



## **Translanguaging Beliefs and Practices of Tertiary Teachers in EFL Classrooms in the Philippines**

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### **Abstract**

Generic qualitative method was used to explore the translanguaging beliefs and practices of tertiary EFL teachers in bilingual language classrooms across Davao de Oro. The results revealed that the participants have a positive translanguaging belief but still encourage their students to use the target language. Additionally, pieces of evidence of translanguaging practices were also found in various parts of the language lesson. Findings can be used as a basis for translanguaging that is already practiced in EFL classrooms but is not reflected in national and institutional policies.

Keywords: Translanguaging, EFL, Translanguaging Stance, Translanguaging Design

### **Background of the Study**

In any multilingual classroom, the teacher's choice of the language medium for instruction and interaction can dramatically influence students' learning. Despite the universal acceptability that harnessing a multilingual student's linguistic repertoire is a boon for second language learning, most English as Foreign Language (EFL) pedagogical strategies still focus on a monolingual paradigm (Nakatsukasa & Loewen, 2015).

EFL instruction is defined by Hoa (2011) as teaching English to language learners whose first language is not English and who are living in a non-English speaking country has long been a challenge. Simply speaking, if a student is learning English within a community whose first language is not English, it is considered as EFL.

García and Kleyn (2016) suggested that one communicative strategy that seeks to break this mold and has gained considerable traction among EFL teachers is translanguaging, which refers to the utilization of a speaker's entire linguistic repertoire, which does not in any way correspond to the socially and politically defined boundaries of

named languages.

A study conducted in a large urban high school in a southeastern state in the United States of America found that translanguaging showed high student engagement in the lesson (Li & Luo, 2017). Meanwhile, Makalela (2015), in a study conducted in an African multilingual class, revealed that translanguaging techniques provided affective and social benefits and a deep understanding of the contents of the participants.

However, Gatil (2021), in her systematic review of literature, suggested that translanguaging studies in the country focused mainly on MTB-MLE in Kinder to Grade 3 and secondary level, overlooking tertiary education translanguaging practices. Furthermore, García et al. (2017) noted that despite a growing body of literature on translanguaging in language classrooms in English-speaking countries, few studies focus on translanguaging in EFL contexts such as the Philippines. She suggested that more studies should be built around translanguaging as a language teaching pedagogy in the mainstream Philippine education context.

In turn, this research aimed to uncover the translanguaging belief and practices of tertiary EFL teachers in bilingual language classrooms across Davao de Oro. The results will become the basis for data regarding translanguaging practices at the tertiary level both in the region and beyond. Furthermore, the findings can become a strong springboard for further studies related to translanguaging and its pedagogical applications and possibilities in multilingual countries.

In particular, this aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the translanguaging beliefs and practices of tertiary EFL teachers in Davao de Oro?
2. What implications can be derived to broaden the knowledge and practice of translanguaging in EFL classrooms?

## **Literature Review**

### **Defining Translanguaging**

Translanguaging originates from Cen Williams, a leading educationalist in the 1980s, who used the term *trawsieithu* to describe a language practice that implied the planned and systematic use of two languages within the same lesson. Baker (2001) later translated it into English as *translinguifying* but then changed to *translanguaging*.

Otheguy, García, and Reid (2015), meanwhile, characterized translanguaging as promoting the use of the students' linguistic arsenal. Additionally, this is a dynamic process in which multilingual users mediate complex social and cognitive activities by strategically using several resources for their actions, knowledge, and existence (Smith & Murillo, 2015). Languages are not seen as independent systems that people have but as practices that people use.

### Types of Translanguaging

Several notable researchers have identified different types of translanguaging. The most commonly accepted classification is based on its use. Nagy (2018) delineated these types as *spontaneous* and *pedagogical* translanguaging. The first type is spontaneous translanguaging, which primarily occurs when speakers engage in a translanguaging activity without any prompting (García & Wei, 2014). *Spontaneous translanguaging* refers to the reality of multilingual usage in naturally occurring contexts where boundaries between languages are fluid and constantly shifting. It can take place both inside and outside the classroom (Cenoz, 2017). Common examples are conversing with friends, sharing personal ideas through social media, and even unplanned classroom interactions.

Meanwhile, Canagarajah (2011) surmised that numerous studies on translanguaging acts are not elicited by teachers through conscious pedagogical strategies. Most often, these come unsolicited and without prompt. Students may translanguague even when they are explicitly asked to speak in the target language.

On the other hand, *pedagogical translanguaging* is defined simply as utilizing two languages in a language immersion classroom – the target language and the widely used language by students in the class. Instead of focusing on the target language, the teacher actively utilizes two languages during instruction. It is used with a pedagogical purpose and is based on instructional strategies (Lewis et al., 2012). Additionally, pedagogical translanguaging refers to teaching strategies applied in a multilingual setting.

Meanwhile, De Los Reyes (2019) eloquently pointed out that translanguaging is critical as a communicative tool in the ESL classroom. He said that as a result of translanguaging, teachers could present their lessons and lead classroom discussions. He added that students were better able to participate in classroom discussions and demonstrate their knowledge and understanding.

Pedagogical translanguaging has gained ground in the education of minority students, both in bilingual education and in more conventional second-language programs. For example, in the United States, translanguaging was taken up as a second language program by teachers in English and standard English classrooms (Vogel & García, 2017).

### Translanguaging Belief

García and Kleyn (2016) define the translanguaging belief, which they called as *translanguaging stance*, as the affirming belief that diverse linguistic practices are valuable in an educational context. They choose to understand the language from the perspective of the people who use it rather than from the perspective of the national governing bodies. This allows teachers to harness the full power of a student's linguistic resources to acquire content and skills.

Moreover, they can use the power to invert the hierarchy of languages to empower

multilingual students to express themselves authentically and develop their skills and identities beyond what educational authorities have prescribed for them (Vogel & García, 2017).

This goes against the common belief of ESL teachers in the classroom. Instead of discouraging the students' first language, the latter's linguistic repertoire is leveraged and accepted as a vehicle for students to succeed academically (Garcia et al., 2017).

### **Translanguaging Practices**

Meanwhile, García et al. (2017) define translanguaging practices, which they termed as *translanguaging design*, as a strategic plan that integrates students' in-school and out-of-school or community language practices. Students' language practices and knowledge inform and drive the design of instructional units, lesson plans, and assessments. It also ensures that students have enough exposure to, and practice with, the language features required for different academic tasks.

Seltzer (2019) highlighted the different functions of translanguaging design in the ESL classroom. It helps in (a) organizing students into groups with different levels of home/new language proficiency; (b) producing a research paper that emanates from multilingual sources and focuses on topics relevant to bilingual communities; (c) providing a text in multiple languages and asking students to compare the linguistic features such as lexicon, syntax, morphology, and so on; and (d) planning assessments that differentiate students' general linguistic performances from their language-specific performances.

Meanwhile, the success of a translanguaging design depends not only on the teacher's ability to plan effectively but also on his/her capacity to provide his/her students with "effective instructional resources and effective instructional grouping." This means that aside from the teacher's instructional aptitude, careful planning and knowledge of one's students' linguistic repertoire can dictate whether a design will be effective or not (García & Kleyn, 2016).

### **Translanguaging in the EFL Classroom**

With the benefits of translanguaging already well-established by several studies, it is expected that it will find its way into tertiary EFL classrooms across the world. Translanguaging can be utilized as a communication strategy that can aid the process of teaching EFL and can also be used to integrate the use of the students' native language in learning English (Sahib, 2019).

Recent studies on translanguaging in higher education paint a translanguaging in a favorable light. One such study is Fujimoto-Adamson and Adamson's (2018) use of translanguaging as scaffolding for the content input among Japanese undergraduate students for a course that uses English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI). They discovered

that translanguaging allows the class to move away from potentially demotivating monolingual practices in the EMI classroom.

Translanguaging, on the other hand, isn't always seen as a good thing. Carroll and van den Hoven (2016) investigated the conflict between institutional pressure on tertiary schools in the United Arab Emirates to teach entirely in English and student desires for the professor to use some Arabic to help them succeed in the course. Translanguaging is essentially illegal, according to the authors, and the possibility of employing translanguaging to access pupils' whole linguistic repertoires is virtually untapped.

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

This study utilized generic qualitative research design. Due to its applicability and relevance in addressing and achieving the objectives of the present, this research methodology was chosen.

#### **Participants and Setting**

This study purposely selected 12 tertiary EFL teachers handling EFL courses in Davao de Oro, six for in-depth interview (IDI), and six for focus group discussion (FGD). Specifically, the participants are from Davao de Oro State College (DDOSC), Kolehiyo ng Pantukan (KNP), and Monkayo College of Arts, Science, and Technology (MONCAST). All these higher education institutions house bilingual students, with the majority speaking Bisaya as their first language.

#### **Results and Discussion**

Analysis of the statements shared by the participants revealed some interesting insights into the translanguaging beliefs and practices of the tertiary EFL teachers.

Table 1: Tertiary EFL teachers' translanguaging beliefs

Themes	Core Ideas
Positive Belief about Translanguaging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The students' first language is valuable in learning English as a target language.</li> <li>• EFL teachers translanguage to help students understand the lesson better.</li> <li>• Contextualized texts using the students' L1 are easier to relate to and understand.</li> <li>• Students are allowed to translanguage but are still encouraged to speak in English.</li> </ul>
English as the sole language in the EFL Classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EFL teachers firmly encourage their students to speak in the target language.</li> <li>• EFL teachers still use the target language exclusively.</li> <li>• Contextualized texts are not that valuable in EFL classrooms.</li> </ul>

The results reveal a positive belief among EFL teachers toward translanguaging in their classrooms. This means that they acknowledge the value of incorporating the students' linguistic repertoire in the EFL class. This aligns with Garcia et al. (2017) definition of translanguaging stance about an educator's belief system on bilingual students and their language practices. The EFL teachers showed a willingness to harness all their students' linguistic features and practices as a resource for their learning. This is evinced by the statement of IDI-Participant 1: *"The first language of the students is [sic], I believe, would be very beneficial in order for the learners to learn the second language."* In addition, IDI-Participant 3 highlighted the importance of the students' first language to EFL: *"It is very valuable because it is actually the fundamental of the students' language. And it's actually their formula or their basis on how they are going to translate a particular word or sentence from the first language, target language which is the English language."*

However, what is interesting to note is that despite this positive translanguaging stance, the participants reluctantly shared that they and their students should speak in the target language as much as possible. As revealed by the responses, some of the participants even imposed strict policies to force students to speak in English. This can be interpreted as adherence to a monolingual paradigm, something common among EFL teachers worldwide (Carroll & van den Hoven, 2016). FGD-Participant 2 shared: *"I do not actively encourage my students to use the language that they use at home when they are in school."*

... I'm dealing with tertiary-level students. That means that they should have already the background of the grammar structures when they when they were in the basic education.” Additionally, FGD-Participant 6 stressed that since her students are already at the tertiary level, they should prioritize speaking in English. “As much as I love the idea of bilingual education and I also adhere to the concepts of English for specific purposes. Since we are dealing with tertiary education students, so, there we have to emphasize the target or the use of target language.”

To summarize, EFL teachers across tertiary schools in Davao de Oro have a positive translanguaging stance. They believe that the students’ use of Bisaya is a critical factor that can impact learning the second language, which in this case is English. Furthermore, they view Bisaya as helpful in allowing students to grasp the lesson better.

However, despite their affirmative belief, they admitted that they and their students need to use English almost all the time, except for specific instances. They still subscribe to a monolingual bias or paradigm, which means that English should always be used, if possible, inside the EFL classroom. Although they acknowledged that this contradicts their stance, they still see that the incorporation of Bisaya is a deviation from the objectives of the language classes. Again, a manifestation of their long-held monolingual bias.

Table 2: Tertiary EFL teachers’ translanguaging practices

Themes	Core Ideas
Translanguaging’s Organic Place in Lesson Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Translanguaging happens during giving instruction and choosing of reference books.</li> <li>• EFL teachers translanguage in a myriad of topics.</li> </ul>
Translanguaging: A go-to in class performances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Translanguaging is designed to occur in performances such as reporting and role-playing.</li> <li>• EFL teachers allow translanguaging in performance-based assessments.</li> </ul>
Translanguaging’s non-existence by default or by design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Books promoting translanguaging are non-existent in EFL classrooms.</li> <li>• EFL teachers disallow students from translanguaging during written assessment.</li> </ul>

Based on the description of the participants, their translanguaging practices can be discovered in almost all parts of the EFL class. They perform translanguaging during the preparation of their topics, giving of instructions, conduct of performance assessment, and

even in question-and-answer discussions. Throughout the class, there are evidences of translanguaging practices used by the EFL teachers. These deliberate translanguaging practices are aimed at helping students better comprehend the lessons using their first language. IDI-Participant 2 discussed that she allows translanguaging: *“I’ve been allowing them to present their own ideas [using their first language] I give them their part in the reporting or specific parts in which they are going to present certain topics.”*

During the assessment part, translanguaging can also be found designed in various strategies, primarily those which are performance-based. These performance-based assessment include reporting, role-playing or simulation, and oral recitation. Despite the class being focused on EFL, they feel that it is inevitable to translanguage in performance-based assessments. IDI-Participant 4 revealed: *“In my speech and theatre arts, during the assessment, I encourage them to make a video which caters to their theater art skills and encourage students to use L1 if they can.”* On the other hand, IDI-Participant 6 disclosed that she allows students to translanguage: *“I allow [for oral recitation], but later on they need to translate into English.”*

However, despite the considerable translanguaging practices in different parts of the EFL classroom, texts or books that incorporate the students’ L1 are either virtually non-existent in the participants’ workplace or not considered for use. IDI-Participant 1 revealed his personal decision not to provide any text or book that incorporates the students’ L1. *“I do not give them text, reading materials that are actually written in their L1.”* Conversely, FGD-Participant 5 stressed that she has not experienced providing any text or book that incorporates the students’ first language. *“I have never provided text in L1. Although I have mentioned that I would have selected literature, but then it wasn’t written in L1 but it is in the target language.”*

One interesting wrinkle from these findings is that it contradicts the emergent theme from their translanguaging belief. As previously stated, although the participants have a positive stance, the participants believe that they and their students should use the English language in their classes almost all the time. However, their EFL classes are replete with translanguaging practices, allowing students to fully use their linguistic repertoire. In hindsight, the teachers’ translanguaging belief is reflected in their translanguaging practices.

This can be interpreted as, despite their monolingual bias, the participants’ translanguaging design still reflects their translanguaging stance. Whether they think that they should speak exclusively in English, they allow translanguaging to happen in almost every part of the EFL classes. This reflects the true translanguaging practice of participants.

### **Conclusion**

The study revealed that EFL teachers have a positive translanguaging belief. However, they still abide by a monolingual paradigm by using the English language



exclusively, as much as possible, when conducting their EFL class and encouraging their students to stick to using English. Meanwhile, their translanguaging practices are embedded into almost all parts of the language lesson. Pieces of evidence of translanguaging can be found in their instructions, discussion, and assessment. Basically, their positive belief is shown in their practices throughout the language lesson. The findings add to the growing body of literature on the translanguaging belief and practices of tertiary EFL teachers. Furthermore, no literature was found discussing the translanguaging stance, design, and shift of EFL teachers in the tertiary level in the Philippines.

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