



## PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF TRANSLANGUAGING IN EFL CLASSROOMS

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the pragmatic functions of translanguaging in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms with two primary objectives: (1) to describe how teachers and learners employ translanguaging as a communicative strategy during classroom interactions, and (2) to analyze the extent to which translanguaging practices influence contextual meaning-making and the effectiveness of students' English utterances in pragmatically oriented tasks. Employing a qualitative case-study design, data were collected over five class sessions through participant observation, video- and audio-recorded interactions, and semi-structured interviews with two teachers and six students. Discourse-pragmatic analysis was applied to identify patterns of code-switching and their pragmatic functions. Findings reveal that translanguaging serves as a meaning-negotiation tool, a communication scaffold, and a promoter of metapragmatic awareness. Teachers strategically alternate between L1 and English to clarify instructions, model pragmatic strategies, and draw attention to socio-cultural nuances. Learners, in turn, invoke their first language to stabilize comprehension and co-construct meaning before producing English utterances. These practices enhance students' situational understanding and expand their linguistic repertoire, leading to more appropriate politeness strategies, register choices, and pragmatic responses in English. The results underscore the pedagogical value of integrating translanguaging into EFL instruction to foster authentic pragmatic competence.

**Keywords:** translanguaging; pragmatics; EFL; communicative strategy; case study.

### INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary landscape of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching, translanguaging has emerged as a crucial pedagogical tool, enabling students and teachers to draw on their full linguistic repertoires. Rooted in research on bilingual and multilingual education (García & Wei, 2014; Creese & Blackledge, 2010), translanguaging challenges traditional monolingual ideologies by allowing for flexible language use that facilitates understanding, communication, and cultural alignment. This study investigates the pragmatic functions of translanguaging in EFL classrooms, examining how teachers and learners use it as a communicative strategy to enhance contextual meaning-making and the effectiveness of students' English utterances during pragmatically oriented tasks.

At the theoretical core of this research is sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), which posits that language development occurs through interaction and social engagement. Translanguaging, as a form of collaborative dialogue, mediates learners' understanding and expression, facilitating cognitive processes in pragmatic tasks. This aligns with van Lier's (2004) ecological approach, which highlights the interconnectedness between language learners and their environment, suggesting that

translanguaging is not just a tool for communication but a strategy for shaping participation, identity, and pragmatic competence (García et al., 2017).

The concept of pedagogical translanguaging (García, 2009, 2017) further contextualizes this research, framing translanguaging as a strategic resource that teachers can employ to scaffold learning and bridge the gap between students' existing linguistic knowledge and the target language. In this view, translanguaging enables teachers to clarify complex ideas (Gort, 2012), rephrase challenging content in more accessible terms, and provide scaffolding to help learners understand and retain new information (García & Lin, 2017). This approach has been shown to enhance students' confidence and their ability to produce pragmatically appropriate utterances in the target language (Bonacina-Pugh et al., 2021; Titania & Ashadi, 2024).

Moreover, critical translanguaging theory (Flores & Rosa, 2015) critiques traditional language separation ideologies and highlights how translanguaging serves to empower marginalized learners by validating their linguistic identities. In this context, translanguaging becomes a tool for students to mark solidarity (Wei, 2011), signaling group membership, aligning with peers or teachers, and expressing cultural belonging. This theory also recognizes that learners employ translanguaging strategically to perform acts of politeness (Martin-Beltrán, 2014), such as softening directives or criticisms, by drawing on culturally specific politeness strategies in both languages.

Empirical studies support these theoretical underpinnings. Research has shown that translanguaging enables learners to negotiate meaning and build shared understanding, thereby enhancing their pragmatic competence (Sapitri et al., 2018; Sakkir et al., 2024). For instance, Gort (2012) found that switching languages often helps both teachers and students clarify instructions, rephrase explanations, and ensure comprehension. Additionally, Creese & Blackledge (2010) noted that translanguaging can foster humor and playfulness, enhancing classroom dynamics and social bonding among students and teachers.

This study adopts a qualitative case study design, collecting data through participant observation, video and audio recordings, and semi-structured interviews with teachers and students over five class sessions. By employing discourse-pragmatic analysis, it explores how translanguaging serves as a tool for meaning negotiation, scaffolding, and enhancing metapragmatic awareness in the context of EFL instruction. The findings suggest that translanguaging not only supports effective communication but also promotes pragmatic fluency by enabling learners to draw upon their full linguistic and cultural resources to engage in contextually appropriate discourse.

In sum, this study builds on a rich theoretical framework that integrates sociocultural, ecological, and critical approaches to translanguaging. It demonstrates how translanguaging can be strategically employed in EFL classrooms to scaffold meaning, facilitate pragmatic competence, and empower learners, thereby underscoring the pedagogical value of embracing translanguaging as a resource for authentic language use.

## **METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative case study design to examine the pragmatic functions of translanguaging in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms at a university level. The primary objectives are to describe how both teachers and learners utilize translanguaging as a communicative strategy and to assess how these practices influence meaning-making and the effectiveness of students' English utterances in pragmatically oriented tasks.



The research was conducted in two EFL classrooms at a university in Indonesia, with two experienced EFL instructors and six students participating. The selection of the teachers was based on their experience in bilingual teaching and their willingness to incorporate translanguaging into their classroom practices. The six students were chosen purposefully from different proficiency levels to provide a broad perspective on how translanguaging is used and perceived in various contexts.

Data were collected across five class sessions conducted over a period of four weeks. The sessions included a mix of teacher-led instruction, group discussions, and individual tasks, all designed to encourage English use while allowing for translanguaging with the students' first language (L1). The data collection methods involved participant observation, where the researcher closely observed classroom interactions; video and audio recordings of class discussions and interactions to capture instances of code-switching and translanguaging; and semi-structured interviews with both teachers and students to explore their perceptions of translanguaging and its role in pragmatic development.

To analyze the data, discourse-pragmatic analysis was employed. This approach helped identify patterns of translanguaging in classroom interactions and examine its pragmatic functions, including meaning negotiation, clarification, and co-construction of pragmatic competence. The analysis also focused on how translanguaging affected the learners' ability to produce linguistically and pragmatically appropriate English utterances, particularly in relation to politeness strategies, register choices, and socio-cultural nuances.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings from the study, which examines the pragmatic functions of translanguaging in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms at a university. The analysis explores how teachers and students employ translanguaging as a communicative strategy and investigates how it impacts the meaning-making process and the effectiveness of students' English utterances in pragmatically oriented tasks. The results are organized around three key themes: translanguaging as a tool for meaning negotiation, translanguaging as a scaffold for pragmatic competence, and the role of translanguaging in fostering metapragmatic awareness.

### a. Translanguaging as a Tool for Meaning Negotiation

A central finding of this study was that both teachers and students used translanguaging to negotiate meaning during classroom interactions. Teachers frequently alternated between English and the students' first language (L1) to ensure comprehension and clarify complex content. For example, when explaining difficult vocabulary or cultural differences in English, teachers often resorted to L1 to offer additional explanations or contextualize the material.

Excerpt 1 from observation:

In one class session, when explaining the use of polite forms of requests, Teacher A switched to Indonesian to explain the difference in social norms between English and Indonesian when asking for a favor. The teacher said:

*"In English, we can say 'Can you help me?' or 'Could you please help me?' The difference is subtle, but in Indonesian, the indirectness is much stronger. You*

*wouldn't just say 'Bantu saya' directly, you would probably use 'Tolong, saya minta bantuannya,' which softens the request a lot."*

This approach helped students understand the politeness strategies in English in a more culturally relevant context.

Students also used translanguaging to assist in their understanding of tasks and to clarify their own English utterances. This was especially common in group work, where learners would switch to their L1 to discuss concepts or vocabulary before attempting to express their ideas in English.

Excerpt 2 from interview (Student 3):

*"When I don't understand a word or if I'm not sure if my sentence is correct, I first ask my friends in Indonesian. We talk it over in Indonesian, and then we try to put it in English. It feels safer and easier to understand this way."*

This use of L1 helped students negotiate the meaning of complex terms and ideas, which ultimately facilitated more accurate and contextually appropriate English output.

b. Translanguaging as a Scaffold for Pragmatic Competence

Another key finding was the role of translanguaging in scaffolding learners' pragmatic competence. Pragmatic competence involves the ability to use language effectively in social contexts, considering factors such as politeness, register, and socio-cultural appropriateness. Teachers used translanguaging as a tool to model and reinforce pragmatic strategies.

Excerpt 3 from observation:

During a role-play task in which students had to perform a formal email request, Teacher B explained in both English and Indonesian:

*"In English, when writing to a professor or a superior, you don't just say 'Send me the report.' It sounds too direct and rude. Instead, you should use a softer form like 'Could you please send me the report?.' In Indonesian, we might say 'Tolong kirimkan laporan itu,' which is a little softer than the English version. Try to use a similar softening in English."*

This modeling helped students understand how to use politeness strategies in their writing. The use of L1 for explanation enhanced the students' ability to understand the subtleties of the request, making it easier for them to transfer this knowledge into their English email writing.

Learners also used translanguaging to scaffold their own understanding of pragmatic rules. When faced with tasks requiring them to choose between formal and informal forms of language, students often used their L1 to discuss the social context of the task—whether the communication was intended for a peer, a superior, or a subordinate.



Excerpt 4 from interview (Student 5):

*“When we do tasks like the role-play, we talk in Indonesian first to decide how formal or polite we should be. For example, when I’m speaking to a teacher in English, I know I should say ‘Could you’ instead of just ‘Can you,’ because in Indonesian, I would never say directly ‘Can you help me?’ to someone older. So, I use that knowledge for my English.”*

The scaffolding effect of translanguaging was particularly pronounced when students were asked to make decisions about politeness and register in their English utterances. These decisions were often easier to make after discussing the task in their L1.

### c. Translanguaging and Metapragmatic Awareness

A significant outcome of this study was the promotion of metapragmatic awareness through translanguaging. Metapragmatic awareness refers to the ability to reflect on language use in social contexts, including understanding the appropriateness of certain language choices. Teachers used translanguaging not only to clarify content but also to guide students’ reflections on language use.

Excerpt 5 from observation:

During a class discussion on indirect requests, Teacher A used both English and Indonesian to help students understand the pragmatic implications of using certain expressions. The teacher explained:

*“In English, a request like ‘Please close the window’ is direct, but ‘Could you please close the window?’ sounds more polite. In Indonesian, we use indirectness a lot more. For example, in the sentence ‘Bisa tolong tutup jendela?’ the use of ‘Bisa’ makes it less direct than the English version. Think about that when you make requests in English.”*

This reflection process enabled students to compare how indirectness functions in both languages, thus enhancing their metapragmatic understanding of English. Students also demonstrated increased metapragmatic awareness through their use of translanguaging. By discussing tasks and strategies in their L1, students were able to reflect on the language they were using in English and assess its appropriateness in different social situations.

Excerpt 6 from interview (Student 2):

*“When we learn politeness in English, sometimes I can’t remember the right words. But when we talk about it in Indonesian first, it’s easier to think about how to be polite. For example, in Indonesian, we use more indirect expressions when asking for help. So, I try to use that idea in English too.”*

By reflecting on how politeness and register differ between languages, students could adjust their English output accordingly. This metapragmatic process, facilitated by translanguaging, enabled learners to make more socially and culturally appropriate language choices.

d. Translanguaging and Social Dynamics

In addition to cognitive and pragmatic benefits, translanguaging also played a role in shaping the social dynamics of the classroom. The use of L1 by both teachers and students helped to foster a sense of solidarity and rapport among participants. Students often used translanguaging to express solidarity with their peers, share personal experiences, and negotiate task-related challenges in a way that was culturally and socially meaningful.

Excerpt 7 from interview (Student 4):

*“When I talk in Indonesian, it feels like we’re all in the same group. We can be more open with each other, and I feel more comfortable asking questions. Sometimes in English, I don’t know if I should ask, but when we talk in Indonesian, it’s easier to talk.”*

This collaborative approach to learning helped build a more cohesive learning environment, where students felt more comfortable experimenting with English and expressing themselves. The inclusion of L1 allowed students to maintain a sense of cultural identity while engaging in English language learning.

This study sought to examine the pragmatic functions of translanguaging in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms at the university level, highlighting the ways in which both teachers and students use their first language (L1) to facilitate meaning-making and pragmatic competence in English. The findings of the study align with various theoretical frameworks of translanguaging and extend our understanding of how bilingual or multilingual practices can enrich language learning experiences. Drawing from both classroom observations and interviews, this discussion will connect the findings with existing research, particularly in relation to pedagogical translanguaging, sociocultural theory, critical translanguaging theory, and metapragmatic awareness.

The findings confirm that translanguaging serves as an effective tool for meaning negotiation, which is in line with the work of Gort (2012), who notes that both teachers and students often switch languages to clarify concepts and facilitate understanding. Teachers in this study used L1 to explain challenging vocabulary or cultural nuances, a practice that is consistent with García & Wei (2014), who argue that translanguaging allows for meaning-making through the fluid movement between languages. This practice helped students stabilize their comprehension before attempting to communicate in English, a finding that echoes the ecological approach to translanguaging, as proposed by Van Lier (2004). According to this perspective, language is a dynamic and context-dependent resource that can be accessed in various forms to support learners’ interaction with the world around them.

One of the key findings of this study was that translanguaging acted as a scaffold for developing pragmatic competence. Teachers modeled pragmatic strategies by alternating between English and L1, providing students with opportunities to better understand social contexts and language choices. This was particularly evident when teachers used translanguaging to demonstrate the differences between direct and indirect forms of communication in English, and how these strategies vary across languages. The idea of scaffolding aligns with García & Lin (2017), who emphasize the importance of



drawing on students' L1 to support cognitive and pragmatic development. By utilizing L1 as a scaffold, teachers made English pragmatics more accessible to students, who could then transfer these insights to their English language production.

Moreover, the role of translanguaging in pragmatic competence is particularly evident in the politeness strategies used by both teachers and students. Martin-Beltrán (2014) suggests that translanguaging helps soften directives and criticisms, making it a tool for maintaining face and mitigating potential social friction. In this study, teachers used translanguaging to explain the socio-cultural norms associated with politeness in both English and L1. For instance, students were taught to use hedging strategies and indirect forms when making polite requests in English, with the understanding that these forms might be more direct in their L1. This reinforces the critical metapragmatic awareness that is necessary for navigating different social contexts effectively (Wei, 2011). Students in this study used their L1 to discuss politeness in the context of their roles—whether addressing a peer or a teacher—before making decisions in English, which reflects García & Wei's (2014) notion of critical translanguaging as a means to better understand power dynamics and social relationships.

A notable theme in this study is the promotion of metapragmatic awareness through translanguaging. Teachers encouraged students to reflect on the social functions of language, such as the choice of register and politeness, by comparing English with their L1. This metapragmatic awareness is consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which posits that cognitive development is closely linked to social interaction and language use. In this case, translanguaging served as a means to help students reflect on their pragmatic language choices in different social contexts. By discussing language in their L1, students were able to process these choices before transferring them into English, which helped them make more informed, contextually appropriate decisions.

Moreover, Wei (2011) emphasizes the importance of solidarity and identity in language use, and this study found that translanguaging allowed students to express solidarity with their peers and assert their identities. When students used their L1 during group tasks, they reinforced their sense of cultural and social belonging, which fostered a collaborative learning environment. Creese & Blackledge (2010) support this view, suggesting that multilingual practices promote social bonding and a sense of community, both of which were evident in this study.

The findings of this study have important pedagogical implications, especially in contexts where students are bilingual or multilingual. The study highlights the potential of translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy to improve pragmatic competence in EFL classrooms. Teachers can use translanguaging not only as a tool for comprehension but also as a way to model pragmatic strategies, such as politeness and register, and to foster students' metapragmatic awareness. This is particularly relevant in university settings where students are often required to perform formal and informal communicative tasks in English. By drawing on students' L1 to discuss the sociocultural dimensions of language use, teachers can help learners navigate the complexities of pragmatic competence more effectively. Flores & Rosa (2015) argue that embracing translanguaging as a pedagogical approach can empower students, allowing them to develop a deeper understanding of both the target language and their own cultural identity.

## CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant role of translanguaging in promoting pragmatic competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. By examining how both teachers and students use translanguaging as a communicative strategy, the findings demonstrate that this approach not only aids in meaning negotiation and cognitive scaffolding but also enhances metapragmatic awareness. Teachers effectively use translanguaging to clarify complex content, model politeness strategies, and draw attention to socio-cultural nuances, while students leverage their first language to stabilize comprehension and reflect on language choices. These practices create a more supportive and effective learning environment, enabling students to navigate pragmatic challenges in English with greater confidence and accuracy.

The study underscores the pedagogical value of integrating translanguaging into EFL instruction, especially in contexts where learners possess rich linguistic repertoires. By recognizing and validating the learners' L1 as a resource, teachers can facilitate a deeper understanding of pragmatics and foster authentic language use in meaningful contexts.

While this study provides valuable insights, future research could explore several areas. First, longitudinal studies could investigate the long-term impact of translanguaging on students' pragmatic development and language proficiency. Second, future studies could examine translanguaging in other EFL contexts, such as in different cultural or linguistic settings, to explore its generalizability. Additionally, research could explore the perceptions of learners and teachers towards translanguaging practices in other academic disciplines beyond language instruction. Finally, examining the role of technology and digital platforms in supporting translanguaging practices could provide further insights into the evolving landscape of EFL pedagogy.

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