



On Translanguaging and Its Role in Foreign Language Teaching

Tünde NAGY

Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania (Cluj-Napoca, Romania)

Department of Humanities

ngtunde@gmail.com

Abstract. The idea that in foreign language classes the use of L1 can be beneficial for students is gaining ground in foreign language teaching methodology. Translanguaging is a relatively newly coined term that is often used to refer both to the process of switching between two languages and the methodology that lies behind it. After presenting the main characteristics of translanguaging and the possibility of implementing it as a pedagogical method in English language classrooms, the paper presents a translanguaging activity and also shows how the students evaluated their participation in this practice. The paper concludes that in order to employ translanguaging practices in the classroom, it is necessary to adopt a new mindset to teaching that allows for multiple language use in class and also encourages language learners to embrace their entire linguistic potential.

Keywords: translanguaging, pedagogical practice, translanguaging activity, multilingual language use.

1. Introduction

When it comes to teaching a foreign language, teachers face the difficulty of having to choose the teaching strategies and methods that are appropriate for the needs of a specific class. While in the past a monolingual approach was considered the right path to follow in teaching foreign languages, due to the effects of increased globalization and the spread of multilingualism all over the world, a new approach to teaching is called for. Nowadays, educational practices are frequently carried out in a bilingual or multilingual setting, where traditional approaches and methods often become obsolete and need to be redefined or reformulated in order to meet the learners' needs. In order to adjust teaching methods to the changes that have taken place over the last few decades, researchers working in the field of education have pointed out the need of new teaching norms and methods that take into account the diversity of the classroom, with respect to the background

of the students, their different linguistic skills and competences. Although new methods are not always easy to put into practice for various reasons (e.g. the lack of materials, insufficient number of classes, a curriculum that needs to be followed, etc.), teachers are still expected to implement a learner-centred mindset that considers the specific individual needs of the language learner.

Translanguaging, a relatively new approach to language teaching, is a language practice that allows language learners to use all their linguistic skills, experience, and competences acquired in L1 as well as other languages for meaning-making purposes. It represents a shift from traditional monolingual methods in that it presupposes a certain fluidity between language system(s) as well as the linguistic skills and competences of the language learner.

After describing the main characteristics of translanguaging, the paper presents the outcome of an activity that involves the use of both English and Hungarian in class and also the reaction of the students to this activity. It puts forward the claim that allowing for multiple language use (Hungarian and/or Romanian), besides English, can bring a series of advantages in foreign language teaching.

2. Translanguaging. A definition

The term *translanguaging* originates from Cen Williams, a leading educationalist in the 1980s, who used the term *trawsieithu* to describe a language practice that implied the planned and systematic use of two languages within the same lesson. The term, later translated into English as *translinguifying* but then changed to *translanguaging* by Baker (2001), was meant to describe a language practice that involved a deliberate alternation between the language of input and output in the classroom (Lewis et al. 2012: 643). Later, however, it also came to be used to encompass the mode and purpose of this linguistic process. Today, translanguaging is used to refer both to a language practice that involves the deliberate process of switching between languages and the theoretical considerations behind it.

The definitions of translanguaging often try to combine both aspects, so Canagarajah (2011: 401), for example, defines translanguaging as “the ability of multilingual speakers to shuttle between languages, treating the diverse languages that form their repertoire as an integrated system”. Other definitions often highlight the purpose of this linguistic practice as well – consider García’s (2009: 140) definition, who defines translanguaging as “the act performed by bilinguals of accessing different linguistic features or various modes of what are described as autonomous languages, in order to maximize communicative potential” or Baker’s (2001: 288) interpretation, where translanguaging is seen as “the process of making meaning, shaping experiences, gaining understanding and knowledge through the use of two languages”.

When it comes to the definition of translanguaging, it should be noted that while the above mentioned characteristics are widely accepted by linguists working in this area, there is no general consensus over what an integrated language system means and how the concept of language should be understood in this theoretical framework. In order to shed light on this matter, García and Lin (2016: 124) propose a definition that differentiates between two versions of translanguaging that they call “strong translanguaging” and “weak translanguaging”. The two versions of translanguaging express different perspectives on the language system(s) and, as such, on the language learning processes. On the one hand, the strong version of translanguaging does not differentiate between languages, it rather talks about one language system and one grammar from which language speakers select the feature they need in their interactions. On the other hand, the weak version of translanguaging maintains the traditional language boundaries but advocates for the softening of these boundaries, focusing on the fluidity and overlap between different language systems. This later conceptualization of translanguaging, while not so widespread, has also found support among linguists (e.g. MacSwan 2017 uses the term translanguaging but argues that each language has a separate grammar). The present paper adopts the weak version of translanguaging in the sense that although it views languages as having separate grammar and linguistic structures, it does not presuppose a rigid boundary between language systems but rather views them in constant fluidity and overlap. In line with the dynamic model of multilingualism proposed by Jessner and Herdina (2002), L1 and all other additional languages are seen as having blurred and fuzzy edges, mutually and constantly influencing each other. Another question that arises with respect to translanguaging is how it differs from code-switching, a linguistic phenomenon that also describes the alternation between two or several languages. The next chapter tries to answer this question in a (hopefully) satisfactory matter.

3. Translanguaging and code-switching

There is some confusion when it comes to defining the terms of code-switching and translanguaging, and this is to some extent due to the fact that the conceptualization of translanguaging has changed over time. That is, while in former works (e.g. García 2009) translanguaging is understood to encompass or include code-switching, in later interpretations (e.g. García and Li Wei 2014), the two concepts are found to be at odds with each other; so, while code-switching is considered to express an alternation between two language systems and separate linguistic codes, translanguaging is seen as a phenomenon that goes beyond language categories. Thus, García and Li Wei (2014) argue that code-switching is a process of merely changing two languages, an alternation between

separate monolingual codes; translanguaging, on the other hand, focuses on how speakers use their entire linguistic repertoire in order to create meaning through interaction. One of the main characteristics of translanguaging is that it presupposes a dynamic and functionally integrated use of different languages and language varieties. As opposed to code-switching that is based on a monoglossic view where bilinguals are considered to operate between separate and isolated linguistic systems, translanguaging expresses a heteroglossic point of view that sees language systems in fluidity, lacking rigid boundaries.

Translanguaging is often seen as a process of knowledge construction that goes beyond language(s) (Li Wei 2018). In these processes, learners are active participants who construct a bilingual dynamic repertoire by adding new features to the ones they already have. This line of thought also appears with García (2009), who refers to translanguaging as a dynamic meaning-making process where all elements are in interaction and mutually influence each other. In her definition (2009: 44), translanguaging is seen as “an approach to bilingualism that is centered not on languages as has been often the case, but on the practices of bilinguals that are readily observable”. In García’s (2009: 45) opinion, translanguaging is more than code-switching as it refers to “*the process* [my emphasis] by which bilingual students perform bilingually in the myriad multimodal ways of classrooms”, a process that involves the intermingling of linguistic features as well as the use of multiple discursive practices.

Another difference between code-switching and translanguaging concerns the functions of translanguaging. Translanguaging has taken its root in pedagogy and, as such, it is closely connected to pedagogical practices unlike code-switching that is used to describe the alternation of languages in all kinds of situational contexts. Translanguaging is ascribed an important role, especially in education, where it is expected to enable the formation of a translanguaging space,¹ created by and for translanguaging practices (Li Wei 2011) where learners can switch between languages and creatively use their linguistic competences in order to negotiate and create meaning through interaction. Code-switching is “rarely institutionally endorsed or pedagogically underpinned” (Creese and Blackledge 2010: 105) and focuses “not on maintaining bilingualism per se but on teaching in or simply teaching another language” (Garcia and Lin 2017: 3) regardless of whether it is done pragmatically by the teacher or with a pedagogical intent. By contrast, translanguaging builds on the dynamic bilingualism of language learners (Garcia 2009) and encourages the use of their linguistic competences and entire linguistic repertoire.

1 The translanguaging space is defined by Li Wei (2018: 23) as a creative space of hybridity between the first and second languages, where all dichotomies between the macro and the micro, the societal and the individual, and the social and the psychological are broken down by interaction, a space where language learners bring together their entire linguistic repertoire. It is a place where both learners and teachers engage in meaning-making practices.

4. Types of translanguaging

Taking into consideration that translanguaging is a complex phenomenon whose patterns and forms of manifestation can vary in different situations, there have been several attempts to categorize translanguaging practices. Besides the distinction between the strong and weak version of translanguaging that reflects different perspectives on this linguistic phenomenon, there are other categorizations of translanguaging that need to be mentioned.

In relation to the language proficiency of the language speakers engaged in a translanguaging activity, a distinction can be made between one-way and two-way translanguaging as well as between dependent and independent translanguaging. Bilingual learners, finding themselves at various stages of the bilingual continuum, tend to use translanguaging strategies for different purposes (García and Li Wei 2014). Emergent bilinguals who lack proficiency in a second language often display a dependent form of translanguaging, and so they heavily depend on their linguistic skills in L1. This form of translanguaging is also a one-way translanguaging, where the language learners use their dominant language as a scaffolding device as well as a language of thought. By contrast, more experienced bilingual speakers who have a good proficiency in both the source and the target language use a more independent form of translanguaging. They tend to display a two-way translanguaging pattern, being able to switch between the languages with ease, according to the situation at hand.

Regarding the purpose of its use, a distinction can be made between spontaneous and pedagogical translanguaging as well. As García and Li Wei (2014) and also Lewis et al. (2012) point out, translanguaging can be used both spontaneously (when speakers engage in a translanguaging activity) and pedagogically (when translanguaging is used with a pedagogical purpose and is based on instructional strategies). In other words, spontaneous translanguaging refers to the discursive practices used by bilingual and multilingual speakers, whereas pedagogical translanguaging refers to teaching strategies applied in a multilingual setting.

5. Translanguaging in foreign language teaching

Translanguaging in education adopts a heteroglossic approach to teaching that allows and also encourages the implementation of multiple language practices. The classroom can be considered a community of practice (Wenger 1998)² that offers the right setting for students and teachers alike to use and further develop all their language skills and linguistic repertoire. According to Williams (2002)

² Wenger (1998) defines a community of practice as a group of people who share a common interest for something they do and aim at improving their skills by practising regularly.

(as qtd by Lewis et al. 2012: 40), translanguaging in education “refers to using one language in order to reinforce the other, in order to increase understanding and in order to augment the pupil’s activity in both languages”.

Despite the fact that to this day there is no universally accepted definition of translanguaging (consider the split between the “strong” and “weak” version of translanguaging), there is evidence of translanguaging practices in many education systems all over the world (for example, Paulsrud et al. (2017) report about the existence of translanguaging in Scandinavian institutions, Krause and Prinsloo (2016) analyse translanguaging in the South African educational setting, or Leonet Cenoz and Gorter (2017) discuss translanguaging within the context of trilingual education in the Basque country) underlining the advantages of these linguistic practices in a bilingual or multilingual setting.

According to Baker (2011: 289), a leading expert on bilingualism who also coined the term translanguaging in English, one of the main advantages of translanguaging in an educational setting is that it leads to a better understanding of the subject matter; so, “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.” Baker (2001) also mentions other advantages of translanguaging in teaching, such as the development of the weaker language, the facilitation of home-school links and cooperation, and also the integration of fluent speakers with early learners. In addition, Stathopoulou (2015) points out the importance of translanguaging in testing and highlights the importance of tests that favour cross-language mediation practices.

Although the present paper focuses mostly on the repercussions of translanguaging in the foreign language classroom, translanguaging as a linguistic practice can and is used in all educational contexts. Lopez et al. (2014), for example, show in their studies how emergent bilingual students alternated between English and Spanish while interacting with mathematical items, which made possible for them to show their mathematical skills even in the conditions where their knowledge of English was not good enough. Similarly, Hassan and Ahmed (2015: 26) give an account of the alternate uses of several languages: Arabic, English, Urdu, and in some cases also Sylheti in religious classes in a madrasah (private Islamic secondary school). They point out that a positive effect of the translanguaging processes is the reinforcement of certain concepts through repetition in various languages, which then leads to a more profound understanding and learning of the subject material.

With respect to the use of translanguaging methods in the foreign language classroom, while the data concerning the efficiency of these practices are rather scarce, several studies point to the advantages of translanguaging in foreign language teaching. For example, Portolés and Martí (2017) analyse the linguistic behaviour of young learners (5-year-olds) in a multilingual setting and show

how youngsters use their whole language repertoire while communicating with each other and construct new concepts based on their previous knowledge. Interesting is also Chukly-Bonato's (2016) analysis of translanguaging processes in the classroom who, observing her students' linguistic behaviour for several weeks, notes how translanguaging pedagogy changes their behaviour in a short amount of time. The implementation of translanguaging practices, by eliminating the pressure of having to articulate in perfect English, created a calmer and more relaxed atmosphere in her classroom, thereby encouraging students to take an active part in class and use their language skills more confidently.

The ways translanguaging practices can be implemented in a language class are multifold, depending on the linguistic background and language proficiency of the students. The classroom as a community of practice includes participants (both students and teachers) that work towards a common goal; in a class with mixed linguistic skills and competences and in certain cases also a different linguistic background, translanguaging can function as a linking element that serves as a tool to overcome cultural and linguistic differences. It can be said that translanguaging in the classroom serves both as a linking element that closes the gap between participants with different linguistic backgrounds and a scaffolding device that helps emergent bilinguals to keep pace with more advanced learners and at the same time demonstrate and improve their linguistic skills and abilities.

Translanguaging can be implemented in a wide range of activities for the practice of various linguistic skills such as speaking, writing, reading, or listening. The aim of translanguaging practices is to allow language learners to use their linguistic competences to the fullest by eliminating the requirements of having to adhere to the norm of an idealized, native-like speaker. Pacheco (2016) gives examples of translanguaging in a class, where, besides English, the use of Spanish can be observed in various speech acts. He points to the employment of translanguaging practices by the teacher and the students alike for various purposes, such as for requesting information and clarification, providing or affirming a particular answer, demonstrating expertise, and so on. The examples given by Pacheco (2016: 79) shows how creatively translanguaging is used in various situations (in initiative, declarative, affirmative, evaluation speech acts, etc.):

- | | |
|--|------------------------------|
| 1. What's a <i>javelina</i> ? | Requesting information |
| 2. Was <i>asistente</i> the same as assistant? | Invitation to a speech event |
| 3. <i>Corrección</i> . Yes, like correction. | Affirming information |
| 4. You got it. It's <i>corriendo</i> . | Affirming information |
| 5. <i>Acción</i> sounds like action. | Provide information |
| 6. They are having a <i>fiesta</i> . | Demonstrate expertise |

Translanguaging strategies could be employed in all kinds of activities that include not only speaking but listening, reading, or writing skills as well in a way that allows or encourages the use of other languages along the target language (L2). Ideas for translanguaging activities could be, for example, reading a text in one language and summarizing it in another, doing research on a topic in L1, report on it in L2, allowing the use of L1 in group work, explaining something in L1 after the explanation in L2 has failed, translating terms from L2 into L1, etc. In what follows, the paper will present the outcomes of a reading activity among L1 speakers of Hungarian, a translanguaging activity that included the alternative use of English and Hungarian in class. In addition, the paper will comment on the reaction of the students to this activity, especially with regard to language use. While students had been used to occasionally hearing or speaking Hungarian in class, it was the first time that they came in contact with Hungarian as part of a reading exercise.

6. A translanguaging activity

The translanguaging activity was carried out at Sapientia University, Faculty of Miercurea Ciuc in three English classes, with first-year pre-intermediate students (around 15 students in a group). I chose these classes especially because at this level a mix of emergent/weaker learners and more advanced learners can often be found, some of them being rather at elementary levels while others approaching the intermediate level. The primary aim of this activity was to see what strategies the students use in order to handle the task at hand and also whether they like or dislike the idea of using Hungarian in class. The results are far from being conclusive and only serve to shed light on the linguistic behaviour of students as well as their perspective on using other languages besides English during the activity.

The task consisted of two parts: the first part was a reading comprehension exercise where students had to put the paragraphs of a text in the right order. Once they had managed to do that, there was a true or false exercise based on the text that they had to do in Hungarian. The students worked in small groups of 3 or 4 and were expected to do the task in a certain amount of time (20 to 25 minutes). No instructions were given with regard to the language use during this activity. After the students finished the task, there was a whole-class discussion in which they talked about the strategies they used to do the exercise and also shared their opinion concerning the use of Hungarian besides English.

A common strategy that the students used during this exercise was translating the paragraphs into Hungarian, which helped them reconstruct the entire story. Other strategies that helped students to put the paragraphs in the right order included looking for connectives, keywords, or repetitions within the text.

Most of the students got involved in a spontaneous, one-sided translanguaging during the exercise. While some of the students did not translate the sentences into Hungarian, all of them switched to Hungarian right at the beginning of this exercise and kept speaking in Hungarian during the entire activity.

With respect to the usefulness of Hungarian as part of the exercise, and also occasionally in class, the answers of the students varied. While the first reaction of the majority of the students (around 70% – as it was part of an oral communication activity, the exact number is hard to tell) was a positive one, saying that the use of Hungarian was useful, later on, it came to a difference of opinions between weaker students, struggling with their English, who would welcome similar exercises in the future, and more advanced speakers for whom the exercise was not challenging enough. According to more advanced learners, or even weaker learners that overestimated their own linguistic competences, Hungarian should be used only in cases when they do not know or cannot remember a word or when they do not understand something. Several students mentioned that during their previous studies they had not been allowed to speak Hungarian in English classes.

In order to understand the students' perspective on the language use in class, their schooling background should be taken into account as well, the more so as this shapes the image the students have of themselves as language speakers. How language learners view their language competences and how confident they are about their language abilities depend on their previous language learning background to a great extent since this already sets the norms for the ideal foreign language speaker. In addition, the self-image of students as language learners and speakers also influences their learning motivation. This idea is highlighted in Dörnyei's (2005) analysis of language learning motivation, a study that draws attention to the importance of self-image in language learning processes. Dörnyei (2005) differentiates between *ought-to L2 self* (language learning motivated by the expectation of the society, teacher, parents, etc.) and *ideal L2 self* of language learners (the ability to use English at work and in daily life in the future), stating that they have a great impact on the students' motivation in learning a foreign language.

As concerns the participants in the translanguaging activity, it is important to consider that most of the students came from a monolingual educational background where only the use of English was encouraged in class. In such circumstances, the formation of the *ought-to L2 self* and also of the *ideal L2 self* images were conditioned solely by the norms of the monolingual language teaching and learning. This can explain why, although the students switched to Hungarian when they started the exercise and had no problem with me occasionally switching to Hungarian either (e.g. when the explanation in English failed), when made conscious of their linguistic behaviour, most of them regarded it as an ultimate solution, a tool that should be limited to situations when their

knowledge of English did not allow them to express themselves properly. Coming from a linguistic background that was defined by monolingual teaching methods, the students' ideal image of themselves as future language speakers did not make room for the use of other languages in the classroom; so, despite the fact that the students used their L1 in class, they were inclined to see it as a mistake, as something that they should not do. Translanguaging practices intend to resolve such contradictions in that they create a learning space where language skills are viewed primarily as communicative competences and where monolingual linguistic methods are regarded as guidelines and not as the only acceptable norm.

Conclusions

Translanguaging, a relatively newly coined term, is used to describe both the alternation between languages and the underlying linguistic processes. The paper offers an insight into this complex phenomenon, elaborating on the possibilities of implementing translanguaging in the classroom, with a special focus on foreign language teaching. Translanguaging as a pedagogical method takes a heteroglossic, multilingual approach to teaching. One of the main advantages of these practices is that, by allowing learners to use their full linguistic potential within a planned activity in the classroom, they motivate weaker learners to engage more in learning activities. By not following monolingual norms exclusively, translanguaging practices also lead to a more relaxed atmosphere, where the learning process is a creative one, based on the language skills of each individual who comes in contact to create and negotiate meaning together. The idea of allowing a multilingual language use in the classroom can be challenging for teachers who have been trained according to monolingual language norms that discarded the use of other languages in class. It is paramount to understand, however, that translanguaging practices, if implemented correctly, do not harm language skills in a particular language; on the contrary, they foster language learning by allowing students to engage more actively in learning activities and also to use their linguistic skills with more confidence in any circumstances.

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Appendix

1. Put the paragraphs in the right order, and then mark the sentences as *true* or *false*.

- ☐ Next day Jamie phoned Hannah and invited her to dinner. He took her to a very romantic French restaurant and they talked all evening. After that Jamie and Hanna saw each other every day. Every evening when Hannah finished work they met at 5.30 in a coffee bar in the High Street. They were madly in love.
- ☐ Suddenly, a man ran across the road. He was wearing a dark coat so Hannah didn't see him until it was too late. Although she tried to stop, she hit the man. Hannah panicked.
- ☐ Hannah met Jamie in the summer of 2017. It was Hannah's 21st birthday and she and her friends went to a club. They wanted to dance, but they didn't like the music so Hannah went to speak to the DJ. 'This music is awful' she said.
- ☐ Two hours later a police car arrived at Hannah's house. A policewoman knocked at the door. 'Good evening, Madam,' she said. 'Are you Hannah Davis? I'd like to speak to you. Can I come in?'
- ☐ 'Could you play something else?'. The DJ looked at her and said, 'Don't worry, I have the perfect song for you.'
- ☐ She didn't stop and she drove to the coffee bar as fast as she could. But when she arrived Jamie wasn't there. She phoned him, but his mobile was turned off, so she waited for ten minutes and then went home.
- ☐ One evening in October, Hannah was at work. As usual she was going to meet Jamie at 5.30. It was dark and it was raining. She looked at her watch. It was 5.20! She was going to be late! She ran to her car and got in. At 5.25 she was driving along the High Street. She was going very fast because she was in a hurry.

- Two minutes later he said: ‘The next song is by Coldplay. It’s called Yellow and it’s for a beautiful girl who’s dancing over there.’ Hannah knew that the song was for her because she was wearing a yellow dress.
- When Hannah and her friends left the club, the DJ was waiting at the door. ‘Hi, I’m Jamie,’ he said to Hannah. ‘Can I see you again?’ So Hannah gave him her phone number.

Text from *New English File*, Pre-Intermediate Level, by C. Oxenden, C. Latham-Koenig, and P. Seligson. 1997.

2. *Igaz vagy hamis?*

- a. Hanna Jamie-t egy diszkóban ismerte meg.
- b. Hannának tetszett a zene, amit a diszkóban játszottak.
- c. Hannának megtetszett Jamie, odament hozzá, és megadta a telefonszámát.
- d. Jamie a diszkóban dolgozott.
- e. Hanna és Jamie megkedvelték egymást, és többször találkoztak.
- f. Egy este, amint Hanna éppen hazafele vezetett, megcsúszott az úton.
- g. Hanna elütött egy férfit, aki éppen ment át az úton.
- h. Hanna bejelentette a balesetet, majd felhívta Jamie-t.
- i. Amikor a rendőrség a helyszínre érkezett, Hanna elmesélte, mi történt.
- j. Hanna nem tudta Jamie-t elérni, mert Jamie telefonja foglaltat jelzett.