


Translanguaging practices in adult ESL classrooms: Fostering investment in language learning and identity construction



 **Mahmuda Sharmin**

West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV, USA.

Email: sharmin.mahmuda@gmail.com



ABSTRACT

Article History

Received: 31 December 2024

Revised: 20 March 2025

Accepted: 2 April 2025

Published: 11 April 2025

Keywords

Agency

Decolonization

Identity

Investment

Linguistic freedom

Translanguaging.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the role of translanguaging practices in adult ESL classrooms in shaping learners' investment in language learning, particularly their engagement, language preference in external interactions, and identity construction. Using translanguaging as a theoretical framework and adopting a qualitative ethnographic approach, data were gathered from five adult immigrant learners participating in an intermediate-level English-speaking course. Each learner wrote a total of ten weekly narratives in a shared Google Doc about their experiences of using language in real life. Learners were instructed to use their preferred language(s) in brainstorming sessions and producing narratives. To analyze the data, learners' written narratives and brainstorming session notes were collected. The findings of the study show that translanguaging practices in the adult language classroom not only foster learners' investment in language learning but also function as a decolonizing tool that promotes justice by advocating learners' linguistic identities, facilitating meaningful communication both inside and beyond the classroom.

Contribution/ Originality: This study explores the role of translanguaging as a means of a decolonizing tool in adult ESL classrooms. It specifically highlights how translanguaging fosters learners' investment in target language learning and shapes their language choice preferences in academic, social, and professional contexts.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), translanguaging practices have been playing a vital role in language classrooms by facilitating language learning, enhancing metalinguistic awareness, and improving reading comprehension (Rafi & Morgan, 2024). Recent studies have found the pedagogical benefits of translanguaging, including its ability to bridge the concepts of first and second language, support the expression of complex ideas, and maintain cultural identities (Canagarajah, 2011; García & Wei, 2014; Li, 2018). In addition, translanguaging pedagogy advocates for multilingual identities and aims to eradicate linguistic discrimination present in educational settings and society (Huang & Chalmers, 2023). More specifically, translanguaging pedagogy serves as a valuable tool for learners grappling with colonial histories and linguicism (De Costa et al., 2017). If learners feel marginalized or experience linguicism inside or beyond the classroom, particularly in the target community, they may be less likely to invest in language learning (Darvin & Norton, 2023). In this context, investment refers to "learners' variable desire to engage in social interaction and community practices," contributing to learners' relationship to the target language (Norton, 2013). Learners often invest in language learning to achieve a broader range of material and symbolic

resources. While previous studies have explored the pedagogical benefits of translanguaging in language learning, few have examined its role in adult ESL classrooms, particularly in fostering learners' investment in language learning and shaping their language preferences in academic and external contexts. The study aims to examine the impact of translanguaging practices on fostering learners' investment in the target language, explore how translanguaging shapes their language preferences, and analyze its role in identity construction in social and professional contexts.

With the increasing use of English as the language of instruction, learning through multiple languages is not common, especially in ESL or EFL classrooms that tend to focus on teaching standard English. Although language learners bring rich linguistic diversity, language classrooms often prioritize the target language or standard language learning by incorporating various tools and techniques. Even within a plurilingual context, instructional practices mostly devalue learners' translanguaging practices and rely on English, a language associated with power and status (De Mejía, 2006; Spiro & Crisfield, 2018). Moreover, language associated with higher social classes is often considered more prestigious and connected to greater opportunities. In addition, existing language ideology is associated with language hierarchy and power, which evaluates some speakers as more valued than others (De Costa et al., 2017). This societal structure can lead to discrimination and exclusion of language learners. Therefore, language learners are compelled to invest in the target language to attain material resources, social power, and prestige. However, when learners feel excluded from a community, they are less likely to continue investing in language learning (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Hence, it is the responsibility of language educators and classrooms to facilitate learners' investment in language learning by incorporating a bottom-up language policy that can challenge the hegemony of English in the language classroom. Classrooms should help build learners' confidence and incorporate strategies to ensure their investment and effective interactions with the target language community. While previous studies have broadly focused on the pedagogical implications of translanguaging in language development, the current study aims to answer two research questions:

RQ1. What role do translanguaging practices play in adult ESL classrooms in fostering learners' investment in target language and shaping their identities?

RQ2. How do translanguaging practices influence adult ESL learners' language preferences in different contexts?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. *Translanguaging in Language Education*

Multilingual learners bring a diverse linguistic repertoire to language classrooms; however, traditional monolingual ideologies often isolate languages in the curriculum rather than integrate or value students' multilingual abilities. The purpose of using standard English in traditional ESL or EFL classrooms is to 'place the ownership of the English language in the hands of multilingual users of English worldwide,' leading to the separation of the language that is often viewed as a discrete system (Molina, 2021). However, the idea of languages as separate entities has recently been criticized (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007; Otheguy, García, & Reid, 2015). To address this current concern, translanguaging pedagogy emerges to challenge the idea of language separation and promotes positive outcomes in language skills and academic performance. Scholars Cenoz and Gorter (2021) argue that "using two or more languages in the same lesson does not imply less exposure to the target language even if this is a minority language" (p. 2). Moreover, learners tend to connect new information to old information, further supporting the effectiveness of translanguaging in language learning.

Although translanguaging is undoubtedly recognized as an effective pedagogical tool in educating multilinguals, some studies questioned why translanguaging pedagogy is often described as a scaffolding method in research (Poza, 2017). This perspective limits its potential on learners' authority and agency. Phillips and Genao (2023) argued that rather than considering translanguaging a scaffolding tool, it needs to be viewed as a framework for language education. A recent study by Turnbull (2019) noticed that students who practiced translanguaging in the classroom

demonstrated higher academic performance in the target language compared to those in monolingual settings, indicating the need of more integration of translanguaging in education.

In addition to academic benefits, translanguaging promotes social justice, working as decolonization tool, which challenges dominant standard languages that historically suppressed local and minority languages. Linguistically minoritized learners often encounter the monoglossic ideology in US school settings, deriving from the political implications and structural constraints. The traditional roles of U.S schools has always been to fix the so-called language deficiencies of English language learners and the education of these students has been marginalizing by design' (Flores, 2013). In such context, translanguaging serves as a vehicle to address systematic inequities, achieving social justice by addressing linguistic power imbalances (Ortega, 2020). Furthermore, García, Johnson, and Seltzer (2017) argued that translanguaging pedagogies should provide opportunities for students to utilize their full linguistic repertoire and multilingual ways of thinking. Moreover, Seltzer and García (2020) emphasized that integrating translanguaging pedagogies in classrooms empowers learners and reduces linguistic anxiety.

Thus, to successfully implement translanguaging pedagogy, teachers need to set some goals and objectives that go beyond the classroom. García and Wei (2014) suggest that teachers should consider adapting instruction based on students' levels and background knowledge of the content. This approach helps students make meaning, engage in translanguaging, develop an understanding of new knowledge, enhance critical thinking, and understand the communicative demands of the educational and social contexts. By doing so, language educators can ensure an inclusive learning environment and prepare learners to challenge the dominant language ideologies.

2.2. Language Choice and Identity Construction

In the center of decolonization, language and identities are woven together. Tlostanova and Mignolo (2012) believe that 'languages are not something human beings have but what human beings are' (p. 61). Multilingual speakers negotiate their identities through language choices. García (2010) argued that in every interaction, multilingual speakers' language choice involves negotiation, upon which their access to powerful social networks depends. Thus, speakers' language choice, investment in language learning, access to resources, and identity construction intersect as it is multilingual speakers' decision 'whom they want to be,' and based on that, 'they choose their language practices' (García, 2010).

In response to the call for space where language learners can negotiate their linguistic identities, translanguaging practices in the classroom provide a platform for understanding learners' fluid transcultural identities. For instance, the use of translanguaging pedagogy was found to be important in developing learners' plurilingual identities (García et al., 2017). By celebrating learners' diverse identities and rejecting false binaries, including the categorization of languages or learners' linguistic identities as native vs. non-native speakers, schools can ensure decolonial performance in the classroom. Moreover, García and Wei (2014) asserted that translanguaging, as a pedagogical process, enables students to construct and modify their identities constantly. In addition, Creese and Blackledge's (2015) study was conducted in a Panjabi community language school in Birmingham, UK, where teachers and youth learners translanguage in the classroom. The findings of their study indicated that young people chose translanguaging discourse, positioning themselves as sophisticated urban speakers with a common identity within the group. The authors also noted that translanguaging practices by teachers and learners in the classroom can engage learners to invest in their identities, creating a space for identity construction and empowerment.

2.3. Investment in Language Learning

The intersection of identity, language choice, and investment in language learning plays a crucial role in determining learners' position in society. Investment, as conceptualized by Norton (2013) refers to learners' commitment to the goal and their desire to engage in the language learning process, offers "a way to understand learners' variable desire to engage in social interaction and community practices," and focuses on learners' relationship

to the target language (p. 6). Investment in language learning is contingent on social status or power, affecting learners' willingness to interact. In this regard, [Darvin \(2019\)](#) stated that learners' investment in the target language relies on negotiating power between speakers and interlocutors. As language choice and identity construction intersect within multilingual settings, influencing social interactions, investment in language learning intensifies this relationship by connecting learners' engagement to their shifting identities and social roles.

Adult language learners' language learning predominantly relies on their activities in the language classroom and their involvement in the target social community. [Norton \(2000\)](#) argued that learners' participation in the social community helps them define who they are and who they want to be, as "it is the language through which learners negotiate themselves and are accepted or rejected in specific, powerful social networks" (p. 5). It is important to remember that learners' investment in language learning always intersects with their identity.

Moreover, [Teng \(2019\)](#) suggests that language learners' identity and social status regulate and influence the language learning effectiveness, outcomes, and language learning process. In addition, [Norton \(2013\)](#) further advocated for incorporating personal narratives and reflective diary writing as a teaching pedagogy to bridge the gap between language learning in the classroom and the opportunities to learn the language outside the classroom. She believed that learners' diary study could be a pedagogy of possibility in the language classroom in identifying personal experiences of language learning and social interaction with the target community members.

Although previous studies have focused on classroom pedagogy that fosters learners' investment in language learning by addressing their lived experiences and identity construction, few have examined the impact of translanguaging—using multiple languages in communication—on learners' engagement with language learning, external interactions, internal language choices, and sense of identity. This current study aims to identify how translanguaging shapes learners' investment in language learning inside and outside the language classrooms and how translanguaging contributes to constructing learners' identities.

3. METHODS

This is action research, which refers to a self-reflective inquiry method to improve the rationality and fairness of participants' practices ([Carr & Kemmis, 1986](#)). A qualitative ethnographic approach was utilized to examine how translanguaging influences learners' investment in language learning and how it contributes to developing their identities. Additionally, a narrative approach was employed to explore learners' experiences with using languages in their daily lives. Participants of this study were enrolled in an intermediate-level language course named 'Speaking Well in the US.' The course 'Speaking Well in the US' was designed to equip learners with communication skills, and I had the opportunity to teach it. As a language teacher, the course helped me realize the challenges language learners face and created a space to resonate with my students, leading to a good rapport between teacher and student. Thus, the relationship created a space where learners could share their experiences without hesitation. Moreover, through action research, teachers can analyze learners' behavior and challenges, enabling them to modify teaching strategies based on their needs.

3.1. Participants

Five adult immigrant language learners participated in this study. Three participants are from Brazil, and two of them are Venezuelan. Learners from Brazil speak Portuguese, while those from Venezuela speak Spanish. All participants had been living in the US for a short period during data collection, but only one had been living in the US for ten years. Participants' age range was between 25 to 48 years old. Regarding enrollment in English language courses, only two participants had previous experience taking language courses before enrolling in the 'Speaking Well in the US' course. This was the first time the rest of the participants had taken the 'Speaking Well in the US' language course after coming to the US. To protect participants' confidentiality, pseudonyms were used based on IRB (Institutional Review Board). [Table 1](#) presents the demographic data of the participants.

Table 1. Participants' data.

Participants	First language	From
Molly	Portuguese	Brazil
Amy	Portuguese	Brazil
Camelia	Portuguese	Brazil
Genia	Spanish	Venezuela
Arena	Spanish	Venezuela

3.2. Data Collection

Learners were asked to write narratives in a shared Google document about their experiences using languages in everyday life, particularly their efforts to improve their English. They were instructed to follow a prompt adapted from Norton (2013) study and optimized based on the learners' needs and the study's purpose. Learners were asked to focus on one specific event and write their weekly narrative. Each participant wrote a total of ten narratives. The prompt is given below-

"Write down a narrative about your experiences using English language this week. When did you use English? Whom did you speak? What did you say? How did you speak? Did you use only English? Tell us in detail and add any relevant information."

To generate ideas during brainstorming sessions and produce weekly narratives, learners were asked to use their preferred language(s). Learners who had the same first language worked collaboratively to generate ideas during brainstorming sessions. For instance, three participants, who were from Brazil and used Portuguese, worked collaboratively. On the other hand, two Venezuelan learners, whose first language is Spanish, had pair work to develop ideas for writing their narratives. Each participant generated a total of 10 notes from the brainstorming sessions before writing the weekly narratives. In addition, learners were also encouraged to use online resources if they needed any language-related support, including translation and writing skills in both First (L1) and second language (L2). Most learners used Google Translation when they needed language-related support during brainstorming. Table 2 presents the data collection details, including the number of narratives each participant wrote, and the corresponding notes taken during brainstorming.

Table 2. Data collection.

Participants	Number of narrative writings	Number of notes taken during brainstorming
Molly	10	10
Amy	10	10
Camelia	10	10
Genia	10	10
Arena	10	10

3.3. Data Analysis

To analyze the data, NVivo 12 plus, which is a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, was used. Learners' written narratives and notes from brainstorming sessions were coded to find the role of translanguaging practice in the adult ESL classroom in fostering learners' investment in the target language, learners' language choice preferences in different contexts, and identity construction. The written narratives and notes were analyzed based on Narrative analysis to uncover the complex relationship between identity, investment, and language learning. This study also used narrative analysis to analyze learners' written narratives as narrative is one of the primary vehicles to understand learners' identities or who they are. This study drew on Pavlenko (2007) sociopolitical context of narrative approach and De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012) interactional contexts of narrative approach. The sociopolitical approach helped examine how broader social dynamics, including language ideology, language policy, cultural norms, power structures, and social justice issues shape language learners' narratives and identity constructions. The interactional context of narrative approach also helped identify the ways in which language choices

shape learners' narratives and how learners co-construct meaning during communication in different contexts. The analysis aimed to understand how translanguaging practice in adult ESL classroom can influence learners' investment in target language and learners' language choice preference in different contexts.

3.4. Theoretical Framework

Translanguaging theory is an appropriate lens for understanding the fluid integration of all linguistic resources. It challenges the traditional views of language as separate and distinct entities. Translanguaging is a theoretical frame that suggests that bilinguals and multilinguals draw from their entire linguistic repertoire rather than separate, autonomous linguistic repertoires to create meaning. Translanguaging is primarily a process that normalizes multilingual learners' languaging practices, serving as a classroom pedagogy and a foundation for teaching and learning, specifically for racialized bilinguals (García et al., 2021). She further proposed that translanguaging is slightly different from other fluid languaging practices as it is transformative and can potentially remove the hierarchy of languaging practices. She also argued that translanguaging is a way of languaging practices in different contexts, including diverse social, cultural, and political settings, a new way that ensures not only fluid discourses but also voices of multilingual to new social realities (García & Leiva, 2014). This concept opposes the ideologies that connect language with nationhood and standardization (Flores, 2013). This is a powerful and liberating framework that eliminates societal power dynamics associated with standardization and nationhood. Translanguaging pedagogy can play critical and politically transformative roles (Flores, 2013; García & Leiva, 2014). It is mainly a theoretical and instructional approach that allows learners to utilize resources from their entire linguistic repertoire.

4. FINDINGS

The findings of this study show that all participants preferred their first language to take notes during brainstorming sessions. However, most of the participants fluidly used their first and second languages in producing weekly narratives, where they narrated their everyday experiences of using English. This section presents excerpts from learners' narratives.

4.1. Agency and Authentic Language Choices

Translanguaging practice in the classroom created a space where language learners felt encouraged to authentically choose language(s), affirming their linguistic abilities and multilingual identities. Although learners were encouraged to use their preferred languages during brainstorming, some fluidly blended languages into their written narratives. This fluidity reflected their ability to navigate linguistic boundaries based on context and audience, affirming their linguistic agency. For instance, Arena, a participant who had lived in the U.S. for four years, wrote a narrative about her interaction with her son, illustrating how her use of English and her home language ensured effective communication and enriched her storytelling.

Excerpt 1:

This week I bought a blackboard for my child (Ignacio). We write the ABCs and draw things like the sun, an apple, Mickey, etc. Then my child says, "Mom, where is the eraser?" I didn't understand exactly what he was talking about, so I said in Spanish, "¿Qué es eso, hijo?" (What is that, son?) He went to look for it. Then I understood what he was talking about, and I said in Spanish, "Borrador" (Eraser). He said, "YEAH!" That day, I learned one more word in English thanks to my son. (Arena, Narrative Writing).

In the above excerpt, Areena described a real-life conversation in her written narrative in which she fluidly blended English and Spanish, integrating languages naturally to bridge the gaps in understanding. This example illustrates how translanguaging fosters investment in language learning by enabling learners to engage in meaningful interactions that promote vocabulary acquisition and affirm their multilingual identities. When Areena had difficulty understanding her son, she said, "¿Qué es eso, hijo?" (What is that, son?), reflecting the practical use of

translanguaging to address the communication gap. This means that when confusion arose, the learner reverted to Spanish for clarification, demonstrating her ability to blend languages to express a need. For example, the parent used Spanish (“¿Qué es eso, hijo?”) (What is that, son?) when she encountered an unfamiliar English word (‘eraser’) and further used the Spanish word “borrador” (eraser) to ensure she understood correctly. This interaction facilitates communication between parents and child across different languages, ensuring understanding and promoting learning.

In addition, Genia, one of the participants living in the US for ten months during data collection, also utilized her linguistic repertoire to communicate effectively in a multicultural context. In one of her narratives, she wrote:

Excerpt 2:

This week, I worked as an Uber driver, and a customer asked, "How can you differentiate in Spanish from which country the person is?" I said it is easy; each country has a unique accent. In Spain, they speak with the 'Z'; for example, in Mexico, some words are different from those in Venezuela, but they mean the same. For example, Mexican people say 'troca' (truck), while in Venezuela, we say 'camioneta' (pickup truck). They are different words but have the same meaning. He said it was funny, and I replied, 'Yes, it is!' (Genia, Narrative Writing).

The excerpt above reveals that translanguaging practices extend beyond the classroom, influencing learners' identity construction in social and professional contexts. The narrative excerpt shows Genia's natural conversation with one of her customers who asked her about linguistic differences between Spanish-speaking countries. Although the actual conversation and written text show that Genia predominantly used English, she blended Spanish words to illustrate the linguistic differences. This example demonstrates learners' awareness and understanding of linguistic variations and cultural references across Spanish-speaking countries. Genia's awareness was conveyed through the examples she used, such as the use of 'Z' in Spain and different words for the same object in Mexico and Venezuela. It is important to note that the learner explained the concept in English while referring to specific Spanish terms and their usage in different countries. It is also evident that the speaker blended languages based on the communicative context; for instance, she used the Spanish terms 'Troca' (truck) and 'Camioneta' (pickup truck) to provide specific examples, while the explanations remained in English. 'Troca' and 'Camioneta' refer to pickup trucks in Mexico and Venezuela, but the terms are region-specific. This excerpt highlights the fluid nature of translanguaging, where the speaker blends languages to ensure meaningful communication that requires using languages from her full linguistic repertoire.

4.2. *Autonomy in Action: Learners' Linguistics Freedom*

Translanguaging practices in the language classroom created an opportunity for learners to exercise their linguistic freedom and autonomy. Genia, a 42-year-old woman from Venezuela, moved to the USA ten months ago. She worked as an economic analyst at a bank back in Venezuela. Genia's whole family moved to the USA, hoping to find better opportunities. Initially, she was happy when her husband found a job and her family received work permits in the USA. However, she also felt upset because speaking English was challenging. After coming to the USA, Genia primarily relied on translation, and her husband and children helped her translate during communication in different settings. It is important to note that Genia habitually translated in the classroom, particularly during brainstorming sessions. For instance, she jotted down notes during a brainstorming session before writing her weekly narrative, translating from Spanish to English, which required a deep understanding of both languages. For instance, she wrote:

Excerpt 3:

This week, I sent food to my neighbor and wrote a letter. Gracias por ser un vecino amable. He disfrutado de su deliciosa comida y aprecio su consideración. Por favor acepta este regalo como un pequeño gracias. Tu amiga...

Thank you for being a kind neighbor. I have enjoyed your food and appreciate your thoughtfulness. Here is a small thank-you gift. Your friend...

(Genia's note from a brainstorming session)

On Saturday, I prepared some empanadas to sell to my friends. The order was 20 patties of ground beef, 25 chicken, 15 of cream cheese, and 50 tequeños (cheese sticks). I gave my neighbor several of each flavor, and to thank her, I gave her three aromatic candles. I thanked her for being a kind neighbor. Gracias por ser un vecino amable (Thank you for being a kind neighbor). I enjoyed her food. In the letter, I said I appreciated her thoughtfulness. He disfrutado de su deliciosa comida y aprecio su consideración. Por favor, acepta este regalo como un pequeño gracias (Please accept this gift as a small thank you).

Beautiful my neighbor, she likes my food. I have already given him arepas, bread with sausages and Venezuelan Mandocas (deep-fried cornmeal snack), all made by me. (Genia's narrative writing).

The above example addresses how translanguaging shapes a learner's linguistic behavior, ultimately enhancing Genia's investment in language learning. The above note and the excerpt from her narrative portrayed how Genia blended languages to write her narrative. During the brainstorming session, Genia started writing her notes in Spanish and translated them into English, demonstrating her proficiency and comfort in both languages. The above notes from the brainstorming session indicated that the learner could convey the message in the target language more fluently when there is an option to use learners' preferred languages.

In this context, the fluidity of languages allowed the learner to access a broader range of vocabulary and expression, ultimately enhancing her confidence and communicative skills. Moreover, translanguaging practice in the classroom helped learners express themselves fully without being confined to a single language. For example, when language learners need to discuss their cultural aspects, blending languages works effectively. Sometimes, one language works well over another based-on topic and situation, ensuring effective communication. The reason is that some words, phrases, and expressions require cultural meanings and connotations deeply rooted in specific cultures or languages. For example, the meaning of the phrase 'deliciosa comida' goes beyond its literal meaning of tasty food; rather, it conveys cultural appreciation and respect for traditional homemade food that people share with their loved and dear ones. It is important to note that people can convey this type of emotional expression only by using their preferred language.

Like Genia, Molly, who came from Brazil, talked about her culture while interacting with the Walmart saleswoman. In one of her narratives, she wrote:

Excerpt: 4

Last Saturday, I went to Walmart to buy food for my house. When I went to pay, I could talk to the cashier very entertaining. His name is Ellen.

We talked:

Me: He Ellen, how are you?

Ellen: Very good, and you.

Me: good. Ask: What is the price of these cookies?

Ellen: \$2.75

Me: In my country, they are called Guayabitas (Newtons Guava).

Ellen: O, really? Awesome, glad to know that.

(Molly's narrative writing)

The above narrative excerpt shows how Molly demonstrated fluidity in language use by integrating a term from her native language into an English sentence, reflecting the translanguaging practice as a natural process in communication. Considerable attention needs to be paid to the context when Molly blended her preferred language and introduced her cultural identity, making interactions more meaningful and engaging. In the conversation, Molly predominantly used English to express greetings and ask the price of the cookie, Newton guava. At this point, Molly

introduced her native language, Guayabitas, connecting her cultural background with her conversation in English. This example shows how translanguaging practices help language learners navigate between their preferred languages. In this context, the learner used her preferred language(s) smoothly, representing her awareness and ability to engage in meaningful conversation. When Molly blended languages to talk about her culture, the cashier responded in English but acknowledged and showed her interest in the cultural references. For example, Ellen's positive response to Molly's cultural references, "O really? Awesome. Glad to know that" indicates a mutual understanding and appreciation of a multilingual speaker's identity and cultural background. This example resonated with [Tai and Dai \(2024\)](#) study that translanguaging practice or learners' ability to translanguage is vital for a person's competence in interaction. Molly's ability to translanguage in a real-life setting with a speaker of a target language also indicates how translanguaging can be a natural and creative process in communication.

4.3. Linguistic Flexibility as an Investment

Learners' narratives reveal that multilingual learners' use of translanguaging enriches their cultural and social capital. In this context, linguistic flexibility allows learners to invest in their own identities and maintain their cultural heritage in the target community. It is often difficult to express cultural aspects in a single language, and specific cultural aspects, including traditions, food, values, or daily practices, may not have direct translations. Using preferred languages allows learners to express aspects of their cultural identity more authentically. If learners only use the target language, they may feel they are not representing who they are. By drawing on learners' preferred languages, they can reflect on the complexity and richness of their own cultural experiences. Switching languages to express complex cultural concepts accurately reflects adaptability and cognitive flexibility.

For example, Amy, a 28-year-old Brazilian girl who came to the USA with her husband and little daughter hoping to find a better opportunity, mentioned in one of her narratives that translanguaging practices supported her when she encountered language difficulties in social interaction. Amy used to work at a hospital in her country, but finding a job in the USA was not easy since English proficiency was one of her main barriers. Initially, her husband assisted her in communicating with English speakers. Additionally, she utilized watching movies with subtitles to enhance her English. However, the translanguaging practice helped her navigate, blend, and manage multiple languages in interaction, ensuring successful communication. For instance, she mentioned:

Excerpt: 5

Last Friday, my husband, daughter, and I met some friends at a brewery. When we arrived at the brewery, we saw a place for the kids to play, so my daughter soon went to play. Our American friend's daughter was playing there, too. After a few minutes, our American friend came to talk with us about a road trip she had taken, and we asked her to help us organize our road trip to the Grand Canyon. After we went to the table, we talked about various topics, including the trip she made to Brazil, culture, family, dance, music, and school. I felt very good because I could talk about various subjects, and when I had difficulty pronouncing something, she helped me out. When I didn't know a word in English, I asked her boyfriend, who is Brazilian. Contrary to what I thought, she is a very open person who is willing to talk and help with the language. This was a very pleasant night for me because I realized I am able to understand and speak English in everyday conversation.

(Amy's narrative writing).

The above example shows how real-life interactions can enhance language learning and how supportive interaction is essential in translanguaging. It creates an inclusive environment where multilingual learners can use all their linguistic resources without fear of judgment. This supportive environment is also necessary for learners' investment in language learning. For example, Amy described how her American friend was open and helpful with language, 'she is a very open person to talk and help in the language,' demonstrating a collaborative and supportive environment for language learning. Because of having a supportive environment, Amy could blend languages whenever needed, ensuring successful communication by integrating her full linguistic resources. For instance, the

mention of asking a Brazilian boyfriend for help with English words, ‘...when I had difficulty pronouncing something, she helped me out. When I did not know a word of English, I asked her Brazilian boyfriend to clarify, representing practical translanguaging in social contexts. The interaction with an American friend and her Brazilian boyfriend highlighted a cooperative approach to language learning and usage. Amy relied on her American friend for English language support and her Brazilian boyfriend for clarification, demonstrating the natural fluid use of English and Portuguese for conveying messages. Moreover, the ability to participate in conversations on various topics comfortably indicates Amy’s personal investment in language learning and growth in language proficiency as she said, ‘I realized I am able to understand and speak English in (an) everyday conversation.’ This statement shows Amy’s satisfaction with her ability to understand and interact with the people of the target community. In addition, the conversation about the trip to Brazil, culture, family, dance, music, and school indicates an exchange of cultural experiences often facilitated by fluid languages. Like Genia and Molly, Amy’s above-mentioned narrative also reminds us how translanguaging can serve as a medium for cultural exchange that helps language learners build relationships with the people of the target community.

In addition to that, one of the participants of this study, Arena, decided to use her native language to explain her culture in her written narrative. Arena said,

Excerpt 6:

This week my friend and me we went to a store Kroger to buy things for his sister's birthday, we bought balloons and food to make typical dishes of Venezuela, we buy cornmeal to make empanadas and black beans to make a typical dish called “Pabellon” that dish is made with arroz, carne desmechada, frijoles negros, plátano frito y queso blanco por encima (Rice, shredded beef, black beans, fried plantain, and white cheese on top). Means with rice, shredded beef, black beans, fried plantain and white cheese on top. (Arena’s narrative writing)

The above excerpt shows that Arena did not limit herself to English but incorporated Spanish to represent her cultural identity. In this context, linguistic flexibility also represents Arena’s ability to incorporate linguistic resources to convey meaning effectively. For instance, the description of “Pabellon” included the Spanish name of the ingredients and their English translations. When learners can fully express their experiences without feeling constrained by the linguistic norms of one language, they feel empowered. The choice of keeping culturally related words in Spanish reflects Arena’s deep connection to her cultural identity. Explaining only in English might dilute the richness of her culture. The excerpt mentioned above shows Arena’s ability to move fluidly between languages depending on the context. For instance, Arena chose English to describe the story’s narrative and context; however, she used Spanish to explain the details of preparing traditional Venezuelan food. Here, Arena’s investment in multiple languages supports personal identity and fosters cross-cultural understanding in the classroom where the rest of the learners do not share the same linguistic or cultural background. Arena invests in maintaining and transmitting her cultural identity while living in a different linguistic and cultural environment. This example demonstrates an investment in the cultural roots and a desire to share aspects of Venezuelan culture. Thus, the above example exemplifies how linguistic flexibility and investment intersect, demonstrating the learner’s layered identity.

5. DISCUSSION

The study found that translanguaging practices in the adult ESL classroom created a space where language learners had the opportunity to choose their preferred language(s) to produce their narratives and generate ideas. This opportunity empowered learners to decide which language to use in different contexts. In this study, adult language learners felt that using only the target language was sometimes insufficient to convey meaning; instead, fluid integration of preferred language(s) was essential to make meaning. It is worth noting that when language learners are required to use only the target language, they may stop investing in language learning due to fear of breakdowns of communication. Learners’ investment in language learning is contingent to how they will be treated

in different contexts and the negotiations of power between interlocutors (Darvin, 2020). Translanguaging practices in the classroom helped learners choose their preferred language, fostering their investment in language learning. For example, in the case of Arena, translanguaging helped bridge communication gaps between herself and her son. The narrative in excerpt 1 shows a real-life example of how language learning occurs through integration of fluid language(s) in daily conversation, leading to vocabulary acquisition: “Then that day I learned one more word in English thanks to my son.” In this context, translanguaging fostered language learning for both parent and child, creating a supportive environment where learners could invest more in language learning. In the excerpt, the participant had a natural conversation with her son, where they negotiated understanding and communication in both English and Spanish. This reflects their parent-child relationship and dynamic and complex language learner identities, which change based on their investment in language learning. In this context, the participant’s statement, ‘I learned one more word in English (excerpt 1),’ shows her investment and desire to learn the language. The learner used her full linguistic repertoire to enhance communication and language learning, reflecting her shifting identities. When learners can flexibly use multiple languages, it serves as a gate for individuals to strengthen their social and cultural identities and build meaningful connections. For example, Arena uses Spanish with her son to foster understanding and preserve her cultural identity, which illustrates how language can secure symbolic resources like family bonds and cultural expression. This example also shows how translanguaging is a tool for communication and a powerful means of reinforcing personal and cultural ties.

Moreover, the findings of this study reveal that translanguaging practices in the classroom empowered learners by preparing them to use fluid language in their everyday communication, extending beyond the classroom. The use of fluid language in written or oral communication not only empowers learners but also serves as a means to challenge the existing social stereotypes and ideology that regulate power division based on language. For instance, one of Molly’s narratives revealed that her interaction with the saleswoman at the grocery store was very successful even though she used fluid language in her communication. The saleswoman’s response was enthusiastic as she showed her genuine interest in learning about Molly’s culture by saying, “Awesome, glad to know that (excerpt 4)”. This created a welcoming environment for Molly, further fostering her investment in target language learning. It is important to note that learners’ investment in language learning depends on how supportive the interlocutor is during the communication as uninterrupted interaction without communication break is essential for language learners’ growth and confidence. This finding shows how classroom practice can prepare multilingual learners to challenge the existing social stereotype and dismantle language hierarchy.

It is also important to mention that the connection between a supportive social environment and the opportunity to use translanguaging mostly depend on how confident learners feel in interaction and how intelligently learners can incorporate their preferred languages. Therefore, it is the classroom’s responsibility to prepare learners to feel confident about external interactions and internal choices of using preferred languages to enhance learners’ engagement and investment in language development. When language classrooms create an option for using translanguaging, learners can decide when and how to use different languages according to their needs and comfort zones. In this context, the learner’s agency and decision to choose a preferred language in the external setting resonate with Vogel and García (2017) study that suggests translanguaging practices in the classroom equip learners with the agency to make linguistic choices based on their comfort and communicative goals.

Moreover, we can see that translanguaging helped learners become more aware of their language use; that is, their metalinguistic awareness became more developed. For instance, Genia, being an Uber driver could make choices according to social context (García & Kano, 2014). The context demanded her to blend the languages fluidly; thus, she did not rely on one particular language to explain linguistic differences to her customers. Furthermore, Genia depicted her multilingual identity by explaining various Spanish dialects. Genia could connect with her customers and share her cultural insights through her multilingual identity. The learner’s ability to differentiate Spanish accents and vocabulary depicts her linguistic knowledge, which is part of her identity. The overall interaction also reinforces

that the learner is culturally aware and knowledgeable. Genia's selective use of Spanish in an English conversation represents a conscious choice to blend languages according to the social context. This negotiation of language choice reflects her investment in her linguistic and cultural identity. Therefore, in this context, translanguaging not only serves as a means of communication or a medium of social connection but also as a means of identity expression. The above example also shows the learner's investment in language learning, which means her desire to ensure successful communication with her customers, with the aim of acquiring material (job) and symbolic (fluency in language) resources in society. To maintain her job and income (material resources), Genia needed to receive positive reviews as an Uber driver, which unquestionably depended on successful communication with the customers. Thus, it becomes evident that language, identity, and Capital (material and symbolic resources) are intertwined, ensuring learners' status and position in society. In order to ensure learners' status in society, they have no alternative options but to invest in language learning. The findings align with Norton (2013) notion that learners engage in language learning to gain access to resources that have tangible and symbolic value. However, when learners face obstacles in language learning, including racism, linguisticism, and other challenges, they tend to stop investing in language learning. In this study, translanguaging practices in the classroom encouraged learners to use languages fluidly in everyday interaction, creating a dynamic environment where language learners could ensure successful communication by celebrating the diversity of languages.

In addition, translanguaging worked as a scaffolding tool for clarifying confusion and understanding complex concepts in the target language. Learners could actively support each other's contributions to improve their understanding of a target language (Feller, 2022). In addition, by switching between languages, learners could engage in higher-order thinking skills, like translation or interpretation. This process also reinforces learners' grasp of multiple languages.

For example, Genia, and most language learners used translation, which also created different pathways for retrieving the same concept or information to ensure successful communication. Translanguaging practices in the classroom created a space, particularly during brainstorming sessions, in which learners used their first language, translated from L1 to L2, and interpreted to write down their ideas. It is worth mentioning that translating and interpreting require a deep understanding of the context and information. Fluid integration of languages and translation process helped learners grasp the underlying meaning of a context in the target language, developing their comprehension. In this study, translanguaging practice gave learners agency in their learning process and communication. Thus, the overall brainstorming sessions enhanced learners' understanding of the target language, contributing to their investment in language learning.

6. CONCLUSION

In sum, the above excerpts and discussion revealed two main points in the article. Firstly, translanguaging practices in adult language classroom enhanced learners' investment in the target language by allowing their agency in choosing preferred language.

Learners' authority to integrate fluid language in different contexts not only helped them preserve their cultural identity but also helped create new identities in the target community. The use of fluid language beyond the classroom played a significant role in challenging social stereotypes and dismantling the existing language hierarchy, ensuring a welcoming environment for multilingual learners. When language learners find a supportive environment for communication, they tend to invest more in the target language. As learners' investment is contingent to the dynamic negotiation of power, language learners need to be prepared to deal with the social class power, suggesting the need to rethink about classrooms' responsibilities that can bridge the gap between language learners' communication abilities and the existing ideology of native speakers. The findings show how classroom practice can empower language learners to challenge the hegemonic ideology in society.

Secondly, translanguaging practice in the classroom enhanced learners' metacognitive awareness of their own language choice. Learners can consciously blend language based on social contexts, ensuring their investment in the language learning.

The findings of the current study urge that using translanguaging in the language classroom is not just a teaching pedagogy; rather, it promotes social justice. Thus, language classrooms should incorporate translanguaging practices to prepare learners to challenge the existing stereotype, ensuring investment and justice both inside and beyond the classroom. In doing so, language educators can ensure both linguistic empowerment and social justice, fostering the linguistics rights of multilingual learners. Future studies in this area need to focus on how language educators can use translanguaging effectively in the classrooms that are politically and linguistically divers. In addition, future research can also focus on the impact of translanguaging on learners' social emotional well-being.

To conclude, this study emphasizes the potential of translanguaging practices in adult ESL classroom in enhancing learners' investment in language learning, fostering agency, and creating shifting identities in a new community.

Funding: This study received no specific financial support.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The Ethical Committee of the University of Memphis, United States has granted approval for this study on 6 June 2019 (Ref. No. PRO-FY2019-637).

Transparency: The author states that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent, that no key aspects of the investigation have been omitted, and that any differences from the study as planned have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.

Data Availability Statement: Upon a reasonable request, the supporting data of this study can be provided by Mahmuda Sharmin.

Competing Interests: The author declares that there are no conflicts of interests regarding the publication of this paper.

REFERENCES

- Canagarajah, S. (2011). Code-meshing in academic writing: Identifying and resolving tensions in the theory and practice of academic English. *The Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 10(3), 271–282.
- Carr, W., & Kemmis, S. (1986). *Becoming critical: Education, knowledge, and action research*. London: Falmer Press.
- Cenoz, J., & Gorter, D. (2021). *Teaching in multilingual contexts: A critical perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Creese, A., & Blackledge, A. (2015). Translanguaging and identity in educational settings. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 35, 20–35. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190514000233>
- Darvin, R. (2019). *L2 motivation and investment*. In M. Lamb, K. Csizér, A. Henry, & S. Ryan (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of motivation for language learning*. London, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Darvin, R. (2020). Translanguaging practices in the classroom and the role of language choice in fostering learner investment. *Journal of Language and Education*, 15(3), 212–229.
- Darvin, R., & Norton, B. (2015). Identity and a model of investment in applied linguistics. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 35, 36–56. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190514000191>
- Darvin, R., & Norton, B. (2023). Investment and motivation in language learning: What's the difference? *Language Teaching*, 56(1), 29–40. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444821000057>
- De Costa, P. I., Singh, J. G., Milu, E., Wang, X., Fraiberg, S., & Canagarajah, S. (2017). Pedagogizing translingual practice: Prospects and possibilities. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 51(4), 464–472.
- De Fina, A., & Georgakopoulou, A. (2012). *Analyzing narrative: Discourse and sociolinguistic perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- De Mejía, A.-M. (2006). Bilingual education in Colombia: Towards a recognition of languages, cultures and identities. *Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal*, 8, 152–168.
- Feller, S. (2022). Language switching and higher-order thinking: The role of translanguaging in language learning. *Journal of Language and Cognitive Development*, 28(4), 334–348.

- Flores, N. (2013). The unexamined relationship between neoliberalism and plurilingualism: A cautionary tale. *TESOL Quarterly*, 74(3), 500–520.
- García, O. (2010). Linguaging and ethnifying. In J. A. Fishman & O. García (Eds.), *Handbook of language and ethnic identity: Disciplinary and regional perspectives*. 1, 519–534.
- García, O., Flores, N., Seltzer, K., Wei, L., Otheguy, R., & Rosa, J. (2021). Rejecting abyssal thinking in the language and education of racialized bilinguals: A manifesto. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, 18(3), 203–228.
- García, O., Johnson, S. I., & Seltzer, K. (2017). *The translanguaging classroom: Leveraging student bilingualism for learning*. Philadelphia: Caslon.
- García, O., & Kano, N. (2014). *Translanguaging as process and pedagogy: Developing the English writing of Japanese students in the U.S.* In A. Blackledge & A. Creese (Eds.), *The Multilingual Turn in Language Education: Opportunities and Challenges* (Vol. 258). New York: Routledge.
- García, O., & Leiva, C. (2014). *Theorizing and enacting translanguaging for social justice*. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer.
- García, O., & Wei, L. (2014). *Translanguaging: Language, bilingualism and education*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Huang, X., & Chalmers, H. (2023). Implementation and effects of pedagogical translanguaging in EFL classrooms: A systematic review. *Languages*, 8(3), 194. <https://doi.org/10.3390/languages8030194>
- Li, W. (2018). Translanguaging as a practical theory of language. *Applied Linguistics*, 39(1), 9–30. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amx039>
- Makoni, S., & Pennycook, A. (2007). *Disinventing and reconstituting languages*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Molina, S. C. (2021). *Examining global Englishes and the decolonization of English language teaching in a post-colonial context*. In A. F. Selvi & B. Yazan (Eds.), *Language teacher education for global Englishes: A practical resource book* Routledge Advances in Teaching English as an International Language Series. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and language learning: Gender, ethnicity, and educational change*. Harlow: Longman.
- Norton, B. (2013). *Identity and language learning: Extending the conversation* (2nd ed.): Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781783090563>.
- Ortega, L. (2020). The study of heritage language development from a bilingualism and social justice perspective. *Language Learning*, 70, 15–53. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lang.12347>
- Otheguy, R., García, O., & Reid, W. (2015). Clarifying translanguaging and deconstructing named languages: A perspective from linguistics. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 6(3), 281–307. <https://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2015-0014>
- Pavlenko, A. (2007). Autobiographic narratives as data in applied linguistics. *Applied Linguistics*, 28(2), 163–188.
- Phillips, A., & Genao, S. (2023). Transforming, translanguaging, and transcending identities: Developing culturally responsive educational leadership. *Intercultural Education*, 34(3), 305–323.
- Poza, L. (2017). Translanguaging: Definitions, implications, and further needs in burgeoning inquiry. *Berkeley Review of Education*, 6(2), 101–128. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8k26h2tp>
- Rafi, A. S. M., & Morgan, A.-M. (2024). Translanguaging in instruction and pedagogic design: promoting learner-centredness in a teacher-centred reading classroom of a Bangladeshi university. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, 21(4), 447–470.
- Seltzer, K., & García, O. (2020). *Broadening the view: Taking up a translanguaging pedagogy with all language-minoritized students*. In Z. Tian, L. Aghai, P. Sayer, & J. Schissel (Eds.), *Envisioning TESOL through a translanguaging lens: Global perspectives*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer.
- Spiro, J., & Crisfield, E. (2018). *Linguistic and cultural innovation in schools*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-64382-3>.
- Tai, K. W., & Dai, D. W. (2024). Observing a teacher's interactional competence in an ESOL classroom: A translanguaging perspective. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 15(5), 2061–2096. <https://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2022-0173>
- Teng, F. (2019). Understanding identities in practice, discourse, and activity: English lecturers' experiences in the context of mainland China higher education reform. Doctoral Dissertation, Hong Kong Baptist University.

- Tlostanova, M. V., & Mignolo, W. (2012). *Learning to unlearn: Decolonial reflections from Eurasia and the Americas*. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press.
- Turnbull, M. (2019). Leveraging translanguaging to enhance learner engagement and achievement: Evidence from multilingual classrooms. *TESOL Quarterly*, 53(4), 1017–1038.
- Vogel, S., & García, O. (2017). *Translanguaging*. In G. Noblit & L. Moll (Eds.), *Oxford research encyclopedia of education*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Views and opinions expressed in this article are the views and opinions of the author(s), International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability etc. caused in relation to/arising out of the use of the content.