TRANSLANGUAGING PEDAGOGY: REDEFINING MULTILINGUALISM IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Introduction

For much of the twentieth century, language teaching methodology was shaped by the assumption that languages exist as discrete, bounded systems and that effective instruction requires strict separation between the learner's native language and the target language. Monolingual immersion, the "target-language-only" classroom, and the treatment of code-switching as a deficiency to be corrected all stem from this view. Over the past two decades, however, sociolinguistic research has increasingly challenged this separatist model, proposing instead that multilingual speakers draw on a single, integrated linguistic repertoire rather than switching between two isolated systems. This shift in theoretical orientation has given rise to translanguaging, one of the most influential and widely debated concepts in contemporary applied linguistics.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the theoretical foundations of translanguaging, to distinguish it from earlier notions such as code-switching and bilingualism, and to assess its pedagogical implications for university-level English language teaching. The topic is of particular relevance today, as classrooms worldwide, including in Uzbekistan, are becoming increasingly multilingual, and instructors are required to reconsider rigid monolingual norms in light of learners' actual communicative practices.

1. Theoretical Foundations of Translanguaging

The term translanguaging was originally introduced in the context of Welsh-English bilingual education to describe pedagogical practices in which input and output were deliberately alternated between two languages within the same lesson. The concept

was later substantially reframed within sociolinguistics to denote not merely an instructional technique but a theory of language itself. According to this reframed view, bilingual and multilingual individuals do not possess two separate linguistic systems that they switch between; rather, they possess one unified linguistic repertoire from which they strategically select features depending on communicative context, interlocutor, and purpose.

This theoretical repositioning has significant consequences. If multilingual competence is understood as a single, dynamic repertoire rather than a set of discrete languages, then the very notion of "language boundaries" becomes a social and political construct rather than a cognitive reality. Named languages such as English, Uzbek, or Russian are, in this view, socially recognized labels imposed upon a fluid underlying system, rather than natural divisions within the human mind.

2. Translanguaging versus Code-Switching

It is important to distinguish translanguaging from the older and more familiar concept of code-switching. Code-switching, as traditionally defined, describes the alternation between two named languages within a single utterance or discourse, while still presupposing that these languages are separate systems being alternated. Translanguaging, by contrast, rejects this separatist premise altogether, treating the alternation not as movement between two systems but as the ordinary, integrated functioning of one repertoire.

This distinction is not merely terminological. Whereas code-switching has historically carried connotations of interference or incomplete competence, particularly in classroom contexts where it was discouraged, translanguaging reframes such practices as a legitimate and cognitively natural resource. This reframing has direct pedagogical consequences: practices once penalized as errors may instead be recognized as evidence of sophisticated multilingual meaning-making.

3. Pedagogical Applications in English Language Teaching

Translated into classroom practice, translanguaging pedagogy encourages the strategic and planned use of learners' full linguistic repertoire to support comprehension, deepen conceptual understanding, and scaffold the production of the target language, rather than treating the first language as an obstacle to be eliminated. Several applications are particularly relevant for university-level instruction.

First, complex or abstract academic content can be introduced or clarified using learners' shared first language before being consolidated and practiced in English, allowing conceptual understanding to be decoupled from linguistic difficulty. Second, translanguaging can be built into collaborative tasks, in which students are permitted to discuss and plan in any language available to them, while producing a final output in English; this approach has been shown to increase the cognitive depth and quality of task engagement without diminishing target-language production.

Third, in oral communication courses specifically, translanguaging-informed activities can help learners negotiate meaning more confidently in mixed-proficiency groups, drawing on shared linguistic resources strategically rather than avoiding communication altogether when full English proficiency is not yet available. Fourth, academic writing instruction can incorporate translanguaging as a drafting strategy, allowing students to plan and organize ideas in their strongest language before translating and refining the final text in English, which supports higher-order thinking during the composition process.

4. Challenges and Criticisms

Despite its growing influence, translanguaging pedagogy is not without critics. Some scholars argue that the theoretical claim of a single undifferentiated repertoire, while linguistically compelling, risks underestimating learners' own metalinguistic awareness of named languages as socially and educationally meaningful categories, particularly in contexts such as standardized proficiency examinations that explicitly test monolingual performance in English. Others caution that unstructured or poorly

planned translanguaging in the classroom can be misapplied as a justification for excessive reliance on the first language, ultimately reducing learners' exposure to and practice with the target language.

These criticisms suggest that translanguaging should not be adopted as an unregulated free-for-all, but rather implemented through carefully designed pedagogical strategies with clear communicative goals, in which the purposeful use of multiple languages serves specific learning outcomes rather than replacing sustained engagement with English.

5. Implications for Curriculum and Assessment

The adoption of translanguaging principles has implications that extend beyond individual classroom activities into curriculum design and assessment policy. Course materials can be developed to include planned multilingual scaffolding rather than treating the first language as entirely absent from instruction. Assessment practices, meanwhile, may need to distinguish between contexts in which monolingual English performance is the explicit target, such as formal academic writing assessments, and contexts in which translanguaging is a legitimate and even desirable communicative strategy, such as collaborative discussion or informal comprehension checks.

For teacher education programs, these developments suggest that future English language instructors would benefit from explicit training in the theoretical basis of translanguaging, alongside practical guidance on how to structure multilingual classroom activities in ways that strengthen, rather than substitute for, target-language competence.

Conclusion

Translanguaging represents a significant conceptual shift in how multilingual competence is understood, moving away from the notion of separate, bounded language systems toward a model of a single, dynamic linguistic repertoire. For English language teaching, this shift offers valuable pedagogical possibilities,

including deeper conceptual scaffolding, more confident learner participation, and richer academic writing processes, provided that its implementation remains purposeful and pedagogically grounded rather than unstructured. As classrooms continue to grow more linguistically diverse, translanguaging pedagogy offers university-level English instructors a theoretically informed and practically adaptable framework for reconciling learners' multilingual realities with the demands of target-language proficiency.

References

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