

TRANSLANGUAGING IN AN ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE CONTEXT IN THE FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING PHASE

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Abstract

English is used as a medium of teaching and learning in most South African public schools although most of these learners are English First Additional Language (EFAL) speakers. To counter this anxiety, translanguaging as a multilingual intervention becomes handy. Translanguaging is about engaging in multilingual discourse practices; it is an approach to bilingualism that is centred not on languages, as has been often the case but on the practices of bilinguals that are readily observable. This study aimed at exploring how grade 11 EFAL learners feel/ behave when the teacher orders them to abandon their home languages the moment they enter the classroom and how to promote one's home language in the classroom. This qualitative study involved 12 grade 11 EFAL learners, equally divided into two interview focus groups. These EFAL learners were purposively selected from one education district in South Africa. The findings indicate that learning involves building on what the learner knows, so that the learner brings it to the current situation, restructures it and creates new knowledge. Also, more knowledge is needed about how to prepare teachers to best serve multilingual learner populations, including how to incorporate new understandings of translanguaging into instruction and assessment practices.

Keywords: translanguaging, english first additional language, language in education policy, multilingualism, multicultural education.

DOI: 10.21303/2504-5571.2022.002448

1. Introduction

With the dawn of democracy in 1994, the new government set about remedying past inequalities, attempting to bring about the requisite social, political and economic reform for re-entering the global economy [1]. In South Africa, language policy has remained a contested and politicised issue, linked to nation-building, ethnic cohesion and human rights, hence when the democratic government came into power in 1994, it crafted a language policy, meant to address just that.

Recent developments in language planning, policy and implementation in South Africa have led to a view that language policy is a text that is in a constant state of productivity and it is always in a state of change and transformation. It could be the politics of compromise that led to the formation of a new nation was responsible for the production of a new language policy and that has caused dire consequences to the implementation of the language policy in South Africa.

Language in Education Policy (LiEP) promotes additive and functional multilingualism, sociolinguistic as well as cultural integration [2]. LiEP anchors on an educational system or model of “structured bilingual education, found in dual-medium (also known as two-way immersion) programmes” [2, p. 1]. The result of this language policy is that two or more languages will be perceived and used as languages of learning for all learners in the country [2, p. 13].

LiEP promotes the additive approach to multilingualism that allowed for schools to take different approaches as long as the “underlying principle is to maintain home language(s), while providing access to and the effective acquisition of additional language(s)” [2, p. 1]. [3, p. 2] highlight the aims of the school and define multilingual education as ‘the use of two or more languages in education, provided that schools aim at multilingualism and multiliteracy’. This definition suggests that multilingualism is the main objective but it can also be present in school settings even if it is not an educational goal. For example, [4, p. 2] extend the term to situations, in which several languages, spoken by minoritised students, are used ‘to make subject matter comprehensible and enhance the development of a dominant language’.

Linked with multilingualism is translanguaging. Readers are referred to the two articles by [5] that trace the origins and developments of the term, translanguaging. Significantly, the term

came out of bilingual education, particularly minority language revitalisation (in the case of Cen William's original work) and the education of minoritised learners (in Ofelia Garcia). It was coined by [6] by adding trans to languaging, a concept that had been in existence for some time and associated with a different group of researchers in the sociocultural theories of second language acquisition, and in systemic and functional linguistics by [7].

The goal in this work is not to cement a definition for the term translanguaging because there is a plethora of definitions for this term. [8] states that translanguaging is a bilingual pedagogy that interchanges language modes where teachers as mediators of knowledge attempt to create bilingual and multilingual opportunities for the learners in the classroom, taking into consideration their identity, cultural background and learning environment. [9] argued that translanguaging is the combined use of all the languages that are the driving force behind the task; all languages are needed in some capacity to fill in where the other language is limited.

Particularly important guidance in this respect came from the work of [10, p. 1223], who notes that translanguaging is both going between different linguistic structures and systems, including different modalities (speaking, writing, listening, reading, remembering) and going beyond them. It includes the full range of linguistic performances of multilingual language users for purposes that transcend the combination of structures, the alternation between systems, the transmission of information and the representation of values, identities and relationships. Thus, translanguaging refers to "the deployment of a speaker's full linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named languages" [11, p. 283].

Translanguaging appears as a repackaging of code switching or as one of several scaffolds for facilitating the scholastic achievement of linguistic minority students without disrupting prevalent ideologies of language and power relations among linguistic communities. In contrast to code switching, which describes language users' strategic and contextually responsive alternation between features of distinct languages, translanguaging stresses that language users select linguistic features from their single repertoire generatively in ways that foment new linguistic and social possibilities [10]. This shift in perspective seeks not only to foster resource pedagogies that incorporate learners' familiar language practices into learning, but also to overtly challenge and overturn ideologies of language, rooted in racist, classist, and imperialist histories of language standardisation [12].

All the above definitions have served to show that translanguaging is about engaging in bilingual or multilingual discourse practices; it is an approach to bilingualism that is centred not on languages as has been often the case but on the practices of bilinguals that are readily observable. Translanguaging fits very well within the spectrum of work on multilingualism. Translanguaging can be both student and teacher directed, varying by modality, interactional schemas, and subject matter, as well as by the nature of the broader socio-political language context. Equally important is to note that, in daily life, translanguaging may occur spontaneously and/or planned, consciously and/or unconsciously across modalities that reflect the dynamic linguistic repertoires of each global-local context [13].

This study aimed at exploring how grade 11 EFAL learners feel/ behave when the teacher orders them to abandon their home language the moment they enter the classroom and how to promote one's home language in the classroom.

2. Materials and Methods

This qualitative study involved learners in the Further Education and Training phase (FET), that is, 12 grade 11 EFAL learners, equally divided into two interview focus groups to collect data. The study was conducted in term one, 2022. The researcher believed that this number of respondents would make it possible for them to keep the focus group on task. A small number of respondents characterises qualitative research. These EFAL learners were purposively selected from one education district in South Africa and were stationed at one high school.

[14] state that qualitative research seeks to understand a given research problem or topic from the perspectives of the local population it involves. The authors further point out that qualitative research is effective in obtaining culturally specific information about values, opinions, behaviours and social contexts of specific populations. Before the respondents took part in the focus group interviews, they were informed of the general aims of the study: To explore how grade 11 EFAL learners feel/ behave when the

teacher orders them to abandon their home languages the moment they enter the classroom and how to promote one's home language in the classroom. The focus group discussion participants were referred to as either Learner 1 to Learner 12 to ascertain anonymity and confidentiality.

In the focus group discussion session, the motivation that kick-started the session was enquiries that were based on the subject matters, devised from the aim of this qualitative study. During that time the researcher tape-recorded and also wrote some notes. The stimulus questions allowed participants and the researcher to dwell on the subject under discussion that was ultimately channelled into a more detailed and solid debate. As the focus group worked together, the researcher was able to comprehend the interpretation behind the analysis and views, articulated by focus-group participants. A shared view about the theme was thus attained through probing and consideration.

The qualitative data for this study were analysed using the content analysis method, which reduced the volume of information and identified significant patterns. The researcher analysed the participants' responses to focus group interview questions closely, finding links and similarities in the responses and coded them appropriately. Then, the researcher abridged and positioned the results into themes. In this research, the course of categorising and theme formulation was pursued by a grouping of themes, entrenched in the aims of the study and focus group interview questions that were used to gather data.

3. Results

3. 1. Research question How do you feel/ behave when the teacher asks you to abandon your home languages the moment you enter the classroom?

[8] states that translanguaging is a bilingual pedagogy that interchanges language modes where teachers as mediators of knowledge attempt to create bilingual and multilingual opportunities for the learners in the classroom, taking into consideration their identity, cultural background and learning environment. This reverberates with the following finding:

There is no way I can challenge my teacher about that 'no mother tongue' rule in the classroom but I will feel like my identity, which I see through my language, is not considered or valued at all in our learning environment (Learner 12).

Similarly, [15] reminds us poignantly of the experiences of learners who are forced to forsake their language as they enter the classroom, by recounting her own story of early education: "I went to school with all of my treasures, including my Spanish language, Mexican culture, familia (family) and ways of knowing. I abandoned my treasures at the classroom door in exchange for English and the U.S. culture; consequently, my assimilation into U.S. society was agonising. One of my earliest memories is of wishing away my dark skin; I wanted desperately to be White and I abhorred being la morena, the dark-skinned girl. I came to associate whiteness with success and brownness with failure. I was overwhelmed with feelings of shame over the most essential elements of my humanness. As a result, my experience in the U.S. educational system was marked by endless struggles to preserve my humanity" [15, p. 121]. This resonates with the following participant's remarks:

I feel like the teacher is asking me to dump my family and cultural practices. My family honours my home language, so when the teacher asks me to ditch my language, I feel detached from my family and our cultural practices (Learner 6).

In the majority of studies on translanguaging in school contexts, [16] found that acts of translanguaging occur with a minimal pedagogical effort from the teacher. Even in classrooms with English-only policies, learners were found to still use translanguaging behind the backs of their teachers. Although the natural and spontaneous translanguaging of multilingual learners in English-only contexts may be of pedagogical value in their language learning, it has been "rarely institutionally endorsed" [9, p. 105]. The above is in line with the following responses:

I always wonder why my teacher can insist on speaking English only in the classroom because it is impossible; I equate it to a crocodile climbing tree. I never decide to use my home language, but it just happens subconsciously. Even if the teacher is to punish me for breaking this rule, on this one, I am innocent because I have no control over my utterances in my home language (Learner 1).

I never plan to use my home language, but words just come naturally. I think I just behave like a robot that is programmed to be red at a certain time and day. It is never my intention to disappoint or disobey the teacher's order (Learner 7).

Supporting translanguaging as pedagogy and as an everyday practice is a way to promote multilingualism and cultural diversity. This linguistic and cultural pluralism becomes possible thanks to the fact that in translanguaging no language is considered dominant, more superior to others, and the original cultures of people involved are not forcibly buried, rather they are given the chance to freely express themselves [17]. This is in line with the following finding:

The moment the teacher discourages me from using my mother tongue, I am made to believe that my language is nothing compared to English. It implies my language is of little importance as compared to English (Learner 2).

In that case, I rush to think that English is superior to my language because if my teacher defends its use at the expense of my home language, then, it means I am made to believe that it 'bosses' my home language (Learner 11).

After Cummins, other linguists, such as Ofelia García, who extensively investigated and published works on translanguaging, went beyond the notion of interdependence. [18] proposed that bilingualism is not just additive but dynamic. This means that there are not two monolinguals in one person but one linguistic system with integrated features. García makes use of the image of a banyan tree, which proves extremely efficient to explain the reality of dynamic bilingualism. The banyan tree is a fig that grows on another plant when its seeds germinate in the cracks and crevices of a host tree [19]. Then, the roots are sent down towards the ground, which envelops the host tree, also growing horizontal roots. These horizontal roots then fuse with the descending ones [19, p. 15–16]. Dynamic bilingualism emerges in the same way, in the cracks and crevices of communication with others who language differently, gradually becoming in and of itself a way of languaging through complex communicative interactions. Dynamic bilingualism is then both the foundation of languaging and the goal for communication in an increasingly multilingual world” [19, p. 16]. This is echoed in the following finding:

I end by thinking that my language, Sesotho, is very different from English. Surprisingly, there is a shocking similarity between 'school' in English and 'sekolo' in my mother tongue, Sesotho. Why can't my teacher let me just use my language, so that I value such 'similarities' in pronunciation (Learner 4)?

Translanguaging is indeed a multimodal practice [20, p. 6]. Translanguaging practices are multimodal since different modes of communication are involved. Multimodality refers to the interconnection between language and other cognitive systems in the human mind. After all, human communication has always been multimodal. People make use of textual, aural, linguistic, and visual resources to construct and interpret messages. If we think of face-to-face communication, we note that speech signals are accompanied by visual information on the face and in gestures. In sign languages, the realisation of this multicompetence is even more visible because multiple channels, like hands, face and body, are used to create a message. Of course, also the media, through which the meaning is realised and made available to others, constitute the multimodality of communication. For instance, the electronic medium is often used to create modes or messages with the use of images, videos, writing, speech, and so on. In multimodal communication multiliteracy is fundamental. Multiliteracy is the ability to comprehend and analyse different modes of communication. It does not only mean reading a text, but also understanding images and sounds, and in particular, understanding how different modes are put together to create meaning [21, p. 21–22]. This is similar to the following finding:

There are ways to go around this. I know that my command of English is not good. So, to avoid much embarrassment before my classmates, I use gestures and even by looking at my face, you can read one or two things about what I am failing to say in English. You know ...kids laugh at you if you make an error or when the teacher or another learner corrects you. It's so embarrassing (Learner 9).

[22] and [23] have documented how translanguaging can provide students with access to classroom content, generate higher levels of participation and richer engagement with texts, build strong relationships between students and their teachers and enable students to represent their bilingual, bicultural voices and experiences. The respondent had this to say:

Even though I might want to contribute to the classroom, I think twice because I have no confidence in my ability to speak English. Had it been my mother tongue, I wouldn't hesitate to contribute to class discussions (Learner 4).

3. 2. Research question What do you suggest should be done to promote your home language in the classroom?

According to [24, 25], the translanguaging approach requires that teachers translate this professional learning into their instructional designs, especially emphasising the use of multilingual, multidialectal and multimodal texts and the development of classroom activities that bring forth and leverage students' multimodal, digital, multilingual, and multidialectal language and literacy practices. Besides, it fosters the development of writing projects and a writing process that deemphasises monolingual, standard language ideologies and encourages code meshing or the integration of different language practices, styles, and modes in a text [24, 25]. The respondent had this to say:

When I am writing, for example, an essay in literature, I suggest a system (curriculum) that allows us to use languages of our choice or we can even use both languages or all languages we know, including English, as we do when WhatsApping a friend (Learner 3).

Similarly, assessments have historically served as part of overarching contexts that restrict choices around language by promoting monolingual, standard language use and therefore are often explicitly anti-translanguaging. [26] has argued that all tests are language tests and function as mechanisms of (often monolingual) ideologies. They are all inherently tests of language because of how language mediates test administration, content, instructions, or responses and function between ideologies and practice. In connecting the language of the tests with the conceptualisation of tests as mechanisms of ideology, [27, p. 55] notes 'when tests are given in certain languages, those tested are not aware that even the very fact of using one language and not another as the language, in which the test is administered, sends a direct message as to the de facto priority of one language over another'. All of these are considered in the following:

I look forward to the time when we are allowed to write our examination in our mother tongue because my marks in Sesotho are always higher than in English. I heard that the Chinese write in their language and remain innovative, so we can also do that here in South Africa (Learner 10).

Comparably, translanguaging plays an inclusive role and enables maximum participation [28]. It also plays a role in activating children's prior knowledge, which would be hard to elicit if only one language was required. [28] points out that in the US context, 'although young bilingual children possess a sophisticated ability to negotiate meaning across languages, this ability is frequently overlooked in elementary classrooms' [28, p. 13]. In most South African classrooms, even though teachers may code-switch or translanguage in explaining concepts to children, it is very unusual for written board work to be bilingual. The respondents had this to say:

There are moments when our teachers relax the 'only English' order, but when she realises that the learners contributing are struggling with English, she will allow one to use Sesotho. I wish even in our written work, we could be allowed to do that but all our tasks are written in English whether for marks or practice (Learner 5).

As investigated by [29] that teachers' storytelling could be an effective way of teaching English, in this method teacher had got knowledge of how to deliver the story in two different languages in teaching a foreign language. Translanguaging can be used here as a good approach to enriching students' understanding of the content of the story by listening to it. Listening to many audios or many stories from the teacher with a multilingual version can be more powerful to modify the method on how teachers teach a language. The respondents had this to say:

Imagine when we are doing a novel, then, the teacher shares the story in my mother tongue and then in English. I easily remember that story, which is shared in my mother tongue, than in English (Learner 1).

From a translanguaging perspective, the goal of language development is no longer for students to attain "native-like" proficiency, but rather for students to strategically choose features of their communicative repertoire in ways that reflect their bi/multilingual identities and that accommodate their interlocutors [30]. [31, p. 632] recommends that teachers engage students in "socially meaningful participation" where "children appropriate the language they need in order to fulfill a range of purposes, both academic and non-academic". The respondent had this to say:

I suggest teachers allow us to respect that bit of English we use, though it might have problems with grammar and punctuation plus spelling and other aspects. I can't speak English like a

home language learner of English. So, that 'little' or broken English I used should be accepted as it is because the idea is just to communicate (Learner 11).

[32] vividly shows how simply including translanguaging strategies, in the absence of a translanguaging stance, does not lead to positive results in a school where students would otherwise be poised to benefit from translanguaging in their education. In other words, translanguaging, embedded in instruction, cannot be a panacea but must be part of an overall school and class ecology that is supportive of emergent bilingual students and respectful of their cultural and linguistic resources. Even the teachers' methodology needs to be supportive of translanguaging. The respondents had this to say:

When we have group discussions or pair work, I observed that the teacher does not care much if we discuss in our home language. However, when giving feedback, we use English. Using home language in groups ensures everyone participates in the discussion because we are comfortable in our home languages (Learner 8).

Teachers should shift from the old traditional beliefs that learners are blank vessels and come to school to be fed with knowledge. Constructivist views show that learning involves building on what the learner knows, so that the learner brings it to the current situation, restructures it and create new knowledge [33]. Therefore, interactive or social learning becomes very effective because it involves sharing experiences from different backgrounds knowledge and interests of different learners. It is a common practice that people move from the known to the unknown, from the simple to the complex. When learners lack a solid background in the subject under study [34–37], it becomes challenging to master new content, and worse, delivered in an additional language, such as English, as highlighted below:

I understand that English is not my home language but when the teacher gives us tasks that resemble what we knew, we can manage the content though expressed in English, but we will rely on our earlier contact with that content. For example, in Sesotho as a subject. It happens mostly with aspects like parts and figures of speech, which we do both in Sesotho and English. It works very well for the learners (Learner 6).

4. Discussion

The findings have shown that it is vital that the language and sociocultural treasures that learners bring are valued and included in classrooms to facilitate humanising engagement. However, the balance of this is that learners should also be helped to gain access to the powerful language and cultural practices that are valued in the school setting. This resonates with [15, p. 138] who has distilled the principles and practices of humanising pedagogy, two of which are of particular relevance within the context of translanguaging as a strategy in a classroom at the FET phase to enable humanising experiences. The first is that students' sociocultural resources are valued and extended. Second, the mainstream knowledge and discourse styles matter [15, p. 138].

Similarly, the findings echo [38, p. 87]'s sentiments in their "Statements of awareness" of a humanising pedagogy that alluded to the importance of learners and what they bring, being accepted in school classrooms: Learners need to be recognised, appreciated, acknowledged and seen. As human beings, all learners and teachers benefit from the appreciation of who they are and the capacities they possess. These must be seen in order to be appreciated and acknowledged. Therefore, encouraging and making a place for the language capacities of learners using translanguaging is a means of enacting transformational and humanising practice in school classrooms [39].

The findings revealed that the home language of the learner should not be seen as a threat, but as a resource to assist in the acquisition of the new language of the school. This is in line with [40] who reports that teachers with a bilingual orientation could find it easier to acknowledge the value of translanguaging. Teachers with a bilingual orientation could find it easier to acknowledge the value of translanguaging [41]. The advantages of translanguaging extend beyond the recognition of language and include recognition and acceptance of learner identities. In this regard, translanguaging becomes handy in supporting the ability of bilingual students to have multiple identities that are not exactly like those constructed in monolingual contexts or other contexts. It buttresses the multiple and fluid identities of bilingual students [41, p. 3].

The findings revealed that the learners wanted flexibility when it comes to the language of assessment. Assessment plays a pivotal role in the academic journey of any learner. Sadly, assess-

ments have historically served as part of overarching contexts that restrict choices around language by promoting monolingual, standard language use and therefore are often explicitly anti-translanguaging. This confirms [27]'s claim that all tests are language tests and function as mechanisms of (often monolingual) ideologies. They are all inherently tests of language because of how language mediates test administration, content, instructions or responses and function between ideologies and practice. In connecting the language of the tests with the conceptualisation of tests as mechanisms of ideology, [27, p. 55] notes "when tests are given in certain languages, those tested are not aware that even the very fact of using one language and not another as the language, in which the test is administered, sends a direct message as to the de facto priority of one language over another".

The findings revealed that the learners believe in the equal status of languages. However, when they are 'blocked' from using their home languages, they are made to believe that their languages are inferior to the languages of instruction. Fortunately, if translanguaging is promoted in schools and as an everyday practice to promote multilingualism and cultural diversity, this linguistic and cultural pluralism becomes possible. According to [17], this is so because in translanguaging, no language is considered dominant or superior to others and the original cultures of people involved are not forcibly buried, rather they are given the chance to freely express themselves.

The respondents revealed that being barred from translanguaging is rather unfair because it (translanguaging) is not a conscious but subconscious act. It just happens artlessly. They cannot help but translanguage when communication matters. This finding highlights [16]'s view that although monolingual policies and practices are prevalent in many educational contexts, translanguaging cannot be completely restrained because it is a naturally occurring phenomenon for multilingual learners. Describing the translanguaging practice of bilingual Chinese children, [41, p. 193] write that it is "the most distinctive behaviour of the bilingual speaker; there is a no better behavioural indicator to show that a speaker is bilingual than when s/he is using two languages simultaneously in social interaction". In the majority of studies on translanguaging in school contexts, [16] found that acts of translanguaging occur with a minimal pedagogical effort from the teacher. Even in classrooms with English-only policies, learners were found to still use translanguaging behind the backs of their teachers. Although the natural and spontaneous translanguaging of multilingual learners in English-only contexts may be of pedagogical value in their language learning, it has been "rarely institutionally endorsed"[9, p. 105].

The limitation of the study is that only participants from one school were selected to participate in the study. For further research, participants should be selected from different schools because each school has a unique context.

5. Conclusion

Although multilingual practices are common in South Africa, most teachers receive no training on linguistic diversity or techniques for working with multilingual students. In South Africa, at the FET phase as in many contexts of language diversity, more knowledge is needed about how to prepare teachers to best serve multilingual student populations, including how to incorporate new understandings of translanguaging into instruction and assessment practices.

Now, the focus should be on translanguaging pedagogies, especially regarding their implementation and outcomes. Researchers must explore EFAL teachers' attitudes and understandings of translanguaging as a theory and its accompanying classroom practices. Such work would consider teachers' understandings of language, bilingualism, and language development as their familiarity with translanguaging increases as well as the extent of their implementation of translanguaging pedagogies with their students. Also, considering that EFAL itch for translanguaging, there is a need for scientific research on the outcomes of translanguaging pedagogies for students when they are implemented systematically in EFAL settings. It is incumbent upon researchers to look into the effects of translanguaging on sustained academic growth, while rejecting hierarchies of languages in schools.

Finally, it bears repeating that translanguaging is but one term among many for the translanguaging practices that the current study sought to highlight. Regardless of its perceived shortcoming, the current scholarship has tellingly shown the cognitive and social benefits of bringing translanguaging into classrooms for linguistically diverse students across a range of interactions and academic tasks. In short, this study has shown that EFAL learners at the FET phase find translanguaging liberating.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Acknowledgement

The author is highly thankful to the reviewers for their insightful comments.

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Received date 27.04.2022

Accepted date 26.05.2022

Published date 31.05.2022

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How to cite: Zano, K. (2022). *Translanguaging in an english first additional language context in the further education and training phase*. *EUREKA: Social and Humanities*, 3, 40–48. doi: <http://doi.org/10.21303/2504-5571.2022.002448>