

## Chapter 27

# A Translingual Approach to Learning and Teaching in a Bilingual Social Sciences Classroom

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter reports findings from translingual learning, teaching, and assessment in a Grade 9 social sciences classroom. The independent samples test for the equality of variance shows that overall learners performed better when the language of input was IsiZulu, irrespective of the language of output. These findings show that learners learn optimally in a language they know the most, whilst their linguistic repertoire serves as a resource for optimal learning. This chapter, therefore, argues and advocates for the use of all linguistic repertoires for learning in content subjects within the constructs of translanguaging as pedagogy. However, in contexts where one language is dominantly used by learners in their everyday lives, the dominant language must be used as a language of input.*

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the role of the home language in learning in a context where English Second Language (ESL) is used for learning and teaching in grade 9 Social Sciences classrooms. Many learners

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in rural schools have exposure to English in the formal school context and on social media, but not in their immediate environment. The English language infrastructure of urban schools is more supportive than that of rural schools, and both teachers and learners have greater access to speakers of English as well as easier access to magazines, newspapers, and television (Cuong, 2021; Taylor & von Fintel, 2016). Klapwijk (2015) emphasises that literacy skills such as skimming and scanning are necessary in content subjects and, in this case, are essential to Social Sciences. Literacy skills are needed because learners in Social Sciences have to read, write, and communicate in classroom interactions.

According to the Department of Basic Education (2013), learners should write regularly, with a clear progression in length and complexity through the grades. In addition, section 6 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) provides for the use of eleven official languages of South Africa and for all official languages to enjoy parity of esteem and equal treatment. However, most of these languages are indigenous and only used for teaching and learning in the early grades.

In line with this, the goal of teaching is to provide subject content and language skills simultaneously (e.g., content-based instruction) so that learners can convey and interpret a message via written or spoken modalities (Grapin, 2019; McKay & Brown, 2016). Thus, to facilitate the learning of Social Sciences, it becomes necessary for teachers to develop and make use of strategies that are democratic and equitable but are also effective for learners with different learning styles and needs.

In addition, the teacher has to ensure that the lesson is interpretable and clear to learners by using appropriate teaching strategies which will enable learners to meet desired lesson outcomes. Jones (1996) emphasizes that allowing the interaction between learners and teachers can lead to the negotiation of meaning and offers a more effective way of assisting learners' comprehension. However, restricting the language can decrease their participation, especially those who are not competent enough in English, as they are discouraged from expressing themselves well. Mutasa (2007) suggests that if learners do not understand the language used in teaching, it indicates that they do not and cannot receive an education. Probyn (2018) and Singh (2010) stipulate that within South African schools, the change from mother-tongue education to English created many challenges as many learners did not have sufficient proficiency in English to cope with the syllabus.

Researchers have advocated using more than one language for learning and teaching in other contexts. For example, Makalela (2019), Garcia (2009), and Williams (1996) agree that translanguaging is a more effective means of learning. They further argue that translanguaging is not only a way to scaffold instruction and make sense of learning and language; it is part of a meta-discursive regime that students in the twenty-first century must perform (Garcia, 2011). Reyes's (2018) study suggests that by adopting translanguaging in their classroom practice, teachers could improve learner understanding, thus enabling increased learner participation. Furthermore, Perfecto (2020) pinpoints various translanguaging strategies that teachers may use, such as direct translation, code-switching, metalinguistic comparison, and metalinguistic explanation, promoting active learner participation during the lesson. Gatil (2020) 's qualitative literature review study primarily focusing on translanguaging strategies of teachers in teaching English in the Philippines revealed that translanguaging, especially amongst language teachers, is flourishing in their classroom practice; however, it still requires to be established as a teaching pedagogy.

This paper, therefore, reports findings from a study that examined the use of translanguaging in the Social Sciences classroom and to ascertain whether or not the use of translanguaging can yield positive results in terms of strengthening and improving the teaching and learning of Social Sciences. We hypothesised that:

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