# Translanguaging as an inclusive approach to English medium instruction

# El translenguaje como enfoque metodológico inclusiva para la instrucción mediante el inglés

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**Abstract:**

English as a medium of instruction (EMI) has expanded students' contact with English in many countries where English is not the dominant language and as a means to open up opportunities for internationalization for students in these communities. Notwithstanding, the spread of EMI has been criticised for sustaining local and global inequalities (Phillipson, 2008; Piller, 2016), and concerns have also been voiced regarding the quality of student learning in settings where EMI is used (Macaro *et al*., 2018; Cho, 2012).

This paper discusses the potential of translanguaging as an appropriate pedagogy in culturally and linguistically diverse settings, portraying as examples Mexico and Australia. By drawing on the natural linguistic resources of multilinguals, we argue that translanguaging enables learners to access the key content in the curriculum. Furthermore, we suggest that translanguaging pedagogy serves as a counter to linguistic hegemony and its injurious effect on linguistic diversity and social justice.

*Keywords:*

*English medium instruction, translanguaging pedagogy, inclusive education, deep thinking, linguistic hegemony*

**Resumen:**

El inglés como medio de instrucción (EMI, por sus siglas en inglés) ha expandido el contacto de los estudiantes con el inglés en muchos países donde éste no es el idioma dominante y como un medio para abrir oportunidades de internacionalización para los estudiantes de estas comunidades. No obstante, la difusión de EMI ha sido criticada por mantener desigualdades locales y globales (Phillipson, 2008; Piller, 2016), y también se han expresado preocupaciones con respecto a la calidad del aprendizaje de los estudiantes en entornos donde se utiliza EMI (Macaro et al., 2018).; Cho, 2012).

Este artículo analiza el potencial del translenguaje como una pedagogía apropiada en entornos cultural y lingüísticamente diversos, presentando como ejemplos a México y Australia. Al aprovechar los recursos lingüísticos naturales de los multilingües, sostenemos que el translenguaje permite a los alumnos acceder al contenido clave del plan de estudios. Además, se sugiere que la pedagogía translenguaje sirve como contraataque a la hegemonía lingüística y su efecto perjudicial sobre la diversidad lingüística y la justicia social.

*Palabras Clave*:

*Instrucción mediante el inglés, pedagogía translenguagadora, educación inclusiva, pensamiento profundo, hegemonía lingüística*

## Introduction

English as a medium of instruction (EMI) has a long and chequered history in educational settings in countries of the 'expanding circle' (Kachru, 1992) where English is not widely used in daily life. Its growing appeal seems not to have been much affected by accusations of the role English medium instruction plays in accelerating global and local inequalities and of the negative impact it may have on linguistic diversity and social justice (Phillipson, 2008; Piller, 2016). Nor does the popularity of EMI seem to have been much affected by serious questions about student learning quality using this pedagogy (Cho, 2012; Gazzola, 2017). These issues of how to provide quality education which protects cultural and linguistic diversity are also at the heart of educational policy for socio-political groups such as indigenous peoples and large immigrant communities, including refugees. Policy reform

across the globe increasingly calls for the recognition of indigenous peoples´ rights to an education which acknowledges their own cultural and linguistic funds of knowledge and likewise measures are sought to accommodate immigrants in mainstream education in countries which have opened their doors to these communities.

In our discussion we bring together these apparently disparate learner populations through the lens of best practice in pedagogy and we suggest that translanguaging has an important contribution to make in all educational settings characterised by cultural and linguistic diversity. For our discussion, we draw on the contexts in which we work, namely, Mexico and Australia.

## English within the curriculum

Mexico is one example out of many from the 'expanding circle' where English is generally viewed as a key to 'internationalization' and routes to building up language competence through schooling have a focal place in educational planning. For the most part, in Mexico, there are sharp contrasts in the approach to the teaching of English within mainstream education and this is based largely on economics. On the one hand, the public sector at primary and secondary levels (grades K3-12) approaches the learning of English as a foreign language, with typically 2 - 3 hours of class per week, usually beginning at 7th grade, although since 2009 efforts to include English from K3-6 apply in some states (Ramírez-Romero & Sayer, 2016). In the private sector, however, there are generally more class hours assigned to English in the curriculum, starting at K1, and with schools often adopting 'bilingual programmes´ and a content approach to English language teaching where English is used as the medium for instruction. This English medium approach to instruction may also extend to tertiary education, with some private universities offering a 'bilingual stream' (e.g. ITESM, Universidad Iberoamericana, La Salle, Universidad de Las Americas, amongst others) and with the "sustainable international bilingual model" being introduced in 2012 for some state level polytechnic and technological universities (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2016).

For students (or their parents), the weight assigned to English within the curriculum can be a key factor for decisions about where to enrol. When EMI is done well in grades K-12, pupils will typically achieve a language level in the Common European Framework at B1 or higher on graduating from school and will be set up to enter a bilingual stream at tertiary level, or to apply for undergraduate and postgraduate courses delivered in English overseas. Opportunities for 'internationalization' become more readily available for students from this sector. The disparity between what the private and the public sector offer in terms of English in the curriculum at all levels of education represents a serious inequality of opportunities and exacerbates social equality and the Ministry of Public Education´s plan to elevate exposure to English in public education (K3-12), with its National English Program in the 2009 Curriculum for Basic Education, has so far done little to equalise the playing field (Ramirez-Romero & Sayer, 2016).

While exposure to English is clearly an important factor – the number of hours immersed in English inside the classroom can have a significant impact on language proficiency – it should not be the main goal of EMI. Rather, the development of language proficiency in the other language should be viewed as a by-product of the learning of the curriculum content. Discussion from Marcaro (2015), Tamtam et al. (2012) and Knagg (2013), amongst others, indicates that this is often not the case and it is insufficient for a teacher to simply teach subject matter through English; embedded in the pedagogy there need to be opportunities for learners to engage in deep learning and in multilingual classrooms for deep learning to occur learners need to be able to access the funds of cultural and linguistic knowledge that they bring with them to the classroom from their home environment (Moll et al.,1992; Choi et al.,2020).

Recently there has been increasing interest in the potential of multilingual approaches to support learning. This has been prompted primarily by the need to create appropriate pedagogy for the growing numbers of immigrants and refugees in mainstream classrooms across the world and the need to create greater equity and inclusive learning environments for indigenous peoples. However, the discussion on best practice for the integration of learners´ multilingual repertoires to support their learning has centred more on the development of theory than on actual pedagogical practice (Duarte, 2016). Nevertheless, one pedagogical approach that specifically draws on the idea of accessing learners cultural and multilingual funds of knowledge as a bridge to new learning is that of translanguaging (Duarte, 2018; Ollerhead, 2018; Mazak & Carroll, 2017).

## Translanguaging as a pedagogical resource

Translanguaging in its widest sense is viewed as a natural resource (Garcia & Li Wei, 2014) where it is understood that an individual will instinctively use their multilingual repertoires to support their efforts in communicating with others and in their sense-making of texts. For instance, bilingual speakers will often switch between shared languages and mix and mesh and playfully re-create new language forms when interacting with each other; they may do this creatively, to help communication flow or they may do this with discursive intention, to assert a particular political stance, perhaps, or indicate a shared belief

system. For example, when a Latino speaker, speaking English, chooses to use Spanish phonology over English phonology and pronounces "Mexico" as [´mexiko], there is a discursive intention here – perhaps to show solidarity with others present, or perhaps to advance a sociopolitical standpoint. The interweaving of these communicative and discursive practices of translanguaging is epitomised in the popular cultures of Chicano rappers, latino pop music and Chicano literature, for example, and the different types of intrasentential and intersentential translanguaging have been well documented (e.g. Turnbull, 2019; Liando et al., 2022; Seals et al., 2020) and may include amongst others the following strategic behaviours:
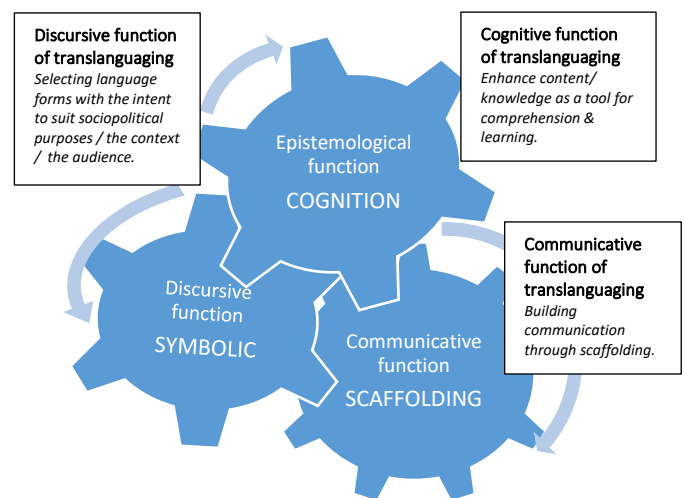
*Table 1. Strategic behaviours of translanguaging at the different levels of discourse*

| Translanguaging strategies/behaviours | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Intrasentential (segmental) level* | *Intersentential level* | *Interactional (cross-speaker) level* |
| • Self-repetition (repeating oneself but using a different language each time)<br>• Code-switching<br>• Translation<br>• Meshing<br>• Mixing of linguistic units<br>• Hybridisation of forms | • Self-repetition<br>• Moves between languages to prop up ideas<br>• Moves between languages to maintain fluidity | • Recasts the ideas of a co-interlocutor<br>• Feeds key language items<br>• Repeats the idea in other shared language<br>• Builds upon a first speaker's utterance but in other shared language |

Whether the intention be communicative or discursive, the point is that this multilingual practice happens naturally between speakers of a shared language repertoire and as such it can be identified as a readily available pedagogical resource which can be drawn on to support sense making and learning. Above all, translanguaging reflects the idea of neural interconnectivity as a function of deep learning and where optimum cognition will use prior learning as a base from which to reconfigure new understandings. In this regard, then, translanguaging shows promise as both a resource to draw on for learning *and* a theoretical model for pedagogy in EMI classrooms and other educational

settings characterised by cultural and linguistic diversity. As Cenoz and Gorter (2021) suggest, to create appropriate pedagogy that acknowledges that multilingual competences impact the ways in which a learner learns, we need to create learning tasks that mirror the natural multilingual practices of learners. Duarte (2020) gives form to the potential of a translanguaging pedagogy drawing on her analysis of learner data which reveals a cognitive function of translanguaging being used alongside a communicative and a discursive function. We can depict this engagement of these three types of functions as a tripartite model of learning, as follows:

*Figure 1. Interrelationship of translanguaging behaviours as a model for learning*



While the epistemological purpose of translanguaging provides the theoretical principles behind the pedagogy, the communicative and discursive functions both offer methodological practices for the classroom. In other words, it is an approach that begs a resource-oriented pedagogy where it is understood that individuals bring to the learning process differing levels of linguistic expertise, sociolinguistic skills and metacognitive processes. As Poza suggests, a translanguaging pedagogy "shifts the focus from the language to the language user, calling attention to their agency, intelligence, and creativity in communicative acts while questioning the social hierarchies that would undermine such traits" (2017:103). It is the way they bring these communicative acts to bear on their learning that is of interest to the pedagogue and we go on to look at studies which address practical examples of ways translanguaging behaviours can be used to enhance content in the classroom and how learners can be encouraged to use their multilingual repertoires and prior knowledge as a tool for learning.

## What does a translanguaging pedagogy look like?

While de Jong (2013) notes a gradual shift toward acknowledging the influential role of students' first languages in their learning across many English-speaking countries, she argues that this shift remains largely superficial, with mainstream teachers lacking the specific strategies needed to harness students' cultural and linguistic experiences for educational purposes. To tackle this challenge, de Jong proposes several practical guidelines based on various school-based projects in the US, advocating for the use of students' L1 resources. She recommends that teachers incorporate cognates in vocabulary instruction, group students by native language, utilize cross-age tutoring with peers from the same linguistic background, create bilingual books, and encourage metalinguistic awareness through cross-linguistic analysis (p. 44). Similarly, Ntelioglou et al. (2014) present findings from collaborative initiatives between Canadian educators and researchers that demonstrate how leveraging the multimodal aspects of multiple literacies—such as writing, digital technologies, and drama—alongside facilitating access to students' L1s can significantly enhance students' engagement and investment in learning.

From a case study in Australia of a teacher workshop focussed on ways to support students newly arrived migrant students in Sydney (Ollerhead, 2018), a significant takeaway was the concept of 'funds of knowledge' (Moll et al., 1992), which refers to the rich cultural knowledge present within students' households or social networks. An especially resonant image for the teachers in the study was Pat Thomson's (2002) depiction of students arriving at school with 'virtual schoolbags' filled with cultural and linguistic knowledge that they rarely had the chance to fully utilize. The teachers then became dedicated to developing pedagogies that allowed students to utilise this knowledge, fostering an inclusive learning environment. As de Jong (2013) suggests, supporting learners in making sense of the academic content being delivered in a language one is just starting to learn requires careful planning by the teacher. To support these emerging bilinguals, teachers searched for strategies that would enable their students to use all their cognitive and linguistic resources in the classroom, and at home, when completing learning activities. Some of the strategies that were explored include the use of bilingual anchor charts or multilingual word walls, cognate charts, graphic organisers, and identity texts (Cummins et al., 2005). In addition, strong connections between the theory of translanguaging and the concept of multiliteracies (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000) were noted, recognizing that classroom texts could draw on multiple modes of meaning-making and communication, such as visual (images, photos, drawings, colour), audio (sound effects, music), gestural (gesture, movement, facial expressions), and spatial (layout, organization of objects). It was understood that finding ways to draw on the full linguistic repertoires of students who have English as an additional language (EAL) ensures they are both cognitively and affectively engaged and not only does it support the learning of both academic English and academic content in English, but also the building of bilingual identities.

What binds this body of research is the emphasis on the importance of EAL students' cultural knowledge and language skills as essential elements in fostering their academic involvement, affirming their identities, and increasing their commitment to learning. Although they are all examples of classrooms where the learners´ language is the minority language, much of the pedagogy can be usefully transferred to EMI contexts, such as Mexico, where learners (and usually their teachers) share a common first language.

## Concluding remarks

Throughout our discussion we have argued that learning is done most effectively when the pedagogy facilitates learners' access to their cultural and multilingual funds of knowledge; in other words, in classrooms with learners who have language backgrounds other than English it is counter-productive to expect the learning to be done only in English. Not only does an English-only approach disregard the resources and natural tendencies of multilingual learners but it also negates opportunities for deep learning. Creating best practice in EMI, as does appropriate pedagogy for indigenous peoples and for immigrants and refugees in mainstream classrooms across the world, has important implications for teacher training. To ensure more inclusive learning environments, it is becoming more and more urgent to include standards which benchmark a teacher's competence in planning for and delivering lessons where all learners are provided with opportunities to draw on their cultural and linguistic funds of knowledge. It is equally important to ensure that graduating teachers feel adequately prepared to carry out these standards.

In Australia, for example, while the skills for national teacher certification subsume a teacher´s ability to provide an inclusive learning environment by being "responsive to the learning strengths and needs of students from diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds" and demonstrating "broad knowledge and understanding of the impact of culture, cultural identity and linguistic background on the education of students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds" (Australian Institute for Teaching

and School Leadership, 2011) we cannot assume that teachers fully grasp the implications of this. Indeed, our current research is suggesting that for student teachers in training this notion of drawing on learners´ funds of cultural and linguistic knowledge may be what Perkins (2006) has referred to as a troublesome concept (Ollerhead et al., in press). Similarly, in Mexico, attempts to formalise inclusive education for indigenous peoples also indicate a certain lack of clarity regarding best practice. While policies have been slowly introduced through the creation of the Inclusive Bilingual Education programme in the 1990s, educational reform has been even slower on the uptake (Hamel, 2017). To equip teachers with the means to implement these policy reforms compulsory professional development is provided throughout the school year but there is no standardised assessment to assess teachers´ clarity or competence in these changing goals of the national curriculum.

This apparent lack of understanding in the teaching profession of how to go about providing inclusive learning environments is perhaps even more apparent at tertiary level, where academic staff may not necessarily hold any kind of teaching certification. For the rising numbers of international students applying to universities in countries of the inner circle (e.g. Australia, the UK, the USA, amongst others), the English-first discourse can be a significant barrier to academic success (Martirosyan et al., 2015; Doiz et al., 2013). Academic staff at the tertiary level may often be unaware of how to provide equitable conditions for these international students who are learning side-by-side with students who have been educated locally. Indeed, our own research findings also indicate that these international students perceive themselves to be at a significant disadvantage in comparison with their local counterparts in terms of the time needed to fully grasp new knowledge and complete academic tasks and in understanding their teachers' expectations. Along with adopting translanguaging pedagogy, universities might learn important lessons by listening to their international cohorts talk about the strategies they use in their struggle to meet the demands of an academic culture which holds English as first and overlooks the need to create more equitable and inclusive opportunities for study.

Last but certainly not least, and moving from the practical to the transcendental, a translanguaging approach to pedagogy not only facilitates the learning of curriculum content but it also has important implications for the way we view multilingualism. It has been argued that bringing the learners´ home languages into the classroom can play a valuable role in contesting hegemonic linguistic practices (Phillipson, 2003; Canagarajah, 2004; Widen, 2010). As a multilingual practice, we contend that translanguaging is in a strong position to counter both the 'English first' discourse that is deeply entrenched in much of the social and educational policy within the Inner circle as well as the 'English only' discourse as 'best practice' which permeates much of English language teaching within the expanding circle.

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