachers who adopt two languages in teaching also face the perception that they are not proficient in the target language or lack the teaching skills to successfully communicate learning.

2. Translanguaging as a Classroom Pedagogy

2.1 Benefits

Translanguaging pedagogy shows how multilingualism has affected practice in the classroom. It disposes of the idea of two languages in isolation and requires the creation of a new paradigm where languages are flexibly applied to meaning making. As is increasingly acknowledged in bilingual education, it plays a vital role in the teaching and learning process. Translanguaging pedagogy is also identified as the process where learners exert all linguistic knowledge that they possess to maximize the learning capacity.

Translanguaging has shown its advantages at schools already. Huang (2018) asserts that it facilitates the negotiation of ideology and identity of Chinese migrants in a Chinese Complementary School (CCS) in Birmingham, England. In the 10-month fieldwork that studied the translanguaging practises in CCS, teachers were found to prefer using their linguistic repertoire flexibly, including Mandarin, English and other semiotics (e.g. body languages), in not just teaching, but also daily community life and even school board meetings. CCS regarded translanguaging as one of the fundamental norms of bilingual education, where teacher identity is shaped to be open, and local Chinese discourse is newly defined as superdiverse, relational and flexible.

In higher education, by making a comparison of three professors at a bilingual university in Puerto Rico, the data in Mazak et al. (2016) showed that the three professors with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds made use of flexible linguistic systems in teaching strategies. Their willingness to use a bilingual ideology ensured their understanding of students' sociolinguistic, cultural and historical backgrounds. It was proved that translanguaging could be practised in different ways and helped expand students' 'linguistic, academic and meaning-making repertoires'. On the other hand, the presentation program in He et al.'s research (2016)

shows the success in breaking the linguistic barrier through building intercultural communications between a professor from mainland China who presented the class using Chinese, English, mathematic symbols and graphs and his students who had varied cultural backgrounds, including international students, native Hong Kongers and those from mainland China. As a consequence, the academic language of emergent bilinguals was developed.

2.2 Challenges

Although the merits of translanguaging clearly appear in schools and universities, many challenges block its further development – chief among them is the position of monolingualism as a totally different, thoroughly entrenched approach. The proponents of monolingualism prevent L1 from entering into the EFL classroom in order to create a linguistically pure learning environment for easier acquisition of L2. This is despite the fact that no evidence-based research has proved the effectiveness of this approach/strategy. Another reason for the pervasiveness of monolingualism is that using L1 in the classroom is mistakenly thought to be a return to the oft-criticized grammar-translation method.

Monolingual education has popularity among students as well. Ekoç's (2020) research illustrated the popularity of monolingual education at a technical university in Turkey. Due to a lack of English proficiency, students demonstrated their support for the English-mediated courses for English-dominant class afterwards because they thought this approach helped them learn English better so that they could be competitive in the global market. In addition to the dominance of the monolingual ideology of faculties and students, social bias is a crucial factor influencing the low-level implementation of translanguaging. As Escobar et al. (2015) mention, using L1 was thought to be lazy and encourage low proficiency in the target language. In their research, the participants (including teachers and students) all held the view that using L1 was ineffective in the EFL classroom, as it impeded the cognitive processes necessary for L2 acquisition and stimulated the form of the 'lazy habit' of resorting to L1. This 'lazy habit' expression undoubtedly poses a threat to the teachers' job security and authority if they adopt L1 to teach (Carroll, 2016).

3. Perceptions of Translanguaging

A handful of studies have focused on their views on language choice, many of which, demonstrate teachers' support for translanguaging. Both the studies conducted by Wang and Kirkpatrick(2012) and Yuvayapan(2019) found English use was proven to improve explanatory, managerial and interactive functions, and the positive attitude of English language teachers towards translanguaging. Nevertheless, through research tools like classroom observation and semi-structured interviews, it was found that teachers' perceptions do not always align with their actual practices. Due to the pressure from institutions and colleagues who advocate teaching only in L2, teachers don't frequently adopt translanguaging. In reality, however, they still use L1 to help low proficiency students in class. Clearly, the intense conflict between monolingual ideology and multilingual reality is often readily manifested.

Translanguaging also gains favour among undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral students. Nearly all participants in Carstens's (2016) research in South Africa show their support for translanguaging. This study, which included L1 use, benefited the learning process greatly and showed cognitive gains. It also contributed to the development of the participants' mother tongues as new terms were created based on English ones. Additionally, a majority of students believed translanguaging to be effective in terms of clarification and classroom management in the preparatory courses of academic writing in a Japanese university. Those with particularly low English competence benefited greatly from translingual writing practice. In addition to undergraduates, the perceptions of masters and doctoral students were also studied by Moody (2019) whose resulting analysis was that positive and neutral responses to translanguaging outweighed negative responses in every aspect.

4. Summary and the Research Gap

As already demonstrated, translanguaging, despite being a relatively new concept, has been widely researched in terms of its definition, benefits, challenges, and the attitudes of teachers and students in different contexts. In Mazak and Carroll's (2016) book, there are a great number of researches collected together that focus on translanguaging in higher education, as a counterpoint to the fact that studies in the field so far are mainly related to primary and secondary schools. However, few papers emphasize the students' overall view towards translanguaging by taking into consideration their educational history (i.e. primary, secondary and college experience). Many pieces of research emphasize one specific context, so the general feelings of students towards translanguaging have not yet been examined. Furthermore, relatively few studies focus on the prospective teachers' own attitudes towards the usage of translanguaging during their education history at primary, secondary and university levels in China. So much research remains to be done in the future to further tap the implications of translanguaging in EFL classrooms.

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