

Session A Key Input: Lecture 1
Translanguaging: Theory and Practice - What is translanguaging?

Lecture Transcript

Presented by **Dr Kari Sahan**

Hi everyone! And welcome to the first part of Module 4 on Translanguaging and L1 use. My name is Dr Kari Sahan, and today I will be talking to you about translanguaging theory and practice.

Now, you might not be familiar with the word ‘translanguaging’ – and you might be looking at this long word thinking, *what does that even mean?! Don’t worry – we’re going to cover that in today’s lecture.*

In this first part of Module 4 – Session A -- we’ll start by discussing what translanguaging is (slide: 1. Definition of translanguaging). Then, we’ll talk about how it relates to teaching English and teaching in English by explore the role of language in EMI (slide: 2). Finally, we’ll take a closer look at translanguaging practices in EMI. So, let’s get started.

Let’s start by looking at the word translanguaging itself:

Trans- + language + -ing

We’ve got the prefix *trans-*, which means *across* or *through*. This connotes movement from one place (or thing) to another. And then we’ve got the word *language* in the middle – that tells us we’re talking about languages. And then we’ve got the present progressive *-ing* ending, which connotes verbal action. That means we’re doing something. So, if we put that all together, *translanguaging* is the action of moving across or through languages in communication.

And indeed, this lines up with definitions of translanguaging: Li Wei has described translanguaging as “a practice that involves dynamic and functionally integrated use of different languages and language varieties” (Li Wei, 2018).

Colin Baker tells us that translanguaging is “the process of making meaning, shaping experiences, understandings, and knowledge through the use of two languages. Both languages are used in an integrated and coherent way to organize and mediate mental processes in learning” (Baker, 2011).

Ofelia García says that translanguaging is “the act performed by bilinguals in accessing different linguistic features or various modes of what are described as autonomous languages, in order to maximize communicative potential. It is an approach to bilingualism that is centered... on the practices of bilinguals” (García, 2009).

So, I know those definitions can be a bit complex. But what do these definitions have in common?

They tell us translanguaging is a practice, process, and act. They tell us that it is dynamic, it integrates different languages, and it maximizes communicative potential. Shall we dig a bit deeper?

Now, you might be looking at those definitions thinking, *okay, I understand that we’re using multiple languages, but how is this different from other theories, like:*

Codeswitching, or ...

Codemixing, or even a broad term that is common in applied linguistics research ...

L1 use (note: here, L1 means first language)

And you’re right, these concepts are very similar. But there’s a key difference:

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Lecture Transcript

Concepts such as codeswitching think about Language 1 and Language 2 as two different buckets, with different words in each basket belonging to that language. When you switch between languages, you're switching between buckets.

Translanguaging, however, imagines all the words in all of your languages being in one basket. So, when you talk or write or communicate in a different language – or with words from different languages -- you're not *switching* between buckets – instead, you are looking into your bucket full of linguistic resources, and you are pulling out the best word or phrase or feature to match that situation and communicate what you want to say to the person you're trying to say it all. But it's all from your one, integrated language basket.

Now, this might sound like a minor difference, but it's important because it puts all of our linguistic resources – all of the words we know – in the same basket, or the same level – meaning that they are all equal.

It's also important because it *normalizes* the use of multilingual resources – or the practice of multilinguals to draw from all of the languages available to them when communicating. And this matches research telling us that bilingual and multilingual use is fluid; bilinguals and multilinguals move across their languages fluidly and naturally when communicating.

As García & Li Wei (2014) have noted: “the **language practices** of bilinguals are **complex and interrelated**; they do not emerge in a linear way or function separately since there is only one linguistic system” (p.14).

This quote highlights those key features of translanguaging that I just mentioned:

- It's based on the actual language practices of bilinguals – and this involves a lot of dynamic movement between languages
- And it recognizes that the language practices of bilinguals are inter-related – not separated. Again, think about that metaphor of one language basket instead of two.

Translanguaging as a concept began in Wales, in the context of Welsh bilingual education – so, teaching the Welsh language to school children in Wales who spoke English but also learning Welsh -- in the 1990s with the work of Cen William. It was first used to describe the bilingual teaching practice of asking students to listen or read in one language, and then speak or write about that concept in their other language.

Since then, the concept has been developed by applied linguistics. It has spread worldwide and has been used in many other global teaching contexts.

It has also expanded in its definition, and the word *translanguaging* is used to describe:

- a *theory* of language use as well as
- *pedagogical practices* that involve using multiple languages in the classroom.

So, to summarize:

Translanguaging refers to the dynamic and fluid language practices of bilinguals (or multilinguals!) that involve the integrated use of linguistic features from across multiple languages.

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Translanguaging: Theory and Practice - What is translanguaging?
Lecture Transcript

And translanguaging is used to increase communicative potential – both in the classroom, for example in the teaching and learning of academic subjects, and also in the everyday lives of bilinguals.

So, what does this mean for teaching English and teaching in English? We'll answer that question in the next video.

And if you are interested in reading more, here are the references from today's lecture:

References:

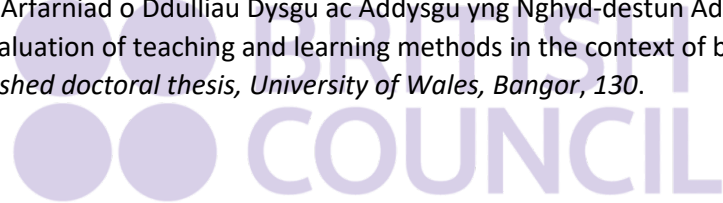
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Teaching English & Teaching IN English
(EMI and EAP Teacher Development)