Translanguaging in Vietnamese EMI University Classroom: Research and Practical Applications



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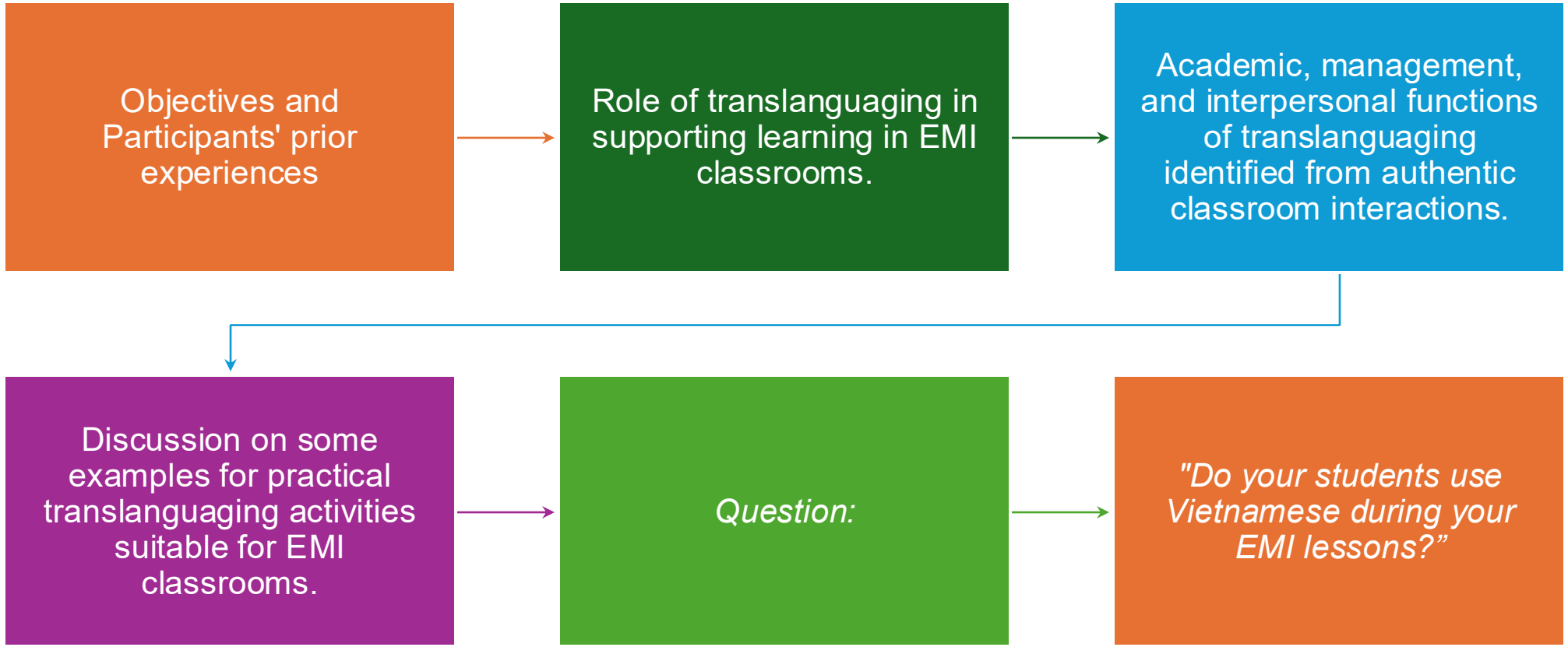
Session objectives



Key Terms

Translanguaging is when teachers or students use other languages as a resource to support their learning of or through English.

English-medium instruction (EMI) is when academic subjects are taught/learned primarily through English.

Activity : Recognising Translanguaging in Action

Discussion

Please raise your hand if you're a language teacher...

Now raise your hand if you're a subject teacher.

Given these different backgrounds, how might your expectations of EMI differ depending on your teaching context?

What translanguaging do you see in your classes?

Notes on context

EMI, ESL/EFL, and content classes taught in English should not be treated as the same pedagogical context: Content class taught in English ≠ English class

Role of translanguaging will differ substantially according to both learning goals and students' English proficiency.

VN case in this study: *use of the English language to teach academic subjects other than English itself" where English is not the majority population's first language*

The students were studying different majors (T&I, Business, Economics, Engineering, IT, International Relations, Science, Media, Tourism) … and the subject is taught in English.

Study in Question-Research overview

We recorded 11 hours of spoken interactions (student-student and student-teacher) in EMI classes at two Universities in Vietnam to find out about EMI students' translanguaging practices.

Background:

Previous studies have found three primary functions of translanguaging in EMI environments:

The **academic** function, broadly corresponding to Lu et al.'s explanation function, focused primarily on knowledge transmission or comprehension, and "cognition or metalinguistic understanding in the process of meaning-making" (Lu et al., 2023, p. 12)

The **management** function - regulates actors' attention (Günther-van der Meij et al, 2020; Romanowski, 2019) and classroom operations, such as work assignments or instructions (Serra & Feijoo, 2022).

The **interpersonal** function (rapport-building) function involves using translanguaging "to achieve a fun and enjoyable learning environment and further develop a supportive and beneficial learning ecology" (Lu et al., 2023, p. 12).

1. Translanguaging for academic purposes



To explain or understand academic knowledge efficiently

To reduce their cognitive load, or that of others

To reduce language-based challenges

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Translanguaging for efficient content knowledge transfer

S1: [Do you know what a **high-involvement product** is? Can you give me an example? I want you to give me an example.]

S2: [I'm thinking. Is that for example a tourism service?]

S3: [No, a high-involvement product is where you have to spend a lot of time to look for it. For example, a laptop, you have to spend time to search for it, what it is, how to use it, where to buy it. While if you buy bananas you wouldn't have to spend that much time.]

[brand marketing tutorial]

S1 uses L1 to ask for example of non-understood content concept

S3 uses L1 to give S1 an example of the concept

The explanation occurs in Vietnamese, allowing the concept to be understood quickly and efficiently.

Rather than struggling through a complex English explanation, the students use their shared first language as a resource for learning.



Translanguaging to reduce cognitive load *Audio*

S10: The problem I found during my other experience of working with peoples around my let's say age group =

T: Yeah, good.

S10: = is they are tend, tend to be a bit shy, and they don't have a drive or initiative to - (.) **[like, what's the word]** (.) - do it.

[theoretical bases of translating and interpreting tutorial]

S10 is unable to activate L2 word, L1 metacognitive primer to help think of the word

This switch functions as a metacognitive tool.
*It helps the student maintain the flow of thought while searching for the appropriate English expression**



Translanguaging to reduce language-based challenges Audio



S9: But there is still a headquarters.

S10: Yeah.

S9: So you work for them and not really individually.

Parallel translation – S9 says utterance in L2, then in L1 to ensure S10 comprehends it

(Original data):

S9: Nhưng mà, c-cũng có một cái, kiểu như, cái headquarter mà.

bases of translating and interpreting

2. Translanguaging for management purposes

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To manage procedural aspects of a task

To manage classroom operations in general



Translanguaging for procedural (task) management

S1: [Let's draw it, {student's name}.]

S2: [Sorry, my {unclear} is messy. (.) You do it. You can draw it on paper.]

S1: [If we do research, we'll get a bonus mark.]

S2: [Okay, you do it. Survey, focus group. (.) I think survey might be the option.]

S2 assigns task to other S in L1

S1 gives additional information

S1 makes a suggestion in the L1

Vietnamese used for: allocating responsibilities, giving information, suggesting actions
Focus: successful task completion — not language learning
Why: shared L1 enables efficient collaboration



Audio

Translanguaging for operational (classroom) management

T: To some extent, some people are prepared to do things like that. Okay, yep.

S9: **[Is that** {Oh **cô O…?-** name of teacher standing outside classroom}**?]**

T: So everyone worked today, I think it's {unclear} time now. Any questions about the quiz? Or-? Yeah, okay (.) okay, yes, we're done today.

[theoretical bases of translating and interpreting tutorial]

S9 translanguages to draw attention to teacher waiting outside. L1 shift attracts T's attention, signals 'off-task' utterance (Canagarajah, 1995)

- ***Observation:*** *student notices another teacher waiting outside, comments in Vietnamese*
- ***Function of translanguaging:*** *signals a temporary shift away from classroom content*
- ***Purpose:*** *draws teacher's attention to an immediate practical issue*

Audio

3. Translanguaging for interpersonal rapport



To demonstrate identity as Vietnamese people

To provide feedback to others

For humour

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Translanguaging to demonstrate Vietnamese identity

S1: You know, I'm thinking about =

S2: Singers.

S1: = no-one here knows like the guy, the Vietnamese guy, lately. Something, Jack something.

S2: Who's that? Say it out. What did he do?

S1: You know, you know Jack?

S3: Yeah, like –

S2: Ah, that **[Jack năm củ]** {Jack five million}.

S1: Yeah yeah, that that that **[Jack năm củ]** {Jack five million}. You know what I mean?

S1 initially elicits the singer's name in L2

S2 says singer's famous Vietnamese nickname

S1 affirms nickname and shared linguistic, cultural identity

Translanguaging for feedback (criticism)

S8: The website presence is a little bit, you know, er, is ah, minimal and simple. And I think it's quite suitable for their target audience, which is men. They want everything to be clear, as clear as possible, and simple and easy to access. So I think the website i- er, very good, like everything is clear here. So let's come to the =

S9: Sorry. **[Why don't you change? Why is she talking about the consistency of {the site's content}? She should be discussing the message, the brand and things like that.]**

[brand marketing tutorial]

After starting with token apology in L2, S9 uses personal and solidarity-enhancing L1 to convey her critique - limits its threat to in-group solidarity and her own face.



Translanguaging for humour Audio



S10: Code of Ethics là gặp là chửi.

S9: Đúng rồi

S10: Gặp là chửi, gặp là đánh (.) Chứ gì nữa (.) Ê, có ai bên legal không? Gặp là kiện nó luôn. Chửi xong kiện luôn, combo.

S9: Okay, we sue.

S10: Mình sue được á.

S9: Mình sue xong mình lên mình "phốt".

[theoretical bases of translation and interpreting tutorial]

Autotelic (non-literal) humour for amusement, not communication (Raskin & Attardo, 1994). Solidarity promoted by Ss' shared amusement at the fantasy narrative they jointly construct (Dynel, 2017)

Translanguaging signals shift from serious discourse to informal language play (Canagarajah, 1995). Humour in L1 more readily conveyed and received as amusing.

Translation

S10: [Following the code of ethics, just scold them.]
S9: [mm, yeah that's right.]
S10: [Just scold them or beat them up. (.) What else can we do? (.) Hey, do you know anyone in the legal field? We can sue them. Scold them and then sue them. It's a combo.]
S9: [Okay, let's sue.]
S10: [Yeah, we sue them.]
S9: [After we sue them we're gonna expose them on the internet.]

Functions of translanguaging

1.Academic

- **Efficient content knowledge transfer**
- **Reduce cognitive load**
- **Reduce language-based challenges**

2. Management

- **Procedural (task) management**
- **Operational (classroom) management**

3. Interpersonal

Demonstrate Vietnamese identity

Feedback

Humour

Activity : Recognising Translanguaging in Action

So what is the function of the translanguaging?

From Class observation data

Possible translations?

How would we analyse it as translanguaging?

Group Activity

Speaker 1:
Media, TV shows, news, books, games, look like that?

Speaker 2:

Tự nhiên thấy câu này xàm ghê.

Speaker 3:
Im lặng quá….

…

Group Activity

… Yeah, I I'm not, I'm not advertising for test, OK. [students laugh] And I don't recommend you do the test without looking at the price price.

Speaker 2: 800 đô

00:23:12 Speaker 1

I think you get the price.

Speaker 2

khoảng 16 – 18 triệu

Speaker 3: đắt vậy

Group Activity

Speaker 1

…. you know about NAATI …. the Australian National Standards certifying …

Speaker 2 … Yeah … in VN we have the the Hiệp hội biên phiên dịch Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh… But -

Group Activity

Speaker 1...

Like, like, briefly speaking, OK? Do you think the action of … “Bỏ phòng bì”] á …

Speaker 2:

Thiệt á? Giỡn hoài!

Speaker 1: Thiệt mà… *(laughed together)*

Preliminary Conclusions

Learners translanguaged to:

- Transfer content knowledge more easily and efficiently
- manage tasks or classroom operations
- demonstrate rapport through shared language, cultural values
- Reduce language-based challenges

But never:

- request L1 translation of lexical items
- request L1 explanation of concepts
- ...to students or teachers



Activity : Scenario discussion (worksheet)

Read the scenario and discuss:

- What is the function of the translanguaging (connect to the types of translanguaging)
- Is it necessary for them to switch to their mother tongue?
- What actually needs to happen in English?

Decide:

- Would you...
  - Encourage translanguaging?
  - Allow translanguaging ?
  - Redirect toward English?
  - Intervene another way?



Scenario 1: concept

Students are discussing a technically difficult concept in English. Their discussion is slow and fragmented. They switch to Vietnamese for two minutes, reach an understanding, and then complete the task successfully in English.

Scenario 2: process

Students complete almost all procedural discussion in Vietnamese: assigning roles, deciding who will speak, organising slides. The final presentation is in English.

Scenario 3: feedback

Students give formal feedback in English but switch to Vietnamese when discussing weaknesses in a classmate's work.

Scenario 4: Spot the translanguaging –your context

Describe a common situation in your classroom where students use translanguaging techniques. Describe:

What are students learning? What kind of class is this? What is the task?

What students are doing with language
When do they switch into Vietnamese or another language? Who switches? For how long?

What seems to be the purpose
Is it mainly:

academic
management
interpersonal
or a combination?



What will you take away?

Note one takeaway and one action you will try in your classroom from today's session.



Key Takeaway

Using Vietnamese is not automatically good or bad

What matters is:

What it's doing for learning	How teachers make deliberate decisions about it

Questions?

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References

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