How can teachers in the Global South who speak the dominant language be supported to leverage students’ whole linguistic repertoire, including non-dominant home languages?

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4.1 Emergent bilingual students from different home language backgrounds and dominant language-speaking teachers

The home languages of linguistic minority students around the world are likely to be non-dominant languages (NDLs) in their respective societies. More often than not, these linguistic minority students tend to study together with students from other non-dominant language (NDL) and dominant language (DL) backgrounds due to the dislocation of people resulting from migration, urbanization, et cetera. The classroom thus becomes linguistically heterogeneous. Moreover, NDL students are emergent bilinguals as they learn their new school languages in addition to their home language. Emergent bilingual students in this multilingual classroom tend to be taught in a medium of instruction that is often the dominant language of their society.

Teachers in this linguistically heterogeneous classroom context often come from the dominant language community of the society and do not understand students’ various home languages. Some teachers might happen to be speakers of one home language out of the various home languages of students, but they cannot be speakers of all of the students’ home languages. Due to different home language backgrounds between students and teachers, a linguistic barrier exists between the two groups. The linguistic barrier may be big when students are not yet proficient enough in the language of instruction, especially during the early grades of primary school.
The language-in-education policies in these schools, however, are likely to be monoglossic, allowing only the dominant language to be used as a medium of instruction for both DL and NDL speaking students. What kind of roles can teachers who speak the DL play in the quality education of their NDL speaking students? The teachers can either be “uncritical bystanders passively acquiescent” (Mohanty et al. 2010) of monolingual language-in-education policy that is imposed upon them, or policy negotiators who create spaces where they could fill the chasm between dominant language-only policy and linguistically diverse emergent bilingual students. I argue that teachers can best negotiate the linguistic gap by utilizing translanguaging pedagogy.

4.2 The Translanguaging Top Model

Translanguaging (TL) is using a speaker’s whole linguistic repertoire freely across language boundaries and appropriately according to the unique communicative context to make a full meaning (Son and Kim 2021a, b). TL pedagogy is a teaching-learning method that leverages students’ translanguaging to teach academic content and develop both the students’ school and home languages (Son and Kim 2021a, b). Even though teachers may not necessarily understand students’ various home languages, they can design their lessons in such a way that students strategically translanguage in class to enhance the learning of content in both school and home languages and develop both their home and school languages. The Translanguaging Top Model (named for the shape of a spinning top) has been developed by the author and Minjung Kim from a TL pilot research project in Chiangmai, Thailand in order to help dominant language speaking teachers to leverage students’ whole linguistic repertoire to enhance students’ performance in school.

In this model, a learner’s multiple languages are represented on the TL top (figure 1a). When the top is in static mode (figure 1a), it represents the policy and practices where one language is used at a time. The boundaries between languages are strictly kept. Students are told not to mix different languages by crossing the language boundaries. When the top is in spinning mode (figure 1b) on the
other hand, it represents linguistic practices in which students are encouraged to use all of their linguistic repertoire freely by crossing the language boundaries. Presently, most schools around the world tend to only have “static top” policies and practices. In this situation, emergent bilingual students whose home language is different from their school language are forced to learn subjects only in the school language even when their proficiency level of the school language is still very low. They have to bury a significant part of their linguistic repertoire that consists of their home language. On the other hand, monolingual students whose home language is the same as the school language can use most of their linguistic repertoire for learning (García 2017). With this condition, school language-speaking students are likely to perform better while emergent bilingual students lag behind in learning. This current situation shows that the education playing field is sloped. On this sloped playing field demonstrated by the slope of the lower triangle in figure 2, emergent bilingual students have to trudge uphill with challenge while school language-speaking monolingual students can easily go downhill.

![Sloped playing field](image)

Figure 2.

Then how can we make this sloped playing field level? We should allow emergent bilingual students to spin their TL top in addition to static top practices. By adding a spinning top to classroom activities, emergent bilingual students can also use most of their linguistic repertoire including their home language. By balancing between the static top and the spinning top, teachers can make the education playing field more level as in figure 2. To balance between the two states of top, spinning top-related strategies need to be added as they tend to be missing in schools. Thus, in the following section I discuss how teachers can design various TL spinning top activities.
4.3 TL Strategies of four TL top states

As Vygotsky said, “Learning is inherently social” (Cole et al. 1978). Students learn better in their “zone of proximal development (ZPD)”, that is, the space where assistance from more knowledgeable people supports better learning. Bilingual students learn better in the space where they receive such assistance from more knowledgeable people who use both of their languages. Moll and Dias call this space “bilingual zone of proximal development (BZPD)” (Moll and Dias 1987). Students learn better when they spin their TL tops together. 1) Teachers need to group students according to the students’ shared home languages and encourage them to use both their shared home language and school language freely as a group (spinning top together). Students with different performance levels in each of their languages help one another in learning. Students are likely to play a role of more knowledgeable others to one another in their bilingual zone of proximal development. 2) Once teachers are satisfied with the performance level of each home language-based group, each individual student may be led to work on similar tasks alone using both school and home languages (spinning top alone). 3) Students with different home language backgrounds may also be grouped together and use only the school language as it is the common language in the group (static top together). 4) Finally individual students perform in each of their school and home languages (static top alone). In this way students may learn the content better and develop each of their languages. (In order to enhance bilingual students’ performances in each of their school and home languages, it is important to first recognize and leverage students’ whole linguistic repertoire, first together with peers then alone by themselves for their learning.)

During our various Translanguaging in Education (TLE) workshops, we gave teachers opportunities to experience these four states of the TL top through a writing activity that would enable them to be in the same shoes as their students. After the activity, they were asked to assess their writing performances along with the four states, and they produced the following conclusion. When the language of the static top is the weaker language of learners, such as English for the teachers and Thai for students in the primary level, the learners’ performance level is likely to decrease at each state of the TL top in the descending order of the spinning top together, spinning top alone, static top together, and static top alone as in figure 3.

Visit the following webpage for the various example activities of TL strategies of four states of TL top: https://www.translanguagingeducation.org/translanguaging-top-activities.

Moll and Dias contend that “bilingual students learn new knowledge and skills when they can use their two languages to help their learning in interaction with others.” (Moll and Dias 1987).
With this TL top performance formula in mind, teachers are supported to design various TL activities that need to be within either the ZPD or BZPD of the students. Moreover, these various TL activities need to be designed based on students’ performance levels in each and all of their languages. These various TL activities need to be planned and included in the TL unit plan.

4.4 Condition: The teacher’s stance

Just as a toy top needs someone to spin it, the TL top also needs teachers to spin it. Teachers, as final arbiters of the language-in-education policy in its implementation, could encourage students to use their whole linguistic repertoire as much as possible to help their learning. It is crucial for teachers to have a “stance of amplification” (García et al. 2017) with which they could see the potential of students’ bilingualism and home language as resources for learning. From several TLE workshops held in June and December 2020, we found that most government school teachers used to have a stance of simplification or ignorance (García et al. 2017) with which they did not expect high standards from emergent bilingual students due to their low performance level in Thai, the school language, or they just ignored the fact that their students are bilingual and speak their home language well. However, we noticed that their stance started to transform while they participated in various sessions in the workshop that have helped them to see students’ home language and bilingualism as a resource to be leveraged for better academic performance (Son 2020a). Furthermore, we found that there is a correlation between teachers’ stances and their application of TL pedagogy. Those with a strong stance on amplification make an effort to apply TL pedagogy while those without it have shown less effort (Son 2020b; Son et al. 2021).

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3 TL performance top was developed as a tool to assess students’ linguistic performance for learning. It helps teachers to understand how well each student can perform for a given learning task both when using each single language that students know (static top) and when using all of their language resources (spinning top). For more information such as how to draw TL performance top, visit the following webpage: 
https://www.translanguagingeducation.org/tl-performance-top

4 See the sample TL unit plans for four subjects (English, Thai, Math, Science) for grade 4 in the following webpage: 
https://www.translanguagingeducation.org/translanguaging-unit-plan
4.5 Non-dominant languages in the 1/3rd versus the 2/3rd world

The TL top model that is practiced here in Chiangmai, Thailand is neither the first nor the only example of pedagogical efforts to overcome linguistic barriers between DL speaking teachers and NDL speaking students in the world. One can surely benefit from various TL strategies for kindergarteners through high schoolers, developed by Ofelia García and her colleagues in the New York State Initiative on Emergent Bilinguals\(^5\) that were initially applied to various schools in the State of New York in the USA. One can also find various TL activities for kindergarteners and students in the early primary level from “Linguistically Appropriate Practice” developed by Roma Chumak-Horbatsch (2002) that was practiced in various developed countries such as Canada, Germany, Iceland, Luxembourg, and Sweden (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2019).

However, what makes the TL top model unique and different from these two programs is the kind of NDLs used by the students. The home languages of students from the above programs are mostly DLs in the respective countries of students' origins thus most likely print-rich languages with various reading materials readily available on the internet. This is not the case for the most home languages of students in the 2/3rd world, such as Thailand, as these home languages are minority languages in the country and written materials in these languages are newly being developed.

4.6 Writing home languages using the script of the school language

In our project, students write their home languages using the script of the school language, Thai, for several reasons. First of all, this idea is inspired from the existing practice of transliteration of English using Thai script among students. Secondly, students using this method can be exposed to better conditions to develop their home languages not only orally but also in written form. By writing their home and school languages side by side, they often have chances to compare the similarities and differences between the two languages and can raise metalinguistic awareness. Thirdly, by using Thai script that is also known to teachers, teachers can facilitate the comparison between languages and they themselves can also write students' home languages. Teachers often write key academic terms and sentences on the blackboard in the home languages of students using Thai script while students dictate to the teachers. Then the writing is confirmed by the group of students with the respective home language. Lastly, Thai has a phonetic alphabet system with a higher number of letters than the phonemes, making it a good candidate to be used for transliteration. This strategy, however, should not discourage every effort to seek chances for students to learn their own writing system if those chances are available. Further research on parents' responses and students' identity and performance in relation to this strategy needs to be conducted to more thoroughly investigate the strengths and weaknesses of it.

\(^5\) Visit the following website to know more about the initiative: https://www.cuny-nysieb.org/
References


