



CAMBRIDGE

Breaking language barriers?

Communication through pedagogical translanguaging

Allen Davenport

Blue

Orange

Pink

Green

Learners in international schools or bilingual programmes need to learn to think in English, but using their own language(s) can stop them from doing this.

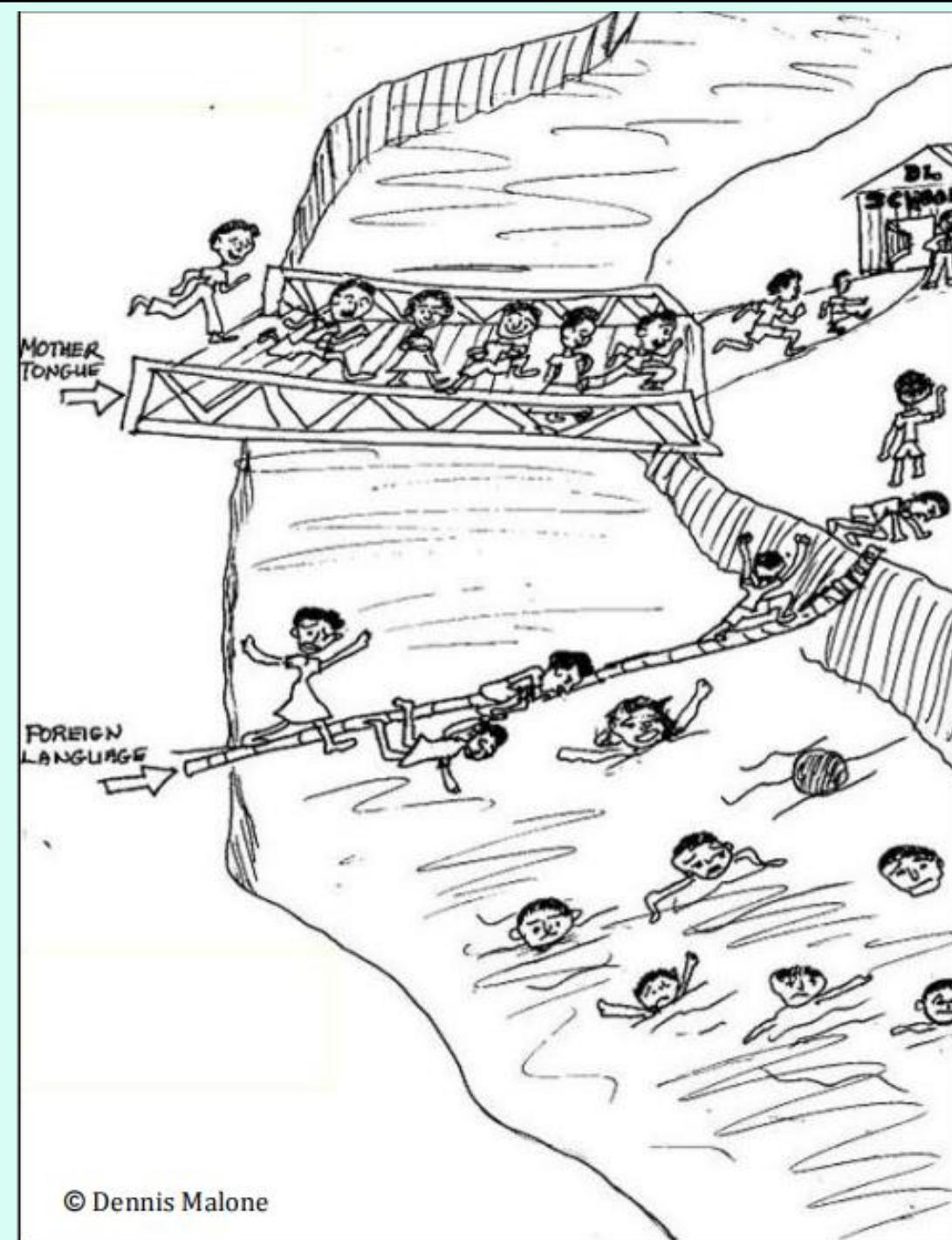
If students use their own language(s), especially to translate, it can make first-language interference worse because it encourages the mistaken belief that everything has a direct equivalent in English.

Parents want their children to study English to be fully immersed in the language and culture. When they use their first language (L1), they miss chances to use English, so it limits their learning opportunities.

Translation isn't a useful skill to practise. Learners should spend their time on the subject content and the syllabus

A picture

- Find a friend
- With your friend, just say what you see (describe the picture)
- Now with your friend, discuss any reactions you have to that picture



Why this matters

- Multilingual learners think in more than one language.
- English-only classrooms limit understanding.
- Translanguaging harnesses what students already know to make meaning and build concepts

Translanguaging

Translanguaging

- First coined in Welsh bilingual education to describe alternation between languages for communication.
- Has existed for as long as multilingualism.
- Sees plurilingualism as using one integrated repertoire, not two separate systems.
- Rooted in additive lingualism, where languages strengthen each other.
- **In essence:** Purposeful use of all one's languages to make meaning

Concept Check: Current thought (such as in the Common European Framework of Reference) prefers terms like **Plurilingualism** rather than **Bilingualism or Multilingualism**.

With your partner, can you think of why that may be?

Learners need to learn to think in English, but using their own language(s) can stop them from doing this.

Brain & Language Architecture

- Languages aren't compartmentalised in separate brain areas
- Brain processes multiple languages simultaneously to a degree

Language of Thought

- Encompasses language, imagery, sensory, and emotional components
- Initial thinking usually in first language (L1) until advanced proficiency (C1+) is achieved*

What is the Learning Goal?

- Not necessary to think in English *initially*
- Excluding L1 from subject lessons doesn't hasten fluency development

The use of the own language(s), especially translation, will exacerbate the problems of first-language interference.

L1 'Interference'

- First language transfer (interlanguage) is common even in English-only classrooms
- It's not always negative; teachers tend to notice it only when errors occur
- Directly comparing the two languages is likely the most efficient way to deal with language transfer issues
- Word-for-word translation tasks may be one of the most effective ways of encouraging learners to notice the differences between English and their own language.*

The time that is spent using the L1 is time that is not spent in using English, so L1 use deprives learners of valuable learning opportunities.

- Balanced Language Use in Classrooms
- Utilization of both English and L1 can enhance various learning aspects including metacognitive awareness and self-assessment tasks
- Small amounts of L1 usage can make classroom activities more economical and create time for English practice
- Benefits of L1 Integration
- Encourages self-motivation and training in learning strategies, particularly those at lower levels
- Facilitates productive classroom activities by allowing students to bridge English and their L1

Translation is not a valuable skill to practise; learners should focus on subject knowledge.

Redefining the Role of Translation

- Acknowledges the daily application of translation for individuals working, studying, or living in plurilingual communities

Balancing L1 Inclusion in the Classroom

- Clear consensus among applied linguists supports the selective use of L1 to enhance learning without entirely discarding an English-only policy
- Need for considering practical and tactical aspects, and aligning strategies with specific classroom contexts

Translanguaging: Moving away from monolingual ESL classrooms and institutions

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Translanguaging: Moving away from monolingual ESL classrooms and institutions

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Translanguaging, defined 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 et al., 2015, p. 281), has great potential to play a key role in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms and institutions. This article first explores the origins and historical development of the concept of translanguaging before examining more general recent developments and applications of this concept internationally and in Australia. The final section provides suggestions for how to apply some of the principles of translanguaging in the adult ESL classroom, with a particular focus on specific translanguaging practices that have been used with Direct Entry English for Academic Purposes students.

Key words: Translanguaging; multilingualism; learner identity; language learning

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Introduction

At its simplest level, *translanguaging* is the crossing of language boundaries. Rather than focusing on discrete, named languages, the prefix *trans-* indicates the spontaneous and flexible gathering and negotiation of diverse resources for making meaning (Hawkins & Mori, 2018). Translanguaging recognises that demarcating language categories is problematic (Dovchin, 2021; Dovchin & Lee, 2019) because the knowledge, understanding, and vocabulary required to transition between and across languages is often accessed without full awareness; thus, language boundaries become blurred (Dovchin & Lee, 2019). Translanguaging is an ever-evolving term and debate exists around how much it overlaps with other linguistic practices and traits including code-switching, code-mixing, bilingualism, and multilingualism (Goodman & Tastanbek, 2020; Li, 2017). Where translanguaging differs from some of these other terms is that its primary concern is to facilitate the meaning-making that occurs during the nuanced, spontaneous, and flexible transitioning between

But on the other hand

Ambiguity and overuse

- The term *translanguaging* is widely used but lacks clear diagnostic criteria
- Researchers apply it inconsistently across bilingual education, code-switching, and cognition
- The article challenges educators to define *what is actually happening* when students mix languages.

Translanguaging

What is it besides smoke and mirrors?

Jeanine Treffers-Daller

University of Reading

Since the launch of the term translanguaging in 1994, the multiple discursive practices that are grouped under this label have been explored in over 3000 papers, covering a variety of contexts, both within and outside education. While the term has clearly resonated with researchers and practitioners, here it is argued that it is unclear what it means exactly, because there are no diagnostic criteria specifying what it is. Extensive criticism has also been put forward in the academic literature, showing that central claims are untenable in the face of overwhelming counter-evidence from a range of fields, including studies on code-switching, bilingual education, bilingual first language acquisition, language contact and language processing. However, translanguaging can become a useful instrument for researchers and practitioners if the concept is narrowed

But on the other hand

Making it practical

- Translanguaging should extend bilingual education, not replace it
- Effective practice relies on clear goals: why, when, and how languages interact.

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Treffers-Daller, J. (2024). Translanguaging: What is it besides smoke and mirrors?. *Linguistic Approaches to Bilingualism*. 15. 10.1075/lab.24015.tre.

But on the other hand

Measured implementation

- Translanguaging should be systematic, evidence-based, and integrated with assessment
- Teachers should monitor whether language flexibility deepens learning, not just comfort.

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Pedagogical Translanguaging

Translanguaging is the general phenomenon of using multiple languages fluidly, while *pedagogical translanguaging* is the educational **application** of this phenomenon. Pedagogical translanguaging is an approach firmly situated in the classroom context, where **the teacher intentionally creates space for multiple languages** as resources for learning.

Allen Davenport

Unpublished Article: *Using Pedagogical Translanguaging in Teacher Training Workshops* (2025)

In essence, translanguaging is what bilinguals *do*, and pedagogical translanguaging is what educators *plan* in order to leverage what bilinguals do for better learning outcomes.

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Core principles of pedagogical translanguaging

Plurilingualism =
Asset

Purposeful
switching, not
random mixing
(code switching)

Focus on
understanding
and content (not
language)

Respect for all
languages in the
room

Evidence- based
planning and
reflection

It's not just for English classrooms

Science: Bilingual labels for processes (evaporation / រំពង).

Maths: Solve in L1, explain method in English.

Social Studies: Use L1 sources → English summaries.

Arts: Reflect in L1, present in English

Quick Strategies Menu

- Bilingual word walls and glossaries.
- Peer explanation in shared language.
- Translation journals or dual-language notes.
- Draft in L1 → final in English.
- Multilingual captions on student work.

Words that are the same in my language

- Time Limit
 - Word Limit
 - Category
 - Creative constraint
-
- You have 3 minutes to list exactly 5 words that are the same in English and one of your own language(s).
 - If you write more than 5 words, you must cross out the extras—only 5 words are allowed on your paper.
 - The words must relate to food or drink.
 - You get 1 point for each word on your list.
 - You get an additional point if no one else has the same word on their list.



A few more ideas:

Peer explanation

Encourage students to explain a difficult concept to a classmate in their shared L1, before reporting back in English.

Group writing or projects

Students can brainstorm in any language, then co-construct a final product in English. For example, in project work students might divide tasks, with students starting in their L1 (finding information from L1 sources), then translating or summarizing findings to incorporate into an artifact.

Same story different languages

Have learners work in groups to find news stories about a world event that is written in their own language. Through English, find similarities and differences in the coverage. Are there similar facts? Differing opinions, etc.

Assessment through a PT lens

- Assess concept mastery before language accuracy.
- Accept mixed-language responses for draft work.
- Encourage students to explain answers in their strongest language first.
- Use oral reflection or peer translation as evidence of understanding.

Inclusive classroom climate

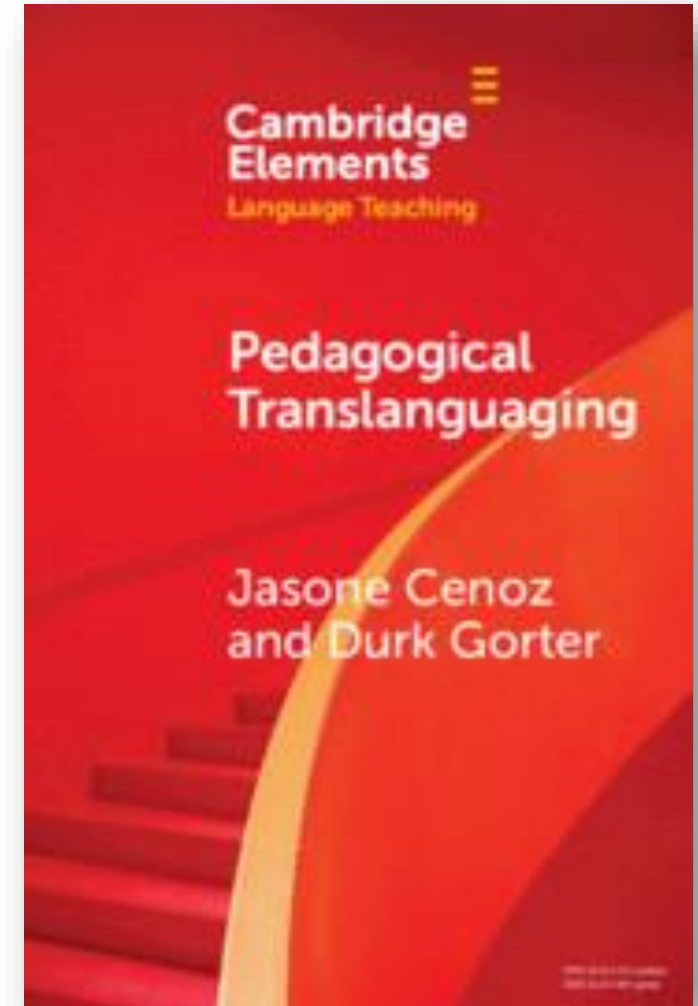
- Display languages of all students.
- Model curiosity about words and meanings.
- Celebrate students who help others bridge languages.
- Normalise translanguaging for thinking.

Over to you (Application and Reflection)

- Identify one lesson where PT could clarify a key idea.
- Add a bilingual resource or task.
- Observe student confidence and participation.
- Note any changes in concept understanding.

And the key question:

- Do you see any value in pedagogical translanguaging (not only translanguaging) in your classroom or school? If yes, what value? If no, why not?



Any questions?

