

**Translanguaging in English Language Teaching:
A Perspective of Bilingual Education**
การเชื่อมโยงภาษาในการสอนภาษาอังกฤษ: ในทัศนะของการเรียนรู้แบบสองภาษา

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Abstract

The term “translanguaging” has been increasingly used in scholarly literature to refer to both complex and fluid language practices in bilingual education as well as its important roles in pedagogical practices in EFL context. This paper reviewed the growing scholarly literature that took up the term “translanguaging” and discussed the ways in which the term was implemented in EFL perspective. The focus in this paper was on the potential and the challenges that a “translanguaging” theory provided for bilingual education and the empirical evidences investigated in the EFL context. After a review of scholarship, the researchers illustrated a research study in relation to the use of students’ L1 in bilingual education regarding “translanguaging” theory including : (1) practical ways that L1 can be used to help international school students learn better, (2) how international school students use their L1 to help them learn better in different learning situations, and (3) international school teachers’ and students’ attitudes about the use of students’ L1 in the classroom in an international school context. We then summarized future practices on which “translanguaging” theory impacted the issues of English language teaching and pedagogy in bilingual education.

Keywords: Bilingual Education

บทคัดย่อ

คำว่า “การเชื่อมโยงภาษา” (translanguaging) ได้ถูกนำมาใช้อย่างแพร่หลายในทบทวนวรรณกรรมโดยแสดงถึงความซับซ้อน และความถี่ของภาษาในการจัดการเรียนแบบสองภาษา อีกทั้งยังมีบทบาทสำคัญในการจัดการเรียนการสอนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศอีกด้วย บทความ

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ฉบับนี้ได้ทบทวนวรรณกรรมในเชิงวิชาการถึงการนำคำว่า “การเชื่อมโอนภาษา” มาใช้ และพิจารณาถึงการใช้ในมุมมองของการสอนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศ บทนี้มุ่งประเด็นไปที่แนวคิดของทฤษฎี “การเชื่อมโอนภาษา” ที่ส่งผลต่อการจัดการศึกษาแบบสองภาษา และหลักฐานเชิงประจักษ์ที่ปรากฏในบริบทของการสอนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศ นอกจากนี้คณะผู้วิจัยยังได้ศึกษางานวิจัยในการใช้ภาษาแม่ของนักเรียนในบริบทการจัดการเรียนการสอนแบบสองภาษาโดยอาศัยหลักการเชื่อมโอนภาษาในประเด็น ดังนี้ (1) การใช้ภาษาแม่เพื่อช่วยให้นักเรียนในหลักสูตรนานาชาติเรียนได้ดีขึ้น (2) วิธีการใช้ภาษาแม่เพื่อช่วย ในการเรียนในสถานการณ์ต่าง ๆ ในบริบทของโรงเรียนนานาชาติ และ (3) ทักษะคิดของนักเรียนและครูที่มีต่อการใช้ภาษาแม่ในบริบทของโรงเรียนนานาชาติท้ายบทความนี้ คณะผู้วิจัยได้แสดงทัศนะต่อการนำ “การเชื่อมโอนภาษา” มาใช้ในเชิงปฏิบัติอันจะส่งผลต่อการสอนภาษาอังกฤษ และการจัดการเรียนการสอนแบบสองภาษาในอนาคต

คำสำคัญ: การศึกษาสองภาษา

Introduction

As it is evident in a number of research studies that EFL learners of English have wide range of language ability: some of them are native speakers, some are bilingual, some are just able to communicate in English fairly, and some are considered as deficient in English for communication. Considering to the low English proficiency learners at the Bilingual education context such as at an international school; they are encountering with language barrier as all subjects are instructed in English. With this regard, EFL learners are suffering because of their learning difficulties such as attending to the lecture, taking notes, or participating in the classroom activities. Apparently, the number of low achieving students at the Bilingual education context is increasing; resulting in teaching and learning difficulties experienced by both native speaker teachers and low achievers in the instruction at an international school. Furthermore, low English proficiency students gain low academic success as less attention is paid on the learning in the mainstream classroom; as a result, low achievers are discouraged to challenge themselves in the classroom activities taught in the target language.

This present situation of the Bilingual education context is in accordance to Cohen (1998), he stated that students' language ability is related to their academic success in many aspects; thus, Thai students who have low English proficiency and study at an international school will surely encounter adjusting difficulties to the new environment of an international school in both academic and cultural aspects. Specifically, they find themselves in an educational environment whose teaching style, language used in the instruction and learning context are different from their former experiences in terms of expectations, learning support and academic requirements (Bureau of International

Cooperation Strategy, 2006). What makes the situation even worse is the diversity of language background that implies a complexity of a wide range of communication: two languages and literacy are needed in teaching and learning context which leads to high frustration, confusion and stress amongst low English proficiency students who are trying to master the language of their disciplines and communicate with confidence and competence in the English tertiary environment (Alptekin, 2002)

As mentioned before, the parents overlook their children's English proficiency and rapidly move their children from a Thai school to an international school setting; this can bring about learning difficulties because all subjects at an international school are taught in English. Here comes the introduction to the issue "Is there a role for the use of students' first language (L1) in the bilingual education setting?" (Anchimbe, 2006) This interesting question brings about the consideration of translanguaging in English language teaching in a perspective of bilingual education.

The enlargement of bilingual education and international school in Thailand

In addition to the above-mentioned, the major change in bilingual education in Thailand which is related to English language teaching is the mushrooming of private bilingual schools and international schools as well as English programme in government schools. In 1991, there was a major expansion of international schools: each school could be set up without restriction and the government allowed all international schools across Thailand to accept Thai students as well; however, the proportion of Thai students could not exceed 50% of the total population. This expansion was regarded as a response to the global capitalist trend of producing people who are capable of catching up with the world and are able to communicate fluently in English. International Schools thus became a new alternative for middle-class parents who wanted their children to be successful in the globalisation era, which people must be able to know and communicate another foreign language as their second language and computer literacy as the third language; in doing so, the children were expected to compete with others in the more competitive world of education and technology (Alptekin, 2002)

At present, Thailand has about 63 international schools with 20,000 students, 65% of who are foreigners (Seupalang 2002: 5). These international schools provide education from kindergarten to high school. There are various instruction system provided starting from British and American to international systems such as Japanese, French, German, and Swiss. Considering on an economic perspective, these international schools gain income to the country from foreign students, and they are considered as a new alternative for the middle class to create more opportunities for the Thai students to acquire the skill and capability to communicate in a foreign language without having to study abroad. With the

increasing number of these so-called international schools, some international schools wrote their own curriculum or added more details to the original objectives and principles of their foreign curriculum without certification from an overseas association or the Thai government. Therefore, there are only 19 out of 63 international schools are certified and reach the standard to have internationally accepted qualification, which enable the learners to transfer credits to institutions in other countries that use the same system worldwide (Suepalang 2002:10).

Language difficulties experienced by EFL learners

It is probably no coincidence that at the same time education and business have become more globalised at the same time and the number of Asian students studying in English-speaking nations has grown rapidly in this recent decade. As a result, research on the issues of learning difficulties and problems faced by international students has also become more extensive and intensive in Australia and elsewhere all around the world. Such research studies have significantly contributed valuable insights in order to gain more understanding towards the present situation of international students learning in the English-speaking countries. The following investigations below will be disclosing interesting examples conducted by several scholars in the field. In addition to the notion of international students' education in English-speaking countries, the issues of learning difficulties experienced by international students will be also uncovered according to various research studies.

Robertson et al. (2000) explored the difficulties experienced by international students studying at one Australian university. The researchers surveyed both international student and local staff perceptions of those difficulties. Staff and students emphasise language as a key source of difficulties in teaching and learning. The students manifest a lack of confidence with English. They have incomplete understanding of lecturers' spoken English, and feel unhappy with their oral performances - in the presence of Australian classmates. The study also revealed the concerns about colloquial language, writing difficulties, and problems of interpretation. The researchers concluded that language issues were the major area of unsolved problems faced by international students. Besides, Bretag et al. (2002) have conducted a research in line with the previous investigation. The findings showed that according to academic staff, international students from a Non-English Speaking Background (NESB students) were unable to contribute effectively, as required, in tutorial discussion; and that due to poor grammar their written work was often hard to read and to assess. Another interesting study conducted in Australia again, Wong (2004) used interviews with international students. He found that many international students,

accustomed to a didactic and teacher centred environment with less classroom conversation, it difficult in Australia to make the transition from passive learning. At the same time, his study found that the students acknowledged that their lack of English language proficiency in the classroom, exacerbated by cultural barriers, was a principal source of learning difficulties. While generic statements about 'Asian learners' should be treated with caution, there is research evidence showing that students schooled in some East Asian and Southeast Asian nations are accustomed to a more passive-receptive style of learning than is the norm in Australian classrooms, especially tertiary classrooms.

Most recent research studies of international students, in particular those conducted in Australia, identify their problems in coping with English – both academic English and conversational English – in the field of education. These difficulties are seen especially in relation to speaking and writing; meaning, most international students are struggling in improving their communication ability and this is especially made clear in the evidence of students themselves. Of all the social and academic issues and problems facing international students that are cited in recent studies—differences in learning style, culture shock, homesickness, social difficulties – the problem they themselves most often refer to is difficulties with English (Chiou, 2014). These studies provide valuable data. However, while they describe the English language problems of international students effectively, they focus on the problems occurred rather than the underlying causes. The research conducted so far has largely focused on language constraints as they have been experienced by international students once embarking on their studies in a new society or academic environment. One way to inquire more deeply into the problems of international students is to examine the influence of students' prior learning experiences and their beliefs about learning. Unless researchers focus on the whole learning biography of the international students, they will not fully understand the difficulties faced by both these international students and their teachers.

All learners are affected by what they already know, and how they have learned to learn. Further, by focusing merely on the language difficulties occurring after the student arrives in the English speaking country, it is implied that the solution of those difficulties lies solely with the students concerned plus the institutions in which those students are studying. But their previous institutions of study in the students' countries of origin, and in many cases the government responsible for these institutions, also have responsibilities. Responding to the gap in previous studies, the in-depth studies about the initial causes of learning difficulties in English-speaking countries are urgently encouraged to be investigated in order to produce clearer picture of learning difficulties in which experienced by international students.

Roles of Learners' L1

The use of learners' first language (L1) is a debatable issue in second language (L2) education for years. Based on the Communicative Language Teaching approach (CLT), language learners are usually encouraged to use L2 in their classroom activities; meanwhile, students' L1 will be discouraged for not being used as much as possible. Thus students are pushed to produce the target language (TL) as much as possible as well as Brooks and Donato

(1994) note that teachers are sometimes avoid using group work just because they feel that students will use their L1 in during group activity.

A major motivation for this avoidance has been the widespread adoption of communicative approaches to language teaching in which classroom activities are designed to maximize learners' use of the target language. In contrast, there are the growing numbers of research studies in which to advocate the use of students' L1 in the classroom; for instance, Schweers (1999) claims that there seems to be empirical evidence supports the idea of L1 as a helpful tool in the ESL/EFL classroom. Schweers conducted a survey comparing teachers' and students' opinions towards the use of Spanish in English classes at the University of Puerto Rico. The findings indicated that more than 80% of the students believed that Spanish should be employed in their English classes. Moreover, 86% of the participants preferred Spanish to be used when difficult concepts are taught on each topic. This means that most of the participants in this study thought that Spanish facilitated their learning. Considering the perception of the instructors, all of the teachers admitted that Spanish used in class was effective as well as was helpful towards their teaching in some way. Therefore, the research results clearly prove that both students and teachers approved of the use of L1 in their English classes.

The issue of the learner's first language in the foreign language classroom has been an arguable discussion for a long time. In the field of second language teaching and learning, Thai people believe that the most productive way to learn a new language is to be immersed in the target language. If a student wants to learn English well, then he or she must listen, speak, read, and write in English as much as possible. In Thailand, people also believe that a native English-speaker teacher is the ideal teacher to offer a perfect target language class (Wiriyachitra, 2009). However, due to the low English proficiency, some students almost learn nothing or little knowledge conveyed by means of English. Needless to say, they get frustrated and eventually to become demotivated learners in their English language learning (Chiou, 2004). As Schalge and Soga (2008) point out, adult English learners' failure in completing the course and the poor attendance result from lack of comprehensible input and frustration.

Although those who support English-only learning environments claim that the benefits of exposing the learners to English as much as possible is the effective way to help students learning English; in doing so, the language learning acquisition can be sped up (Bateman, 2008; Mangubhai, 2006; Nazary, 2008; Prodromou, 2002). Recent research findings show that the use of L1 increases both learning and comprehension of the TL (August, 2006; Bouangeune, 2009; Cianflone, 2009; Jadallah & Hasan, n.d.; Miles, 2004; Mole, 2009; Morton & Woodson, 2006; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003; Tang, 2002; Weschler, 1997). As you can see, there seem to be a continuity of the discussion about how students' L1 can play the role in L2 teaching and learning; hence the answer of this crucial question is a challenging goal for those who are in the field and of course it is worth finding the right answer.

Translanguaging in a perspective of bilingual education.

Although different epistemologically, translanguaging is linked to the study of code switching in education in that it also disrupts the traditional isolation of languages in language teaching and learning. Throughout the world, code switching, understood as the going back and forth from one language to another, has been used by teachers to scaffold the teaching of additional languages. Although this practice has not been generally legitimized in language teaching scholarship, teachers engage in code switching on a day-to-day basis. It is, however, when this linguistic behavior is used to teach language-minoritized students that this practice becomes extremely contested. The fear, of course, is that the state or national language would be 118 O. García and A.M.Y. Lin “contaminated” by the other language. And yet, scholars have documented how teachers regularly code switch to make meaning comprehensible to students when they are taught through a colonial or dominant language (see, e.g., Lin and Martin, 2005).

Arthur and Martin (2006) speak of the “pedagogic validity of code switching” in situations in which students do not understand the lessons. Despite the documentation of code switching as a prevalent pragmatic practice, code switching is “rarely institutionally endorsed or pedagogically underpinned” (Creese and Blackledge 2010, p. 105). In the late 1980s, Rodolfo Jacobson developed what he called the “concurrent approach,” although it was never fully legitimized (Jacobson 1990). Jacobson’s approach relied on having teachers code switch strategically, although only inter-sententially. Whether code switching is done pragmatically by the teacher or as in the Jacobson approach with pedagogical intent, code switching in the education literature, valuable as it may be, focuses not in sustaining bilingualism per se, but in teaching in, or simply teaching, an additional language. In this respect, the concept of translanguaging makes a very different contribution and it is, as we will discuss, an epistemologically different

concept because it questions the proposition that what bilinguals are doing is going from one language to another.

Furthermore, translanguaging should also be seen differently from code switching. Code switching, even to those scholars who see it as linguistic mastery (see Auer 2005; Gumperz 1982; Myers-Scotton 2005), is based on the view that bilinguals have two separate linguistic systems. In contrast, translanguaging posits the linguistic behavior of bilinguals as being always heteroglossic (see Bakhtin 2010; Bailey 2007), always dynamic, responding not to two monolingualisms in one but to one integrated linguistic system. It is precisely because translanguaging takes up this heteroglossic and dynamic perspective centered on the linguistic use of bilingual speakers themselves, rather than starting from the perspective of named languages (usually national or state languages), that it is a much more useful theory for bilingual education than code switching. It is precisely because of its potential in building on the dynamic bilingualism of learners (García and Lin, 2017) that translanguaging has been taken up by many bilingual educators and scholars in the twenty-first century.

In brief Lewis et al. (2012) clarify that translanguaging refers to using one language to reinforce the other in order to increase understanding and augment the pupil's activity in both languages. The mentioned definition of translanguaging emphasize the use of students' L1 in bilingual education. This is in line with Colin Baker, one of the most influential scholars in the field of bilingual education, observed how the practice of what he first translated from the Welsh *trawsieithu* as translanguaging helped students make meaning and gain understandings and knowledge. He explained: "To read and discuss a topic in one language, and then to write about it in another language, means that the subject matter has to be processed and "digested" (2011, p. 289). Baker (2001) pointed out four potential educational advantages to translanguaging: (1) it may promote a deeper and fuller understanding of the subject matter; (2) it may help the development of the weaker language; (3) it may facilitate home-school links and cooperation; and (4) it may help the integration of fluent speakers with early learners.

L1 use in translanguaging as a vehicle for L2 acquisition

Although some teachers and researchers support an English-only policy in the EFL class, some advocate a bilingual approach to be implemented using the learners' L1 as a helpful tool to facilitate their learning. The issue of whether L1 should be used in the English class has been debated for several years. Both proponents and opponents propose rationales to support their beliefs. As Turnbull (2001) states that proponents of English-only in the class stress the benefits of the quantity of exposure to the target language:

they firmly believe that L1 should be completely excluded in the class, and that there is room for students' L1 in the class. They also suppose that to maximise the exposure to the target language (TL) can lead to language learning attainments in the form of successful and confident language use.

Therefore, the question occurred: What is the appropriate amount of TL to be applied in class? And is there any proper place or time for L1 used to facilitate the acquisition of the target language (Turnbull, 2001)? On the other hand, the supporters for L1 use have strong belief in the Threshold Hypothesis proposed by Cummins (1979). The hypothesis of the Threshold Hypothesis is that an individual's achievement in the target language relies heavily on the level of his mastery of his native language. Therefore, the most positive cognitive effects come about when both languages are highly developed. In addition, in contrast to the "time on task" concept in which presents the idea of the greater the quantity of instruction in the target language, the better the educational result will be, so instruction via learner's L1 does not cause any harmful outcome on development in the target language. It seems like the answer of the issue will not be concluded in short time, thus empirical studies are necessary to support whatever the answer is going to be promoted.

The most obvious reason to doubt the effectiveness of immersion programs is the learner's inability to understand the incoming language since all instruction will be taught in the target language; in other words, the learner gets lost easily when the teachers talk to them in the target language simply because they are not ready for it. To be more specific, their linguistic knowledge of the target language competence is not sufficient for them to cope with the arriving message, which turns into incomprehensible input (University of Michigan, n.d.). Thus, Lightbown and Spada (1999) suggest that probably the most effective way for the limited-English-proficient learner to learn new knowledge more effectively and to connect such knowledge to their structure of existing knowledge is to employ his L1 to learn the target language.

In addition, Dietze, Dietze, and Joyce (2009) investigated a survey study to explore the attitudes of 21 English language teachers from J. F. Oberlin University in Japan on their use of L1 (Japanese) in their classes. All the teachers were qualified in English language teaching with master's degrees or above. The participants self-ranked their Japanese proficiency levels from the beginner to the native level. The research findings indicated that the teachers used L1 carefully and wisely during the instruction could improve students' achievements. They also made good use of L1 when necessary to help students learn based on their students' English proficiency levels and switched between the two

languages when they felt it was necessary. Those teachers with bilingual capabilities strengthened the notion that the use of L1 makes acquiring L2 easier and more effective. These studies presented above were undertaken within different contexts such as different cultures or different extents of L1 use. Research studies assert that the student's L1 has a crucial role in teaching and learning processes as well as in classroom activities. With the aid of their L1, those learners who have limited proficiency in L2 are able to activate their existing knowledge and generate ideas to complete the tasks by employing students' L1, the teachers benefit greatly as well.

Future practice and conclusion

As always, translanguaging practices will continue to be present in bilingual classrooms, sometimes surreptitiously and other times out in the open. Translanguaging offers many advantages for a multilingual future, by taking the perspective of the individual speaker, and not that of bilingual users are freed from the strictures that keep us from understanding each other and from discovering the common features in our language repertoire and those held by others. The linguistic flexibility posed by a translanguaging perspective means that individuals will be able to more openly appropriate linguistic features and make them their own, rather than linking them to a particular language. The studies outlined above have in common that they all emphasize the advantage of translanguaging in mediating cognitively challenging material that has to be learnt through the medium of a second language (English). Also the studies mentioned the benefits of creating and/or using translanguaging as a tool to facilitate concept literacy using both English and the L1.

However, translanguaging in bilingual education sometimes contradicts the regulatory role of schools or traditional practices. Bilingual educators must decide whether to always accept the regulations imposed upon bilingual students that restrict them as two monolinguals or to find spaces to liberate their tongues and minds. Then bilingual education will be truly able to assist bilingual students to choose intelligently when to select or suppress certain features of their repertoire and when to liberate their tongues, their full language repertoire, along with their minds and imagination.

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