

Ideas for translanguaging in the EFL/ESL classroom

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With contributions from Prof. Julu Sen, Dr. Heera Rajwani and Sathyavathi Balakrishna

Here are some of the ideas that I have shared in workshops on translanguaging in the EFL/ESL classroom. My hope is that, rather than seeing 'L1' as a resource to be used 'judiciously' (a mindset stemming essentially from a mono/bilingual understanding of language), we begin to view and understand all language classrooms as inclusive of all languages. If you would like to contribute, please send details of your own ideas explaining your context and how each idea works in your classroom. Many thanks to all contributors so far.

These resources are produced in a spirit of 'L1 inclusivity'. Depending on how you use them, and who you use them with, they are likely to generate differing ranges and types of more translanguaging practices than are currently advocated in the 'English-mainly' ELT classroom.

Remember that this is still a controversial and even emotive issue for some, including schools (as policy centres), line managers, colleagues and students. It's normal and (unfortunately) natural for many people to look negatively upon translanguaging, and many continue to expect an 'English-only' or 'English-mainly' approach to language teaching. So most importantly, make sure that you have the agreement, understanding (and permission if necessary) of relevant stakeholders before introducing translanguaging activities. Once learners' awareness of the naturalness of translanguaging has been raised, they are likely to be much more receptive to translanguaging approaches. As for administrators and school policies, if you need evidence to support a more translanguaging approach, please see the following paper I wrote for ELT Journal advocating for more translanguaging practices in ELT classrooms with research to back up the theoretical arguments:

Here's the [link](#) that should take you straight through to the article for free

on the Oxford University Press website, and here's a reference for the Advance Access version:

Anderson, J. (2017) Reimagining English language learners from a translanguaging perspective. ELT Journal Advance Access. doi:10.1093/elt/ccx029



Translanguaging WhatsApp conversation involving Bahasa Melayu and English.

"Mimi nitawapa **knowledge**
hata kama siku **murder college**
Chekini habari kila siku ni **war**
Mazee tafakari **what you just saw**
Hatutaki kuwasikia **man** mkibonga mkibonga
Juu hata **last year** bado tuligongwa
Kisa cha **Westgate** bado **a great hatred**
waliomadwa Manderu, **post-election**, Kibera
mimi bado ni **Mkenya**
Mkizindi kututenda
nitawakubusha kama **Mkenya**
Tunapigwa na militia, kila siku tunalia..."

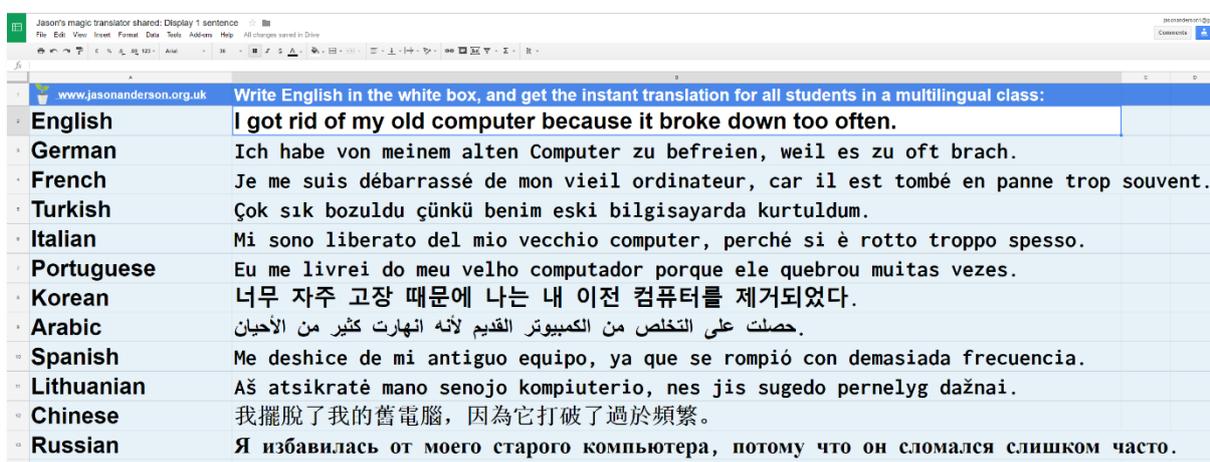
Extract from Kenyan hip-hop artist Frobo's lyrics: "[Garissa We are One \(Kenya Lets Reunite\)](#)" Click to listen on YouTube (see: Milu 2016)



Idea 1: Translingual news jigsaw

- An international news story is chosen. Learners are given 10 minutes to research the story online.
- They are requested not to use any resources (websites, apps, etc.) in English. They must use other languages. This forces them to translanguage, helping to develop a specific skill that needs practice!
- They then come back together to share what they've learnt, noting points of agreement, any factual differences, different emphases (e.g. looking at different headlines chosen).
- If time, each group could present findings to the class.
- Alternatively, groups could create their own English language version of the story, and only then look at extant English language versions and notice any differences. Sometimes students find that their multilingually-informed article is better (perhaps from a factual or a sociocultural point of view) than the original.

Idea 2: Jason's magic translator



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL www.jasonanderson.org.uk. The page title is "Jason's magic translator shared: Display 1 sentence". The main content is a table with two columns: the language and the translated sentence. The English sentence is "I got rid of my old computer because it broke down too often." The translations are as follows:

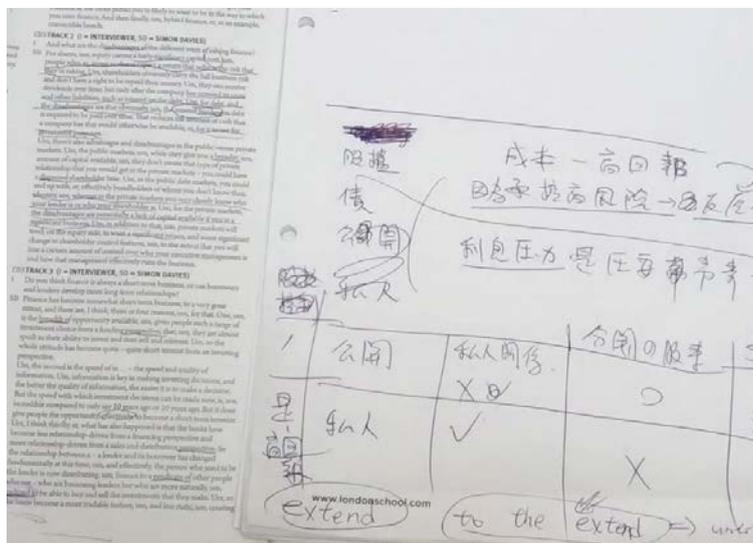
Language	Translation
English	I got rid of my old computer because it broke down too often.
German	Ich habe von meinem alten Computer zu befreien, weil es zu oft brach.
French	Je me suis débarrassé de mon vieil ordinateur, car il est tombé en panne trop souvent.
Turkish	Çok sık bozuldu çünkü benim eski bilgisayarda kurtuldum.
Italian	Mi sono liberato del mio vecchio computer, perché si è rotto troppo spesso.
Portuguese	Eu me livrei do meu velho computador porque ele quebrou muitas vezes.
Korean	너무 자주 고장 때문에 나는 내 이전 컴퓨터를 제거되었다.
Arabic	حصلت على التخلص من الكمبيوتر القديم لأنه انهارت كثير من الأحيان.
Spanish	Me deshice de mi antiguo equipo, ya que se rompió con demasiada frecuencia.
Lithuanian	Aš atsikratė mano senojo kompiuterio, nes jis sugedo pernelyg dažnai.
Chinese	我擺脫了我的舊電腦，因為它打破了過於頻繁。
Russian	Я избавилась от моего старого компьютера, потому что он сломался слишком часто.

- Good for checking understanding of an area of grammar, or lexis e.g. at the start (checking prior knowledge) or the end of the lesson (revising and consolidating learning).
- Requires internet access and large TV, interactive whiteboard or data projector.
- Use a Google spreadsheet setup for multiple translation. Make sure you are signed into a Google account, then click here and save the document to your own Google Drive: <https://goo.gl/3b8560>
- Before the class prepare the spreadsheet with formulas for all your students' languages.
- Explain to the students that they're going to see a sentence in all their languages that will not be perfect, but they should catch the meaning. They must work together to 'transcreate' the sentence in English. Part of the challenge is using all their languages to 'iron out' any mistakes in the translation.
- Get students to close their eyes or look away from the board / TV, and quickly type a sentence in English using the grammar or lexis to you want to practice. Hit enter. The sentence will appear in their languages.
- Hide the English sentence (you can just scroll down a little).

- Students all look at the translations, and together, drawing on their different languages, they try to create/reconstruct the English sentence.
- Then you can show the English sentence comparison, discussion and more translanguaging fun to discuss different languages in different mistakes that Google Translate has made.

Idea 3: Translingual text challenger

- Learners do reading or listening as normal. After, using the text (tapescript for listening), ss. prepare notes in L1 only that will lead to a 'replication task' (Norrington-Davies 2016) in English.
- This has the advantage of getting learners to encode the content of the original text into an accessible, meaning-processed form without the original (L2) form.
- The replication stage then involves them encoding the meaning back into L2.



Idea 4: Translingual 'Facebook' friend report

- Good for present continuous and/or present perfect.
- Students write down the name of two or three friends who are active on social media (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, etc.).
- Working in pairs they make two or three predictions about what these friends are doing at the moment / have been up to recently.
- Each then goes to social media on own devices to check (it's expected that their friends will be using other languages for their posts) and report back to partner.
- During the reporting, they are encouraged to show, translate, paraphrase content in 'L1'.
- Based on a suggestion in an IATEFL Voices article by Oliver Hipkins (2013)

Idea 5: Translanguaging from notes

- Can be done with any speaking activity for which learners might want to prepare notes (e.g. telling anecdotes, giving opinions on a topic, describing things, etc.)
- Learners are asked to prepare their notes only in L1. The activity then proceeds as normal, in English. Note: the first time you do this, explain why.
- Notetaking in L1 is faster - students can produce more notes that are more detailed and likely to push them into unfamiliar territory during the speaking stage. Also it encourages them not to simply read out their notes, but expand on them.

- As they speak, learners are required to mentally translate words, chunks, concepts, etc. They are required to notice equivalence and difference, as translators must. And where no equivalence exists, the teacher is on hand to support and help with this 'emergent languaging'.

Idea 6: Culture share

Many thanks to Professor Julu Sen of the EFL University, Hyderabad, India for this contribution.

- Works well with students from diverse cultures (e.g. multicultural cities, teacher training groups).
- Get students to bring items of cultural importance to class (e.g. a leather lamp from Andhra Pradesh, a Matroishka doll from Russia, etc.).
- Students tell each other about the items they've brought and why, explaining how it links to their culture.
- Students are initially free to use any languages they like to talk about and explain the importance of these items, including L1, an L2 like Hindi and to mix English as required.
- Then they prepare either a text, or give a brief presentation on the item in English.

Idea 7: Meshed news report

Many thanks to Professor Julu Sen of the EFL University, Hyderabad, India for this contribution.

- Works best with students at higher levels of proficiency in English.
- Working in pairs or small groups, students listen to a news report in English, and 'attempt' to report the key details in a chosen other language simultaneously (not necessarily translating directly, and not writing).
- Because of the challenge of this task, and depending on proficiency levels, students will naturally be forced to translanguage, meshing bits of English with the other language, as naturally happens outside the classroom.

Idea 8: Five sentences

Many thanks to Dr. Heera Rajwani of the Noble Group of Institutions, Junagadh, India for this contribution.

- An appropriate topic is chosen (e.g. social media, addictions, IT).
- Working in pairs, students write five sentences on the topic in a shared language, but not English, then they read them out to other students (for example in groups of 4).
- The next day the task is repeated, but this time in English. The teacher supports as necessary.
- Then on the third day, students try to remember their 5 sentences without opening their books, using as much English as possible, but with L1 support as necessary.

Idea 9: Translingual storytelling

- Works at any level – the choice of story should be age-appropriate – and is arguably essential at primary level, especially where you want your English lessons to be more inclusive of your learners’ culture and community.
- In advance of the lesson, one student is asked to research and then tell a story in L1, ideally one that comes from the local culture.
- The other students listen, taking brief notes, and then get into groups to recreate the story in English. Whenever they don’t know the correct English for a word or idea, they can write it in L1. The teacher supports as appropriate.
- The next stage has many options. Students may enjoy telling and comparing their translingual stories in groups or in front of the class. The teacher may tell the same story in English, and groups try to find an English equivalent to the words that they wrote in L1, or groups with online access could publish their translingual stories and share with the local community.

Sathyavathi Balakrishna, Mumbai, India suggests this variation:

- “I ask them to think of a story that their parents or grandparents have told them. I then have them share the story one sentence at a time with the class. The class will then translate the story into English for me as I don’t the speak my students’ mother tongue.”

Idea 10: Translingual posters

- Especially with primary age learners, posters that have two or more languages help to raise learners’ awareness of notions of equivalence in different languages.
- Such posters can be made interactive by including cards that can be flipped.
- The example shows a poster with cards attached by sticky tape. Each card has the English word on one side and a Bangla equivalent on the other.
- Students enjoy flipping the cards and reading them, thereby developing literacy in both languages simultaneously.



Idea 11: Building instruction comprehension using L1

Many thanks to Sathyavathi Balakrishna, Mumbai, India for this contribution.

Working in Mumbai, Sathya teaches primary learners, whose L1 (Gujarati) she doesn't speak, so she uses the following strategy to help them understand and learn instructions in English:

“I have students repeat the instructions in English and then have them repeat it in their L1. This is because I have very low level learners who can't understand English yet. I use this mainly with the 5th and 6th grade students. By the time they get to 7th grade they are able to follow Instructions entirely in English.”

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Please provide feedback on how you get on with these activities in your classroom, including both positive and negative feedback that can constructively help to improve the ideas. I would be delighted and honoured to add your contributions to these ideas, acknowledging your contribution. So please do send them to me, with permission to include them.

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References

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