

SEVERAL BENEFITS OF TRANSLANGUAGING IN EFL AND ESP COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: *“Translanguaging” is usually tackled in relation to code-switching, bilingualism and multilingualism. This paper aims at providing definitions of translanguaging and a research overview in connection with this concept; the emphasis will be on its benefits and drawbacks, as well as on several proposals of translanguaging strategies and activities that can be implemented in the English classroom. Leaving aside the matters of contention, both scholars and teachers are aware of the challenges triggered by the employment of learners’ mother tongue in the foreign language classroom. Nevertheless, the benefits entailed by this approach should not be left aside; in addition, it is characterized by a large applicability scope. Taking into account the English-only policy pursued and enforced by many teachers and schools, with its benefits and drawbacks, we recommend that teachers and educators reconsider it by bringing L1 (the native language/ first language/ mother tongue) into the classroom, especially as a form of contrastive analysis. Thus, being a meta-analysis, this paper will discuss the importance of pedagogical translanguaging also through examples of instructional strategies and activities.*

Keywords: *code-switching; EFL/ ESP; learning strategies; multilingualism; pedagogical translanguaging*

Introduction

The literature focused on translanguaging against the wider background of pedagogical theories has explored various paths for the active engagement of multicultural and multilingual learners in the foreign language classroom. In this regard, scholars perceive the concept of translanguaging as an instructional approach based on the integration of multilingual, conjunct and interactive strategies and activities. However, there are also concerns and debates regarding the ways in which multilingual practices can play the role of subversive language in an instructional setting dominated by monolingual norms (see Teppo et al.).

Literature review: A glimpse into the terminological labyrinth. Defining translanguaging and related key concepts

Translanguaging is a concept delineated by Cen Williams in 1996, and it designates a pedagogical approach in foreign language teaching, which

consists of shifting “the language of input (reading or listening) and the language of output (speaking or writing) in bilingual classrooms” (see also Mazzaferro 2). Later, García (45) developed this concept in order to refer to “multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage in order to make sense of their bilingual worlds”.

This concept has been also scrutinized by García and Li Wei; these scholars perceive it as connected “to new language practices that make visible the complexity of language exchanges among people with different histories, and releases histories and understandings that have been buried within fixed language identities constrained by nation-states” (García and Li Wei 21). Canagarajah (401) contributes to the comprehension of this notion and sees it in connection with “the ability of multilingual speakers to shuttle between languages, treating the diverse languages that form their repertoire as an integrated system”.

Mendoza (13) compared translanguaging and plurilingualism and noticed that these two terms do not perceive multilingual proficiency as a complete, exhaustive and proportionate element in all languages spoken by an individual. Thus, the focus does not fall on the individual’s ability to master in a fluent or a native-like manner all the languages that s/he has learnt. On the contrary, translanguaging and plurilingualism involve the learners’ ability to employ their entire language repertoire and even to mix their languages and multimodal resources depending on their objectives and on the respective situation. Seen through the lens of these two concepts, the learners’ multilingual and multimodal practices have an asset-based nature, being therefore perceived in a positive manner. Mendoza (13) also draws a distinction between plurilingualism and translanguaging in terms of their origins, indicating that the former springs from the EU description of its citizens’ linguistic competencies required for work or study purposes, which impacts the assessment of the immigrants’ linguistic proficiency in connection with the ‘cultural mainstream’.

The literature on translanguaging is also connected to the concept of *code-switching*, which has been misunderstood and therefore repudiated, while multilingual practices have proliferated. According to Mendoza (18), code-switching was seen as outdated and it was erroneously associated with diglossia and delineated “as the separation of languages, dialects or registers for high/ low, formal/ informal or standard/ non-standard purposes”. The aforementioned scholar also explains that the literature has misunderstood language acquisition and use, as it was believed that each language had a distinct compartment in the individuals’ brain. Moreover, it was also assumed that code-switching perceived language use in a top-down manner and that language labels were attached to utterances based on the belief that language use is experienced in a more fluid way. In fact, code-switching practitioners

were against all these conceptions. They professed that language frontiers were also experienced in a fluid and distinct manner because individuals perform both code-switching and translanguaging constantly (see Mendoza 18-19).

In his turn, MacSwan (83) perceives code switching as a common worldwide practice in bilingual families and societies. He defines it as “a speech style in which bilinguals alternate languages between or within sentences”, and exemplifies it through a sentence that begins in a language, switches to another language, and then moves back to the previous language.

These ideas are also supported by other scholars, such as Grosjean, specialized in bilingualism. This scholar professes that the linguistic structure of a bilingual individual is not the mere tally of two or more monolinguals; this structure has special features and it is a distinct, interspersed whole, a particular linguistic entity, whose abilities meet his/ her needs and those of their surroundings. Grosjean (6) further explains that bilingual individuals employ the two languages either disjointly or together, in order to achieve various goals, in a wide array of situations and interactions. The aforementioned scholar also emphasized that bilinguals often have different proficiency levels in the two languages, because of his/ her usually different needs and uses of the respective languages.

The terms “translanguaging” and “code-switching” have been tackled by García and Li (22), who attempted to place some differences in the spotlight:

“Translanguaging differs from the notion of code-switching in that it refers not simply to a shift or a shuttle between two languages, but to the speakers’ construction and use of original and complex interrelated discursive practices that cannot be easily assigned to one or another traditional definition of a language, but that make up the speakers’ complete language repertoire”.

Thus, translanguaging is much more complex, as it also involves discursive practices deeply rooted into one’s linguistic repertoire.

The revival of translanguaging in contemporary English classrooms

Nowadays, more and more scholars focus on the benefits entailed by the reintroduction of the learners’ mother tongue in the foreign language instructional process and militate for its reintroduction in the classroom. Such instances are provided by *OnTESOL*, a website created by *Coventry House International* – aimed at furnishing “the highest standards of Teaching English

to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) education” – has published several articles on translanguaging, delineating its advantages and drawbacks, and providing advice regarding the efficient implementation of this approach in the EFL classroom.

One such article published on this website (*OnTESOLa*) tackles the pros and cons of L1 - “English-only” policy, and explains that it stemmed from the assumption that if learners were allowed to employ their mother tongue in the instructional environment, they would not be able to develop their foreign language skills adequately, as they would not feel the urge to use the respective foreign language. Nevertheless, this assumption overlooked the fact that teachers are still able to create the necessity to employ the foreign language without enforcing the “English-only” strategy.

Cenoz and Gorter (b) (345) notice that multilingual individuals are endowed with different trajectories, discourses and competence, due to their rich repertoire, which they can employ in order to optimize the communication process or when learning other languages. When employing resources extracted from other languages, multilingual individuals connect prior insights to novel ones, to various extents, based on the social background of the respective interactions.

OnTESOL (a) explains that instead of playing the role of policy enforcers, teachers could stimulate and prompt students to employ the foreign language, while also capitalizing on the advantages of using their mother tongue, such as better understanding structures, phrases and lexical items; boosting the learners’ comfort and trust levels; mitigating their fears, stress and frustration. The employment of the native language in the foreign language classroom ensures better comprehension of the lesson and provides students the opportunity to verify their understanding of the newly taught information. Thus, reassurance and clarity are enhanced, and learners feel more empowered. According to the same website (*OnTESOLa*), learners will employ less and less their source language as their foreign language proficiency enhances, the native language being used only to verify that they comprehended the meaning of certain lexical items or phrases accurately.

Another phrase used in connection with translanguaging is “pedagogical translanguaging”. Cenoz and Gorter (b) (342-344) define it as the employment of various planned, organized strategies and techniques aimed at triggering the learners’ resources from their entire linguistic knowledge. Therefore, this process is more challenging and stimulating in cognitive terms.

Mendoza (17-18) explains that an extended solid frame of translanguaging pedagogy involves three characteristics, i.e., translanguaging stance, translanguaging design and translanguaging shifts, first highlighted by García et al. The first one refers to the teacher’s attitudes regarding multilingualism; the second one is connected to the integration of

multilingualism in lesson planning, and the third one makes reference to those impromptu interactions during the teaching process that trigger multilingualism.

Advantages and disadvantages of using the native language in the English language classroom

The *OnTESOL* (c) article, “Using the Mother Tongue in the English Language Classroom”, presents several benefits and drawbacks entailed by the employment of the native language in the EFL instructional process. In addition, it furnishes advice about how to prevent and/ or mitigate the respective disadvantages. According to this article, one leverage generated by the native language in the EFL classroom stems from the very nature of translation, which is inherently used by those who are in the first stages of learning a foreign language; in other words, beginner learners instinctively translate everything from the target language into their mother tongue, in order to learn vocabulary fundamentals (see Cook; Woodall). *OnTESOL* (c) recommends thus the capitalization of this inherent action, instead of compelling students to use the target language and increasing their frustration, shame and stress levels (see also Goldstein).

The employment of one’s mother tongue in the foreign language classroom could transform the learning experience into a positive one, as students should not feel ashamed for doing something that comes in a natural manner. Moreover, as noticed by Harbord, it would contribute to the improvement of the relationship between the teachers and their students.

Other advantages brought about by the integration of the mother tongue in the EFL instructional process, evidenced by the aforementioned online source (*OnTESOLc*), are represented by time efficiency and streamlining, as learners will comprehend faster – and consequently, they will perform better – their activities and/ or tasks.

Nonetheless, translation should not be employed excessively, as it could trigger dependency (Harbord), and diminish the students’ confidence in their foreign language communication skills; in such situations, they would be tempted to employ their native tongue even when they are able to convey their ideas in the target language. This “addiction” negatively impacts the practice opportunities and hinders the development of language proficiency and related abilities. Excessive translation can also engender oversimplification, as in some contexts no perfect correspondence exists between the source and the target language, due to cultural and linguistic nuances (Harbord); such instances are represented by a wide array of idioms, proverbs, phrasal verbs, and even some legal terms and phrases. Having in view these drawbacks,

OnTESOL (c) provides some pieces of advice that could help teachers and students increase the advantages and diminish the drawbacks of employing the source language.

There are many scholars, such as Harbord, who strongly uphold the exertion of the English language policy, as often as possible, whenever practicable. In their perspective, the sole goal of target language use is mainly to save time; English should be used even in situations such as presenting instructions, and carrying out classroom management activities, as they can be perceived as opportunities for employing English, and it would not transform the language into a mere subject for learning.

Translanguaging activities in the EFL/ ESP classroom

As already mentioned, in recent years, the mother tongue has been placed again in the spotlight in the foreign language instructional process. An increasing number of scholars encourage the introduction of translanguaging in the EFL classroom, emphasizing the advantages of this approach, in a globalized and multicultural environment. Enhanced comprehension, higher motivation, increased engagement and improved language acquisition are only some of the benefits entailed by this approach. Furthermore, learners feel more empowered, as they are able to use their entire linguistic repertoire in order to achieve their communication tasks.

Therefore, this section focuses on the presentation of several techniques and suggestions of translanguaging activities that can be implemented in the ESP language classroom, and which can be customized according to the targeted ESP field.

According to Cenoz and Gorter (a, b), pedagogical translanguaging – whose objective is represented by the improvement of language and content abilities in school environments via the student's entire linguistic repertoire – involves the activation of the resources held by multilingual speakers in order to develop content learning and language proficiency. Although it is evident that multilinguals have more learning experience and their linguistic repertoire is larger, these two aforementioned scholars notice that their potential has not been harnessed to its full capacity because of the traditional monolingual ideologies propagated in schools and the isolation of languages in the curricula. This situation was also encountered in educational environments focused on the enhancement of multilingual abilities.

Cenoz and Gorter (a; b) further explain that translanguaging pursues the improvement of proficiency in both languages, and supports the enhancement of academic abilities via activities and techniques based on the employment of both languages in the same lesson. An interesting distinction

made by these two scholars is the one between “pedagogical translanguaging” (with a pedagogical nature, designating the educational strategies and techniques merging at least two languages) and “spontaneous translanguaging” (designating the natural bilingual usage in real-life environments, with shifting and flexible language frontiers) (Cenoz and Gorter a: 23-24). They add that there is no intermediate setting between pedagogical and spontaneous translanguaging, as they are not designed as a dichotomy but as a continuum.

In one of their subsequent studies, Cenoz and Gorter (a: 23-24) emphasize that translanguaging attempts to enhance multilingual skills in at least two languages (the minority language is also included), both in linguistic and class content terms. In this regard, the two authors see pedagogical translanguaging as an approach that encompasses “the alternation of languages in both the input and the output”, but that also extends beyond this initial perspective “because it includes other practices that use elements from the whole linguistic repertoire” (Cenoz and Gorter a: 23-24). In their perspective, the analysis of, and reflection on the languages involved by the translanguaging process connect these procedures to the expansion of metalinguistic awareness. Thus, the learner’s entire linguistic repertoire represents the foundation of the multilingual pedagogical techniques, strategies and activities designed, implemented and expanded through the lens of pedagogical translanguaging. The design possibilities are multiple and versatile, as they can be performed both in oral and written form, at a wide array of levels (e.g., phonetic, lexical, morphological, syntactic, discursive, etc.), in both language and content classes (see Cenoz and Gorter a). Moreover, the literature pinpoints that the broad nature of pedagogical translanguaging is reflected in its applicability to both bilingual students in situations characterized by common spontaneous translanguaging and to a larger population. Its broadness is also triggered by the possibility to expand it to at least three languages.

It is also noteworthy that since pedagogical translanguaging contributes to the improvement of school languages and academic content, it can improve the learning process of weaker languages (sometimes a minority or a less employed language), enhance language proficiency and academic subjects by relying on, and maximizing the linguistic capital of the multilingual speaker. In this respect, Cenoz and Gorter (a 24) explain the following:

“Students activate prior knowledge to maximise the use of their resources as multilingual speakers. They need pedagogical translanguaging as a scaffold to become aware of those resources and activate connected growers that go across languages. In this way, they

can develop metalinguistic awareness and lay the foundation for autonomous learning. Pedagogical translanguaging works on multilingual resources and, in the case of content, the activation of prior knowledge goes beyond language”.

Nevertheless, the aforementioned authors argue that pedagogical translanguaging – due to its focus on linguistic and academic enrichment and relevance to language and content subjects – has the potential to facilitate the understanding of academic content because languages represent the content learning medium (Cenoz and Gorter a: 24-25). Furthermore, in terms of organization, these scholars state that pedagogical translanguaging is part of the lesson plan, involving the delineation of objectives, design and/ or choice of material and the establishment of the particular didactics required for the performance of the instructional tasks and activities. Thus, it stretches beyond the fluid employment of languages and the implementation of designed and coordinated activities in various language courses, being underlain by a multilingual capital engaged throughout the same lesson (Cenoz and Gorter a: 25).

In García and Li’s perspective, although translanguaging is employed as a scaffold, it is more than that. In their turn, Menken and Sánchez profess that translanguaging should not be perceived merely as a transition process to learn English and that it should trigger dynamic bilingualism. In this regard, the aforementioned scholars argue that scaffolding is not seen merely as a transition process aimed at enhancing the skills in the majority language. On the contrary, it plays a major role in pedagogical translanguaging as it contributes to the expansion of the multilingual repertoire; it is connected to the improvement of those abilities, strategies and techniques that assist students in the employment of their multilingual capital. Based on these considerations, Walqui notices that scaffolding connects previous knowledge to newly acquired information (which raises the learners’ awareness of the interconnections between languages) and emphasizes its bridging function. In addition, pedagogical translanguaging plays the role of a background that supports the development of metalinguistic awareness (Walqui).

According to Mendoza (18), the implementation of translanguaging in the language classroom requires four main elements. The first one is represented by the focus on the linguistic procedures and techniques typical of multilingual and multidialectal communities. The second one involves an asset-based perspective, which encourages learners to use what they have – i.e., their language repertoire – and not focus on their deficiencies. Third, learners should be stimulated to create meaning across the whole repository of linguistic and semiotic resources; last, but not the least, this approach

encourages the implementation of critical procedures that question linguistic ranking and uniformization.

An article published by *OnTESOL* article (b) presents several tips related to the employment of the students' first language in the foreign language classroom. In this controlled environment, besides the already planned activities, the teacher can also take advantage of incidental opportunities to make students practice their foreign language communication skills, i.e., discussing weekend activities or ways to perform a certain task; asking a classmate to further clarify a task or a grammar element. In such situations, the teacher can ask students to use the foreign language, and practice their communication skills. Nevertheless, the students' language proficiency level is paramount. While advanced students are usually able to perform most language tasks using the foreign language, beginners encounter more difficulties as far as complex instructions are concerned, and need more time and thorough explanations in order to perform them. Moreover, when conveying instructions, information and explanations in the students' native language, teachers mitigate their confusion or frustration, foster comprehension and boost productivity, learning and performance. Consequently, the aforementioned online source encourages the teachers' employment of the native language in the beginner foreign language classes (*OnTESOL* b)

On the other hand, *OnTESOL* (b) warns against the excessive use of translation when dealing with unknown words or phrases, as it could hinder the vocabulary learning and retention processes. In this case, translation can be used only to rapidly confirm/ disconfirm suppositions about the meaning(s) of new terms or phrases, and learners should be stimulated to employ them efficaciously.

Another suggestion that places EFL in the limelight, furnished by *OnTESOL* in the material, "Using the Mother Tongue in the English Language Classroom" (c), is transforming complex instructions into English teaching activities. For instance, this activity might involve teaching some lexical items from the task, and requiring students to rearrange the scrambled instructions correctly. This article (*OnTESOL* c) also suggests using the native language to verify comprehension only when the teacher has depleted all other techniques (e.g., visual prompts, miming, eliciting, paraphrasing, defining, multiple examples). According to researchers, this strategy will also give students several instruments that will help them convey messages in real-life communication contexts using the foreign language. Moreover, the focus should also fall on building and strengthening teacher-student relationships by telling jokes, chatting, and providing certain personal pieces of information in English. The same article (*OnTESOL* c) further suggests that the focus should also fall on making students aware of the importance of context when

translating vocabulary items. For example, the word “interest” may have different meanings that depend on the context: “He looked at the old book with interest.”; “I asked the bank clerk about the monthly rate of interest.”; “I thought that this topic might interest you.”

In another translanguaging activity, students can also be required to read a text or watch a video in one language and summarize the content or discuss it orally in another language. Through this activity, the teacher can check the students’ comprehension of the respective text or video and assess their receptive skills. Moreover, s/he can initiate discussions/ debates on various topics, depending on the read/ visualized material, which involves the students’ productive skills as well.

Bilingual role-plays represent another interesting and engaging activity that can be easily implemented in the translanguaging ESP classroom. This activity provides students the opportunity to experiment with various professional situations while employing both English and their mother tongue. In many real professional situations, such as those in the IT, scientific or economic fields, where the English jargon, specific to these professions, predominates, the speakers’ mother tongue and English language intertwine. Thus, such role-plays would prepare students for prospective multilingual workplace contexts and boost their pragmatic abilities as well. For instance, in an ESP class focused on Business English, the teacher may ask students to work in pairs and imitate a real-life discussion between a client communicating only in his/ her mother tongue and a bilingual sales agent who talks both in the clients’ mother tongue and in English, and who switch between these two languages in order to clarify various ideas and issues, depending on the given discussion topic.

Another useful activity is the creation of a glossary via the support of the learners’ mother tongue. Thus, the ESP teacher asks students to work in groups and write their own ESP glossary with key words from a certain lexical field or based on a specific topic (e.g., job interviews, trials, laboratory glassware, etc.) and understanding in both English and their mother tongue. This glossary can encompass the definitions of the respective ESP terms in English and their translation in the students’ native language; they can also design mind maps based on these specialized terms or use various colors in order to highlight code-switching.

Teachers can demand students to prepare – either individually or in groups – dual language presentations on certain professional topics from their field of study. These presentations give students the opportunity to practice their communication and public speaking skills as well. During the presentation, students are allowed to switch from English to their native language when they want to emphasize ideas, provide clarifications or engage the audience. Teachers can also grant students the possibility to ask or look

for the meaning of a term or phrase they do not comprehend when using their productive skills.

Interpreting activities can also involve the employment of both the students' native language and ESP, contributing to the enhancement of their metalinguistic awareness. They can simulate a wide array of situations that require an interpreter, such as conference presentations, debates, interviews on given ESP topics, or even interrogations, press conferences, marriage ceremonies between people speaking two different languages. Another variation of this activity is reading a specialized text in English and verbalizing the process while translating parts of the respective text in one's mother tongue. These activities can be followed by observations and comments on the changes in terms of structure and terminology undergone by the respective texts following the translation or interpreting process.

The translation activity can also be transformed into a game. The chain translation game requires students to translate and retranslate the same phrase. In other words, the teacher arranges his/ her students in a row. The first student in the row receives a piece of paper with one or two ESP sentences and is required to translate it into his/ her native language on another piece of paper. The translation is passed to the next student who has to retranslate it into ESP and the next student has to translate the sentence(s) into his/ her native language, and so on. The last version of the sentence(s) is compared with the original one and students discuss the differences.

Scaffolded writing is another efficient ESP activity that involves translanguaging and triggers the development of the learners' writing skills in a structured manner. This activity can be tailored to focus on various professional text types, such as e-mails, reports, declarations, statements, etc., depending on the selected ESP context and learners' needs. To implement this activity, the teacher first organizes students in small groups and facilitates a brainstorming session on the respective topic. This step allows students to formulate ideas freely, either in English or in their mother tongue, using thus their own linguistic repertoire. Moreover, students will not feel the constraint of prompt translation. Then, s/he requires the students to work together and draft an outline intertwining English and their native language, which will represent the base of the final text. The last step of this process is the refining stage, where the students transform their bilingual draft into a developed text written exclusively in English. This activity enhances the students' ESP writing skills, boosts their motivation and increases their ability to easily switch from their mother tongue to English.

Another interesting activity, which can be implemented especially with the students enrolled in Performing Arts – Music, involves listening to, and discussing bilingual songs, in which artists switch between English and another language. This approach fosters linguistic awareness, boosts cultural

understanding and develops critical thinking. Teachers can guide students in identifying and extracting vocabulary related to a specific lexical field, summarizing the main ideas conveyed in the lyrics, identifying the overarching theme and key words. Moreover, students can be asked to comment upon the message transmitted by the lyrics, reflect on the feelings it conveys, and discuss how the employment of the two languages contributes to the overall impact of the song. This activity also furnishes the opportunity to investigate cultural contexts and analyze the connections between languages and various identities.

Recommendations

The use of pedagogical translanguaging can have several benefits in the EFL and EFL classroom:

- To make students feel confident, react and interact with their peers and the teacher, but at the same time focus on the use of target language;
- To actively involve learners in pair or group work and projects, first strengthening their confidence, encouraging them to participate and express freely their own ideas, and then formulating them in the target language;
- To help them understand new vocabulary and generate ideas, opinions, dialogues for performing oral or written tasks;
- To use the L1 for explaining terms pertaining to certain fields of inquiry, for purposes such as crosslinguistic comparisons, lexis development, understanding abstract/ technical/ specialized lexical items, explaining grammar rules, preventing students from making spelling mistakes, etc.;
- Students can get access to information and interaction in both languages;
- Students use two languages in the same class;
- Students are able to explore languages in a cross-linguistic manner;
- Students can perform a wide array of activities and tasks;
- Students find sources and information in both languages;
- The curriculum is designed, planned and coordinated so that languages reinforce each other.

Conclusion

Nowadays, multiculturalism, multilingualism, code-switching and linguistic diversity have become the norm, while uniformity and monolingualism are constantly losing ground. Having in view these global transformations,

teaching and learning approaches, strategies and techniques require constant revision so that educational systems meet their learners' needs and motivate them to extend and develop those sets of skills required by the globalized labor market. The translanguaging activities implemented in the ESP classroom contribute to the validation of learners' linguistic identity patterns, reflecting real-world communication in multilingual environments, typical of the contemporary diversified world.

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