



**Review Article**

## Translanguaging and Teaching L2 Pragmatics

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### Abstract

The predominant perspective in L2 language education holds that teachers should primarily employ the target language. Various influences, including historical colonial strategies for English learning and teaching have shaped this view, associating native English speakers as the perfect standard. As a result, augmented exposure to the target language, both within and beyond the classroom, has been considered extremely crucial. However, in the past two decades, there have been substantial shifts in monolingual approaches, proposing translanguaging pedagogy, which involves integrating languages other than the primary target language into classroom instruction. This particularly involves recognizing and leveraging learners' linguistic repertoire (, encompassing their mother tongue and any heritage or community languages. The inclusion of multiple languages in language classrooms, whether incidental or deliberate, can serve various educational purposes, such as providing clarifications, explanations, discipline, as well as fostering inclusion and social equity. Additionally, the translanguaging approach aligns EFL learners' language knowledge with their educational purposes while acknowledging their identity. Therefore, adding translanguaging into EFL teaching programs can be auspicious. Pedagogical translanguaging has recently received attention among ELT scholars, and a sizable body of research has already been conducted to examine its possible advantages in teaching/learning L2 skills. The present paper attempts to take into view pedagogical translanguaging as fruitful tool in teaching L2 pragmatics.

**Keywords:** Cultural Sensitivity, English Language Teaching (ELT), Pragmatic Competence, Teaching L2 Pragmatics, Translanguaging

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## 1. Introduction

Pedagogical translanguaging has recently received attention among ELT scholars, and a sizable body of research has already been conducted to examine its possible advantages in teaching/learning L2 skills. The present paper attempts to take into view pedagogical translanguaging as fruitful tool in teaching L2 pragmatics.

The predominant perspective in L2 language education holds that teachers should primarily employ the target language. Various influences, including historical colonial strategies for English learning and teaching have shaped this view, associating native English speakers as the perfect standard. As a result, augmented exposure to the target language, both within and beyond the classroom, has been considered extremely crucial (Phillipson, 2014). However, in the past two decades, there have been substantial shifts in monolingual approaches (MacSwan, 2022), proposing translanguaging pedagogy, which involves integrating languages other than the primary target language into classroom instruction. This particularly involves recognizing and leveraging learners' linguistic repertoire (LR), encompassing their mother tongue and any heritage or community languages (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021). The inclusion of multiple languages in language classrooms, whether incidental or deliberate, can serve various educational purposes, such as providing clarifications, explanations, discipline, as well as fostering inclusion and social equity (Flores & Schissel, 2014). Additionally, the translanguaging approach aligns EFL learners' language knowledge with their educational purposes while acknowledging their identity (Otheguy, Garcia, & Reid, 2015). Therefore, adding translanguaging into EFL teaching programs can be auspicious.

Encouraging the fluid use of multiple languages, translanguaging has gained prominence for its ability to bridge linguistic and pragmatic gaps in education (Lewis, Jones, & Baker, 2012). Originating within bilingual education, translanguaging is now applied more broadly to support multilingual learners in navigating complex linguistic landscapes (García & Wei, 2015). By treating languages as interrelated rather than isolated systems, translanguaging fosters metalinguistic awareness, validates students' linguistic identities, and enhances their intercultural competence (García, 2009). Its potential to enhance pragmatic competence lies in its ability to merge linguistic and social knowledge. Pragmatic competence, defined as the ability to use language effectively in contextually appropriate ways, requires understanding both explicit and implicit social norms (Thomas,

1983). Translanguaging facilitates this by enabling learners to draw on their full linguistic repertoire to understand and practice complex pragmatic phenomena.

## **2. Translanguaging Defined**

Translanguaging adopts a fluid approach in L2 programs, objecting to the policies that limit the use of L1(Sánchez et al., 2017). Garcia and Kano (2014, p. 261) defined translanguaging as “a process by which students and teachers engage in complex discursive practices that include ALL the language practices of ALL students in a class in order to develop new language practices and sustain old ones ...”. In other words, it is “the process of making meaning, shaping experiences, gaining understanding and knowledge through the use of two languages” (Baker, 2011, p. 288). Garcia and Wei (2015) believed translanguaging is a practice to alternate languages for productive and receptive use to promote hybrid language uses as well as transformation of social boundaries. Garcia and Kleifgen (2020) also suggested that by utilizing translanguaging approach learners perform bilingually in varied aspects of classroom practice. Translanguaging is the ability to adopt the view that the languages of a learner’s repertoire to be an integrated system (Canagarajah, 2011). Furthermore, Garcia and Wei (2015) emphasized that translanguaging helps learners exploit their linguistic repertoire strategically to enhance the quality of communication.

## **3. Pedagogical Translanguaging and EFL Learning/Teaching**

It is not wrong to deem translanguaging as a practice that has positive influence in EFL education. Cenoz and Gorter (2021) suggest that translanguaging has shown promise in improving language and content learning skills by leveraging learners' current linguistic knowledge. By blurring language boundaries, it can also increase students' metalinguistic awareness. Translanguaging can encourage creative and critical responding in learners as they engage in a frequent process of sociocultural identity modification (Garcia & Wei, 2015). This pinpoints the fact that by enabling learners to acknowledge their diverse languages, that allows them to revere their sociocultural identity. Such space helps learners to use their language repertoire as resources (Garcia & Wei, 2015). Garcia and Wei (2015) further argued that by translanguaging, the speaker harmonizes different language practices which results in the creation of a unified linguistic repertoire to be exploited from. They

further explained that learning an L2 is not the only practice involved, but the learners alter and elaborate their repertoire of "meaning-making resources" which is unique to each individual learner.

Through applying translanguaging approach, a supportive and enjoyable environment can be established in the classroom that facilitates learning of complex items (Littlewood & Yu, 2011; Cook, 2001; Pan & Pan, 2010). It also encourages more learner participation (Barahona, 2020). Moreover, the gaps between learners' life-worlds through translanguaging (Ticheloven et al., 2019). The goal of translanguaging is to tap into the linguistic resources of multilingual speakers to improve both language and content acquisition, and encourage multilingualism in educational settings and advocate for a holistic approach to languages (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021). Harnessing the linguistic abilities of multilingual students can have a positive impact on their language proficiency and academic achievement. Languages can support and enhance each other, and existing language knowledge can be productively utilized in classroom settings.

A wide array of studies has recently focused on translanguaging and EFL from different angles. In Barahona's (2020) study, translanguaging is categorized as a core practice to enhance English teaching in a Chilean context. He found that there is an agreement on the effectiveness of translanguaging and integration of L1 as a core practice for a productive EFL program. Translanguaging could make the input more comprehensible, thus promoting understanding as it was easy to be applied by novice teachers. Besides, it could benefit the cultural and linguistic resources of every single learner. In another study, Escobar (2019) had learners work in groups of three in an activity that involved discussions of pictures depicting graffiti using their full linguistic repertoire. Translanguaging created a fluid mode of speaking for the participants that facilitated engagement and production of speaking items. In addition, they expressed positive views on the use of translanguaging in that it gave them a sense of confidence and freedom.

The pedagogical functions of translanguaging were examined by Duarte (2018) in two pre-school level and the primary education level. Data collected from video tapes and teachers' reflections upon the approach demonstrated three functions for translanguaging: symbolic, which aimed at acknowledging migrant languages; scaffolding, in which teachers scaffolded learners' learning; and epistemological, the active use of diverse

languages to enhance content knowledge as well as language knowledge. This can be applied for exploring migrant languages as instruments for learning. Translanguaging can also be applied to teaching different skills as Adamson and Coulson (2015) focused on its use on developing academic writing skill. Writing skill was also the focus of a more recent study by Machado and Gonzales (2020) but from the point of view of teachers. Moreover, the effect of pedagogical translanguaging on reading skill was noticed by Vaish and Subhan (2014).

Furthermore, teachers are on the other side of the coin in translanguaging (Wei, 2018). In this vein, teacher emotion labor in relation to translanguaging was explored in Nazari and Karimpour's (2023) work. Their study focused on the emotions the teachers experience as they enact translanguaging, since such practices, imposed tensions for them as they had to meet the institutional expectations of following the native-languaging policy. A private school in a multiethnic city of Iran was selected as the context of research since it could provide a multilingual context for the researchers. The eight teachers selected as participants were multilingual as well. The findings demonstrated that the teachers used translanguaging judiciously. For example, they switched codes for humor and alleviating the emotional aspect of both themselves and learners as well as making the learning process more memorable.

Another finding of this research endeavor hinted at the utilization of translanguaging as a face-saving act. When the teachers shared their positive experiences in using translanguaging in their classes, those teachers who had refrained from using it started to enact translanguaging to save his/her face among colleagues. It was also mentioned by the teachers that using translanguaging felt good and provided a positive emotional state for them as they could observe progress in their learners' learning and in the atmosphere of the classroom. What Nazari and Karimpour touched upon accentuated the role of teachers in the facilitative use of translanguaging which should be considered of utmost importance (Canagarajah, 2011; Garcia, 2009; Wei, 2018).

#### **4. Translanguaging and Pragmatic Competence**

Pragmatic competence refers to the skill of being able to understand and express intended meanings in real-life conversations, taking into account the specific context (Chalak, 2021). According to Taguchi and Roever (2017), this involves being able to grasp the

underlying intentions of others and communicate one's own intentions effectively. Kasper and Rose (2002) also note that there is a strong correlation between the ability to comprehend and produce suitable pragmatic language and the cannot be separated. Taguchi and Sykes (2013) explain that understanding and interpreting the intended meanings of others in a second language involves various factors such as shared knowledge, sociolinguistic understanding, interactional skills, and the context. However, Taguchi and Sykes (2013) argues that accurate conveyance of intended meaning may not always occur due to the complex nature of pragmatic comprehension and the underlying processes involved. This is because pragmatic comprehension is influenced by cognitive, social, linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic factors that shape how intended meanings are understood, reconstructed, and interpreted in conversations (Taguchi, 2009). Garcia (2004) defines pragmatic comprehension as the ability to understand the intended meaning conveyed through spoken language during real-life interactions with either native speakers or highly proficient non-native speakers of the second language.

One significant contribution comes from Prilutskaya (2021), who provides a systematic review of pedagogical translanguaging in English Language Teaching (ELT). The review examines several empirical studies on translanguaging in multilingual classrooms, highlighting its impact on students' pragmatic comprehension. He argues that translanguaging enables students to use their entire linguistic repertoires, enhancing their ability to grasp pragmatic strategies in real-world contexts. This review underscores the importance of allowing students to access and apply their full linguistic resources to foster better understanding and production of pragmatic content.

Intercultural competence pertains to how well an individual can effectively navigate and communicate in different cultural contexts. In this increasingly globalized world, intercultural competence has gained significant attention across research, education, and professional fields. Translanguaging has proven to have great potential in facilitating students' comprehension of intercultural exchanges, which is essential for fostering cross-cultural understanding and communicative competence. By encouraging students to draw on their multilingual resources, translanguaging can help to bridge the gap between languages and cultures, leading to enhanced comprehension of intercultural strategies. The practice of translanguaging helps learners navigate complex social interactions by fostering a dual awareness of their first language and second language pragmatic norms. Cenoz and

Gorter (2017) highlighted the benefits of translanguaging for language learners, especially when learning about sociocultural aspects of language. They argue that incorporating both the learner's first and second languages allows for a more nuanced understanding of communicative subtleties. This flexibility, according to the authors, enhances students' ability to navigate diverse communicative contexts effectively.

In a similar study, Bouzid and Javier (2024) found that bilingual students leverage both their language resources to understand and navigate cultural nuances. The study concludes that translanguaging provides students with the flexibility to select the most contextually appropriate linguistic resources, which can aid in achieving pragmatic accuracy. Creese and Blackledge (2015) also explored how translanguaging supports bilingual students in understanding cultural pragmatics. They highlight that in multilingual classrooms, students can enhance their pragmatic competence, cultural sensitivity and awareness.

Research has indicated that understanding oral or written pragmatics requires not only knowledge of language, but also a grasp of the situational context including information about the participants, the topic being discussed, the physical environment, body language, nonverbal cues, and shared knowledge between those involved in the interaction (Kelly, 2001; Krultaz, 2018; Shardakova, 2016). Kelly's (2001) study found that successful pragmatic comprehension goes beyond just the words and sentences used, and relies on a range of contextual clues. García, Johnson, and Seltzer (2017) emphasized that translanguaging encourages bilingual students to draw on their full linguistic toolkit, which not only aids in language acquisition but also helps students understand social roles and hierarchies that influence pragmatic behavior in different cultural contexts. In the same line, Duarte (2018) examined how translanguaging in multilingual education allows learners to express formality in a way that aligns with their cultural norms. This flexibility is essential for teaching pragmatic aspects, as these strategies are context-sensitive and culturally dependent. Duarte's research reinforces the notion that translanguaging can facilitate a better understanding of cultural nuances.

In a research endeavor, Ticheloven et al. (2019) investigated the pragmatic and educational elements of translanguaging within the educational setting. Their study revealed the positive role of translanguaging in facilitating communication exchanges in the school space. Yet, a number of challenges were also identified which can be helpful in

displaying how translanguaging could be more effectively implemented in multilingual contexts. More recently, Makoa and Moea (2025) explored how translanguaging promotes inclusivity and addresses social justice issues in language education. They found that multilingual pedagogies enable students to engage with complex social issues from multiple cultural perspectives. This inclusive approach helps students develop a broader understanding of various linguistic and cultural settings.

Research has it that the shared knowledge between speakers along with bottom-up processing, which involves the grammatical features of the communication, are important in understanding implied meanings and the overall direction of a piece of speech or writing. Garcia (2004) examined how well non-native Spanish speakers who were low or high proficiency in the language, as well as native English speakers, could recognize different types of speech acts in authentic conversations. Very recently, Yang and Shen (2025) investigated how translanguaging practices among Chinese students in international classes in UK influence learners' understanding of politeness strategies in making online requests. Their study demonstrates that students often use translanguaging to express themselves more effectively, especially serving interpersonal, expressive and textual purposes. The research underscores role of translanguaging as a scaffold, enabling students to align their responses with pragmatic norms, even in the absence of full fluency in the target language.

Collectively, these studies highlight the significant role of translanguaging in enhancing pragmatic comprehension, particularly concerning politeness strategies. By allowing students to navigate multiple languages and cultures, educators can deepen learners' understanding of how politeness is constructed and performed across diverse sociocultural contexts. Translanguaging, therefore, serves as a vital tool for teaching pragmatic competence, fostering better communication, and promoting cultural sensitivity (Heidari Tabrizi & Chalak, 2024, 2025a, 2025b; Heidari Tabrizi & Mair, 2025).

## 5. Final Remarks

In addition to promoting positive learner attitudes, improving language proficiency, and allowing for a more authentic engagement with language use, translanguaging is an effective pedagogical tool for enhancing L2 learners' understanding and application of pragmatic norms and strategies. It helps learners compare and contrast pragmatic features

across languages, deepening their awareness of cultural and social norms. allowing students to draw on their full linguistic resources, teachers can promote a more inclusive and effective learning environment. This approach enhances not only linguistic fluency but also pragmatic competence and intercultural communication skills, which are essential in today's globalized world.

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