

Translanguaging as a tool to preserve L1 languages and promote multilingualism

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Abstract

Linguists have become increasingly more aware and active in the field of Language Revitalisation since Michael Krauss' call to action in 1992. In his article 'The World's Languages in Crisis' Krauss estimated a ninety percent extinction rate for the world's languages by the year 2100. Changing global and regional economies, as well as increased language contact, have created both external and internal pressures for many minority and indigenous populations to shift to dominant languages (Bradley, 2010). Bradley (2010) argues that the modern situation of globalisation does not lend itself to supporting monolingual situations, but multilingualism doesn't have to mean indigenous languages are lost. He believes instead that indigenous languages can still be maintained alongside of additional languages in a bilingual or multilingual model, where the indigenous language can still be used in the ways the people choose to use it. With Bradley's thesis in mind, this paper will explore a 'translanguaging' case study trialled at the International School of the Hague from 2011. This multilingual teaching approach will be examined through both theoretical and practical perspectives, demonstrating how domains of L1 language use (minority, indigenous or additional) can be strengthened and preserved within the context of English language instruction.

Key words: Multilingualism, Domains of usage, Preserving minority and indigenous languages, translanguaging, language status, cross-lingual transfer, L1 maintenance

Introduction

Multilingualism is a complex concept that can be defined in a multitude of ways, through a variety of real world contexts. The two definitions below provide a basic idea for what multilingualism can mean, informing later discussions about how it could be pursued as a potential solution for language loss.

The Oxford English dictionary defines multilingualism as 'the ability to speak many languages or the use of many languages.' For the purposes of this paper, bilingualism can be subsumed under this broader category as well (Todd, 2008).

Garcia (2009) has a more dynamic definition of bilingualism and multilingualism to offer:

Much like the banyan tree so common in Southeast Asia, bilingualism, and especially multilingualism, needs to be recognized for its interconnectivity and multiplicity, grounded not only vertically, but also horizontally. (p. 143)



PICTURE 1. Banyan Tree (Retrieved from https://www.tes.com/lessons/_9CVDbOO-pgpyw/banyan-tree-art-lesson)

It is this definition that will feature when examining the multilingual teaching practice of translanguaging.

In the remainder of this paper, I will draw together a variety of theoretical research which supports the cognitive and identity-based advantages of promoting multilingualism, and translanguaging as a specific multilingual strategy. From this theoretical context, I will move into a specific school-based case study where translanguaging is used as a vital, language learning tool, raising student academic achievement and motivation to retain their L1 languages. The conclusion of this article aims to prove that translanguaging can be an easy-to-implement learning tool which can accelerate language learning and help to preserve minority, indigenous or additional languages within educational contexts that promote majority languages.

The Benefits of Multilingualism and L1 Maintenance

The benefits of being bilingual or multilingual are numerous and provide strong evidence for people to maintain their L1 languages, and indeed add additional languages to their repertoire. In multilingual people “blood flow (a marker for neuronal activity) is greater in the brain stem.” (Marian and Shook, 2012, p. 6). This can be interpreted to mean that heightened neuronal activity is occurring within a multilingual person’s brain, more so than a monolingual’s brain. Multilinguals build up more connections between concepts and words, in different languages. These complex neural networks allow multilinguals to access and retrieve more information, simultaneously in different languages, than that of a monolingual person, who builds conceptual links in only one language:

Research has overwhelmingly shown that when a bilingual person uses one language, the other is active at the same time. When a person hears a word, he or she doesn’t hear the entire word all at once: the sounds arrive in sequential order. Long before the word is finished, the brain’s language system begins to guess what that word might be by activating lots of words that match the signal. If you hear “can,” you will likely activate words like “candy” and “candle” as well, at least during the earlier stages of word recognition. For bilingual people, this activation is not limited to a single language; auditory input activates corresponding words regardless of the language to which they belong. (Marian and Shook, 2012, para. 2)

In addition, multilingual people have a heightened ability to monitor their environment (Batthacharjee, 2012), as they switch between languages depending on the setting or speaker they are addressing. The use of multiple languages is therefore a kind of exercise for the brain, as research shows multilingual people are “...more resistant [...] to the onset of dementia and signs pointing to

Alzheimer's disease: the higher the degree of bilingualism; the later the age of onset." (Batthacharjee, 2012, para. 1).

Multilingualism also brings greater employment opportunities, as many jobs in the modern economy require proficiency in multiple languages, to be able to meet the needs of diverse people in diverse settings. This is especially true as the world economy becomes more interconnected and people move freely and flexibly around the globe in pursuit of economic well-being.

Preserving one's home language (L1) beneath a broader umbrella of additional languages (L2, L3, etc.) holds many educational advantages as well. In light of language acquisition, the more developed a person's L1 is, the easier it becomes for them to develop additional languages alongside it. This principle is detailed in Cummins' Interdependence Hypothesis (1979), under which knowledge, concepts and skills transfer between L1 and L2 languages. Therefore, if a person has academic level content knowledge in their home language, this does not need to be relearned in their new language. A person with a well-developed L1 needs only the new word label in their L2. The new word label can then be connected to the concept they already know in their L1 and comprehension is achieved with minimal effort. For students who are able to learn through their L1 in mainstream classrooms, learning can take place more rapidly and comfortably, as they are able to connect new knowledge to familiar words and ideas. Students are also better able to express themselves in the language they know best, making the learning a more interactive process (Lameta-Tufuga, 1994).

Mwaniki (2014) also argues L1 language learning should be given priority in classrooms as: "The mother tongue is the basis upon which all other learning is anchored...it is a sound educational principle to proceed from the familiar to the new" (p. 1). The collective prior knowledge of the child is therefore wrapped up in their mother tongue or tongues. At the core of most teaching training programmes, is the central idea that lessons should begin with what students know, and then move them into the new learning they need. The mother tongue is inextricable a part of this learning process.

Furthermore, maintaining one's home language (L1), alongside additional languages, has significant implications when the topic of identity is raised. Language and culture are interconnected; therefore, keeping up with one's home language(s) allows for greater participation in the home culture and builds stronger ties between different family generations. Mwaniki again reinforces this close link between mother tongue languages and culture:

For children, language provides the power to start, in a more efficient and differentiated way, a dialogue with their world, and also with the people in their world. Through mother tongue, a child gains a whole cultural heritage, which will to a large extent determine his further thinking, feelings, desires and attitudes. (2014, p. 7)

Additionally, in the modern world, identity formation is not as straightforward as it used to be, as people travel and live between many different settings, from the home, to the community, to the region, to the larger world. These distinct environments may require them to navigate both multiple identities and languages flexibly and fluidly:

Each of us is a complex being with multiple roles that we attempt to balance and live out daily. We all move in and out of belonging to many different groups, and as such we each have a number of different and evolving identities. Our identities are often defined according to who we are by birth and by what we do, know and value. Some aspects of our identity will be strong and others weak and this may change over time. Some aspects we choose and other are placed upon us by our family, society or employment. Some aspects fit comfortably and others seem ill-fitting and at times create an inner conflict for us as we seek to maintain harmony between the various elements of our identity (Custance, 2012, p.1)

Under this additive worldview, it is advantageous for people to have the tools and balanced mind-set to maintain all their identities. This balance could be critical in helping people into future life successes and opportunities. Not at the expense of their community and family ties, however, which are also necessary for a well-developed confidence and healthy cultural heritage.

In the literature on Mother Tongue Education (MTE), development of one's home languages (L1), or mother tongues, can be also classified as a human right (Ife, 2001). Maintaining their mother tongues can help children to develop their potential more fully, as they would be given the chance to learn through their strongest language. This could perhaps lead to wider employment opportunities in people's mother tongues as well.

Unfortunately, the numerous advantages that come with being multilingual are not widely known outside of academic circles. Even within school-based contexts, misinformation and misunderstandings on second language acquisition run rampant. The research on the topic needs to be distributed more broadly if it is ever to have a greater impact on people's lives. In today's world, with its variety of complex settings, it should be possible for people to balance multiple identities which allow them to participate in the larger world, as well as within their own communities and family. What kinds of support can we give people to help them realise that this is indeed an attainable goal?

In the next subsections, I will explain how translanguaging, as a learning tool, promotes multilingualism and can be considered a form of multilingualism. In addition, L1 preservation, beneath the umbrella of multilingualism, will be examined in light of pre-colonial world. The power of mother tongue education will also be touched upon as an important means of unlocking people's potential and enhancing their well-being. Finally, theoretical perspectives that support the use of translanguaging will be presented to demonstrate how this multilingual strategy can enhance academic learning and promote positive student identity formation.

Translanguaging as a Form of Multilingualism

Mother Tongue Education is yet another way to develop minority and indigenous languages and promote multilingualism. However, mobilizing political will and community action to establish mother tongue or bilingual schools can be a challenging and long-term process. Creating the right circumstances to establish these schools, within either a monolingual, nation-state or a former colonized country, requires committed individuals with powerful connections or larger, mobilised grassroots groups who are willing to fight for long-term change. As channels of change within political systems can move slowly, and the status of many endangered languages remain critical, something more immediate and action-oriented should be done to give a stronger status and more opportunities for minority and indigenous languages, indeed all languages, to thrive.

Translanguaging may be one such option. It is defined as flexible language use that occurs naturally among populations of bilingual people. Translanguaging can open up any teaching space to multiple languages, rather than just one. Within any educational system, it has both practical and political implications for raising the status and usage of one's mother tongue against the backdrop of additional languages. It also has the added benefit of accelerating the learning of these additional languages. Translanguaging in mainstream classrooms could be a solution for how to maintain endangered and minority languages in countries where bilingual or mother tongue immersion schooling does not yet have governmental or community-based support. Below, translanguaging will be viewed through practical examples, that encourage both multilingualism and L1 usage at school and subsequently, home domains.

World Context (prior to colonization) and Mother Tongue Education

According to García (2009), “throughout the world, bilingual children are the norm” (p. 140). Though the goal of many nations, through deliberate language planning, is to create competent monolinguals; this is not the way the majority of children start out. Most have begun life learning a different language, not the dominant language of their country, in their home. In the powerful words of Canadian, second-language specialist Mary Ashworth, delivered at a Canadian ESL conference in (1978):

Many students come to school either already bilingual in their home language and English or in the process of becoming bilingual. However, 12 years later, a large proportion of these students leave school essentially monolingual in English. The whole point of education is to make students *more* than they were when they entered school. But when the messages bilingual children receive in school cause them to replace their L1 with English, education has made them *less* than they were. The very essence of the term *education* -- the nurturing of students’ abilities and talents—was negated by the education they received in Canadian schools. (as cited by Cummins, 2011)

Why should the aim of school be to make students ‘less than who they were’, by subtracting the languages and connected identities they came into the school with? This provocative statement lends credence to translanguaging: a multilingual approach that can be trialled in any school. Additionally, literature that supports mother tongue education suggests that

...multiculturalism (and therefore multilingualism) is a defining feature in the former colonised world. In this part of the world, multiculturalism is a way of life, not an unintended social and cultural consequence of immigration. (Mwaniki, 2014, p. 6)

Under this lens, a return to a plurality of cultural and linguistic identities would be a return to a former way of life: a healing prospect for many minority and indigenous groups. World languages are, of course, necessary for widespread communication; however, this does not mean personal and cultural identities must be sacrificed as a result. Co-existence should be possible between dominant and minority groups, between personal and international identities. Ethically, efforts should be made to allow people to balance different sides of themselves, and achieve their full potential. Translanguaging in schools offers a possible way forward under this vision of balanced identities.

The Theoretical Context behind Translanguaging

It was Cen Williams (1994) who first coined the term translanguaging, through his work in bilingual schools in Wales. This approach to language learning was further publicised and promoted through the work of Colin Baker (2003) and Ofelia García (2009). García (2009), who has further researched translanguaging practices in New York’s English-Spanish bilingual schools, defines it as

...the act performed by bilinguals of accessing different linguistic features or various modes of what are described as autonomous languages, in order to maximize communicative potential. Translanguaging is centred...’on the practices of bilinguals that are readily observable in order to make sense of their multilingual worlds. (p. 140)

Translanguaging allows children to draw on all the languages they know to access new languages or communicate a message using more than one language. Contrary to widespread belief, switching between languages, for a communicative purpose shows an understanding for how languages work and reveals a developing competency in different languages. Under researchers like García (2009), this mixing, formerly called ‘codeswitching’ is not a sign of language confusion in children, but rather signals a growing awareness for how they use multiple linguistic systems to create purposeful meaning. This means that when children are translanguaging, they may substitute a word from their L1 in place of the word they do not know in their L2. Therefore, a bilingual English-Dutch child might say: My teacher gave me a hard *oefening* (exercise) to do in class today. This process is referred to as gap-filling (Genesee, Nicoladis, & Paradis, 1995). Children may also use a specific word from one language in an utterance constructed from another language because that specific word-concept does not exist in the language they are trying to use, such as: It was *gezellig* (cosy) out on the terrace today.

This positive view on the mixing of languages for communication, seen as both a natural and beneficial learning process, marks a huge shift from previous educational thinking. In the past decades, bilingual educators were convinced that languages needed to be taught separately from one another to avoid cross contamination. They were worried that languages mixing into each other would result in children developing one language composed of two systems mixed incoherently. This separatist approach was considered common sense by a generation of educators and therefore not researched in any great detail to prove its accuracy (Jacobson & Faltis, 1990). According to Cummins (2005) this separatist mind-set was responsible for the dominance of monolingual instruction and strategies employed in Canadian and American schools from the 1960’s into present day, where it lingers still. There are a number of damaging assumptions built into this bilingual teaching approach. They are as follows:

1. Instruction should be exclusively in the target language (TL) without recourse to the students L1.
2. Translation between L1 and L2 has no place in the teaching of language or literacy. Encouragement of translation in L2 teaching is viewed as a reversion, linking back to the discredited grammar-translation method...or concurrent translation method.
3. Within L2 immersion, and bilingual/dual language programmes, the two languages should be rigidly separate: constituting two solitudes (Cummins, 2005) or *parallel monolingualism* (Heller, 1999).

All of these assumptions run contrary to Cummins’ Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis (1979), which has shown through a multitude of corroborating studies (2017) that academic concepts and linguistic skills, like reading, transfer from a student’s L1 to additional languages they are learning. Therefore, Cummins advocates for language learning classrooms, where L1-L2 similarities and differences can be explored side-by-side to make cross-lingual transfer more effective for L2 acquisition. Under this viewpoint, learning to understand how languages work, by exploring the differences between their linguistic systems, is not considered to be a negative process. Rather, differences between languages are reframed as ‘teachable moments’, capable of enhancing students’ overall knowledge of multiple linguistic systems. When students learn additional languages, similarities between the languages can of course be utilised as a learning scaffold or tool to accelerate L2 learning. When L1 and L2 languages work differently from one another, Cummins argues that students need to be made aware of these differences. Raising this explicit awareness in students, for how their L1 relates to their L2, could potentially increase their linguistic accuracy in applying rules from contrasting linguistic systems. Cummins argues that all learned concepts and linguistic knowledge are processed through a Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) in the brain, which feeds directly into all the languages we use .

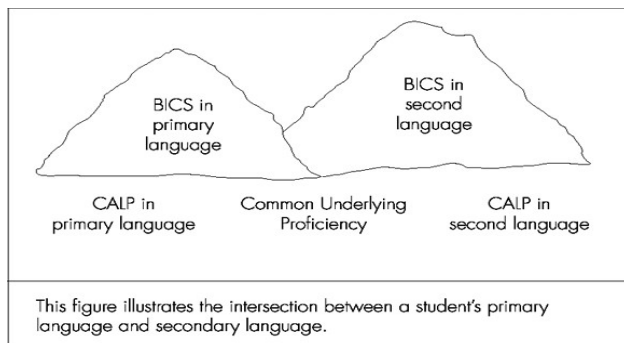


FIGURE 1. The Interdependence Hypothesis (Source: Cummins, J., 1979)

In recent years, a number of studies have been conducted on ‘translanguaging’ or ‘code-mixing’ used by children simultaneously acquiring multiple languages before the age of three. In particular, one study which focused on code-mixing in native Inuktitut and English children revealed that its regular use did not lead to language confusion or the mixing of two grammatical systems into one.

Child bilingual code-mixing is grammatically constrained because children usually mix the two languages at points in an utterance where the grammar of both languages is concordant; they seldom mix at points where the grammar is not concordant. (Allen, Genesee, Fish, & Crago, 2002 as referenced by Genesee and Nicoladis, 2008)

This study, one among many in the language acquisition field, documented the level of accuracy young bilingual children displayed when acquiring their first languages simultaneously (Allen et. al., 2002). They discovered that when children applied a grammatical rule to both of their languages, it was because the rule worked similarly or ‘concordantly’ in each system. Children were therefore able to access grammatical constraints from each of their linguistic systems and apply them with a high degree of success to the correct language system.

In addition, Meisel (1994) and Köppe (2014) argue that when grammatical errors are made by ‘simultaneous bilingual’ children, they indicate where they are developmentally in the acquisition of their language systems. Children generally apply the grammatical constraints they are learning to the languages they belong to, however, it takes time for them to grow into the complete grammatical knowledge an adult language user has. Consequently, there does not appear to be a stage in a child’s bilingual development when grammatical constraints do not operate (Meisel, 1994) and (Köppe, 2014).

To clarify, there does not seem to be any point in a young child’s simultaneous L1 and L2 development where words are produced without grammatical constraints. Children are naturally tuned into grammatical structures from the start and very naturally separate out which rules apply to which languages without much intervention. When adding additional languages to the language(s) the child already knows, he or she will transfer and apply their previous linguistic knowledge to these new languages. This transfer will also support L2 or L3 acquisition, if the L1 transfer is concordant.

Under this theoretical context, translanguaging, or flexible language use, allows students to tap into their L1 and knowledge of additional languages. Students can then use what they already know as a springboard into learning new languages. Within common language families, there can be a multitude of connections including word cognates, grammatical functions and even phonetic sounds. Allowing children to work with multiple languages side-by-side in a school setting enables them to discover these connections, thereby retaining new linguistic knowledge more easily. Likewise, as mentioned previously, differences between languages can also be explored to enhance knowledge and application of contrasting linguistic systems.

To illustrate this principle practically, I draw on my practical experience as an English support teacher. In 2011, I worked with a Year 5 student who came to the International School of the Hague as a complete English beginner. Though new to English he was already fluent in French (from his parents) and in Dutch (from his previous schooling). In the first months of my English beginner lessons, he seemed frustrated though I was sure he had not yet encountered the English words I was using. These vocabulary sets were around themes like feelings, basic verbs, adjectives, and body part names. No matter how much I tried to make his lessons more challenging in vocabulary level, his frustration with the material grew. I finally decided to reassess his passive English understanding through an academic-level vocabulary test. He passed the multiple-choice test of twenty questions with only two errors. Completely surprised, I asked him how he was able to know what descriptive words, like ‘opaque’ and ‘autonomous’ meant, as he had only been studying English for the past two months. He read out the list of words on the test, pointing at each one along the way and saying to me: “From French, From Dutch, French, French, Dutch, Dutch.” The languages he brought with him were tools that allowed him to unlock new English vocabulary because of their similarity to words he already knew. From that moment, I began working with him in books I usually gave second and third year students of English. This boy was very bright and had, on his own initiative, naturally tapped into his multilingual resources. Within two years of international school, and additional EAL support, he reached grade-level standard in his English speaking and literacy skills.

The majority of children I teach English to, however, often need more reminders to make these L1 links and use their prior languages to acquire English. When they do find these connections between their languages, they become very enthusiastic about the learning process, as it ‘affirms their identity’ (Cummins, 2011) and helps them to retain new word meanings more easily. I also encourage children to use this strategy when taking standardised reading and writing tests in English, as they do come across words they do not recognise. I ask them to think about whether or not an unknown word resembles a word in their mother tongue and if that might help them find a meaning. Often it does.

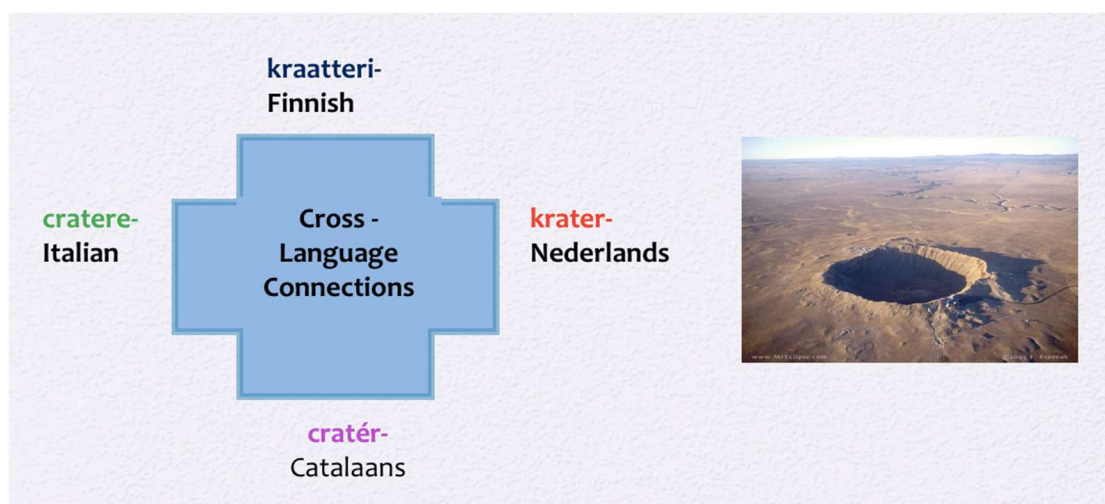


FIGURE 2. Cross-Language Connections (International School of the Hague 2013)

Becoming more aware of the differences between linguistic systems is also useful for students to learn. These differences can lead to mistakes being made in a L2 language they are acquiring. For sequential bilinguals, who learn one language from birth, and then another later on in childhood, L2 errors often emerge as they apply their L1 linguistic system to the L2 language ‘non-concordantly’, where a difference occurs. Otto (2010) summarises this general conclusion from the field:

Some [researchers] have documented what they call language interference, when children appear to confuse knowledge of one of the aspects of L1 language with that of L2 language. For example, a child might use the vocabulary or syntactic structure of one language when attempting to communicate in the other language. (para. 4)

To illustrate more concretely, French and Spanish students need to be reminded that adjectives are placed before the nouns in English (e.g. the red car), as opposed to their L1 where the adjectives follows the nouns (e.g. the car red). Many Asian languages do not have verb tenses. This means tenses in English, from basic to more complex, must be taught explicitly for these children to become accurate English speakers. Likewise, in Russian, indirect and direct articles do not exist and thus native Russian speakers must be frequently reminded how and when to use this English linguistic feature. Under this perspective, as an English teacher in an international school, I must continue to develop my awareness of how syntactic systems in other languages work, drawing also on my students' L1 knowledge and explanations for how their languages work. Consequently, I can better assist my multilingual children through the differences in linguistic systems, developing their total meta-linguistic knowledge of languages to higher levels. In summary, exploring languages side-by-side in the classroom, allows these similarities and differences in systems to be revealed, making students more effective and knowledgeable users in their many languages.

Translanguaging and Identity Formation

Translanguaging is also supportive of student identities. It allows all languages through the classroom doors, making the whole child feel welcome (Cummins, 2001). Translanguaging gives greater status to children's mother tongue or L1, as it is utilised as a learning tool in classroom. This enables children to create their own voice, comprised of many languages. This multilingual practice is referred to as heteroglossia (Bailey, 2007). Heteroglossia particularly addresses the inequalities and invisible power structures that marginalise and suppress minority and indigenous groups (García, 2009). When a space for all languages is opened up for learning, the status of those languages equalise. For students, this step is crucial for their confidence, as their identity undergoes a positive shift: from being a struggling L2 learner to an emerging bilingual or multilingual child with many linguistic resources to draw from (Cummins, 2011). It has since been discovered that acknowledging student identity, by recognising their culture and language, is key in keeping students engaged and invested in their schooling... This factor can affect their school achievement more than language level (Cummins, 2011)

People can have very complex identities, with very different expectations attached to each one. They may not all be visible to the eye, though they can have a large impact on people's values, attitudes and behaviour (Teaching ESL students in mainstream classes, 2013).

Identity in the modern world can be complex and formed through a multitude of diverse cultural and personal experiences. As an educator, it is my priority to ensure every child feels welcome and comfortable enough to show who they really are. Only then may their true talents and abilities surface, when they feel good enough about themselves to reveal them.

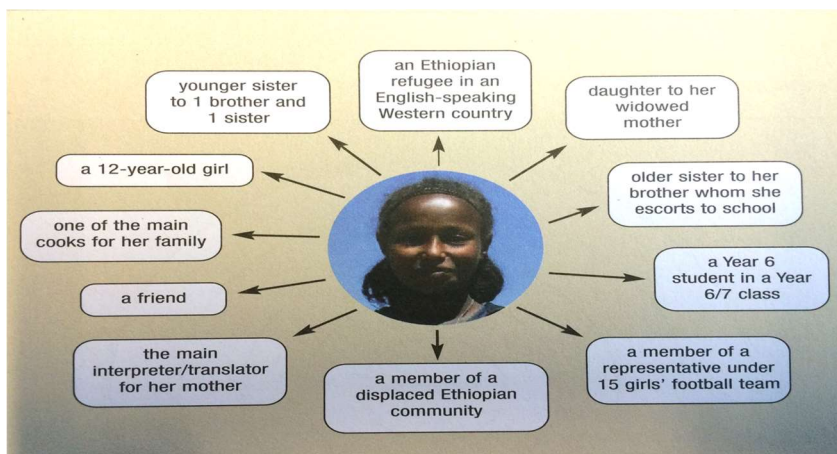


FIGURE 3. Teaching ESL students in mainstream classes (Teacher Course, 2013)

The International School of the Hague: A translanguaging case study promoting multilingualism

According to García, Skutnabb-Kanga, & Torres-Guzman (2006):

Translanguaging takes place in multilingual schools that exert educational effort, which takes into account, and builds further on, the diversity of languages and literacy practices the children...bring to school. This means going beyond acceptance and tolerance of children's languages, to 'cultivation' of languages through their use for teaching and learning. (p. 103)

Bringing in all student languages to enhance student learning is the same vision the International School of the Hague aims to bring into reality.

What is translanguaging?

Translanguaging allows children to connect their previous life experience to new learning.

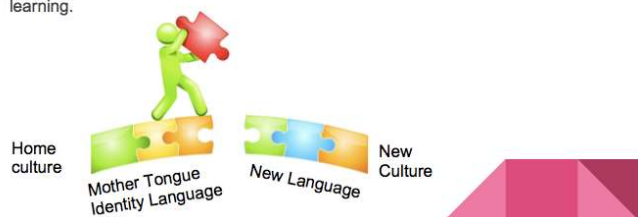


FIGURE 4. Translanguaging (International School of the Hague, 2016)

The Educational Context and the Influence of the ECIS MT/EAL Conference

The International School of the Hague (ISH Primary) was founded in 2003 under the *Stichting* (=‘Foundation’) *Het Rijnlands Lyceum*. Since its inception, it has grown into a four-stream school that hosts over sixty different nationalities and language backgrounds. Though the school's core instructional language is English, Dutch and Mother Tongue instruction are prominent in its learning environments as well.

The English ‘as an additional language’ (EAL) department within our school was founded by an educational consultant with expertise in assessing second language learners. She established our

English support department in-line with the current research around second language learning and brain development. We continue to keep up with this field by regularly attending the European Council of International Schools: EAL and Mother Tongue Conferences. This specialised conference draws the leading experts in second language acquisition together to present their findings every three years. Our role as educators is to then try to translate their research into best practice for our students.

Currently, we provide structured English language support, on top of the curriculum mainstream teachers deliver. We provide this support for all of our students who speak a language other than English at home. Second language learners represent eighty percent of our student population, and of this percentage our department gives extra support to approximately half. Our support programme offers a combination of ‘pull out’ and in-class lessons for students who are building a beginning fluency in English, all the way up to students who are developing speaking, reading and writing to academic levels. Since becoming academically proficient in any language can take between four to nine years (Cummins, 1979), children are allowed access to our support services for as long as they need to reach grade-level performance.

Our Mother Tongue department, whom we liaise with, provides a traditional after school programme for all language groups we can find a native teacher or tutor for. Under this programme, mother tongue lessons are focused on expanding students’ academic language, as well as developing their reading and writing skills. When students reach higher-levels of mother tongue literacy, they follow an additional spelling and reading programme. The aim of our school’s after school programme is language sustainability and lessons are held on a weekly basis. Currently, we run the following language groups for Upper and Lower School children: Arabic, French, Spanish, Dutch, Portuguese, German, Hungarian and Slovakian.

The Mother Tongue department is also responsible for supervising the in-class mother tongue session, where children complete mainstream curriculum projects, over a period of weeks, in their mother tongues. Although, instruction is provided in English, google translate and secondary students are brought in to support the diverse language needs of each class. This unique mother tongue slot happens every Tuesday at the end of the school day and lasts for approximately forty-five minutes.

Getting the Message out: L1 maintenance

It is our mission as a language support team to spread current theories on language acquisition and best practice, such as translanguaging, to our student, parent and teacher populations, as well as the wider communities we come into contact with. The more we spread this message, the more people we are able to encourage towards L1 maintenance. L1 preservation matters, for both better learning and positive identity formation. Here are some of the ways we carry this message out to others:

- Hold annual EAL/Mother Tongue evenings to present current language practice and theories to parents;
- Hold regular trainings with teaching staff about the philosophy and practicalities of developing our student’s mother tongue at school;
- Include articles about how to practically develop the mother tongue and support children with their homework in the school newsletter ;
- Discuss the importance of maintaining the mother tongue in parent teacher conferences and in EAL reports;
- Celebrate International Mother Language Day 21st February through assemblies and various classroom activities;

- Create interactive presentations with student-created videos that bring the research around mother tongue development in a child-friendly manner (so students also understand why maintaining their L1 is important).

Many parents come to us each year, having received the wrong message about their L1 languages from other national and international schools, and indeed even schools down the street. When they first arrive at our school, many children are sadly already on the path to losing their home languages, or indeed have lost them already. Still, we try our best to stimulate parents to recover what L1 language use they can and give them all the research that justifies future investment in their L1 languages. This is knowledge they can hopefully take with them to new schools and countries in the future. In this way, through the parents, we aim to positively influence L1 usage in the home.

Translanguaging and L1 Usage in the School

Translanguaging is frequently used in EAL lessons to promote cross-lingual transfer and develop metalinguistic knowledge in students. Some classroom teachers also use it as a learning tool, to support students at every language stage. What we tend to observe is that once children know they are allowed to use other languages in their class lessons, they naturally begin to use them when they need to. For example, two French students may find each other in a Maths class, when they are unsure about a math concept. A quick discussion in French may help them to resolve their questions before they move on to their exercises.

Additionally, completing work in the L1 is an option frequently given to English beginner students, so they may complete classroom tasks that are not yet accessible to them in English and, therefore, not fall behind on the academic concepts others are learning.

Translanguaging Strategies

Translanguaging and Vocabulary

(Below are several video transcripts that model how translanguaging can be practiced in small group, EAL lessons.)

VIDEO CLIP 1

EAL Audio Transcript, Spanish and English

This Year 5 student explains how connecting new English vocabulary to his Spanish mother tongue helps him to remember new academic words. Building up his vocabulary will help this student to develop greater spoken and written fluency in classroom subjects like science, history, geography and art. In EAL lessons, explicit vocabulary instruction is a regular part of introducing new curriculum topics to children who are still developing their English. When they make the link between a new English word and a familiar mother tongue word or concept, it helps them to retain and retrieve word meanings more easily. Pictures that illustrate word meanings also help children to overcome the English language barrier and demystify what new words mean.



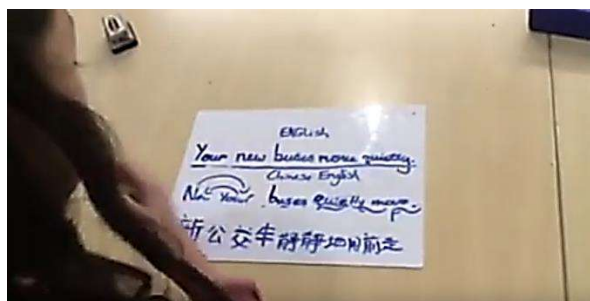
Boy: This is really easy because ‘structures’ in English is the ‘structures’ and ‘structures’ in Spanish i...is *estructuras* so that he...helps me to remember the word ‘structures’ and what it means.

Translanguaging and Grammar

VIDEO CLIP 2

EAL Audio Transcript, Chinese and English

This language activity involved constructing a simple English sentence from coloured word strips broken into nouns, verbs, adjectives etc. As a group, we examined the English word order of a basic English sentence (Subject-Verb-Object). We then compared this English word order to the Chinese word order, using the same sentence. This is a Year 6 girl explaining how the word order of Chinese and English differ drastically from one another and why understanding these differences are important for her English writing.



Girl: My English sentence is: ‘Your new buses move quietly’.

And my Chinese sentence is: [reads aloud in Chinese].

Then if you translate it straight away from Chinese to English, it’s going to be [*in the Chinese word order*]: ‘New your buses quietly move.’

You changed the ‘your move’ [*in the English word order*] to the ‘new your’ buses [*in the Chinese word order*]. And you also change move quietly [*English*] into quietly move [*Chinese*].

EAL Teacher: So when you are doing some English writing, how might this help you?

Girl: Well, let’s say I’ve got a really good sentence in Chinese, well then, I have to...think in like what the rules of English is...so I can’t translate it straight away, otherwise it will sound totally incorrect [laughs], so I have to think of the rules and write it down and...yeah....

Mother Tongue process: English Process

VIDEO CLIP 3

EAL Audio Transcript, Chinese and English

This is a Year 2 boy who first sings a song in Chinese and is then asked to explain the song's meaning in English. First, he sings in Chinese for about 30 seconds. Then his EAL teacher asks him to explain the message of the song in English.

EAL Teacher: Can you tell me what the song is about?

Boy: A flower.

EAL Teacher: Tell me a little bit more.

Boy: Dat (That) flower is wed (red) and is beautiful an (and) somebody wan (wants) to take it.

EAL Teacher: Oh? And does he take it?

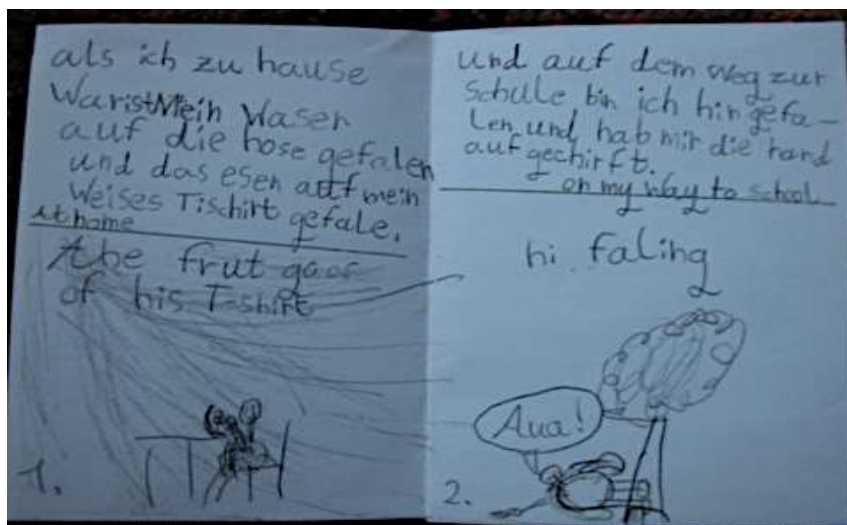
Boy: [*nods silently*] And gave somebody she frens (friends).

EAL Teacher: [*teacher models the correct form back to him*] He gave the flower to his friends.

That's a beautiful song, thank you.

Classwork in Mother Tongue

This piece of writing comes from a Year 3 boy, whose English was still at a very basic stage. Something upsetting had happened to him and the teacher allowed him to recount his problem in both German and English.



The pictures make his message clear and the inclusion of his L1 (German) enables the boy to express his worries more easily and show his class teacher a more realistic measure of his academic writing abilities.

What Primary-aged children say about how mother tongue use impacts on their learning

A group of Upper and Lower School children, between the ages of 4 and 11, were asked the following questions (2014) to see how L1 usage impacted their daily learning:

1. How does it feel to speak your mother tongue at school?
2. How does using your mother tongue help you learn?

Here is a sample of their responses:

VIDEO CLIP 4

(5-6 year olds)

1. (Swahili) **Girl:** Happy.
EAL Teacher: Why does it make you feel happy when you speak it [*Mother Tongue*] at school?
 (Swahili) **Girl:** Because...I speak with my Dad and it's my language.
2. (Dutch) **Boy:** Nice....cuz...um..uh...'ecause (because) it makes you more comfortable.
EAL Teacher: Why does it make you feel more comfortable?
 (Dutch) **Boy:** 'ecause (because), uh, there's a lot of children by school you can play with.
3. (Dutch) **Girl:** English is almost the same as Holland....almost the same language because...like many things are the same.
EAL teacher: Does that help you learn?
 (Dutch) **Girl:** [eyes widen] Yes [said with emphasis].

VIDEO CLIP 5

(9-11 year olds)

4. (Czech) **Boy:** I feel free to speak my mother tongue and it's amazing to speak our mother tongues because we know more words in our mother tongues than in English, so I think we should speak in our language even though we are in ISH (*International School of the Hague*) and speak English, we should we speak our language also because it can help us with learning.
5. (Korean) **Boy:** I feel really comfortable when I'm a...at EAL, when I am allowed to speak mother tongue...
6. (Japanese) **Boy:** It makes me feel happy and...[*thinks for a moment*] comfortable.
7. (Dutch) **Boy:** I...I feel a bit different 'cause I, I can speak English (L2) better than Dutch (L1). So, if, I, it's a bit harder to speak it, like sometimes, I have to think about what word I am trying to use, but in English I usually don't have to. Sometimes it [*a word*] is spelt very similar [*between the two languages*], and sometimes it's spelt very different.
8. (Korean) **Boy:** Um, I don't feel comfortable to speak English with my family 'cause (because) I think my brain just changes...If...I think I...the thing is, that if I speak English, my brain just changes into English if the place or setting is really matches to English or Korean for example so if it's for example my home, my brain just changes into Korean...
EAL Teacher: How can using your Korean help you to learn English?

9. (Korean) **Boy:** I think it helps 'cause (because) if you know the meaning in Korean, for example, to say waterfall is 폭포 (pogpo) in Korean and if you know the meaning...you just know the name in English so it's basically waterfall, then it's...you know the meaning in Korean but the word in English. That'll be easy.
10. (Kenyan) **Boy:** Uh, I guess that sometimes if I forget an English word, I try to figure it out in my mother tongue. That might give me an idea...I'll maybe find out the word.
EAL teacher: What are you looking for?
 (Kenyan) **Boy:** Connections...or something that might have been spelled together...
EAL teacher: Something similar?
 (Kenyan) **Boy:** Yeah, like a pronunciation...

After spending approximately four years at the International School of the Hague (Primary), L2 students consistently outperform the average standardised test norms set by UK children (ISH Learning Support Department, 2017). This performance trend repeats itself year on year on year (ISH Learning Support Department, 2017). Though this standardised result is partially due to high levels of parent involvement (Cummins & Swain, 1986), and the strong abilities the children bring with them, the vast majority of our students are learning through English as their second or third language. The third factor in the mix is therefore language development. The EAL department at the ISH is well-equipped with both the knowledge and tools to accelerate the language development of its students. EAL teachers accomplish this through explicit English teaching in modelled contexts and through mother tongue linking strategies like 'translanguaging'. Throughout the years, a number of EAL students have progressed from low English proficiency to grade level in a matter of 2-3 years, considerably faster than the norm of 4-9 years. These students' accelerated English acquisition could also be partially attributed to a combination of positive, school-created factors: namely their heightened linguistic awareness (stemming from regular translanguaging practices) and having regular access to clear, differentiated language input from both the EAL and mainstream classroom teams.

Conclusion

The research around acquiring and maintaining multiple languages posits many provoking conclusions for governments and educational systems to consider.

Firstly, being multilingual brings with it numerous cognitive advantages in light of information retrieval, cross-lingual transfer and the slowing down of dementia in older age. Being multilingual, on these fronts, is healthier for the brain than remaining monolingual. Maintaining one's L1 language, as a strong foundation for learning new languages, has been proven to be the best language practice and offers minority and endangered language communities the scientific justification they need to continue using their L1 languages, next to majority languages.

Secondly, the diverse, international world requires flexible individuals capable of navigating complex settings requiring multiple identities to be successful. Being multilingual lends itself towards having many identities and cultures, over just one. Electing to keep personal identities in balance can enhance well-being, as it allows a person to develop their complete identity without shame or rejection of certain sides. Mother Tongue, or L1 languages, then operate as an identity marker but also as a foundation from which new learning can spring, as all multilingual students move from what is known (L1) into the unknown (L2 or L3).

With this premise in mind, translanguaging is presented as an important, language-learning tool that opens up an educational space for both multiple languages and identities to thrive side-by-side

equally. It allows students to utilise all their languages in their repertoire flexibly, enhancing both their general learning and communicative potential. In the past, based on very little evidence, educators kept languages in strict isolation from one another for fear that code-mixing would inevitably lead to language confusion and random language mixing. Recent studies on simultaneous bilingual language acquisition have overturned this still widely-held and practiced assumption. Children learning two languages from birth naturally acquire and separate out the grammatical systems that constrain their languages. Grammatical errors made by children in their early years reflect either the linguistic, developmental stage they are in, or a ‘gap-filling’ scenario they employ to make their meaning clear. Code-mixing is therefore not done at random and does not threaten bilingual linguistic acquisition or competence. On the contrary, finding connections between languages accelerates new language learning.

Finally, it has been found that incorporating L1 usage throughout a school raises students’ linguistic knowledge, while simultaneously bringing them into a multilingual vision where all languages and identities are valid. Translanguaging and mother tongue programmes mandate L1 usage in mainstream classrooms, helping students to realize that their languages are indeed, valuable learning tools for school and the world beyond. As ISH educators allow student languages into the classroom, it reveals to children that we value who they are and where they come from; that their identity is something worth protecting, and a learning resource to draw from as well.

It is especially promising to see how articulate and conscious the older primary kids can be of their linguistic and cultural identities. These students live our school’s vision by being able to balance their personal and international identities side-by-side. They are proud multilinguals who stand a good chance of taking their confidence and sustainable L1 language practices into the world wherever they go. It is our hope they carry this message further and farther into national institutions and systems, transforming monolingual expectations and norms into a more dynamic, pluralistic society reflecting its true population.

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