

# TRANSLANGUAGING IN ENGLISH-NEPALI BILINGUAL SPACE IN UNIVERSITY-LEVEL ENGLISH READING INSTRUCTION

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**Abstract:** Framed within pedagogical translanguaging, this qualitative case study explored university teachers' translanguaging practices in the bilingual space in English reading instruction. Data were gathered through class observations and semi-structured interviews with four teachers instructing English reading courses in the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) program at a university in Nepal. Analysis reveals teachers' heteroglossic awareness that inspired them to embed the translanguaging strategy in reading instruction despite the university's monolingual orientation. Perceived as the irreducible fabric of bi/multilingual classrooms, English-Nepali translanguaging was integrated into reading lessons for different purposes, such as, to orient students to texts, enhance students' access to text content and language, and optimize reader-text interaction and collaborative meaning construction. The study highlights how teachers can leverage students' bi/multilingual resources to compensate for and complement their emergent meaning-making and meaning-sharing processes in English reading. These findings imply that idealized monolingual instructional practices commonly promoted through conventional approaches and methods are to be revisited and the role of learners' prior and emergent linguistic repertoires is to be repositioned in EFL contexts. The study sees the need for further exploration of the translanguaging praxis in EFL contexts to institutionally validate the deployment of bi/multilingual resources for learning enhancement.

**Keywords:** bilingual space, collaborative meaning construction, English reading instruction, translanguaging

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Scholarship on ESL/EFL pedagogy has convincingly articulated the primacy of reading skill in students' overall academic performance (e.g., Grabe & Stoller, 2011; Krashen 2004; Rafi &

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Morgan, 2022). Reading occupies a pivotal role in ESL/EFL programs since written texts form the major source of language and knowledge input and models for writing, especially in contexts where students' exposure to English is rather limited (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Considering this contextual reality, English language curricula in Nepal, like in many other EFL contexts, have emphasized the reading component to develop students' language skills and content knowledge. Accordingly, reading holds a prominent place in the English curricula at both Faculties of Humanities and Education within Tribhuvan University Nepal (Adhikari & Poudel, 2020). This study concerns the case of English reading instruction in the Bachelor of English Education (B.Ed.) program within the Faculty of Education (FOE), where two of us (first and second authors) have been engaged for two decades in designing reading courses and course materials and instructing them.

The Faculty of Education within Tribhuvan University is the nation's pioneering and biggest teacher education institution with 26 constituent campuses and 590 affiliated colleges (FOE, 2024, Sep. 30). The current B.Ed. English program has a country-wide coverage that runs in all the constituent campuses and colleges within FOE. This program offers four reading-focused courses along with other ten English-major specializations. The courses comprise authentic readings from different disciplines and adopt a content-based approach to developing prospective English teachers' reading proficiency and content knowledge. They espouse the basic premise of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) that the integration of language and content yields better learning outcomes (Villabona & Cenoz, 2021). In terms of their means and goals, the reading courses are language-driven CLIL (i.e. learning language through content), as their primary goal is to develop reading skills through content drawn from interdisciplinary areas (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Since the program's principal aim is to enhance students' English reading proficiency, it presupposes English as the sole or dominant medium of instruction. Despite English being positioned as the *de facto* medium of academic affairs, the instructional setting of Nepal's higher education is characteristically multilingual where in practice English co-exists and even competes with Nepali and other local languages (Adhikari, 2020). Consequently, the simultaneous and fluid use of English with Nepali in teaching content and language subjects is common, which has the potential to open up a fertile bilingual space for translanguaging (Adhikari & Poudel, 2023; Linn et al. 2021). The present study is situated within Nepal's bi/multilingual context of higher education which serves as a representative case of the pedagogical enterprise in English-dominated bi/multilingual contexts.

The current study is based on the premise that L2 reading is fundamentally a translingual performance occurring within a bilingual context, where text-reader interaction is mediated by the reader's pre-existing and evolving cultural, cognitive, linguistic, and textual resources (Grabe, 2009). Pedagogical practices that primarily require bi/multilingual learners to interact with texts monolingually cannot leverage these resources, thereby limiting the potential to achieve optimal learning outcomes. It is neither realistic nor desirable to expect bi/multilingual students as readers to interact with texts monolingually, keeping pre-existing resources at bay. This perspective suggests that bilinguals' reading performance is less likely to be monolingual. Hence, the exploration of bi-/multilingual dimensions of L2 reading instruction, a relatively underexplored area, particularly in Nepal's ESL/EFL context, deserves greater attention. The present study seeks to answer the following interrelated research questions:

- a) What translanguaging practices are used by university teachers in English reading instruction?
- b) What inspires the teachers to adopt such practices in reading lessons?

### **Translanguaging in Reading Instruction**

A growing body of scholarship has recognized translanguaging as an undeniable reality of multilingual classroom settings and celebrated its pedagogical potential to create a supportive and transformative learning environment for bi/multilingual students (Cenoz & Gorter, 2022; Galante, 2020; Garcia, 2009; Hopewell, 2011; Lewis et al. 2012; Makalela, 2015; Vaish & Subhan, 2014). For instance, Hopewell's (2011) study reported that reading lessons with English-Spanish bilingual spaces optimized learning opportunities for school-level Spanish-English speaking students, whereas English-only lessons stifled the students' ability to read, process, and discuss texts. Vaish and Subhan's (2014) study in Singapore highlighted the scaffolding function of translanguaging for primary school students with low achievement in reading. Their study showed that the incorporation of translanguaging-embedded teacher's talk enhanced content comprehension, facilitated the learning of key vocabulary items, and made the classroom environment more student-centered and engaging.

Another study from a South African context has asserted translanguaging as a powerful vehicle for bi/multilingual students to gain epistemic access to text content, enhancing and deepening reading comprehension when the language of input (Sepedi, students' home language) was juxtaposed with the language of output (English, the target language) (Makalela, 2015). Barlett (2018) reported the positive impact of translanguaging-embedded instruction on Japanese university students' academic reading performance. As reported, students supported with translanguaging instruction scored higher in content retention and motivation in reading than those receiving English monolingual instruction. Rafi and Morgan's (2022) study in Bangladesh revealed the multifaceted benefits of translanguaging for Bangla-English students that a bilingual space within reading lessons maximized students' comprehension of complicated English texts and expanded multilingual vocabularies.

Notwithstanding the benefits of translanguaging in reading instruction as reported consistently in the studies conducted in different contexts, some studies have also called for a critical reexamination of its use in second language teaching programs, especially concerning students' L2 proficiency (Allard, 2017; Lyster, 2019; Qureshi & Aljanadbah, 2022). Despite this, increasing research evidence in applied linguistics suggests the positive impacts of translanguaging, especially by empowering bi/multilingual students through recognizing and building on their linguistic resources.

### **Theoretical Considerations**

As a practical theory of language, translanguaging accounts for bi/multilinguals' flexible and fluid languaging in a bi/multilingual space to achieve communicative ends (Baker, 2011; Blackledge & Creese, 2014; Garcia & Leiva, 2014; Li, 2018). It espouses the heteroglossic language ideology (Blackledge & Creese, 2014; MacSwan, 2017) that acknowledges the simultaneous presence of different named languages in bi/multilingual's language performance

(Busch, 2014). Bi/multilinguals possess a translanguaging instinct to fluidly navigate across named languages, exploiting diverse semiotic resources constituted in their repertoires as an integrated system (Canagarajah, 2011; Garcia & Li, 2014; Li, 2018). Language systems are inherently complex, dynamic, and porous, leading to transgressive language practices that transcend boundaries and blend resources from different named languages. (García, 2009; García & Li, 2014; Makalela, 2015; Prinsloo, 2023). Therefore, monoglossic understandings of languages as separate, bounded and sealed entities are unhelpful for bi/multilinguals (Canagarajah, 2011; Li, 2018; Schissel et al., 2018). Heteroglossic or integrated theoretical orientations to language use have direct implications for classroom instruction in bi/multilingual settings such as Nepal. Studies in bi/multilingual educational contexts have demonstrated that translanguaging has been a commonly practiced and more naturalized classroom phenomenon for both teachers and students (Canagarajah, 2011; Li 2018; Lopez et al., 2017). They have also revealed that translanguaging increases students' participation in learning and their access to content (Baker, 2011; Garcia & Li, 2014). Bi/multilingual students tend to translanguage to support their understandings in one language with the aid of the other and to expand and enhance their understandings and existing language practices (Garcia & Kano, 2014). Strategically motivated, teacher translanguaging is reported to serve multiple pedagogical functions, which include, among others, involving students in tasks, enabling them to articulate their voices, clarifying academic concepts, reinforcing learning, managing classrooms and clarifying tasks, and extending and asking questions (Garcia & Leiva, 2014; Lewis et al., 2012).

Translanguaging has been increasingly recognized as a viable instructional approach in CLIL (e.g., Cenoz & Gorter, 2022; Lin & Lo, 2017; Setyaningrum et al., 2022) for its potential to support students in accessing, processing, and (re)producing text content. CLIL lessons aim to develop students' language and content knowledge often in a balanced way through the instructional process that includes, among others, dialogic talk, negotiation of meaning, activation of existing epistemic and language resources, and scaffolding (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). The efficacy of CLIL-based reading courses, like the ones discussed in this article, depends largely on students' ability to access and process reading texts, as content comprehension appears to be a major challenge for students in CLIL lessons (Villabona & Cenoz, 2021). The incorporation of translanguaging has been reported as a viable approach to mitigating this challenge as it contributes to maximizing students' engagement with reading texts, leading to improved content comprehension and production (Cenoz & Gorter, 2022).

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design and Context**

The study utilized a case study design, in which B.Ed. English reading instruction was taken as a case. As indicated above the B.Ed. English teacher education program places a strong emphasis on the reading component, recognizing its crucial role in enhancing students' overall academic skills. The reading component is also the base for students' writing skills, eventually impacting positively on their performance in other content courses. The insights gained from the study of English reading instruction of the B.Ed. students are expected to inform the pedagogy

of other related courses. As a research site, we selected a constituent campus of a university in Nepal located in a multilingual urban setting in the capital city of Kathmandu. The campus runs B.Ed. and Master of Education (M.Ed.) programs in different subjects, including English Education. The current B.Ed. English Education curriculum of the institution offers four reading courses, one per academic year, each taught by a different teacher. The researchers' long involvement in the same institution enabled them to build better rapport with the teacher participants and have in-depth experience on how reading classes are run.

### **Participants**

The participants included four purposively selected university teachers teaching B.Ed. reading courses at the selected campus. One teacher was selected from each academic year. All teachers identified themselves as multilinguals with Nepali as their mother tongue. Table 1 presents the profiles of teacher participants:

**Table 1.** The profiles of teacher participants

<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Course taught</b>	<b>Nature of course</b>	<b>Highest degree earned</b>	<b>Self-perceived language proficiency</b>	<b>Teaching experience</b>
Teacher 1	Literature for Language Development	Literary	M.Phil. (English Education)	Nepali, English, Sanskrit	5 years
Teacher 2	Critical Readings in English	Interdisciplinary (literary, academic, journalistic)	Master's (English literature)	Nepali, English, Hindi	5 years
Teacher 3	General English	Interdisciplinary (literary and general)	MPhil (English Education)	Nepali English, Hindi	6 years
Teacher 4	Expanding Horizons in English	Interdisciplinary (academic and literary)	Master's (English Education)	Nepali, English and Hindi	10 years

The classes comprised 30 students on average. Like the teachers, the students identified themselves as multilinguals. Although students were from several mother tongue backgrounds, they reported Nepali as their language of habitual use, perhaps because all had Nepali-medium school education.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The data were gathered through class observation and interviews. We employed class observations to examine the teachers' use of translanguaging in reading lessons and semi-structured interviews to explore their views and voices on translanguaging practices. Seven reading lessons of each teacher were observed using a pre-developed observation scheme, and each class was audio-recorded and accompanied by narrative field notes and the

researchers' reflections (see Appendix 1). Having observed 28 lessons, we felt empirically confident that we had sufficient observation data to answer the research questions (Dornyei, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 2017). After the observation of the third lesson, each teacher was interviewed at their workplace for about 45 minutes to elicit their views on translanguaging practices such as their classroom decision-making (see Appendix 2). The interviews were held in English-Nepali mixed medium as per the comfort of the interviewees.

The data obtained in English were transcribed and those obtained in Nepali/English-Nepali were translated, coded, and thematized collaboratively. The authors engaged in an iterative process of coding and recoding the data, to establish a higher level of reliability in meaning-making. The authors collaborated in strengthening findings and discussion of the findings in relation to the literature. The consent for the study was obtained from the campus as well as from all the individual participants. To maintain anonymity, the name of the campus within Tribhuvan University and personal information about study participants have been nullified.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the data revealed the interweaving of translanguaging in all phases of reading lessons. Although the extent of translanguaging differed across lessons, the teachers were found to engage in creating a bilingual space for translanguaging in reading lessons, intending to support and optimize students' interaction with texts. The findings of this study have been reported thematically, drawing primarily on the observation and interview data.

### Translanguaging for Text Orientation

The teachers translanguaged frequently to engage students in different text-orienting activities intending to arouse students' interest in texts, to prime them with new knowledge and more importantly, to activate their existing knowledge and language resources. Embedding translanguaging in text-orienting activities offered cognitive and affective benefits for students. Activities such as talking about the previous lesson, pre-teaching of keywords, and talking about the author and the title assessed and/or activated students' schematic knowledge, further providing necessary cognitive support for lesson comprehension. Similarly, activities such as teacher-student informal talk about the topic, singing, cracking jokes, and picture-based discussion prepared students affectively by setting the mood for the text. Table 2 illustrates translanguaging featured in text-orienting activities and their intended purpose.

**Table 2.** Translanguaging embedded in text-orientating activities

Activity	Observed instances of translanguaging	Purpose
1) Pre-teaching of key words	Teacher 2: Gender equality (लैंगिक समानता), discrimination (विभेद), patriarchy (पितृसत्ता) (Lesson 3)	To prime students with new knowledge.
2) Song	Teacher 1: हिजो देखि आज बल्ल भेट भयो]. [We saw each other only after yesterday.] Do you remember this song?	To make the learning environment enjoyable

Activity	Observed instances of translanguaging	Purpose
	Students: No sir. (Lesson 5)	and make a connection with the topic.
3) Picture and questions	Teacher 1: Look at the slide. यस्तो चरा देख्नु भएको छ [Have you ever seen this bird?] (Lesson 1)	To arouse students' interest and activate their existing knowledge.
4) Asking about the previous lesson	Teacher 4: Where did we leave off yesterday? याद छ हिजो के पढ्यौं हामिले ? [ Do you remember what we studied yesterday?] (Lesson 4 )	To connect the present lesson with the previous one.
5) Talking about the author	Teacher 3: तपाईंहरूले ओशोको नाम सुन्नु भएको छ ? [Have you heard about Osho?] He was an Indian philosopher. (Lesson 2) Students: No.	To assess students' knowledge of the author
6) Talking about the title	Teacher 4: Have you watched the movie Numafung? S: No. T: नुमाफुङ। लिम्बु भाषाको चर्चित फिल्म हो । [Numafung is a famous Limbu-language movie.] नबिन सुब्बाले direction गरेको [Directed by Nabin Subba] It is a wonderful movie about Limbu culture. (Lesson: 4)	To assess students' relevant knowledge about the topic

Table 2 shows lesson-opening reading activities that integrated teacher-initiated translanguaging. As can be seen, the teachers drew on Nepali, the students' shared habitual language of use, mainly to prepare them for upcoming reading performance. These translanguaging-embedded activities serve the functions of motivating students to engage with the text (e.g., through songs), activating and/assessing their existing knowledge (e.g., talking about the author and title), and equipping them with lexical resources necessary for understanding the text (e.g., pre-teaching of keywords). For instance, in Activity 1, the teacher wrote keywords (e.g., gender equality, discrimination, patriarchy) on the board and asked the students if they knew the meanings. Acknowledging the students' partially correct responses, the teacher translated the words into Nepali and explained their meanings in English. Here, translation primes the students with new lexical information which serves as lexical scaffolding for them to access text content. Such practices support the previous studies that learning new vocabulary is intimately connected with the learner's prior linguistic resources facilitating cognitive processes in meaning-making (Nation & Nation, 2001; Vaish & Subhan, 2014). Likewise, in Activity 6 (Talking about Title), Teacher 4 initiated a conversation in English to activate and/or assess students' knowledge about the movie before engaging them with the movie review titled 'Numafung: A beautiful flower'. When the students showed a lack of knowledge, the teacher promptly switched to the Nepali language to provide basic information about the movie and then transitioned back to English to offer additional information. About this fluid move across languages, Teacher 4 in the post-observation interview said, "I often use Nepali when I have to facilitate my students quickly to enter the text content and to relate it with

their existing knowledge and experiences” (translated text). This teacher's simultaneous use of Nepali and English echoes Wu and Lin’s (2019) position on translanguaging as the dynamic and functionally integrated use of different languages in the construction of knowledge.

In other teacher-student triadic dialogues like this, teachers and students seemed to be hardly aware that they were deploying linguistic resources from across two syntactically incompatible and culturally distant named languages. These bilinguals’ use of communicative resources from their dynamic and functionally integrated communicative repertoire in meaning-making is a strong instance of translanguaging (Blackledge & Creese, 2014; Wu & Lin, 2019). In this study, the teachers’ intentional move to students’ home language resources offers the students cognitive support to enter the unfamiliar terrain of the text. As the teachers recounted, the use of Nepali in greeting, cracking jokes, and chatting with students makes the classroom environment less formal, less intimidating and more interactive (Teacher 1, Teacher 4), creating a supportive atmosphere for upcoming reader-text interaction. The teachers’ use of Nepali in praising and encouraging students, invoking their experiences, and building rapport with them is an instance of the affective role of translanguaging (Vaish & Subhan, 2014). The teachers also asserted that the integration of Nepali in English reading lessons contributed to the contextualization and personalization of English texts.

### **Translanguaging-embedded Activities for Enhancing Access to Content**

The teachers noted content accessibility as the most prioritized aspect of university English reading instruction. To facilitate students to access the content of English texts, the teachers used translanguaging frequently and consistently, which was also valued by students. Table 3 presents teachers’ embedding of translanguaging in reading activities to enhance students' access to English text content.

**Table 3.** Activities used to enhance students’ access to text content

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Observed instances of translanguaging</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
1) Digging into the title	Teacher 4: What is ‘ethnic’ in Nepali? Students: जात, जनजाती,, जाती अल्पसंख्यक समुदाय ... (Lesson 6)	To assess, activate, and clarify a complex concept.
2) Content explanation	It means a child’s all-round development बालबालिकाको सर्वांगीण विकास भन्छ नि नेपालीमा ...	To simplify and deliver text content to students.

In Activity 1 (Digging into the title), Teacher 4 leveraged students’ pre-existing linguistic and cognitive resources in understanding the content that students found cognitively challenging. After writing on the board the title of the essay: Who is ‘ethnic’? and underlining the word ‘ethnic’, the teacher asked the students in English about its meaning and waited for their responses, likely expecting them to answer in English as well. As no response came from the class, he asked them if they knew the meaning of the word in Nepali. Teacher-student interaction unfolded as:

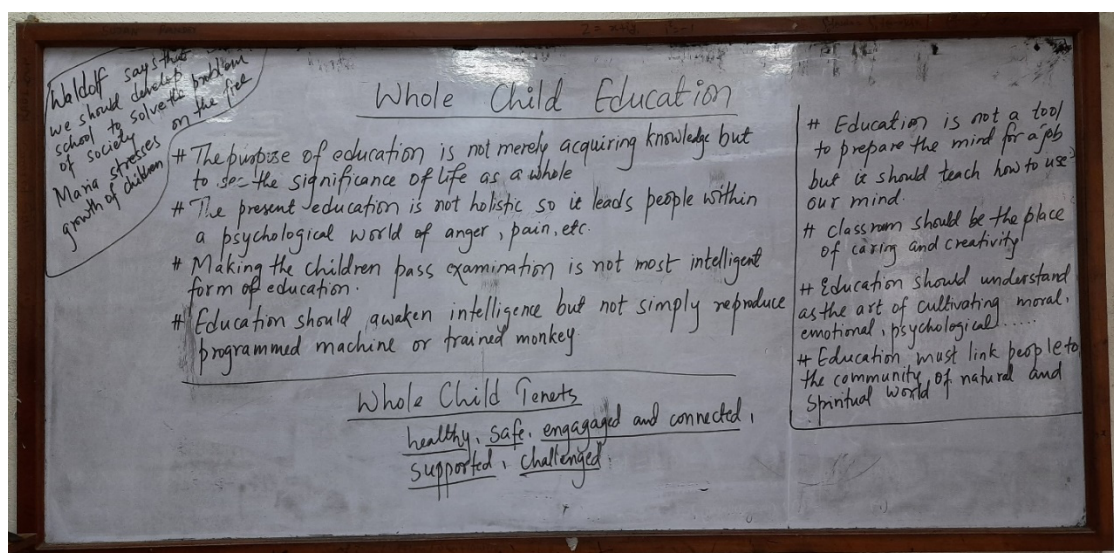


- Teacher : What do you mean by ‘ethnic’?  
Students : (No response)  
Teacher : Do you know what ‘ethnic’ means in Nepali?  
Student 1 : जात?  
Teacher : जात means caste. Very close, but not exactly.  
Student 2 : Umm, जनजाती, right?  
Teacher : You’re right. For example?  
Students (in chorus) : Magar, Rai, Limbu.

As the teacher asked the students to answer in Nepali, those who were silent a moment ago engaged actively in the dialogic negotiation of meaning. The translanguaged exchanges facilitated students to delve into the conceptually complex term, which is laden with multiple interpretations. After writing the elicited Nepali words on the board, the teacher engaged the class in the back translation of each word into English and discussed their meanings in relation to ‘ethnic’. They finally agreed upon जनजाती as the semantically and contextually closest for the English word, ‘ethnic’. The use of back translation in reading lessons is marked for its “pedagogical potential to enhance higher order cognitive reading skills among the EFL students” (Bhooth et al., 2014, p.82). Clarifying the central concept in Nepali, the teacher instructed the students to read the first paragraph and share their understanding of “what is ethnic” in English or Nepali. The activity shows how students’ home language lexical resources can compensate for and complement their weaker lexical knowledge in the emergent language, further revealing interdependence and interaction between semiotic resources across named languages (O’Halloran, 1999). The teacher’s use of students’ pre-existing linguistic and cognitive resources leverages cross-linguistic connections to deepen and widen their understandings of the concepts (Hopewell, 2011). This critical translanguaging instance opened up an interactional opportunity for students who would otherwise remain silent mostly because of inadequate linguistic resources for interaction in English. By allowing students to use the language they feel the most comfortable with, the teachers helped them “take cognitive and acquisition advantages” (Rafi & Morgan, 2022, p. 9). Because of the teachers’ emphasis on content accessibility, content explanation dominated the reading lessons. Presenting key points in English on the board (see Figure 1) and explaining them in English-Nepali translanguaging was found to be a dominant mode of teaching.

In Lesson 13, Teacher 1 presented the gist of Weldolf’s essay, ‘Whole Child Education’ in points and explained it through English-Nepali translanguaging:

Whole child education means a child’s all-round development (pauses and seems to be reading some of the students’ confused faces) बालबालिकाको सर्वांगीण विकास भन्छ नि नेपालीमा The author has presented some key features of whole child education. (Referring to the first point) Good education should support our lives as a whole. खाली ज्ञान दिने मात्र होइन । जागिर खाने मात्र बनाउने होइन। (*Class observation excerpt*)



**Figure 1.** Lesson Content for Translanguaging-embedded Explanation

In clarifying the essay's key concepts written in English, the teacher engaged in the interlingual meaning-making process by translating English phrases into Nepali (e.g., *child's all-round development* as *बालबालिकाको सर्वांगीण विकास*). First, he approached the concepts monolingually through the intralingual meaning-making process by restating, for example, 'whole child education' as 'child's all-round development' and then he instantly restated the meaning through interlingual resources (i.e. Nepali). In the second instance of translanguaging, he deployed Nepali linguistic resources both to restate English content (e.g. not only acquiring knowledge as *खाली ज्ञान दिने मात्र होइन*) and to expand it (e.g. *जागिर खाने मात्र बनाउने होइन* [not only to prepare for jobs]). This shows how bi/multilingually aware and equipped teachers can utilize a bi/multilingual classroom setting as a translanguaging space to deploy students' linguistic resources in optimizing their access to complex content. This teacher's flexible and fluid deployment of English-Nepali linguistic resources suggests that instructional translanguaging practices can be instantaneous, intentional and responsive often driven by immediate pedagogical exigencies (Makalena 2015; Probyn 2019).

### Translanguaging for Collaborative Meaning Construction

Teacher 1 and Teacher 4 frequently engaged students in collaborative reading through Read, Discuss, Write and Share (RDWS), and Exploring Text Through Questions (ETQs) to facilitate their encounter with texts. In these activities, the teachers allowed students to choose their most comfortable language for interaction with peers. In RDWS, students working in groups read the assigned text or a part of the text individually, shared their understandings of the text in the group, and presented the answers to the class followed by whole-class

discussion. (Adhikari, 2010). The following task instruction exemplifies the integration of translanguaging into this activity:

Read the assigned stanza individually, discuss your ideas with your friends in the group and write down two sentences about the stanza. You can discuss in Nepali or English, but you need to share your answers with the class in English. (Teacher 1: *Class observation excerpt*)

Following the teacher's instruction, students in each group read the assigned stanza individually, discussed their views mostly in Nepali, and one of the members jotted down the negotiated answers in English. Then one member from each group shared the answers followed by teacher-initiated whole-class discussion that took place in an English-Nepali translanguaged environment where English-Nepali heteroglossic discussion continued. By offering students a language choice during discussion, the teacher recognized the bi/multilingual makeup of the classroom and appreciated students' bilingual repertoires in meaning-making and meaning-sharing processes (Blackage & Creese, 2014; Scibetta & Carbonara, 2020). About his translanguaging approach to the reading activity, the teacher stated,

Why limit students to English only? They can use Nepali and other local languages in the classroom. I think this helps them share their understanding of the text in a better manner. Most importantly, this encourages the students weak in English to participate in interaction. (Teacher 1)

Another teacher also reaffirmed this approach as "Teaching English is our destination, but other languages that support students' learning should not be overlooked while reaching this destination" (Teacher 4). By this, the teachers not only demonstrated their sensitivity to the multilingual ethos of their classrooms and openness to fluid multilingual practices as a means of facilitating English learning (Adhikari & Poudel, 2023). They also promoted multilingual repertoires at individual and collective levels for inclusive instruction (Scibetta & Carbonara 2020). Their translanguaging approach to reading instruction asserts the argument that bi/multilinguals' meaning-making potential should not be limited to the use of languages as discrete sets of linguistic resources (Blackage & Creese, 2014).

Inspired by the teachers' pro-translanguaging approach, students were also found to translanguage freely during task performance. The following extract from the conversation among students is prototypical:

Student 1 : (Upon reading the first stanza of the poem) What it means?

Student 2 : खै के [No idea].

Student 3 : चराको देश हुँदैन भनेको के. [Means birds have no country. ]

Student 4 : Oh, yes. Birds have no nations.

Student 1 : Yes, they are free ल, तिमी लेख न. [Now, you do write down.]

(Student 2 writes down the answer negotiated in the group)

This translanguaged classroom discourse demonstrates students' active engagement in the negotiation of meaning through linguistic and cognitive resources at their disposal. As Student 1 and Student 2 admitted their failure to understand the stanza, Student 3 gave its meaning in

Nepali, which was instantly translated into English by Student 4. Scaffolded with the information in Nepali and its English translation, Student 1 contributed to collaborative meaning-making by adding to the ideas of Students 3 and 4. As seen here, information generated in one language (students' stronger language) can serve as a scaffolding tool (Bhooth et al., 2013) for generating further information in another language (students' weaker language). This process also reveals how learners with stronger and weaker languages can collaborate to construct meaning from the text.

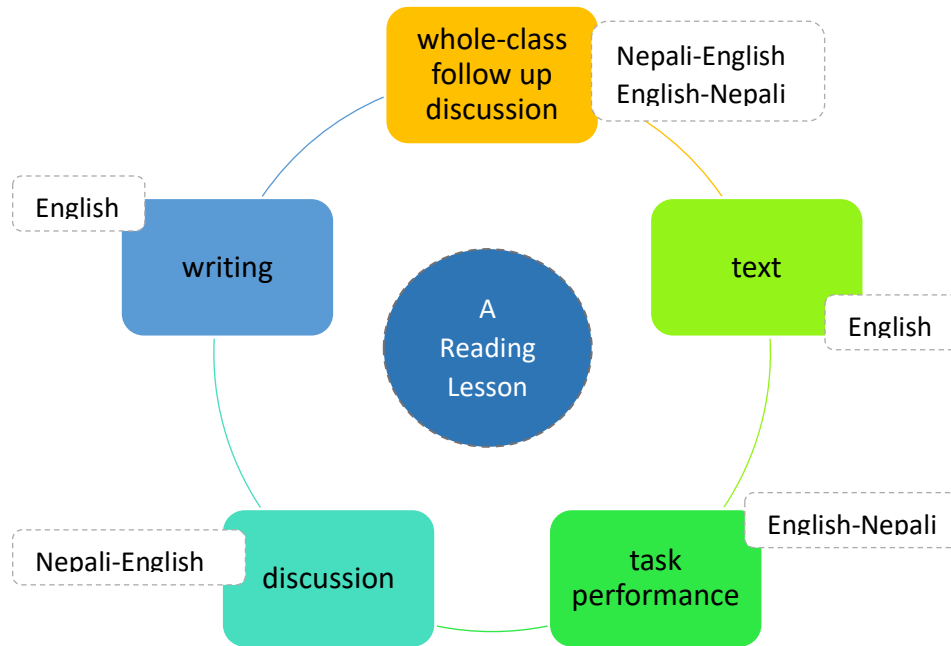
In another text-encounter activity, Exploring Text Through Questions (ETQs), the teacher (Teacher 4) divided comprehension-checking questions among different groups before they read the text. As instructed, each group discussed the questions mostly in Nepali, underlined the sentences in the text that contained the answers, and wrote the answers collaboratively. Subsequently, a group member presented the collaboratively formulated answers to the class in English. Here, the students were engaged in collaborative processing of English input (questions) through Nepali-dominated translanguaged discussion and shifted to English in producing and sharing the negotiated output in English. The teacher also frequently translanguaged in initiating, sustaining and monitoring discussion on question content. In this fluid alternation of languages in accessing and processing input and negotiating output, Nepali, students' language of habitual use, served as the language of negotiation and a tool for content clarification and generation, whereas English, students' emergent language, served as the language of input and a medium of output. The teacher explained his motive for embedding translanguaging in question-answer activity as,

If they understood questions, they would know what they have to seek in the text. As the saying goes- understanding a question is half an answer, I want my students to discuss the question content before they read the text. You know that they use Nepali far more than English in classroom discussion. Therefore, I tell them to use Nepali and English both to discuss the questions. (Teacher 4)

During lesson observations, it was also noted that when students were allowed to use familiar and emergent communicative resources from both languages, even those with limited English proficiency became more interactive, engaged, and responsive to the assigned reading tasks. In these text-encounter activities, such resources operated in a mutually supporting way in accessing and processing input and communicating the negotiated output. This process can schematically be conceptualized in a form of a translanguaging wheel (Figure 2).

Figure 2 illustrates English output through English-Nepali and Nepali-English translanguaging in approaching the text, engaging in the task, and participating in relevant discussions. It also exemplifies how two languages (Nepali and English in our case) can co-exist and interact within an English reading lesson, making up a functionally integrated synergetic whole. As Figure 2 shows, English dominated the receptive phase (reading the text) and productive phase (writing), whereas Nepali-English played a dominant role in the collaborative meaning construction and follow-up whole-class discussion. Allowing students to shuttle fluidly across the conventionally segregated named languages to access, process and share text content

can be recognized as a typical translanguaging approach to reading instruction (Garcia & Li, 2014; Makalela, 2015).



**Figure 2.** Translanguaging Wheel in English Reading Instruction

### **Compensatory and Complementary Functions of Translanguaging**

The use of translanguaging as a compensatory pedagogical tool emerged as a dominant theme in teachers' interviews. According to teachers, students' limited proficiency in English occasioned them to invoke students' home language resources. Teachers 2 and 3 in particular stressed the compensatory function of such resources that facilitated students to access, process and share text content. Teacher 2 noted,

Most of the students are so weak in English. Only a few of them can read and understand the prescribed texts. So, they expect me to tell the meanings of keywords and the gist of the lesson in Nepali.

This teacher's integration of Nepali linguistic resources in English reading lessons appeared to be driven by her awareness of students' home language as a teaching-learning resource (Cook, 2001) with its potential to compensate for struggling students' limited command of English. Teacher 3 recounted a similar experience that he used "Nepali in explaining key points written in English mainly for those students whose English is poor". The teacher let the class do the

same in carrying out collaborative reading activities so that the students with low English proficiency could participate in and contribute equally to collaborative meaning-making and meaning-sharing practices (Dunne, 2020). By this, the teachers recognized the scaffolding function of students' linguistic resources in processing complex concepts, and promoting students' participation in learning activities (García & Kano 2014; Swain & Lapkin, 2013). They allowed students to resort to their home language resources to compensate for their lack of adequate English knowledge and skills. Regarding his use of Nepali in English lessons, Teacher 3 stated, "If our students could understand everything in English, English-only is better." Other teachers also stated that English-only instruction would be preferable if their students were 'highly proficient' in English. However, the teachers at the same time admitted that English-only instruction is only ideal, and in the EFL context, it is far from reality (Morales et al., 2020). Deep down, they believed that English-only instruction could be used by minimizing or avoiding translanguaging once students develop a strong command of English for academic purposes. This view hinges on a flawed assumption of translanguaging as "a temporary discourse practice out of which people transition when they are fully bilingual" (Celic & Seltzer, 2013, p.2), failing to espouse the true spirit of translanguaging pedagogy. . This view Simultaneously, Teachers 1 and 4 recognized the complementary function of translanguaging viewing that Nepali and English language resources are intricately interwoven in ESL/EFL classroom discourse, co-existing and interacting subtly with each other. Teacher 1 remarked, "Students' home languages cannot be kept out of the classroom. You cannot say that this is an English class so leave the Nepali language outside. I see its presence in the classroom and in students' mind'." This view suggests that ESL/EFL students' emergent linguistic repertoires not only are inseparable from but also build upon their existing linguistic repertoires (Sayer, 2020), both operating in a shared space of the multilingual classroom setting. It was therefore impossible for this teacher to envision English-only classes, irrespective of his students' English proficiency.

In teachers' view, Nepali as students' "everyday lived language" (Garcia, 2017, p.18) serves better than English, the language of academic discourse, in communicating personal and local cultural experiences. Recognizing that a single language was insufficient to meet the diverse interactional and transactional needs of English-Nepali students in the classroom, the teachers welcomed, encouraged, and leveraged the classroom's diverse linguistic resources (Hopewell, 2011) to enhance students' interaction with English texts.

### **Tensions in Embedding Translanguaging in English Reading Instruction**

The teachers in this study recognized students' translanguaging skills as a valuable meaning-making resource, thereby creating a dynamic bilingual space for them (Poza, 2019) in English reading classes. As reflected in the observation and interview data, the teachers perceived English reading classroom as a bilingual space (Gallagher, 2020) and frequently translanguaged and allowed their students to do the same for varied purposes, such as introducing and clarifying unfamiliar concepts, drawing students' attention (Teacher 2), helping students relate different contents and contexts to their personal and cultural experiences (Teachers 1 and 4), addressing the language needs of students with low English proficiency (Teachers 2 and 3), making classroom discussion more inclusive and informal. and maximizing

students' participation in classroom reading activities (Teachers 1 and 4). Despite this, the teachers were found to confine translanguaging almost virtually to reading processes, minimizing its presence in students' reading products.

In production-focused reading activities such as RDWS (Teachers 1 and 4) and comprehension-checking questions (Teachers 1, 2, and 4), students were encouraged or even instructed to present their oral or written answers only in English. In giving task instructions, Teacher 1, for instance, clearly stated that the students could discuss the task in any language they felt comfortable with, but they were to write and present answers in English (see Figure 2). Although the teacher created a translanguaging space to allow students to deploy their full linguistic repertoires in the meaning-making and meaning-sharing process (Blackage & Creese, 2014; Garcia & Li, 2014), this space was almost entirely limited during the production phase. Espousing the heteroglossic translanguaging view of language practices, the process dimension of the lesson celebrated the fluidity, hybridity, and multivoicedness of language practices offered by the bi/multilingual classroom context. However, teachers' restriction on language choice specifically in written production was influenced by pervasive and persistent monolingual ideologies of language separation, purity, and English supremacy in the demonstration of academic content knowledge and language skills (Li & Martin, 2009; Poudel et al., 2022; Sembiente & Tian, 2020). In assessing students' understanding of the lesson, Teacher 2 translanguaged the question (*Gender role का बारेमा के बझ भो भन्नु त?* [Please tell me what you understood about the role of gender]), but she instructed the student, who was trying to answer in translanguaged form, as:

Wait, Wait. Please try to answer in English. I use Nepali to help you understand the lesson, but you must try to answer the questions in English. You need to practice answering in English. (Teacher 2: *Class observation excerpt*)

Despite recognizing the comprehension-facilitative role of translanguaging, this teacher displayed a monoglossic bias by encouraging students not to translanguage in production activities. Such a monoglossic orientation conflicted with the fluid and disbordered language practices of multilingual classrooms as evidenced in teachers' content delivery and classroom interactions. Several factors such as the curricular goal of preparing students for English exclusive medium in examination and students' ideology that too much use of other language resources in English classrooms deteriorates their English performance exerted monoglossic pressure on teachers (Adhikari & Poudel, 2023; Schissel et al., 2021). As a result, the teachers experienced a conflict between leveraging the classroom's diverse linguistic resources to facilitate students to access and process content and language and curtailing the presence of such resources in their learning outcomes. Teachers' gravitation towards English-only medium of production/performance further reveals heteroglossic-monoglossic tensions they experience in everyday multilingual classroom settings. Previous studies have also reported the dominance of monolingual injunction on end-product, i.e., requiring students to produce oral/written product in the target language despite teachers' and students' recognition of the pedagogical contribution of translanguaging to learning processes, including student engagement and motivation, and

content and language clarification (Allard, 2017; Li & Martin, 2009; Lyster, 2019; Qureshi & Aljanadbah, 2022).

As also indicated above, the English-prioritized end-product view of teachers was found to be inspired by the university's monoglossic assessment system requiring students to demonstrate their content knowledge and language skills exclusively in English (Adhikari & Poudel, 2023). The teachers in the present study felt that it was their duty to prepare the students for the English-only examination, which further revealed conflict and tension between heteroglossic centrifugal force of bi/multilingual classrooms and the monoglossic centripetal force of the examination system. The teachers' experiences of being squeezed between monoglossic and heteroglossic orientations might have also emerged from other ideological forces such as the maximum target language exposure fallacy (Phillipson, 2007) and teaching English in English that nullifies the possibility of using students' bi/multilingual resources in English learning (Choi & Poudel, 2024; Freeman et al., 2015; Kuchah & Milligan, 2024). The English language teachers espousing a heteroglossic orientation often face the monolingual bias that propagates the fallacy that exclusive immersion in English increases students' exposure to English, yielding better results (Phillipson, 2007). Likewise, the teachers also held an opinion that their frequent use of the Nepali language might lead the students to doubt their capacity to teach English courses in English. This shows that the teachers probably felt pressure to ensure their epistemic credibility (Kotzee, 2017) as English language teachers.

## **CONCLUSION**

This article reported the translanguaging practice in English reading instruction in the university context of Nepal. The study found that both university teachers and students were proactively engaged in translanguaging in dealing with English texts. The teachers translanguaged frequently and consistently in optimizing students' engagement with a reading text and the students deployed the available bilingual resources in negotiating the meaning of the text content. Valuing and utilizing the Nepali-English bilingual space, both teachers and students engaged in the fluid use of languages as an impactful scaffolding in approaching and processing the language and content of English reading texts. The observation and interview data confirmed that translanguaging-embedded reading instruction facilitates students' interaction with texts and enhances their participation in meaning-making and meaning-sharing processes despite the curricular goals that intend them to be engaged in English-only reading, both in processing information and language production. The teachers' allowance of English-Nepali translanguaging in English reading lessons appeared to avail students of greater opportunities in accessing, processing and communicating both language and content. This process not only compensated for students' emergent English language reading proficiency but also complemented their learning of the content in English monolingual texts. Narratives of teachers revealed that deploying diverse linguistic resources in classrooms supports students as readers affectively as well as cognitively, enhancing their access to text content and language and deepening their comprehension. In this sense, translanguaging offered cognitive and acquisition advantages to Nepali-English bilingual students. The findings also imply that fluid



linguaging is an undeniable feature of EFL/ESL contexts with its potential to create a fertile space for the interactive process of meaning-making.

The teachers in this study appeared to be aware of the insufficiency of one single language to cater to Nepali-English students' diverse interactional and transactional needs in classrooms and this awareness enabled them to invoke and leverage students' diverse linguistic resources. The teachers' awareness reaffirms the logic of heteroglossic translanguaging that foregrounds mutual interdependence and enhancement of languages (Proctor et al., 2017). The findings of the study expand the existing literature that translanguaging could be a viable pedagogy in bi/multilingual educational contexts. Although this study found that translanguaging has been a matter of everyday instructional praxis in teaching English, a more transformative policy response integrating this praxis into curricular guidelines would bring it into mainstream education ultimately benefiting all the students in content and language learning. Institutionalizing translanguaging practice will provide students with shared spaces to utilize their actual and potential linguistic and epistemic resources in interaction with texts, peers and teachers. As this study focused on exploring translanguaging praxis in English reading instruction through observation and interviews, a further study could be conducted to assess the impact of translanguaging-embedded activities on students' reading performance.

#### **DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest regarding the research, authorship and publication of this article.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1. A Sample of Reflection Notes

#### Reflection note - 13

Subject: <u>6. English for B.ed. 8th year</u>	<u>Sunday,</u>
Teacher: <u>Teacher 1</u>	<u>9:00-9:45am.</u>
Academic Year: <u>1st year B.ed, 2023</u>	

**Reflective notes**

Teacher's lesson starting in English, with a topic written on the board in English followed by Nepali equivalent saying 'सिक्ने छु कि?' OKAY? shows an initial instance of translanguaging in the classroom. The teacher switches to Nepali to explain the points in English probably to ensure content accessibility. Teacher questioning in English but welcoming answer in English-Nepali seems to promote student's engagement in classroom discussion.

## **Appendix 2.** Post-lesson Interview Questions

These questions were framed based on the classroom observation data.

- Which language do you usually use as a medium of instruction in your class?
- Do you use languages other than English in English reading lessons? If yes/no, why?
- We noticed you mixing Nepali with English in the classroom. Why is it necessary?
- Don't your students think that you as an English teacher should teach in English? Why do you keep using Nepali along with English?
- Do you tell your students that you will use Nepali when necessary? If yes, why do you think this is necessary?
- Are you aware that our course/English program assumes that English should be taught in English?
- Does the mixing of Nepali with English have a negative impact on students' English learning?
- Why did you translate English words into Nepali for your students? What motivated you?
- When do you mix Nepali with English? Is it good to do so?
- Why did you use Nepali to summarize the story?
- It was observed that you often began your lesson by greeting and cracking jokes in Nepali. Why did you do that?
- If you remember, you told your students to discuss in English or Nepali during the groupwork but to present their answers in English. Why?