Using Translanguaging Pedagogy to Teach Naming and Action Words

An Exploration into an Indian Primary Level English as a Second Language (ESL) Classroom

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Abstract

An ESL class session from an Indian primary level government school is analysed in this paper as one instance of use of teacher-led translanguaging for pedagogic purposes. This classroom observation was done post a training programme, where teachers from primary grades in Hyderabad were given structured inputs to use various multilingual strategies to teach language and content. The analysis shows that translanguaging is used to clarify concepts, instruct students and help them participate in classroom activities. Teacher reflection adds to our understanding of the usefulness of translanguaging to employ students' L1 more systematically, to help them learn about a set of naming and action words in English by drawing equivalent lexical comparisons between Telugu (L1), Hindi (L1) and English (L3). Instances of use of translanguaging or fluid ways of communicating using multiple languages in class helps in validating the practice todevelop linguistic skills in students who do not get exposure to English at home.

INTRODUCTION

In Indian schools, students are largely multilingual. However, the schools they go to either have state language as the medium of instruction (MoI) and/or English as the medium of instruction

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(EMI) to fulfill the three-language policy for education (Pattanayak, 1981). Indian researchers have criticised this policy (Petrovik and Majumdar, 2010) as it assumes that teaching of English (as a subject or as the MoI) from an early age would ensure better proficiency in the language. However, there are some fallacies to this assumption— the target language in its oral communicative form is not available as comprehensible input at home of most students, especially the ones who are from the low socio-economic status (SES) families. Furthermore, teachers of government schools many a times lack adequate conversational proficiency in English, training and preparedness to teach English communicatively (Coleman, 2017; Brinkmann, 2015; Mukherjee and Vasantha, 2002). Quite naturally all of these factors results in poor learning outcomes, leading to large number of dropouts in schools (Pratham, 2017; Erling et al., 2016).

In government schools in India that practice EMI, teachers are encouraged to teach languages (English) in a monolingual manner, which they often fall short of. They are neither trained nor encouraged to use multilingual repertoire of students in a positive manner to develop proficiency and content learning through a new language. Although theorisations of transfer of linguistic cognitive aspects from a language one knows well (L1) to a newly developing language (English) (Cummins, 2007) is now well established, teachers are not informed about their existence.

Even if teachers try to utilise students' L1, it is mostly at the lexical level or a word-to-word translation. The strategy is not utilised to deeply engage in the meaning-making process. But, research shows that employing multilingual resources to learn the target language and academic concepts is very useful in multilingual contexts across the world (Durairajan, 2017; Anderson and Lightfoot, 2018; Canagarajah, 2013; Garcia and Wei 2014; Tsimpli, 2019). Quite interestingly, the use of multilingual strategies gets a mention in the recent National Education Policy (NEP, 2020) but its widespread implementation is still in its formative stage. To take this argument forward, this paper presents a detailed analysis of a classroom session, which will serve as an example for language teachers to systematically use translanguaging for academic purposes.

The MultiLiLa Project

The MultiLiLa is a four year funded research project by UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), and led by the University of Cambridge in collaboration with Indian and UK partners, to study the learning outcomes of bi/multilingual grade IV students from low SES background and studying under challenging contexts across three sites — Delhi, Hyderabad and Patna. The learning outcomes have been studied with respect to literacy, language, cognitive abilities and mathematics

in the state MoI (Hindi and Telugu), and English to understand if children who have MoI overlap with their home language enjoy an advantage over the ones who do not have this overlap. Furthermore, classroom observations of English and mathematics lessons were done to better understand teachers' use of languages to transact in the class. Classroom observation analysis across the sites showed that language mixing happened within a range of 60 per cent to 43 per cent in both English and content classes, with more mixing instances in mathematics lessons. Though teachers were observed to use quite a few pedagogical practices ranging from read aloud to solving problems and having discussion with students, the extent to which they were mixing the languages was not too clear.

Translanguaging is an instance of a structured multilingual pedagogic practice that emerged as an approach to bilingual education, where students in bilingual Welsh and English classrooms were encouraged to alternate languages to communicate in oral and written forms (Williams 1994, as cited in Garcia and Lin, 2016). Since then, this pedagogical practice has been theoretically acknowledged and researched. There are multiple references of the positive impact of such research in several multilingual contexts— Canagarajah (2011), Garcia and Lin (2016), Garcia and Wei (2014) and Baker (2011). However, use of translanguaging for pedagogic purposes has also met

with resistance from practitioners of direct and monolingual methods of teaching languages as they have felt that this fluid interaction using two or more languages would make the target-language learning process 'labourious' and 'contaminated' (Silverstein, 1996). Interestingly, the usefulness of this method and its pedagogical validity in multilingual contexts, and in linguistic minority student communities has far outweighed its limitations and criticisms over the last four decades.

Prior to using the term translanguaging in the western school space, the use of multiple languages to foster communication has had been a natural choice of the multilinguals across the world, and certainly in India. In India, instances and success of using this practice has sometimes been well documented (Anderson and Lightfoot, 2018; Chimirala, 2017; Durairajan 2017). Still, a lot of it yet remains to be documented to bring out the actual classroom practices. To use this fluid medium of communication as an alternative to the traditional monolingual and direct method of instruction in schools, the primary place of contact for young students, is by no means easy or will gain acceptance as a natural phenomena unless the language policy of a country by understanding its importance accepts and implements it. This paper, therefore, aims to bring out the method to practice translanguaging and discuss the possible gains that

teachers can experience as a result of this practice.

In this paper, the construct of translanguaging is considered as all instances of code-switching and translation that could be done in a motivated and systematic manner by language teachers. It would be a conscious and planned manner of communication involving multiple languages in class for the purposes of learning concepts as well as the target language. Thus, this multidimensional construct of translanguaging is open to accommodating the needs of both content and language teachers, especially in the EMI context. In this paper, however, discussion and analysis of use of translanguaging is restricted to the ESL classroom and treated it as one instance of applying the concept to help students benefit academically.

Translanguaging in an Indian Primary Level Classroom

In an attempt to academically draw from the multilingual resources of the ESL classroom and EMI contexts, a two-day training programme as an impact study of the MultiLiLa project on possible uses and benefits of translanguaging was offered to a group of 22 primary school level teachers who expressed interest to participate. The training was conducted in Hyderabad, the capital city of Telangana, a state in the south of India as part of an impact study in collaboration with the University of Cambridge, EFL-U and British Council, India division (for details refer Mathew et al. submitted). From the group, five teachers agreed to prepare lessons incorporating uses of translanguaging in English and content classrooms. Of these teachers, one teacher was observed for an ESL lesson where she planned, used, and most importantly reflected upon her use of translanguaging.

This paper presents a detailed report of this lesson observation as one instance of practice of translanguaging in an ESL classroom to answer two research questions—

RQ1 : What are the various uses of translanguaging attempted in the ESL classroom?

RQ2 : At what stages does the teacher need to be engaged in the concept of translanguaging to make this practice effective?

Following are the objectives of this lesson observation report—

• to give a narrative account of the lesson as it progresses with critical comments;

• to highlight instances of use of translanguaging and the purposes it is used for;

• to point out the lesson focus and the aspects of language proficiency dealt with along with supporting explanations and activities;

• to present teacher talk and the various functions it is used for;

• to focus on the language-teaching methodology and aids used;

- to list the types of student activities and responses during the lesson.

An ESL lesson on naming and action words from the sporting world

I along with another researcher on a summer afternoon went to observe Anita's[1] lesson, a teacher of grade five in a Telugu medium government primary school in Dilsukhnagar, an old commercial area in the city of Hyderabad.

As we entered the nice and airy classroom and one that had no fans, we could see a bunch of young smiling faces busy with their playful activities and their school satchels kept in front of them. They were 39 students, ten to thirteen years of age. At the beginning though they were sitting in two separate groups — one of boys and the other of girls — later as the lesson proceeded they exchanged places and the groups had a good mix of both the genders. I noticed that apart from the teacher's two tables and a couple of cupboards there were no other furniture in the room. This is quite a frequent sight in Indian government primary schools. The classroom had a couple of posters on vocabulary and quantification pasted on the walls and a huge blackboard.

Anita walked into the class and made us sit comfortably on two chairs, which two of the students quickly got from another classroom. They placed the chairs on one side of the room so that we could observe the class and not obstruct the vision of any student as they were sitting on the floor. Anita began her class by addressing the young students cheerfully and then asked them to welcome us, the guests in their class for that day. She also mentioned that we are like her teachers who have come to see all of them. The students readily accepted our presence and the lesson began in full earnest.

Anita asked the students in a mix of Telugu and English to open the English textbook, Unit 7, titled "I was bad at cricket", the first page:

Referring to the pictures given in textbook, she enquired—

T : Can you see a picture? What are some of the words you can use to describe the pictures?

SS : happy, cricket, play, cheerful ...

T : ...*She asks for a few synonyms of the words – /happy = anandam, santosham/*

T : Okay from the picture we will now practice some action words. Who will help us do this activity?" (mix of Telugu and English)

SS : *They look at each other, and one girl named Srika volunteers to do the activity by raising her hand.*

T : Is it okay that Srika will guide you? (in English)

While giving instructions, Anita kept using related words and phrases from Telugu to help the students connect to vocabulary to be used for this lesson.

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[1] All the names of the teacher and students, used in this report, have been changed to maintain anonymity and permission to do classroom observation has been sought following the standards of research ethics.

Activity 1

A number of action words are spoken aloud, and Srika along with the other students got up from their places and did the corresponding actions to show comprehension of these action vocabulary like — *walk, jump, run, swim, sit, stand, go left, go right* and so on.

All along, Anita kept encouraging the students in a fluent mix of Telugu and English. She ended the activity by asking in both the languages: "Shall we end this activity now?"

I Was Bad at Cricket

Everybody at Bojyanaik Thanda was good at cricket, except myself. I tried my best, but it was no good. Every time I tried to catch the ball, it seemed to escape from my hands. It was the same if I tried to bat. My bat seemed to miss, or the ball flew off the edge of it. Each time I missed the ball, all the boys groaned. As for bowling, well, I was so bad that I was never asked to bowl.

One evening, an old man who sat on the verandah of a house near the ground watched me drop an easy catch. He shook his head slowly. 'That boy has got no eye for the ball,' he said. I bit my lip to hold back my tears. I had not always been bad. I used to be quite good. But over the past year or so, I had just got worse and worse.

At home, Jangu, my brother began to tease me. 'He dropped such an easy catch today,' he said to father. Even our little Isru could have done better. 'Well, Somla has butterfingers,' said Jangu. 'He's no eye for the ball.' But father said, 'I had a dream last night. It was about Somla playing for the Indian side.' The next day we were playing cricket as usual. Jangu went into…

Activity 2

T : Let us now look at the picture in the book. Which game is played?

SS : Cricket.

T : How do you know that?

SS : The bat.

T : Now I will show you some pictures of games. You tell me which sports or action you can see.

Anita brought out mini cutouts of people playing football, tennis, boxing and asked the students "to observe the difference".

1. Cutout of a football player—

SS : Football

T : How could you say that? By jumping/skipping/standing?

SS : By looking at the feet.

2. Cutout of a boxer—

T : Name of the player?

SS : Sania Mirza?

T : Is this Sania Mirza? Where have you seen her?

SS : In posters.

T : Okay, seen her in posters. She is Mary Kom.

3. Cutout of a tennis player—

T : What sport is this?

SS : Shuttle?

T : Is this shuttle? Or tennis?

SS : Tennis.

Like in the previous activity, Anita used Telugu as and when required along with English as the primary language of instruction; the mini conversations given above were in English. Her use of translangauging at this stage was still mainly to better communicate with the students which words or phrases she wanted them to notice.

Activity 3

Anita then went on to explain to the students that with names of the game played we also have to know the names of the people who plays the game; like the one who plays cricket is a cricket player. Likewise, she asks for the corresponding naming words or phrases—

cricket : cricket player
bowling : bowler
batting : batsman (she adds batswoman referring to the women players)

Here, Anita used Telugu to explain the need of using naming words, especially compound nouns in the sporting world.

Activity 4

After brainstorming with the students about naming (common nouns) and action (verbs of motion) words, Anita asked them to get into smaller groups of five or six, read the first page of Unit 7 and underline the action words.

For this activity, Anita gave ten to fifteen minutes and then, from each group one member was invited to write their list on the board. Anita presented this instruction in a bilingual manner so that the students

knew what the teacher expected them to do in the next fifteen minutes of the lesson.

The class, divided into 5 groups, was abuzz with activity during this time, and the following was the outcome—

knowledge to identify which are root words (e.g., evening) and which are morphologically derived words (e.g., missed). Thus, mere presence of a marker may not be sufficient to categorise words into action words.

Table 1
Listing Actions Words

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5
missed playing *evening	dropped tried slowly	seemed asked *grooned (=groaned)	watched	looked

Here are a few observations about the student responses— As is clear from the students responses, many of them had generalised the past tense marker /ed/ and /ing/ to identify action words. Although this analysis helped them pick action words well, but there were a few overgeneralisation errors as follows—

1. the verb 'seemed' is a mental category verb and not an action word;

2. one student identified the present progressive marker/ing/ to identify action words and has listed 'evening' as an action word. This is an overgeneralisation error where students are found to use the strategy of tense morphemes to identify action words — so using a grammatical category for vocabulary recognition. The teacher gave feedback that this is an exception and 'evening' is a noun. So, along with knowledge of morphological markers, students need a morphemic analysis

Another interesting point noted is that one child had also put down a word like 'slowly' which is also a *manner* of action word or an adverb, but, rightly within the category of action words. So, this indicated that the students were going beyond what the teacher expected them to do, identify action words or verbs; they were also associating other words that represent action like adverbs. This indicates students' ability to extend their learning to related concepts and willingness to use a wider set of vocabulary.

Anita gave feedback on the board-work activity by saying that there is something called 'language consciousness' or the brain hints if a word does not exist in the language. She said this with reference to the spelling of the word 'groaned' misspelt by a student as 'grooned'. She also summarised that two parts of speech can be considered in action words — verbs with tense markers and adverbs indicating manner of

movement (*slowly*, *fast*, etc). Some of the explanation was interspersed with Telugu.

Activity 5

To take the lesson forward the teacher gave the next activity as follows—

T : Write down in your notebook six action words with their simple present and past tense forms.

Thereafter, Anita also gave chits of papers to the students with words given as simple present and simple past tense [*look – looked*]. Students who took the chits had to find from each other pairs to complete the word formations. The students had a lot of fun doing this hand-on activity on word formation. Anita took words from some of the pairs and put it up on a white board as follows:

Table 2
Listing Action Word Forms—Present and Past

Present	Past
miss	missed
look	looked
play	played
watch	watched
drop	dropped
catch	caught
bring	brought
think	thought

Through this activity, Anita helped students notice that action words may have two forms — simple present and simple past, and that some verbs just add 'ed' morpheme to express pastness while in some

there is a change in spelling and pastness is expressed by /ght/ and a change in root spelling (e.g., bring – brought). For some of the words, she used Telugu equivalents to show similarities in word formation across the two languages.

The class ended after two hours. The students seemed to have enjoyed the lesson and were happy to have been heard. The fact that most of them could participate in the series of activities well planned by the teacher made them feel positive about the lesson.

ANALYSIS OF THE ESL LESSON AND DISCUSSION

Based on this detailed example of a description of use of translanguaging in the ESL classroom, let us now try to address the two research questions:

RQ1 : Types of uses of translanguaging in the ESL classroom

Anita as a teacher was well prepared for her lesson, and her attempt to teach vocabulary along with grammar and give students practice with help of a series of activities worked well with the students. Her lesson was a good example of using the communicative mode as well as translanguaging to help students focus on concept learning as well as lexical and grammatical aspects of the target language, English.

Throughout her lesson, Anita used Telugu along with English to give instructions to the students and prepare them to do the activities

listed as one to five. Most of her translanguaging happened to fulfill language functions of instruction and explanation to ensure that students were able to comprehend her instructions and carry out the tasks well. She used instances of translanguaging to draw students' attention to lexical equivalents in Telugu and English action words. She also used translanguaging to compare and contrast grammatical aspects like change in word forms to convert words from present tense to past tense.

RQ2 : Teacher engagement about translanguaging

After her lesson was over, I had a chance to speak to Anita and she expressed that thinking about the concept of translanguaging, which she had received in the training for two weeks prior to the observation, made her use Telugu in the English lesson more consciously and choose for some purposes to use it for. Her main intention was to use the students' L1 to clarify concepts so that they could better communicate in English.

"As I had mentioned and you all knew I am already into MLE, all the government institutions are like this. And, one of the participants also shared that we teach in three languages including Hindi. So, we have got certain idea about practicing it and facing the problems. How this helped me is, first, its professional enrichment and I am not at all proud to say that our proactiveness also

matters— where I am ready to learn and change or not— that made me come there and attend the workshop. The interaction with the participants and the various subject experts has made me realise how we should pre plan or how should we strategise before we go for class, how we can implement this as a part of our lesson plan."

Anita was able to reflect on the usefulness of planning to use translanguaging in the class systematically and her perception of student benefits seemed to be aligned to her lesson goals.

"...assigning the specific time for the use of other languages was planned meticulously. I feel that learners were more comfortable with that. I always used Telugu in my classes but by the planning to use it I have achieved more responses from the student and display of better understanding by them."

Teacher Reflection as Professional Development

As a result of the training and the classroom observation experience with us, Anita seemed to be more open to trying out translanguaging in her future lessons that would again be observed. This is an evidence of an attempt at professional development to use multilingual resources.

"When I prepare my lesson plan I make a mental note of where I am going to use Telugu, which earlier to the workshop I never did. It used to be a spontaneous input. I feel that

planning the multilingual inputs gives a better opportunity to anticipate the problems students might face in understanding the concepts to be taught and their learning needs."

"Next week when I actually do this in the class, I should be in a better position to give you more examples of the challenges I have had in doing this — my students' interaction in that regard."

In sum, Anita's comments gives the evidence that for the translanguaging practices to be effective and be well-aligned to the unit taught and the needs of the students, teachers need to be engaged with the concept right from the stage of preparation, to classroom use and during post lesson reflections about the practice, all of which can also help in building students' estimate of performances.

CONCLUSION

Though Anita attempted to use translanguaging for the purposes of instructing the students and explaining grammatical aspects by drawing comparisons between L1 and the target language in her talk, she used it only at the oral level and not for print purposes. Also, there were no activities planned with two language inputs or outputs as part of the activities she used, though she had a mental plan to use Telugu inputs with English as a translanguaging practice during her activities. So for her next lesson, she may be advised to plan some activities where both languages are used not only by her but

also by the students in a systematic manner and for print purposes. Anita could be advised to take up reading comprehension, an oft-neglected area in the language classroom and plan for some translanguaging inputs and tasks like — bilingual texts, text recalling in L1 and L2, comprehension questions in L2 and answers in L1 — to suggest a few. To conclude, overall, Anita could be seen to use few of the multilingual strategies that she received training and break away from a teacher-centered class to more learner centeredness (Clarke, 2003) and use the linguistic resources that the learners had to explain concepts.

Overall, through the singular instance of Anita's detailed lesson observation report, her planning, and actual use of translanguaging in the English classroom show that if conceptualised and planned effectively, the practice can be beneficial for the students who would otherwise have not understood all that was taught in the lesson if the teacher strictly followed the direct monolingual method (Arthur and Martin, 2005; Durairajan, 2017; Canagarajah, 2011a). It can also be a source of satisfaction and motivation for ESL teachers to perform better and thereby support SL learning by engaging with students' L1 resources and thereby validating translanguaging as an effective pedagogical practice.

The ESL lesson presented in this paper has presented various instances of use of translanguaging

as practiced by the teacher— for concept clarification and ease of communication, and her reflections on the usefulness of the practice. The translanguaging practices presented in this paper are to demonstrate one of the findings from the MultiLiLa project classroom observations that teachers use multiple languages for transaction of meaning and creating opportunities for students to communicate and express their understanding.

NOTE

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