

An Investigation into Arab Students' Translanguaging of Turkish Language

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Abstract: *The purpose of this research was to investigate how Arab students acquire Turkish language at the TÖMER center of Istanbul Aydin University. This research tackled difficulties of Turkish-Arabic translanguaging and attitudes of the participants were reported and supported by examples. The study engaged 34 participants with ages ranging between 18- 25. The focus of the research was centered on the fact that a lot of students encounter misspelling and mispronunciation problems because of the similarity between Turkish and Arabic vocabularies and pronunciations. For this reason, we worked on answering the following research questions: To which extent are the students practicing the Turkish- Arabic translanguaging technique? What kind of obstacles do the students encounter when they practice translanguaging? In order to collect the data, the participants were to fill in a survey comprising several language-relevant questions. The survey question solicited general information about the participants, questioned their speaking difficulties and then probed their aptitude for the encountered obstacles in their trials to communicate in Turkish. The findings indicated that student translanguaging has turned to be a kind of code-mixing. Moreover, it was deduced that translanguaging was facilitated but confused by the similarity between both languages Arabic and Turkish, and thus, many students were resorting to the strategy of recontextualization.*

Keywords: Translanguaging, second language acquisition, code-switching, bilingualism, multilingualism

1. Introduction

In the last few decades, it was important for second/foreign language (hereafter L2) learners to forget all about their mother tongue (hereafter L1) and focus only on the target language. However, in the last ten years, there has been a strong movement to put the L1 and L2 together in a productive technique called "translanguaging": "the ability of multilingual speakers to shuttle between languages, treating the diverse languages that form their repertoire as an integrated system" (Canagarajah, 2011, p.401). Translanguaging is the use of one's full linguistic repertoire, a way of teaching pedagogy that allows children to read in one language and discuss or write in another, even if teachers do not know the L1 of their students. The main purpose is using all accessible linguistic resources to make meaning (Garcia, 2016). As Garcia puts forward, translanguaging is not solely a technique or social practice but also a linguistic theory that poses a mental grammar shaped through social interaction and negotiation and this kind of socialization of multilinguals arises competences through their contacting practices (2016).

The importance of illuminating students' translanguaging technique is accompanied by the significance of identifying a few language barriers that many students are not able to overcome. Since L2 learners at early stages might not have developed an autonomous learning technique, they might not be able to understand the process by which they receive input of L2 codes but understand them in their L1 and then produce the outcome codes again in L2. It happens that sometimes L2 learners produce a kind of mixed sentence between L1 and L2 to compensate for unknown words so they might resort to speak and write in the simplest way. This sometimes may occur sneakily behind the backs of the teachers in classes that proscribe language mixing (Canagarajah, 2011).

This study reveals how the students' trials to understand one language through the other would result in positive language mixing. Our concern here is to investigate the frequent occurrence of the process by which the Arabic-speaking participants unconsciously understand Turkish, try to generate their ideas, and produce their words in a mixed outcome language. We believe that Arabic (its alphabet as well as its phrases, clauses, expressions, and idioms) makes it more difficult for the learners to develop language competences so quickly. Moreover, there are some Turkish words with Arabic origin and similar pronunciations; sometimes these false friends might be an advantage for their learning process, but mostly they lead the Arabic learners of Turkish to encounter misspelling and mispronunciation. When we consider the teaching of Turkish as an L2, the degree of similarity or differences of the culture that the students bring with them to the Turkish culture makes up one of the most important factors that affect the learning process (Mert, Gundogdu & Albayrak, 2013).

The purpose of this study is to investigate the input-output process of Arab students while acquiring Turkish. The main interest was centered on how these students dealt with the processing of Turkish and how well they were able to switch between Arabic and Turkish, which we referred to as Turkish-Arabic translanguaging.

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

This research was conducted on 38 Arab students of intermediate level taking Turkish classes at the TÖMER (Turkish Language Preparation) center at Istanbul Aydin University Istanbul, Turkey in 2018-2019 academic year. The participants' ages ranged between 19 and 25. They were studying B1 level of Turkish Language, which is considered

as the third level after A1 and A2 levels before they enroll their undergraduate or graduate programs. Purposive sampling strategy was used while selecting the sample since the focus was only on Arabic native speakers. Since the gender of the participants was not an independent variable of the study, their sexes were not included.

2.2 Procedure

In this descriptive study, the data collection process began after having received the ethical approval letter from the Social Sciences Institute of İstanbul Aydın University. Before meeting the students at the university, the schedule for data collection was arranged with the head of the TÖMER Department, and before distributing the questionnaire, the researcher observed two classroom hours. The instructor first provided the students a Turkish context and then asked them to relate it to their own literature and culture and explain what they deduced so in Turkish. As she used Turkish in the classroom, the students seemed to be very willing to express themselves using Arabic. This multilingual interactive session also built rapport among the learners who would not have an opportunity early on to collaborate and interact in order to solve learning challenges.

It took 10 minutes for the participants to answer the questions in Arabic since the researcher's mother tongue is Arabic. Expressing their opinions in their L1 is thought to yield data that are more detailed. Then, the participants were asked whether they volunteer to have an interview with the researcher. Unfortunately, only three participants attended the session, which may be one of the limitations of this study.

The quantitative data gathered from the survey were subjected to the statistical calculation of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 19, and the results were shown on tables. In addition, the qualitative data collected through the focus group interviews were transcribed and then analyzed through descriptive analysis as a method used deductively with qualitative data (Elo and Kyngas, 2008).

2.3 Instrument

This descriptive study aimed to explore the translanguaging process of the Arab students acquiring Turkish as a second language. The researcher asked 10 yes-no questions to the students related to the obstacles they suffer while trying to generate ideas, interact within the class, and perform activities in Turkish. Then the students were asked to answer the reasons of their answers orally. These open-ended questions enabled the researcher to measure and allocate the findings, and by linking them to the previous studies, she could figure out some implications about the occurring translanguaging among the learners during the language class. Moreover, making interviews with a certain number of students provided this research with all the missing information that could not be explained by "yes, no" questions. Further explanations supported by the students on the translanguaging practice have narrowed any occurring gap between the research questions and the answers of the survey. After analyzing the survey, the interviews allowed the respondents to discuss and express their ideas verbally

and make them feel more comfortable as well as raise the issues that had been considered by the interviewer. Throughout the interviews, the participants were probed in order to obtain the richest and the most in-depth information possible. As a result, in this study, mixed methods were used to collect and analyze the data.

3. Results & Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the process by which Arabic students practice Turkish translanguaging, and the kind of translanguaging obstacles they experience. This section presents the findings in two main sections: the findings from the survey and the findings from the focus group interview.

3.1. Results from the survey

As illustrated in the table below, the third and fifth items yielded identical results; 68% of the students affirmed that they had difficulty in finding the right word to express themselves in Turkish but they were eager to use the context to guess the meaning of the unknown word. It is worth mentioning here that the first question is probing students for any difficulty suffered in the learning process; however, it is clear that almost the same percentage tries to take the risk and keep on using the target language (like jokes) in their learning process (Item 5).

Table 1: The Distribution of the Answers in Frequencies and Percentages

Turkish Translanguaging Items	Yes	No
	F %	F %
1- Do you have difficulty in finding the required vocabulary in the target language?	26 (68,0)	12 (32,0)
2- Do you have any problems related to the Turkish sentence structure or word order?	27 (69,0)	11 (31,0)
3- Can you understand the meaning of strange and new words from the context of the sentence?	26 (68,0)	12 (32,0)
4- Do you have the tendency to find an alternative or approximate meaning to the word if you could not understand it in the wording of the sentence?	23 (60,0)	15 (40,0)
5- During the class do you prefer to tell a joke to your friends in the target language?	26 (68,0)	12 (32,0)
6- Do you think you can formulate the sentence as it should be using the correct rules and sequence of words within the sentence?	20 (54,0)	18 (45,0)
7- Do you think it is helpful to find equivalents for parts of Arabic literature in Turkish?	17 (44,0)	21 (56,0)
8- Do you think translating parts of Turkish poetry or prose into Arabic would help in better understanding?	18 (47,0)	20 (53,0)
9- Does the similarity between Turkish and Arabic words in both meaning and pronunciation help you better recall vocabulary?	31 (83,3)	7 (16,7)
10- Do you experience any language problem when using Turkish vocabulary that has the same Arabic pronunciation with different meaning?	35 (94,6)	2 (05,4)

However, although the third question has the same answer percentage of that of the first question, it seems that many of the students (40%; Item 4) do not seem to be able to compensate for unknown words within a new context. In the sixth question, 20 participants (54%) asserted that they could constitute grammatically correct sentences, while 18 of them

(45%) assured that they could not. For Item 8, some participants (53%) do not agree with translating the literature into mother tongue language. Similarly, more than half of the students disagree with translating the Arabic literature into Turkish for the aim of understanding as clarified in the seventh question.

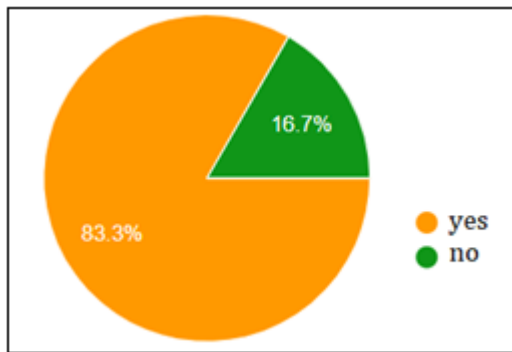


Figure 3.2.1

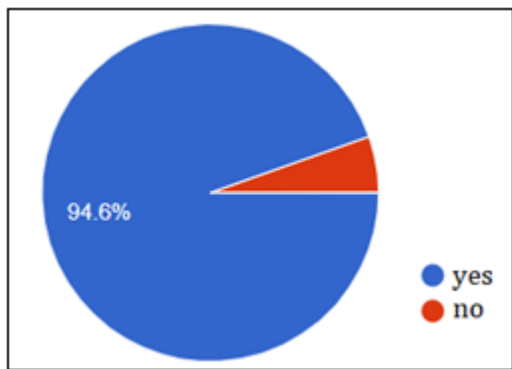


Figure 3.2.2

We have found that according to majority of the participants (83.3%), almost identical words of both languages help better recalling the words, and the rest (16.7%) stated that this similarity does not help them in this context. However, as clarified in Figure 3.2.2, most of the students (94.6%) are suffering from language problems when they encounter two words with the same pronunciation but different meanings. This contradiction corresponds into interesting consequences.

3.2. Results from the Focus Group Interview:

This section presents the findings gathered through the focus group interview. In the focus group interview, only three students volunteered. Fares, Selma and Ali were willing to answer some of the questions that were already posed in the survey. The main aim of using this interview was to enable the interviewer to gain valuable information from the participants' experiences, yield shared understandings and several perspectives that was not reached by yes/no questions.

The focus group interview also allows the respondents a space to discuss and express their ideas verbally.

They were first asked whether they would chat or prefer to tell a funny story to their friends in the target language, and

they were asked to justify their answers. Their answers were as the following:

Fares: "During the class, I would like to converse only in Turkish for the purpose of improving my language skills"

Selma: "We as learners cannot avoid using home language when joking or chatting because it is so hard to say all these words immediately in the target language."

Ali: "It is so difficult to use the target language when you want to joke or say something between friends; sometimes the expression loses its meaning when translated literally or mistakenly."

Then, the participants were to answer the second related question: Do you think it is helpful to find equivalents for parts of Arabic literature in Turkish language?

Fares and Selma agreed on the idea that it was not that much challenging to look for equivalents for literary concepts or parts of literature, but the difficulty lies in the complexity of Arabic language itself, for it is classified as one of the most difficult-to-learn languages. However, Ali has a different point of view: "It is not useful to compare any language literature to another because each one was created within its own wording, culture, attitudes and conceptions. Each language has its own tone and it will lose this tone when translated because tones can never be translated."

For observing the participants' views, the following two questions were elaborated upon:

- Does the similarity between Turkish and Arabic vocabulary in both meaning and pronunciation help the students better to recall vocabulary?
- Do you experience any language problems while using Turkish vocabulary that has the same Arabic pronunciation with different meaning?

The participants mentioned several vocabulary examples that really have the common meaning and pronunciation between Arabic and Turkish: they pointed out that words such as "kitap, mühendis, sabah, cevap, etc." are so helping and remarkable especially when they practice translanguaging, so that if they forget the exact Turkish word they can use the Arabic one interchangeably.

However, when they have to use the word "fakat", for example, the three participants agreed on the fact that the degree of confusion was very high, and it was difficult to deduce the meaning since Arabic has the same pronunciation with different meanings.

Vocabulary	Turkish	Arabic
Fakat	But	only
vücut	Human body	Entity, Existence

The students were asked whether they had the tendency to find an alternative meaning to expressions they do not understand in the wording of the Turkish sentence. Fares and Selma explained that they usually suffer from problems like "general understanding" and they "try to find equivalents but they do not always succeed."

On the other hand, according to Ali, "I understand the speech as a whole but when using new vocabularies and

expressions and when the teacher speaks rapidly, I try to generate all possible ideas relating and fitting to the context in order not to miss the meaning as a whole." Ali also mentioned an example of a grammar rule that does not exist in the Arabic language. He explained "when the teacher taught us the grammatical rule of "gelmişken," for instance, it was so challenging to understand this rule since it does not exist in Arabic. So, I and my colleagues tried to understand the context by which the rule is used; however, it is much difficult than understand it to use it in the future."

3.3. Findings on code-mixing as a phenomenon of translanguaging

In Grosjean's (2013) point of view, nowadays we are able to notice the borrowed elements from one language to another, and code mixing is a "phenomenon of bilingual or multilingual society." Bilingual or multilingual speakers as engaged persons by using two or more languages are involved with two or more cultures. According to Kim (2006), what causes code-mixing is when people mix two languages or more in a speech act or discourse without any obligation.

One of the factors that thrust people to involve code mixing, according to Kim (2006, p.43), is "bilingualism." Since communication is the process of expressing and sharing ideas between two conversation participants, a speaker needs a speaking partner to communicate, and code mixing could appear if both of them use and understand both languages well. The second factor is that it occurs when there is a lack of vocabulary in one language. The shortage of appropriate words or even expressions in one language obligate people to change the word or the phrase from one to another language and it can be combined together within the whole sentence (Kim, 2006). That is to say, during the conversation lesson, for instance, the speaker wants to use a specific word in the dominant language, but s/he cannot recall its equivalent in the second or third language. Thus, the language learner (as many students reported) needs to borrow a word from the mother tongue and use it in the target language in order to avoid any gap within the sentence. This phenomenon is taking place in every class of intermediate level, and this language mixing is, thus, a normal outcome of shuttling between Turkish and Arabic.

3.4. Findings on the translanguaging facilitated but confused by the similarity between both languages

Although a big number of Arabic loanwords can be noticed in literary Turkish, their counterparts are used commonly in daily Turkish. Many students declared that this similarity facilitates learning many words, and they referred to them as "common words," which are referred to as "cognates" (i.e. words that have the same origin or root).

On the other hand, according to the answers of students, it appears that while they practice Turkish translanguaging, there exist transfer effects on the part of Arabic (L1) to Turkish (L2). If we consider, for example, the acquisition of Turkish word order (verb placement), in Arabic learners, we notice that adult Arabic learners may experience specific difficulties while obtaining the word order patterns (verb

placement) in Turkish that causes transfer errors because of the two languages variations in the syntactic structure. The verb is usually at the end of the sentence in Turkish language and the basic word order is SOV (subject-object-verb). Nevertheless, according to Hoffman (1992), this word order is not obligatory. The controversy of a verb in Turkish in addition to other 'free' word order languages do not have to take a place in a 'fixed' word order. However, in both cases, this ordering does not fit with order of Arabic language sentences. According to the examples below, Turkish sentences may have different pragmatic and discourse dependent terms.

Turkish-Arabic structural differences (starting with object)

Language	Object	Subject	Verb
Turkish	elma-yı	Kemal	Ye-di
Arabic	التفاحة	كمال	أكل
English	the apple	Kamal	ate

Turkish-Arabic structural differences (starting with subject)

Language	Subject	Object	Verb
Turkish	Kemal	elma-yı	Ye-di
Arabic	كمال	التفاحة	أكل
English	Kamal	the apple	ate

In Arabic, the verb usually comes at the beginning of a sentence preceding the subject so the basic word order is VSO (verb-subject-object). Many students reported difficulty in processing sentences while trying to order the words of sentences grammatically in the proper way. This word ordering problem, according to some learners, could be similar to the problem of writing direction in Arabic language. That is to say, Arabic writing start from right to left, unlike English, Turkish, and other Latin languages, and this could be a further point of difficulty for Turkish learning on the part of Arab students. The students' knowledge how to deal with the differences between structures of sentences will enlighten their intellectual techniques and broaden their thinking way about the acquired language specifically when they compare and contrast such grammatical rules.

3.5. Findings on the recontextualization as a translanguaging strategy

It was deduced throughout the conducting and analyzing data of this study, that when we believe we should provide enough room for students to be able to utilize all of the available and accessible linguistic resources they will require, they might encounter so many hardships. This is much more beneficial than providing literal instructions and tips, which when we use, we restore to make them too simple because we believe some complexity would be risky. All of that casts a severe negative influence on students' real-life context learning opportunities and prevents them being released from bounds that real social occasions are a challenge they cannot overcome. Therefore, Translanguaging, in this regard, helps us provide more chances to bring contexts that are more complex in term of the four language skills. It as well help students access more information and learn more effectively. It will also grant many students more confidence to apply gained knowledge and put their empowered skills into practice.

In his book of *Approaching Dialogue*, Linell (1998) affirmed the fundamental role of recontextualization practices to cognition and communication, declaring that recontextualization is not a mere transfer of a fixed meaning. This includes manipulating definitions and future interpretations in ways that are generally complicated and not well understood.

The use of translanguaging by bilingual or multilingual learners of Turkish results in both advantages and disadvantages linguistically and socially. On the one hand, and as one of the advantageous effects, TOMER students, who are Arabs in this study, resorted to translanguaging when they encounter a challenge of understating and comprehending a text for example. Thus, the coping mechanism is to search for the meaning in their L1 lexical and fill the missing knowledge or information or clarify a vague unclear phrase. The learners might also highly use translanguaging in term of understating social references of Turkish sayings and proverbs. In fact, the learners, subject of this research, often tend to delve into their L1 proverbs and sayings storage whether they are formal, informal or slang, to extract a matching one. An Example of such a case is understating one popular Turkish Saying 'ayakaltındolaşmak'. When Arab learners are trying to use L2 to catch the meaning of this saying into Arabic, they find its meaning as 'make one's foot sliding'; however, they, with the help of translanguaging technique, will recall in their L1 sayings and proverbs alternatives of this expression. As a result, they find a matching saying 'dig a hole for others to make them lose or get hurt based on envy'. Thus, by applying this technique they could better receive the intended target meaning linguistically and socially. Therefore, by translanguaging the vague and socially unclear meaning of a proverb in L2, they are able to recover their input in such circumstance.

On the other hand, although learners, interviewed and studied in this research, reach better understanding in many other cases by using the technique of translanguaging, the over use of translanguaging can lead to different -misleading and deformed language skills, outputs, meanings and structures. To illustrate, in TOMER course, some learners of Turkish, excessively adopt translanguaging technique in order to understand and digest grammatical data and inputs. Because of that over-using, the learners face a lot of misleading apparent understating discovered when they put the grammar information into practice. The following example will draw much clearer idea; if a learner depends on translanguaging to understand the Turkish sentence 'diyetyapmamanlazim'. The sentence under translanguaging means 'it is necessary that you do not make a diet', however, actually this is not the aimed meaning of the sentence which means 'you should not go on a diet'. The learner who attempts to have in depth understanding of the grammar rule in the given sentence faces obstacle of applying the model presented in real life. Their misunderstanding causes them face social problematic situations.

In the same way, this study found that TOMER students resorted to this sense-making practice when they translanguage between Turkish and Arabic. The Arabic students' comprehension of Turkish language as a whole is

not void of orientation. According to the result of the survey, we noticed that students try to build the context of L2 in their repertoire in a way that fits their L1 interpretation and try to do their best in order to come up with as similar context as that of the L2. The degree of best doing process is linked to their demographic information. When Ali and his friends encountered a rule that was "strange" and probably "not understandable at first", they did not want to skip it and leave it vague; rather, they tried to find equivalents of that grammar in Arabic contexts. In this way, they recontextualized that rule in a way that would fit their understandings of the Turkish context in order to be able to use it in the future. Context is a prominent factor of language learning since bilinguals may apply these languages in a different way depending on the person who they are speaking to and their communicative purposes.

Thus, if language learners received sufficient and adequate support by their teachers in term of allowing them to apply translanguaging, providing proactive situation in classrooms, the development of L1 and L2 at the same time will enable the learners utilize and use both languages effectively. In all Turkish learning courses, there is a considerable degree of translanguaging usage, and in order to cope with utilization of the learning process Turkish language learners and so many teachers adopt the use of such a technique and strategy.

4. Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to assess both the prevalence and efficacy of translanguaging practices within classroom discourses at TÖMER centers. Throughout the study, it has been detected how the students' use of one language in order to understand the other revealed the degree of effectiveness of translanguaging in deepening comprehension and cultivating a high sense of self and identity. The students alternated input and output languages in order to achieve better understanding of the target language and gain epistemic pedagogical access. The frequent alternation between both languages has proved that the students' use of any of the two languages is incomplete without the other during the class, as in the case when they tried to understand an L2 grammar rule in their home language. In brief, the results showed that the teacher and students were using translanguaging purposefully and effectively to support multilingual access by the students, though students are largely inclined to practice all forms of translanguaging more that teachers are inclined to, since highly motivated students are striving to acquire the language so they try to invest and employ every possible practice. The student case documented in this research showed effective and adaptive use of translanguaging strategies and performance of the goals of the classroom discourse. In particular, the students demonstrated a systematic use of multiple language learning, a greater understanding of the taught material, and the growth of multilingual concepts. In specific, they displayed a strategic use of multiple language practice, deeper comprehension of the content taught and multilingual concept development. Thus, we can observe how translanguaging has become one of the inspirational initiatives that encourage students to look how the structures of both languages can be interconnected, compared and

contrasted and how they can employ the structure of home language in getting across meaning. Translanguaging and code-switching are epistemologically different in the sense that when you code-switch, you are moving from one named language with all its linguistic system to another and this is an external point of view. However, translanguaging is an internal point of view where the learner uses full language repertoire in order to make meaning. The monolingual teacher should not behave as an authority in the class; rather, he should be a co-learner with the students in order to take the students' existing resources and leverage them in developing the target language as well as their social emotional identities.

There has to be a space for translanguaging by securing the bases and providing both time and the kind of practices like establishing events comprising both Turkish and Arab students and practicing translanguaging within these events. However, if a student's L2 output showed that they have mis-contextualized a topic or certain expression, such a strategy can lead to miscommunication and probably great mis-understanding if the interlocutor fails to catch the intended meaning of the translanguagers. For this season, students have better join classes inhabited by their equals, i.e. same language background or same nationality. Classes that house communities of the same cultural background would also facilitate teachers who can negotiate students' resulting output and would deal with their thoughts as creative rather than peculiar. In this way, the interaction of students with their fellows would help them produce their output wisely and confidently.

Appendix 1

- 1) Do you have difficulty finding the required vocabulary in the target language?
- 2) Can you understand the meaning of new words from the context of the sentence?
- 3) Do you have the tendency to find an alternative or approximate meaning to the word if you could not understand it?
- 4) During the class do you prefer to tell a joke to your friends in the target language?
- 5) Do you think you can formulate the sentence as it should be using the correct rules and sequence of words within the sentence?
- 6) Do you think it is helpful to find equivalents for parts of Arabic literature in Turkish language?
- 7) Do you think translating parts of Turkish poetry or prose into Arabic would help in better understanding?
- 8) Does the similarity between Turkish and Arabic words in both meaning and pronunciation help students better recall vocabulary repertoire?
- 9) Do you experience any language problem while using Turkish vocabulary that has the same Arabic pronunciation with different meaning?

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