

Challenging the monolingual habitus of international school classrooms

Eowyn Crisfield Burr

This paper is designed to explore the intersections of language and translanguaging theory and practice in international schools. Language is an important but complex issue in international education for many reasons. Despite this, or perhaps because of this, little work has been done on ensuring adequate provision in international schools for the multilingual nature of many of the students. This is misaligned with the current stated goals of international education, which are to promote global citizenship and international mindedness. Translanguaging pedagogy is a flexible method for using more than one language for teaching and learning. Although most of the work to date has been in bilingual contexts, there is a strong argument to be made for the consistent use of translanguaging in international school classrooms.

International schools are, by their nature, multilingual environments. Despite this, they function in many ways as a monolingual habitus (Gogolin, 1997). The natural multilingualism of many of the students and some of the teachers is suppressed by the monolingual curriculum and the push towards proficiency in English. This has been noticed and remarked upon within the field (Carder, 2007) (Horsley, 2011) but there are currently no clear solutions within programmes and curricula to bring about a change in situation. Where institutional solutions are absent, there is the potential for a pedagogical solution to many of the language and learning related concerns in international schools: pedagogical translanguaging.

The term translanguaging has only been in current use since the mid-1980s, when Cen Williams translated the original Welsh 'trawsieithu' into English. There are many other related research constructs, from applied linguistics (plurilingualism, metrolingualism); literacy studies (code-meshing, multiliteracies); sociolinguistics (code-switching) and education (interlingual teaching). The choice for the term *translanguaging* in this article is based on two factors. The first

is *intentionality*. Many of the other current paradigms that involve describing multilingual language use are describing natural phenomena, in which speakers react to their environment and interlocutors in making their language use choices. Translanguaging, from the Welsh school, involves *intentional* language planning for pedagogical purposes. The second factor is *directionality*. Translanguaging implies across languages, which illustrates well the pedagogical use of languages across a teaching and learning cycle. Other iterations of the concept often imply between (interlingual) or mixing (code-meshing, metrolingualism).

The term translanguaging itself has undergone a field-expansion in recent years, moving from the strictly pedagogical concept it was originally, and Lewis, Jones & Baker (2012) who suggest a tripartite distinction between classroom translanguaging, universal translanguaging, and neurolinguistic translanguaging. Thus, the focus of this article is (pedagogical) classroom translanguaging, as conceptualised by the Welsh school, which defines it as ‘the planned and systematic use of two languages inside the same lesson by specifying and varying the languages of input and output’ (Williams, in Abello-Contesse, Chandler, Lopez-Jimenez, & Chacon-Beltran, 2013, p.110).

Thus, we are faced with the bizarre scenario of schools successfully transforming fluent speakers of foreign languages into monolingual English speakers, at the same time as they struggle, largely unsuccessfully, to transform monolingual English speakers into foreign language speakers. (Cummins, 2005, p.586)

There are two areas of concern regarding language development in international schools. The first is immersion-style experience of students who arrive without the language skills necessary to mediate content in the school language; usually English. There is a pervasive misconception in education that content-based learning (immersion, EMI, CBI, CLIL) is sufficient to provide students with the language development necessary to not only manage the content but to be successful academically. Years of research on immersion schooling has clearly shown that this is not the case. In order to develop the levels of language required, students need more than just immersion or they lose out on content learning as well as language development (Lyster, 2007). The second area of concern is the students’ own languages. There should be a clear mandate within international education that students who arrive speaking a language other than English should not weaken or lose that language in the pursuit of English. Academically, there are strong links between the level of development of a student’s own language (mother tongue/

home language) and their development in English. Ethically, it is not acceptable for students to be alienated from their language and culture as a result of being schooled in an English-medium international school.

Current approaches to supporting bilingual development in international schools are voluntary, fragmented, and of varying quality and success. There is no one-size fits all for supporting home languages, and given the linguistic diversity of international schools, there never will be. Each school is unique in its language profile, which includes student language backgrounds, staff language backgrounds, and the local language ecology. Schools with a curriculum framework that encourages bilingualism in policy (if not always in practice) often make efforts to support the home languages of students in some way. Some schools never get past a basic linguistic tokenism, where shallow efforts are made to give the illusion of inclusion (Motha, 2014). Schools that make a more concerted effort generally use one of the following three models:

Extra-curricular	Parallel	Integrated
After school hours	During the school day	During the school day
Usually community organised	Teachers employed by school	Connected to school curriculum
Variable in content and quality	Curriculum and pedagogy independent and variable	Connects to school methodology and pedagogy

Source: Crisfield, 2016, p.12

All of these models are problematic in one common area: they only allow for support for a finite number of languages, generally those with the highest student numbers. Translanguaging pedagogy has the potential to address and rectify these weaknesses in current approaches to both EAL/ELL and home language/mother tongue development in international schools.

Research on translanguaging is still in its infancy, and remains mainly tied to the original Welsh school, or the growing New York school, with Garcia at the head. Both of these are bilingual contexts, with two main languages involved in each. This leads to problems of extrapolation to diverse multilingual contexts, but there is still much on which to base our understandings. The Welsh school have identified four potential benefits of translanguaging, all of which are pertinent in international schools.

1. It promotes deeper and fuller understanding of the subject matter.
2. It may help students develop in their weaker language.
3. The dual-use of languages can facilitate the home–school connection.

4. It may help the integration of fluent speakers with early learners. (Baker & Wright, 2017)

Here we find two elements that are linked to our first area of concern: support for EAL/ELL learners. Using translanguaging pedagogy can help support the content-learning of students who are still learning English, so that they can fully understand subject-specific knowledge. It can also help moderate the interactions between students who share a language, as a proactive pedagogy that allows for same-language students to support each other, while still focusing on the task and eventually the development of English content ability. The other two elements are linked to our second area of concern: supporting home language development. Strategic use of translanguaging can help students develop from BICS to CALP in their own languages, and also allow access into their learning for parents. A final benefit of translanguaging pedagogy not noted by Baker *et al* (because it is not relevant to their situation) is the benefits of positive multilingualism in promoting international mindedness in international schools. An inclusive attitude to languages is better aligned with this goal than the monolingual habitus that currently exists in many international schools. New research has shown the potential of translanguaging pedagogy in supporting the development of cross-linguistic awareness in both bilingual and monolingual students, as well as positive bilingual identities (García-Mateus & Palmer, 2017).

The first element of developing a translanguaging pedagogy is to create what Garcia *et al* call a translanguaging stance. This attends to four aspects of the classroom and learning:

1. To support students as they engage with and comprehend complex content and texts.
2. To provide opportunities for students to develop linguistic practices for academic contexts.
3. To make space for students' bilingualism and ways of knowing.
4. To support students' socioemotional development and bilingual identities.

(Garcia, Ibarra Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017, p.50)

Essentially, a translanguaging stance in the classroom leaves space for students to use their stronger language for learning, and to use it to scaffold both content learning and language learning in this way. This works for students who are learning English and use their own language as a scaffold, but also for students who have become English-dominant, these same structures can help them re-engage in developing their own languages for academic contexts as well. The acknowledging and accepting of other ways of knowing creates an inclusive classroom

environment where students can develop as bilinguals, and not as aspiring English-only speakers. A classroom with a translanguaging stance naturally allows for the presence of serendipitous translanguaging, which is the first of two types of classroom translanguaging. *Serendipitous translanguaging* happens at the point of need, and usually involves translation strategies or on the spot scaffolding to ensure understanding. This type of supportive pedagogy happens in most classrooms where other languages are not banned, although it is often seen as a crutch or temporary scaffold, only to be used until the students' English is good enough to not need it. The second type of classroom translanguaging is *planned translanguaging*. This involves the teacher actively considering all aspects of learning and language, and making clear decisions about where the use of home languages will be valuable for learning content, for scaffolding language, or for bringing students' varied backgrounds and experiences into the classroom.

One of the essential areas for progress regarding translanguaging is the development of a clear and applicable pedagogy. There are many valuable resources coming out of the New York school, but they are highly embedded in the US context, both in terms of curricula and in terms of sociopolitical issues. There are also many excellent examples of pedagogical activities available in various publications, both print and digital. What is lacking, however, is a clear framework for classroom translanguaging that would allow every teacher to start planning for multiple languages in the classroom. The following framework has been developed working with international schools, and is designed to offer a clear template for teachers to use in order to move from serendipitous to planned translanguaging.

Step 1: Critical questions

Are there aspects of this content that will be inaccessible for some learners?

- Remember to consider type of input, level of language, prior knowledge and BICS and CALP level processing and language

If the answer is yes:

How can we use translanguaging to set them up for success?

- Pre-work, group work, home language resources or partner, etc.

If the answer is no:

- Are there any aspects of this topic that make sense for learners to approach in their own language
- Cultural aspects, identity, local knowledge, etc.

From the answers, teachers can gain an idea of where to plan for translanguaging within the unit or theme, and can consider how best to do so in the second step.

Step 2: Planning the learning cycle

This takes inspiration from the original Welsh “varying the language of input and output” and adds in the critical step of processing. Thus, each class period will be divided into input-processing-output, and the answers from Step 1 will inform the planning.

Input:

- What input sources will be used (text, video, discussions, *etc.*)
- Do some students need to access input in languages other than English for comprehension?
- Should some students access input in other languages to enhance the input (prior knowledge, cultural factors, *etc.*)

Processing:

- How will the students process the input (alone, pair work, group work)?
- What language use structures would allow for better processing? (same language groups, varied level of English groups, *etc.*)?
- How will I ensure I can track the processing (graphic organiser, written notes) if necessary?

Output:

- Do I need to know what the students have learned immediately?
- If yes, how can I scaffold them towards sharing their learning in English (translation, visuals, other methods of presenting)?
- If I would like the output in English, have I built into the processing opportunities to transfer knowledge from their own languages into English?

Sample learning cycles:

1. Input: Students research an ecosystem from their own countries in their own languages and take notes on a graphic organiser in English, using their own languages when necessary

Processing: Using a VENN diagram, pairs of students compare and contrast the ecosystems from their own countries

Output: Pairs present a short summary of their findings to the class in English

Learning impact: Students learn about a variety of ecosystems, and use their own languages for academic research. Students transfer their learning from their own languages into English, and learn the

necessary vocabulary to present in English.

2. Input: Watch a video in English, with a graphic organiser as a guide for note-taking (in any language)

Processing: Guided group discussion (multilingual, with access to same-language peers or translation resources) on key questions (different questions for each group), and preparing a short presentation of answers to the class in English

Output: Groups present questions and answers in English, all students note answers down on graphic organiser

Learning impact: Planned use of graphic organisers helps EAL/ELL students tune in to necessary content in the video and increases understanding. Group discussions allow all students to check understanding, and to transfer the gained knowledge into English to share with the class.

Teacher understanding of task design is an important factor in making translanguaging work in the classroom. It is important to be clear about the goals of each learning cycle within a unit, and to plan for the gradual scaffolding of students towards the final assessment in terms of language and content. One common criticism of translanguaging is that if teachers let students work in their own languages, their English will not improve as much. Clearly, there is a need in English-language schools for English language development to be a focus, but carefully planned classroom translanguaging offers a scaffold both for content and for English language development, through task design elements.

Classroom translanguaging can be used across all age groups and language levels. There are differences in implementation with younger learners and older learners, due mainly to their literacy levels. With pre-literate students there is greater use of technology as support, as students cannot read and write in their own languages. The benefits of translanguaging with younger learners are particularly evident in promoting inclusion, and allowing them to communicate before they have enough English to do so. Schools that have tablets in the classroom can use these for translation of spoken language, either from teacher to student or student to teacher. As the students learn to read and write, they can begin experimenting with putting thoughts into one language and translating to the other themselves.

Translanguaging with literate learners (upper primary and middle school) is particularly useful and beneficial, as it can allow better access to the curriculum for students who are still learning English, and opportunities to develop CALP and academic literacy in home languages as well.

Classroom translanguaging has the potential to address the most

pressing language-related issues in international schools. It allows for better inclusion of speakers of other languages, provides a scaffold for learning content while English is being learned, and provides continued development for the home languages of all the multilingual students in international school classrooms. Perhaps most importantly, it allows for international school classrooms to become the multilingual habitus that they should be, and to develop true international mindedness through the sharing of knowledge, perspectives and culture through the many lenses our students bring themselves into the classroom.

Bibliography

Abello-Contesse, C., Chandler, P., Lopez-Jimenez, M., & Chacon-Beltran, R. (Eds.). (2013): *Bilingual and Multilingual Education in the 21st Century*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Baker, C., & Wright, W. (2017): *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism (6 ed.)*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Canagarajah, S. (2011): 'Translanguaging in the Classroom: Emerging Issues for Research and Pedagogy', *Review of Applied Linguistics in Communication*, 2(1), 1-28. doi:10.1515/9783110239331.1

Carder, M. (2007): *Bilingualism in International Schools*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Crisfield, E. (2016): 'Do we need to change our approach to mother tongue?' *International School Magazine*, (Spring/Summer), 11-13.

Cummins, J. (2005): 'A proposal for action: Strategies for recognizing heritage language competence as a learning resource within the mainstream classroom', *The Modern Language Journal*, 80(4), 585-592.

Garcia, O., Ibarra Johnson, S., & Seltzer, K. (2017): *The Translanguaging Classroom: Leveraging student bilingualism for learning*. Philadelphia: Caslon.

García-Mateus, S., & Palmer, D. (2017): 'Translanguaging Pedagogies for Positive Identities in Two-Way Dual Language Bilingual Education', *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 16(4), 245-255. doi:10.1080/15348458.2017.1329016

Gogolin, I. (1997): 'The "monolingual habitus" as the common feature in teaching in the language of the majority in different countries', *Per Linguam*, 13(2), 38-49. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5785/13-2-187>

Horsley, A. (2011): Acquiring Languages, in G. Walker (Ed.), *The Changing Face of International Education – Challenges for the IB*. International Baccalaureate Organization.

Lewis, G., Jones, B., & Baker, C. (2012): 'Translanguaging: origins and development from school to street and beyond' in *Educational Research and Evaluation*, 18(7), 641-654.

Lyster, R. (2007): *Learning and teaching languages through content: A counterbalanced approach*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

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

Eowyn Crisfield Burr is an Educational Consultant and Author specialising in Language Education.