



Translanguaging and the Goal of TESOL

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Should students be allowed to use their first language (L1) in learning English as a foreign language classroom? This question has long been a topic of intensive debate. Many believe that class time should be used to maximize the input of the target language and any use of L1, or any other language for that matter, would reduce the input and have a negative effect on the learner. Teachers in foreign language contexts may have particularly strong opinions about this issue, because of the limited access to English that their students have in their everyday environment.

Let us remind ourselves of the goal, the objective, the purpose of teaching and learning of English as a foreign language. Is it to get the learner to become another monolingual speaker in English only? The answer is clearly no. We will never be able to, nor should we want to, become a monolingual in a different language and completely and entirely forget our mother tongue! The goal of TESOL or any second language education is not to replace the L1, but to become Bilingual or even Multilingual. Yet, we rarely use the bilingual language user as the model for TESOL and language learning. We rarely let other languages into the English classroom!

Back in the 1980s, psycholinguists already made the point, based on extensive research evidence, that Bilinguals are not some kind of two-headed monster, or as Francois Grosjean (1989) put it: Bilinguals are not two monolinguals in, or with, one brain. And the most recent brain science tells us that the multilingual brain pools elements of different languages together and coordinates, selects, activates, de-activates certain parts of the multilingual repertoire for different purposes and in different contexts (e.g. Kroll and De Groot, 2009). As part of their communicative competence, bilinguals know who speaks what language to whom and when, as Joshua Fishman famously said (1965/2007). Moreover, the multilingual language users also use other resources (traditionally termed 'non-linguistic') such as gesture, emotion, attention, and memory in learning and using languages as part of everyday communication.

When we do this, we translanguange. translanguaging means:

- Going beyond the boundaries of named languages such as English, Arabic, Chinese, French, Spanish, or Russian, and making use of our entire linguistic repertoire, not one-language-only or one-language-at-a-time.

Translanguaging also means:

- Going beyond the boundaries between language and other meaning-making (semiotic) and thinking (cognitive) resources.

We all translanguage overtly in our speech and writing but also covertly in our thinking. Many of us have been socialized into fearing mixing and meshing our languages, desperately trying not to translanguage. But we do it 'in our heads' all the time. Some of us used to think using abbreviations in text messaging and emoji unacceptable. Technology advances mean that they are not only acceptable but necessary in our everyday lives. How things have changed!

The concept of translanguaging came out the Welsh school context, where the teacher was trying to teach in Welsh but the students tended to respond in English (Baker, 2001; Garcia and Li Wei, 2014). The textbook might be in one language only – Welsh. But the classroom interaction was bilingual across the modalities of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Rather than seeing this as a problem, bilingual educators argue that translanguaging can be used as an effective pedagogical strategy to maximize the use of the student's, and the teacher's, linguistic, social, and cognitive resources in learning.

The language classroom is a highly complex, multimodal environment, with multiple meaning-making signs. When we ask the learners to look at the blackboard or whiteboard, to listen to a TED talk on the Internet, to read a text from a book, to talk about a topic or to write a short paragraph, we are asking them to engage in a complex process of translanguaging.

Translanguaging brings out the multi-competence of all language learners and users (Cook and Li Wei, 2016). Multilingual skills and competences defy boundaries, purities, and strictly linguistic communication. By allowing, better still encouraging, our students to use all their linguistic and other resources in learning, we are empowering them; we are releasing their full potential. If we say to them: do NOT use your mother tongue, do NOT use the language or languages you already know and you know the best, while you are trying to learn English as an additional, new language, it is like tying one of their hands at the back or blindfolding one of their eyes and still expect them to do and see things as others do and see with two free hands and two open eyes. We should regard the students' L1s and other languages they may know as a useful resource for learning. And use that resource positively. Every lesson in TESOL should be about English-in-multilingualism, not just English.

Translanguaging also urge us to think critically of some of the issues relating to EMI (English medium instruction) and CLIL (content-language-integrated-learning). Given its cultural-

political history, English can never be regarded simply as a medium of instruction. The choice of English as the language of instruction is value-laden and ideologically driven. And language learning and content learning cannot be regarded as two separate processes. There is no such a thing as content-free language learning. Language learning is an integral part of knowledge construction. Translanguaging is to maximize the students', and the teachers', full linguistic, cognitive, semiotic and socio-cultural resources in knowledge construction.

Translanguaging presents challenges to all of us. There are efforts still promoting a monolingual ideology in the English language classroom. We have been socialized into a one-language-only or one-language-at-a-time system. We translanguage covertly and often with guilt. But we do translanguage; our brains translanguage when we are doing thinking and making meaning. It is powerful and transformative when we are aware that what we do is enabling and empowering our students. With this awareness, we can then begin to do it consciously, purposefully, as an effective pedagogical tool for learning.

Here are some questions for us to consider:

For the government official and policy makers, how could the policies you make and promote encourage translanguaging – how could they contribute positively to the realization of all students' full multilingual potentials in learning?

For the directors of programmes, how do you make sure that there are sufficient resources and spaces for translanguaging? Are there opportunities for the teachers and students to purposefully engage in translanguaging?

For the textbook writers and publishers, How can your textbooks and learning materials allow Translanguaging practices?

For those who are language test makers, and this is a really tough one, how do we assess translanguaging competence? In other words, how do we really assess the full potential of the students, rather than what they can or cannot do with one language only or one language at a time? It entails testing the complex competence of multilinguals, or their multi-competence, which would mean allowing and encouraging overt translanguaging on tests. It also means testing whether students (and teachers) have learned to exploit and make optimal use of translanguaging as a resource for language learning.

And for the teachers and the teacher trainers, we need to think more of the actual pedagogical practices and how to make sure that our pedagogical practices are inclusive, and encourage and enhance the learners' translanguaging competence and potential.

Let us not forget the goal of teaching and learning English and additional languages. We are not trying to replace the learners' L1 and make them into another monolingual. We are developing more bilinguals with the flexibility that multilingualism gives them. And

bilinguals and multilinguals translanguage. So let's make translanguaging the objective of TESOL and all language learning!

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