

Chapter 3:

# ***Translanguaging Strategies for Supporting English Grammar Learning in Multilingual Contexts***

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## **A. Introduction**

*“For most of my students, learning English grammar feels boring and complicated, but I find that including other languages such as Indonesian and Arabic makes it more engaging and, in turn, help them improve their grammar mastery.” (An English teacher in a pesantren school in Lampung, Indonesia)*

What this teacher does is in line with the concept of translanguaging, an ability of multilingual speakers to switch between languages, viewing the various languages in their repertoire as a unified and interconnected system (Canagarajah, 2011). While translanguaging has been widely explored in areas such as reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and other basic language skills (Chaisiri, 2022; Qureshi & Aljanadbah, 2022; Yasar & Dikilitas, 2022), its application to grammar instruction remains underdeveloped. This chapter addresses these gaps by exploring how translanguaging strategies can make grammar lessons more engaging and effective for multilingual learners.

The chapter addresses the population gap by focusing on multilingual learners, particularly those studying in Indonesian pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) who generally speak local language, Bahasa Indonesia, and are users of Arabic language in this educational environment. Most importantly, the chapter provides practical strategies that bridge the gap between theoretical discussions of translanguaging and its implementation in grammar instruction.

## **B. Strategies for Grammar Instruction through Translanguaging**

Translanguaging in grammar instruction enables students to use all their linguistic resources to explore and understand grammatical concepts. This section outlines key strategies for incorporating translanguaging into grammar teaching, particularly in the context of Indonesia's multilingual classrooms.

### ***Translanguaging in Teacher-Student Conversations to Support Grammar Mastery***

Allowing students to translanguage between languages during classroom conversations fosters their engagement. In this moment, teachers could take benefit from the words in other languages to support grammar learning. The example below shows how a teacher initiated a discussion about a reading passage.

Teacher : According to the passage we read about food, what are some popular Western foods?

Student A : Pizza, hot dog, and hamburger, Sir.

Teacher : Excellent. Do you like them?

Student A : I don't know, Sir, never *akala*, hehe.  
(*Most students laughed.*)

Student B : (Raising his hand) I like *pecel*, Sir.  
(*The class laughed again.*)

Teacher : Me too, hehe.

Teacher : Guys, the word *akala* is an example of a verb,  
and *pecel* is an example of a noun.

This playful interaction exemplifies how translanguaging can create an engaging atmosphere while helping students understand grammatical concepts and vocabulary in context. In this example, the teacher used the students' Arabic word "*akala* (أَكَلَ)" and a traditional food's name "*pecel*" to illustrate the concept of part of speech in English grammar. This experience reflects what García & Wei (2014) state that translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy, where students incorporate their home languages into classroom activities.

### ***Using Grammar Term Equivalence in Various Languages***

In the context of Indonesian *pesantren*, where students are already familiar with Arabic and Bahasa Indonesia, using equivalent grammar terms from these languages can be a powerful tool to explain English grammar concepts. This approach leverages students' prior knowledge of Arabic (acquired from religious studies) and their fluency in Indonesian to bridge the gap between their existing linguistic knowledge and English (Sohn et al., 2022), including its grammar rules.

As an example, when explaining the English "past tense," the teacher can use the Arabic term "فعل ماضٍ" (*fi'l madhi*) or the Indonesian term "*kata kerja lampau*" to highlight parallels. Similarly, for the English "present

continuous,” the teacher can relate it to “*fi’l mudhari*” in Arabic or “*sedang terjadi*” in Indonesian. Since tenses are one of the most challenging grammar concepts for Indonesian students, this method helps make the explanations more relatable and easier to understand by connecting them to familiar linguistic structures.

Another example is that the teaching of subject pronouns in English can be related to the pronouns in Arabic (أنا/ana, هو/hiya) and Indonesian (saya, dia) to highlight similarities and differences. More specifically, teacher can describe that “I” in English corresponds to أنا (*ana*) in Arabic and *saya/aku* in Indonesian. Similarly, “he” aligns with هو (huwa) in Arabic and *dia* in Indonesian. Teachers can then invite students to practice identifying and using the tenses pronouns in sentences, switching between the three languages to deepen their understanding.

### ***Translanguaging Grammar Drills***

English grammar learning drills can be made more engaging and effective by incorporating students’ home languages—such as Arabic, local languages and Indonesian—into the learning process. This translanguaging approach allows students to draw on their existing linguistic knowledge to better understand and practice English grammar (Liando et al., 2023). For example, before drilling the subject-verb agreement rules in English, teachers could first describe the concept of this grammar rule and emphasize the need for the verb to agree in number with the subject (e.g., singular or plural). Then, teachers could relate this to Indonesian grammar, where verbs remain unchanged regardless of the subject, and Arabic, where verbs must agree in both number and gender with the subject.

The next step, teachers provide students with sentences in Indonesian and Arabic, and ask them to translate them into English while maintaining grammatical accuracy, particularly with subject-verb agreement. See the example below:

Teacher : *Budi suka membaca buku*

Student A : Budi likes reading books.

Teacher : *Anak-anak bermain sepak bola pada sore hari.*

Student B : The kids play football in the afternoon.

The teacher could then explain that in this sentence, the verb *suka* and *bermain* do not change regardless of the subject, different from the verb 'likes' with -s ending and 'play' with no -s ending due to different number of subjects.

The teachers can do the same drilling in Arabic language as follows:

Teacher : *زيد يقرأ كتابًا (Zaid yaqra' kitāban)*

Student A : Zaid reads a book.

Teacher : *فاطمة تقرأ كتابًا (Fatima taqra' kitāban)*

Student B : Fatima reads a book.

In Arabic, verbs agree with the gender of the subject, even in the third person. For masculine subjects, the verb is in the masculine form, such as in *زيد يقرأ كتابًا (Zaid yaqra' kitāban)*, where *يقرأ (yaqra')* is the masculine form of "reads." For feminine subjects, the verb changes to the feminine form, as in *فاطمة تقرأ كتابًا (Fatima taqra' kitāban)*, where *تقرأ (taqra')* is the feminine equivalent. In contrast, English verbs in the simple present tense do not change based on the subject's gender. The same verb form applies to both genders, as seen

in “Zaid reads” and “Fatima reads,” with changes occurring only for singular or plural subjects.

With the teachers accommodating the languages the students are familiar with as a bridge, they can clarify complex grammar rules, demonstrate parallels and differences, and create a more inclusive and interactive classroom environment. This multilingual strategy not only enhances comprehension but also respects and values students’ linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

### **C. Further Discussion**

Translanguaging as a pedagogical approach has sparked considerable debate in the field of language instruction, particularly in multilingual contexts like Indonesian pesantren. On the positive side, translanguaging offers an inclusive way to bridge students’ prior linguistic knowledge with English language concepts, making the material more accessible and relatable (Payant & Galante, 2022). For instance, using Arabic and Indonesian grammar equivalences to explain complex concepts like tenses or subject-verb agreement helps learners grasp abstract ideas more easily. This approach also increases engagement, as it validates students’ home languages and offers the learners opportunities to share their voices (Wawire & Barnes-Story, 2023). However, critics argue that excessive reliance on translanguaging may hinder students’ immersion in English and limit opportunities for active use of the target language (Creese & Blackledge, 2010). There is also the challenge of ensuring accurate translation and equivalence, especially for nuanced grammar points that might not have direct parallels in other languages (Kelly, 2015). This highlights the need for careful implementation of translanguaging strategies to

strike a balance between leveraging students' linguistic resources and fostering their proficiency in English.

Despite these concerns, translanguaging holds great potential when applied judiciously. Teachers must strike a balance by using students' home languages as scaffolding tools while gradually transitioning toward English-dominant instruction. Additionally, translanguaging activities should be designed to foster deeper linguistic analysis rather than simple translation exercises. For example, comparing the structure of English passive voice with its Indonesian and Arabic counterparts can develop students' metalinguistic awareness and critical thinking (Ballinger et al., 2020; Cenoz & Gorter, 2022). Moving forward, it is recommended that teachers receive specific training on how to implement translanguaging effectively, avoiding overdependence while maximizing its benefits. Ultimately, the goal of this approach is to enhance students' mastery of English grammar by leveraging their multilingual repertoire as a foundation for new learning (Canagarajah, 2011).

Further research could investigate how consistent exposure to translanguaging practices influences students' ability to internalize complex grammar rules across languages. Additionally, studies could examine the effectiveness of translanguaging in other aspects of English language learning, such as writing and speaking skills, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of its benefits. Comparative studies across different multilingual settings, including urban and rural schools, could also offer insights into how sociocultural factors affect the implementation and outcomes of translanguaging strategies. Finally, incorporating digital tools and resources in translanguaging-based grammar instruction could be an area of interest,

particularly in understanding how technology can enhance or limit the approach in modern classrooms. Integration of artificial intelligence (AI) tools, for instance, could also be tried out as many domains of language pedagogy have lately enhanced the quality of their practices by empowering them (Hasbi et al., 2024).

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