RESEARCH ARTICLE

One or Many: The Enigma of Language Mixing in the ESL Classroom

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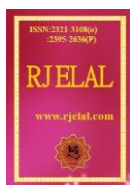
Abstract
The use of other languages in the English classroom has always been a hotly debated issue among the ELT practitioners. Over the past two decades, capturing the attention and imagination of the linguists and applied linguists, the concept translanguaging has assumed a wider significance. The present research paper examines the effects of implementing translanguaging practices in the English language classrooms at the school level. The researchers contend that the construct of translanguaging could be an effective pedagogic tool that utilizes learners' linguistic repertoire to scaffold ESL learners. A cohort of twenty-five English teachers participated in the study, which recorded teachers' perceptions on the effects and challenges of using L1 in the learning of L2. A questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. The results reveal that though the existence and deployment of multiple languages offer a rich linguistic repertoire in the teaching of L2, the implementation of translanguaging practices could be bewildering and challenging. This paper foregrounds these practical challenges of using L1 in English classrooms at the ideological, administrational, training and implementation levels. It suggests some possible translingual classroom practices, and looks at how translanguaging can act as a systematic approach of integrating the use of L1 into language education bringing educational legitimacy to use other languages in language classrooms.

Keywords: Translanguaging practices, the use of L1 in the ESL classroom, multiple languages, ELT practices

INTRODUCTION: A CLASSROOM SNIPPET

Tara is an English teacher in a Kannada medium government primary school at Mekeri village in Kodagu district of Karnataka. Her school consists of students whose parents work in the local coffee estates. They mostly speak Kannada at home and those children who have different mother tongues also have good knowledge of Kannada. Tara is an ardent teacher who has been teaching English to students in this school for the past eight years. Here is a snippet from Tara's classroom.

Tara: All of you open your books. Take out page number 51. Bega page number 51 thegiri. [Open page number 51 quickly] and read the title of the chapter.

Students: (Read aloud together) Why god made teachers.

Tara: Good. What does it mean? Enu idra artha? [What is its meaning?]

Rohan: God yake teachers na create madidhu? [Why did god create teachers?]

Tara: Good. Why did god create teachers or what is the reason god created teachers.

(Teacher writes the title on the blackboard)

Look here. This is a question. Iga idhannu utharisi [Now answer this]

Pallavi: Help ge [to help]

Tara: To help. OK. To help whom?

Pallavi: To help us.

Tara: Very good. Anyone else? Bere yaradhru uthara heli [Somebody else can tell the answer]

Jeevan: Teaching madakke [to do teaching]

Tara: To teach whom?

Jeevan: To teach students

Tara: Very good. Now let us read the poem and see what the poet says. Kaviya vichara thiliyona   [Let us know the poet's thoughts].

Are you confused about the snippet given above? Are you wondering why they are using Kannada in an English class? Isn't an English classroom supposed to have 'Shh! Speak only English' rule? This is because Tara believes that use of languages that they already know will ease their learning process. Many teachers across the globe exploit the learners' earlier known language in English classrooms as an intentional strategy. This is done especially in multilingual classrooms. However, to what extent it is done with planning and systematicity is questionable.

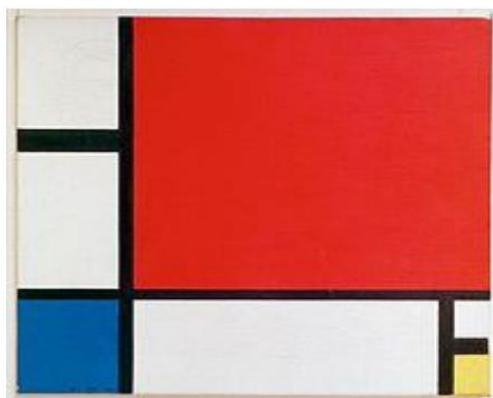**UNDERSTANDING TRANSLANGUAGING**

Tara's technique of alternating between languages is what we call translanguaging. Translanguaging is an act of utilising the students' languages as a multilingual resource available to facilitate learning and to optimise communicative potential. Researchers across the world have defined and understood translanguaging differently based on the focus of their study. An exploratory study that throws light on translanguaging as a classroom process, understands the construct of translanguaging as all instances of code-switching and translation as systematic, conscious and planned ways of communication in the classroom for purposes of learning concepts as well as the target language, and for teacher-student negotiation for meaning and communication (Mukhopadhyay, 2020). Translanguaging used specifically in educational context is called pedagogical translanguaging. Juvonen and Källkvist (2021) describe pedagogical translanguaging as a construct referring to teaching approaches in both language and content subjects, where the students' multilingual resources are involved and utilized, as well as intentionally taken into account in both planning and teaching.

Translanguaging is a conscious act of using learners' linguistic repertoire as a resource to enhance their learning of concepts as well as language. It is not done impulsively but planned in a systematic and intentional manner to scaffold the learners using their own existing knowledge of their mother tongue and other languages. Canagrajah (2011), laying emphasis on the repertoire building, states that competence doesn't consist of separate competencies for each language, but a multicompetence that functions symbiotically for the different languages in one's repertoire; and, for these reasons, proficiency for multilinguals is focused on repertoire building – i.e., developing abilities in the different functions served by different languages – rather than total mastery of each and every language.

The construct of translanguaging includes code-switching and translation (Mukhopadhyay, 2020). However, the concepts code-switching and translanguaging differ in some respects. Code-switching and translanguaging both involve alternating between two languages. Code-switching refers to the alternation between languages in a specific communicative episode (Wei, 2018). In code-switching, an individual shifts from one language to the other at specific points within a

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communication deliberately with a purpose depending on the environment. It views each language as an isolated system and intentionally shifts from one to another. On the other hand, translanguaging is an act performed by bilinguals of accessing different linguistic features or various modes of what are described as autonomous languages to maximise communicative potential (Garcia, 2013). Translanguaging is a meaning-making process which focuses on using multiple linguistic, cognitive and semiotic resources to make sense. It views languages as a unified system within which the individual makes efforts to optimise communication.

To understand this difference, let us look at the image given below.

Imagine that languages are colours. Image (a) can be seen as an instance of code-switching where the colors have rigid borders. Image (b) can be seen as an instance of translanguaging where the colors have complex relationships and defining borders is impossible.

(a)

Mondrian (1930)

(b)

de Kooning (1955)

In translanguaging, we do not focus on switching between separate systems but involve drawing flexibly on resources from a single, unified languaging system, appropriate to context, interlocutor and interaction (Anderson & Lightfoot, 2018). Anderson calls this ability translingual competence. Therefore, in every multilingual context, translanguaging can be used as an effective tool not just to communicate and enhance the communicative potential but also as a pedagogical strategy to build knowledge of a new language on the existing linguistic repertoire of the learners. It will not be limited only to language classrooms because with proper planning, it can be used to teach other contents as well. The key is to understand the process and plan its use in the classroom.

TRACKING THE TRODDEN PATHS: STUDIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Most of the countries in Asia, Africa and other parts of the world have a rich linguistic culture.

Along with passing years, languages have travelled with people and rooted in places far from their origin. Most parts of the world today are therefore multilingual and acknowledge their linguistic diversity. Researchers have shown interest in understanding translanguaging and their implications in different parts of the world.

Gabryś-Barker's (2020) at University of Silesia studied the language choices made during alternations between L1 and foreign language by in-service teachers and pre-service trainees in English classrooms. The study suggested that the language choices enabled classroom management and efficient handling of disruptive behavior. Another positive impact was seen on the comprehension of learners.

Kampittayakul (2018) studied translanguaging in Thai context and pointed out that translanguaging fosters interactional competence thereby easing the process of rapport building, teacher-student interaction and peer interaction.

The study also highlighted that the pace of understanding was faster as an effect of translanguaging.

Sulaiman et al. (2020) conducted an educational experiment using pre- and post-translanguaging testing. It resulted in showing better performance of learners' post-translanguaging in terms of inferential information and processing ability. Furthermore, they also showed a higher level of thinking because the learners are challenged to analyze information on different levels of processing working with their entire linguistic repertoire.

The above three studies prove the positive impact of use of translanguaging on communication, comprehension, learning pace and cognition. They concretise the idea of translanguaging as an effective pedagogical tool. However, the strategies involved in bringing translanguaging into the classroom practice through specific interventions are not very clear in these studies. Some more studies have been picked up to understand these specific interventions.

A study by Lyster et al. (2009) looked at how French and English teachers alternated the readings of the same books in English and French and reported that it aroused motivation in learners. Another study by Lyster et al. (2013) focused on morphological awareness in French and English looking at the development of prefixes and suffixes that could be found in stories in French and English. It gave out positive results in the group that received translingual instruction.

Arteagoitia and Howard (2015) worked on the use of cognates in Spanish and English to study the influence of knowledge of L1 (Spanish) on L2(English). Good knowledge of vocabulary in Spanish enhances English vocabulary and comprehension.

These studies demonstrate how translanguaging strategies can be used to provide specific interventions in the classroom to understand how it brings in a positive impact. All these studies are placed in foreign contexts where the language being learnt is English. This context is different from the Indian one because of its diverse multilingual society. A few such studies based in Indian contexts are discussed below.

Chimirala (2013) studied the effect of L1 on collaborative L2 writing and found that L1 supports, mediates, negotiates and navigates the writing process in L2. Mukhopadhyay (2003) studied L1 as a scaffolding device for developing academic skills in L2. The students were encouraged to brainstorm, plan and organise their writing responses in their first language, all of them showed remarkable improvement in their writing

Gupta (2009) studied the role of the local dialect in teaching English through the L1 and Meher (2011) studied using learners' home language in teaching English at the secondary level in West Odisha. They both showed that learners were able to recall well and also displayed improved vocabulary use.

Mukhopadhyay (2020) explored the effect of training in translingual practice and collected teacher feedback which reassured that translanguaging helped teachers to plan and execute their lessons well. They also saw a positive impact on the learners.

Durairajan (2019) reviewed the Indian studies across two decades and elucidated on the ways in which studies have shown that L1 can be a rich resource in the classroom.

All these studies strengthen the view that L1 use in the L2 classroom when done in a planned manner could enhance L2 learning. Translanguaging can be used by the teacher while delivering a lesson. It can be used by material producers to create bilingual or multilingual textbooks, extra resources etc. It can be used by students to respond to the prompts or even present their knowledge and understanding.

EFFECTS AND CHALLENGES OF TRANSLANGUAGING: A SURVEY

Data Collection

A small scale survey was conducted to understand the teachers' perspectives about using mother tongue and other languages in English classrooms. The survey intended to understand

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what teachers think about the use of other languages in an ESL classroom based on their beliefs and practices. The participants of this study were twenty five English teachers. Their teaching experience varied from one year to more than ten years. They came from different schools out of which 52% of them worked in urban schools while 40% of them worked in rural schools. 76% of the teachers said that the medium of instruction in their school was English while 24% came from schools with regional language as the medium of instruction. A questionnaire was used to collect data from the participants. It consisted of twenty five questions that intended to record the cognitive, affective and behavioural attitude of teachers towards using other languages in ESL classrooms. Out of the twenty five questions, six questions tried to capture their cognitive attitude, attempting to understand what teachers think about the effect of L1 use, eight questions investigated the affective aspects of how

teachers feel about the effect of L1 use and seven questions examined the behavioural patterns of teachers in using the L1 in their own teaching practice.

Data Analysis

In understanding how teachers perceive use of languages and language teaching in their classroom, table 1 represents the outcome of the study. Most teachers disagree with the idea of teaching English without taking recourse to their L1. They agree that learner input and participation is necessary for learning to take place. They also believe that language learning enriches the linguistic repertoire of the learners and all the languages they learn form an integrated system. This repertoire building is more important than mastering individual languages. However, most teachers also think that use of multiple languages could create chaos in the classroom.

Table 01: Descriptive Analysis of responses to questions regarding the thoughts of teachers on use of languages.

Questions	Q10. English can be taught without taking recourse to their mother tongue/ L1.	Q13. The use of multiple languages in the classroom could create chaos and confusion.	Q16. I am of the view that students' input and participation is more important than the language they use for successful conduct of language activities.	Q20. I think that my students' linguistic repertoire is enriched as a result of learning English.	Q22. I think that different languages that are used in the class form an integrated system.	Q23. In multilingual classrooms, repertoire building (i.e, developing abilities in the different functions served by languages) is more important rather than mastery of each language.
N	25	25	25	25	25	25
Mean	3.04	3.2	3.76	3.92	3.84	4
Median	3	3	4	4	4	4
Mode	2	4	4	4	4	4
Standard Deviation	1.05	1.11	0.77	0.70	0.8	0.86

In expressing their understanding of the effect of use of L1 in their classrooms, most teachers acknowledge the positive effect of use of L1 on various aspects of language learning. The teachers' response showed that a great number of them

believe that L1 can be a great tool in teaching English. It enhances student motivation, builds intercultural competence, enriches all kinds of interaction and exposes them to various linguistic resources in the meaning making process. Teachers

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felt that language learning does not limit to mere practice but goes beyond that. On being aware of the advantages of using L1, they also feel they need more training to practice it in their classroom.

Table 02: Descriptive Analysis of questions related to the feeling of teachers' towards L1 integration.

Questions	Q7. I believe that students' L1 can be a great tool in learning English.	Q8. I consider that the use of their mother tongue increases the students' motivation.	Q14. The use of multiple languages in the classroom could lead to developing intercultural competence.	Q17. The use of L1 could enrich varied interaction patterns (student to teacher, student to student and whole class interaction).	Q18. I believe that my students use varied linguistic resources in the meaning-making process.	Q19. I consider that classroom teaching is far more complex than simply practicing languages.	Q25. I feel that I need training in adopting my students' multilingual repertoire for learning purposes.
Nt	25	25	25	25	25	25	25
Mean	4.24	3.96	4.04	4.16	4.04	3.88	3.64
Median	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Mode	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Standard Deviation	0.72	1.05	0.78	0.37	0.45	0.88	1.15

Table 03: Descriptive Analysis of response to questions related to the teachers' practices

Questions	Q5. I encourage using languages other than English in the classroom.	Q9. I use different aspects of my students' L1 in the teaching of English.	Q11. I find it challenging when I allow my students to use multiple languages in the class.	Q12. I focus more on what my students intend to do with language rather than the language itself.	Q15. I encourage my students to switch between languages in the classroom discussions.	Q21. Most of my students feel ashamed when they use their mother tongue in English class.	Q24. I encourage my students to collaborate with others in the class to critique each draft for subsequent revisions as they use the language of their choice.
N	25	25	25	25	25	25	25
Mean	3.2	3.64	2.96	3.92	3.2	2.96	3.52
Median	3	4	3	4	3	3	4
Mode	3	3	3	4	3	2	4
Standard Deviation	1.04	0.81	0.88	0.64	1.11	1.39	1.12

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6. On a scale on 0 to 5, rate the effect of using L1 on the given aspects of English language learning based on your experience and understanding. (0 - Not at all effective, 5 - highly effective)
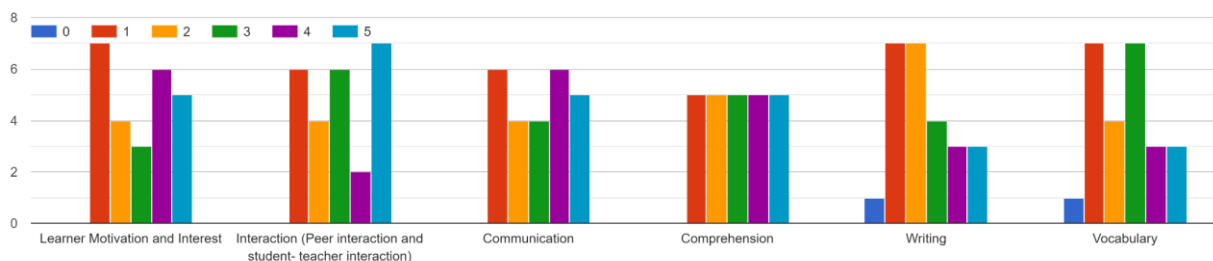
The teachers' practices with regard to the use of L1 in English classrooms based on the study reveal that the majority of them encourage use of L1 and accommodate switching between languages. The different aspects of multiple languages are used as a resource to focus on what learners intend to do with language. Most teachers also encourage peer collaboration for feedback on drafts. Very few teachers found it challenging to handle multiple languages in class.

The teachers' perception towards the effect of use of L1 on various aspects of English language learning was recorded and the results show that most teachers think that the use of L1 can increase motivation, enhance interaction, communication and comprehension but only few believe that it can positively affect learners' vocabulary and writing.

FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

The study reveals that teachers understand the positive effect of the use of L1 in ESL classrooms. Translingual practices can be used strategically to integrate L1 in teaching and learning processes. The study also highlights learner input and participation is as a necessary aspect of classroom practice. In fact, the mother tongue use is considered a key contributor to learner motivation.

When multiple languages are brought into the class, the teachers are able to build their linguistic repertoire instead of focusing on language mastery. This kind of approach allows teachers to facilitate skill transfer across languages in ESL classrooms. It also enriches the intercultural competence of the learners making them aware and sensitive to the cultural diversity of the society they

come from. When teachers accommodate switching between languages, peer collaboration and peer feedback, critical thinking abilities are also enhanced.

Some teachers believe that L1 is an obstacle in language acquisition. They suppose that languages are mutually exclusive and need to be learnt separately. The ideological framework in the minds of these teachers needs to be modified. It can only be done when they understand that use of L1 in the classroom is a way of innovating and creatively planning language learning.

Researchers have found that use of L1 can have a positive effect on communication and comprehension (Gabryś-Barker's, 2020), interaction patterns (Kampittayakul, 2018), inferencing and processing (Suleiman et al., 2020), vocabulary (Lyster et al., 2013), writing (Chimirala, 2013) and academic skills (Mukhopadhyay, 2003). During this study, we found that most teachers believe that L1 use can positively affect interaction, motivation, communication and comprehension but not writing and vocabulary. The teachers might have not seen an effect of L1 use on writing and vocabulary because they lack knowledge of methods through which this can be achieved. Therefore, they require more training in translingual practices for L1 integration in their classrooms.

THE HARD CLIMB: CHALLENGES AND DIFFICULTIES

Translanguaging is emerging as a promising tool that can be used pedagogically. However, there are a number of challenges to the implementation of translanguaging in educational contexts. Cenoz and Gorter (2017) have highlighted four major

challenges. First difficulty is the conceptual understanding of the term 'translanguaging'. The terms code-switching, translation, cross-linguistic pedagogies and language alternations are all related to translanguaging but teachers and language practitioners around the globe have found that these terms are defined differently in specific contexts which create confusion in its understanding and use.

Second difficulty is that it questions monolingual traditions of language learning. All through these years languages have been kept in isolation and learnt through separation. Translanguaging now attempts to assimilate the knowledge of all languages into an integrated system which most people refuse to accept.

Third, translanguaging is not limited to only English as a subject. It transcends across the curriculum. This means that not only language teachers but other subject teachers can also use this strategy to enhance learning in the classroom. The challenge is to train them in using this potential pedagogical tool.

Fourth difficulty is that in a context where a minority language exists, there are certain social and political pressures to utilise a dominant language rather than a minority language. The school administration and teachers will have to deal cautiously with such issues keeping in mind the languages to be used that can be in student's interest.

In the Indian context, the teacher's linguistic repertoire and the linguistic diversity of the classroom, both play an important role in translanguaging. For example, Tara's classroom had students whose mother tongues were different. They spoke Kannada, Malayalam, Kodava and Tulu but Tara chose to use Kannada because all of them had good knowledge of Kannada and Tara made it a common base for her class. In another exploratory study (Mukhopadhyay, 2020) Anita used Hindi and Telugu in her classroom along with English.

Some teachers practice using L1 in classrooms but they may not be doing it systematically. One of the teachers after receiving training in the use of multilingual resources said, 'My main takeaways from the workshop are the use of terminology regarding the ML which I am already into practice but was unaware of the terms.' (Mukhopadhyay, 2020). This remark strengthens our argument for the need for training for teachers to encourage translingual practices. To overcome varied challenges highlighted above, translanguaging has to be acknowledged as a practice that can open new horizons in language teaching.

THE WAY FORWARD AND POSSIBILITIES

There are various reasons why translanguaging now needs to be brought into the forefront. Identification of translanguaging as a pedagogical tool in education can pave the way to a lot of progress in the field of language education. Cenoz and Gorter (2017) pointed out a few implications of translanguaging. Translanguaging will provide educational legitimacy to use other languages in language classrooms which otherwise is seen as a punishable act by a few traditional language teachers. Now, we have the NEP 2020 stressing on the use of mother tongue in teaching and learning scenarios. Therefore, translanguaging can act as a systematic approach of integrating the use of L1 into education.

Translanguaging is a natural process. Many teachers might already be using other languages in their classroom but its efficacy needs to be proved. This can be done through research on ways of using translanguaging. More research is required in the area of multimodality of translanguaging.

This tool develops metalinguistic understanding and metacognitive awareness in learners. Therefore, encouraging more research and practice in this field can be promising for the future of language learning.

Anita, a teacher in an exploratory study (Mukhopadhyay, 2020) commented, "I always used Telugu and Hindi in my classes but by planning to use it I have achieved more responses from the students and display of better understanding by them". This suggests how training can help teachers plan their translingual practices to promote student

performance. Teacher preparedness and awareness can have a positive impact on the classroom transaction.

Educational implications of using L1 in L2 classrooms could be far reaching (Durairajan, 2017). L1 can be the language of thinking and reflection and enhance the learners' productivity. In homogenous L1 classrooms, teachers can use L1 with ease. Apart from classroom transactions, materials like textbooks can also be bilingual. At least the instructions and task prompts can be given in L1 to provide clarity. We might have observed that when question papers are bilingual, the moment students have some problem understanding the question in English, they can read it in their L1 to avoid confusion.

Anderson (2017) suggests some practical ways of using translingual practices which include cultural share, meshed news reports, five sentences, translingual text challenger, translingual storytelling and translingual posters. Many more such creative ideas can be designed by the teachers based on the learner's need to create a translingual space in the classroom. Use of their L1 will help reduce anxiety and increase motivation to learn a new language

Translanguaging has established a strong ground in language teaching but only when all this research reaches teachers around the world through training and awareness, will it take shape as an effective pedagogical tool. Teachers, parents, school administrators, policy makers and material designers need to acknowledge the significance of using L1 in language classrooms as a multilingual resource.

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