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'We mix to make meaning': A case study of translanguaging practices in a Thai tertiary EFL classroom

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Abstract

The present qualitative single-case study investigates the translanguaging method in a Thai university English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom during collaborative group work in an Intermediate English for Academic Purposes course in a public university in central Thailand. By using non-participant video observation in five class sessions, semi-structured interviews with 15 purposefully selected students and their instructor, artefact analysis, and thematic analysis, this study reveals that the students strategically utilise their unitary linguistic repertoire (Thai and English) for procedural scaffolding, cognitive scaffolding (including idea generation and first language (L1) reasoning before using English), creative expression, and metacognitive regulation. Students also demonstrate that using translanguaging enables real understanding, minimises anxiety, boosts participation and confidence, and promotes bilingual agency, evidenced in metaphors such as a "bigger toolbox." These agentive translanguaging practices challenge monolingual ideologies in Thai university EFL contexts and confirm previous studies on the socio-cognitive and affective advantages of using translanguaging in EFL contexts. This study suggests that future research should consider the integration of translanguaging stance and design in teacher education programs, the implementation of English-only policy to embrace multilingual repertoires in Thai university EFL contexts, and the design of tasks that facilitate strategic language use to promote equitable and inclusive learning.



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Introduction

English for Foreign Language education in Thailand has been historically influenced by monolingual ideologies, which support the principle of linguistic separation and the exclusion of the learner's native language (L1) in favour of an English-only policy in the classroom (Ambele & Watson Todd, 2021; Eslami et al., 2016; Thongwicht & Ulla, 2024). These ideologies have been historically grounded in national policies aimed at modernisation, globalisation, and native-speakerism, in which English represents a distinct and separate linguistic system to be mastered in isolation and without interference from the learner's L1, which may function as an obstacle to the mastery of the target language and may reflect linguistic deficiency on the learner's part (Boonsuk & Ambele, 2020; Weerachairattana, 2025). In spite of the country's long-standing inability to reach high levels of English proficiency and the fact that L1 sharing between teachers and students is very common in the context of the university, the dominant ideologies in EFL education in Thailand dismiss translanguaging, the dynamic and purposeful use of the learner's full linguistic repertoire, as an inappropriate and ineffective way of learning and mastering a second language (Ambele, 2022; Chaisiri, 2022).

Translanguaging, however, presents a theoretically and empirically well-supported alternative. It has evolved from bilingual education environments, particularly through the works of García (2009), Otheguy et al. (2015), and Li (2011), who have collectively reconceptualised bilingualism not as the sum of two separate linguistic systems, but rather a unitary, dynamic linguistic repertoire from which multilingual speakers derive linguistic features for making meaning. In the classroom, it includes both unplanned and planned pedagogical approaches that capitalise on the L1 of the student for understanding, for facilitating student participation, for reducing anxiety, and for facilitating more profound cognitive engagement (García et al., 2017, 2022; Cenoz & Gorter, 2021). Empirical studies conducted in EFL environments worldwide have proven the benefits of translanguaging, including the development of metalinguistic understanding, content understanding, increased student confidence, more cooperative student interaction, and lower levels of foreign language anxiety (Eren, 2026; Ulum, 2024; Turnbull, 2025; Ali, 2026). In the Thai EFL context, studies have pointed to the positive perceptions of translanguaging among teachers and students, where it has contributed significantly to interactional competence, meaning-making, and inclusive student participation despite the policy constraints (Duangsaeng, 2025; Pawapootanon, 2025; Okoye, 2023; Le, 2024).

Literature Review

The Thai EFL Context and the Case for Translanguaging

In recent years, traditional bilingual education models in Thailand have emphasised the need to separate and keep languages distinct, a practice that is rooted in monolingual ideologies, which are

based on the belief that language is best acquired in isolation from other languages (Eslami et al., 2016; García, 2017; Maphalala & Mpofu, 2020; Almusharraf, 2021). This has led to stringent policies in Thai EMI and EFL settings, where the use of the learner's first language is dismissed or viewed through a subtractive lens. Whatever the subject matter, the problem of communication mode remains a challenge when a teacher is instructing learners of English as an additional language. In order to address this problem, current research among scholars has introduced the idea of translanguaging (García, Johnson & Seltzer, 2017; Otheguy et al., 2015). This has led to paradigmatic shifts in instruction that promote the use of the learner's L1 in EFL settings (Ambele & Watson Todd, 2021; Flores & García, 2013; Otheguy et al., 2019). Translanguaging offers the possibility for both the teacher and the student to use the entire repertoire at their disposal for the learning and teaching of a foreign language and content. Thus, the use of bilingual strategies in the classroom may not only not impede the work of the teacher and the student but actually help them achieve their respective objectives. In support of this argument, Cook (2001) and Ambele (2020) emphasised the need for the use of the learners' L1 as a resource, pointing out the many conditions under which the learners' repertoire resources may be beneficial rather than detrimental for the learning process. One of the main points emphasised by the concept of translanguaging is the 'open' nature of language (Chukwuemeka & Ambele, 2022; Pastushenkov, Camp, Zhuchenko & Pavlenko, 2021). For example, EFL teachers, such as Thai EFL teachers, may use the Thai language, which is the students' L1, grammar, words, etc., to help the Thai students learn the content presented through the medium of English. This is a way for the teacher and the student to 'tap into both their L1 and L2 resources, spanning from their linguistic background to their personal history and knowledge acquired at home, to where they can produce meaningful communication' (Pastushenkov, Green-Eneix & Pavlenko, 2021, p. 53). As for the pedagogical implications of the concept of translanguaging, the teacher is encouraged to 'blur the boundaries between named languages' because EFL learners 'make use of the entire repertoire at their disposal for meaning-making' (Wei, 2018). This may help the learners work collaboratively with each other (Kleyn & Garcia, 2019; Lewis & Baker, 2012; Poza, 2017; Maphalala & Mpofu, 2020; Almusharraf, 2021), comprehend the content presented through the medium of English with the help of the L1 as a facilitator for completing the task and remembering the content (Kleyn & Garcia, 2019; Lewis & Baker, 2012; Poza, 2017; Maphalala & Mpofu, 2020; Almusharraf, 2021).

In the case of Thai universities, where the L1 of both the teachers and learners is Thai, and English is a foreign language, concerns about language use in the classroom have been an issue of concern for a long time. Despite all the benefits associated with the use of translanguaging in the classroom, it is evident that many Thai EFL teachers in the university setting have been observed to adhere to

monolingual ideologies, contrary to the numerous benefits associated with the use of translanguaging in the teaching-learning process. In earlier studies, it was evident that, in other settings, teachers believed in the use of translanguaging in the teaching-learning process because it is a natural tool, but in the case of Thailand, it was evident that Thai EFL teachers exhibited hesitation in using translanguaging in the teaching-learning process (García & Kleyn, 2016; Otheguy et al., 2015; Wei, 2011; Hojeij et al., 2019; Rahman et al., 2021). This is because of the traditional monolingual policy of language separation ideology in Thailand (Ambele & Watson Todd, 2021). Nevertheless, in an attempt to assist learners in their learning, some university teachers allow their learners to use L1 (Thai) and L2 (English) and make use of their repertoire of resources in the teaching-learning process (Ambele & Watson Todd, 2021). However, to date, little empirical study has been done to investigate the perceptions of Thai EFL teachers who have been observed to use translanguaging in their teaching-learning processes in the university setting, and that is what this study aims to do in that direction.

A Definition of Defining Classroom Translanguaging

Translanguaging is an increasingly advocated strategy that promotes the use of learners' L1 as a valuable tool for scaffolding learning (Carroll & van den Hoven, 2016) and for linguistically and academically supporting learners in the acquisition of a foreign language (Hojeij et al., 2019; Rahman et al., 2021). While many scholars have offered competing definitions, García's (2009) operationalisation of the concept is among the most influential in the literature. García (2009) operationalised translanguaging in the classroom as follows:

An approach to bilingualism that is centred not on languages, as has often been the case, but on the practices of bilinguals that are readily observable. These worldwide translanguaging practices are seen here not as marked or unusual, but rather taken for what they are, namely the normal mode of communication that, with some exceptions in some monolingual enclaves, characterises communities throughout the world. (p. 44)

According to García et al. (2016), 'language is an ongoing process that only exists as translanguaging' (p. 12). Therefore, it can be seen that translanguaging influences teachers and students in their interaction in the classroom to create meaning. As L1 and L2 use in the classroom may not be totally accepted and seen as separate and distinct, words like code-switching and code-mixing have lost their previous popularity. The main focus of translanguaging is no longer on 'codes' and their established norms of separation, but on the fluid verbal and linguistic performances in a variety of interconnected classroom exchanges. As a practice in the classroom, translanguaging refers to 'a natural and

necessary aspect of bilingual and multilingual learners' meaning-making processes, in which their L1 and other semiotic aspects beyond L2 are intertwined' (Wei & Lin, 2019). This practice of translanguaging is common in some EMI classrooms at various levels in which the L1 of the learners is not the medium of instruction. As a practice in the classroom, translanguaging has blurred and transcended the limits of conventional teaching and learning. Otheguy et al. (2015) and García (2009) have highlighted the dynamic nature of translanguaging. They have stated that 'while bi/multilinguals are learning, they do not observe the socio-political rules and boundaries between languages' (p. 194). This practice of translanguaging 'has been found to "increase the inclusion, participation, and understandings of learners in the learning process; developing fewer formal relationships among learners; conveying ideas more easily; and accomplishing lessons"' (Wei & Lin, 2019). As described by Wei (2018, p. 17), 'the focus of translanguaging in the classroom emphasises a "linguistics of participation" in which teachers and students jointly participate in the construction of knowledge.'

Theoretical Foundations: Stance, Design, and Shifts

The concept of translanguaging has undergone significant development from its pedagogical beginnings to become a significant tool for the analysis of multilingual practices. In fact, the idea of translanguaging was coined in the context of the Welsh English educational system, where Williams (1994) referred to a pedagogical approach that was implemented to ensure effective learning. In the development of the concept, Cenoz (2017) built on the earlier idea to create a pedagogical approach that was intentionally implemented to ensure effective learning. However, the idea of the pedagogical approach might not capture the spontaneous nature of the multilingual practices that are evident in the classroom. In order to capture the spontaneous nature of the concept, Li (2011) introduced the idea of translanguaging space, referring to the concept as the space that transcends linguistic boundaries to create meaning and identity.

The current understanding of translanguaging theory has clearly moved away from the idea that languages are distinct and separate entities and instead suggests that "emergent multilingual learners (EMLs) access a 'unitary linguistic system to assemble features socially categorised as English, Spanish, or any other named language'" (Seltzer, 2019, p. 5). This understanding of the theory is not only a move to a different understanding but also has significant implications for breaking free from monolingual ideologies in educational policy and practice (García, Ibarra Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017; García & Wei, 2018; Menken & Sánchez, 2019; Seltzer, 2019). García et al. (2022) have built on this understanding to propose a pedagogical framework that is based on three strands: stance, design, and shift. These strands have provided a powerful tool for understanding how monolingual ideologies are translated into practice in the classroom.

The stance strand "encompasses the educator's belief that 'a bilingual student has one holistic language repertoire that he or she draws on at school,' including 'the linguistic and cultural resources that students bring from their homes and communities to the classroom'" (García et al., 2017, pp. 49-50). Importantly, research suggests that "this stance is not necessarily something that educators have to acquire before they act on translanguaging in their classrooms; rather, they may come to have a translanguaging stance through the very process of 'learning about and trying translanguaging strategies in the classroom'" (Menken & Sánchez, 2019, p. 745).

This stance is carried out through two different pedagogical approaches: translanguaging design and translanguaging shifts. Translanguaging design refers to the "strategic, intentional, and deliberate planning of instruction, materials, and assessments that work within the 'translanguaging Corriente,' the natural, always-present, and ubiquitous flow of multilingual practices that surround students" (García et al., 2017, p. 61). It has been described as the pedagogical heart of the translanguaging classroom, where all students have equitable opportunities for accessing content and language standards (García et al., 2017, p. 62). An integral part of the translanguaging design includes the development of a multilingual ecology, where linguistic diversity is visibly and orally celebrated through signs, greetings, and other visual aids, which consequently creates a positive climate where students feel comfortable and proud of their linguistic diversity (García & Menken, 2015). At a micro-level, translanguaging shifts refer to the spontaneous decisions teachers make "moment by moment" during the instructional process (García et al., 2017, p. 62). In other words, translanguaging shifts are the teachers' flexibility and ability to change the planned instruction "on the spot" and release the students' voices "in unanticipated ways." Within the Thai context, translanguaging has been found to occur in the following forms among teachers who do engage in translanguaging: "use of a text in one language and discussion of the same text in another language; shift from a text in one language to a text in another language; integration of the whole linguistic repertoire of the learner; and the flexible and free use of the two (or more) languages available in the class."

Strong and Weak Forms: A Continuum of Practice

To further categorise and analyse translanguaging in diverse educational settings, researchers have proposed the idea of strong and weak forms of translanguaging depending on the levels of pedagogical planning and language integration (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021). Strong forms of translanguaging, such as activities aimed at developing metalinguistic awareness through direct comparison of linguistic features across languages and the flexible and free use of the whole linguistic repertoire of the learner, have been found to promote greater cognitive and linguistic engagement. However, the im-

plementation of strong forms of translanguaging requires extensive teacher training and administrative support to provide teachers with the time to design multilingual lessons. On the contrary, weak forms of translanguaging are common in English-only settings and institutions that do not support translanguaging. This includes integrated language curricula that acknowledge and accept multilingualism but maintain linguistic separation in instructional design and delivery. Translanguaging shift is also a weak form of translanguaging proposed by Cenoz and Gorter (2021), which is the weakest form of translanguaging and refers to spontaneous language alternation for immediate communication. This is particularly relevant to EFL settings such as Thailand, where English has symbolic power and teachers are likely to engage in translanguaging for particular pragmatic reasons such as efficiency and communication (Pawapootanon et al., 2025). While strong forms of translanguaging provide greater metalinguistic engagement, weak forms of translanguaging are common due to policy and institutional constraints. This poses a critical question regarding the conceptualisation and assessment of translanguaging in EFL contexts.

L1 Use in Thai EFL Classrooms: Empirical Insights and Debates

In Thai universities, EMI, and EFL classrooms, there are strict policies set by the school administrators and teachers on the use of language, especially the use of the L1. These policies strictly dismiss the use of the students' L1 in the learning of English. According to research, the debate on the use of the L1 has since shifted, though at a slower rate for the Thai context. This is because of the strict policy on the use of the two languages, as well as the ideology of some Thai teachers that the use of the L1 and L2 will not allow the students to learn the L2. However, the use of the students' L1 has been acknowledged to actually assist the students, not impede, the learning process (Cook, 2001; Littlewood & Yu, 2011; Hall & Cook, 2012). In fact, it is common knowledge and sense for the bilingual classroom that 'the L1 will play an important part in teaching and learning a foreign language' (Ambele & Watson Todd, 2021, p. 18). Despite the concerns of the majority of Thai instructors on the use of L1 (for example, low level of proficiency in L2 or going off topic), studies have revealed the benefits of the use of L1 for the learners' learning of the target language (Pastushenkov et al., 2022). According to García and Otheguy (2020), learners are able to develop their L2 language acquisition and content acquisition simultaneously if they are allowed to use their L1 strategically. In this way, L1 can act as a facilitatory tool for learners of different proficiency levels. For example, Littlewood and Yu (2011) opined that if learners are not allowed to use their repertoire support and are compelled not to use their L1, they might become demotivated, especially if they are low English proficiency learners.

The process of learners using their L1 in the classroom was described by Lewis and Baker (2012, p. 4) in the following manner: "the process of using one language in order to reinforce the other, in

order to increase understanding and in order to augment the learners' development in both languages." According to TESOL research, the process of translanguaging enables learners to 'strengthen their weaker language by not allowing them to do the majority of their work in their stronger language and to tackle less difficult tasks in their weaker language.' By doing this, learners 'enhance their academic language proficiency in their L1 and L2, leading to fuller bilingualism and biliteracy' (Baker, 2001, p. 290). For example, Källkvist et al. (2019) conducted research on the process of translanguaging in the 'English only' multilingual classroom. According to their research, 'both L1 and L2 do not exist in isolation from one another but in relationship to one another. This is why learners' L1 should be used.' They also stated that learners 'can make use of their L1 and that knowledge of different languages supports language development.' Edstrom (2006, p. 55) emphasised that 'L2 learning is maximised when learners have access to L1 skills, and not making use of both the L1 and L2 in the classroom is a waste of a valuable resource.' According to Littlewood and Yu (2011), if learners 'only use English to explain grammatical structures, it takes a long time. If learners build up their vocabulary in this manner, they build a larger vocabulary and learn faster if they are allowed to make links between their L1 and L2.' Baker (2001) emphasised that 'the process of using one language in order to reinforce the other, in order to increase understanding and in order to augment the learners' development in both languages promotes a deeper understanding.'

In a monolingual teaching situation . . . whole sentences or paragraphs can be adapted out of a textbook, from the Internet . . . without real understanding. It is less likely to do this with 'translanguaging'. To read and discuss a topic in one language, and then to write about it in another language, means that the subject matter must be processed and digested. (Baker, 2001, p. 28)

The main research on translanguaging in EFL settings has taken an empirical form and generally has two interrelated strands. The first strand has focused on the perception of translanguaging. This has consistently found translanguaging to be viewed positively in terms of its contribution to understanding, participation, and support for lower-proficiency students (Ambele & Neumaihom, 2024; Xiao & Lertlit, 2022; Yuvayapan, 2019). However, a limitation of the perception-based research on translanguaging has been its largely speculative nature. This has been true to the extent to which the research has been reliant on self-report data without seeking to verify the findings through direct observation of interactions.

The second strand fills this research gap by investigating the reality of translanguaging practices. For example, Elashhab (2020) studied the strategic use of translanguaging by Saudi Arabia teachers, while Yuan and Yang (2020) investigated the use of multiple linguistic and discursive resources by EMI

Chinese teachers. Other studies shed light on the translanguaging practices of students through interactions with peers (Li & Qu, 2024) and with teachers (Emilia & Hamied, 2022; Neumaihom et al., 2024). A large volume of studies has also demonstrated the socio-affective benefits associated with translanguaging practices, which include the alleviation of anxiety levels (Ulum, 2024; Zam et al., 2024) and the facilitation of increased student participation (Lan, 2025; Okoye & Ambele, 2023; Ulum, 2024). However, Chaisiri (2022) warned that the socio-affective benefits of translanguaging practices would not be realised among Thai students unless the teachers were encouraged to use translanguaging strategies appropriately and beyond the literal level.

In addition to these identified strengths, researchers have also identified limitations and areas of concern. For example, there is a risk that learners might not have enough practice using the target language if they are over-reliant on their L1, and this risk might not be addressed if there is a lack of intentional balancing of this practice (Tai, 2025). In another example, if there is an over-emphasis of one language, there is a risk that translanguaging might actually contribute to the marginalisation and isolation of students (Itoi & Mizukura, 2023; Ticheloven et al., 2019). In terms of a more critical sociolinguistic position, Jaspers (2018) argues that there is a risk that translanguaging might actually contribute to linguistic hegemony if one language is dominant in the discourse. In order to develop a more nuanced understanding of the strengths and limitations of translanguaging, these limitations and areas of concern need to be acknowledged.

Identifying the Research Gap

Thus, to summarise, although previous studies have exhaustively discussed attitudes toward the practice of translanguaging and its overall benefits (e.g., Ambele & Neumaihom, 2024; Elashhab, 2020; Yuvayapan, 2019), and although the overall frameworks have been elaborately discussed (e.g., García et al., 2017; García et al., 2022), few studies have actually focused on exploring how this practice is actually used in the particular context of Thai university EFL classrooms. Indeed, research on this practice in Thailand is still limited, and from the observational results, it is clear that only a few Thai EFL teachers are using this practice in their classes against the dominant and recommended monolingual policy of separating two or more languages. Indeed, there is a particular need to research this practice not only in the overall context of Thai university EFL classrooms but also to explore the particular and specific reasons for using this practice. This particular study aims to achieve this objective through the overall application of the particular and specific integrated model of translanguaging stance, design, and shift to not only research the overall practice of translanguaging in Thai university EFL classrooms but also to research the particular and specific reasons for using this practice. Indeed, this study aims to capture the views and particular attitudes of Thai EFL teachers who have been observed to use this practice in their classes.

Research questions

Question 1: In what ways do the teacher and Thai EFL students employ their entire linguistic repertoire (both Thai and English) during collaborative meaning-making activities?

Question 2: What are EFL students' perceptions of the use of translanguaging as a learning tool?

Methodology

Research design

This study uses qualitative single case study research design to explore the translanguaging practice and student perceptions in a Thai context of a tertiary English as Foreign Language classroom. The single case study design is relevant and appropriate in this study since the aim is to explore and investigate complex social and linguistic processes embedded in real-life contexts in which the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly defined (Yin, 2018). The practice of translanguaging is interactionally and socially embedded in classroom discourse; therefore, this study seeks to explore and investigate the practice in an authentic context to gain deeper insight into how students use their linguistic and cognitive resources to facilitate meaning-making while engaging in learning activities with their peers. Therefore, this study is based on a bounded case defined by its context, setting, and pedagogical activity. The case is an intact classroom context of an Intermediate English for Academic Purposes course in an autonomous public university in central Thailand with one instructor and a cohort of students engaging in learning activities such as collaborative group work. The rationale and purpose of this research design are not to make any statistical inference but to develop an in-depth analytical understanding of the practice and how it functions as an interactional and pedagogical tool in an EFL learning context. The data was collected over approximately four weeks in the second semester of the academic year 2024–2025 in five sessions.

Research context

The study was set in the context of a compulsory Intermediate English for Academic Purposes course that was part of the general education program of the university. The course was designed to promote the development of academic communication skills such as collaborative discussion, problem-solving, and oral presentation. The course was structured in such a way that there was both instructor-led teaching and collaborative group work that required the students to negotiate meaning, share ideas, and jointly produce arguments. The collaborative group work provided the students opportunities to utilise their full linguistic repertoire in accomplishing the task, which was both conceptually and linguistically demanding.

Each class session was ninety minutes long and followed the same pattern; two phases. The first phase was instructor-led teaching for approximately thirty to forty minutes, where the instructor introduced the topic, explained the concepts, and explained the requirements of the task. The second phase was collaborative group work for approximately forty to fifty minutes, where the students worked in small groups and jointly discussed the topic, generated ideas, and produced an output such as a short presentation or writing.

Participants

The participants consisted of twenty-eight second-year undergraduate students from the same university, aged nineteen to twenty-two years old, who were enrolled in the Intermediate English for Academic Purposes course. The students were majoring in Business Administration, Environmental Science, and Communication Arts. All the participants were Thai and spoke Thai as their native language (L1). The English proficiency level of the participants was from A2 to B2 level based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), determined by the institutional placement test conducted by the university prior to the semester.

The instructor of the course was a Thai female instructor aged thirty-five years. She had eight years of experience in the instruction of EFL at the tertiary level. In the informal interview conducted prior to the study, the instructor revealed that she was relatively receptive to multilingual pedagogical practices and sometimes permitted the use of Thai during collaborative learning when such usage facilitated comprehension and task accomplishment. To gain deeper insight into students' perceptions of translanguaging, fifteen students were purposively sampled to be part of semi-structured interviews. The purposive sampling method was employed to ensure that there was variability across different parameters, including the rate of translanguaging in interaction, different levels of English proficiency, and ensuring that there was a mix of male and female participants. This sampling method was useful in ensuring that the study was able to access a wide variety of students' perceptions about the use of Thai and English in collaborative learning activities.

Materials

Several materials were employed in ensuring effective data collection and analysis. The main materials used in this study include video recordings of classroom interaction, interview recordings, field notes, and artefacts created by the students during collaborative learning. Two high-definition video cameras and two boundary microphones were employed in recording group interactions during the collaborative learning phase of the classroom interaction. The cameras were strategically positioned to ensure that student interaction was well recorded without interfering with the learning session.

Besides video recordings, the researcher was also able to take detailed notes about contextual aspects of interaction, including task instructions, group composition, teacher intervention, and instances of

translanguaging. The use of video recordings, in addition to field notes, was useful in ensuring effective analysis of classroom interaction. Artefacts created by the students during group interaction were also collected as part of the study materials. The artefacts include worksheets, mind maps, presentation outlines, and notes created by the students during group interaction. The artefacts were photographed for analysis. A protocol of twelve open-ended interview questions was designed for the semi-structured interview approach with the aim of eliciting the interviewees' reflections on their translanguaging practice. The interview protocol was piloted with two students from another class for the purposes of ensuring the clarity and appropriateness of the questions and the context for the proposed study.

Data collection procedures

Data collection for the proposed research was conducted over five class sessions held over the course of four weeks. Non-participant video observation was employed for collecting the data in the classroom setting. The researcher attended all the class sessions and positioned herself at the back of the class without disturbing the students. Two video cameras and two boundary microphones were used for the purpose of collecting the data during the student interaction in the class. During the class sessions, the students were divided into groups and were engaged in problem-solving activities related to environmental issues, including plastic pollution and the greenhouse effect. These problem-solving activities required the students to discuss the ideas and negotiate the meaning of the ideas in order to prepare the responses for the groups. These activities provide scope for the spontaneous use of translanguaging by the students in the groups. After the completion of the class sessions, the selected students and the course instructor were interviewed using the semi-structured interview approach. Each of the fifteen selected students and the course instructor was interviewed for twenty-five to forty-five minutes in a quiet meeting room at the university. The students were given the option of using either Thai or English or a combination of both languages during the interview.

Data analysis

The data was subjected to reflexive thematic analysis using the guidelines provided by Braun and Clarke (2022). All the sources of the data, such as interview transcripts, classroom recordings, field-notes, and artefacts, were managed using NVivo 14 software for the purpose of the analysis.

The analysis started with the researcher engaging in a long period of data familiarisation, where the video recordings, transcripts, and notes were repeatedly accessed and reviewed in order for the researcher to have a complete understanding of the data. Initial coding was inductively performed by identifying the data segments that were significant in illustrating the patterns of language use, collaboration in meaning-making, and the perceptions of the translanguaging practice by the participants. These initial coding segments were further grouped into broader analytical categories that

described the general functions of translanguaging in the classroom interaction. These categories were further developed into themes that described the functions of translanguaging as a pedagogical tool in the collaborative learning of the students. Throughout the analysis period, the researcher repeatedly accessed the video recordings in order to have a better understanding of the interactional context in which the translanguaging practice occurred. Peer debriefing with a colleague familiar with the body of knowledge in translanguaging was conducted during the coding period in order for the analysis credibility to be maximised.

Trustworthiness

A number of strategies were employed in the research in order for the results of the analysis to be maximised and the trustworthiness of the analysis results to be maximised. Firstly, the research employed methodological triangulation by using more than a single source of data in the analysis.

Secondly, the use of member checking entailed presenting the participants with summaries of their interview results in order to ensure the accuracy of interpretation. Thirdly, thick description of the research setting, participants, and activities is offered in the present study in order to ensure the transferability of the results to similar contexts of EFL learning. Moreover, peer debriefing was used during the data analysis process. Lastly, the present researcher used a research journal in order to record the methodological process and reflect on biases that might affect the interpretation of the results.

Ethical considerations

Clear ethical approval was sought from the university's Institutional Review Board regarding the present research (IRB No. 2025-045). All participants provided informed consent before the research. All participants were free to withdraw at any time during the research process. They were assured that there would be no negative consequences on their academic performance. In addition, confidentiality was ensured by assigning pseudonyms to all participants. For instance, the students were identified by P01, P02, P03, etc. For the instructor, a neutral description was used. Videos were deleted once the analysis was completed. Moreover, participants were offered the option of deleting parts of their video recordings if they did not wish to have them used in the research. No conflict of interest was identified in the present research.

Analysis

The qualitative findings derived from the observations of the group task and the participants' reflections reveal the translanguaging process as a complex, multi-layered pedagogical resource for EFL students in Thai settings of collaborative learning. Contrary to the idea of random language use, the translanguaging process was found to be an intentional, agentive process that facilitated task accomplishment, cognitive processing, creativity, and metacognition. Five interrelated themes, as shown in Table 1, were derived, revealing the students' fluid use of Thai and English to support the procedural

and conceptual dimensions of learning, as well as the development of students' metacognitive knowledge.

Table 1.

Thematic Analysis Schedule: Translanguaging in a Thai Tertiary EFL Classroom

Theme	Sub-theme	Code	Quote/Example from Data	Participant
1. Translanguaging as Procedural Scaffolding	Task Management	Clarifying instructions	"So we have to do part one first, <i>chai mai?</i> "	P08
		Delegating roles	" <i>Khun scribe, na. I'll present.</i> "	P12
	Peer Support	Re-explaining concepts	" <i>Kue... greenhouse effect man kue...</i> " (It's like... the greenhouse effect is like...)	P03
		Checking comprehension	" <i>Khao jai mai?</i> " (Do you understand?)	P15
2. Translanguaging as Cognitive Scaffolding	Idea Generation	Brainstorming in L1	" <i>Rao khit wa... maybe we focus on plastic pollution.</i> " (I think... maybe we focus on plastic pollution.)	P07
		Hybrid proposing	" <i>Channels mai samkan. It's the message that matters.</i> " (Channels aren't important. It's the message that matters.)	P11
	Deep Thinking	Complex reasoning in L1	" <i>If I only think in English, my brain is too slow. I can only have small ideas.</i> "	P04
		Connecting prior knowledge	" <i>It connects new English with what I already know in Thai.</i> "	P09
3. Translanguaging as Creative Resource	Hybrid Expression	Playing with language	" <i>It's gonna be a-met lap!</i> " (It's gonna be awesome!)	P02
		Emphatic mixing	" <i>Nak fear reng!</i> " (Very scary!)	P14
	Knowledge Construction	Synthesising ideas	" <i>So the problem khue... plastic waste. And solution khue... reduce, reuse, recycle.</i> "	P06
		Coining new phrases	" <i>Finish laew</i> " (Already finished)	P10
4. Student Perceptions: Scaffold for Learning	Comprehension Tool	Bridging understanding	" <i>We use Thai to make sure everyone really understands. If we only use English, some friends might not get it.</i> "	P05

		Verification talk	"Without Thai first, our English would be just memorised. We wouldn't truly understand."	P13
	Confidence Builder	Feeling safe	"I feel safe. I can say my idea even if I don't know all the English words. It makes me want to talk more."	P01
		Collaborative strength	"It's our group strength. Using Thai means we all understand and can help each other."	P08
5. Student Perceptions: Strategic Awareness	Contextual Adaptation	Task-stage adjustment	"If brainstorming, I use more Thai. If writing the final answer, I try to use more English."	P11
		Audience consideration	"I choose my language based on who I'm talking to and what they understand."	P03
	Metacognitive Awareness	Toolbox metaphor	"It's like having a bigger toolbox. You choose the right tool for the job."	P07
		Intentional code selection	"I don't just mix randomly. I choose my language depending on what we are doing."	P09

Translanguaging as procedural scaffolding

The translanguaging process was found to be an important resource for the students to accomplish the procedural dimensions of the task, such as the clarification of instructions and the delegation of task roles. Phrases such as “So we have to do part one first, chai mai? (ใจไหม)” (P08) and “Khun scribe, na (นะ). I'll present” (P12), for instance, reveal how the students’ use of discourse markers and titles to address the members of the group facilitated the accomplishment of the task. Under the theme of peer support, the students’ use of translanguaging to re-explain concepts, such as “Kue (คือ)... greenhouse effect man kue (มันคือ)...” (P03), and to ensure understanding, such as “Khao jai mai? (เข้าใจไหม)” (P15), served as immediate procedural scaffolds to ensure that the students remained on task, despite the English-medium task, and that no misunderstandings that might hinder the accomplishment of the task arose.

Translanguaging as cognitive scaffolding

Moving beyond superficial management effects, translanguaging was found to facilitate greater cognitive depth. For example, in idea generation, the students mainly translanguaged in Thai before switching to English (“Rao khit wa (เราคิดว่า)... maybe we focus on plastic pollution” (P07)) or employing hybrid formulations (“Channels mai samkan (ไม่สำคัญ). It's the message that matters” (P11)). This

right tool for the job” (P07). Another student highlighted the selection aspect of this intentionality: “I don’t just mix randomly. I choose my language depending on what we are doing” (P09). This indicates an advanced level of metalinguistic awareness and constructs students as strategic bilinguals rather than L2 users in deficit.

Discussion

Overall, the findings suggest that translanguaging was not a compensatory strategy but rather a powerful pedagogical tool for procedural efficiency, cognitive depth, creative freedom, emotional security, and strategic awareness. In this way, translanguaging transcends artificial linguistic boundaries and provides a more equitable and cognitively richer learning environment in English-medium collaborative contexts. This study contributes to the growing body of literature indicating that translanguaging, if recognised and strategically utilised, can improve students’ linguistic and cognitive learning outcomes and learner agency.

The results of this single-case study also shed light on the dynamic and agential nature of translanguaging in Thai university EFL collaborative learning processes that transcend simple language alternation to become a multi-faceted scaffold that supports procedural efficiency, cognitive depth, creativity, and strategic regulation. Rather than simply representing the randomness or making up for the lack of linguistic resources in the Thai or English languages, the research practices and students’ reflections show that Thai EFL learners and their instructor used their entire linguistic repertoire (Thai and English) to co-construct meaning that directly confronts the dominant monolingual ideologies in the Thai educational system (Ambele & Watson Todd, 2021; Eslami et al., 2016). These results fill the research gap identified in this study by shifting from perception-based or anecdotal studies (e.g., Yuvayapan, 2019; Ambele & Neumaihom, 2024) to empirically grounded research that reveals the processes and practices of translanguaging in real-time during collaborative meaning-making processes, while also unveiling the sophisticated metacognitive processes that have not been well explored in Thai university EFL contexts.

As to the first research question, the classroom practices that reveal how the participants used their entire linguistic repertoire in Thai university EFL contexts show considerable similarity to García et al.’s (2017, 2022) tripartite model of translanguaging stance, design, and shifts. For example, the spontaneous translanguaging shifts used in procedural scaffolding (e.g., using Thai discourse markers such as “chai mai? (ใช่ไหม)” to ask for clarification or using “Khun scribe, na (นะ)” to assign a role), peer support (e.g., “Kue (คือ)... greenhouse effect man kue (มันคือ)...” or “Khao jai mai? (เข้าใจไหม)”), and related interactions show strong resemblance to the “translanguaging corriente” described in García et al.’s (2017) model (p. 61). These practices were not used in a deviant manner from English-medium instruction but functioned naturally and efficiently to facilitate task management, reflecting the weak-

form translanguaging identified by Cenoz and Gorter (2021), which remains dominant in Thai university EFL contexts that are often pressured to conform to English-only policies.

Most importantly, however, the data also suggest the emergence of more sophisticated forms through the use of L1 for idea generation and complex reasoning, such as “If I only think in English, my brain is too slow. I can only have small ideas” (P04), which enabled deeper cognitive engagement and knowledge integration. This is reminiscent of Lewis and Baker’s (2012) conceptualisation of translanguaging as a process in which one language supports the other for mutual development. These kinds of mixed formulations, such as “Channels mai samkan (ไม่สำคัญ). It’s the message that matters,” further illustrate the translanguaging space conceptualised by Li (2011), where learners move beyond the boundaries of named languages for meaning-making that simultaneously engages linguistic, cognitive, and affective resources.

The development of translanguaging as a creative resource, through the use of playful “mixed” language formulations such as “It’s gonna be a-met lap!” and “Nak fear reng!” and the use of code-meshing for knowledge construction, also goes beyond the more functional uses of translanguaging reported by EFL studies (Pawapootanon et al., 2025), such as clarification or repair, and resonates more closely with Wei and Lin’s (2019) conceptualisation of translanguaging as a “linguistics of participation,” and Baker’s (2001) conceptualisation of translanguaging, where the processing of content through the use of two languages prevents superficial understanding and leads to more profound digestion of the subject matter being dealt with. In the Thai context, where the use of L1 has traditionally been dismissed by the monolingual policy (Ambele & Watson Todd, 2021; Chaisiri, 2022), the creativity of the translanguaging reported here underscores the way the repertoires of the teacher can help mitigate anxiety for more emotional engagement and group cohesion, reminiscent of the socio-affective benefits reported by other studies (Ulum, 2024; Okoye & Ambele, 2023), while countering the concern about the use of L1 leading to the neglect of L2 practice (Tai, 2025).

Moving on to the second research question, the students’ perceptions unequivocally positioned translanguaging as a scaffold rather than a crutch, underscoring their advanced level of strategic awareness that extends beyond the positive but speculative attitudes toward translanguaging previously found in Thai studies (Xiao & Lertlit, 2022; Ambele & Neumaihom, 2024). Most notably, the students’ positioning of Thai as essential to understanding the English material (“Without Thai first, our English would be just memorised”) aligns with Littlewood and Yu’s (2011) argument that learners without access to their L1s become demotivated, especially if their proficiency levels are lower, and García and Otheguy’s (2020) argument that strategic L1 use promotes both linguistic and learning content development at the same time. Most importantly, the level of metacognitive complexity in the “toolbox” metaphor and the students’ adaptations to task-stage and audience in their use of

Thai and English (“If brainstorming, I use more Thai... If writing the final answer, I try to use more English”) suggests that the students have developed a stance on translanguaging (García et al., 2017) that counters Menken and Sánchez’s (2019) argument that stance and translanguaging are developed reciprocally. Indeed, the students’ strategic awareness belies Jaspers’ (2018) argument that translanguaging could potentially lead to the reinforcement of linguistic hierarchies; instead, the students used their linguistic repertoire to democratise their class discussions to promote strength in numbers (“It’s our group strength”) and inclusivity for learners at different proficiency levels (A2 to B2).

These findings collectively challenge the subtractive monolingual ideologies still embedded in Thai EMI/EFL policy (Almusharraf, 2021; Rahman et al., 2021) and confirm the value of even weak-form translanguaging for significant pedagogical benefits with the space created by the instructor’s approach. By illustrating the procedural, cognitive, creative, affective, and metacognitive functions of translanguaging at work, the current study also contributes to the emerging body of research supporting the theoretical move from a view of language as a distinct system to a repertoire (Otheguy et al., 2015; Seltzer, 2019). For the Thai EFL context specifically, where there is a need for more empirical studies on EFL classrooms (Chaisiri, 2022), the present findings support the potential for teacher professional development on stance, design, and shifts (García et al., 2022) to move beyond spontaneous repair and into more intentional strong-form translanguaging designs for further metalinguistic awareness and equitable student learning.

While the present study’s single-case design does not allow for generalisation, the rich description and use of triangulation and member-checking contribute to the transferability of the findings to other EFL classrooms in Thailand and beyond. Future studies could productively explore the impact of explicit translanguaging pedagogies on the longer-term L2 learning outcomes and the impact of institutional support on the constraints currently affecting Thai EFL educators’ translanguaging. However, the present study confirms the value of translanguaging as a natural and strategic resource for EFL collaborative learning processes: it is the move from a site of linguistic restriction and constraint into a site of possibility and understanding.

Conclusion

his study has shown that translanguaging is a potent and complex pedagogical tool in Thai university EFL collaborative learning, allowing Thai students and their teacher to readily access their shared linguistic repertoire for procedural efficiency, cognitive complexity, creativity, affective security, and self-regulation. Rather than code-mixing phenomena and/or a substitute practice, the translanguaging acts in this study, including task management signals and re-explanation among peers and hy-

bridised brainstorming, language play, and task-stage adaptation, reveal translanguaging as a purposeful and agentive practice that aligns well and expands on García et al.'s (2017, 2022) stance, design, and shifts. Students' metacognitive sophistication, as captured in their metaphors of a "bigger toolbox," places them as agentive bilinguals rather than deficient L2 learners and thus counters monolingual ideologies on the negative impacts of L1 on L2 learning and use (Ambele & Watson Todd, 2021; Thongwichit & Ulla, 2024).

These findings support and add value to the existing body of research on translanguaging in EFL contexts by presenting interaction-based evidence of translanguaging use in a Thai tertiary education setting, where such documentation has been found to be scarce (Chaisiri, 2022; Duangsaeng, 2025). These findings also support the socio-affective and cognitive benefits of translanguaging, such as reduced anxiety, improved understanding, increased involvement, and more thorough content processing (Ulum, 2024; Eren, 2026; Ali, 2026), while also highlighting the considerable benefits of even weak forms of translanguaging (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021) when opportunities for its use are provided. What is more, the lack of negative effects such as marginalisation or reduced L2 use (Tai, 2025; Jaspers, 2018) in a collaborative translanguaging setting also implies that translanguaging, when recognised, can be a force for inclusivity and group strength, rather than hierarchy.

These findings have three main implications: for Thai EFL contexts, the study challenges the existing English-only dominance and advocates for teacher development that supports the development of translanguaging stance and design, which can, in turn, support the development of stronger forms of translanguaging that can further support metalinguistic awareness and inclusivity; for teacher development, the use of translanguaging frameworks can support pre- and in-service teachers in understanding and making use of students' translanguaging repertoires as a resource, rather than a hindrance; and for EFL contexts facing similar monolingual pressures, the study highlights the potential of translanguaging for transforming collaborative learning into a site of possibility, agency, and bilingual development.

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