Stakeholder's Perceptions of Translanguaging in Chinese Primary Education

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Abstract—**A new paradigm in multilingualism, known as translanguaging, offers a fresh and different perspective on second language acquisition. However, little is known about stakeholders' attitudes towards translanguaging in China. By conducting interviews, questionnaires, and making classroom observations, this study investigates primary school teachers' and students' perceptions of translanguaging in China. The results revealed that although they do not recognize its legitimacy, they use it in classes due to limited English proficiency and improved classroom management, among other reasons.**

Keywords—**attitude, Chinese primary school, English language teaching, translanguaging**

I. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the last two decades, translanguaging has gained significant momentum in multilingual contexts. An increasing number of empirical studies have been conducted on translanguaging, and very few were carried out in a Chinese context, especially in primary education. Monolingualism still prevails in mainland China: stakeholders (e.g., teachers and students) firmly believe that exclusively using the target language is the most effective approach to learning a language [1]. This indicates a need to understand varying perceptions of translanguaging to investigate its feasibility in China. This is the first study to explore classroom translanguaging practices and stakeholders' perceptions of it in Chinese EFL classes.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. The Concept of Translanguaging

The term translanguaging is derived from [2]'s English translation of the term Trawsieithu by the Welsh scholar Williams [3], which referred to the planned and systematic use of two languages for input and output inside the same lesson. In its original definition, languages were viewed as separate, so translanguaging was a process of moving between languages. However, the past decade has witnessed a continuous extension of the term translanguaging, with increasingly more scholars engaging in its conceptualization. As a new theoretical model of language, translanguaging does not treat

languages as bounded systems. Instead, it transcends such boundaries, viewing them as an integrated linguistic repertoire. The prefix trans- and suffix -ing of "translanguaging" together indicate that language is a dynamic process of meaning construction [4]. Based on this interpretation, the multimodal nature of translation is also emphasized, including gestures, objects, visual cues, touch, tone, sound, and words. Multilinguals are allowed to draw on their linguistic resources for meaning-making and communication [5, 6]. To date, translanguaging has already been broadly embraced by bilingual and multilingual education in many parts of the world, except for some with entrenched monolingual ideology.

B. Monolingual Habitus in China

Monolingualism considers the use of the first language a taboo during language acquisition [7]. Recent years have witnessed the prevalence of monolingual ideology in China, especially in primary and secondary education. Among different English teaching methods, immersion English teaching is broadly embraced by stakeholders in China; that is, teachers and students can only use the target language in class so as to be immersed in a second language environment [8]. However, while immersion has become a significant trend, its efficacy in enhancing students' English proficiency still remains questionable. [9] points out that English-only pedagogy can discourage some students with relatively low English proficiency. Similarly, the results of [10] report that English-medium questions are more often to be greeted with silence more than Chinese-medium ones in English-Medium Instruction (EMI) classes. Therefore, the unsatisfactory results of monolingualism entail a need to approach L2 teaching from a multilingual perspective. Translanguaging pedagogy has already been widely recognized as an effective approach to language teaching [11, 12].

C. Attitudes toward Translangugaing

Previous research has revealed ambivalent teachers' attitudes towards translanguaging as a pedagogical approach. [13] found that some teachers believed a certain amount of L1 in classes would facilitate students' learning, while others thought the functions of translanguaging were limited and therefore abided by the English-only approach. Likewise, [14] noted that whereas some teachers exhibited a positive attitude towards

translanguaging, other teachers saw no benefit of translanguaging or felt guilty about using the approach.

Additionally, studies have shown that students demonstrated a similarly mixed position to translanguaging. Students in Portugal appreciated utilizing their whole linguistic repertoire [15]. By contrast, almost half of the students learning Chinese as a foreign language instead preferred teachers to follow the monolingual principle [14]. However, these results were all based on data from universities. Much uncertainty still exists about how translanguaging was approached and perceived in primary school in China, where monolingualism is deeply embedded. Therefore, this research seeks to address the following questions:

1) What kinds of translanguaging practices are there in Chinese rural primary schools included in this study?

2) What are teachers' and students' attitudes towards translanguaging in Chinese rural primary schools?

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Setting and Participants

Purposive method sampling was adopted during this study, with a focus on English classes in Chinese primary schools. The research setting was two primary schools in Huludao city in Northeast China. The two schools are on a six-year cycle. The students in the study have started to learn English at Grade 3. Subjects of the current research were from Grade 5 and Grade 6, around 11 or 12 years old. They were all native speakers of Chinese and studying English as a foreign language. Four English teachers and 189 students participated in this study. Learners from both schools came from communities that suffered from relative poverty and unemployment. School and parental consent were granted before the study. Tables I and II highlight the participants' details.

TABLE I. STUDENTS' DETAILS

	School A		School B	
	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 5	Grade 6
Age	11	12	11	12
Number of subjects	68	75	27	24
Total number	194			
Students' L1	Chinese			
Students' L2	English			
Years of learning English	2.5	3.5	2.5	3.5

TABLE II. DATA SOURCES AND METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

	Data sources	Data Collection
Classroom	Pedagogy	Radio recordings
	Learning activities	Observations
	Interactions	Fieldnotes
Teachers	Attitudes	Interviews
	Purposes of using translanguaging	
Students	Attitudes	Questionnaires

B. Data Collection

A mixed-methods approach was adopted by this study. Following the principles of ethnographic research, the researcher immersed herself totally into the context of the study itself. Three sets of data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and data collecting questionnaires. Table II provides detailed information on the data source.

1) Classroom observation

Classroom observations were conducted to thoroughly investigate translanguaging practices in a natural environment. Invitation emails were sent out to English teachers, informing and notifying them of the research topic and procedures. In order not to intimidate the students and teachers, the term "translanguaging" was not explicitly mentioned but instead was presented in translated Chinese explanations. Four teachers expressed their willingness and consent to open their classes for observation and participate in the interview. A total of 24 sessions were recorded, with the total observation time amounting to 1080 minutes. The observation was supplemented by field notes.

2) Semi-structured interviews

Four English teachers were interviewed to understand their perceptions of translanguaging and its purpose in the classroom. Interviews were held through phone calls or the online video platform Zoom, which were conducted mainly in Chinese, with occasional English. The teacher's profile and detailed information about observations and interviews are shown in Table III.

TABLE III. TEACHERS' DETAILS

No.	Teaching Experience	Qualifications	Duration of observation	Duration of the interview
T1	18 years	Bachelor	6 sessions (270min)	25′13″
T2	10 years	Bachelor	8 sessions (360 min)	21′45″
T3	7 years	Bachelor	5 sessions (225 min)	23′28″
T4	3 years	Master	5 sessions (225 min)	40′12″

3) Questionnaires to understand students' attitudes

194 questionnaires were distributed to students in grade 5 and grade 6 at the two primary schools. The questionnaire was adapted from [13, 16] to investigate students' attitudes towards translanguaging.

C. Data Analysis

During data analysis, Nvivo 11 was used for coding after identifying translanguaging practices in the classes to analyze the qualitative data gathered from classroom observations. Then the codes were categorized according to different translanguaging purposes. All the transcriptions were checked by the participants to ensure accuracy. For the quantitative data, the researcher calculated percentages of every item in the questionnaire based on the 5-level Likert scale.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Translanguaging Practices in the Classroom

In general, translanguaging practices in this study were categorized into three types according to different purposes: translanguaging for scaffolding, classroom management, and rapport building. Cases involving multimodal use of languages, slide presentations, gestures, and learning materials, among others, are all regarded as translanguaging practices as well.

1) Translanguaging for scaffolding

a) Content scaffolding

T1, T2, and T3 frequently used translanguaging for content scaffolding in class, utilizing their linguistic repertoire to explain textbook-related content. This included vocabulary, grammar, or the localization of certain concepts to facilitate understanding.

TABLE IV. CONTENT SCAFFOLDING (1)

Speaker	Utterance	English Translation
T1	The next word is kangaroo. What is a kangaroo? Is it a kind of food, animal, or an item of clothing? Kangaroo likes 跳着走路.	The next word is kangaroo. What is a kangaroo? Is it a kind of food, animal, or an item of clothing? Kangaroo uses hopping for locomotion.
	It is a symbol of Australia 澳大利亚，南半球的一个国家，和我们季节相反。	It is a symbol of Australia, a country in the southern hemisphere, which has the opposite season to ours.

TABLE V. CONTENT SCAFFOLDING (2)

Speaker	Utterance	English Translation
T3	In China, idioms about dogs have negative meanings. For example, 狐朋狗友，狗腿子.	In China, idioms about dogs have negative meanings. For example, a gang of depraved friends, lackey.
	However, in English, if I say, "You are a lucky dog," I mean you are very lucky. "Every dog has his day" means everyone will succeed at some point in their lives, 风水轮流转.	However, in English, if I say, "You are a lucky dog," I mean you are very lucky. "Every dog has his day" means everyone will succeed at some point in their lives; fortune knocks once at least at every man's gate.

In Table IV, T1 deploys the students' L1 to illustrate some complex expressions to scaffold understanding of new words. In Table V, T3 actively uses translanguaging by comparing two commonly used four-character Chinese idioms with the corresponding English idioms to facilitate their understanding of cultural differences.

b) Task scaffolding

In this type of scaffolding, the teacher uses the students' L1 to repeat the tasks and/or rules of a game to highlight.

TABLE VI. TASK SCAFFOLDING (1)

Speaker	Utterance	English Translation
T4	This game is called "What is missing?" 什么消失了？	This game is called "What is missing?" (What is missing?)
	I'll give you 10 seconds to memorize the three words in the PowerPoint. 你们有 10 秒钟时间记忆幻灯片上三个单词的位置。	I'll give you 10 seconds to memorize the three words in the PowerPoint. (You have 10 seconds to memorize the three words in the PowerPoint.)
	Then one of them will disappear. You will win if you can tell me which word is missing loudly. 三个图片中的一个会消失，如果能大声告诉我消失的是哪个单词，你们就赢了。	Then one of them will disappear. You will win if you can tell me which word is missing loudly. (One of them will disappear. You will win if you can tell me which word is missing loudly.)
	十秒钟，你们只有十秒钟啊！	(Ten seconds, you only have ten seconds!)

TABLE VII. TASK SCAFFOLDING (2)

Speaker	Utterance	English Translation
T2	The homework is reciting the first two paragraphs of the text we learned today and preparing an English introduction of your favorite food. We'll discuss your guy's favorite food tomorrow. 今天的作业是背诵课文前两段。每个人回家准备一段对自己最喜欢食物的英文自我介绍，明天我们课上讨论。	(Today's homework is reciting the first two paragraphs of the text. Everyone, please prepare an English introduction about your favorite food. We will discuss it in class tomorrow.)

Tables VI and VII illustrate a task scaffolding strategy by using translanguaging. T4 repeats the game's rules in Chinese to strengthen the instructions, ensuring every student understands the rules and can participate in the game. In Table VI, T2 assigns the homework in Chinese again to highlight it and raise students' attention.

c) Material scaffolding

Figure 1. A demonstration of the new word list.

Material scaffolding involves the use of supplementary learning materials to facilitate their memorization. In T2's classroom, a list of new English words with their Chinese translations and corresponding pictures was put up (see Fig. 1). The T2 also utilized similar vocabulary cards (see Fig. 2).

Figure 2. A demonstration of the vocabulary card.

2) Translanguaging for classroom management

In Table VIII, this translanguaging strategy was most frequently observed in T1's class for discipline maintenance and attention-raising with the students.

TABLE VIII. TRANSLANGUAGING FOR CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Speaker	Utterance	English Translation
T1	我们来约定一个暗号好不好？When I say, "Attention!" You should sit up straight and say loudly, "One! Two!". 当我说"Attention!"的时候，你们就要坐端正大声回应我"One! Two!"	(Shall we build a classroom rule? When I say, "Attention!" You should sit up straight and say, "One! Two!" When I say "Attention! Sit up straight and say "One! Two!".)

3) Translanguaging for rapport building

The rapport-building strategy was common across all four of the teachers' classes. It was noticed that the students felt more comfortable in the environment when the instructor used a certain amount of L1 during their interactions [17].

TABLE IX. TRANSLANGUAGING FOR RAPPORT BUILDING (1)

Speaker	Utterance	English translation
T4	Please pay attention that the word "actor" ends in "or", not "er". Don't be a 小马大哈 on the exam.	(Please pay attention that the word "actor" ends in "or", not "er". Don't be scatterbrained on the exam.)

In Table IX, "小马大哈" (underlined) is a playful and affectionate way of saying being careless. T4 adopted it to communicate with the students with ease and to create a comfortable classroom atmosphere.

In Table X, in order to maintain fluent communication, the T4 also used "过山车" and "棉花糖" rather than their English name, thereby, encouraging the student to continue speaking in English and establishing a good rapport with him.

TABLE X. TRANSLANGUAGING FOR RAPPORT BUILDING (2)

Speaker	Utterance	English translation
S1	I went to the amusement park last weekend.	
T4	Wow! That must be exciting!	
S1	Yeah, and I played that…huge…and long one…	
T4	Oh, I know! You rode the roller coaster 过山车, right? 过山车 is super scary. You're so brave!	Oh I know! (You rode the roller coaster, right? The roller coaster is super scary.) You're so brave!
S1	Yeah! 过山车 is amazing! And I also ate 蓝色的棉花糖.	Yeah! (The roller coaster is amazing! And I also ate blue fairy floss.)
T4	Oh god! 棉花糖 is my favourite! And in blue? That's rare.	Oh god! (Fairy floss is my favourite!) And in blue? That's rare.

B. Students' Attitudes towards Translanguaging

The results of students' perceptions of translanguaging are listed in Table XI. Their attitudes towards different questions were divided into negative, neutral, and positive. In general, the results showed that their attitudes towards translanguaging in class were nearly equally divided. 54.09% of them regarded translanguaging as an appropriate practice (Mean = 3.44). It is worth noting that 72.7% of the students believed that using translanguaging in language class indicated low linguistic proficiency (Mean = 3.96). Moreover, the results indicate that translanguaging was not deemed to develop their confidence in learning English (Mean = 2.33). The data, therefore, reflects the students' ambivalence towards translanguaging in language class. Even if about half of them took translanguaging as proper practice, the majority still regarded it as a sign of nonproficiency. Translanguaging was not able to bring them positive psychological feedback. In contrast to earlier findings, however, students in Portugal appreciated the use of their linguistic repertoire through the translanguaging approach [15]. Possible reasons for this deviation may be due to different age groups, different cultural backgrounds, and language policy, namely monolingualism.

Table XII shows students' different attitudes towards teachers' varied translanguaging practices. Among them, using translanguaging to help low proficiency students scored the highest (Mean = 4.12), followed by clarifying activity rules (Mean = 3.93) and vocabulary explanation (Mean = 3.79), indicating a need for content and task scaffolding, which coincides with [13]. Students' opinions on their own translanguaging practices are demonstrated in Table XIII, with helping others ranked first (Mean= 4.15). Besides, it is notable that language output activities, such as answering questions and brainstorming during classroom activities, scored the lowest. That, to some extent, revealed their willingness to practise their oral English in the class, which echoes [18].

TABLE XI. QUESTIONNAIRE TO UNDERSTAND STUDENTS' ATTITUDES PART I RESULTS (MEANS)

	Negative (below 2.5)	Neutral (2.5-3.5)	Positive (above 3.5)
1. English teachers at my school use Chinese in English class.			4.91
2. Using Chinese in English class is an appropriate practice.		3.44	
3. Using Chinese in English class indicates a lack of linguistic proficiency in your second language.			3.96
4. Using Chinese in English class is essential for learning a new language.		3.09	
5. Using Chinese in English class develops my confidence in learning English.	2.33		
6. English teachers should avoid using Chinese in English classes because it will prevent second language learning.		2.84	

TABLE XII. QUESTIONNAIRE PART II RESULTS (MEANS)

	Negative (below 2.5)	Neutral (2.5-3.5)	Positive (above 3.5)
1. To explain vocabulary terms			3.79
2. To give directions		3.13	
3. For classroom management		2.69	
4. To give feedback to students			3.65
5. To clarify activity rules			3.93
6. To help low proficiency students			4.12

TABLE XIII. QUESTIONNAIRE PART III RESULTS (MEANS)

	Negative (below 2.5)	Neutral (2.5-3.5)	Positive (above 3.5)
1. To discuss contents or activities in small groups		3.25	
2. To provide assistance to peers during activities			4.15
3. To explain problems irrelevant to content		3.26	
4. To brainstorm during class activities	2.41		
5. To ask permission		3.13	
6. To answer teacher's questions	2.12		

C. Teachers' Attitudes towards Translanguaging

Translanguaging practices were observed in all four of the teachers' classes. However, their perceptions of it were distinct. T1, T2 and T3 all favoured translanguaging practices. Their frequent use of translanguaging in classes also revealed their attitudes. Some of their represented ideas are shown below.

1) Teachers' attitudes in favour of translanguaging (Tables XIV−XVII)

TABLE XIV. TEACHERS' ATTITUDES IN FAVOUR OF TRANSLANGUAGING (1)

T1: We all know that the monolingual strategy is better. But from my experience, questions are always greeted with silence in class if I only use English or encourage them to only use English when corresponding in class. We all do not want the students to be trapped in a situation where they cannot express themselves.

TABLE XV. TEACHERS' ATTITUDES IN FAVOUR OF TRANSLANGUAGING (2)

T2: There are some teachers like T4 whose English is very good. However, I am not among them. Only using English in class is challenging for me. Also, if I explain a word in English, some students will ask me to explain it in Chinese again afterward.

TABLE XVI. TEACHERS' ATTITUDES IN FAVOUR OF TRANSLANGUAGING (3)

T1: It is important to use Chinese to give instructions and keep the class in order. If I use Chinese, the classroom can become quiet quickly; however, if I use English, some students cannot understand it, so it takes more time for classroom management.

TABLE XVII. TEACHERS' ATTITUDES IN FAVOUR OF TRANSLANGUAGING (4)

T3: Although immersion classes are beneficial to students, it is not feasible for beginners. It is difficult to figure out the meaning of some words or expressions without the help of the native language. From the perspective of teaching, if you want to stick to an English-only strategy, the loss of knowledge is unavoidable.

In the interview of the three teachers, it was found that they still acknowledge immersion teaching, despite implementing translanguaging. Their translanguaging practices were more like a forced act due to various reasons such as the low English proficiency of the students, teachers' limited proficiency, and unsatisfactory participation. The results show that they felt guilty about using translanguaging and were reluctant to use it. Such a stigma was also found in [19]. That might can be explained by the standard language ideology proposed by [20]. Any deviation from the target language (standard language) can arouse a sense of guilt. Thus, further training of EFL teachers' translanguaging practices is needed to alleviate such feelings and enhance their translanguaging skills in primary education.

2) Teachers' attitudes opposed to translanguaging

TABLE XVIII. TEACHERS' ATTITUDES OPPOSED TO TRANSLANGUAGING (1)

T4: Only in an English context can the students "feel" the actual usage of a certain word or a sentence pattern, the effect of which can never be achieved by using translanguaging. For instance, it is difficult for students to differentiate "look, see and watch" without a certain context.

TABLE XIX. TEACHERS' ATTITUDES OPPOSED TO TRANSLANGUAGING (2)

T4: Once the students start to use their native language to explain something, it is difficult to change their speaking habits. Ultimately, they will use an excess of their mother tongue and rely on it. In addition, teachers' use of the native language would make them subconsciously feel that it is permissible to also use it in the classroom.

T4 stuck to an English-only strategy in class, with minimal use of Chinese. The two Tables XVIII and XIX indicate that T4 believed that although translanguaging can sometimes be more efficient, the advantages of an immersion class are more significant. Concerns about students' overuse of their mother tongue are another constraint on teachers' adoption of translanguaging.

V. CONCLUSION

This research investigated the translanguaging practices and stakeholders' attitudes towards it in the context of Chinese primary schools. In general, teachers use translanguaging for scaffolding, classroom management, and rapport building. The results of the attitudes revealed that monolingual ideology has a profound impact on Chinese teachers and students. Overall, the study found that students' attitudes towards translanguaging were ambivalent. Although half of the students regard translanguaging as an appropriate practice, it seems that they did not recognize its legitimacy in the way that students in Portugal do. Most teachers favoured translanguaging, but all of them showed signs of the stigma attached to the approach, such as guilt. Therefore, the results of this research suggest that teachers lack training in pedagogical translanguaging practices and should be encouraged to use them in their EFL training.

This work contributes to existing knowledge about translanguaging by examining Chinese primary students' and teachers' attitudes towards translanguaging. However, caution must be applied with a relatively small sample size, as the findings might not be generalized to all primary schools in China. Further research regarding the attitudes of parents would be worthwhile.

APPENDIX QUESTIONNAIRES TO UNDERSTAND STUDENTS' ATTITUDES

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

Gender *

○   ○
Male   Female

Grade *

○   ○
Grade 5   Grade 6

Part I Perceptions of translanguaging*

	1	2	3	4	5
1. English teachers at my school use Chinese in English class.	○	○	○	○	○
2. Using Chinese in English class is an appropriate practice.	○	○	○	○	○
3. Using Chinese in English class indicates a lack of linguistic	○	○	○	○	○

	1	2	3	4	5
proficiency in your second language.					
4. Using Chinese in English class is essential for learning a new language.	○	○	○	○	○
5. Using Chinese in English class develops my confidence in learning English.	○	○	○	○	○
6. English teachers should avoid using Chinese in English classes because it will prevent second language learning.	○	○	○	○	○

Part II It is important for English teachers to use Chinese (in the following contexts).*

	1	2	3	4	5
1. To explain vocabulary terms	○	○	○	○	○
2. To give directions	○	○	○	○	○
3. For classroom management	○	○	○	○	○
4. To give feedback to students	○	○	○	○	○
5. To clarify activity rules	○	○	○	○	○
6. To help low proficiency students	○	○	○	○	○

Part III It is important for students to use Chinese (in the following contexts). *

	1	2	3	4	5
1. To discuss contents or activities in small groups	○	○	○	○	○
2. To provide assistance to peers during activities	○	○	○	○	○
3. To explain problems irrelevant to the content	○	○	○	○	○
4. To brainstorm during class activities	○	○	○	○	○
5. To ask permission	○	○	○	○	○
6. To answer teacher's questions	○	○	○	○	○

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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