

## ESOL instructor's reflections on the use of pedagogical translanguaging

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### Abstract

In this article, I present my reflections on the use of pedagogical translanguaging at a language centre for newly arrived adult refugees and asylum seekers in the United Kingdom. As a volunteer ESOL instructor of this course, I decided to make use of the students' various linguistic repertoires by incorporating multilingual text reading and writing tasks. In the article, I present my thoughts on this practice and provide my recommendations to other ESOL instructors looking into utilising and bringing their students' languages into the classroom spaces.

Keywords: ESOL, refugees, students, fairy tales, pedagogical translanguaging.

### Introduction

In response to the mobility of people, teachers around the world are encouraged to reshape their practices in order to meet the specific needs of their students. By the end of 2022, the number of refugees worldwide reached a record high number of 108.4 million with an estimated 43.4 million of which are children of school age (UNHCR, 2022). Even though many refugees and asylum seekers enter their host countries as multilingual speakers, they are often faced with monolingual language ideologies. Among the many consequences of resettlement, feelings of loneliness and homesickness, the adjustment to a new job market, and in most cases, learning the language of the host country, are taxing (Dovchin, 2021). This is on top of the hardships already experienced due to war, loss of loved ones, and starting a new life in a new place. Current scholarship that looks at refugees and asylum seekers' wellbeing (Dryden-Peterson & Reddick, 2021), emotions (Dovchin, 2021), and sense of acknowledgment have been putting forward the concept



of translanguaging and its use for pedagogical purposes. Inspired by the mentioned studies, I reflect on the use of translanguaging as a pedagogical practice in an ESOL course at a language centre for newly arrived adult refugees and asylum seekers in the United Kingdom. As a volunteer instructor of this course, I designed lessons with the aim of developing students' knowledge of vocabulary, acknowledging their varied linguistic repertoires, and bringing them into the classroom spaces. Below I share my reflections on the use of pedagogical translanguaging with the students of beginner and pre-intermediate levels.

## Fairy tales and pedagogical translanguaging practice

Of the various topics that can be used in the ESOL course, I find the topic of fairy tales the most interesting, especially for students with beginner or pre-intermediate levels. In my lessons, I want to engage the students in fun and interactive activities and create an enjoyable atmosphere for them. This ESOL course at the language centre is open to adults with diverse English language skills, and the students in the course are either beginner or pre-intermediate speakers. In my lessons, I want to create a safe space for the students by choosing a topic that is enjoyable, positive, and easy to understand. Especially, as the students come from different cultural backgrounds and speak various languages, I want them to feel connected and included. Therefore, I find the topic of fairy tales to be universal and known to everyone which in turn helps to elicit strong and emotional responses (Lepin, 2012) and engage even the quietest students. I also think that the topic of fairy tales allows to create various activities targeted toward acknowledging the presence of different languages and activating their use in classroom spaces.

The CEFR (2018) highlighted the importance of using the students' languages and stated that "*in the reality of today's increasingly diverse societies, the construction of meaning may take place across languages and draw upon user/learners' plurilingual and pluricultural repertoires*" (p. 27).

The CEFR (2018) recommended exploring similarities among languages or analysing the same sources across languages, and these strategies are considered to be pedagogical translanguaging practices. Cenoz and Santos (2020) stated that pedagogical translanguaging is used "for cross-linguistic metalinguistic awareness so as to strengthen the students' ability to meet the communicative exigencies of the socioeducational situation" (p. 2). In other words, pedagogical translanguaging can be used with the aim to help students to make meaning and benefit from being multilingual by using their whole linguistic repertoires. Pedagogical translanguaging is related to the term translanguaging, which was first used in Welsh bilingual education (Cenoz & Santos, 2022; Lewis et al., 2012; Williams, 1994) as a way of alternating between the languages for both input and output. According to Cenoz and Santos (2022), pedagogical translanguaging is based on this concept, but at the same time, it is "broader and can apply to a wider range of context" (p. 346). A few of the most common strategies include "word walls, sentence starters, cognates, comparing multilingual texts,



multilingual vocabulary inquiry, and multilingual syntax/morphology inquiry” (Cenoz & Santos, 2020, p. 2), and in my lessons, I used multilingual text reading and writing tasks.

## Lesson procedures

In this section besides my reflections, I also offer recommendations for teachers looking into incorporating pedagogical translanguaging strategies into their practices. In my lessons, I incorporated pedagogical translanguaging strategies by teaching a topic of fairy tales to adult students at beginner and pre-intermediate levels. Although this topic may be relevant to younger age groups, I still found that it worked well with this group of students.

To understand whether students are familiar with different fairy tales, I recommend teachers display the pictures of famous fairy tales and base their discussions around them. For instance, in my lessons, I usually display pictures of well-known fairy tales, such as *Cinderella*, *Three Little Pigs*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, and *Snow White*. In most cases, I find that students are not familiar with them and cannot elaborate on the fairy tales’ plots. In such cases, teachers can ask students to look up unknown fairy tales online and this step usually leads to interesting results as students can report different variations of these fairy tales or mention other fairy tales popular in their home countries. For instance, the students mentioned that in their country, *Little Red Riding Hood* is known as *Leila and the Wolf*. Others shared that they are more familiar with *Chinese Cinderella* than with the original *Cinderella* fairy tale. This in turn facilitates the interaction between the students as they start sharing the well-known fairy tales in their countries and ask each other whether they are familiar with them. In this step, I emphasise that the students can report their findings on fairy tales’ names and their plots in English but also encourage them to use and incorporate their linguistic repertoires. I find that this helps to decrease students’ anxiety toward speaking as most of them are still learning the language. This step prepares them for the next task which is a *multilingual text reading* task.

In this task, students need to read an assigned fairy tale in their languages and then summarise and answer the questions in English. Afterwards, we brainstorm together the elements of fairy tales and move on to a *multilingual text writing* activity. After we identify the elements, I instruct the students to follow these fairy tales writing elements and write their own fairy tale using English as well as different languages in their repertoire. I also note that the students can include drawings instead of words in cases when they find it difficult to express themselves. In order to help them complete the task I also provide students with high-frequency words and phrases used in fairy tales so that they can incorporate them into their writings.



## Fairy tale writing elements

Step 1	Start your fairy tale with the following opening sentence: “Once upon a time”
Step 2	Describe the setting in detail
Step 3	Describe your main character in detail
Step 4	Describe the plot of your fairy tale
Step 5	State the problem that needs to be solved in your fairy tale
Step 6	Describe the moral of the fairy tale

Students’ final written works should follow the provided elements’ structure where they can showcase their entire linguistic repertoires along with the drawings. As students can choose to create any kind of fairy tale, I noticed that the majority of the students still prefer to link these fairy tales to their lives. For instance, some of the students portrayed themselves as main characters and described the events from their lives or described the lessons they learned from a particular event. Some of the students described the events that made them flee their countries and noted that the morale of their fairy tale was to *never give up*. Other students wrote about political destabilisations as the main plot while others’ plots revolved around their lives in a new country and how they are adapting to the new setting. Most students portrayed themselves as protagonists of their fairy tales while the hardships they experienced were in the role of an antagonist. This in turn created a vibrant discussion among the students as the written fairy tales are read in front of the classroom. Most students found these fairy tales relatable and even the quiet students became active and engaged with this type of activity. Also, the provision of high-frequency words helped students to tie the writing together. For instance, I include the phrase *lived happily ever after* in the high-frequency words and phrases list but purposefully leave it out from the elements. In most cases, I see that students conclude their fairy tales with this phrase and that shows me the importance of providing the list with high-frequency words and phrases. The students’ writings were much longer compared to the previous tasks, and they shared that the usage of their languages allowed them to write in more detail and at the same time to increase their vocabulary knowledge by using high-frequency words in English. Thus, I felt that the *multilingual text writing* activity not only helped students to increase their vocabulary knowledge and write their fairy tales more vividly by providing as many details as possible, but most importantly decreased their anxiety toward making mistakes. As most of the students have a beginner level, I feel that these types of tasks and activities motivate and encourage them to learn more. The students became more active and confident as language learners but most importantly they were able to express themselves and share their stories.



## Final thoughts

In view of the mentioned points, I can say that utilising pedagogical translanguaging activity allowed me to see the students from a different side. When students are encouraged to use the entire linguistic repertoire, their voices become much stronger. Such activities also help them to convey their messages as they can write about the obstacles or the lessons they learned on their path to a happy ending, just like characters in fairy tales. In the beginning, I thought that the use of pedagogical translanguaging activities would help me to develop students' knowledge of vocabulary, but in fact, it did more than that—it provided a platform for students' voices.

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## Author Bio



Maira Klyshbekova is a third year PhD candidate in Education at the University of Sheffield. Her research focuses on multilingualism, pedagogical translanguaging, and medium of instruction policies. She has extensive experience in teaching English both at secondary school and university levels. Maira is also keen on exploring teacher support, training, and understanding the challenges that teachers experience in their teaching practices. She is also a Postdoctoral Research Associate at King's College London where she is exploring the use of AI in education.