

TRANSLANGUAGING AS A NORM IN MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION: AN EXAMPLE FROM POLAND

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Abstract. This paper discusses the functioning of translanguaging in the context of international schools in Poland. In the introductory part various definitions of the concept undertaken by linguists since its coining in 1994 have been presented. An exemplary lesson is explored in the final part of the paper where the huge potential of translanguaging for language education and content learning in multilingual contexts is revealed.

Keywords: translanguaging; multilingual education multilingual speakers; pedagogical strategy; content learning

1. Definition of translanguaging

The concept of translanguaging derives from the Welsh word *trawsieithu*, and the notion itself was coined by Cen Williams from Bangor University (Wales) in 1994. In its initial version, it referred to a situation when learners usually changed a language depending on its receptive or productive use, for instance, they were reading a text in English and writing a summary based on the text in Welsh (Baker, 2011; Romanowski, 2019). In other situations, a teacher was trying to teach in Welsh, while students answered in English or a textbook was available in Welsh, but an interaction was in English or it was bilingual. Since that time numerous attempts of the model development have been undertaken in order to refer to complex linguistic actions among multilingual speakers or communities (Garcia, 2009; Blackledge & Creese, 2010; Li Wei, 2011). Each researcher defines the term of translanguaging in a slightly different manner, however, the discussion always focuses on the issues pertaining to bi- or multilingual education.

Colin Baker, who first translated the term from Welsh into English, defines it as a process of creating a meaning, shaping experiences, understanding and gaining knowledge with the use of two or more languages (2011: 288). Lewis, Jones and Baker (2012) claim that languages are used dynamically and in a functionally integrated way in translanguaging so that the processes of thinking, speaking,

writing and also learning can be organised accordingly. Translanguaging involves effective communication, cognitive activity as well as linguistic production. It focuses more on the function than the form.

Nevertheless, the concept of translanguaging goes beyond the idea of two or more languages as the prefix *trans* suggests a process as a result of which a new complex reality appears, forming a new independent phenomenon. In addition, the prefix *trans* emphasizes transdisciplinary consequences of reconceptualization of the terms such as *language* or *acquiring language* (Li Wei, 2011). Going beyond the borders of the aforementioned discipline becomes necessary if we want to grasp and understand appropriately complex linguistic and learning processes placed in social structures. According to the definition by Mignolo (2000), the second part of the word *linguaging* means “thinking and writing between languages.” The use of *linguaging* instead of *language* defines the dynamics and complexity of human ways of use and functioning in the language reality, and at the same time it expresses the essence of becoming ourselves every time we try to participate in an interaction and reveals our way of understanding the world. Such a model allows us to consider language as a fluid construct, functioning within social, cultural, historical and political contexts (Bloomaert, 2010). It is the language understood as an action or an activity, something we create and not a structure or material we derive from (Pennycook, 2010).

In the same way translanguaging does not refer to two or more separate languages or to the synthesis of various linguistic actions. It is rather an activity manifesting the complexity of interactions among speakers of divergent linguistic experiences which were previously hidden by a national identity and now they are released (Romanowski, 2018). In the translanguaging model, individual languages such as: English, Spanish or Russian are defined as those which have the social reality because they are constructed socially, therefore they belong to particular speakers, they are not political property, neither do they belong to particular countries or regions (Otheguy, Garcia & Reid, 2015).

Canagarajah (2011) provides yet another definition, according to which, translanguaging entails frequent “movement between languages,” and perceiving various languages forming a repertoire or one integrated linguistic system. It is also claimed that translanguaging is an ability which is part of multi-competence of bilingual speakers whose life, minds and actions are distinct from those of monolingual speakers, since two languages function in their minds, and their complex interactions are always visible in the background (Cook, 2008; Franceschini, 2011).

2. Translanguaging as opposed to code switching

According to Garcia & Li Wei (2014), translanguaging differs from code switching in the fact that it does not only refer to a change or movement within two or more languages, but it entails the formation and application of speakers’

utterance, which cannot be assigned to a traditional definition of language, and it is a complete linguistic repertoire that gets involved. We do not concentrate on an individual language or languages, but on speakers' linguistic activities, which are visible. Speakers have one repertoire, from which they draw necessary elements, forms, without differentiating or wondering which language they belong to (Romanowski, 2018). Blackledge & Creese (2010) talk about flexibility of bilingual or multilingual speakers who are in the centre of interaction. The theory of translanguaging takes as a point of departure a bi- or multilingual speaker, for whom the concept of two or many linguistic systems does not exist as it has one complex and dynamic structure.

The traditional model of bilingualism



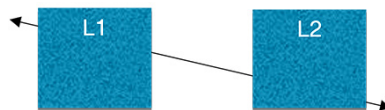
The first language (L1) as a separate language in relation to the second language (L2) – two linguistic systems exist separately. The above model of bilingualism allowed Lambert (1974) to talk about additive and subtractive bilingualism.

Cummins' language interdependence hypothesis (1992)



Bilingual speakers have two separate linguistic systems, yet these systems complement each other and linguistic transfer from L1 to L2 or vice versa is possible.

Code switching



The model of code switching is based on the notion of national languages as separate language systems, which are crossed excessively by bi- or multilingual speakers and which are perceived as autonomous and closed systems.

Translanguaging

Fn, Fn, Fn, Fn, Fn, Fn, Fn

An *F* signifies an element deriving from a speaker's linguistic repertoire and is marked with the symbolic number (n). We do not assign the elements with particular languages, L1 or L2. The excessive use of words in the utterance, e.g., *dinner; casa, amigos, room, comida, cielo, drinks*, define the richness of our repertoire. They are the words of a particular speaker, but on the other hand, they are the examples of lexical items taken from English and Spanish as languages defined nationally and culturally. Certainly, the choice of words is imposed by the context. Translanguaging occurs not only in the school context, but also in the home or in the public space (Romanowski, 2018).

3. Translanguaging as a tool in the educational context

Translanguaging can be treated as an effective pedagogical strategy aiming at maximizing linguistic, social and cognitive possibilities of a learner and a teacher in education. Baker (2011) and Lewis et al. (2013) talk about potential advantages of translanguaging in language education such as:

- 1) translanguaging promotes deeper and better understanding of a topic or an issue;
- 2) translanguaging reinforces the development of a less developed language;
- 3) translanguaging maintains cooperation between school and home;
- 4) translanguaging supports the integration of “fluent” speakers with less competent ones.

Translanguaging is used by teachers in bi- or multilingual environments in situations aiming at teaching content and language. Garcia & Li Wei (2014) outline some possible situations to occur in educational contexts together with suggested solutions:

Purpose (why?)	Possible activities/ strategies (what?)
1) differentiating and adjusting	translating
2) knowledge expansion	reading multilingual texts, listening to multilingual recordings, project work
3) improving understanding, critical thinking	reading multilingual texts, listening to multilingual recordings, writing, project work, research projects
4) linguistic transfer	creating multilingual dictionaries, making lists of cognates, comparing multilingual texts
5) inter-language flexibility	substituting languages with other languages, translating
6) investing in identity	all the aforementioned
7) questioning linguistic inequality	all the above-mentioned

Aims 1, 2 and 3 refer to communicating and proper adjustment of knowledge depending on the context. Aims 4 and 5 define developing new linguistic actions and taking care of previously used ones. Aims 6 and 7 provide voice and form the new social and political reality through questioning linguistic inequality. Moreover, strategies accompany pedagogical aims of translanguaging, which are used in bi- and multilingual education. The strategies presented in the table reflect three categories:

1) a teacher's care in the scope of creating new meanings through the use of translanguaging when it is necessary for understanding; encouraging students to apply translanguaging;

2) a use of means in translanguaging by a teacher which includes: accessibility and creation of multilingual texts as well as accessibility and creation of technologically supported means, and also accessibility and creation of multilingual landscape of a class, which includes multilingual recordings and texts, tables with multilingual vocabulary (also cognates) and technologically supported means (podcasts);

3) designing curricula for translanguaging by a teacher, which include grouping students depending on the use of the first language in order to enable them to do tasks developing teamwork skills, task-based teaching and project work, developing research skills enabling students to gain new information while using translanguaging, tasks requiring inter-language comparisons, for example identification of cognates, developing metalinguistic awareness.

Finally yet importantly it is worth noticing that translanguaging is particularly essential for schools emphasizing linguistic and intellectual development (Otheguy, Garcia & Reid, 2015). Although its beginnings were in the bilingual environment, translanguaging can be freely applied in multilingual schools, in the environments with minority languages (also immigrant ones), but also in the situations when revitalisation of a particular language would be crucial (e.g., Irish) or actions aimed at maintaining a less popular language superseded by another language (e.g. languages of the former USSR).

4. Translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy in the Polish educational context

A class example outlined below referred to a Natural History course conducted in an IB school in Poland. The ethnographic research was applied which was based on the observation of one group for 6 weeks (each class lasted 45 minutes) in the period from January to February 2018. A description of the students' linguistic behaviour was formulated on the basis of notes, recordings and short interviews. There were fourteen students (all aged 15) of various linguistic and cultural backgrounds (French, Spanish, Danish, Ukrainian and German), for whom English was the language of instruction. All the students demonstrated a good command of Polish. They also represented five other national languages mentioned above.

The actions of the Natural History teacher allowed the students to use their whole linguistic repertoire and create the means for developing understanding of the taught content. In this way, the students had an opportunity to develop their academic language (Blackledge & Creese, 2010; Garcia & Li Wei, 2014; Lewis, Jones & Baker, 2012). The transcript below illustrates the efficiency of translanguaging in the Natural History classes taking into account the use of new content. The described class was devoted to malaria and its means of prevention. In order to introduce the students to the theme, the following poster was shown.



Poster

The students brainstormed the ideas related to the theme and were taking notes while working in groups of three and four. This short introductory exercise allowed them to learn more about the topic by exchanging some initial thoughts in their mother languages. They benefited a lot by learning from one another and cooperating in their respective groups. Additionally, they developed research skills by searching some key words from the slide related to the topic in their mobile devices (tablets and smartphones).

The discussion that was connected with the slide and based on its ideas followed. The students used the whole of linguistic repertoire they possessed. They switched to their native languages whenever needed. Besides, they were frequently heard translating into Polish individual words from the poster to one another. This alternate use of several languages in the group on the basis of the material available only in English made it possible to observe how translanguaging functions in practice. This way the students built knowledge based on the content and obtained access to academic language within the discipline. The students took notes in their native languages, which later provided

the source for responses in English. They helped one another during the interaction, prompting missing words or expressions in English. Translanguaging turned out to be very useful in their oral responses, and linguistic transfer repeatedly helped provide fast responses. The transcript from the excerpt of the class is available below:

T: What is malaria?

S1: It is a dangerous disease.

S2: It is spread in Africa.

T: That is correct. Why is it dangerous? And how is it transmitted?

S1: Because many people die every year, especially in underdeveloped countries.

S3: It is transmitted by *insectos*.

S4: You mean insects, right?

S3: Si, claro. Yes, of course. Sorry.

T: No problem. How is it spread?

S5: Malaria is passed from person to person by some mosquitoes. When a mosquito bites a person, it injects into their blood germs which cause malaria and, as a result, he/she becomes ill later.

T: Thank you. That is correct. Did you know that each year malaria kills about one million people in Africa? Most of them are children.

S6 to S3: *Un million de personnes meurent du paludisme en Afrique chaque année*. [One million people die from malaria in Africa every year]

S3 to S6 : *Un millón de personas mueren de malaria, de verdad?* [One million people die from malaria, really?]

T: What are the symptoms of malaria?

S3: You have *fiebre*. Another symptom is that you also get chills.

T: *Fiebre?*

S5 and S4: Fever!

T: That is true. What else?

S7 to S8 and S9: *Du fängst an zu kotzen...* [You start to puke]

S8 to T: You start to puke.

S9: You have a headache and you are weak.

T: Very good, thanks! That's all correct. Malaria is not only curable but also preventable. Do you know how to prevent the spread of the disease?

S2: Taking drugs can help.

T: Yes, correct. Drugs can eliminate the parasites so that if a person is later bitten by another mosquito, the transmission of malaria is reduced.

S4: Mosquitoes like exposed skin so wearing long sleeved tops and trousers is a good idea especially in the evening.

T: Right. What else?

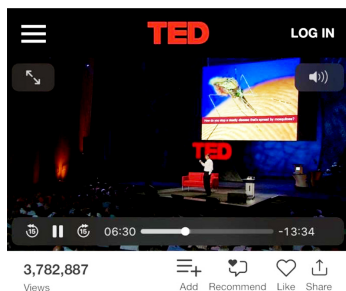
S3: Using mosquito *repelentes* is advisable.

T: Yes, you can use mosquito repellents.

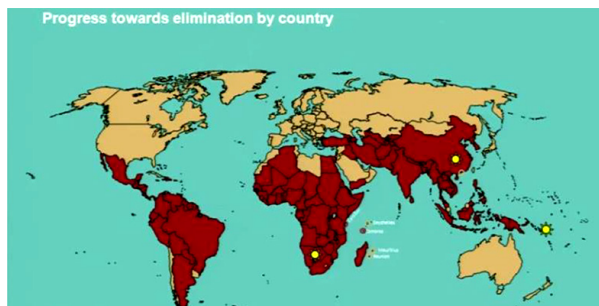
S10: One can use nets to cover their bed.

T: Good. Not just the beds but the whole house should be screened if possible to keep mosquitoes from entering.

At the closing of the class, the teacher played a recorded talk by Bill Gates on solutions to preventing and fighting malaria.



Slide 1



Slide 2

Conclusion

As observed, the students' linguistic repertoire is very flexible and open, which results in the sudden use of various linguistic elements and forms. This process leads to the use of the linguistic repertoire and sometimes going beyond it. The students unintentionally and spontaneously took advantage of their whole linguistic systems in order to give their interaction a more dynamic character and visualise the process of knowledge transmission in the class. This pedagogical strategy supports the acquisition and processing of the content. In addition, the use of several languages depending on their receptive or productive aspect has a positive influence on linguistic transfer. The observed group is an example of how linguistic complexity is released, which is reflected in the identity and ideology of each multilingual speaker. Employing translanguaging creates a space where the students juggle languages to reach a communicative target.

Last but not least, it is worth indicating that adopting and popularising the translanguaging lens in Polish education is extremely important because the linguistic reality is changing as well as the linguistic landscape of Polish schools. More and more newcomers from the immigrant communities influx the country at an unprecedented rate. The students applying the pedagogical model of translanguaging feel unrestricted and can freely choose linguistic forms and elements which are necessary for them to converse at a particular moment. Perhaps, it should be stressed that the concept of translanguaging has already functioned well outside the school environment, i.e. in homes and public spaces, hence its potential seems huge and worth investigating.

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