
The Prospects of Translanguaging in the second language learning classroom: Undergraduates' Perspectives and Experience

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Abstract

In the context of second language learning in Sri Lanka, Translanguaging in its multilingual nature, means the process of mediating between several languages or language related gestures. This takes place in the instances where the utilitarian languages of the majority are either Sinhala or Tamil but still when they are supposed to communicate in English. This study focuses on the students' indicating resistance in the use of their first language in the English language classroom, owing to the second language learning and teaching culture and some other issues surrounding English language learning in Sri Lanka. Thus, the objectives of the study were to examine the perspectives of students on the utilization of translanguaging and to see whether it can be used as an effective pedagogical tool in language classrooms. Following a qualitative approach of using self-reflective essays and classroom observations, this research was conducted with the participation of 30 undergraduates as the entire study sample. The results of the study revealed that the students are willing to alternate between languages for the purposes of communication, meaning making and to acquire a better understanding of language pedagogy.

Keywords- *English as a Second Language, Language Resistance, Tertiary Education, Translanguaging, Undergraduates*

Research problem and Research Background

All language learners translanguage overtly in their speech and writing but also covertly in their thinking. The majority has been socialized into fearing mixing and meshing their languages, desperately trying not to translanguage. The classroom interaction appears as bilingual across the modalities of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Rather than seeing this as a problem, translanguaging can be utilized as an effective pedagogical strategy to maximize the use of the student's, and the teacher's, linguistic, social, and cognitive resources in learning. When considering a context like Sri Lankan higher education sector, language diversity exists in

a larger scale more than in its secondary education surrounding. Specially, the language classroom is a highly complex, multimodal environment, with multiple meaning-making signs. Therefore, by allowing, better still encouraging, the students to use all their linguistic and other resources in learning, they can be empowered, and their full potentials can be exhibited.

However, the resistance of using L1 (first language) is highly rampant in the Sri Lankan higher education environment, when the medium of instruction and the medium of degree program arrives in English Medium. This causes ideological stances and some other circumstances like higher education culture and language hierarchy; considering English as the paramount language. Subsequently, after having thirteen years of secondary education in Sinhala or Tamil medium, the undergraduates have to study for their higher education in English medium which put them into a challenging and a difficult period of time of learning. Although English exists as one of the main subjects in their secondary education, due the lack of resources, lack of English trained teachers and other demographic circumstances in Sri Lanka, the majority is not being able to obtain a sound English language learning experience during their school time.

Introduction

In the concept of 'Translanguaging' all languages are considered as equal capitals. Hereby, students are asked to alternate languages for the purposes of receptive or productive use. It aids to go beyond the boundaries between language and other meaning-making (semiotic) and thinking (cognitive) resources. Translanguaging can be considered as the buzz word in Language teaching pedagogy. There is an increased presence of diverge languages in the general society that had been previously relegated to private domains and now they accentuate the hybridity, variability and sense making process of literacy practices nowadays. Despite the concept of bilingualism and biliteracy, the terms of plurilingualism and pluriliteracies more precisely indicate the complexity of language practices and values of speakers in multilingual communities. Plurilingualism involves practices and values that are not equivalent or even homologous in different languages, but that are integrated, variable, flexible and changing (Coste, 2001).

Thus, translanguaging carries not only the baggage of bilingual aspects, but also the cultural hybridity. The act of translanguaging constructs a social space for bilingual individuals within families and

communities that grants them the opportunity to bring together all their language and cultural practices. A translanguaging space is where the interactions of multilingual individuals break down the artificial dichotomies between the macro and the micro, the societal and the social and the psyche in studies of bilingualism and multilingualism (Wei,2011).

Transidiomatic practice is a jargon which entails with translanguaging and it suggests the communicative practices of transnational groups that interact using different languages and communicative codes (Jacquemet,2005). Translanguaging differs from code switching because it is not a shift between two languages but a use of original and complex interrelated discursive practices that cannot be easily assigned to one or another traditional definition of a language.

Translanguaging entails the multi-competence of all language learners and users. Multilingual skills and competencies defy purities, boundaries, and strictly linguistic communication. Hence, the objective of this study is to depict how translanguaging can be utilized to maximize the students' full linguistic, cognitive, semiotic and socio-cultural resources in knowledge construction pertain to English language learning by identifying the ways of mitigating the issues that arise in the due course through the viewpoints of the research participants and with the aid of the previous literature reviews. Therefore, the study expects to see whether translanguaging can be utilized as a bridge which connects the processes of sound communication, student interaction and successful English language learning environment.

Literature Review

Prior literature reviews suggest that 'translanguaging' can be used as an effective pedagogical tool in the sphere of English language learning and teaching. Language is not a fact, a system of syntactic, semantic and phonetic rules. 'Languaging' is thinking and writing between languages and speech and writing are strategies for orienting and manipulating social domains of interactions (Mignolo, 2000). As defined by Baker (2011), 'translanguaging' is the process of making meanings, shaping experiences, gaining understanding and knowledge through the use of two languages.

Moreover, it is the ability of multilingual speakers to shuttle between languages, treating the diverse languages that form their repertoire as an integrated system (Canagarajah, 2011). Translanguaging can be considered as multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage in order to make sense of their bilingual worlds (Garcia, 2009).

Moreover, it can be further elaborated as the deployment of a speaker's full linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named (and usually national and state) languages (Otheguy, Garcia et al 2015). They further intricate translanguaging as an approach to the use of language, bilingualism and education of bilinguals that considers the language practices of bilinguals not as two autonomous language systems as has been traditionally the case, but as one linguistic repertoire with features that have been societally constructed as belonging to two separate languages.

As indicated by Li Wei (2011), the act of translanguaging creates a social space for the multilingual user, by bringing together different dimensions of their personal history, experience and environment, attitude, belief and ideology, their cognitive and physical capacity into one coordinated and meaningful performance. From a dynamic systems theory perspective, translanguaging is a creative process in which the property of the agents' way of acting in interactions, rather than belonging to the language system itself (Shanker and King, 2002).

According to Garcia (2009), it is natural that students and teachers move among their linguistic repertoires to fulfill their communicative demands for the purpose of scaffolding in the absence of required proficiency in the language of medium or English in the present context. Thus, this navigation among languages is called 'translanguaging.' Though, the majority of the language users are utilizing this, they are not aware of the concept and some of them claim that using translanguaging can hinder the process of proper second language acquisition and its enhancement.

Elaborating further, translanguaging considers linguistic systems as no separate entities but meaning making tools in a heteroglossia which is natural in bilingual or multilingual communities (Garcia, 2009). Contrary to the monoglossic environment, in a transglossic environment, the boundaries demarcating linguistic identities may blur.

In such a context, teachers and students will shuttle between languages to achieve pedagogic communicative objectives in a more democratic and equitable approach. Hence, this heteroglossic, cross-linguistic flexibility becomes potentially a path for mutual understanding (Creese and Blackledge, 2015).

Translanguaging creates fluid space for the interlocutors to shuttle between the languages (Garcia & et al, 2017). Therefore, it defies prevailing dominant ideologies and resists powers it may have been subjugated to in

monoglossic contexts where languages are reflected as separate entities. Accordingly, Richie and Bhatia (2010) argue that this choice is not random but relies on several phases such as bilingual pragmatic competence, which entails in a complex set of implicit socio-psychological determinants.

Therefore, it is evident that in language learning pedagogy, students being multilingual will naturally use whole linguistic repertoire available to them (in this case Sinhala, Tamil and English) to achieve communication purposes. In brief, they would translanguage, unless restrictions are imposed (Creese & Blackledge, 2015; Garcia, 2009; Sayer, 2013).

Similarly, studies have indicated that, mother tongue is used mainly for classroom management, marking the transition points of a lesson structure, encouragement, summary/review (Johnson 1983). Thus, it can be confirmed that it is natural for the students and teachers use any language in the ESL class. They may engage in translanguaging in the absence of restrictions.

In such contexts, languages are not considered as separate entities when students and teachers freely navigate between linguistic symbols in their linguistic repertoires. In this context, their ethnic identities demarcated by languages may also become fluid. Thus, translanguaging is "both going between different linguistic structures and systems, and going beyond them for the purposes that transcend the combination of structures, the alternation between systems, the transmission of information, and representation of values, identities and relationships (Wei, 2011).

Theoretically, Garcia and Wei (2015) contend that languages are not monolithic, but make meanings in contexts, subsequently meanings are situated and conceived dynamically. In effect, languages as separate entities are not a natural phenomenon as Makoni and Pennycook (2007) claim. Specifying languages as different entities, such as English, Sinhala, Tamil or German, is an invention of Eurocentric thinking. Contrastively, in a heteroglossic context when (named) languages are considered as one single system with different symbolic signs meant for communication in a social space, the individuals who inhabit that social space may become a new linguistic community.

Research Methodology

The study has been conducted in a qualitative approach. The entire sample of the research was 30 first year undergraduates of a state university in Sri Lanka. As per the previous evaluations the participants

belong to the CEFR (Common European Framework Reference for Languages) B1 intermediate level in their second language proficiency. Among them, the voluntary participants were asked to write self-reflections based on their English as a second Language (ESL) classroom learning experience. Specifically, they were supposed to express their sentiments on translanguaging. Before conducting the study, ethical consent has been taken from all the participants. The voluntary participants were given freedom to write their reflections on behalf of their preference.

The teacher of the study also represents the role of the researcher of this study and while the lectures are going on throughout a period of 15 weeks (one semester), classroom observations have been done by the researcher. Based on the observations, the scenarios and the nature where the process of translanguaging was taking place were noted down. When utilizing these qualitative research tools, attention has been driven to the following aspects and the gathered data were thematically analyzed.

- The extent in which L1 and other languages are being utilized in classroom activities other than L2.
- Preference/reluctance of students in utilizing other languages in the circumstance of L2 learning procedures.
- The ways in which translanguage does take place in the classroom context
- How can teachers contribute positively to the realization of all students' full multilingual potentials in learning?
- The opportunities and challenges for the students to purposefully engage in translanguaging at the ESL context
- The extent in which the integration of translanguaging as a pedagogical tool in English language learning/ teaching has have a positive/negative impact upon the students.

Results and Discussion

1. Prevalence of Translanguaging in the ESL Classroom

All students, irrespective of their ethnolinguistic orientations, equally claimed that the translanguaging environment is prevailed in the ESL classroom. From the gathered results it has become evident that the students are using their full linguistic repertoire without regard to watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of Sinhala, Tamil and English.

2. Translanguaging as a scaffolding tool in learning English

The students have mentioned a number of advantages of this approach, in which languages act as scaffolding tools. Translanguaging has been aided them to complete the cognitively and academically demanding classroom tasks (Kramsch & Whiteside, 2007). Moreover, it supports to academic knowledge comprehension via the use of different languages.

Furthermore, according to the students' responses translanguaging has helped them with language recognition and improvement, especially in relation to the language of the 'other'. It paves the ways to deduct the hierarchy or language and language diversity is promoted by ratifying the sole purpose of learning and teaching languages; sound communication and proper meaning making in the long run. They also talked about how it helped them in various ways, for example in grasping subject matter more effectively when peers translate and explain. In fact, they have declared that "it's like learning in all three languages".

Translanguaging has been moving between different genres of discourses – from the written discourse of English to the spoken discourse of their first language, and then to the written discourse in English. Specially during the processes of learning grammar and meaning making, students have expressed a higher range of preference in using translanguaging.

3. Translanguaging as a supportive aid in collaborative second language learning

When focusing on classroom observations, it can be seen that translanguaging is mostly happening during group work and pair work in which the shuttle between different discourses or genres such as written texts, spoken discourse in the same language and also in different languages do occur. Specifically, when group activities are taking place, students are effectively communicating 'in all three languages': Sinhala, English and Tamil along with their feasible gestures in their ESL classroom. They are describing a heteroglossic environment in the classroom, in which there is free navigation between languages and where languages are considered as meaning making tools without boundaries.

4. Translanguaging as a solution in overcoming the shortcomings of second language education

As per the written reflections of the participants, the tool of translanguaging has aided them in a great deal to understand, memorize and catch up the content of their main subjects and components in their degree program. Therefore, this paves them the way to overcome the difficulties that arise when they are entering to the university and when they are supposed to study the degree program in English medium after having their secondary education in either Sinhala or Tamil medium for thirteen years.

Conclusion, Implications and Significance

From the study, it has become evident that 'translanguaging' better captures the sociolinguistic realities of everyday life. It has the capacity to broaden the scope of contemporary linguistics, to look at linguistic realities of the world today and how human beings use their linguistic knowledge holistically to function as language users and social actors.

Translanguaging offers a transdisciplinary lens that combines sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic perspectives to study the complex multilingual interactions as social and cognitive acts able to transform not only semiotic systems and speaker subjectivities but also socio-political structures.

As an effective implication, the pedagogical tool of translanguaging is envisaged as a phenomenon which grants equity to all languages by reducing inhibition and language anxiety of the students. It promotes students' self-esteem, inclusivity, autonomous learning, and creative thinking. It leads to create a hetroglossic environment contrary to monoglossic environment.

In the context of Sri Lanka, whereas many multilingual discourses do take place and specially in the arena of higher education in which the diversity exists at its higher level, the research has attempted to indicate the significance of introducing translanguaging as a didactic device that almost all the students do prefer to use and are already being using with the blindfold standpoint that it might obstruct the accuracy of second language advancement. The teaching practitioners and educators also should be aware of this stance and with the aid of research studies and practical implementations, they should be able to find the most apt tools in English language teaching (ELT) process.

The results and findings suggest the significance of promoting 'translanguaging among ESL classrooms by rectifying the issues that arise when practically implementing it as a pedagogical tool under the existing circumstances. Hereby, the teachers and the teacher trainers, are needed to think more of the actual pedagogical practices and how to make sure that those pedagogical practices are inclusive and encourage and enhance the learners' translanguaging competence and potential.

Limitations and future work

The entire research sample was not enough to generalize the opinion of the majority those who are currently engaged in their tertiary education in Sri Lanka. In the study, attention has been entirely driven to the perspectives and usage of translanguaging among the undergraduates and the viewpoints of those who are engaging in English Language teaching (ELT) were not taken into consideration. As future studies, the extent in which textbooks and learning materials allow Translanguaging practices can be explored as a significant factor in the jargon of translanguaging. Moreover, the impact of translanguaging on testing and evaluation can be studied as another future work.

Abbreviations

- ESL- English as a Second Language
- ELT- English Language Teaching
- CEFR -Common European Framework Reference for Languages
- L1- First Language
- L2- Second Language

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