

Teacher's Translanguaging Practices in EFL Classroom Interaction: A Case Study at SMP Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan

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Abstrak: *This study aims to examine how translanguaging is practiced by the teacher and to explain the reasons for its use in EFL classroom interaction. The research applied a descriptive qualitative method, focusing on a teacher and approximately 24 students in class VII-3 at SMP Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan. Data were collected through classroom observation, audio recording, documentation, and interview, then analyzed using data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that the teacher practices two major types of translanguaging: translanguaging shifts and instructional scaffolding. Translanguaging shifts are used in short utterances for giving instructions and feedback, while instructional scaffolding is applied in detailed explanations of grammar and text content. Furthermore, these practices are driven by several factors: the need to optimize communicative resources, the effort to connect with students' prior knowledge, the necessity to adapt to the classroom situation (flow of interaction), and the requirement for effective classroom control. Although these strategies facilitate comprehension, the interaction remains teacher-centered with limited student participation.*

Keywords: Translanguaging, Teacher Practices, Classroom Interaction

INTRODUCTION

Language plays a fundamental role in educational settings, acting not only as a medium to deliver knowledge but also as an essential tool to build communication and interaction between teachers and students. However, in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, effective interaction is often hindered because students face severe difficulties understanding and using the target language due to their limited proficiency. To maintain communication and ensure the learning process runs

smoothly, teachers frequently engage in translanguaging, which is the strategic practice of combining English with the students' first language or Indonesian. While theoretical perspectives present translanguaging as a pedagogical tool that enhances classroom engagement, preliminary observations at SMP Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan revealed a contrasting reality. Despite the teacher's frequent use of both English and Indonesian, classroom interaction remained highly restricted, and student participation was minimal. This problem raises critical questions about how translanguaging is actually applied in practice and whether it functions as an effective interactional strategy. While previous studies have extensively explored how students utilize translanguaging and its direct impact on learning outcomes, there is still a clear gap in empirical research regarding the specific types of translanguaging practiced exclusively from the teacher's perspective and the underlying reasons driving these practices during classroom interactions.

To address this gap, the objective of this study is to describe how translanguaging is practiced by the teacher and to explain the underlying reasons for its use in the EFL classroom interaction. Conducting this study is highly significant as it theoretically enriches knowledge on pedagogical translanguaging from the instructor's perspective while practically offering teachers insights into maintaining a balanced linguistic approach that supports comprehension without minimizing target language exposure. The scope of this investigation is strictly limited to analyzing the teacher's utterances within the classroom. Operating under the qualitative paradigm, this case study utilized a descriptive qualitative method to holistically capture the natural classroom environment. The subjects involved were one English teacher and approximately 24 students in class VII-3 at SMP Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan. Data were gathered systematically through direct classroom observation, audio recordings of teacher-student speech, documentation of teaching materials, and a semi-structured interview with the teacher. The gathered qualitative data were then analyzed using the framework of Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña (2014), which involves data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification.

The data analysis was guided by two prominent sets of literature in the field of multilingual education. To examine how translanguaging was practiced, the study adopted the pedagogical translanguaging framework by Jasone Cenoz and Durk Gorter (2021), which identifies instructional scaffolding, metalinguistic awareness, and translanguaging shifts as core classroom strategies. To evaluate why the teacher used these strategies, the study drew on the conceptual model by Jay Lemke and Angel Lin (2022), focusing on factors such as optimizing communicative resources, adapting to the interactional flow, and maintaining classroom control. The major findings of this study demonstrate that the teacher relied on two primary types of translanguaging, namely translanguaging shifts, which are short, spontaneous language switches used to deliver quick instructions, questions, and feedback, and instructional scaffolding, which means fully utilizing Indonesian to explain complex grammar rules and text content. These practices were heavily driven by the need to manage the classroom situation effectively and maximize communicative resources. Ultimately, this research concludes that while teacher-led translanguaging successfully prevents communication breakdowns and clarifies material, it results in a heavily teacher-centered dynamic that fails to stimulate active student production. This study leaves open the question of how teachers can structurally transition from functional, teacher-centered translanguaging shifts into interactive, student-centered practices that promote authentic communicative autonomy.

RESEARCH METHOD

Participants

This study was designed as a descriptive qualitative case study to investigate natural classroom interaction without any manipulation from the researcher. The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan, located in Deli Serdang, North Sumatra. The subject of this study was one English teacher who taught English for seventh-grade students. Specifically, the participants involved in the classroom interaction were the teacher and approximately 24 students in class VII-3 during the academic year of 2025/2026. The selection of this specific class and teacher was based on purposeful sampling, as the teacher frequently utilized more than one language during teaching and learning activities, making it an ideal setting to study translanguaging practices. The primary focus of the data collection was strictly directed at analyzing the teacher's utterances and the pedagogical reasons behind them, while the students served as the interactional environment that triggered these language practices.

Instruments

To collect data regarding the teacher's translanguaging practices and the underlying reasons for their use, four qualitative data collection instruments were utilized in this study. The first instrument was classroom observation, which was conducted directly by the researcher to capture the real-time context of the classroom. The second instrument was an audio recorder, which was used during the observations to record every verbal interaction and ensure that the teacher's exact utterances were documented accurately. The third instrument was documentation, which involved collecting the lesson plans, teaching materials, and textbook pages used by the teacher during the observed sessions to provide contextual support for the analysis. The fourth instrument was a semi-structured interview guide, which was used during a face-to-face interview with the English teacher after the classroom observations were completed. This interview allowed the teacher to explain their thoughts and motivations, providing deep insights into why specific translanguaging choices were made during the lessons.

Data analysis procedures

The qualitative data collected from the observations, audio recordings, and interviews were analyzed systematically using the interactive qualitative analysis model proposed by Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña (2014). This analysis process consisted of three concurrent flows of activity. The first step was data condensation, where the audio recordings of the classroom interactions and the interview were carefully transcribed into written text, and irrelevant data were removed while the target utterances were selected, focused, and simplified. The second step was data display, where the condensed data were organized and structured into descriptive narratives and tables to clearly show the types of translanguaging used and the reasons behind them. The third step was conclusion drawing and verification, where the researcher interpreted the displayed data to find patterns and meaning, which were then validated against the theoretical frameworks of Jasone Cenoz and Durk Gorter (2021) for the practices, and Jay Lemke and Angel Lin (2022) for the underlying reasons, leading to the conclusions of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this qualitative study outline the teacher's translanguaging practices and the underlying motivations for their use during English as a Foreign Language (EFL) interactions in class VII-3 at SMP Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan. The collected data show that the implementation of multiple linguistic resources remains a structured, practical, and functional approach driven by specific situational needs. Based on the interactive qualitative data analysis, the findings are organized into two primary thematic categories: how translanguaging is practiced and why it is utilized by the instructor.

How Translanguaging is Practiced in Classroom Interaction

The descriptive analysis reveals that the teacher relies on two major types of pedagogical translanguaging from the analytical framework of Cenoz and Gorter (2021), specifically translanguaging shifts and instructional scaffolding. In contrast, the third type, which involves expanding students' metalinguistic awareness through comparative cross-linguistic analysis, was completely absent from the classroom data. The occurrence and structural distribution of these language practices within the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) interactional flow are systematically presented in Table 1.

Table: 1 Distribution and types of teacher's translanguaging practices

No	Type of translanguaging	Pedagogical Function	Occurrence Context	IRF Interactional Structural Role
1	Translanguaging Shift	Short, immediate language switches to maintain communication flow, save time, and clarify meaning.	Giving quick classroom direction, asking questions, and delivering prompt corrections	Initiation or immediate feedback
2	Instructional Scaffolding	Extended, detailed explanations in the narrative language to reduce students cognitive load	Unpacking complex grammar rules (e.g., past tense) and unpacking reading text context	Extended initiation positioning students primarily as passive listeners
3	Metalinguistic Awareness	Comparative language analysis and cross-linguistic reflections	Not practiced by the teacher	absent

Translanguaging shifts occur spontaneously within a single utterance or across sequential turns to provide instant clarity. The teacher frequently uses an English phrase followed by an immediate Indonesian equivalent (e.g., "*Okay, please open your book, ya. Buka bukunya halaman yang kemarin*"), which successfully eliminates communication breakdowns for low-proficiency learners but strictly serves as a tool to support teacher talk. Instructional scaffolding takes a more macro-pedagogical role, occurring when the teacher completely abandons target language use to deliver abstract linguistic concepts entirely in Indonesian (e.g., "*Past tense itu biasanya ada setelah subject, ya. Jadi kalian lihat kata kerjanya*"). While this scaffolding ensures

text and conceptual comprehension, its extended descriptive nature creates a teacher-centered dynamic where students act as passive recipients of information.

Why the Teacher Uses Translanguaging

The secondary analysis focuses on the underlying motivations that compel the instructor to combine English and Indonesian, guided by the framework of Lemke and Lin (2022). The semi-structured interview and observation protocols show that the teacher's language choices are driven by structural realities within the classroom rather than random code-switching. The primary factors extracted from the data are categorized in Table 2.

Table: 2 Underlying Reasons for Teacher's Translanguaging Practices

No	Underlying Factors (Lemke & Lin, 2022)	Pedagogical Purpose in the Classroom	Behavioral / Situational Triggers	Impact on Classroom Interaction
1	Optimization of Communicative Resources	Simplifying complex grammar explanations and saving time during instructions.	Students' systemic low English proficiency.	Prevents communication breakdowns but makes students look for translations.
2	Promotion of Epistemic Justice	Connecting new reading texts with students' prior knowledge and real-life experiences.	Students' lack of familiarity with foreign cultural contexts.	Helps basic content comprehension but keeps the learning process passive.
3	Entrainment/ Flow of Interaction	Maintaining the lesson progress and avoiding long pauses or awkward silence.	Total silence or blank expressions from students after a question.	Keeps the lesson moving forward but creates a one-way communication flow.
4	Classroom Management and Control	Managing classroom discipline and giving direct, firm behavior warnings.	Noise, lack of attention, or uncooperative student behaviors.	Achieves immediate student obedience and keeps the class orderly.

The factual data demonstrate that the teacher approaches translanguaging as a vital pedagogical coping strategy. When encountering systemic low English proficiency, the teacher combines linguistic resources to ensure that instructions are deciphered and core materials are absorbed. However, the data show that while these purpose-driven practices effectively manage classroom behaviors and safeguard mechanical understanding, they maintain a highly teacher-centered environment that limits independent language production or active conversational engagement from the students.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the teacher's translanguaging practices at SMP Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan serve as an essential pedagogical tool to maintain communication, yet their current application results in a heavily teacher-centered dynamic. By exploring how these practices are implemented and why they occur, this section interprets the significance of the results, links them to established theoretical frameworks, and discusses their broader implications for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction.

The empirical data regarding how translanguaging is practiced reveal a strict reliance on two specific dimensions of the pedagogical translanguaging framework proposed by Cenoz and Gorter (2021), which are translanguaging shifts and instructional scaffolding. The prevalence of translanguaging shifts, which are executed as immediate English to Indonesian translations of instructions and questions, indicates that the teacher utilizes multilingual resources primarily as an interactional safety net. From a functional perspective, these rapid shifts act as a mechanical tool to prevent immediate communication breakdowns and save valuable classroom time. However, because these shifts are immediately provided by the teacher before students are given the opportunity to process the target language, they inadvertently condition students to wait for the Indonesian translation rather than actively engage with the English input. Furthermore, the extensive use of instructional scaffolding, where the teacher switches entirely to Indonesian to explain grammar rules and text content, confirms that the native language remains the primary vehicle for conceptual development. While this scaffolding succeeds in reducing the students' cognitive load when facing complex structures, it creates an interactional imbalance. By shifting the entire linguistic burden to Indonesian during core academic explanations, the teacher minimizes students' exposure to natural, extended target language input, which ultimately restricts their opportunities to develop authentic receptive competencies.

A critical finding in this investigation is the complete absence of activities aimed at developing metalinguistic awareness, which is the third core element of Cenoz and Gorter's framework. The data show that the teacher did not engage in comparative language analysis or cross-linguistic reflections. This absence highlights a broader pedagogical issue in local EFL settings, which is that translanguaging is treated merely as a functional tool for translation and comprehension rather than a conscious strategy to develop deep multilingual competence. By ignoring the metalinguistic potential of translanguaging, the teacher misses an opportunity to help students critically compare the structural and grammatical systems of Indonesian and English, which could otherwise foster more meaningful, higher-order language learning.

Regarding why translanguaging is used, the results strongly validate the conceptual model of Lemke and Lin (2022). The teacher's motivations, such as optimizing communicative resources, adapting to the interactional flow, and maintaining classroom control, prove that translanguaging is a systematic, purpose-driven coping strategy rather than arbitrary code-switching. When the teacher encounters low target language proficiency, systemic silence, or blank expressions from the students, switching to Indonesian becomes an immediate necessity to restore the interactional flow and maintain behavioral control. Using the native language for classroom management ensures that procedural directions are followed efficiently and behavioral rules are understood without confusion. This confirms the proposition that in low-proficiency classrooms, a rigid English-only policy is practically unviable, and utilizing the students' linguistic repertoire is essential to keep the lesson moving forward.

However, extrapolating these findings to the larger field of language acquisition reveals a crucial paradox in classroom interaction. While the teacher's purposeful use of translanguaging successfully achieves short-term instructional goals, such as maintaining order, ensuring basic comprehension, and preventing communication breakdowns, it simultaneously undermines long-term communicative development. The resulting classroom dynamic remains strictly teacher-centered, positioning the instructor as the dominant linguistic actor while students remain passive recipients who rarely produce independent English utterances. This finding challenges the overly optimistic view in some modern literature that any form of translanguaging naturally democratizes the classroom and enhances interaction. Instead, this study demonstrates that if translanguaging is initiated and controlled exclusively by the teacher for functional translation and management, it can unintentionally restrict student output and limit authentic communicative autonomy. Therefore, the practical consequence of this study is the urgent need for a pedagogical shift, where teachers must transition from functional, teacher-led translanguaging shifts into more intentional, balanced, and student-centered practices that actively encourage learners to use their full linguistic repertoire to communicate, negotiate meaning, and participate interactively in the EFL classroom.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of pedagogical translanguaging by the English teacher at SMP Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan functions primarily as an essential interactional safety net and classroom management tool. The teacher systematically relies on translanguaging shifts for rapid operational tasks like giving short directions and feedback, alongside instructional scaffolding to deliver detailed grammar and text explanations in Indonesian. These practices are deliberately driven by the structural necessity to optimize communicative resources, adapt to student silence, maintain classroom control, and bridge new materials with prior knowledge. However, while this purpose-driven approach successfully prevents immediate communication breakdowns and maintains instructional order, its exclusive execution from the teacher's perspective creates an intense teacher-centered dynamic. Because the linguistic flexibility is controlled entirely by the instructor for translation and management, it restricts authentic student output and leaves them as passive interactional participants. Ultimately, while translanguaging is vital for safeguarding mechanical comprehension in low-proficiency EFL classrooms, it requires a deliberate transition from a functional, teacher-led coping mechanism into an intentional, student-centered strategy that actively fosters communicative autonomy.

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