

EXPLORING TRANSLANGUAGING IN CHINESE AS A SECOND LANGUAGE CLASS AMONG INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN CHINA

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Abstract: This paper reports on the results of a survey investigating translanguaging in Chinese as a second language class among 121 international students in China. The collected data were processed by means of descriptive analysis via SPSS 26.0 so as to explore the perceived attitudes, motivation and influencing factors of translanguaging among the participants. The results revealed that the participants believed in the effectiveness of translanguaging even though they are cautioned to some degree in this regard, their perceived motivation towards translanguaging includes assisting classroom learning, facilitating classroom participation, and promoting classroom interaction, and their perception of translanguaging is mainly influenced by such factors as needs to participate in classroom, affect needs, and convenience of translanguaging space. This study shall provide implications for Chinese language teaching to international students in China and beyond.

Keywords: International students in China; Chinese as a second language; Translanguaging

1 INTRODUCTION

Translanguaging refers to the concept of language use in foreign language class that is blending and creative. Translanguaging is a kind of complex social and cognitive activity which is mediated by the use of multiple language resources by multilinguals, through which knowledge is acquired, information is retrieved, and social relations as well as identity are expressed [5]. In recent years, translanguaging in second language class has been drawing increasing attention, mainly focusing on the perceived attitudes among the learners [1], motivation [1] and influencing factors [6]. However, these studies mainly paid attention to translanguaging in English as a second language contexts, little attention is paid to contexts of other languages. Meanwhile, in contrast to studies abroad, research in China on translanguaging is relatively late with a focus on the introduction and review of studies on translanguaging [11]. It can be found that research on translanguaging in China is inadequate.

In the past decade, the Belt-Road initiative policy of China promoted the heat of learning Chinese abroad. More and more international learners come to China to learn Chinese. International students are diverse in terms of language, culture and educational background. Therefore, it is unavoidable for translanguaging to take place in class of Chinese as a second language. In light of that, the present study aims to explore the translanguaging in Chinese as a second language class among a group of international students in China.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Since its appearance, the concept of translanguaging has been drawing attention from the scholars. Existing research on translanguaging has mainly explored the attitudes towards translanguaging [1], the perceived motivation for translanguaging [1, 7], and the influencing factors on translanguaging [6].

Research has revealed that learners displayed positive or neutral attitudes towards translanguaging in second language class. For instance, Adelia [1] found most of the surveyed students believed that translanguaging could exert a positive influence on their foreign language learning. By contrast, Rivera & Mazak [6] found that learners are reserved towards the influence of translanguaging in class. With regards studies in this aspect in China, it is often reported that Chinese learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) are open to translanguaging in their English learning. Wang [9] reported that most learners surveyed tend to use more than one language in their language learning.

Translanguaging is reported to be of multiple functions. It has been found that translanguaging could promote the cognitive development of the learners [1]. Translanguaging is also conducive for knowledge construction in second language class. It could promote deep learning, and harmonious teacher-learner relationship [3]. Translanguaging could help learners more master the knowledge learned from the class [7]. These findings are also reported in studies in China. For example, translanguaging is found to be facilitative in helping learners comprehend the newly learned content and task requirements [4]. It could also help the learners express themselves and interact with others [4]. Translanguaging could promote teaching innovation, and the learning of language and context [10].

Translanguaging is influenced by multiple factors. It has been reported that language policy, language attitude and ecological factors could exert certain influences upon translanguaging [6]. Such ecological factors as harmonious teacher-student relationship, language awareness of the learners, language attitudes at school and community all are influential on translanguaging [2]. Meanwhile, translanguaging is also influenced by learner needs and language

competence and others. Cognitive needs of the learners, expression of thoughts, classroom participation as well as affective needs are found to be determinants of translanguaging [4]. Additionally, translanguaging is also constrained by foreign language proficiency of the teacher [9].

All in all, existing research on translanguaging has been developing rapidly. However, the research mainly explored translanguaging in the English as a second language or foreign language contexts, with limited attention paid to the translanguaging of learners of other languages. Meanwhile, research on translanguaging in China is relatively late and mainly introduces the research state of translanguaging abroad. There is limited empirical research on translanguaging among international students of Chinese as a second language in China [8]. Therefore, this study aims to explore the translanguaging in Chinese as a second language among international students in China.

3 RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Research Questions

This study intends to explore the translanguaging in Chinese as a second language among international students in China. Specifically, it aims to investigate the perceived attitudes towards, motivation for, and influencing factors for translanguaging among the learners of Chinese as a second language in China. It aims to answer the following three questions:

- (1) What are the attitudes towards translanguaging among international students of Chinese as a second language in China?
- (2) What are the motivations for translanguaging among international students of Chinese as a second language in China?
- (3) What are the influencing factors for translanguaging among international students of Chinese as a second language in China?

3.2 The Participants

The present study involved 121 international students of Chinese as a second language in China. They were 89 males and 32 females. Of these learners, 27 were at the preliminary Chinese class and 94 degree learners. The youngest was at 17 years old, while the oldest was at 30 years old, with an average age of 22.16 years. These learners had a background of multiple languages, with 10 monolinguals, 57 bilinguals, 30 trilinguals, 19 quadrilinguals, and 4 pentlinguals. They were from such nations as Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Ghana, Laos, Zimbabwe, Kazakhstan, Zambia, Rwanda, Tanzania, and others.

3.3 Instrument

This study used a self-designed questionnaire adapted from previous studies [9, 10]. After a pilot study, the finalized instrument included two parts: the first part inquired the background information of the participants like their gender, class, age, and nationality. The second part of the questionnaire investigated the following three dimensions with 25 items: attitudes towards translanguaging (Item 1-5), motivation for translanguaging (Item 6-14), and influencing factors for translanguaging (Item 15-15). The instrument followed the Likert-5 scale, from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The reliability of the questionnaire was measured by means of Cronbach's Alpha. The Cronbach's Alpha of the questionnaire was 0.797, indicating a sound reliability of the questionnaire.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

After getting consent from the teachers of the international students, the questionnaires were distributed to the participants during the class break time. Before the participants answered the questionnaire, the objectives of the survey as well as methods to answer the questionnaire were briefed to them. The participants were also made sure that their response would be kept confidentially and would be no threat to the final scores of their class. Altogether, 150 copies of the questionnaire were distributed, with 146 ones returned. After removing the invalid ones, 121 valid ones were obtained for later analysis.

The collected data were firstly processed with EXCEL. Then, the data were computed into SPSS 26.0 for descriptive analysis so as to explore the attitudes towards translanguaging, motivations for translanguaging, and influencing factors for translanguaging among the international students of Chinese as a second language in China.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Attitudes towards Translanguaging among the Participants

Table 1 Attitudes towards Translanguaging among the Participants (N=121)

Item	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
1. I hope to only use Chinese to teach in my class	1.00	5.00	2.6198	1.30548
2. I hope to only use Chinese in my class	1.00	5.00	2.6529	1.29557
3. To use another language instead of Chinese to teach is acceptable	1.00	5.00	3.2314	1.19555

4. To use another language instead of Chinese could promote classroom interaction.	1.00	5.00	3.3967	1.13636
5. To use another language instead of Chinese could facilitate my study.	1.00	5.00	3.5372	1.19053

Table 1 presents the attitudes towards translanguaging among the participants. The mean value for Item 1 is 2.6198, for Item 2 is 2.6529. These two mean values both are between 2.5 to 3.0, indicating that those students seemed to be reserved to some degree in their attitudes towards translanguaging. Besides, the mean values for Item 3 and Item 4 are 3.2314 and 3.3967 respectively, both above the level of 3.0-3.5, which indicate that the participants were positive towards the effectiveness of translanguaging in their Chinese as a second language class. The mean value for Item 5 is 3.5372, higher than the 3.5 threshold level, indicating that the participants were positive about using translanguaging to facilitate language learning in Chinese as a second language class. These results echo the ones of previous studies [9, 10].

4.2 Motivation for Translanguaging among the Participants

Table 2 Motivation for Translanguaging among the Participants (N=121)

Item	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
6. Chinese and other languages are the ones that are actually used.	1.00	5.00	2.4876	1.13369
7. What my teacher uses in class are Chinese and mother tongue.	1.00	5.00	2.2562	1.30083
8. Though I am required to only speak Chinese, I would still speak other languages.	1.00	5.00	3.2810	1.05058
9. I mixed Chinese and other languages in class to ask questions.	1.00	5.00	3.3058	1.16793
10. I often use other languages instead of Chinese to ask questions.	1.00	5.00	3.2810	1.17773
11. I use other languages instead of Chinese in group activities.	1.00	5.00	3.5785	.98109
12. I use other languages instead of Chinese to deal with unfamiliar topics.	1.00	5.00	3.7438	1.05300
13. I use other languages to interact with others.	1.00	5.00	3.8099	.93376
14. I tend to interact with those who share the same language.	1.00	5.00	3.9587	.97807

Table 2 reports the results of the motivation for translanguaging among the participants. The mean values for Item 6 and Item 7 are 2.4876 and 2.2562 respectively, both under the range of 2.5-3.0. This result suggests that the participants had a medium to low level of motivation for translanguaging. They seldom used Chinese and their mother tongue in Chinese as a second language class. The mean value for Item 8 is between 3.0 and 3.5, indicating that the participants were motivated for translanguaging at a medium to high level. They revealed a certain degree of motivation for translanguaging. They were clear to use translanguaging to assist their classroom learning. Besides, the mean value for Item 9 is 3.3058, and that for Item 10 is 3.2810. These two mean values are between the range of 3.0-3.5, suggesting that the participants had a medium to high level of motivation for translanguaging to promote their participation into group activities. The mean value for Item 11 is 3.5785, suggesting that the participants were strongly motivated for translanguaging in group activities. They made use of translanguaging to assist their participation into class. Last, the mean values for Item 12, 13 and 14 are 3.7438, 3.8099, and 3.9587 respectively, all above 3.5. These results revealed that the participants had a strong motivation for translanguaging to facilitate their interaction with others in class. These results to some degree agree with previous studies [4, 10].

4.3 Influencing Factors for Translanguaging among the Participants

Table 3 Influencing Factors for Translanguaging among the Participants (N=121)

Item	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
15. I use other languages to complete group activities.	1.00	5.00	3.7355	.98123
16. I use more than one language to better interact with others.	1.00	5.00	3.7686	.82422
17. I switch languages to better comprehend the teacher.	1.00	5.00	3.9008	.85054
18. I use other languages instead of Chinese to help me participate in class when there are important topics.	1.00	5.00	3.7438	.84191
19. I use all my language resources to help me participate in classroom activities.	1.00	5.00	3.9008	.99503
20. I would become less anxious when the teacher uses other languages instead of Chinese to explain her points.	1.00	5.00	3.4628	1.09576
21. I would become less anxious when communicating with other languages instead of Chinese.	1.00	5.00	3.0909	1.00830
22. I would have a better sense of self value when communicating with other languages instead of Chinese.	1.00	5.00	3.6033	.94410
23. Using other languages instead of Chinese would improve my confidence.	1.00	5.00	3.5455	.97468
24. I tend to use the language that is shared by peers around me.	1.00	5.00	3.3140	1.11828
25. I tend to other languages instead of Chinese because I have experience of learning other languages.	1.00	5.00	3.4793	1.05751

Table 3 presents the influencing factors for translanguaging among the participants. The mean values for Item 15-19 are 3.7355, 3.7686, 3.9008, 3.7438, and 3.9008 respectively. These five mean values are all above 3.5, indicating that the participants were deeply influenced by these factors. A further analysis of these items revealed that these items were all related to the needs to participate in class among the participants, suggesting that the translanguaging among the international students of Chinese as a second language is strongly determined by their needs of participating in class [4].

Besides, the mean values for Item 20 and Item 21 are 3.4628 and 3.0909, both between 3.0-3.5, implying that the participants were influenced by these two factors at a medium to high level. The mean values for Item 22 and Item 23 are 3.6033 and 3.5455, both above 3.5, implying that the participants were strongly influenced by these two factors at a high level. A further examination of these items revealed that these items were all about the affective needs of the participants, suggesting that the translanguaging among the international students of Chinese as a second language is strongly impacted by their affective needs. At last, the mean values for Item 24 and Item 25 are 3.3140 and 3.4793, both between 3.0-3.5, indicating that these two factors exert their influence on translanguaging among the participants at a medium to high level. These two items pertain to the convenience of translanguaging space, suggesting that translanguaging among the international students of Chinese as a second language was constrained by the convenience of translanguaging space [9].

5 CONCLUSION

The present study conducted a questionnaire survey to investigate the perceived attitudes towards, motivation for and influencing factors for translanguaging among a group of international students of Chinese as a second language in China. It has been found that the participants were overall positive towards translanguaging, even though some of them were reserved. Their motivation for translanguaging in Chinese a second language class includes translanguaging for class learning, for facilitating class participation, and promoting classroom interaction. Their translanguaging was influenced by their needs to take part in class, affective needs, and convenience of translanguaging space.

This study to some degree confirmed previous studies, revealing the similarities of learners of Chinese as a second language with learners of English as a second language, thus providing empirical evidence to previous studies. Meanwhile, the present study expanded the research participants from learners of English as a second language to learners of Chinese as a second language, thus enriching existing literature. The results could help us better understand the ecology of the Chinese as a second language class, providing insights into the teaching of Chinese to speakers of other languages and thus improving the effectiveness of the teaching of Chinese to international students.

This study has its limitations. For example, its sample is relatively small, and the data were only obtained by means of questionnaire. Future research is suggested to include more methods of data collection with large sample population when further exploring the translanguaging of Chinese as a second language learners.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

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