

Critical Evaluation of Translanguaging in Primary School English Class in Xi'an

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Abstract: The issue of this article is about translanguaging, and the author critically discusses the application of the translanguage method in a specific context. This paper explores the impact and effectiveness of adopting a translanguaging pedagogical approach on English learning in the educational context of Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, China. The author describes the strictly enforced English-only teaching environment in local schools and its effects on students' language learning, noting that while this approach aims to improve students' English proficiency, it may also limit their potential to use their full linguistic repertoire for learning. The paper argues that translanguaging not only helps students better master a new language but also promotes their identity and cultural understanding in a multilingual environment. Through translanguaging, students can use different languages for communication both inside and outside the classroom, thereby enriching their language knowledge base. The author calls on educators to give students more linguistic autonomy in teaching and create a multilingual ecological environment in the classroom to enhance students' overall development and language skills.

1. Context

Xi'an is in Shaanxi Province, China. This is the city where the author primary school, junior high school and high school are located, where she has received nine years of English learning and education. Moreover, the author worked as a trainee teacher in a primary school for two years. The students come from different villages and speak the Shaanxi dialect with their parents in their communities and families. When the students enter school, they are required to speak Mandarin. In the second grade of primary school, when students are nine, English appears as a compulsory course in the students' class. The score of English class occupies the same proportion as the main subjects such as Chinese and math in the final exam of each semester. English test results are also an essential part of the college entrance examination, the most crucial test for Chinese students. Therefore, English education is highly valued by students, teachers, and parents in Xi'an.

To enable students to master English more effectively and immerse themselves in a pure English environment, the school requires teachers to speak only English in English class. Teachers will be punished for speaking Chinese while teaching. To give students a deeper exposure to authentic English, the school has invited native English-speaking teachers to provide students with an English lesson once a week to deepen their understanding of English culture.

Although the school invited foreign teachers to class for children, native-tongue teachers

contribute to the cross-cultural aspects of language teaching. They can provide a great deal of foreign cultural knowledge that local teachers cannot bring to their students. The author also mentioned that their school forbids Chinese, including Mandarin and dialects, in English classes. The school believes that the immersive learning environment helps to improve the efficiency of second language learning ^[1]. Moreover, the traditional bilingual view is presented by two independent systems representing two languages and autonomous language systems with different language features ^[2]. However, it is argued to separate the two languages. There is no translation or mixing of languages ^[3]. The bilingual model, which is connected to translanguage theories, proposes that there is only one language repertoire with consistent traits throughout ^[4]. In this context, when students study in English class, they are regularly used in the English repertoire in their brains. When the students come out of the classroom, parents and the community speak Chinese and force them to communicate with the Chinese repertoire again. This method of dividing the repertoire into two independent wholes is criticised. Therefore, instead of formulating a language policy that tries to seal off the language, we should describe the use of interpenetrating vernaculars to understand their users' social reality ^[5].

2. Issue

Translanguaging refers to what bi-/multilinguals do when they use elements from their entire language repertoire to create sense, and it's universal because students live in different contexts ^[6]. For example, children grow up in their parents' language environment in most cases. At other times, children acquire different languages from the family environment to the community. The most common situation is that children learn a new language from their families and communities after school or learn a foreign language. No matter how children become bilingual or multilingual, children worldwide most often participate in bilingual languages or translanguaging ^[6]. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the role of translanguaging in language learning. Translanguaging implies an ideology of multilingualism or bilingualism, and it emphasises that students only use one repertoire of their own to learn different languages rather than several isolated ones. Moreover, translanguaging argues that there is no distinction between high and low languages, and it acts as a scaffold to connect two or more languages. Therefore, in the context, teachers that only allow pupils to use a portion of their language repertoire, mainly those regarded as their weaker languages, limit their potential to learn ^[12]. Whether a teacher or a student, it is practical to use a translanguaging approach to learn a language, whether for first or second.

3. Relevant Concepts

From the beginning to the end, scholars have questioned the normative advantages of monolingualism, which is the basis of practical research on language acquisition and educational assessment. We have not eliminated the established terminology associated with "native speakers" ^[16]. In other words, you may or may not have a "mother tongue," but you cannot escape being "born" with one or more languages imprinted on your body ^[2].

In the middle of the twentieth century, the study of bilingualism and multilingualism became a vital research field ^[4]. As the author mentioned above, in the traditional multilingual teaching, scholars insist on the complete separation of the two languages of the second language to avoid interference ^[7]. Grosjean (1982) critically pointed out that bilingual or multilingual students are expected to be seen as a simple addition of two monolinguals rather than a mastery of multiple languages ^[8]. According to Cummins (2005), one explanation for this separation is the persistence of monolingual classroom practice. The two languages should be strictly distinct in L2 immersion and bilingual language programmes, and they are "two solitudes" ^[9]. However, it is unwise for

scholars to regard the language used by students as several isolated monolinguals just because the mixture of multiple languages will complicate the research. To some extent, they ignore the identity of their students^[4], and so do in the above school.

On the contrary, dynamic bilingualism shows that bilinguals' language practices are complex and interrelated; because there is only one language system, they do not appear linearly, nor do they function separately. This perspective of dynamic system theory is connected to translanguaging, although it emphasises modifying rather than just discarding the idea of bilingualism^[2]. However, in the context, the teacher's refusal to speak Chinese in English class violates this concept because only when contrasted to other languages such as French, Spanish, or Chinese, English called a language. None of these languages exists in isolation, and they all interact with and are impacted by other languages, including structural components from other languages^[2]. We are all translingual, not natural speakers of a single language who live in similar settings^[10]. The multilingual turn has become more prominent with the acceleration of globalisation and the influence of immigration factors. There is a shadow of multilingual turn everywhere in life. For example, some Chinese words, tai chi and kung fu, have been incorporated into English vocabulary. From this point of view, in the above context, it is unwise for the school to refuse to use Chinese in English class.

The translanguaging approach has its limitations. When learning a new language, students rely on using a language they are familiar with, their native language^[11]. However, once this limitation is overcome, we believe that translanguaging is a process that connects language and practice, promotes fairness in social communication, allows learners to express their identity, and uses their overall bilingual. So, they can act as complete people in their bilingual world^[12].

4. Debates in the Field

Cognitive theory adopts the viewpoint of human learning information processing and puts forward the interface between conscious and unconscious processes in language learning. They also believe that conscious attention is the first step in understanding a language. According to this view, learners need to pay attention to the characteristics and forms of the language^[13]. Other sociocultural perspectives hold that language acquisition is more conceptual than a knowledge system. The cognitive hypothesis and the sociocultural learning perspective focus on knowledge as a commodity that exists independently of learners. Language is usually narrowly conceptualised in applied linguistics, especially second language acquisition. Many studies on second language acquisition focus on studying language structure^[14]. However, learning means acquiring new knowledge and recognising that learning is interpretive, and learners are interpreters and creators of meaning^[14]. The author realised the importance of interpretation, which helps students express what they have learned in their own words to understand the content of knowledge. In this process, translanguaging also plays a role. Students can interpret the content of their target language through their mother tongue or use the target language to interpret the content of their mother tongue. Students learn to use their language practices in different contexts, communicate with other interlocutors and produce meaning, thus showing that they are effective emerging bilinguals.

Therefore, in the above context, we can see that although the school has invited native English-speaking teachers to teach the children, the school thinks that this is the use of translanguage teaching methods; in fact, this is not the case. When the students came out of the classroom, they only returned to use their familiar language. Moreover, it is inappropriate to use only English in English class. Teachers should use a translanguaging approach, for example, to get students to read in one language and then write in another language. In addition, students should be encouraged to communicate with foreign language teachers in class and after class. Students can promote the enrichment of repertoire and the relevance of various languages by learning and

exchanging familiar languages with foreign language teachers. Translanguaging pedagogy aids in the replacement of monolingual notions that are prevalent in this school's English instruction. In this process, we promote the equality and harmony between learners' multi-languages and their related identities so that they can thoroughly learn from their language repertoire and express themselves in their capacity in the process of developing the target language to make their bilingual world meaningful ^[12]. In the translanguaging classroom, teachers should give students some power and provide them with space to control their language development and enrich their repertoire ^[10]. Therefore, teachers can use some Mandarin and dialects to help students construct connections between different languages according to multilingual norms. Translanguaging can break the boundaries of language and improve students' multilingual ability.

5. Future

Dynamic Systems Theory holds that there is an interaction between internal cognitive ecosystems and external social ecosystems; thus, language is always co-constructed between humans and their environments ^[2]. As blog two shows, the author will build the classroom as an ecological environment for students to use translanguaging methods to learn. In future teaching activities, the author will consider giving students more space in the classroom, letting them use their repertoire to learn new languages and encouraging them to express specific contexts, such as making banana milkshakes and your favourite animals and what are their characteristics. If they achieve the purpose of expression, teachers will not emphasise the accuracy of language structure. Moreover, a new transdisciplinary framework should be considered to meet the challenges of multilingualism and globalisation. Under this framework, language learners can develop multilingual awareness and a deep understanding of culture, history, institutional significance, and social action ^[15].

6. Conclusion

This essay argues for the effectiveness of adopting translanguaging as a pedagogical approach in the present context. It is necessary to help students to use the translanguaging method to learn and we must have a multilingual and globalisation vision. Moreover, the interdisciplinary concept and the theory of ecological classroom require every teacher to implement it in the classroom.

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