

# Translanguaging in International Student Teaching: Narratives of Filipino Teachers in an Indonesian Setting

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## Abstract

Regardless of numerous studies on translanguaging, little attention has been given to its practice among pre-service teachers, particularly in the ASEAN context. To fill this gap, this article explores the experiences of three pre-service English teachers from the Philippines who were assigned to a private elementary school in Indonesia as part of a pre-service teacher exchange program. Working in a context that did not share a similar first or second language, the three teachers used English, their second language, as a lingua franca in communicating with the students. Drawing upon data from their teaching diaries, class observation, and in-depth interviews, this article reveals that using English in the classroom was challenging because English was neither the first nor the second language of their students. Three narratives from the teachers are recounted to shed some light on their use of translanguaging to bridge the communication gap. The implication of the study is also discussed.

**Keywords:** multilingualism, translanguaging, pre-service teacher, English as a Ling

## INTRODUCTION

Previous studies into English as a global lingua franca, English as an international language, and English as a world language show that the use of English has penetrated into different educational terrains in educational settings across ASEAN increases rapidly as more opportunities for educational cooperation and exchange programs become available for the academic community in the region. It is important to note that the use of English in ASEAN is not related to any varieties of English. Instead, the term English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) is used to define the use of the language among people who do not share similar mother tongues. In this sense, ELF is not a linguistic variety that is based on any native-speaker norms (Hülmbauer, Böhringer, Seidlhofer, 2008), and its sole purpose is effective communication through the use of any linguistic repertoire and communicative strategies that a speaker possesses (Friedrich & Matsuda, 2010). In this sense, it is vital to view English, not in isolation from other languages. Instead, English should be considered as one resource among other

languages (Jenkins, 2015) and nonlinguistic aspects that are available to achieve effective communication in the abovementioned context. In other words, in ELF contexts, it is common to use two or more named languages simultaneously or interchangeably.

Code-switching has been a popular term to define such practice. However, in a classroom context, the term indicates that there is a separation between the target language and another language that is ignored most of the time or even considered a hindrance for target language learning (Garcia & Lin, 2016). The interplay between English and other languages in real-life communication is best defined using the term translanguaging (Garcia & Wei, 2014). In translanguaging theory, two or more languages in an individual's repertoire are not treated separately (Garcia, 2017); those languages are equally essential in the meaning-making processes, and one particular language should not be considered more important than the others.

Regardless of numerous studies on translanguaging, little attention has been given to

translanguaging among pre-service teachers. A study conducted by Musanti and Rodriguez (2017) explored translanguaging practices of pre-service bilingual teachers' academic writing in Texas, United States. In the same context, Caldas (2019) discussed the ideology shift of a group of pre-service teachers as they participated in a teacher preparation course. Meanwhile, Iversen (2019) explored translanguaging practice of pre-service teachers in Norwegian multilingual classrooms during their field placement. The findings reported that spontaneous translanguaging practices were used to support the students. Given the scarcity of research on translanguaging in pre-service teachers' classroom practices, particularly in the ASEAN context, the present study explored how three pre-service Filipino teachers with English as their second language used translanguaging in teaching Indonesian elementary students who studied English as neither first nor second language. This study is one among the first to explore pre-service teachers' translanguaging practice in the context of International student teaching in ASEAN.

## **THE STUDY**

This study highlights the preliminary findings of a larger research project on an international student teaching program in the ASEAN context that was conducted in 2019. The program involved 12 pre-service teachers with different majors, including natural science, math, and elementary education from the Philippines and Thailand. They were placed in three different schools in Yogyakarta, Indonesia to teach science, math, and English for two weeks. Prior to the teaching practice, they took a two-day Indonesian Language course to learn basic Indonesian words and expressions. The present study involved Lourdes, Jane, and Maria (pseudonyms), three Filipino female pre-service teachers, and also fourth-year students of a private university in the Philippines majoring in elementary education. The three teachers were assigned to a private Islamic elementary school to teach English. They were chosen as participants of this study because of the similarity in the linguistic background, major, and context of the teaching practice. Such consideration was made to enable

the author to explore the topic of this study from three different narratives.

Lourdes's mother was an elementary school teacher so that Lourdes was exposed to English through storybooks and educational books and videos since when she was five years old. She used English and Filipino in a school setting and Mainitnon, a dialect of the Surigaonon language, at home. However, she expressed her preference for using English so that she could improve her communication skills. She realized that English was important not only as of the Philippines' national language but also as an international language.

Jane started learning English at home at a very young age. Her parents, aunts, and uncles taught her basic English words and greetings. Besides English, she was proficient in Tagalog and Surigaonon. Jane was passionate about teaching and help students develop their knowledge, potential, and skills. Her passion led her to participate in the teacher exchange program in Indonesia. Maria learned English when she was in elementary school. She could speak English well, but she said that she used English at school most of the time. She preferred speaking Surigaonon and Tagalog in other situations. Her parents were both municipal councilors, and they frequently gave public speeches in English. However, they did not use English much at home.

Narrative inquiry was implemented for "its focus on how people use stories to make sense of their experiences in areas of inquiry where it is important to understand phenomena from the perspectives of those who experience them" (Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2014, p. 2). Through narrative inquiry, the experiences of the three pre-service teachers were explored from their own perspectives in an attempt to understand how they situated themselves in their teaching context and why they made particular decisions in their practices, particularly in the use of translanguaging. The teacher narratives were derived from the teaching diaries that they wrote as partial fulfillment of the final report for the student teaching program. In addition, classroom

observation notes and a series of online correspondence were also conducted to gather more data on how the three teachers used translanguaging in their classes. The data were then presented as part of the storytelling so that the teacher narratives were rich and comprehensive. The three narratives were analyzed thematically to determine shared themes and pinpoint individual differences (Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2014).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

Four recurring themes in the three narratives were the influence of an Indonesian language course, translanguaging through translation, visual and non-verbal support for translanguaging, and students' sociocultural backgrounds in translanguaging. The following sections present vignettes of each participant with the focus on these four themes.

#### *Lourdes*

With no prior knowledge of the Indonesian language, Lourdes expressed her relief for having the opportunity to take a course on the Indonesian language before her internship.

- (1) I can say that we were lucky because the university fixed us a schedule to learn Bahasa because it would be really helpful for us to communicate with our students since not all students in our designated schools were good at speaking English. In just two days, I learned a lot of things about Indonesia, not just their language and important terms, but also their culture, way of communication, and how bright their personalities were.

Lourdes was told by her cooperating teacher that most of the students were difficult to control. Knowing that using English only to teach the class would be challenging, she included the Indonesian language in her teaching preparation.

- (2) So the night before the day I will teach, I prepared myself to the best that I can be, not

just my lesson presentation or class discussion, but thinking and visualizing ways and strategies on how to control the misbehaviors of the class. I also included translations for important terms in my presentations so that there is a smooth transition in my class discussion.

In her first teaching session with grade-four students, the topic was animals. Lourdes used English to communicate with the students, and the Indonesian language was only used when she read the translation on her materials and during an activity of finding Indonesian language equivalents for animal names. As a result, many students did not seem to fully understand what she said. Several students were seen talking to each other or doodling on their books. Furthermore, several other students preferred asking their class teacher, who was observing the class, about what Lourdes explained. However, by using gestures to explain word meanings and demonstrate the instruction, Lourdes could make most of the students understand her. She narrated,

- (3) I was able to encourage my pupils to be participative during discussion and activities, through using different kinds of creative strategies, but I cannot deny the fact that there are pupils who are very noisy.

Reflecting on her experience of teaching her first class, she learned that translation was needed not only for materials but also for class instruction, particularly because she was to teach students of the lower grade with clothes and color as the topic.

- (4) Even though the topic was very easy for me, but the challenge and difficulty there was how you will help the pupils understand the lesson or how you will deliver the information to them. The Grade 3 pupils were very behaving and enthusiastic but cannot understand straight English, that is why beforehand I put translations in my PowerPoint presentation especially for the important information and directions in order to have a smooth transition of class

discussion and for them to understand me while discussing.

After several teaching sessions, Lourdes started to translanguage using English and Indonesian language in her class. In her last teaching session, while most of the time she still used English, in an exercise of finding appropriate past tense verbs for particular activities in pictures she asked "Apa verb? (What verb?)" to the students while displaying an image of a person writing. When it came to the group activity, she said to one group, "This group,  *baca* (read) number four." Then, she told another group, "Read number one and two." She repeated her instruction, "*Baca* (read) number one and two." She also asked, "What is this?" and repeated it in the Indonesian language "*Apa ini?*" to elicit the students' answers. In addition, she also used body movement to demonstrate the activities displayed on the screen, such as writing, brushing teeth, watching, sweeping the floor, etc. in that session, all of the students actively participated in the learning process. Lourdes recounted,

- (5) I prepared activities that make the pupils interacted and participated in my class, activities where they can show how much they have learned from my discussions, and activities be it may be grouped or individual where they showcase or manifest their gained knowledge. I started and ended my class with a lot of positivism and enthusiasm for myself to the point where I was able to influence my class as well.

#### *Jane*

Prior to her internship, Jane joined a two-day course on the Indonesian language. She learned basic expressions, such as introduction, greetings, and questions.

- (6) Then after introducing ourselves, our teacher taught us to introduce ourselves using the Indonesian language, therefore we do introduce ourselves again by using the Indonesian language, for example; "*Kenalkan, nama saya (...) dan nama Indonesia saya, Jane*". In English "I will introduce myself, my name

is (...) and my Indonesian name is Jane". Then after that, we proceed to our deep discussion about the Indonesian language, then our teacher also provides an activity to evaluate our learning about the discussion, then they taught us about; greeting each other or greeting someone by using the Indonesian language, then also counting numbers, etc. On the last day of our BIPA class, the teachers taught us more about the Indonesian language, especially the words or a type of sentences that can help us to communicate with the pupils, as the WH question, how, what, where, when, and why. In the Indonesian language, *bagaimana, apa, dimana, kapan, mengapa*.

On her several first days at school, Jane observed several classes that she was going to teach to identify what the students needed and any other possible challenges. She narrated,

- (7) While observing I can think of some effective teaching styles or strategies for my class, because as what I've observed to the pupils, they can't understand the English language, that's why I planned to translate the English language to the Indonesian language for the pupils to better understand my discussion.

When she was teaching the first grade class about food and beverage, Jane not only provided a translation of the materials but also spoke in both English and Indonesian language. She asked the students, "Food is important for our body?" A few students replied using minimal response "Yes." Then, Jane asked them again why food was important, but the students were unable to answer. Then, she explained, "*Kalau tidak ada makan kita tidak sehat* (If we do not eat, we will be sick)."

In one activity, she showed several food pictures one by one and ask the students for each picture, "*Apa ini* (What is this?)" The students replied by mentioning the names of food on the pictures in English. When there are no pictures left, Jane grabbed a student's bottled tea and asked a

similar question in the Indonesian language, and the students answered either water or tea.

- (8) I used to translate the English language to the Indonesian language, and then I practiced some lines in the Indonesian language. In Grade I, I teach about Foods and Beverages, I show sample pictures of foods and beverages and I let them identify the picture that I've presented, either it is a food or beverage.

For confirming the student's understanding, Jane asked the students, "*Baik?* (Is everything ok?)" On one occasion, when she showed a picture of several apples, several students said, "That is apple." Jane responded, "More than one, use 'those are'. If *satu* (one), 'this is'. Only one. *Ingat* (remember)?"

In another class, Jane taught the students about the living room. She asked the students to read a text aloud. However, not all students participated in the activity. She asked the students again, "*Lagi, lagi* (Again, again). All, all. *Baca* (Read)," and all students did what she asked. Then, she proceeded on the explanation of the living room using pictures depicting the room and things inside it.

- (9) Then for Grade II, I teach all about Living Room, then I showed to them a picture of things that can be found in the Living Room and I let them named the things that I presented to them. After that, I explained to them that the things that I presented will be found in Living Room, and then after that, I discussed to them the meaning and the importance of the Living Room in the house. I enjoy teaching the pupils because they are very participative and I don't expect it, because I thought that it's hard for me to interact with the pupils because of the language barrier.

### *Maria*

Maria was excited about the two-day course on the Indonesian language. However, she found that the language was difficult to learn particularly in terms of pronunciation.

- (10) They conducted this activity for us to learn something since we are in the other country and to have another weapon the moment, we start our practice teaching because according to them, most of the students and teachers can hardly understand and speak English that's why I was very excited during this time for I could learn again new language which is the Indonesian language. For that morning session, we talked about random things but just the basic terms only that we can use in our practice teaching like how to introduce ourselves using the Indonesian language, the numbers, the daily conversations and she (the teacher) also presented to us the tourist spots and transportations in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. It is quite hard to learn the language because of the terminology that is hard to pronounce but if you apply that in our daily interaction like what I did you can learn it easily.

Unlike the other two teachers, Maria did not include translation of her teaching slides to help the students understand the materials. She also used English in most of the teaching process.

- (11) I was well prepared on that day but quite unproductive because my students showed less interaction in the class for, they could not understand English. In short, we could not understand each other, they could not speak also using the English language. I was struggling on that day but for that experience, I've learned something that's why on my next teaching demonstration I provided translation.

In the next class, Maria provided a translation of her teaching materials, but she still spoke English in most of the teaching process. She spoke the Indonesian language only when she read the translated materials aloud. Many students looked confused with her explanation, but she was not aware of it. As a result, several students were murmuring at each other.

- (12) I translated everything in the Indonesian language but still I taught them how to speak English and understand such basic

words for they are still beginners for learning much.

The next activity was group work. Maria asked the students in each group to make a circle, and she moved her hand as if she was drawing a circle. In this activity, the students had to mention anything that they could find in a picture of a living room. They work enthusiastically to complete the task. When Maria asked what the living room was for, the students answered using the Indonesian language, "*Ruang untuk tamu* (A room for guests)." She tried hard to understand it, but the students were unable to explain it using English or demonstrate it using gestures. Maria then said, "It is a room for the family." It turned out that Maria and the students had a different concept of the living room. The students did not say anything to her either because they did not understand what Maria said or because they did not know how to respond.

For the next activity, Maria showed several pictures of things inside a living room. The pictures were followed by several statements with no verbs, and the students were asked to fill the gaps with 'is' or 'are'. A student incorrectly chose 'are' for a picture of three vases, and Maria said, "If *satu* (one), you will use 'is'." She further explained, "without -s," indicating a singular noun without the suffix -s. She then added, "If *banyak* or many or more than one, with -s." She also used her fingers to demonstrate singularity and plurality.

To check the students' answers, she invited them to read their answers. One student did not read clearly, and Maria asked her, "Again *baca* (read)." When a student did not pay attention to her because of walking around the class, she asked him, "Please *duduk* (sit down)." At the end of the activity, she checks students' comprehension by asking, "Any question?" Several students raised their hands, but they seemed to have difficulties in expressing their questions. Maria asked them again, "*Paham tidak?* (Do you understand?)," and the students had different answers. Some of them understood,

but the others did not. Unfortunately, there was no more time left for any further explanation.

Maria specifically recounted in her diary that what she learned from the course enabled her to communicate with the students outside the class.

- (13) It good thing we had Bahasa class for 2 days before we had our class observation and practice teaching so I've learned some basic words and conversation of Bahasa. Every time I talked to my pupils even outside the class, I used Bahasa also even just the basic one and I can understand them little by little but just the simple words. The more I talk to the students using Bahasa, the more I learn. Of course, I also teach them how to speak English and I introduced the basic and simple English terminologies for their further learning and future use.

### **Discussion**

The findings revealed the three teachers' progression in acquiring new linguistic resources and utilizing them along with their existing repertoire to ensure that their students learned something from them. The three teachers acknowledged that the Indonesian language course was helpful, despite being given only for two days. As Indonesian had been added to their repertoire, the three teachers were able to accommodate their communication with the students. At the beginning of the internship, Lourdes and Maria used only English in their class, while Jane started using both English and Indonesian language in her first teaching session. When using only English resulted in the students' non-understanding, they translanguaged so that their utterances became more understandable for the students.

However, due to limited Indonesian language resources, non-understanding may be unresolved. For example, when talking about the function of a living room, Maria and her students had different concepts of the living room probably due to their different cultural backgrounds. The students said that the living room was "*ruang untuk tamu*" (a room for accepting guests) in

reference to a common perception among Indonesian people to have separate rooms for welcoming guests and spending time with family members. Maria did not understand what the students said, and rather she told the students that a living room was for family, which the students also did not understand. As a result, they did not come to an agreement on what a living room was for until the end of the session.

Translanguaging in ELF settings is advantageous especially if there is a disparity in the English language proficiency of the interlocutors. As narrated above, because the students could not understand English well, using only English resulted in the students' non-understanding and lack of participation. When the three teachers incorporate words and expressions in the Indonesian language, the students could understand better and participate in the class activities. In fact, the use of the Indonesian language not only helped the students understand the materials but also made them feel a sense of acknowledgment for their identity. As observed in the classroom, the students immediately paid attention to the teachers when they spoke the Indonesian language, and many of them were surprised that the teachers could speak the language. Informed by ELF paradigm, translanguaging, particularly through translation from English to learners' languages, "make(s) a negotiable transition from language learners to language users as well as to recognize their first language or native language not as a hindrance but rather as a resource for building and developing their English language repertoire" (Widodo & Fang, 2019, p. 195).

Translanguaging also promotes the exchange of linguistic resources and the acquisition of new languages, as narrated by Maria at the beginning of this section. As more people with different languages interact to each other, boundaries between languages, the ones that separate one language from the others, disappear (Li, 2018; Baker & Sangiamchit, 2019). In such a situation, any interlocutors "go beyond narrowly defined linguistic cues and transcend culturally defined language boundaries to achieve effective

communication" (Li, 2018, pp. 24-25). Translingual communication not only leads interlocutors to make use of any linguistic resources that they have but also to gain new resources to be integrated into their 'communicative repertoires' (Zentz, 2014). Communicative repertoires refer to the ability of an individual to select and use certain communicative resources among all that he/she possesses "to create the meanings and identity attributes that s/he wishes to present to others or to feel himself/herself in any of the languages s/he speaks" (Zentz, 2014, p. 71). As reported in this study, the three teachers utilized their newly learned Indonesian language resources to make their students understand what they said and gained their students' attention while at the same time used English to provide the students with a certain amount of exposure to the language.

## CONCLUSION

This study explored the narratives of three pre-service teachers from the Philippines in terms of the use of ELF for teaching Indonesian elementary students. The findings revealed that the teachers encountered a communication problem due to their students' limited English proficiency. Thus, the Indonesian language was also used along with English and other nonlinguistic strategies in their instruction to help their students comprehend the lessons.

Pedagogically, this study implies that students' L1 should be prioritized over English, especially in the context of elementary education in ASEAN and particularly in Indonesia. This does not mean that English should not be taught in elementary school. Rather, the teaching of English should not deny the existence of students' mother tongue as the closest available linguistic resources. By acknowledging the importance of L1 in an educational setting, students can learn more effectively while at the same time maintain their mother tongue and/or national language as the representation of their linguacultural identity. Furthermore, as Kirkpatrick (2012) argued, "children are advantaged by learning in their mother tongue in the early years of schooling, and will be seriously disadvantaged if forced to learn

subjects in a language that is neither spoken nor understood" (p. 341).

In addition, this study also indicates that mixing different language aspects in classroom settings should not be considered an error in language learning. From ELF perspective, such practice occurs either because an individual has limited proficiency in one language or because they are trying to show their identity through the use of a certain language. Despite the reasons, the only goal of such practice is achieving effective communication in which all interlocutors understand one another.

It is important to note that this study is still in the exploratory stage, and thus the result is not generalizable. However, this study provides insight into the nature of English as a lingua franca in a classroom setting and the interplay between English and other languages as parts of multilingual ability.

#### DECLARATION OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There is no conflict of interest in this paper. This paper has not been published or considered for publication elsewhere.

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