



# Bilingual Basics

The Newsletter of the *Bilingual-Multilingual Education Interest Section (B-MEIS)*

## ARTICLES

### SHORTCOMINGS OF VALIDATING TRANSLANGUAGING WITHOUT PEDAGOGIC FOCUS IN BILINGUAL CLASSROOM

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Discursive practices in bilingual classrooms have recently been reframed as "translanguaging", which refers to "the act performed by bilinguals of accessing different linguistic features of various modes of what are described as autonomous languages, in order to maximize communicative potential" (García 2009, p. 140). The study presents findings from a post-intervention class, where the focal teacher embraced translanguaging to teach Shakespeare's Sonnet 18 to first-year students in an "Introduction to Poetry" course offered by the English department of a Bangladeshi private university. The medium of instruction of this university is English, but Bangla (aka Bengali) is the mother-tongue of the teacher and students, as well as the national language and the lingua-franca of Bangladesh. Previously, the entire cohort participated in a pedagogical intervention to experience a clearly articulated translanguaging pedagogical approach.



Wei's (2011) Moment Analysis approach was used to examine the audio-clips of three representative moments from the post-intervention class. Wei (2011) proposed Moment Analysis as a paradigm shift to distance from frequency and regularity-oriented, pattern-seeking approaches, to focus instead on spontaneous, impromptu, and momentary actions and performances of the individual. To ascertain whether translanguaging achieved the goals of the class, the following sections present an analysis of three representative moments:

#### Moment 1: Insufficient Scaffolding With Bangla Word Meanings

In the pedagogical intervention, PowerPoint slides were used to display Bangla meanings of difficult English words so that the students could instantly analyze what they saw. As can be seen, the teacher replaced PowerPoint slides with oral translanguaging to provide the word meanings whenever the need arose:

Teacher: just read and underline the words that you don't understand.  
 (Students started reading)  
 Teacher: So, there are some old words, right? Thee, thou....  
 Student-1: Thou is you  
 Teacher: Excellent.  
 (Students resumed reading)  
 Student-2: *Ma'm বাউের meaning কি?* (What's the meaning of buds?)  
 Teacher: কুঁড়ি  
 Student-3: ma'am এটা কি (Madam what is this?)  
 TY: Hath... h- a- t-h --->Has!  
 Student-4: ওহ আল্লাহ! (Oh my god!)  
 Student-6: Ma'm এই line টার "Nor shall death brag thou wand'rest in his shade"-- wand'rest মানে কি? (Student asked the meaning of the English sentence)  
 Teacher: Wander মানে ঘুরে বেড়ানো est গুলো these are like old spelling, so actually it's wandered. Wander means what? Roam around. (Teacher explained the early modern English spelling of "wand' rest" and told the meaning in English as well).  
 Student-7: কারো যদি কবিতা পড়তে যেয়ে দাঁত ভেঙ্গে যায় দয়া করে নিজ দায়িত্বে লাগিয়ে নেবেন (read this poem at your own risk if you want to break your teeth while pronouncing these words)  
 Everybody bursts into laughter.

Extract 1. A translanguaging moment with a focus on scaffolding technique.

Students struggled to understand the early modern English text of sonnet 18 despite the oral scaffolding of Bangla meanings; hence, they relied heavily on translanguaging and frequently expressed their frustration. For instance, when the teacher explained the word "hath" and a student responded with (Oh my God!). The students also laughed at their struggle. For example, when the teacher elucidated that suffixes, such as "-est" in "wand'rest" are the early modern English spelling, the linguistic complexity made the content least accessible. These students did not know the meaning of the word "wander" in the first place, learning the meaning and pronunciation of the same word in its original form was a lot to ask. It was evident in the sarcastic remark of another student when he asked his classmates to read the poem at their own risk if they want to break their teeth while pronouncing these problematic English words.

### Moment 2: Culturally Inappropriate Content

The following moment represents an incongruence between course content and Bangladeshi culture. After the first read-through of the entire poem, the teacher asked: "so after your first reading, did you understand what it is about?" About two or three students immediately replied,

ma'am (didn't understand a single thing, ma'am)." This response caught the teacher off-guard as she started laughing in despair and dismay. Thereupon a student came to her rescue only to provide a wrong answer:

Student 1: A woman?  
 Teacher: A woman? Okay! She has a very good guess. There is somebody in the poem, about whom the first-person narrator is writing, right?  
 Student 2: A guy!  
 Teacher: wow! এটা কেথায় থেকে বের করে ফেলাছ? (How do you know it?) We are not supposed to know it now. She got the actual information. It's not a woman. Shakespeare is actually writing about a man.  
 Students whispered: বর্ণনাম নী gay / ছিঁপ? (I told you he was gay)  
 Teacher: Here it's a male friend, it was actually his patron. Patron বোঝ? (Do you understand who a patron is?)  
 Students: No.  
 Ty: Somebody who helps... alth... যেমন আগে আমাদের গ্রামে জাইপীর মাস্টার থাকত না? Lodging master? So the master would have food and ... you know... housing... for the family, আর তার বদলে পড়াত। (A patron is somebody who has been given food and shelter in return of tutoring the children of the household).

Extract 2. A translanguaging moment with a focus on culturally relevant materials.

Among the 154 sonnets of Shakespeare, the first 126 are called the Fair Youth sequence where homosexuality is a relevant theme. In this Fair youth sequence, the poet becomes emotionally attached to his friend and seeks to eternalize his beauty through the lineage (Ganguly, 2018). Few students were already aware of this fact. However, the teacher did not tap into this existing knowledge, as homosexuality is not a culturally relevant concept in Bangladesh. She brought up only culturally relevant concepts such as the lodging master. Consequently, the choice of culturally inappropriate materials as a course content prevented discussing more of what the poem was about than who it was for and left crucial elements of a literary piece undiscussed in this classroom.

### Moment 3: Assessment of Group Work

Students were divided into small groups to solve a set of 12 questions from the lecture. The following moment was from the group discussion where the entire cohort translanguaged to ask and answer a set of questions:

Teacher: সিমাদের group. Is there any symbol? কোনটা কিসের symbol? Number 10? (Addressing a particular student group, what is the symbol for Number 10?)  
 Group 1: The eye of heaven  
 Teacher: The eye of heaven.... এঁটাতো metaphor! সরাসরি সূর্য টা হচ্ছে আকাশের চোখ। (The eye of heaven is a metaphor, not a symbol)  
 Teacher: Subject matter? Number 11?  
 One group was urging other groups to answer. Finally, a group responded.  
 Group 2: Timelessness of love and beauty.  
 Teacher: Timelessness of love and beauty!? তাহলে থিমে কি লিখস? (Then what did you write in themes?)  
 (Teacher was not happy with the answer and looked at other groups for the better interpretation.)  
 Group 3: friend নিয়ে কথা বলেছে। (He talked about a friend)  
 Teacher: well, it's about his friend. A topic should be about the person. He's writing the poem about the person, Shakespeare's friend. আর অন্য যা যা কিছু love, beauty, timelessness, Nature, এগুলো সব হচ্ছে theme. ওরে আমার কপাল!! (The rest such as love, beauty, timelessness, Nature are themes. My bad luck!)

Extract 3. A translanguaging moment with a focus on student-performance.

This moment demonstrated that two of the three student-groups could not perform well. The teacher's utterance, "My bad luck!" evidenced her frustrations since she was not satisfied with the performances of her students.

### Discussion

Despite dislodging the monolingual ideologies of EMI and embracing translanguaging as the norm in the focal classroom, the analysis of three representative moments demonstrated that translanguaging was not sufficiently successful in serving the pedagogic goal. Under these circumstances, Williams' (2012) classification of "natural" translanguaging and "official" translanguaging is suitable to explain what went wrong and what could produce a better outcome. Natural translanguaging refers to a spontaneous occurrence in classroom interaction for enhancing subject or language-related understanding, while official translanguaging means explicit strategies employed by teachers in order to use several languages in class (Williams, 2012). The translanguaging episodes featured in the representative moments are "natural" which lack the explicit strategies of "official" translanguaging. The following discussion demonstrates how explicit strategies of translanguaging pedagogy could solve the problems located in the representative moments:

Moment 1 featured students' struggle to access early modern English vocabularies. In this regard, the teacher could provide additional support alongside natural translanguaging. Using a presentation tool such as PowerPoint as a teaching supplement in the fast-paced class of foreign literature could have supported the students by displaying written information clearly and helping them follow along with the lecture.

Moment 2 revealed the dissonance between course contents and students' culture. The teacher could use a poem with culturally accessible themes. While she was teaching Shakespearean sonnets in this introductory course, the 'canon' has moved on in other sites (e.g. Australia), and more contemporary works would be used in most instances, unless there was a focus on particular century poetry, for example. Culturally relevant texts enhance engagement, comprehension, and proficiency, as these texts enable students to draw on their background knowledge and experiences (Rafi & Morgan, forthcoming).

Moment 3 demonstrated poor performances of the students. Neither the students nor the teacher was sufficiently concerned with the linguistic aspects of topics throughout the class. Although the teacher shaped her language practices in English and Bangla according to demands of the communicative interaction, she did not make any rules for managing the languages in the classroom. Setting explicit rules promotes greater linguistic inclusion and stimulates students' ability to translanguage in a more structured and conscious manner (Caruso, 2018). Then again, she could have adapted the lessons instead of directly starting from the original text. Providing a paraphrase or Bangla equivalent of the original text as a scaffold, if not found, a Bangla translation of poem alongside the text could open up scope for cross-linguistic analysis and enhance understanding of the curricular knowledge. Furthermore, she could engage students in writing what they understood, translating into Bangla. This guided writing activity could have provided a more robust understanding of the topics under discussion.

### Conclusion

While the benefits of translanguaging pedagogies have been widely recognized, this study addressed questions on the effectiveness of translanguaging if not carefully implemented. The findings of this study demonstrated that validating translanguaging practices without explicit strategies in English-only classroom does not necessarily ensure satisfactory performances of emergent bilingual students. The study concludes recommending teacher-education for enabling teachers to maximize the benefits of using the linguistic resources of bilingual learners with specific goals and to ensure the successful implementations of translanguaging pedagogical approaches.

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