

The Use of Translanguaging by Students of the English Education Study Program in Class Discussion at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu

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Abstract

Translanguaging, the strategic use of multiple languages within communication, has emerged as a significant pedagogical phenomenon in multilingual classrooms. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, it enables students to draw on their full linguistic repertoire to enhance comprehension and participation. This study examines the types and functions of translanguaging employed by students during class discussions in the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) course at the English Education Study Program, Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu. This study employed a descriptive qualitative design, data were gathered through video recordings of three discussion sessions, transcriptions, and structured observations based on the classifications of Hoffman (1991) and Poplack (1980). The analysis identified three main types: intrasentential, inter-sentential, and tag translanguaging, with intrasentential being the most prevalent, often used to embed technical terms within Indonesian explanations. Functions observed include clarifying academic concepts, providing culturally relevant examples, and fostering inclusive social interaction. These findings indicate that translanguaging in EFL classroom discussions operates as a deliberate and strategic communication approach rather than random language mixing. It can serve as an effective pedagogical tool to improve comprehension and active engagement, suggesting its potential for broader application in EFL learning environments.

Keywords: Classroom Discussion, EFL Students, Second Language Acquisition (SLA), Translanguaging.

INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized academic landscape, multilingualism has become an integral aspect of communication, particularly within educational settings where students bring diverse linguistic backgrounds into classroom interaction. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, especially at the tertiary level, learners frequently rely on more than one language as they attempt to comprehend complex concepts and participate in academic tasks.

Discussion-based learning, which requires spontaneous, analytical, and collaborative dialogue, often prompts students to draw on Bahasa Indonesia and their local languages alongside English to articulate reasoning, negotiate meaning, and maintain the flow of interaction. This dynamic and natural process aligns with the notion of translanguaging, defined as the strategic use of a speaker's full linguistic repertoire to construct meaning without adhering to rigid linguistic boundaries (García, Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017).

Indonesia's multilingual reality reinforces translanguaging practices, especially among university students who routinely navigate between several languages in academic settings. In the English Education Study Program at Muhammadiyah University of Bengkulu, discussion classes are an essential part of the curriculum, particularly in courses such as Second Language Acquisition (SLA) that require deep conceptual reasoning. During these discussions, students frequently embed English technical terms within Indonesian explanations to clarify ideas, ensure comprehension, and sustain interaction. Although such naturally occurring translanguaging has been widely observed, there is still limited research focusing specifically on how university students employ different types of translanguaging during peer-led discussions. Existing studies often center on teachers' translanguaging strategies or structured pedagogical implementations, leaving a gap in understanding how students' spontaneous linguistic choices shape academic interaction in authentic classroom dialogue.

Scholars such as García and Wei (2014) emphasize that translanguaging is more than simple code-switching; it is a purposeful and resourceful process through which multilingual speakers integrate all available linguistic resources to communicate effectively. Research in EFL settings supports the pedagogical value of translanguaging. Rabbidge (2019), for instance, found that multilingual language use can enhance students' confidence and participation in class, while Nursanti (2021) and Liando (2023) documented the role of translanguaging in fostering more meaningful interaction. However, these studies do not explicitly explore how students themselves utilize specific types of translanguaging such as intra-sentential, inter-sentential, and tag translanguaging in spontaneous discussion activities at the university level. This gap highlights the need for focused investigations into students' real time language practices, especially in intellectually demanding subjects like SLA.

Addressing these gaps, the present study explores how students in the English Education Study Program at Muhammadiyah University of Bengkulu employ translanguaging during classroom discussions. By analyzing video-recorded discussions, this research documents students' real-time linguistic behavior, identifies the types of translanguaging that appear in their utterances, and explains how these linguistic practices function within academic interaction. Rather than viewing translanguaging as an indicator of linguistic limitation, this study positions it as evidence of multilingual competence and as a strategic communicative approach that enables learners to engage more effectively with theoretical content.

Understanding these translanguaging practices is significant for informing EFL pedagogy, particularly in developing inclusive learning environments that acknowledge students' linguistic identities and support their academic needs. As Cenoz and Gorter (2021) emphasize, embracing translanguaging can enrich learning by validating students' full linguistic repertoires and improving access to academic content.

In line with this purpose, the study seeks to answer the following research question: What are the types of translanguaging used by students in class discussions in the English Education Study Program at Muhammadiyah University of Bengkulu?

METHODS

Research Design

In order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of how students employed translanguaging during classroom discussions, this study used a qualitative descriptive research methodology. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to observe linguistic practices as they occur

naturally in the classroom and to describe them in detail without manipulating the learning environment. The qualitative descriptive design was appropriate for identifying and explaining the forms and functions of translanguaging used by students during discussion-based learning activities.

The subjects of this research were twenty-one fourth-semester students enrolled in the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) course in the English Education Study Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu in the academic year 2024/2025. These students were selected through purposive sampling, with the primary criterion being their active participation in the discussion sessions where translanguaging naturally occurred. The students came from multilingual backgrounds and used Bahasa Indonesia, their local languages, and English in daily communication, making them suitable participants for this study.

The data were collected through documentation. Three classroom discussion sessions were recorded, each focusing on different SLA topics: (1) Foundations of Second Language Acquisition, (2) Interlanguage Theory and Language Transfer, and (3) Input, Interaction, and Output in SLA. A video camera was used to record the entire interaction, capturing both spoken discourse and relevant paralinguistic cues. After recording, the data were transcribed verbatim. An observation sheet, based on Hoffman's (1991) and Poplack's (1980) classifications, was used to identify and categorize the instances of intra-sentential, inter-sentential, and tag translanguaging found in the transcripts.

The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. The researcher read through all transcripts to identify translanguaging occurrences, categorizing each according to the established types. The categorized data were then grouped to determine the most dominant form found across the three discussion sessions. Through this systematic analysis, the study was able to describe how students strategically used translanguaging to support comprehension, clarify academic concepts, maintain interaction, and express their multilingual identities during classroom discussions.

FINDING AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

In multilingual EFL learning environments such as Indonesian university classrooms, translanguaging naturally emerged as a central communicative practice among the students during the discussion sessions of the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) course. Rather than adhering to monolingual language boundaries, the students employed English and Indonesian fluidly as part of a unified linguistic repertoire. This practice aligns with García and Wei's (2014) interpretation of translanguaging as an intentional pedagogical and cognitive strategy that enables learners to make meaning, negotiate understanding, and engage more actively in academic interaction. The analysis of all three discussion sessions revealed various patterns of translanguaging use, including tag translanguaging, intra-sentential translanguaging, and inter-sentential translanguaging. Each type fulfilled

different communicative functions that facilitated comprehension, emphasis, clarification, and social engagement. Through systematic examination of each session, it becomes clear that translanguaging did not merely compensate for linguistic limitations but also supported academic precision, social rapport, and inclusivity, thereby enabling the students to participate meaningfully in complex SLA discussions.

Foundations of SLA

The first classroom discussion, which explored the topic Foundations of Second Language Acquisition, displayed extensive translanguaging practices as students shifted between English and Indonesian depending on the communicative demand. English was primarily used to deliver theoretical concepts, while Indonesian served as a scaffold to clarify terminology, offer examples, and ensure audience comprehension. In addition, students employed English and Indonesian tags to maintain rapport and interactive engagement.

Three types of translanguaging were identified in this session: intersentential, intra-sentential, and tag translanguaging.

Excerpt 1. Inter-sentential translanguaging

"Motivation significantly influences SLA outcomes. Itu ada integrative motivation and instrumental motivation."

This utterance demonstrates inter-sentential translanguaging because the language shift occurs between two sentences. English first introduces the academic concept, followed by Indonesian, which provides clarification and emphasis. This strategy helps ensure that technical terms such as integrative motivation and instrumental motivation are understood by all members of the group. This supports García and Otheguy's (2021) view that translanguaging functions as a cognitive bridge that enhances understanding of complex academic terminology.

Excerpt 2. Intra-sentential translanguaging

"And then, there are Factors Affecting SLA. First is age and cognitive factors, personality, and social factors. Dan children are better at pronunciation..."

This example represents intra-sentential translanguaging due to the insertion of Indonesian within an English sentence structure. This mixed-language construction enables the speaker to maintain fluency while ensuring that the audience can easily follow the point being made. Li Wei's (2018) concept of translanguaging space is evident here, as the student blends resources from both languages to express meaning more fully.

Excerpt 3. Tag translanguaging

"... bukan hanya sekadar di mana kita duduk di kelas, right?"

The tag right? signals engagement and invites listener confirmation,

demonstrating that translanguaging supports both academic and interpersonal functions. This aligns with Creese and Blackledge's (2019) argument that translanguaging also strengthens social solidarity.

Excerpt 4. Intra-sentential translanguaging

"For example, yang formalnya students from Japan is studying in the Canada..."

Inserting "yang formalnya" within an English example highlights the speaker's intention to emphasize specific information. The Indonesian phrase provides interpretive clarity, allowing the audience to process the content more easily.

Overall, translanguaging in this first session operated as a pedagogical resource for clarifying theoretical ideas, sustaining fluency in content delivery, and supporting social interaction. Intersentential translanguaging clarified abstract theoretical claims, intrasentential translanguaging connected academic terminology to accessible explanations, and tag translanguaging maintained active participation among discussion participants.

Interlanguage Theory and Language Transfer

The second discussion, which focused on Interlanguage Theory and Language Transfer, displayed a more varied use of translanguaging. English remained the primary medium for presenting theoretical explanations, while Indonesian was used to elaborate on real-life examples and clarify language transfer phenomena. Students increasingly integrated both languages within single utterances, showing more complex multilingual practices.

Excerpt 1. Inter-sentential translanguaging

"This intermediate system are in the language. Dan bagi saya, masa depan saya bisa Anda."

Here, English delivers the theoretical point, and Indonesian follows as a personal reflection. This shows how translanguaging can serve conceptual and rhetorical purposes simultaneously.

Excerpt 2. Intra-sentential translanguaging

"Learning strategies, learner use simple ways of strategies to express themselves in the new language. Example: learner say yesterday, I go male..."

This utterance demonstrates how translanguaging clarifies linguistic errors arising from negative transfer. Students used their bilingual resources not just to explain concepts but to analyze how transfer errors manifest in actual learner language.

Excerpt 3. Tag translanguaging

"... penting dalam bidang SMA karena menyediakan kerangka kerja... You

know?"

The use of you know? functions as an interactional strategy to maintain audience attention and promote shared meaning-making.

Excerpt 4. Intra-sentential translanguaging

"Japanese often in the world to be. Sama kayak kita di Indonesia..."

Here, Indonesian helps contextualize the English example by linking it to local experiences, supporting deeper comprehension of interlanguage processes.

Overall, translanguaging in this session served as an analytical tool, helping students connect theoretical explanations with practical examples. This finding aligns with Creese and Blackledge's (2019) assertion that translanguaging enhances learners' ability to analyze linguistic phenomena through shared multilingual knowledge.

Input, Interaction, and Output in SLA

The third session revealed the use of translanguaging not only for academic purposes but also for expressing cultural identity. Students drew from English, Indonesian, Arabic, and Japanese to articulate their ideas and express themselves socially.

Excerpt 1. Inter-sentential translanguaging

"Iteration is the communication process between the learner and others... Jadi interaksi itu adalah percakapan yang dilakukan dua individu manusia."

The English technical definition is followed by an Indonesian explanation to ensure conceptual clarity. Excerpt 2. Intra-sentential translanguaging

"Output, right and for the interaction is collaborative with the group. Maybe where is the plan planning to travels dan kayak tempat makan yang kayak gimana?"

The insertion of Indonesian phrases such as "dan kayak tempat makan" contextualizes the theory with everyday experiences.

Excerpt 3. Multilingual tag translanguaging

"Thank you for your attention. Wassalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakaatuh. Arigato gozaimasu."

This excerpt demonstrates how students used multiple languages to express identity and cultural belonging, reflecting Li Wei's (2018) concept of translanguaging space as a site of identity expression.

Excerpt 4. Inter-sentential translanguaging

"Input is the language that we care or we read or we can call it like material or media. Contohnya seperti box, movie, song, and others."

English provides the definition, while Indonesian provides examples that ground the concept in familiar materials.

Overall, translanguaging in this session functioned on academic and cultural levels. Students used multilingual resources to deepen understanding while expressing shared cultural identities.

DISCUSSION

The findings across the three discussions reveal that translanguaging was pervasive and strategically employed throughout the SLA course. These results align with García and Wei's (2014) theory that translanguaging is a purposeful use of full linguistic repertoires to optimise comprehension and engagement. The data show that learners did not switch languages arbitrarily; rather, they used translanguaging to clarify concepts, maintain interaction, and preserve the integrity of academic discourse.

The most striking finding of this study is that intra-sentential translanguaging emerged as the dominant form, a pattern not commonly reported in Indonesian EFL research. Previous studies (Rabbidge, 2019; Nursanti, 2022; Liando, 2023; Aldianto, 2024) often found inter-sentential translanguaging to be more frequent, especially among learners with limited English proficiency. The divergence observed in this study likely stems from the technical nature of SLA content. Because many SLA terms (e.g., input, interaction hypothesis, fossilization) do not have precise Indonesian equivalents, embedding these terms within Indonesian discourse allowed students to retain conceptual accuracy while remaining comprehensible to their peers.

This study also confirms Canagarajah's (2011) concept of translanguaging spaces, where linguistic boundaries are flexible rather than fixed. Students in the observed discussions fluidly integrated English and Indonesian within single utterances, creating bilingual constructions that enabled rich academic and social functions. Compared to earlier studies, which often emphasized translanguaging as a compensatory strategy, this research demonstrates that translanguaging supports not only comprehension but also higher-order academic reasoning.

Furthermore, the findings show that translanguaging strengthened interactional engagement, confirming Liando's (2023) observation that multilingual discourse enhances rapport-building. Notably, this study extends prior literature by demonstrating that even socially oriented turns contained intra-sentential elements, revealing a deeper level of integration between languages.

In conclusion, this study provides robust evidence that translanguaging in tertiary-level SLA instruction is evolving toward more integrated bilingual discourse. Intra-sentential translanguaging, in particular, appears to be the most efficient linguistic strategy for preserving technical precision while ensuring accessibility in multilingual academic environments.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

The present study investigated the forms and functions of translanguaging used by students during classroom discussions in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) course. The findings reveal that translanguaging occurred in three primary forms: intra-sentential, inter-sentential, and tag translanguaging. Among these, intra sentential translanguaging was the most dominant, indicating that

students frequently embedded English technical terms within Indonesian sentence structures to maintain both academic accuracy and communicative clarity. Inter-sentential translanguaging and tag translanguaging also played important roles, supporting explanation, conceptual reinforcement, and interactional engagement.

The use of translanguaging in these discussions demonstrates that students actively drew on their full linguistic repertoires to make sense of complex SLA concepts. Translanguaging enabled them to bridge linguistic gaps, articulate theoretical ideas, contextualize terminology through real-life examples, and maintain active social engagement throughout the discussion. This confirms the theoretical perspectives of García and Wei (2014), Li Wei (2018), and Canagarajah (2011), who argue that translanguaging offers cognitive, social, and pedagogical benefits by allowing learners to integrate all their linguistic resources in academic discourse.

The study further contributes to existing literature by identifying intra-sentential translanguaging as the most prevalent form, a finding not widely documented in Indonesian EFL contexts. This structural preference appears to be influenced by the technical demands of SLA content, which requires precise English terminology combined with explanatory scaffolding provided by the first language. Thus, translanguaging in this context functions as an advanced communicative strategy that supports conceptual accuracy and fosters deeper understanding.

Overall, the study concludes that translanguaging is a beneficial and necessary practice in multilingual university classrooms, particularly in courses involving dense theoretical concepts. It promotes meaningful participation, enhances comprehension, and creates a supportive academic environment where students can engage confidently with challenging content. These findings highlight the need for educators to acknowledge translanguaging as a legitimate pedagogical tool that enriches the learning experience rather than hindering it.

Suggestions

The findings of this study suggest that lecturers in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms should recognize translanguaging as a valuable pedagogical resource rather than viewing it as inappropriate language mixing. Allowing students to strategically use their multilingual repertoire can facilitate conceptual understanding, increase classroom participation, and create a more inclusive learning environment, particularly in discussion-based courses involving complex academic content.

Furthermore, future researchers are encouraged to investigate translanguaging practices in different educational contexts, involving larger participant groups or employing different research designs such as mixed methods or classroom interventions. Such studies may provide broader insights into the pedagogical impact of translanguaging on language learning, student engagement, and academic achievement across various EFL settings.

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