# Translanguaging Pedagogy for Meaning Making through Classroom Interactional Competence in Thai EMI Context

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## Abstract

Translanguaging can be conceptualized as a theory of communication and language use, and, involves the fluid use of multiple languages as an integrated system of communication. It is the process where individuals employ their full linguistic and semiotic capabilities to make meaning, considering languages not as fixed codes by themselves, but as fluid codes framed within social practices. Pedagogical translanguaging is a practice that refers to instructional strategies integrating two or more languages in naturally occurring contexts where boundaries between languages are fluid and constantly shifting. It provides spaces to encourage learners' understanding through discussion activities by using different languages for input and output. This paper explores how translanguaging contribute to knowledge construction of interaction competence within the Thai English Medium Instruction classroom. In particular, the classroom interaction competence builds on ideas related to the centrality of interaction in language learning and focuses on the ways in which teachers' and learners' interactional decisions create learning opportunities in the classroom. Employing translanguaging through classroom interactional competence can encourage learners' deployment of different semiotic resources, especially their free choice and use of languages, in the process of dialogic knowledge construction. The learners can utilize their full linguistic and multimodal repertoires to construct knowledge and facilitate meaning-making processes in the classroom. Therefore, translanguaging can give learners deeper insight into the subject matter discussed and has the potential to promote higher-order thinking and fuller understanding.

*Keywords:* Classroom Interactional competence; Meaning Making; Thai EMI context; Translanguaging; Translanguaging Pedagogy

## Introduction

In accordance with global trends, higher education (HE) institutions have attracted a substantial number of international learners and academic staff to facilitate teaching and learning in the target language. Notably, English medium instruction (EMI) in HE is rapidly expanding worldwide (Macaro et al., 2018; Rose et al., 2020).

In many universities, EMI has been integrated into the classrooms, with English being widely employed to teach academic content (Ra & Baker, 2021). In Thailand, many universities that formerly operated in Thai now offer English-medium program as an option. Some programs even provide double degrees through collaborations with the world-renowned universities. Additionally, certain educational programs adopt a mixed mode of learning, wherein teachers use Thai for teaching, and English serves as the medium of textbooks and written assignments.

However, the adoption of this new medium of instruction may fail to convince students. A significant factor contributing to the failure of English-medium instruction innovation is a lack of understanding of students, social dynamics, and personnel behavior within the host educational environment. Similarly, Thai learners often exhibit unsatisfactory English proficiency. This lack of competency can be attributed to factors such as the insufficiency of a communicative language approach and a supportive environment, an emphasis on receptive language skills and English grammar for examination purposes, inadequate practice in productive language skills, limited opportunities to use English daily, and a lack of confidence in using English. Additionally, there is insufficient language knowledge at the small classroom level (Jiang & Zhang, 2023).

Furthermore, there is a dearth of classroom research on EMI university teachers' teaching practices as well as their efforts to deliver content knowledge and cater for learners' linguistic needs (Gu et al., 2022). At the classroom level, a common concern in universities is that EMI may potentially compromise the quality of content teaching and learning (Rose et al., 2020). This concern becomes particularly relevant when teachers and/or learners lack a sufficient command of English (Zhang, 2018). Similarly, in Thailand, students have limited chances to use English and have not experienced much success in their learning journeys. Therefore, creating a supportive environment for improving English proficiency is essential, allowing teachers and students to share a space for using English.

Thai teachers and learners using English for subject matter may face limitations in their English proficiency, particularly when it comes to explaining complex content. Some teachers who have been teaching other subjects, such as mathematics, science, and social studies, in the context of English medium instruction in Thailand may not have a deep understanding of the content. Previous articles have also indicated that when teachers exclusively use English, learners may experience mental exhaustion as they constantly grapple with complex subject matter expressed in English (Jiang & Zhang, 2023).

To mitigate the issues mentioned above, it is common for teachers to avail the L1 to facilitate and assist learners' content learning (Galloway et al., 2017; Jiang et al., 2019), and using the learners' L1 as a resource can potentially support and not deter learning (Ambele, 2022). A key highlight of the translanguaging concept is that language is open. However, García and Li (2014) emphasize that translanguaging differs from the notion of code-switching. It does not merely involve a shift or a shuttle between two languages but refers to the speakers' construction and use of original and complex interrelated discursive practices. These practices cannot be easily assigned to

one or another traditional definition of a language but constitute the speakers' complete language repertoire. Similarly, extensive research on translanguaging pedagogy illustrates how opening up spaces for learners to use their entire linguistic repertoires creates possibilities for identity development (Parra, 2023). The various translanguaging strategies are adopted to challenge the monolingual ideology (Fang et al., 2022). From a theoretical perspective, Cenoz & Gorter (2022) investigated pedagogical translanguaging and its application for language classes and stated that in terms of learners' multilingual and multimodal repertoires, pedagogical translanguaging plays a key role in facilitating learning. Learners are able to employ multilinguals to confidently communicate and share what they think.

Pedagogical translanguaging focuses on the process of meaning making, knowledge co-construction, empowering students' voices, and developing their identities as bilinguals through planned strategies and activities (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; 2021; Cenoz & Santos, 2020; Li, 2018). Bilingualism is, therefore, dynamic, focusing on what people do with language to produce and interpret their classroom interactions for deep understanding (Garcia & Otheguy, 2020; Li, 2018). In addition, pedagogical translanguaging tasks engage students to make meaning through both cognitive (awareness) and social factors (lived experiences), and require that learners use their entire repertoire and not only their L1 (Galante, 2020). For instance, a learner whose first language is Thai (L1) and second language is English (L2), even if not yet fully proficient in English, is encouraged to utilize all of these linguistic resources when learning English. Scholars have begun to examine how teachers apply translanguaging in their practices. Informed by the dynamic, distributed, and fluid view of language (Lin, 2019), translanguaging studies have transcended a mere interest in the use of multiple languages for meaning-making. According to Lin and Wu (2015), translanguaging between the L1 and the L2 can be well-coordinated with multimodal resources to facilitate students' meaning-making. Lin and He's (2017) ethnographic study further showcased how teachers and students orchestrated multilingual, multisemiotic, and multimodal resources (e.g., spoken, written, gestures, visual images, facial expressions) in the dynamic flow of interactions and activities. In a similar effort, Pun and Tai (2021) explored the process of students' joint knowledge construction in the context of science laboratory work and demonstrated that multilingual and multimodal resources were used for learning and meaning-making in the flow of action events.

To believe is to have more fine-grained understanding of how knowledge (both content and English language knowledge) is constructed in the multilingual classroom mediated by teachers (Zhang & Zhang, 2020) and learners' translanguaging practices. Translanguaging refers to the use of multilingual, multisemiotic, and multimodal resources to create meaning, ultimately promoting deeper comprehension among learners (Li, 2011, 2018). However, despite the growing body of empirical evidence supporting translanguaging as a valuable pedagogical approach for facilitating meaning-making in EMI and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), there has been minimal research conducted on translanguaging in the context of EMI in Thailand. To apply translanguaging in the classroom, translanguaging pedagogy begins

with an understanding of learners' language practices. The teachers need to actively support translanguaging for it to be effectively used in the classroom. Translanguaging involves planned activities designed by the teacher, who are not confined in using different languages solely for input and output. Teachers' flexibility and willingness to support students' voices can be strategically utilized by instructional strategies, contributing to the establishment of students' identities. When translanguaging is employed for pedagogical purposes, and learners are encouraged to creatively utilize their language repertoires, the potential for knowledge development becomes boundless. In these settings, teachers and learners can collaborate to promote critical thinking. Therefore, this paper supports translanguaging pedagogy to explore how Thai EFL university teachers incorporate this practice into their classrooms and their perceptions of its application in tertiary education in Thailand.

**Theorization of Pedagogical Translanguaging**

The term "translanguaging" derives from the Welsh term "trawsieithu" which in earlier times referred to pedagogical practices in bilingual classrooms where teachers and students deliberately altered languages of input and output (Lewis et al., 2012). The scholar defined it as various ways in which individuals who are bilingual participate in communicative activities to comprehend and navigate their multilingual environments. García (2009). In simple terms, translanguaging is a transformative practice that focuses on meaning making through the orchestration of languages and their varieties, along with other semiotic, cognitive, and multimodal resources. It can consider that languages 'are not fixed codes by themselves; they are fluid codes framed within social practices (García, 2009). Following this, Baker (2011) translated the word as translanguaging and introduced it into bilingual education, linking it to the construction of meaning, the shaping of experience, and the acquisition, understanding, and digestion of knowledge through the use of two languages. Translanguaging is built on the idea of languaging, meaning the process of using language to gain knowledge, make sense, articulate one's thoughts, and communicate (Li, 2011; 2018). Therefore, Translanguaging can be conceptualized as a theory of communication and language use, which involves the fluid use of multiple languages as an integrated system of communication (Curle et al., 2020).

As pedagogy, translanguaging transforms the classroom into a translanguaging space where teachers and learners can engage in diverse meaning making systems and subjectivities (García & Li, 2014). It is a transformative and resemiotization process where language users' creativity and criticality can be best displayed. It is also about a new way of being and languaging in a new sociocultural and political context, which allows a fluid flow of discourses and gives rise to new social realities (García & Leiva, 2014). Pedagogical translanguaging has been defined as being planned by the teacher inside the classroom and can refer to the use of different languages for input and output or to other planned strategies based on the use of students' resources from the whole linguistic repertoire (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017).

The idea of a language repertoire (Otheguy et al., 2015) transcends traditional conceptualizations of language and disrupts the notion of languages as discrete, bounded systems. It recognizes all of language users' fluid language and multimodal practices as part of an integrated meaning making system. As practice, translanguaging is about fluid practices that transcend the boundaries between socially constructed and culturally defined languages and language varieties, as well as between linguistic and other semiotic and multimodal resources (Li, 2018). Pedagogical translanguaging is also broad because it is not limited to two languages but extends to three or more languages. This is concerned with the planning, application and extension of multilingual pedagogical strategies and practices based on the student's whole linguistic repertoire. This can be designed at the phonetic, lexical, morphosyntactic, pragmatic and discourse levels and can be implemented in language classes and content classes including oral and written activities (Leonet et al., 2017; Cenoz & Santos, 2020).

Additionally, in a study conducted by Ambele (2022), which examined the views of Thai university EFL teachers on classroom translanguaging in tertiary education in Thailand, the data revealed that, on the whole, the teachers exhibited positive attitudes towards the use of learners' L1 in the classroom (referred to as classroom translanguaging pedagogy) for the purposes of L2 development and content learning. To promote the concept of translanguaging, engaging learners in the learning process is a fundamental pedagogical objective in any classroom.

**Translanguaging for Making Meaning in EMI Classrooms**

EMI requires teachers to deliver their subject matter in the English language as the medium. EMI can be defined as the practice offering academic subjects such as economics, history, and chemistry through the medium of English where the first language of the majority of students is not English. With English as the teaching language, local content might not be fully understood or appreciated, limiting the depth of knowledge. In contrast, research studies on multilingual classrooms have focused on translanguaging as a transformative, creative and critical meaning-making phenomenon (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Garcia & Li, 2014). Translanguaging aims to transcend the boundaries between different named languages and also between different modalities, for instance: speech, sign, and gesture (Li, 2018; 2022). It has shown that human languages are highly complex and constantly evolving ways of communication, utilizing various signs and methods. To enhance comprehension of content knowledge in English, translanguaging effectively supports students by incorporating their home language (Jiang & Zhang, 2023).

Conversely, learners typically resorted to using English for simple responses. However, in tasks requiring higher-order cognitive processes such as reasoning, elaboration, positioning, and other intellectually challenging activities, they tended to use their L1 more frequently. In the context of teachers, translanguaging served as a versatile tool with pedagogical, cognitive, and socio-affective functions. It actively engaged learners in interactions and facilitated the modeling of meaning-making in the L2. In contrast, for the students, translanguaging enabled them to actively participate in

and contribute to the collaborative construction of knowledge through dialogic interactions.

Tai (2023) found that EMI teachers can transcend the boundaries of disciplinary knowledge by integrating relevant content knowledge from other academic subjects to facilitate learners' learning of new content knowledge. This illustrates that the construction of a translanguaging space for cross-curricular connection allows learners in the classroom to participate in flexible language usage, while also enabling the EMI teacher and learners to introduce diverse perspectives that assist in comprehending new academic information within a new classroom interactional setting.

This can encourage teachers to provide chances for learners to actively use the English language in their lessons (Turnbull et al., 2011). Nevertheless, it is equally important for teachers to employ their full linguistic and multimodal repertoires strategically and purposefully in EMI classrooms to support and enrich learner's linguistic repertoire in the named L2 and achieve specific pedagogical goals, including facilitating content explanation, and promoting meaningful communication with learners. Several studies explore the development of spaces where translanguaging occurs in EMI classrooms. There should be a dedicated place for translanguaging in EMI settings, offering accessible multilingual, multisemiotic, multisensory, and multimodal communicative resources for teaching and learning.

Hence, this paper aims to explore how translanguaging contributes to knowledge construction of interaction competence within Thai EMI context, emphasizing the transcending of multimodal resources. Specifically, this strategic approach allows teachers to adapt translanguaging pedagogy and provide essential support for learners in the learning process.

## Five Advantages of Translanguaging

Scholars have identified several benefits that translanguaging brings to bilingual and multilingual settings. Firstly, translanguaging is likely to reduce affective barriers for individuals lacking confidence in using the L2, thereby diminishing feelings of alienation, anxiety and tension (Ortega, 2020). Likewise, translingual practices promoted learners' active participation and contribution. Secondly, it may improve learners' agency and plays an identity-affirming function, allowing learners to fully express their voices (Arthur & Martin, 2006; Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Lin & He, 2017). Furthermore, learners' spontaneous use of their L1 enabled them to leverage familiar resources to express their ideas freely and comfortably. By using their home language, learners incorporated their daily life experiences (e.g., cellphone, mineral water, battery), which were then connected to and expanded upon the target content knowledge (Jiang & Zhang, 2023). Thirdly, translanguaging can give learners a deeper insight into the subject matter discussed in the classroom and has the potential to promote higher-order thinking and fuller understanding (Baker, 2011). By the same token, translanguaging can contribute to learners' engagement in the content of the curriculum (Infante & Licona, 2021). Fourthly, by utilizing the L1 alongside, rather than instead of, the target language, translanguaging can enhance classroom

communication, facilitate improved participation between weaker and stronger learners, and potentially transform teacher-learner relationships (Palmer et al., 2014; Paulsrud et al., 2017). Lastly, experience in translanguaging can help learners build their linguistic tolerance and flexibility that should enable them to learn additional languages throughout their lives (Garcia, 2009).

In conclusion, the challenges of employing translanguaging involves several aspects: L2 learners must overcome their apprehension to speak both L1 and the target language, effectively express their ideas, engage in in-depth classroom discussions, and facilitate participation among learners of varying proficiency levels. Despite these challenges, translanguaging plays a pivotal role in enhancing classroom interaction competence.

## Combining Translanguaging Pedagogy through Classroom Interactional Competence for Making Meaning in Thai Context

Under the sociocultural perspective, knowledge is constructed through social interactions where learners bring their sociocultural histories and communicative resources into relevance (Vygotsky, 1978). Meaning-making processes vary across sociocultural contexts, influenced by individuals' culturally determined literacy practices used for specific cultural and communicative purposes. Therefore, integrating the target language with classroom interaction, where language and content are learned through discussion and co-construction, can mutually enhance the learning process and promote higher-order thinking.

The theoretical concept of interaction competence (IC) was introduced by Kramsch in 1986 as a response to proficiency-oriented approaches in L2 teaching and testing. Kramsch advocated for prioritizing the development of L2 speakers' ability to effectively use their knowledge and resources in grammar, vocabulary, and prosody to engage in real-world interactions.

Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC) is defined as the ability of teachers and learners to use interaction as a tool to mediate and support learning (Walsh, 2006). This concept emphasizes the pivotal role of interaction in language learning and underscores how teachers' and learners' decisions during interactions create opportunities for learning. To deepen the understanding of interaction in foreign language classroom contexts, the paper expands the concept of IC by incorporating translanguaging as an interactional phenomenon. This perspective highlights that learners' proficiency in language is enhanced when they utilize a variety of semiotic resources to facilitate complex social activities.

Within the context of classroom interaction, Walsh (2006) coined the term "Classroom Interactional Competence" which emphasizes CIC as a resource that both language learners and their teachers can draw upon to promote learning in the classroom, without specifying whether the teachers are L1 or L2 speakers of the target language. This conceptualization of classroom interaction competence creates a framework for classroom discussion. It emphasizes the teacher's role in shaping learner contributions through actions such as seeking clarification or repairing learner input,

thereby assisting learners in expressing their intended meanings through practice using translanguaging. Both teacher and learners can benefit from the various ideas presented by CIC without being overly concerned about language usage. In addition to the focus on L1 interactional competence, this paper can provide insight into the full range of semiotic resources L1 native English speakers draw on for effective interaction, complementing findings from existing research on L2 interactional competence (Tai & Dai, 2023). In the Thai classroom context, both the teacher and learners engage in discussions, co-constructing their knowledge by using L1 and L2 to deepen their understanding of the content. As noted by Ambele (2022), these teachers allow learners to strategically use their L1 to accomplish a range of teaching and learning tasks and objectives. This underscores the importance of conducting research on this topic with a diverse sample of Thai teachers across Thailand, including those who may initially oppose translanguaging, as well as learners.

In addition, CIC's focus on real-world language use, rather than abstract linguistic knowledge such as grammar and vocabulary, aligns with the general communicative language movement spearheaded by Hymes's seminal work on communicative competence (Hymes, 1972). Similarly, it is effective in explicating the detailed process of how translanguaging practices are jointly constructed between teachers and learners in EMI classrooms, even though classroom participants are expected to use the target language throughout the lessons under the monolingual policy (Jakonen et al., 2018).

Despite efforts EMI classes to approach native speaker proficiency, most learners never achieve the same level of nativeness as their models. Translanguaging, in essence, refers to practices where teacher and learners draw on their multilingual and multimodal resources from their repertoires in a fluid and dynamic manner to construct meaning in the multilingual classroom setting (Li, 2018). Therefore, developing an understanding of the diverse interactional resources that teachers and learners employ in translanguaging pedagogy can contribute to improved teaching and enhance their multilingual competence. This underscores the importance of integrating translanguaging and classroom interaction competence for meaning construction in the Thai EMI context, thereby enabling effective access to content knowledge.

## Conclusion

Translanguaging reconceptualizes language, enabling learners to employ diverse modes within their full communicative repertoire for meaning-making practices. Its application in classroom settings aims to enhance learning empowerment. Various strategies challenge both the teacher and learners while exploring classroom interactional competence in Thai EMI setting by utlizing translanguaging to deepen understanding of content. This approach allows learners to use multiple languages in constructing knowledge and articulating complex ideas, thereby fostering enhanced learning outcomes. Therefore, engaging in discussions or interactions with peers who utilize translanguaging to support their conversations offers an opportunity to comprehend specific content through mutual learning.

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