Translanguaging in ELT: Starting Points and Strategies
by Leah Shepard-Carey

Translanguaging pedagogies are intentional instructional practices that leverage multilingual learners' (MLs') full linguistic repertoires in instruction and assessment, avoiding the rigid language boundaries and policies that often exist in language learning contexts (García et al., 2017). However, with the wide-spanning theoretical and pedagogical perspectives and contextual nuances of implementing translanguaging pedagogies, educators, teacher educators, and scholars remain curious about the practical "how" of making translanguaging part of the fabric of everyday life in classrooms.

Moreover, while all language teaching contexts negotiate issues of linguistic bias and monolingual ideologies, English language teaching (ELT) continues to wrestle with its history and the dominance of monolingual approaches in classroom settings (Motha, 2014), often to the detriment of MLs' learning. For this reason, translanguaging pedagogies are integral to the future of ELT and work toward decolonizing the field (Wei & García, 2022).

Translanguaging pedagogies contribute to a social-justice oriented approach to language teaching by understanding that multilingualism is at the core of multilinguals' identities and language practices, and hence need to be integrated and celebrated in the classroom. With this underlying perspective, this article provides a starting point for educators, administrators, and teacher educators who want to integrate translanguaging into traditionally English-dominant classrooms. I take a top-down approach, by acknowledging the necessary community-building and establishment of multilingualism as a norm in the classroom, and then providing suggestions and resources for "go-to" translanguaging strategies to use in the classroom.

Multilingual Ecology: Building a Culture of Multilingualism

As educators seek to integrate multilingual teaching strategies into their practice, schools and classrooms must first build a culture of multilingualism. This begins with developing and reflecting on educators' individual language ideologies or "stances" (García et al., 2017) in terms of valuing multilingualism, beyond its use as a tool in academic settings, as central to MLs' identities. At the school and district level, scholars identify building a culture of multilingualism as building a "multilingual ecology." Menken et al. (2020) describe this in the following way:

In addition to English, the languages of all students within a school are visible, represented in signs throughout the school, in texts in the library and classrooms, and heard throughout the school in conversations. Furthermore, the students' languaging practices and cultural understandings are engaged as resources for learning. (p. 131)

Building a culture of multilingualism also means that school and district leaders and educators work to know their learners, which aligns with TESOL's 6 Principles. Educators and school leaders should intentionally build relations with multilingual communities and caregivers and support one another in making multilingualism the norm in school spaces. The CUNY-NYSIEB project as well as other translanguaging experts make several recommendations for building a multilingual ecology:

- **Create a multilingual-rich print environment school-wide and in classrooms**: This includes hanging welcome signs in all languages, providing multilingual parent communication in accessible locations, and displaying bilingual student work. In their educator-focused book, *Rooted in Strength: Using Translanguaging to Grow Multilingual Readers and Writers*, Espinosa and Ascenzi-Moreno have a checklist that educators can use to assess how multilingualism is present in the school/classroom environment.

- **Involve caregivers:** Communicate to caregivers that multilingualism is a priority for your school setting. Communicate ways that caregivers can encourage bilingualism and community languages at home, and underscore the benefits of bilingualism. This communication could take place in the form of letters, conferences, and community/school events. See an example of a caregiver letter from CUNY-NYSIEB project in New York state here.

- **Recognize multilingualism in the classroom environment:** Ensure that students have access to bilingual resources, including technological and print resources such as bilingual dictionaries, bilingual or home language books, and home language news and internet resources. Other ways to build a multilingual community include creating identity portraits or profiles at the beginning of the year (see recommended resources), bilingual word walls, and/or inviting bilingual community members and parents into the classroom. For example, my colleague and I invited a Somali elder to read a traditional Somali folktale in English and Somali during a folktales and fairytales reading unit.

Launching Translanguaging for Learning

The concept of "launching" translanguaging derives from Daniel et al.'s (2019) article in *TESOL Journal*. In their work with educators, they found that students needed explicit and direct scaffolding to make translanguaging a norm for learning activities in the classroom. Educators in this study likened this process to starting a readers' or writers' workshop, when students are engaging in independent and guided work. The educators and researchers engaged in lessons that discussed the purposes of and ways to use translanguaging for learning, and they also created strategies students could use and refer to during learning. This included creating anchor charts of

possible strategies: direct translation of words and phrases into students' home and community languages, use of cognates, word-borrowing, and describing things via circumlocution.

Though multilingual students are translanguaging all the time, whether we see it or not, purposeful integration and scaffolding of translanguaging for learning purposes may help students feel more confident in sharing their multilingualism in the classroom. To get started with launching translanguaging, here are some guiding steps and questions, adapted from the work of Daniel et al. (2019):

1. **Welcome Language Identities and Cultures:** How will you intentionally build community and your multilingual ecology?
2. **Utilize an Opener:** Show a model of translanguaging (mentor text, video, community member read aloud, etc.)
3. **Engage in Guided Discussion About Language Practices in the Model:**
   a. Example Questions:
      i. What did you notice about the way the person/people used language? What languages were they using?
      ii. What languages do you use? Who do you use them with? Where do you use them? How do you translate/translanguage in your life?
      iii. How can you use your languages at school? (You may want to create an anchor chart of ways students use languages.)
4. **Model Translanguaging/Transliteration:** Specific to a task or activity you regularly engage in, model imperfection, skills, and strategies used for translanguaging and translation. For example, I could model brainstorming in Spanish and English, which are part of my linguistic repertoire. If educators identify as primarily English dominant, they could model their processes of learning another language and translanguaging with assistance from multilingual student volunteers.
5. **Cocreate Strategies and Resources:** As a class, create an anchor chart of strategies and tools for translanguaging (see example in Daniel et al., 2019).
6. **Allow Student Practice:** Create an opportunity for students to practice their translanguaging strategies.

Know Your Translanguaging Goals and Communicate Them

MLs should be encouraged to use their full linguistic repertoires across learning and social contexts, yet it is important for educators to have specific objectives when integrating translanguaging into the classroom. García et al. (2017) state that these objectives should connect to content standards, and they further provide examples in their book *The Translanguaging Classroom*.

A translanguaging objective might sound like this: "Students will compare and contrast characters in English and their home and community languages" or "Students will discuss how they solved a math problem using Spanish and English." If you're not sure how translanguaging might be integrated, ask yourself:

- What's my content objective?

- What do I want students to know or do in the lesson/unit?
- How will students' multilingualism help them get there?

Language objectives should address the linguistic skills of students across languages. They should be written to allow for flexible language use, as translanguaging should enhance and be additive, rather than apply a set of language policies students have to abide by.

Starting Points and Go-to Strategies

There are an array of high- and low-preparation translanguaging strategies, which include anything from scaffolding bilingual research projects and creating bilingual word walls to utilizing bilingual discussion strategies. The CUNY-NYSIEB guides are full of strategies and approaches that educators could apply almost immediately in the classroom, and I highly suggest that educators start with these guides.

Additionally, other texts on translanguaging pedagogies provide examples from classrooms and/or target specific age groups, language backgrounds, or modalities of language (see recommended resources at the end of this article). In my own experience as an educator, a collaborator/coteacher, and a teacher educator, I've found it is helpful for folks new to translanguaging to start with "entry point" (David et al., 2022) strategies to get acquainted with translanguaging pedagogies and further observe how they play out in one's classroom context. I encourage educators to start small at first, and pick a strategy or two that they feel confident about implementing and that will also encourage their students to participate. Educators may find it helpful to ask themselves:

- Why am I choosing this strategy?
- How does this strategy account for the needs, skills, and funds of knowledge of my students?
- How does this expand and/or leverage students' linguistic repertoires? What mode(s) (speaking, writing, reading, listening) am I targeting during this part of the lesson?
- How will this activity/lesson encourage flexible language use?

There are a number of go-to and entry point strategies that educators can use immediately and frequently in the classroom to contribute to translanguaging as a norm. Following, I share two categories of strategies that educators can use.

Multilingual Vocabulary Strategies

Multilingual vocabulary strategies are entry point strategies because they are highly adaptable for all languages and contexts and encourage both expansion and leveraging students' existing knowledge. You can (and should) also include students in these approaches.

- *Frayer model*: These are highly adaptable graphic organizers that can be used with almost any age group. Opportunities for translanguaging encourage students to write the word in their home language, a sentence using the word in their home language, bilingual definitions, and so on.

- *Bilingual vocabulary journal*: Create or adapt a format that is developmentally appropriate. You could give a word list in English, or a topic for a unit of study. Have students use their own knowledge, tools, and dictionaries. Invite caregivers, community members, paraeducators, and others to help fill in words, too!
- *Bilingual vocabulary word walls and anchor charts*: Similar to journals, these could become living artifacts that students, parents, and community members add to.

Multilingual Collaboration Strategies

Create and encourage same-language groupings to help students collaborate across languages. Some guiding questions and points that may help you plan:

- Think about what kind of collaborative task you want students to do. Does the task involve discussion? Reading a text? Creating a written product? Giving a presentation?

- Incorporate a translanguaging strategy. Once you know what kind of work the collaborative task involves, then you can see which of the translanguaging strategies described here would help your MLs. Teach and model to MLs how to utilize their multiple languages in collaborative work.

- For example, in a sequence involving reading a text, discussing the text, writing about the text, and then presenting the writing, consider which stages can be done in English, the home or community languages, or both.

Moving Forward With Translanguaging Pedagogies

This article provided a general roadmap for getting started with translanguaging pedagogies. That said, translanguaging pedagogies are not a one-size-fits all approach and are dependent on the students in the classroom and their multilingual communities. Classroom culture is part of the foundation of translanguaging, so as you implement translanguaging strategies, consider explicitly inviting students to draw on their resources, involving students as cocreators and experts, and being a colearner of students' languages.

Finally, imperfection is part of this journey, especially with the continuous challenge of negotiating monolingual policies and practices in districts and schools. Yet, the more students see multilingualism as the norm, the more likely they are to feel that translanguaging is not only welcomed, but an integral part of their learning journey.

Selected Recommended Resources for Teachers

Articles, Books, and Guides

CUNY-NYSIEB Translanguaging Guides (comprehensive lists and instructions for strategies; check out the whole website for lots of resources)

Espinosa, C., and Ascenzi-Moreno., L. (2022). *[Rooted in strength: Using translanguaging to grow multilingual readers and writers](#)*. Scholastic.

García, O., Ibarra Johnson, and S., Seltzer., K. (2017). *[The translanguaging classroom: Leveraging students' bilingualism for learning](#)*. Caslon.

García, O., & Kleyn, T. (Eds.). (2016). *[Translanguaging with multilingual students: Learning from classroom moments](#)*. Routledge.

Identity Portraits and Texts

Hamman-Ortiz, L. (2021, September). *[Language and culture portraits](#)*. Language and Culture Portraits | Institute for Educational Initiatives.

Sienkiewicz, E. (2023, February 19). *[Honoring students' stories: Identity texts to write and diverse texts to read](#)*. Confianza.

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Daniel, S. M., Jiménez, R. T., Pray, L., & Pacheco, M. B. (2019). [Scaffolding to make translanguaging a classroom norm](#). *TESOL Journal*, *10*(1). https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.361

García, O., Ibarra Johnson, and S., Seltzer., K. (2017). *The translanguaging classroom: Leveraging students' bilingualism for learning.* Caslon.

Menken, K., Pérez-Rosario, V., & Valerio, L. G. (2020). Multilingual ecology in CUNY-NYSIEB schools. In CUNY-NYSIEB (Eds.) *Translanguaging and transformative teaching for emergent bilingual students: Lessons from the CUNY-NYSIEB project* (pp. 131–146). Routledge.

Motha, S. (2014). *Race, empire, and English language teaching: Creating responsible and ethical anti-racist practice*. Teachers College Press.

Motley, N. (2016). *Talk, read, talk, write: A practical routine for learning in all content areas (K–12)* (2nd ed). Canter Press.

Wei, L., & García, O. (2022). Not a first language but one repertoire: Translanguaging as a decolonizing project. *RELC Journal*, *53*(2), 313–324.

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