

# Translanguaging as a Technique for Teaching Writing Skills to the Students of Engineering College

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## **Introduction**

Teachers all over the world evolved several methods and approaches of English Language Teaching (ELT) over a long period of time and the prominent among them are the Grammar –Translation method, the Direct method, the Structural method, Audio-Lingual method and Communicative Language Teaching. They implemented these methods and approaches during the classroom interaction but no method attained the status of ‘the best method of teaching’ as all methods and approaches have one or the other lacunae or deficiency in teaching learning process. Hence, the ever innovative teacher is trying out with one or other new way of teaching which is result-oriented, suitable to students and text. In this regard, Cen Williams, the Irish teacher-researcher conducted classroom experiments in 1980 on bilingual learning of Welsh and English. He worked on the topic, “An Evaluation of Teaching and Learning Methods in the Context of Bilingual Secondary Education”. For his approach to teaching, he coined a term, ‘*trawsieithu*’ from Welsh language, and the same term was translated into English as ‘translanguaging’ by Baker in 2001. This approach discusses the pedagogical strategies in bilingual classes that did not bar the use of two languages in classroom interaction. But, in the Grammar-Translation method wherein code-switching is involved, the teachers’ translation of words and sentences of target language into the mother tongue of the learners takes place. Thus, the target language and the learner’s mother tongue were treated as two separate entities. In this method there is

limited focus in speaking and listening to the target language. Further, students were made to learn through rote memorization which strained their mental faculty. Furthermore, with the arrival of more communicative methods, the Grammar-Translation method is not being encouraged. In addition to that in recent decades translation acquired a different role by means of which the second language (L2) learners are allowed to use words from their mother tongue (L1) or home language and this learning approach of ‘translanguaging’, is communicative and hence being encouraged by the teachers in many parts of the world.

## **Review of Literature**

Translanguaging is playing a vital role in the case of bilingual learners and it is a way to improve language learning and writing. Apart from Cen Williams who worked on this approach of second language acquisition, there are several other researchers like Hornberger, 2005, Lewis, Jones and Baker, 2012, Ricardo Otheyguy, Ofelia Garcia and Wallis Reid, 2015, Velcosco and Garcia, 2014, Garcia and Wei, 2018, who worked on the effectiveness of translanguaging on students’ learning.

1. ‘Translanguaging Pedagogies in EFL Writing Education’ (2023) by Q. Yang, S. Yang and W. Shi. This research concluded that translanguaging can be helpful to learners to improve their writing skills in English. It also helps them to comprehend and be on par with others who had instruction in English medium up to intermediate.
2. ‘Translanguaging Strategies in Multilingual Classrooms: An Asian Perspective Context’ by Viniti Vaish (2020): This study proved that Translanguaging can be a strategy to identify and suggest remedies at word, sentence and text levels. It can be used as scaffolding in the planning, drafting and pre-writing stages of the process of writing. Further, it offers strategies for teaching English reading skills to students who struggle with the language. The book also compares Chinese-English and Malay-English bilingual learners and highlights challenges teachers face.

3. 'The Pedagogies in EFL Writing Education' (2022) authored by Qi Yang, Shizou Yang and Wanjun Shi published in *International Journal of TESOL* (Oct.2023). This research emphasizes that translanguaging, when employed while writing, will be helpful to develop critical thinking skills, open-mindedness and inquisitiveness.
4. 'A Study of How Translanguaging Promotes Literacy Skills' (2020) by M.J. Champlin. This research concluded that translanguaging can enhance the English language skills of the learners and makes teachers confident about the positive effect of translanguaging strategies.
5. A. McBride, R.T. Jimenez contributed an article on 'Responding to the Call for Multi/Translingual Approaches to Writing Instruction: A Review of Post-Secondary Translanguaging Studies' (2021) published in the 'Journal of College Reading'.
6. "Multilingual students' use of their linguistic repertoires while writing in L2 English" by Tina Gunnarsson (2019). In this article published in *Lingua*, volume 224, June, 2019 pp.34 to 50, Tina Gunnarsson examines six multilingual users composing processes and language use while writing in L2 English.

The above review of the previous research on translanguaging suggests that there are challenges in implementing various research results such as spatial repertoire, linguistic repertoire and the use of semiotic resources. However, this researcher tried to find the effectiveness of translanguaging in improving the writing skills of the learners.

## **Aim and Research Questions**

'Spoken discourse' and 'written discourse' are the productive skills of a language. Spoken discourse is an interaction between specific people on specific situations or occasions. As against spoken discourse, written discourse is in a visual medium. When multilingual speakers gather, while exchanging views and ideas they take the help of their mother tongue as they are concerned with the verb 'communicate' rather than the noun 'communication'. Thus, the primary aim is to communicate

effectively whether spoken or written and prove the ability that they are aware of grammar, vocabulary of multilingual speakers. As part of learning, if the teachers encourage the bilingual learners to use their mother tongue while writing diaries, letters and answers to the questions on their own during the acquisition of L2, then we can say that the particular sets of students who are multilingual learners of English (MLEs) are applying the technique of translanguaging which is the ability to move fluidly between the languages while talking or writing as languages are in fluid state. It is a pedagogical approach that allows learners to use multiple languages at a time and use their first language (home language) to learn academic English.

In fact, when we observe in our daily life that translanguaging begins at an early stage of a child. This researcher happened to visit a friend where he found his grandson, who just crossed three years of age and started going to play school, was playing with building blocks. It was observed that he built a structure with blocks and upon questioning, 'What is this?' Immediately he answered, 'This is *illu*'. In Telugu language *illu* means 'house'. After sometime the same child asked his dad, 'I want my *bomma*', *bomma* means toy. Since the child is not aware of the L2 words 'house', 'toy', he used a word from L1 which is in his linguistic repertoire. Thus, we can state that translanguaging starts naturally at an early age. The child uses words at his command in a multilingual society. The child knows that there are two languages. But when asked he picks up the appropriate word from L1.

In another context, while sipping tea in the college canteen, I overheard two employees talking about the nature of their mutual friend. The first person said, 'Raju shares tea with us regularly but never pays bill, such a *'kanjus.'* (stingy). In both the instances, the words *illu*, *bomma* and *kanjus* are from L1 of the speakers, otherwise there would have been a breakdown in communication. The translanguaging technique is proved as the speakers used two languages retrieving from their linguistic repertoire as a source language and thus whenever the situation demands we use multiple languages in a single context.

Further, let us observe the extensive research done by Li on translanguaging.

In 2018, Li published his research on translanguaging and stated, ‘Translanguaging is transcending the traditional divides between linguistic and non-linguistic’. He speaks of the concept of ‘translanguaging’ and questions the idea of using only language and separating it with other modes of communication like body language and cues. He opined, language as a fluid, multimodal resource and all semiotic can be utilized to develop meaning and convey it successfully while speaking or writing. Thus, it can be stated that translanguaging is moving beyond various languages and modes.’ (Garcia and Li, 2014 and Li, 2018).

Based on the above observations, this researcher raised the following questions and will try to find out answers with regard to the students who studied in vernacular medium up to Intermediate:

1. Can MLEs draft a letter or an application appropriately by using the translanguaging technique?
2. Will there be marked change in their proficiency in target language?

The above two questions will be answered by using translanguaging as a technique to impart writing skills to the students through action research.

## **Action Research**

As we know, ‘action research’ focuses on solving problems that arise out of classroom interaction and the research results when implemented will have an impact on teaching and learning process. This researcher, taking cue from the above, who teaches Communication Skills in English in Geethanjali College of Engineering and Technology (GCET), Hyderabad conducted action research. He engaged the Professional Communication Skills (PCS) language lab and tested the level of improvement in the writing of the selected seven students. These students belong to rural areas where English is not at all used. But English is the only language of communication in classroom activities and they were not allowed to use their mother tongue or any other known language.

However, considering that MLEs have a linguistic repertoire where two more languages are stored from where they can select a language to convey a particular idea that they cannot do in target language (English). So it is strongly believed that if the students use translanguaging that it can help them in effective communication. Further, it is felt that it can foster the right classroom environment to participate in interactive communicative activities.

## **Participants**

As the researcher got an opportunity to experiment with B.Tech third year Computer Science and Engineering 'A' section students who mostly hail from villages with a vernacular language as a medium of instruction up to Intermediate, who have very limited language proficiency even to draft a letter, so as a facilitator of learning, the researcher decided to provide the right ecosystem for nurturing second language. So, an appropriate learning environment is created for the sake of these unprivileged students to foster writing skills in them in the language lab. These students, though multilingual, in an informal chat told the researcher that they feel that writing is a very difficult task. It is true that of the four language skills, writing skill is considered to be higher order skill and the most difficult one. Hence, the topics on writing like 'Letter Writing' and 'Application Writing' were chosen as they are part of their syllabus. The researcher took up this activity as the students feel it difficult to draft letters and applications as it involves the selection of words, organization of matter (cohesion) and presentation (use of appropriate discourse markers or cohesive devices) by linking ideas. The researcher motivated them to participate by stating that each student is unique and their contribution is variable and it is not the format but body of information that matters most. Further, during the classroom activity, they were instructed to avoid code switching but were advised to switch between L1 and L2 within the sentence or paragraph to convey the meaning effectively.

All good writing depends on sub-skills of a language like grammar, knowledge of discourse markers (cohesive devices) and appropriate

vocabulary which lead to the formulation of sentences. In fact, the process of writing involves thinking and planning a writer does while drafting a text. The ability of the individual to use the suitable cohesive devices (linkers) and in organizing ideas makes the text coherent and readable. Thus, several writing techniques make the text unique and praiseworthy. Texts like short essays, paragraphs, and letters contain an introductory section in two or three lines. To foster (habituate) writing by using translanguaging, the following are the examples taken up in the language lab. Further, they were told through brainstorming when words pertaining to new ideas arrived that they can be translated into target language later on.

### **Use of L1 while writing L2**

The above discussion suggests that translanguaging has potential and hence the following action research is taken up to test whether the learners can be imparted writing skills and encouraged to participate actively in the classroom interaction on par with other monolinguals. As per the above observation, translanguaging is an important part of the writing process for multilingual learners as it helps them in critical thinking by using their fullest potential.

‘Our students are at their best when they are encouraged to access all the linguistic tools they have at their disposal ‘

- Kayla McLaughlin, NWEA (2022)

The action research was conducted in the language lab where all the 50 students of CSE ‘A’ section, including the seven students who are multilingual learners of English (MLEs), were made to participate in the ‘letter writing’ and ‘Application Writing’ activity. Thus, the students participated in learning activities in the multilingual context of the lab. They were given the following questions:

1. Draft a letter to the Branch Manager, State Bank of India, requesting to sanction Educational loan’.
2. Draft an Application to the Principal of our college requesting him to organize an Industrial Tour to National Fuel Complex (NFC), Cherlapally, Hyderabad

3. Draft an Application to the Principal of our college requesting him to arrange a Sports Lounge in our college

The seven MLEs do not have proficiency in English and hence as part of the writing process they were allowed to write without any linguistic restrictions. All the students were instructed to attempt the above three questions.

The MLEs while attempting, 'Draft a letter to the Branch Manager, State Bank of India, Cherlapally requesting to sanction Education loan', used the following words from their L1 repertoire: 1. *pedarikam* (poverty), *tapana* (desire) *vayidaalu* (installments) *udyogam* (employment) *chellistha* (repay). Further, while attempting the second topic, 'Draft an Application to the Principal of our college requesting him to organize an Industrial Tour to National Fuel Complex, Cherlapay, Hyderabad', they employed L1 words like 1. *avagahana* (exposure) 2. *pani samskruthi* (work culture) 3. *sthapana* (establishment) 4. *sphurthi* (inspire) 5. *samstha* (organization). Furthermore, while writing the third topic, 'Draft an Application to the Principal of our college requesting him to arrange a Sports Lounge in our college'; they retrieved words from their L1 which include 1. *saukaryam* (facility) 2. *pratinidyam* (represent), 3. *potee* (competition) 4. *klistatha* (puzzle) 5. *sathuva* (stamina).

## Discussion

The researcher, after the activities, evaluated the answer scripts and found each of them made unique contribution

- a) in the selection of words
- b) in the linking of ideas
- c) presentation of content.
- d) some students used words from their mother tongue to write the body of the letter,

- e) some other's wrote addresses in target language and salutation in native language.

“When we encourage students to draw upon their entire linguistic repertoire, we’re empowering them to use their fullest, most authentic voice.”  
-Kayla McLaughlin, NWEA (2022)

In the multilingual context of the Professional Communication Skills lab, the students with vernacular language as medium of instruction up to Intermediate do not have proficiency in English, but are allowed to use translanguaging techniques in writing. They have the knowledge of grammar and know how to use cohesive devices but the problem is with vocabulary. They do not have the sufficient vocabulary (repository) in their second language to choose ‘right’ word to express an idea. And the meaning of ‘right’ in this context is- appropriate in relation to the context. But they have funds of knowledge in their first language and that needs to be retrieved and as a result, translation is necessary.

They were motivated to apply translanguaging techniques which helped the learners to enhance confidence levels. They freely moved with the peer group. They cultivated an inclusive and diverse learning environment. This approach is useful to the students to speak, write and translate to and from their first language. In a research article published in Taylor and Francis Online, pages 6-23, April, 2014 “Translanguaging and the Writing of Bilingual Learners”, the authors Velasco and Garcia stated-

“Writing is a highly complex and demanding task. The writer must negotiate the rules and mechanics of writing while maintaining a focus on factors such as organization, form and features, purposes as well as audience needs. The writer must be goal-oriented, resourceful and reflective” -Velasco and Garcia (2014)

Thus, ‘Translanguaging’ is an instructional approach which allows the learners in a multilingual class to use their first language or any other language which they know whenever the context demands or necessitates. Thus, such learners make use of their linguistic repertoire to retrieve, to access, to modify when speaking or revise their drafting

while writing which appeals to them as if it is natural and congenial. Thus, bilingual/multilingual learners, based on the context, are allowed to use words from their mother tongue or any other language which they know while speaking or writing.

While writing, switching between languages will develop cognitive flexibility of students whereby they think critically and divergently about their writing. Further, permitting the students to draft their pre-writing first in L1, by outlining and note taking was an exceptional case as two students were very poor even to draft in broken English. So if they fail to draft in target language, they should be permitted to frame sentences in their known languages. Such learning facilitation is necessitated as multilingual learners of English hail from rural areas and in the initial stage of their education the learning ecosystem is not proper as they studied in vernacular language and do not have proper exposure to English. Further, they do not have any motivation to learn as there are no incentives nor anyone to interact in English. Finally, through the above discussion, we can define Letter Writing through translanguaging techniques as follows –

‘The practice of composing a letter by employing a multilingual writer’s linguistic repertoire with a liberty of switching between L1 and L2 within a single letter where clarity of expression is achieved by using the strengths of each language as required.’

-Tina Gunnarsson (2019)

After the evaluation of the answer scripts, found answer to the first research question as the MLEs actively participated and answered the given questions by using the translanguaging technique. So, it was concluded that

1. Learners have the knowledge of grammar, cohesive devices but insufficient repository of words in English to choose a right word to express an idea.
2. It is translanguaging that helped them to use words or phrases from their home language to express their ideas in the target language.

3. Their active participation proved that the writing skills in second language acquisition can be enhanced through translanguaging leading to access to better understanding.

Regarding the second research question, after implementing translanguaging technique there is a marked change in the proficiency in English in the MLEs as they actively used L2 through existing language skills. The reasons for change can be attributed to creative flexibility, confidence building, brainstorming, glossary creation from L1 to L2, exercises in translation, context specific application of vocabulary.

## **Limitations**

1. Language policy constraints of government.
2. Concerns about stigmatization of learners' native language in a multilingual class where an international language has upper hand and reverence.
3. Cognitive flexibility is not possible for all students as they cannot adopt strategies to counter the changing learning environment.

## **Suggestions**

1. To optimize second language acquisition, teachers should be trained on effective translanguaging integration within the curriculum.
2. Government educational policies should support the importance of learner's home languages in the learning process.
3. Teacher's knowledge of translanguaging practices is essential as they should instruct students as to how to use linguistic repertoire.

## **Conclusion**

1. This study proved that translanguaging can re-conceptualize language learners as multi-competent users, leading to inclusivity and diversity in education. Translanguaging in the field of education leads to more equitable and humane practices in a multilingual classroom as students of different socio-economic and educational backgrounds move freely. In fact, translanguaging encourages

learners to cultivate positive attitudes towards multilingualism which enhances their confidence level.

2. Translanguaging clearly had its impact on enhancing language learning, developing critical thinking skills, helping in scaffolding to comprehend.
3. Translanguaging helped the learners in organizing and presenting matter systematically.
4. Incorporating home languages within the classroom writing led to better understanding of the material.
5. Translanguaging resulted in developing learners' academic literacies leading to easy learning and desired outcome.
6. Translanguaging in bilingual classes helps the learners to expand linguistic repertoire by incorporating the ways required for literacy development.
7. Self-directed translanguaging practices lead to self-management, self-motivation and persistence in academic learning.
8. The action research proved that in attaining proficiency in writing in English, translanguaging played a significant role by creating interactions among students which led to peer support in the acquisition of a second language.

Further, this study proved that translanguaging technique:

- a) re-conceptualizes language learners as multi-competent users in a multilingual class
- b) leads to inclusivity and diversity in education
- c) enhances language learning, developing critical thinking skills
- d) uses semiotic repositories to enhance learning and communication.
- e) challenges monolingual restrictions by recognizing learners diverse linguistic repertoires
- f) optimizes language acquisition if teachers are trained and translanguaging is integrated within curriculum.

Furthermore, it can be concluded that this study was done at graduation level but teachers can implement this from primary school level as it develops a positive attitude towards multilingualism and also it recognizes the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the learners. The research suggests that translanguaging can be called an additive approach to language acquisition as it can create concepts and perspectives to a curriculum. Overall, translanguaging in the field of education paves the way for democratization of learning in a multilingual class.

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