



Translanguaging Practice in Classroom Interaction between Junior High School Teacher and Students

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify the types of translanguaging used in classroom interaction between a junior high school teacher and students, and to describe how these practices were implemented during the English learning process at SMP N 2 Nainggolan. The research employed a descriptive qualitative design grounded in García and Wei's (2014) concept of translanguaging as the flexible use of bilingual speakers' linguistic repertoires to support communication and meaning-making in multilingual classrooms. Data were collected through classroom observation across three meetings and interviews with the English teacher and selected students. Findings showed that translanguaging occurred through the use of Indonesian, English, and local language expressions, appearing 53 times overall and comprising three types adapted from Sari (2021): inter-sentential translanguaging (30 occurrences), intra-sentential translanguaging (14 occurrences), and tag translanguaging (9 occurrences), with inter-sentential translanguaging the most dominant. In terms of function, teacher-directed translanguaging served to deliver instructions, clarify learning

materials, scaffold students' understanding, ensure comprehension, and manage the classroom, while student-directed translanguaging supported scaffolding, meaning negotiation, and peer interaction. These practices helped create a more comfortable learning atmosphere and encouraged students' active participation. In conclusion, translanguaging functions as an effective pedagogical strategy that supports communication, comprehension, and interaction in the English learning process within a multilingual EFL classroom.

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INTRODUCTION

Language plays a vital role in human communication, enabling individuals to express ideas, share feelings, and maintain social relationships (Yule, 2020).

In multilingual classrooms, students and teachers frequently draw on more than one language to facilitate understanding, pattern sociolinguistic research attributes to the natural tendency of multilingual communities to shift between languages to ensure effective communication (Mantra et al., 2025). This phenomenon, known as translanguaging, refers to the seamless use of multiple linguistic resources in communication rather than a rigid switching between clearly separated language systems (García & Wei, 2014). In classroom contexts, teachers often employ translanguaging for pedagogical purposes such as clarifying meaning, emphasizing key points, and managing classroom activities, while students similarly draw on translanguaging to seek clarification, express ideas more comfortably, or respond in ways that feel more natural (Liando et al., 2022).

In the Indonesian educational context, translanguaging is increasingly evident in classroom communication, with teachers and students often combining Bahasa Indonesia, English, and regional languages during teaching and learning. This linguistic practice serves pedagogical and social functions beyond mere convenience, including clarifying meaning, managing classroom activities, and fostering rapport with students (Liando et al., 2022). Berlianti and Pradita (2021), examining translanguaging in EFL classroom interaction, found that teachers frequently alternated between English and Indonesian to clarify instructions, explain vocabulary, and check students' understanding, contributing to more engaging classroom interaction through both intra-sentential and inter-sentential switching. Similarly, Liando et al. (2023) reported that translanguaging plays an essential role in creating an interactive learning environment by helping teachers manage interaction and bridge linguistic gaps with students, while Marsevani and Hana (2023) observed that translanguaging contributes to students' better understanding of instructions and smoother classroom communication, particularly in overcoming vocabulary limitations.

Building on these findings, the present study focused on SMP N 2 Nainggolan to provide further insight into how a junior high school teacher manages translanguaging in instructional practice. Preliminary observation at this school revealed that both the teacher and students frequently used translanguaging during English classroom interactions, appearing when explaining grammar concepts, giving instructions, posing questions, and providing feedback. Although several studies have examined

translanguaging in educational contexts, limited attention has been given to the specific types of translanguaging used in Indonesian EFL classrooms, particularly in rural school settings, and to the dynamic ways teachers and students employ these practices to facilitate communication and learning. This study therefore aimed to identify the types of translanguaging used in interaction between a junior high school teacher and students, adapting the classification proposed by Sari (2021) into intra-sentential, inter-sentential, and tag translanguaging, and to describe how translanguaging practice is used to support classroom interaction during English learning.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design with a descriptive approach, chosen because the aim was to describe naturally occurring translanguaging practices in teacher-student interaction during English learning at SMP N 2 Nainggolan. According to Creswell and Creswell (2023), qualitative research allows researchers to understand social phenomena in their natural context and interpret participants' experiences in depth. The identification and categorization of translanguaging practices were guided by García and Wei's (2014) framework, which distinguishes translanguaging into teacher-directed and student-directed dimensions, while the specific types (inter-sentential, intra-sentential, and tag translanguaging) followed the classification proposed by Sari (2021). The primary data were obtained directly from the English classroom of grade VIII at SMP N 2 Nainggolan, comprising teacher and student interactions recorded during three meetings of English teaching and learning activities focused on recount text and simple past tense, together with interviews with the English teacher and selected students regarding the use, purposes, and benefits of translanguaging.

Three main instruments were used to collect data. An observation sheet served as the primary instrument, recording each utterance's type of translanguaging and its interactional function, such as delivering instructions, clarifying learning materials, ensuring students' understanding, and classroom management. Audio and video recording devices captured classroom interactions accurately to support detailed transcription and analysis, while a semi-structured interview guide, developed with reference to prior studies on translanguaging in classroom interaction (Pakpahan, 2025; Sapitri et al., 2018), was used to gather deeper insight into the teacher's and students'

reasons for using translanguaging and its perceived benefits. Data were collected through non-participant classroom observation across three meetings, audio/video recording of classroom interaction, and semi-structured interviews conducted after the observation phase. The data were then analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), in which transcribed utterances were coded according to Sari's (2021) translanguaging categories and further classified as teacher-directed or student-directed following García and Wei's (2014) framework; the resulting codes were organized into broader themes, and methodological triangulation across recordings, interviews, and observations (Denzin, 1978) was applied to strengthen the credibility of the analysis.

RESULTS

Types of Translanguaging

Based on classroom observations conducted across three meetings, the researcher identified 53 utterances containing translanguaging practices, classified into three types following Sari's (2021) framework: inter-sentential, intra-sentential, and tag translanguaging. As shown in Table 1, inter-sentential translanguaging was the most dominant, occurring 30 times (56.6%), followed by intra-sentential translanguaging with 14 occurrences (26.4%), and tag translanguaging with 9 occurrences (17.0%). The teacher produced the majority of translanguaging instances (45 of 53), while students contributed 8 instances, most commonly through intra-sentential and tag translanguaging during peer interaction and requests for clarification.

Inter-sentential translanguaging appeared when the speaker switched languages between sentences, most often from English to Bahasa Indonesia, such as when the teacher posed a question in English and then restated it in Indonesian to check comprehension. Intra-sentential translanguaging involved mixing both languages within a single utterance, for example when a vocabulary item was immediately followed by its Indonesian equivalent within the same sentence. Tag translanguaging involved inserting short expressions such as “ya” and “kan” into English utterances to confirm understanding or maintain a friendly and interactive classroom atmosphere.

Table 1. Frequency of Translanguaging Types by Speaker

Type of Translanguaging	Teacher	Student	Total	Percentage
Inter-sentential	29	1	30	56.6%
Intra-sentential	11	3	14	26.4%
Tag	5	4	9	17.0%
Total	45	8	53	100%

Functions of Translanguaging in Classroom Interaction

The functions of translanguaging were classified into teacher-directed and student-directed practices, following García and Wei's (2014) framework. As presented in Table 2, five functions of teacher-directed translanguaging were identified: delivering instructions, clarifying learning materials, scaffolding students' understanding, ensuring students' understanding, and classroom management. Clarifying learning materials was the most frequent function, reflecting the teacher's consistent use of translanguaging to explain vocabulary, grammar, and recount text structure. Two functions of student-directed translanguaging were also identified: scaffolding and meaning negotiation, and peer interaction, both of which supported students in expressing ideas and communicating with classmates when their English vocabulary was limited.

Interview data reinforced these observational findings. The teacher reported switching to Bahasa Indonesia when students appeared confused or when instructions were complex, using it deliberately to ensure clarity rather than as an unplanned lapse into the first language. Students, in turn, reported relying on Bahasa Indonesia when they lacked the English vocabulary to express an idea, and several noted that mixing languages made them feel more confident and less afraid to speak during classroom interaction.

Table 2. Functions of Translanguaging by Category

Category	Function	Description
Teacher-Directed	Delivering Instructions	Combining English and Indonesian to ensure students understood classroom tasks
Teacher-Directed	Clarifying Learning Materials	Explaining vocabulary, grammar, and recount text concepts in both languages
Teacher-Directed	Scaffolding Students' Understanding	Guiding students step by step through grammar rules such as simple past tense

Category	Function	Description
Teacher-Directed	Ensuring Students' Understanding	Checking comprehension through bilingual questions and confirmation
Teacher-Directed	Classroom Management	Using Indonesian to organize activities and give directions efficiently
Student-Directed	Scaffolding and Meaning Negotiation	Using Indonesian to express ideas when English vocabulary was limited
Student-Directed	Peer Interaction	Mixing English terms and Indonesian explanations during discussions with classmates

DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study demonstrated that translanguaging was used systematically in classroom interaction between the teacher and students at SMP N 2 Nainggolan, rather than occurring as random or unplanned language mixing. This supports García and Wei's (2014) theoretical perspective that translanguaging is a flexible and purposeful practice, shaped by communicative needs and classroom situations rather than a simple alternation between separated language systems. The dominance of inter-sentential translanguaging, accounting for over half of all instances identified, indicates that the teacher preferred to switch languages between sentences, particularly from English to Bahasa Indonesia, to clarify meaning and facilitate students' understanding. This finding is consistent with Liando et al. (2023), who similarly found that inter-sentential translanguaging frequently occurs during explanation and instruction in Indonesian EFL classrooms, allowing information to be presented in a more structured and comprehensible way.

The presence of intra-sentential translanguaging, in which English and Bahasa Indonesia were combined within a single utterance, reflects a more integrated and natural use of linguistic resources during explanation. This is consistent with Sapitri et al.'s (2018) observation that combining languages within utterances can function as a scaffold that supports EFL learners' comprehension without requiring a full switch of language mode. Tag translanguaging, though the least frequent type, played an important interactional role: short expressions were used to confirm understanding and sustain a friendly classroom atmosphere, a function consistent with Berlianti and Pradita's (2021) finding that translanguaging contributes to more interactive classroom discourse.

In terms of function, teacher-directed translanguaging served several pedagogical purposes, most prominently clarifying learning materials and scaffolding students' understanding of grammar such as the simple past tense. This scaffolding function aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) concept of assisted learning, in which learners accomplish tasks beyond their independent ability with appropriate support, and is reinforced by García, Johnson, and Seltzer's (2017) view that translanguaging can function as pedagogical scaffolding that reduces cognitive load while maintaining learning objectives. The teacher's use of translanguaging in delivering instructions and managing the classroom further reflects Saqinah et al.'s (2025) finding that translanguaging reduces confusion and improves students' understanding of classroom tasks in junior high school EFL settings.

Student-directed translanguaging, though less frequent than teacher-directed practices, played a meaningful role in supporting students' participation and confidence. Students relied on Bahasa Indonesia primarily to bridge vocabulary gaps and negotiate meaning, consistent with Pakpahan's (2025) finding that translanguaging supports EFL learners' classroom interaction by allowing them to draw on their full linguistic repertoire rather than being confined to English alone. During peer interaction, students combined English terms with Indonesian explanations to discuss tasks, a pattern that mirrors Sukirman et al.'s (2023) finding that translanguaging enhances participation and engagement among junior high school students in similarly localized EFL settings. Taken together, these findings suggest that translanguaging functioned not as a limitation on English learning but as a context-sensitive pedagogical resource that supported comprehension, classroom management, and student participation in this rural Indonesian EFL classroom.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the types of translanguaging used in classroom interaction between a junior high school teacher and students at SMP N 2 Nainggolan, and described how these practices were implemented during English learning focused on recount text and simple past tense. Based on classroom observation across three meetings and interviews with the teacher and students, three types of translanguaging were identified following Sari's (2021) classification: inter-sentential, intra-sentential, and tag

translanguaging. Inter-sentential translanguaging was the most dominant, accounting for 30 of 53 identified instances (56.6%), followed by intra-sentential translanguaging with 14 instances (26.4%) and tag translanguaging with 9 instances (17.0%).

Regarding function, translanguaging operated as both a teacher-directed and a student-directed practice. The teacher used translanguaging to deliver instructions, clarify learning materials, scaffold and ensure students' understanding, and manage classroom activities, while students used it to negotiate meaning and interact with peers when their English vocabulary was limited. These practices contributed to a more comfortable and interactive learning atmosphere, supporting students' confidence and active participation in classroom interaction.

These findings suggest that translanguaging should not be regarded as a limitation on English language learning, but rather as an effective, context-sensitive pedagogical strategy, particularly in rural EFL classrooms where students' exposure to English may be limited. Teachers are encouraged to apply translanguaging strategically, using students' first language to clarify difficult material and support understanding while gradually encouraging greater use of English to build learners' proficiency. Future researchers are encouraged to examine translanguaging practices in different educational levels and language skills, and to explore its relationship with students' long-term learning outcomes.

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