

## Exploring Indonesian Teachers' and Students' Perceptions and Practices of Translanguaging and Trans-Semiotizing in EFL Classrooms

\*<sup>1</sup>Ronald Maraden Parlindungan Silalahi, <sup>2</sup>Wulandari Santoso

<sup>1-2</sup>Universitas Bunda Mulia, Indonesia

**\*Correspondence:**

bomberrose@gmail.com

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### Abstract

The current trend of dynamic multilingualism in applied linguistics has triggered the emergence of pedagogical approaches that intend to support and legitimate multilingual language practices. Translanguaging and trans-semiotizing are widely used to describe the dynamic flows of discursive practices that involve one's entire semiotic repertoire to communicate and construct knowledge, which remains unexplored in this context. This study investigated university teachers' and students' perceptions of translanguaging and trans-semiotizing in English classrooms. Using observation, semi-structured interviews with five teachers, and focus group discussion with seven students, the results of the thematic analysis demonstrated that while the teachers seemed to expect the implementation of monolingual instruction, the students had a more positive view towards the utilization of multiple languages and semiotic signs in the classroom. It was also found that translanguaging and trans-semiotizing served numerous pedagogical functions in enhancing students' comprehension of the materials. Nevertheless, the ability to trans language and trans-semiotic was not seen as a multilingual competence but as a manifestation of one's linguistic deficiency. The results of this study would contribute to the reconceptualization of English language policies and practices, which should move towards legitimizing and valuing these discursive practices.

**Keywords:** Translanguaging, trans-semiotizing, multilingualism, multilingual language practices

### INTRODUCTION

Recent research in applied linguistics has moved toward rejecting traditional concepts in language teaching in favor of a monolingual ideology emphasizing the target language as the medium of instruction (Cenoz, 2017; Cenoz & Gorter, 2020; García & Li, 2014). This monolingual instruction is no longer relevant and appropriate in multilingual contexts, such as Indonesia, where most students are multilingual because it represents the hegemony of English (Silalahi, 2019, 2021), which appears to be more dominant than other languages

(Santoso, 2020; Santoso & Hamied, 2022). Such instruction has reinforced the ideological hierarchies among languages and weakened the role of national and local languages (Mahboob & Lin, 2018).

Multilingualism in language education implies an inclusive and flexible learning model that allows the freedom to use other language variations so that cultural identity and linguistic plurality can be respected and optimized to achieve learning goals (Santoso, 2020; Santoso & Hamied, 2022). Moreover, the globalization and internationalization of education have had a significant impact on linguistic diversity, which has prompted the emergence of various research related to optimizing sociocultural identities in interactions in the classroom (Cenoz, 2017; Vallejo & Dooly, 2020).

Multilingualism, a linguistic phenomenon in which several languages constantly interplay in social interactions, is often associated with translanguaging. In this case, translanguaging is an umbrella term that emphasizes using semiotic repertoire to communicate effectively (García & Li, 2014). Linguistic variations are seen as communication involving different languages or semiotics in an integrated communicative repertoire (García & Lin, 2017; García & Li, 2014). Translanguaging can transform classroom discourse by empowering teachers and students to legitimize their multilingual language practices (Santoso, 2020; Santoso & Hamied, 2022). Translanguaging thus supports students' cognitive abilities and creates classroom spaces that favor the diversity of linguistic and semiotic variations.

Recent studies have investigated teachers' perceptions of translanguaging in ELT (Khairunnisa & Lukmana, 2020; Rasman, 2018; Rerung, 2015; Santoso, 2020). Previous studies have also discussed the cross-linguistic pedagogy of Indonesian students' perceptions (Nursanti, 2016; Santoso, 2019). Although some studies in Indonesia have examined translanguaging practices, there is still a lack of research focusing on trans-semiotizing. Recent literature has reconceptualized the notion of translanguaging, including semiotic signs (Lin, 2019). Therefore, challenging monolingualism and incorporating translanguaging in the classroom contexts are essential to legitimate multilingual language practices.

This study investigates teachers' and students' perceptions of translanguaging and trans-semiotizing in English classrooms in an Indonesian private university. Exploring this issue at the micro level is important to unpack teachers' and students' views dominated by the monolingual norm so that they can transform and reflect on their multilingual practices. The results of this study will be beneficial to inform pedagogical practices and policy-making concerning the language used in the Indonesian multilingual setting.

## METHOD

This research involved five English teachers and seven students in a private university in Jakarta, Indonesia, that offers subjects related to applied English linguistics in English translation and teaching, linguistics, literature, and culture. Demographic information for teachers and students in this study is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants' demographic background

No	Participant	Acquired Language
1	Teacher 1	Indonesian, English, & Javanese
2	Teacher 2	Indonesian & English
3	Teacher 3	Indonesian, English, & Javanese

4	Teacher 4	Indonesian, English, & Javanese
5	Teacher 5	Indonesian, English, & Javanese
6	Student1	Indonesian, English, Japanese
7	Student 2	English, Indonesian, Hokkian, Mandarin, German
8	Student 3	English, Indonesian, Japanese, Mandarin
9	Student 4	Indonesian, English
10	Student 5	Indonesian, English
11	Student 6	Indonesian, English, German
12	Student 7	Indonesia, English, Spanish

This research was qualitative since it focused on understanding the phenomenon's complexity in its own right (Creswell, 2009). Multiple research instruments were used to triangulate data from the participants (teachers and students) and their classroom interactions. Interviews with the teachers and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with the students were the main research instruments to investigate their perceptions regarding translanguaging and trans-semiotizing in the classroom. In addition, observations were carried out in four English classes in four sessions (every 100 minutes) to supplement the data.

The thematic analysis (Robson & McCartan, 2016; Terry, Hayfield, Clarke, & Braun, 2017) linked the three data sets. It consists of the following procedures: (a) Classify responses according to the sub-themes, which are then coded; (b) Transcribe the assessed data according to the theme and purpose of the research and translate it into English; (c) Arrange the analysis according to the research theme and include quotations representing the analysis.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Teachers' and Students' Views towards Monolingual Instruction

This study's findings demonstrated discrepancies between teachers' and students' perceptions of monolingual instruction in English classrooms. Most teachers perceived the exclusive use of English as the ideal condition of language learning.

*"But for me, teachers should maximize opportunities in using English. The more students get exposure to English from their teachers, the more they will get vocabulary and knowledge to pronounce words."* [Excerpt 1, teacher 3]

*"I think 100% of English in the classroom is the perfect condition for language learning. But if we cannot aim for 100%."* [Excerpt 1, teacher 4]

Despite their preference for using English in the classroom, the teachers admitted that such a condition did not exist due to several circumstances. Therefore, using Indonesian was unavoidable.

*"I have tried to use English fully in the listening and speaking classes. However, some language chunks were difficult to explain in English. Again, I tried my best to use English, but the result was not satisfying."* [Excerpt 2, teacher 2]

The results of this study are similar to previous studies (Afriadi, 2021; Wang, 2019), revealing that In EFL contexts, monolingual instruction has often made teachers feel guilty if

they provide a space for students to use their integrated linguistic practices. The widespread belief that being immersed in the target language is the ideal way of learning the language could cause this dilemma (Rasman, 2018). The pedagogical practices still oriented to the monolingual norm are also manifested in many teacher education programs (Santoso & Hamied, 2022), which can influence future teachers' understanding of teaching English.

While many of the teachers considered monolingual instruction as a more favorable teaching method, the students regarded the use of Indonesian in the classroom as desirable:

*"For me, using a bit of Indonesian is okay even in the upper level because sometimes there are some terms we don't understand."* [Excerpt 3, teacher 3]

*"I think Indonesian can also be used, but I hope English can be used consistently in the class."* [Excerpt 3, teacher 5]

Some of the students were also concerned with the exclusive use of English as it would inhibit their learning process:

*"It's good that teachers always use English, but I am afraid I need longer time to comprehend materials. Using two languages helps me compare words from one language with another."* [Excerpt 4, student 2]

*"If teachers use English 100%, I hope we [students] are not prohibited from using Indonesian."* [Excerpt 4, student 4]

The mismatch between teachers' and students' perceptions of the monolingual policy may demonstrate the gap between the idealized view of monolingualism and the plurality of language practices. Prior and recent research has demonstrated that using students' languages always occurs in the classroom despite the imposition of monolingual instruction (Santoso, 2019). The pedagogical practices of multilingual individuals always involve plurilingual instruction. Therefore, teachers should provide a safe space for students to engage in dynamic discursive practices to legitimize and construct their multilingual identities (García-Mateus & Palmer, 2017).

### **Teachers and Students' Views towards Translanguaging**

The participants stated that they used Indonesian to scaffold students' comprehension of materials.

*"I once taught them about word stress. I used Indonesian to relate the material to my students' lives. I used the word 'pasar' to ask them to guess which part of the word is stressed. Then, I gave other examples in English."* [Excerpt 5, teacher 5]

The Indonesian language was used for numerous functions, such as clarifying, giving examples, and providing instructions. When students experienced difficulties in understanding the material, the teachers immediately changed the language of instruction to Indonesian to save time and enhance students' understanding.

*"To help students who face difficulties in learning through English, I switch to Indonesian to save time."* [Excerpt 6, teacher 2]

*"In grammar classes, I explain materials in English first. I will translate my explanations if students ask me a question or get confused."* [Excerpt 6, teacher 3]

The students stated that the teaching strategies could help them solve difficulties in learning English. The teachers constantly monitored their understanding of cognitively demanding subjects by re-explaining materials in Indonesian and providing opportunities for students to ask questions. In addition, all students positively perceived translanguaging since it could help them understand the material in class and bridge communication barriers during the learning process.

Since no official language policy was stipulated in this context, the teachers admitted that they set up rules in each class, considering the students' proficiency.

*"When we promote our department to prospective students, we always say that it is okay if their English is not good as they will learn English from the basic level."* [Excerpt 7, teacher 1]

The students also confirmed that teachers rarely used English entirely in the classroom. According to the students, the percentage of using English was 50 to 70 during the learning process. The findings of this study correspond to those of the previous studies revealing that translanguaging could serve as a pedagogical tool to scaffold students' cognitive abilities (e.g. (W. Wang & Curdt-Christiansen, 2019; Yuvayapan, 2019; Zhou, 2021). This study demonstrated that the exclusive use of English was difficult to realize since English was not the student's home language. Many students encountered difficulties when the materials were cognitively demanding. In this case, students' familiar languages could function as a valuable resource as they could draw on various communicative resources to negotiate to mean (Lin & He, 2017). Translanguaging could strengthen students' weaker language by utilizing their schemata of the dominant language (García & Li, 2014). In contrast, pedagogical practices oriented toward the monolingual ideology could potentially lead to academic, social, and economic disadvantages for students (de los Ríos & Seltzer, 2017).

Translanguaging uses language(s) to mediate understanding, make meaning, and produce comprehensible output in the learner's repertoire (Li, 2018). Translanguaging has refined our understanding of how multilingual engage in dynamic language practices by transcending socio-politically constructed named languages. Consequently, identifying which language is used in one's thinking process becomes irrelevant since multilingual do not think in a separate language system.

The results of this study which demonstrated that translanguaging occurred during teacher-student and student-student interactions, may also indicate the role of social interactions in acquiring knowledge (Duarte, 2019). Similar to the present study, research has shown that translanguaging encourages students to construct knowledge creatively through the flexible use of students' linguistic repertoire, as it could allow students to deliberately control their talk in knowledge construction (Duarte, 2019).

### **Trans-semiotizing: Going beyond linguistic practices**

Trans-semiotizing refers to using various learning modes to support the learning process in the classroom. In this study, the participants utilized a range of semiotic signs to enhance students' understanding of the material being studied (See Table 2).

Table 2. Semiotic signs

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Excerpt 8</b>	<b>Semiotic signs</b>
Teacher 2	<i>I use videos and other semiotic signs in teaching any class. For example, in teaching reading strategies. taking notes</i>	Picture (shape)
Teacher 4	<i>I use audio-visual support in my class. Audio-visual can facilitate our senses to help us understand materials.</i>	Audio-visual material
Teacher 5	<i>Pictures help my students understand the meaning of the sentence" displayed on the screen. I use online games which also contain pictures.</i>	PPT and online games.
Student 2	<i>In phonology class, the teacher shows how he pronounces words, so we can know the correct way to pronounce words.</i>	Body movement

Implementing these semiotics was made easy by advancing technology, which facilitates the audio-visual modes, such as images, audio, video, and interactive learning tools. Semiotic signs enable the teachers to scaffold students' understanding of the materials, increase students' participation, and contextualize learning materials. Several modes were proven to boost the students' creativity in language(s) in some of the courses.

*"The use of semiotic signs can help us contextualize materials. If teachers rely on their explanations, sometimes I am still confused." [Excerpt 9, student 1]*

*"In grammar classes, he usually shows some pictures and then asks us to make sentences based on the pictures. These help us develop our creativity to create sentences." [Excerpt 9, student 3]*

The findings of this study align with the previous studies revealing that the use of different meaning-making signs, including semiotic resources, was reported to be beneficial for the process of knowledge construction (Leung & Valdes, 2019; Li, 2018). A trans-semiotic system as a pedagogical practice stems from a more recent conceptualization of translanguaging, which has been extended to cover one's semiotics (Lin, 2015; Lin, 2019). Lin (2015) draws the notion of trans-semiotizing to capture better plurilingualism, which belongs to first-order languaging, encompassing linguistic and non-linguistic communicative resources (García, 2017, 2019; Lin, 2019). Translanguaging is thus a trans-semiotizing act (Lin & He, 2017), involving the whole-body sensory formation of speech.

The holistic perspective of semiotic repertoire as a scaffold indicates that trans-semiotizing is essential to students' cognitive systems. Knowledge construction cannot be limited to linguistic resources as it goes beyond the deficit view of language in a narrow sense (Li, 2018). Thus, cognitive processes are inseparable from the language experience, comprising a multimodal and multisensory semiotic system (Li, 2018; Lin, 2019). In real-time interactions, translanguaging and trans-semiotizing result in what García & Lin (2017) call *la corriente*, the dynamic flow of language features in the classroom. When given a safe



space to trans language and trans-semiotic; students move between and beyond meaning-making systems to focus on tasks and co-construct their understanding of the world (Lin, 2019; Velasco & Fialais, 2018).

### **Translanguaging and trans-semiotizing as a sign of linguistic incompetence**

Despite translanguaging and trans-semiotizing, most teachers considered these discursive language practices a clear manifestation of linguistic incompetence, referring to one's limited English proficiency. They perceived translanguaging and trans-semiotizing as reflections of teachers' and students' low competence in English.

*"I see translanguaging as a negative thing. If translanguaging occurs in the classroom, there must be a problem there. It indicates students' lack of English competence."* [Excerpt 10, teacher 4]

The findings of this study support the prior studies (e.g., Rerung, 2015; Santoso, 2020), revealing that translanguaging and trans-semiotizing were mere pedagogical tools that could serve as practical solutions to classroom problems. The students seemed to have a nuanced perspective on the role of translanguaging and trans-semiotizing. While some students felt that the teachers used translanguaging and trans-semiotizing as practical tools to clarify and simplify complex concepts, others stated that their use indicated the teachers' difficulties in using English.

*Semiotic signs are helpful, especially for visual learners. But too much Indonesian makes us think: "If it's okay to use Indonesian, we will always use Indonesian."* [Excerpt 11, student 7]

Most participants thought multilingual speakers have similar characteristics to monolingual speakers. This bias can lead to unfair judgments comparing multilingual speakers to so-called native speakers of each language (Moriarty, 2017). Research on multilingualism has demonstrated the advantages of acquiring a second and a third language (Jessner & Cenoz, 2019; Jordà, 2017). These studies have shown that multilingual speakers possess a broader linguistic repertoire, better metalinguistic awareness, and better strategies for learning languages. Multilingual trajectories are dynamic since their language repertoire is not static, which constantly involves changes depending on the language acquisition they experience.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study aimed to investigate teachers' and students' perceptions of translanguaging and trans-semiotizing in English classrooms at the tertiary level. This study revealed that these multilingual practices were unavoidable. Despite the numerous pedagogical advantages, many participants considered translanguaging and trans-semiotizing a sign of one's linguistic incompetence. It indicates that the participants still strongly believed monolingual English speakers are an ideal model for English learning.

This study has deepened our understanding of Indonesian teachers' and students' views towards translanguaging and trans-semiotizing, which remains unexplored. It has also provided evidence that translanguaging and trans-semiotizing were beneficial for knowledge building. However, they needed to be holistically seen as legitimate language

practices due to the participants' insufficient understanding of multilingual competence. This study could further inform pedagogical practices in English classrooms. Imposing monolingual instruction in this context is irrelevant since teachers and students have acquired other languages that could positively impact the meaning-making process. In contrast, providing a safe space for translanguaging and trans-semiotizing in the classroom could facilitate both teachers and students to transform classroom discourse through their multilingual fluid flows.

This study has several limitations that could be addressed in future research. The findings of this small-scale study cannot be generalized to other research contexts. Instead, this study has focused more on understanding translanguaging and trans-semiotizing in a specific setting. Future studies could address a more significant number of participants and focus on investigating planned in addition to spontaneous translanguaging and trans-semiotizing practices.

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