

Analysis of Translanguaging in classrooms: An Effective Way to Teach a Second Language to Students

Haowen Hu*

School of Arts, Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts, US

**Corresponding author. Email: hu.haow@northeastern.edu*

ABSTRACT

English has become increasingly important in this globalized world for people working in all kinds of career. For students, specifically, English proficiency is become extremely important. Not only the society placed high value on being English proficiency, getting admission in various next level institutes also require students to have high English proficiency. With the massive demand for advanced English learning experience, the amount of international schools that provide English learning classes outside of schools are significantly increasing in recent decades. Thus, this paper aimed to examine how the teachers who work at international schools in China used two languages, Chinese and English, interchangeably in their classroom. I hypothesized that how each language is used in class is based on the students' proficiency of English and their levels of understanding of the language at the moment. Data analysis found that using Chinese to help students to learn English is vital to create a good language learning environment. The proportion of each language being used is dependent on students' English proficiency.

Keywords: *Translanguaging, English, Chinese, Bilingual, International Schools*

1. INTRODUCTION

English, as a second language, has been a default part in Chinese curriculum for few decades. Chinese students are required to start English learning from the third grade. However, the demand for students to be more proficient in English pushes the majorities of schools to start English course from kindergarten. Nowadays, a five-year-old child is able to speak few words of English, such as cars, buses and teachers. This enthusiasm of having kids to be proficient in English plays a vital role in the development of English teaching and the change of society's perceptions on English. For example, parents would seize every opportunity to improve their children's English proficiency. They would not only having kids to attend English after-school classes but also ask their children to practice English at any random occasions when an English speaker is present or even when other family members are present. The reason behind this whole passionate pursuit of being English proficient is not merely that English proficient children can make their parent proud. Also, the admission to well-known schools and prestigious education institutions have high requirements for perspective students' English proficiency. Student who have higher scores in those required English proficiency tests (e.g., TOEFL, IELTS)

are more likely to be admitted, if other application requirements are also met. Also, in career setting, a person who have higher English proficiency (e.g., speaking) is more likely to be employed. The perception toward speaking another language especially English, in China, is that one can have more opportunities and will be considered as a more competitive employee and even a better person.

With the massive demand for advanced English learning experience, the amount of international schools that provide English learning classes outside of schools are significantly increasing in recent decades. Teachers in these institutions are often highly proficient in English since most of them are former students who are graduates from colleges in the UK and the US, or native speakers who were born in an English speaking countries. Thus, this paper aimed to examine how the teachers who work at international schools in China used two languages, Chinese and English, interchangeably. I hypothesized that how each language is used in class is based on the students' proficiency of English and their levels of understanding of the language at the moment. Moreover, the effectiveness of each language used in the class differs when they are used for different purpose. For example, some teachers tend to use student's native tongue to do explanations of knowledge for students with

limited English ability. However, this may not be ideal when this approach is employed by teachers on students with better English proficiency. In contrast, if too much English is being spoken by instructors in the class with students with lower English proficiency, they will not benefit so much from the class. Thus, English and Chinese will need to be used interchangeably depending on the moment to moment judgement of the teachers. Therefore, this paper aimed to investigate how the two languages, English and Chinese, are used by teachers who work at international schools in order to look for an ideal use of two languages to maximize the efficiency of learning English.

2. TRANSLANGUAGING

“You are using all your linguistic and cognitive resources to make sense of the academic content being delivered in a language you are just starting to learn.” [1][2][3][4]. When people engage with multiple languages, they are engaged in a translanguaging environment. People often use their mother language to help navigate through understanding a brand new language system. In this process, people may mix two languages in their daily language uses. For a Chinese student, to learn English one tend to use Chinese to help him understand certain things in English. As many scholars argued, to become a better learner in another language, students have to be proficient in their mother tongue. As globalization proceeds, people around the world get more connected. Everyone live in a translanguaging world. We ought to understand some degrees of other language to understand more information that is circulating in our daily life.

3. METHODS

3.1 Context and Participants

Data collection happened in Xi’an, which is located in Northwest China. Convenient sampling strategy was applied to recruit English teachers who work in the same school as the author. These teachers works in a English preparation institution outside of traditional schools. Students who come here to improve their English skills. Classes are designed to create a English speaking environment for students, therefore most classes are encouraged to take place only by speaking English.

Participant recruitment process resulted in two teachers agreed to participate in this study. Table 1 displays the detailed participant information. Participants were asked to video record one of their English lessons of their choice.

Table 1 Participant Information

	Age	Gender	Years of Teaching English	English Proficiency
Teacher A	25	Male	5 years	Fluent, Studied in the UK
Teacher B	24	Male	4 years	Fluent, Studied in the US

3.2 Data Analysis

Two class recordings were collected for data analysis and was investigated thoroughly to look for any scenarios on translanguaging, which is anytime of each language was being used. Students’ reactions when different languages used were also examined. Teachers’ approaches when different languages used were also exanimated for their effectiveness in terms of student language learning outcome. The proportion for each language being used throughout the class were also exanimated. This study looked to find solutions for more effective way for teachers to speak different language for specific purpose so that the students can acquire the most knowledge from the class.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Below is an excerpt:

- 01 T: Ok.= Good. Ok. So. I will give you some time to
- 02 read these words.
- 03 Ok? So next. You are going to give me
- 04 the definition of the words. Ok? And also you are
- 05 going to know how to pronounce it, Ok? And finally
- 06 I want you to make a sentence with 04 these words.
- 07 Does that make sense to you?
- 08 [Sort of.]
- 09 I need you to know their pronunciations and I;;; need
- 10 you to make sentences using these words.
- 11 Do you understand? [Um-]
- 12 Good=
- 13 So let’s get started::
- 14 S: Less. [Length-]
- 15 Length
- 16 [yes-]
- 17 My glasses:: have two(0.8) lengths.
- 18 Re(0.4)commend(0.7) I:::recommend you
- 19 play::: [I recommend you what?]

- 20 Play:: [I recommend you play]
 21 play basketball.
 22 S: shoot. [suits-]
 23 S::uit. I:: think about the jacket(0.5) is suit you.
 24 [I think about the jacket is:: suit 26 you?
 25 So it's opposed to be, I think the jacket suits you.
 26 Ok?] [Ok.]
 27 Expected::: I expect my bir::thday gift.
 28 [expected]
 29 I expected [Yes.]
 30 My:: birthday gift. [gifts]
 31 gifts. [Yes. Good.]

Above is an excerpt from the first class recording of Teacher A. As we can see the classroom is a translanguaging teaching environment. Students' practice and teachers' approach in this case can be described as translanguaging. Meanwhile, learning a new language, students make connections with their native tongue. As we can see from the excerpt, teachers used Chinese to explain the content of the task given to the students. Moreover, when the student was asked to make the sentence, he paused before giving out an answer, which indicates he was making connections in his brain. For example, when he was making a sentence on the word recommend, he thought about the word that came after play. It took a longer time for him to locate the word he wanted to say as a beginner learner. Therefore, the word he chose to say was basketball. The word he was familiar with and was something he does in his leisure time. This indicates that learners have the tendency to draw from their memory when learning new things. As Michael Puskar in her article named *The Relationship between Learning And Memory*, she stated that, "The relationship between learning and memory is incredibly close and intertwined." [5] In his case, the student's practice was merely drawing memories from the past and helping him to understand the new concept that he was learning.

Moreover, the use of Chinese by the teacher in this situation is intriguing. The teacher started with saying that "we need to look at these words now". This sentence had no relation to do with any explanation of knowledge. It was an introduction of the task they were going to do. The second time he spoke Chinese was after he finished giving the students instructions in English. He was not sure if the student made sense of what he was talking about. The use of Chinese here played a role in translating the English he just used. The reason being was that the content of the class was not relatively difficult. Therefore, there was no need for explanation of any complicated concept. Due to the fact that the student's English

proficiency was limited, he used English and Chinese for the instructions, in hoping to teach him some English through using two language after each other. He then gave student time for him to read all those words and make sentences. Clearly, he had memory from previous class. He was familiar with the word "recommend" and "length". The teacher corrected him immediately when he made a mistake. The teacher chose to use English to correct the student, which again enhanced students' memory with the corrected sentence and words. I believe this approach was effective when it came to teach students with limited proficiency in English. They seeked to memorize detailed corrections for the moment rather than having a broad understanding of the whole thing. For example, the student made a sentence using the word "suit", he clearly made a mistake by putting an "is" in front of "suit". The teacher corrected him but did not give any explanation of his mistake. His purpose was to teach the student the meaning of the word and he wanted to stay closely to this aim. If he was going to give him a lecture on the composition of sentence in English, it would confuse the student even more. To teach a student with reflectively low level of English proficiency, the effective way is teach them step by step. Teacher should give out instructions clearly and specifically, and this is what this teacher was engaging in this above excerpt. The teacher ignored giving students a broad understanding of the knowledge, instead he taught them subtle concepts at a time. Along the way, student eventually will understand the essence of learning English. As Vygotsky stated that teachers' role is to help student reach the zone of proximal development. He argued that zone of proximal development is the difference between potential development level and actual development level. Children are able to learn certain concepts on their own and this is their actual development level. Under the guidance of teachers and elders, they will be able to learn more [6]. In this scenario, the teacher acted as an tool to guide the student to learn more concepts that are not within the student's reach if there was no one to help him.

The second recording I examined was a class where the teacher was trying to teach student an important grammar in English. The student's English proficiency is relatively better than his peers in the previous excerpt. It is intriguing to see the difference in proportions of each language being spoken by the teacher. Moreover, the other noticeable changes the purpose of each language alters from the previous recording.

Below is the excerpt:

- 01 T: So today we are going to learn a new expression that native speaker often use
 02 on a daily basis, which is as,as,[as,as?]
 03 Yes-
 04 When you are comparing two things together

05 and they have something in
 06 common, then you can use this expression. I will
 07 give you an example. I am as
 08 tall as you are. The pizza is as tasteful as the
 09 hamburger. As you can see, there
 10 are two objects in these two sentences and there
 11 is one adjective in the middle.
 12 [O::k-]
 13 Now::: Let's do an exercise-
 14 Let's do an exercise together.
 15 You give me two objects and I give you
 16 an adjective. We together use as,as. to- make a
 17 whole sentence. -Understood?
 18 [I come up with any objects?]
 19 Sure- Anything thing will do for now.
 20 S: Um::: Computer an::d Phone?
 21 T: O:k. I will:: u::se expensive. So the whole
 22 sentence is- repeat after me. The
 23 computer is as expensive as the phone. [The
 24 computer is as:: ex::pensive as the phone.]
 25 Very good- Now. You can try to think about any
 26 two objects and an adjective
 27 then make a whole sentence with them by using
 28 as,as. [Ok. Got it]
 29 S: Um::: I would use two places. Beijing and
 30 Shanghai- So:: Beijing is as:::
 31 crowded as Shanghai? [Excellent.]

The difference between two transcripts is quiet obvious. In the second recording, there was less Chinese being used throughout the whole session. The teacher talked to the students in English for a relative longer time than in the previous excerpt. There was hardly ever a long sentence being spoken in Chinese. It was clear to see that the teacher used English to explain the concept and giving out instructions at the same time. In the previous excerpt, the teacher translated everything into Chinese for the student. The proportion of each language differed when students' English proficiency altered. This teacher used more English to stimulate students' memory, hoping to teach the student not only the concept they were going to learn for that class, but also to teach the student expressions that can be used outside of class. Language environment is the best way for children to learn a new language. The teacher in the excerpt tried to recreate this

language environment for his student by emerging him in an English speaking classroom. In the long run, the student will be likely to learn both concepts and daily expressions.

Apparently, these two teachers used two approaches and two ways of teaching their students. By using the Chinese and English, they created a bilingual classroom environment for the students. It is argued that to "better understand a second language concept, one should also be proficient in home language." [7][8][9] These two teacher did not choose to discard the use of Chinese in their teaching since they need to make sure students are clear with their instructions. Some teacher may pose a rule that forbids speaking home language in their class. Scholars argue this may not be the best way to teach student. Larry Ferlazzo argued that ELL students' home language is an asset, not a "barrier" [10]. He believed that allowing children to use their home language to learn new language can better help them to understand new concepts and shorten the distance between teachers and students. Therefore, using Chinese to help students to learn English is vital to create a good learning environment. The proportion of each language being used is dependent on students' English proficiency. It is at the hand of the teachers to decide how much English and Chinese they need to speak so that their students can benefit the most.

5. CONCLUSION

The results of this study manifested the ideology most Chinese teachers possesses. They believe by using two languages to teach student, they will successfully convey their meaning to students and in the long run students will not only learn a new language but also improve their home language at the same time. This study cannot pin down to a specific point of proportion that a teacher should employ in their practice so they can reach maximum efficiency, since teacher have their correct evaluations on student as guidance for them to decide. However, the most effective way of teaching a second language to them is yet to be discovered, this paper argues that to create a bilingual environment is crucial to students.

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