




Translanguaging in a Northern Sotho classroom: A case study of Khelobedu-speaking learners and their teachers in the Foundation Phase in Mopani District



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Previous research has established that translanguaging can be utilised as a resource for bilingual or multilingual children to accomplish specific communicative goals. However, translanguaging in South African classrooms is presently not generally accepted as a legitimate classroom strategy by Curriculum specialists, nor has it been sanctioned in teacher training. Therefore, teachers in Bolobedu are not really at liberty to use the local language, Khelobedu, in the classroom despite didactic benefits associated with using the local language as a medium of instruction. This study aimed to explore the cases of translanguaging in a Northern Sotho classroom by teachers and Khelobedu-speaking learners. In exploring such, the study aimed to investigate the extent to which translanguaging was used in the Foundation Phase classrooms and, the didactic consequences of such practice in the classrooms in Motupa circuit. The study utilised a case study design with quantitative and qualitative components. A purposive sample of four Foundation Phase Northern Sotho teachers and 129 learners was used to collect data. Four classroom observations were conducted at one selected primary school in [blinded] District and content analysis was used to analyse data. The findings of this study indicated that translanguaging is widely used by Northern Sotho Foundation Phase teachers and considered successful in minimizing learners' miscomprehension of the lesson. Furthermore, the study revealed that also learners employed translanguaging in the Northern Sotho classrooms. Learners were found to enjoy lessons and were actively involved throughout the activities that were performed in class when translanguaging was used.

Contribution: The most outstanding feature of this article is that it makes a plea to those responsible for language policy formulation in South Africa that mother tongue instruction is a right even for those learners who do not speak standard languages. The article reveals the challenges faced by Khelobedu Foundation Phase learners who do not learn in their mother tongue but are forced by the South African Language in Education Policy which dictates the language used in disseminating knowledge in schools. This article further posits that translanguaging is a suitable teaching strategy for a multilingual country like South Africa and should therefore be placed at the centre of classroom practice in South Africa.

Keywords: translanguaging; multilingualism; teaching strategy; Khelobedu; Northern Sotho; Foundation Phase; LoLT.

Introduction

The South African Language in Education Policy (LiEP) stipulates that African languages shall be employed as languages of learning and teaching (LoLTs) in South African schools, at least from Grades 1 to 3 (Department of Education 1997). Thereafter, there must be a switch to an additional language – in most cases, English as LoLT (Department of Education 1997). Regarding the choice of a second language, in a South African context, the government allows the school governing bodies (SGBs) in consultation with the parents to choose a second language. Previous studies reveal that many schools choose English as a second language (De Wet 2002; Gordon 2019; Kola 2018). The reasons for the SGB choices are beyond the scope of the current study. As a result, in such contexts, a number of learners will have to switch to English as a medium of instruction in Grade 4. This LiEP endorses monolingual orientation where only the mother tongue is valued, developed and used as a medium of instruction in the Foundation Phase. The authors of this article are of the view that learners' background knowledge about other languages should be considered as a resource to facilitate learning. Espana and Herrera (2020) describe this process as translanguaging (TL). Translanguaging is then defined by Baker (2011) as:

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[T]he process of making meaning, shaping experiences, gaining understanding and knowledge through the use of two languages. This means the simultaneous use of two languages in the same classroom in the context of the current study. (p. 288)

Espana and Herrera (2020) underscore that TL is when a multilingual person's entire linguistic repertoire is used and respected, rather than focusing solely on a single language, a situation the South African LiEP encourages.

Research indicates that there is a reasonable amount of linguistic background that learners bring to school, apart from the linguistic background of their mother tongue. For example, Cekiso, Meyiwa and Mashige (2019:6) conducted a study on the Foundation Phase teachers' experiences with instruction in the mother tongue in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. They observed that the vocabulary used in the mother tongue material was not user-friendly to the Foundation Phase learners. Specifically, the isiXhosa that learners speak at home is mixed with other languages like English and Afrikaans, whereas the isiXhosa used in the learning materials is archaic isiXhosa that is no longer used in their communities for everyday communication. In the context of the aforementioned study, it was clear that learners picked up some Xhosa vocabulary from their home environment. This serves as clear evidence that the Foundation Phase learners do not rely only on their standard language but also have some knowledge of their mother tongue that might not necessarily be the one used as a medium of instruction. Therefore, utilising both the learners' mother tongue (Xhosa) and Northern Sotho (NS) (standard language) could facilitate the process of learning.

The aforementioned view is supported by many researchers. For example, Banda (2018:198) conducted a study in a black secondary school in Cape Town and focused on how learners used their multilingual repertoire to achieve power, agency and voice. The results of the study revealed that the 'Xhosa-English translanguaged discourse provided the context on which the Standard English texts were consumed and produced'. The study concluded with a thesis for language education policy that places TL at the centre of classroom practice in multilingual South Africa. A similar study was conducted by Ngubane, Ntombela and Govender in 2020. The focus of their study was on the extent to and ways in which TL is useful in enhancing learning of writing amongst the English First Additional Language learners. The results of the study showed that in situations where the integration of isiZulu and English better explained writing concepts, TL was found to improve learners' understanding of the writing concepts and to encourage active engagement in the learning of writing. Similarly, Sibanda (2019) yearns for the recognition of *lok'shin* lingua in South African multilingual township classrooms. This is in support of the view held by the authors of this paper that apart from the learners' mother tongue, any language or version of the language the learner is accustomed to should be utilised for learning, especially in the Foundation Phase. The authors of this article are of the view that the value and practice of TL is important in a multilingual

country like South Africa and other multilingual contexts where the standard variety of a language is elevated to the only acceptable standard.

Although a large body of research has been done on ESL (English as a Second Language) is an umbrella term used for those for whom English is not their native language (SAGE, 2017) classrooms and TL, not enough attention has been given to the topic with a special focus on previously marginalised languages such as Xhosa, Sepulana, etc. Moreover, Probyn (2009) has indicated a shortage of studies of this nature. This study therefore has the potential to add to the body of knowledge on the role of TL in a South African context. Therefore, this study sought to explore the use of TL in an NS classroom at one selected rural primary school in Xhosa South region. Accordingly, the current study sought to answer the following question:

- What are the incidents and functions of TL by teachers and Xhosa-speaking learners in an NS classroom?

Context of the study

Concerning the occurrence of TL in Xhosa Foundation Phase classrooms, an awareness of the language situation in Xhosa is imperative. According to the researchers' knowledge, there are two languages that are widely spoken in this region, Xhosa and Xitsonga – the former being the dominantly spoken language and the latter being the least spoken language. In this regard, a vast majority of learners in this region are first speakers of Xhosa. The previous observation is confirmed by the teachers' and learners' linguistic profiles presented in the findings section. Moreover, Xhosa is believed to be one of the widely spoken languages in a district of Limpopo Province, particularly in Tzaneen Municipality, made up of approximately 120 villages (Statistics South Africa 2016). Xhosa in the context of this study is part of local identity. Although it has no orthography, it is a lingua franca of cognition in which learners interact and form concepts for self-expression, facilitating learning. Northern Sotho, on the other hand, is a standard language used as LoLT, which differs consistently from the local language, Xhosa. In this regard, NS researchers such as Mojela (1999), Manamela (2006) and Ramothwala et al. (2021) put forward these differences as in origin, phonemes, vocabulary, spelling and pronunciation. These differences are categorically shown in the findings section from the examples of Xhosa utterances picked during classroom observations.

With regards to education, only two languages are used as languages of instruction in Foundation Phase schools around Xhosa: NS and Xitsonga (DBE 2011; DoE 1997; Mafokwane 2017). For this reason, children who are born and raised speaking Xhosa or Xitsonga are expected to receive education through the medium of NS and Xitsonga. Concerning Xitsonga, it is important to mention that there is only one school in the whole of Motupa Circuit that offers dual-medium education, in which Xitsonga is one of the mediums used. All the other schools use the medium of NS. This situation prevails

in over 50 primary schools in Bolobedu South. The linguistic situation that prevails in Bolobedu and even throughout some South African communities is acknowledged by global organisations such as UNESCO. In South Africa, at the moment, only 11 official languages are preferred as MoI despite the learners' language repertoires. These languages are isiZulu, isiXhosa, English, Afrikaans, NS, Setswana, Southern Sotho, siSwati, isiNdebele, Tshivenda and Xitsonga.

Theoretical framework

This study was underpinned by the TL theory primarily because of the diglossic climate that exists around the school where the study was conducted. Because of the lack of policies that promote the use of nonstandard languages in the classroom, these languages end up not having momentum in the classroom, hardly being embraced or used for any pedagogical purposes.

Accordingly, TL embraces the use of the first language amongst others and accepts that instead of being in competition, different languages can work together harmoniously. With the support of their teachers, learners are able to use different languages in the classroom, which enhances their learning.

As a theory, many scholars believe that TL inherits ideas from the concept of bilingual education and instruction. In bilingual instruction, 'learners and teachers are able to interact, negotiate meaning and transfer cognitive and linguistic skills in an environment conducive for free and active participation in more than one language' (Benson 2005; Cummins 2000, 2007; Krashen & Brown 2007). These feed into effective teacher-learner-content interaction described in the Dialogic and Cognitive Pedagogy Model of Learning and Social Interaction (Zhou & Landa 2019). Translanguaging may be viewed as a tool of meaning-making through the use of languages within the reach of learners as they attempt to access discipline-specific knowledge. By description, TL is more about communication than language proficiency. Translanguaging highlights the difference between a named standardised language and the ability to use multiple languages for various tasks, including academic tasks and purposes. Based on the previous discussion, it becomes clear that when learners have more than one language at their disposal to access content, understanding is better and deeper. Translanguaging in class would therefore allow learners to use whatever languages they are comfortable with and confident in; hence, the TL theory was deemed relevant for the current study.

Literature review

Translanguaging as a pedagogical tool

Research has it that teachers often smuggle the vernacular into the classroom by means of TL when their learners fail to grasp what is being taught (Probyn 2009; Shinga 2019). In South African schools, TL has become a common feature of classroom interaction, especially in schools where learners

are taught in a language different from the language they use in their everyday lives.

Translanguaging refers to a process of 'communicating across and between different varieties of language(s)' (Heugh 2015:2). This, Heugh adds, includes translation, interpretation and code-switching. It also covers what has been described as polylinguaging, codemeshing and metrolanguaging (Blommaert 2010; Canagarajah 2011). In the education context, TL achieves educational legitimacy in which education literally has meaning. It carries the promise of facilitating the transcending of the linguistic divide characterising the South African classroom context. It encourages 'multilingualism and multilingual pedagogies in the classroom' (Heugh 2015:2).

Given that knowledge has been packaged in official languages in a South African context, it should be expected that Foundation Phase learners coming from a predominantly African background with home languages other than official languages should face challenges. In the following section, challenges faced by teachers when teaching learners in a language different to what they use in their everyday lives are discussed.

Linguistic challenges experienced by teachers when teaching their learners in the official language

Studies by researchers such as O'Connor and Geiger (2009), Evans and Nthulana (2018) indicate that educators, like learners, also face numerous challenges when teaching their learners in the official language. In this vein, UNESCO (2010) reports that:

[I]n most African countries, teachers are expected to teach learners to read and write in a language which is (a) unfamiliar to the learners, (b) in which they have little competence themselves to teach. (p. 28)

Consequently, both teachers and learners in some African classrooms face serious communication and learning impediments on a daily basis.

Regarding the challenges faced by teachers, Ndeleki (2015) points out that:

[I]n a case where children do not speak the language used as a medium of instruction, teachers do most of the talking whilst learners remain silent or passive participants during most of the classroom interactions. (p. 15)

Furthermore, Ndeleki adds that in such predicaments, teachers are forced to use traditional teaching techniques such as code-switching.

This echoes what Brock-Utne (2010:84) experienced in Tanzania where teachers complained that if they used English throughout a lesson, it was like 'teaching dead stones'. Similarly, Nyarigoti and Ambiyi (2014) cite an example from Tanzania where a secondary school teacher confessed that

she had to switch to Kiswahili to have her learners participate in learning or to make the class a bit lively. In such a case, teachers resort to TL as a means of supporting the learners and to minimise the language barrier. In this vein, Evans and Gleghorn (2012:78) caution, 'TL can minimise the language barrier in the classroom but overt linguistic inadequacies in the LoLT can cause confusion, frustration or discomfort'.

Similarly, Jegede (2012:43) suggests that 'teachers employ TL as a means to cope with challenges they face when using an unfamiliar language as a medium of instruction'. This echoes what Evans and Nthulana (2018) experienced in South Africa, where teachers reverted to explanations in Tshivenda during classroom observations in an English classroom. Evans and Nthulana (2018) further reveal that teachers endeavoured to address their learners' struggle to understand new content by switching between English and Tshivenda. This implies that TL is employed mainly to support the learners, as permitted by official documents (DBE 2011).

However, whilst TL is believed to support the learners, it should be mentioned that teachers can also make use of it because of their own inadequate proficiency. This is supported by what Ramothwala (2019) experienced in South Africa, where teachers employed TL throughout the interviews that were meant to be conducted in the language (NS) they were teaching. The teachers could hardly complete sentences in NS without switching to Khelobedu. In the instance of Ramothwala et al. (2021), teachers did not use TL to support the learners, and thus it can be implied that they did so to cope with their own inadequacies in the language they were teaching, when, according to Vygotsky's theory, they were supposed to be 'experts'.

Despite the previous finding, Evans and Nthulana (2018) warn that 'TL, as a sole strategy to support the learners, may improve understanding of the content but not proficiency in the standard language'. This practice, according to Duran (1994), Nel and Muller (2010), Oyeonomi (2006) and Pollard (2002), can further limit learners' exposure to the standard language.

Furthermore, apart from TL, teachers can also resort to using traditional techniques such as chorus teaching, repetition, recall and memorisation (Ndeleki 2015). Nevertheless, other scholars do not deem such techniques to be effective; if anything, they deem them to be ineffectual as far as teaching and learning is concerned. One such example is by Luangala and Mulenga (2010), who claim that such traditional techniques would hinder learners from developing thinking skills that enable them to solve problems independently. Luangala and Mulenga (2010) further argues that 'these traditional techniques do not promote authentic teaching and learning – such situations account largely for the school ineffectiveness and low academic achievements'.

Translanguaging by learners

The learners may use TL for a number of functions. Elridge (1996) names these functions as equivalence, floor holding,

reiteration and conflict control. The first function of employing the TL switch is the lack of equivalence. In this case, the learner makes use of the native equivalent of a certain lexical item in the target language and therefore switches to his or her native tongue. This process, according to Hamid and Erling (2016):

[M]ay be correlated with the deficiency in linguistic competence of target language, which makes the learner use the native lexical item when he/she has not the competence for using the target language explanation for a particular lexical item. (p. 7)

Floor holding, as explained by Hamid and Erling (2016), means that during a conversation in the target language, the learners fill the gap with native language use. It may be suggested that this is a mechanism used by the learners in order to avoid gaps in communication, which may result from the lack of fluency in the target language. The third consideration in learners' TL students is reiteration, which is pointed out by Elridge (1996:56) as 'messages are reinforced, emphasized, or clarified where the message has already been transmitted in one code, but not understood'. In this case, the message in the target language is repeated by the learner in the native tongue through which the learner tries to give the meaning by making use of a repetition technique (Hamid & Erling 2016). Accordingly, this study investigated the functions of TL in an NS classroom by Khelobedu L1 learners.

Methodology

Design

The study utilised both quantitative and qualitative approaches, and a case study design was followed. Strefkerk (2019) argues that quantitative research deals with numbers and statistics, whilst qualitative research deals with words. Cherry (2021:59) defines a case study as 'an in-depth study of one person, group, or event and it seeks patterns and causes of behaviour'. A case study was used in the current study in order to identify cases of TL by teachers and learners in the Khelobedu classroom when teaching and learning through the medium of NS in the Foundation Phase classrooms.

Participants

The sample consisted of both Foundation Phase teachers and learners. The total number of teachers was four, and they were all females. Their age distribution ranged between 40 and 59 years, and their teaching experience ranged between 15 and 33 years. Three of the four teachers were Khelobedu L1 speakers, and one was an NS speaker. The total number of learners who participated in this study was 129 learners from one selected primary school. Unlike their teachers, learners were both male and female. A vast majority of the learners, representing 91%, were Khelobedu L1 speakers, and a small pocket of learners, representing 9%, were Xitsonga L1 speakers.

Sampling procedure

Purposive sampling was used to select participants in the current study. Patton (2002) declares that in purposive

sampling, 'participants respond to the criteria which enables the researcher to select information-rich participants'. More specifically, the decision was made on the bases of the participants' particular linguistic profiles. Their profiles served as testimony to their knowledge and experience of the focus languages of the study.

Data collection methods

In this study, data were collected through classroom observations, which according to Cohen et al. (2007) is 'a way of gathering data by watching behaviour events or noting physical characteristics in their natural setting'. This method enabled the researchers to verbatim record the utterances of the participants and to observe what was happening in the classroom during lessons. The primary researcher observed lessons as a nonparticipant observer and wrote down notes for data coding purposes. The primary researcher observed both learners and their teachers in order to observe the incidents and functions of TL in an NS classroom. Teachers were observed for five specific functions, which were asking questions, demonstrating activities, checking understanding, giving instructions and maintaining order. In addition, the functions for which learners were observed were asking questions, responding to questions and general interactions. The primary researcher observed four lessons from the four selected teachers, one from each school.

The lessons were observed for 30–40 min, which according to Maree (2007) is enough, as participants will start behaving naturally. In Grade R, learners were given a couple of activities to do. The first activity focused on drawing, and another activity focused on tracing or locating the lost items. In Grade 1, the learners were taught how to read. In Grade 2, learners were taught visual literacy. In Grade 3, the teacher was teaching sounds, vowels and consonants and how to formulate words using those sounds.

Data analysis

Content analysis with quantitative and qualitative components was used to analyse data in this study. Luo (2019) states that content analysis can be both quantitative (focus on counting and statistics) and qualitative (focus on interpreting and understanding). In the current study, the quantitative component comprised counting the number of incidents and functions of each of the features of teacher- and learner-directed TL. On the other hand, the qualitative

component comprised interpreting and understanding the data, often through the discussion of specific examples.

Findings

This section presents the findings of the study, based on the research questions mentioned in the introduction. The classroom activities were mainly observed for determining incidents of TL. This was done to unveil the circumstances where both teachers and learners employ TL or feel that there is a need for using L1, and this has been derived from observing teachers whilst teaching. Findings pertaining to teachers are presented first.

Translanguaging by teachers

Classroom observation analysis involved four teachers in Motupa Circuit. During the four lessons observed, TL incidents occurred 50 times as reflected in Table 1.

Ranking of translanguaging functions

The following are TL functions ranked according to their frequency of occurrence from (1) to (6), as Table 1 illustrates. Each TL function is exemplified by an observed extract, where *Khelobedu* utterances are bolded, NS equivalence typed in normal font, and translations into English are given in italics. 'T' stands for the teacher and 'L' stands for the learner.

Maintaining order

This was the most frequently used function of code by the case of teachers. This function was used 12 times, representing 24% of the overall observed code instances.

MO extract:

T1: Ke **dho o tiya** (KB)
Ke tlo o betha (NS)
I am going to hit you (ENG)

Here the teacher was presenting a lesson on sounds and how to formulate words using the vowels. Whilst others were listening attentively, one learner was frequently making noise, and the teacher had to pause the lesson to call the learner into order. The teacher, in the middle of the NS lesson, then switched to *Khelobedu* to call the learner into order. After reprimanding the learner in *Khelobedu*, order was restored and the teacher continued with the lesson. The

TABLE 1: Incidents and functions of translanguaging by teachers.

Function	Asking questions (AQ)	Demonstrating activities (DA)	Checking understanding (CU)	Giving instructions (GI)	Maintaining order (MO)	General (other)	Number of TL incidents
Teacher							
T1	2	3	3	0	6	1	15
T2	4	6	2	5	5	4	26
T3	0	2	0	0	1	3	6
T4	3	0	0	0	0	0	3
Total	9	11	5	5	12	8	50
Total ranking and percentage (%)	18	22	10	10	24	16	100

Source: Sert, O., 2005, 'The functions of code switching in ELT classrooms', *The Internet TESL Journal* 10(8), viewed from <https://www.iteslj.org>.

phoneme 'dh' is unknown to NS. It is worth pointing out that this is one of the basic phonemes in this language from which many words emerge, for example, *dhisa* meaning *to submit* or *to bring it*, *dhisitše* meaning *brought it* or *submitted it*, *dha* meaning *eat*, etc. The word *tiya* again is different from NS's equivalent *betha*. Again, this example points out the difference in terms of vocabulary, also:

- T2: **Dhowelani** o rasa (KB)
Tlogelang o dira lešata (NS)
Stop making noise (ENG)

Similar to the previous incident, the teacher was presenting a lesson where learners were disruptive. Thus, TL was used to reprimand the learners and to maintain order. The teacher used the word *dhowelani* instead of *tlogelang*, and the message got across.

Demonstrating activities

Demonstrating activities, together with asking questions, ranked second with 22% of the total observed code incidents.

DA extract:

- T1: O bea **kheadha khao kha** ngele (KB)
O bea letsogo la gago la ngele (NS)
You put down your left hand (ENG)

Here, the teacher was demonstrating an activity to the learners. The learners were tasked to draw two hands on their activity books. The teacher then demonstrated this activity by code to Khelobedu as per the previous example. She placed her left hand on the chalkboard and said to the learners, '*o bea kheadha khao kha ngele*' as she did and further said, '*wa thala ka ledzowo la udha*', which in English means '*you put your left hand down and draw with your right hand*'. *Kheadha* and *ledzowo* mean the same in Khelobedu. However, both words are still not so close to the NS equivalents. The word *kheadha* denotes a different vocabulary altogether, whilst the *ledzowo* bears a phoneme that does not exist in NS:

- T2: A re **dzamayeni gha dzila** thwi (KB)
A re sepeleng ka go latela tsela (NS)
Let us follow the route directly (ENG)

Here, the learners were tasked to help a boy find his bicycle. Therefore, they were to make a connection through a line to the location of the bicycle. Therefore, the teacher was demonstrating to the learners that they had to draw a line following the route until they reached the bicycle's location. Again, TL became handy in achieving this. The words *dzamaya* and *dzila* embody different phonemes. These phonemes account for different pronunciations. Nonetheless, learners did not have any difficulties comprehending what the teacher had said.

Asking questions

Asking questions as a function of TL ranked second, with nine incidents amounting to 18% of all incidents observed.

EG extract:

- T3: *Mamotlha* ke di kae? (KB)
Lehono ke di kae? (NS)
What is today's date? (ENG)

In light of the previous example, teachers have shared with me that they start the lesson by asking the learners the date at the start of each day. Likewise, the teacher asked the learners the date. In this observed incident, the teacher used the word '*mamotlha*', instead of the usual NS word '*lehono*'. The words '*mamotlha*' and '*lehono*' are synonymous, and teachers do not penalise the learners if they use either of the two. Nonetheless, the word '*mamotlha*' derives from an NS dialect other than Khelobedu. The word '*mamotlha*' has over the years come to be adopted as a synonym, but '*lehono*' very much remains an accepted term.

EG extract:

- T3: Lefoko la **number 1** (NS + ENG)
Lefoko la mathomo (NS)
The first sentence (ENG)

In this incident, the teacher was asking the learners to give answers to a number of questions. The teacher utilised TL in English, as per the previous example. In this incident, however, the teacher did not switch to Khelobedu or any of the NS dialects, as in the previous example, but rather to English.

Other (general)

General (other) was also observed five times in all lessons observed. This ranked fourth with 16% of the total observed code incidents.

G/O extract:

- T2: **Tšhepela** (KB)
Sepela (NS)
Go (ENG)

In this incident, the teacher was responding to the learner. The learner had asked to go to the bathroom. In response, TL was used:

- T2: Ke *emedhe* bo lena ka *mokwa* wa nowe (KB)
Ke emtsi lena ka *mokgwa* wo (NS)
I am waiting for you (ENG)

In this incident, the teacher was waiting for the learners to get to the classroom to get on with the lesson. In the process, TL was used.

Checking understanding

Checking understanding was noticed five times (10%) in the lessons observed.

CU extract:

- T2: *Thakuwa* o *dhe* o mpontšhe (KB)
Emelela o tle o mpontšhe (NS)
Come forward to show me (ENG)

Here, the teacher wanted to see if the learner could correctly identify the number 10 from all the numbers written on the wall. This was just after they drew the two hands in their workbooks, after which they counted the fingers from the left hand to the right, up to 10. Therefore, in this incident, TL was used to check the learners' understanding. Apart from TL, what is notable in the previous example is the difference in vocabulary and pronunciation:

T1: Le *diile dzona* bo lena? (KB)
Le dirile tšona bolena? (NS)
Did you get it right? (ENG)

Here the teacher wanted to check if the learners did the correct thing. Therefore, in this incident, TL was again used. The previous example denotes difference in terms of pronunciation and phonemes.

Giving instructions

Lastly, GI was also observed five times at 10% in all the lessons observed, ranking fifth in all the functions of observed TL.

GI extract:

T2: Yo a ke a *khumanao* puku a *dhe* ka pele (KB)
Yo a sa hwetšago puku a tle ka pele (NS)
Those without books should come in front (ENG)

In this incident, the teacher was issuing books to the learners so that they could write the task she had given them. Noticing that some learners were without books, she instructed them to come to the front so they could check the books together. In giving this instruction, TL was used:

T2: E *dha* o e tjiye (KB)
E tla o e tsee (NS)
Come take it (ENG)

Here, learners were to write down the task, and some were without pencils. After the teacher noticed that some learners did not have pencils to write, she told learners to come to her so that she could give them the pencils. In the process, TL was used.

Translanguaging by learners

The classroom activities were also observed to unveil the circumstances in which the learners employed TL, and this has been derived from observing learners' interactions with their teachers and amongst themselves whilst learning. During the four lessons observed, TL incidents occurred 20 times, as reflected in Table 2. In Table 2, G stands for Grade and L stands for learner.

Ranking of translanguaging functions

The following are TL functions ranked according to their frequency of occurrence from (1) to (3), as Table 2 illustrates. Just like teachers' TL, each TL function is exemplified by an observed extract, where Khelobedu utterances are bolded,

TABLE 2: Incidents and functions of translanguaging by learners.

Function	Asking questions	Responding to questions	General interactions	Number of TL incidents
Grades				
GR	0	2	3	5
G1	1	3	3	7
G2	0	2	3	5
G3	1	0	2	3
Total	2	7	11	20
Total ranking and percentage (%)	10	35	55	100

Source: Sert, O., 2005, 'The functions of code switching in ELT classrooms', *The Internet TESL Journal* 10(8), viewed from <https://www.iteslj.org>.

NS equivalence typed in normal font and translations into English are given in italics.

General interactions

This was the most frequently used function of code by the case learners. This function was used 11 times, representing 55% of the overall observed code instances.

GI extract:

L4: Ma'am, nna nka *idwze* (KB)
Ma'am, lebelela (NS)
Teacher, have a look (ENG)

In this incident, the learner was getting the teacher to have a look at their work. In the process, TL was used. Thus, the learner used the word '*idwze*'. The word '*idwze*' does not exist in NS, let alone the phoneme '*dzw*'. This establishes that Khelobedu differs from NS phonetically:

L5: Nna a ka *dzamaya* nayo (KB)
Nna ga ka sepela le yona (NS)
I didn't go with it (ENG)

In this scenario, the teacher was issuing books to the learners so that they could write down the task. Some learners did not receive their books, and the teacher was convinced that the concerned learners did not submit their books the previous day. L5, trying to convince the teacher that he (the learner) did not go home with his book, used the word '*dzamaya*' instead of '*sepela*'. Thus, TL as a communication strategy was used. This incident further points out the differing vocabulary of the two languages concerned.

Responding to questions

Responding questions ranked second, with 35% of the total observed code incidents.

RQ extract:

L2: Nna ke bona motho a ke *dhowa* (KB)
Nna ke bona motho a sepela (NS)
I see a person walking (ENG)

The teacher had asked learners to identify a couple of items in their workbooks. In this incident, the teacher had asked the learners to describe what they saw in their workbooks. L2, responding to the teacher, used the word '*dhowa*' instead of '*sepela*'. Thus, TL was used. This example demonstrates that

Khelobedu, being the primary language the learners spoke, differs from NS in terms of vocabulary:

- L4:** Re bona motho a *khe abha* le nyonyana (KB)
 Re bona motho a bolela le nonyana (NS)
We see a person communicating with a bird (ENG)

In this incident, the learner again was responding to a question, identifying what they saw. The learner used the word *abha* instead of the word '*bolela*'. Like the previous example, this again illustrates the different vocabulary of Khelobedu and NS, currently being used as the medium of instruction.

Asking questions

Asking questions was the least observed function of all observed TL incidents. This function was used twice, representing 10% of the overall observed TL instances.

AQ extract:

- L1:** Ke *obhela* o ya toilet? (KB)
 Ke kgopela o ya botshwelamare? (NS)
May I go to the toilet? (ENG)

In this incident, the learner was asking for permission to go to the bathroom. The learner used '*obhela*', which is a Khelobedu word, instead of the NS word 'kgopela'. Thus, TL was used.

Discussion of the findings

The all-encompassing aim of this study was to explore the use of TL in an NS classroom in one selected primary school in Motupa Circuit of the Bolobedu South region. The study therefore aimed to uncover the incidents and functions of TL by both teachers and learners. Accordingly, the classroom observations revealed that both the teachers and the learners employed TL during NS lessons. There is clear evidence that the Foundation Phase teachers in the selected school employed TL as a teaching strategy to benefit learners. This finding is in line with Mokgwathi's (2011) findings in which TL was found to 'enhance understanding amongst the learners, promote participation in the learning process and facilitate communication in the classroom'. In this study, the teachers were mindful that they had to teach in NS but used Khelobedu when they saw the need as teaching pedagogy to enhance understanding and comprehension in class. When the teacher used NS or even asked a question in NS, the learners did not readily respond. However, as soon as TL was used, some learners participated positively in the lesson. This, then, implied that the learners were more comfortable responding in Khelobedu than in NS. This finding supports the findings of a study conducted by Majola, Ditselê and Cekiso (2019). The focus of their study was on learners' attitudes towards the recognition and development of isiBhaca, which was their dialect. The results of their study indicated that learners held positive attitudes towards isiBhaca.

Lastly, researchers such as Mokgwathi (2011:9) and Shinga (2019:177) believe that TL in schools is mostly used to repeat information rather than to convey objective information. In using TL to repeat information, Mokgwathi (2011:9) provides the following examples; a teacher, for instance, may say:

- Do you understand? *A lo a tlhaloganya?*
- The assignment is due tomorrow. *Tiro e tlisiwe ka moso.*

In both Mokgwathi's (2011) examples, what the teacher says is exactly the same thing in two different languages with no new information being given in the language to which he or she switches. The teacher thus translates the English sentence into Setswana to ensure that the learners understand and can follow the lesson, instead of conveying social information. In this study, however, it appears that TL was not used just to repeat information, as many scholars believe, but to convey objective information. This assertion is reinforced by the examples presented under the findings, where teachers employed TL for the purposes of demonstrating activities and checking the comprehension by learners. Unlike in Mokgwathi's (2011) examples, the teachers completely switched to Khelobedu and did not repeat this information in NS. Thus, in these instances, TL was used to convey objective information. With regard to the framework underpinning this study, the findings support the TL theory because teachers indeed used two languages, as required by the theory. In the classrooms, teachers used one language to reinforce the other, and that significantly increased the learners' deep understanding and participation in learning activities. Thus, this study affirms the effectiveness of the TL theory, as the findings are complementary and not contradictory.

Conclusion

The study sought to explore the use of TL in an NS classroom in one rural primary school in the Bolobedu South region. This was in view of the fact that Khelobedu could play an important role in facilitating learners' understanding of the concepts taught in the Foundation Phase in NS. In this regard, the findings of the study revealed that teachers used TL (Khelobedu in this context) to maintain order, check understanding and demonstrate activities. On the other hand, learners used TL for general instructions, responding to questions and, to a smaller degree, asking questions. The findings confirm the view that was presented by the authors of this article in the introduction that learners' background knowledge about other languages, especially their mother tongue, should be considered as a resource to facilitate learning. This is important in cases where their mother tongue is not used as a medium of instruction but a standard language is used. Thus, using learners' mother tongue together with the standard language has the potential to facilitate learning. In other words, the reintroduction of mother tongue education at the primary school level is recommended, as it is a practice in many parts of the world.

Recommendations

Having established that TL is used to benefit the learners and to compensate for learners' poor economic and linguistic backgrounds and lack of exposure to NS, this study first recommends that TL be incorporated into the language policy to enable the Foundation Phase teachers to formally and legitimately use Xhosa in the classroom. Secondly, the study recommends that the current LiEP or its implementation should be examined to establish whether it stifles learning. Provision should therefore be made in the LiEP for the use of TL in education in recognition of its important instructional role. The SGB and relevant bodies should revise the LiEP to accommodate, where appropriate, the use of Xhosa in teaching and learning. Most importantly, the study recommends teachers' training on how to use TL in the classroom. Lastly, the reintroduction of mother tongue education at the primary school level should be considered consistent with an international practice, based on the findings of research carried out in different parts of the world that mother tongue plays a very important role in concept formulation at this level of education.

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Competing interests

The authors have declared that no competing interest exists.

Authors' contributions

T.R. (60%), I.P.M. (40%) and M.P.C. (40%) contributed to the writing and research of this article.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance for the study was granted by the Faculty Committee for Research Ethics – Humanities of Tshwane University of Technology (ref. no. FCRE/APL/STD/2020/08). Permission was obtained from the educational district, and principals subsequently permitted the primary researcher to collect the data at their schools. Teachers were given leaflets to inform them about the study and the roles in the data collection. Likewise, permission to observe the learners was granted through the signed consent forms by the parents, as the children are minors.

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Data availability

No accessible codes and figures were used; only two tables have been used. No restrictions are attached to the data of this article.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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