

DEVELOPING STUDENTS' TRANSLANGUAGING COMPETENCE IN EFL CLASSROOMS

Ismailova Marifat Bakhrambek kizi

PhD, EFL teacher

*UzSWLU, English Faculty 2, department of
integrated course of the English language №2*

Abstract. *This article examines translanguaging competence as a dynamic communicative ability in EFL learners. Drawing on sociocultural and multilingual theories, it reconceptualizes competence as the strategic use of integrated linguistic resources. The study critically reviews major theoretical perspectives and argues for pedagogical transformation, demonstrating how translanguaging enhances strategic competence, learner agency, and communicative effectiveness in multilingual educational contexts.*

Keywords: *translanguaging competence, EFL learners, multilingualism, strategic competence, communication*

Introduction

The growing recognition of multilingualism as a normative condition rather than an exception has led to significant transformations in applied linguistics. Within this paradigm shift, the concept of translanguaging has emerged as a powerful framework for understanding how language users draw on their full linguistic repertoires in communication. For learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), particularly in multilingual contexts, this perspective challenges traditional assumptions about language competence and learning.

Conventional EFL pedagogy has largely been grounded in monolingual ideologies, where the target language is treated as an isolated system to be mastered independently of other linguistic resources. However, such an approach fails to reflect the realities of multilingual speakers, who naturally integrate multiple languages in their communicative practices. Translanguaging, therefore, offers a more accurate and inclusive conceptualization of language use.

Main part

The term translanguaging has evolved from its initial pedagogical usage in bilingual education to a broader theoretical construct encompassing cognitive, social, and ideological dimensions. García (2009) conceptualizes translanguaging as the process by which multilingual speakers utilize their entire linguistic repertoire to make meaning. This perspective rejects the notion of languages as separate systems and instead views them as integrated resources. Building on this foundation, Li Wei (2018) frames translanguaging as both a theory of language and a practice, emphasizing its creative and transformative potential. According to this view, translanguaging competence involves the ability to navigate and construct meaning within what he terms a “translanguaging space,” where linguistic boundaries are fluid and negotiable. Translanguaging competence can thus be understood as a multidimensional construct that includes not only linguistic knowledge but also cognitive flexibility, interactional skills, and sociocultural awareness. It reflects the capacity of learners to strategically mobilize their linguistic resources in response to communicative demands.

The conceptualization of translanguaging competence is supported by a range of theoretical perspectives, each contributing to a more nuanced understanding of multilingual communication. From a sociocultural standpoint, García (2009) emphasizes the role of language in mediating thought and interaction. Translanguaging, in this context, is a tool for learning that allows students to access prior knowledge and engage more deeply with content. This aligns with Vygotskian principles, where learning is viewed as a socially mediated process. Li Wei's (2018) notion of translanguaging space extends this perspective by highlighting the dynamic and creative aspects of language use. He argues that multilingual speakers actively construct meaning by integrating linguistic and semiotic resources, thereby reshaping their communicative environment. This perspective foregrounds learner agency and identity. Cummins (2000), through his interdependence hypothesis, provides a cognitive explanation for translanguaging practices. He posits that linguistic skills are transferable across languages, suggesting that the use of the first language can facilitate second language development. This challenges deficit-oriented views that associate L1 use with interference. In contrast, Canagarajah (2011) adopts an interactional perspective, focusing on how speakers negotiate meaning in multilingual contexts. He introduces the concept of code-meshing, which reflects the blending of languages within discourse. From this viewpoint, competence is not static but emerges through interaction.

Developing Translanguaging Competence in EFL Contexts

The reconceptualization of language as a dynamic and integrated system necessitates a fundamental rethinking of pedagogical practices in EFL classrooms. Translanguaging competence, understood as the strategic and flexible deployment of multilingual resources, cannot be developed within traditional monolingual instructional paradigms. Instead, it requires a shift toward pedagogies that recognize learners' full linguistic repertoires as central to meaning-making, interaction, and learning.

A key implication emerging from translanguaging theory is the need to move beyond the entrenched monolingual bias that has historically dominated EFL instruction. Conventional approaches often position the target language as the sole legitimate medium of communication, implicitly discouraging the use of learners' first language(s). However, such practices contradict the sociocultural understanding of learning as mediated through prior knowledge and linguistic resources. As García (2009) argues, prohibiting the use of the first language limits learners' cognitive engagement and reduces opportunities for deeper comprehension. From this perspective, translanguaging pedagogy does not simply permit multiple languages; it actively mobilizes them as essential tools for learning.

Central to this pedagogical shift is the creation of what Li Wei (2018) describes as translanguaging spaces—environments in which learners can integrate linguistic resources freely and purposefully. These spaces foster creativity, critical thinking, and identity negotiation, enabling learners to engage in authentic communicative practices. Importantly, such environments require careful scaffolding by the teacher, ensuring that translanguaging practices contribute meaningfully to language development.

The development of translanguaging competence is also closely linked to the reconceptualization of strategic competence. Rather than viewing strategies as compensatory mechanisms, translanguaging pedagogy frames them as resource-driven practices. Learners are encouraged to draw on their full linguistic repertoires to enhance

communication, rather than to compensate for perceived deficiencies. This shift has profound implications for task design, as it necessitates the creation of activities that naturally elicit translanguaging practices. Problem-solving tasks are particularly effective in this regard, as they require negotiation of meaning, collaboration, and strategic use of linguistic resources. In such contexts, translanguaging becomes an integral part of communication, enabling learners to co-construct knowledge and achieve shared goals. This aligns closely with the development of strategic competence, which is central to communicative effectiveness.

The role of the teacher is equally critical in facilitating translanguaging competence. Rather than enforcing strict language boundaries, teachers must adopt a more flexible and responsive approach, recognizing and valuing learners' linguistic resources. This involves not only allowing translanguaging but also modeling it strategically, demonstrating how multiple languages can be used to construct meaning and support learning.

At the same time, the implementation of translanguaging pedagogy must take into account contextual constraints, particularly in settings where monolingual norms and standardized assessments remain dominant. In such contexts, a balanced approach is required, one that integrates translanguaging practices while maintaining a focus on target language development. Assessment practices must also evolve to reflect the complexity of translanguaging competence. Traditional assessments, which prioritize accuracy in a single language, fail to capture learners' ability to use multilingual resources strategically. Alternative approaches, such as performance-based assessments and discourse analysis, offer more comprehensive insights into learners' communicative abilities.

Discussion

The analysis presented in this article highlights the transformative potential of translanguaging competence in redefining language learning and teaching. By challenging monolingual norms and embracing multilingual realities, translanguaging offers a more inclusive and accurate framework for understanding communication. For EFL learners, this shift is particularly significant, as it empowers them to utilize their full linguistic repertoires and develop more flexible and adaptive communicative skills. At the same time, it raises important questions about pedagogy, assessment, and policy, underscoring the need for continued research and innovation in the field.

Conclusion

This article has examined translanguaging competence as a multidimensional construct that integrates linguistic, cognitive, and social dimensions. Through a critical review of theoretical perspectives, it has demonstrated that translanguaging extends traditional models of communicative competence, particularly in relation to strategic competence. The findings suggest that fostering translanguaging competence requires a fundamental shift in pedagogical practices, moving toward more inclusive and flexible approaches that recognize the value of multilingualism. For EFL learners, this competence is essential for navigating the complexities of real-world communication. Future research should focus on empirical investigations into the development and assessment of translanguaging competence, particularly in specific educational contexts.

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