

Translanguaging to Support Student Learning

When a person uses more than one language to translate meaning or communicate information, this is translanguaging. It is a natural process as new understanding in second (or third) languages develop in parallel with current knowledge in a primary language. The brain needs to be able to fluidly access words from all languages it has learnt as it constructs new memories, communication, and deepens understanding.

Translanguaging happens spontaneously in informal and social contexts, as two bilingual / multilingual people converse using all shared languages to communicate information or increase clarity. Within the tutoring process, we encourage this activity.

When Tutees are invited to use translanguaging, there are personal and academic benefits that come from the translanguage activities:

- Learners can more easily express themselves and be acknowledged for their primary language(s). This makes it easier to participate in peer, group, and class oral discussions.
- Learners are more likely to comprehend, analyze, and interpret content area texts and materials more fully (rather than skimming over unfamiliar terms).
- This process encourages critical thinking and meaning making, using all of our linguistic resources. Using languages and concepts across cultures deepens cognitive flexibility in ways that supports decolonization of education by placing the learner at the centre as a whole person. The learner expands their knowledge, which will, in turn, increase equity and inclusion for both the tutee and tutor.

Translanguaging in a Tutoring Session

Using translanguaging allows the tutee to start where they are most comfortable, in language and imagery, and then to proceed through a series of literal translations to an understanding and meaning in English which will be the language of examination at the university. The tutee connects the ideas that they understand in their primary language(s) to build the professional and technical language that they need in English.

This works most fluidly when the tutor and tutee share a common language, however, it still works even if they don't! The common ground is the target language of the assignment and the content the tutee is trying to master. The key is that the tutee is the one that frames their understanding in their primary language(s) and then works to translate this to English in several steps with the help of the tutor.

The tutor may be able to guide them in their primary language(s) and definitely can guide when the ideas are starting to be translated to English. This form of peer communication can ease feelings of frustrations, stress, and shame as well as enhance understanding for the tutee while making it easier for the tutor to guide a session in productive ways.

Process for Peer Tutors

Ensure that your tutees know that they are encouraged to start in their primary language(s) in your session and that this will help them to develop both/all their languages.

Even if you do not share a common language outside of English, encouraging them to think in their primary language will help them move over to the target language of the assignment.

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When you do share a language, the session should start in whatever language(s) is most comfortable for the tutee and progress, with understanding, to the language in which academic assessment will be done.

When the tutee is learning new content, you can ask them if they have any experience of the ideas in their primary language(s), cultures, and in their overall prior experiences. If they have, this is a good place to start with your clarification. Definitions of technical terms will be key no matter which language you are working in.

If you share the same languages with the tutee you can build bridges between languages by using similar words across languages to highlight connections between the primary language(s) and the English of the course.

Your next steps will include discussion, direct translation, and then editing to the English standard required for the university course.

Some stems that tutors might use:

- How would you say this in your primary language(s)? (name the language(s) when you know what it is.)
- Do you know the technical terms for this concept in English? Let's start to translate.
- We can make a table that compares the idea in both/all languages.
- Let's use the English terms to explain the idea.

The basic process is simple:

1. Form ideas in a primary language(s).
2. Translate directly to English.
3. Format the concept into clear English.

If you do not share a common language outside the target language of the assignment:

- Acknowledge and validate: make a point of telling tutee using their primary language for thinking or processing is a valuable and natural part of learning.
- Implement first language sections in session: brainstorm, take notes, pre-write in their first language before attempting assignment in target language
- Incorporate non-linguistic cues: visuals (such as images, diagrams, and charts), gestures, and tone of voice to convey meaning and make content accessible
- Use technology tools: translation apps or bilingual dictionaries to look up specific words or short phrases
- Focus on content comprehension before grammar: concentrate on main idea first in tutee's primary language before writing in the target language.

It does take practise and coaching.

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Activity

Using a current session plan for your content area, work with a partner to identify places that the tutee may be asked to think in their primary language(s), make statement and questions, and then where you can help them turn this into the language of the discipline. This can happen right at the introduction and at many places during the session.

What phrases and prompts might you use in your discipline area?

Some Helpful Infographics

I Say, I Say, Compare

- 1

I Say
Write your ideas using any language(s).
- 2

I Say
Cover your notes.
Try to write your ideas using English.
- 3

Compare
Compare your notes in the different languages. What is similar? What is different? What can you learn from this?

Routines for Translanguaging & Multilingual Thinking is a project by Jacob Hucktle (www.jacobhucktle.com/routines)
Images: Flaticon.com

Multilingual Research

- 1

From my mind
Make notes in any language(s) about what you know already about this topic and what you want to find out.
- 2

From sources in Language 1
Research using resources in your first chosen language and take notes using that language.
- 3

From sources in Language 2
Research using resources in your second chosen language and take notes using that language. You can repeat in other languages.
- 4

Connect
Use pens, highlighters, etc. to organise or identify any connections between the research from your different language sources.
- 4

Reflect
Reflect on the information you found out from the different languages. What is similar and different? Why are there differences?

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