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REFUGEE FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING: TRAUMA AND THE USE OF TRANSLANGUAGING SPACE AS A VEHICLE FOR PSYCHO-SOCIAL SUPPORT

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ABSTRACT

Refugee language learners have traumatic experiences that could hinder their language learning and negatively impact on their academic achievement. Literature on the effects of trauma on refugee foreign language learning is still modest even with unprecedented numbers of refugees. This article investigates the effects of trauma on refugee education in English-as-a-foreign-language settings and draws on the translanguaging practices of refugees, internally displaced and host community learners. I do so by reviewing the relevant literature and applying the concept of translanguaging using an ethnographic study in a non-profit organisation in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. Interviews, observations and fieldnotes were used to record translanguaging practices employed by coaches and beneficiaries of the non-profit organisation, not only to maximise communication and learning, but also to create safe spaces for learning. The article concludes with a set of pedagogical implications and recommendations for English language teachers regarding how to implement translanguaging as a vehicle for psycho-social support in refugee settings.

KEYWORDS

Refugees, trauma, translanguaging, EFL classroom.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2021), the number of people forcibly displaced as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or events seriously disturbing public order worldwide amounted to 82.4 million at the end of 2020. Out of this number, 48 million are internally displaced people and more than 30 million are refugees and asylum seekers. Forced migration includes refugees, asylum-seekers, internal displacement, trafficking, development-induced displacement, and exile (Castles, De Haas, & Miller, 2013). Most displaced people are located in the Global South "where there are fewer unified systems for dealing with asylum and refugee protection" (Capstick, 2020, p. 218). For example, Syrians fleeing the war in their country make up a fifth of the population of neighbouring Lebanon. These unprecedented numbers have posed great challenges to different countries, especially those with limited resources. These challenges include the provision of education, employment, health, public funds, and other services. Similarly, refugees and asylum

seekers experience culture shock, adaptation and an uneasy process of socialisation (Demirdjian, 2011).

Socioeconomic hierarchy, social inequality, linguistic discrimination, and monolingual bias are issues that coexist with huge waves of migration, and refugees are at the forefront to deal with them. For example, refugees are perceived as powerless, unskilled and illiterate because their language(s), semiotic repertoires and cultural practices differ from those of the host community. These ideologies and perceptions often result in refugees experiencing social exclusion, low self-esteem and cultural inequality (Blommaert, 2010). Central to this discussion is the importance of communication and second/foreign language (L2/FL) learning. In refugee settings, this importance is boosted by the need to communicate in the host community language or a shared language for numerous purposes (e.g., employment, education, accessing services, etc.). In a globalised world, flows of commodities, cultures, ideas and languages go hand in hand with the mobility of people that transcend national borders. Therefore, it becomes pressing for vulnerable people such as refugees to learn a foreign language in this socially interactive world. It is the norm now to know a second or third language and it may be unusual to know only one, for language is at the centre of human life (Cook, 2016).

However, learning a foreign language is not a linear process and the difficulties to foreign language learning are multiple and varied, from learner-based factors to language-related difficulties and psychological pressures (Masri & Abu-Ayyash, 2020). This is further complicated when learners live in extreme conditions with unusual life experiences and trajectories such as is the case for refugees and asylum seekers (Cirocki & Farrelly, 2019). Carrying traumatic experiences is probably one of the most notable experiences impacting this group and learning a new language is surely not on the top list of priorities for refugees, at least at the beginning of their resettlement. Sinclair (2001) notes that trauma can be a major hindrance for refugees and can affect their learning abilities. In a review of literature on educational needs and barriers for refugee learners, McBrien (2005) points out that refugees have more obstacles to face in their education compared to their migrant peers. One pedagogical intervention that researchers have called for in recent years in order to create safe spaces especially in migrant English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) settings is the adoption and inclusion of all communicative repertoires, including languages, that learners bring to the classroom.

As a result of this inclusion, EFL learners start to feel more comfortable with managing their negative emotions, reducing their traumatic symptoms, and subsequently making academic gains (Capstick & Ateek, 2021; Dovchin, 2021; Piller, 2016). However, little is known about how exploiting full linguistic repertoires helps in creating safe spaces for refugees and how interaction in different languages takes place in refugee EFL classrooms. Therefore, the aim of this article is twofold: to explore the challenges that face refugee learners when learning a foreign language, with a particular focus on trauma and learning in EFL settings, and to investigate teachers' and learners' translanguaging practices in the EFL classroom and examine how these practices facilitate or hinder the creation of safe spaces for language learning.

This article begins with a review of studies on how trauma negatively impacts foreign language learning. It then discusses monolingual ideologies that are prevalent in EFL settings

and how academics and educators have challenged these ideologies in the last two decades, promoting multilingualism in the EFL classroom. The article concludes with a case study that is based on a previous research project to show how coaches and beneficiaries use translanguaging as a vehicle for psycho-social support.

2. TRAUMA AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING IN REFUGEE SETTINGS

Some academics have grouped refugees with other immigrants (Clayton, 2015; Duran, 2017). While both groups may have similar motivations and characteristics, refugees are a particular group that are forced to leave their countries out of fear of persecution (McBrien, 2005). The UNHCR defines a refugee as an individual who:

> owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country, or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it (Convention and Protocol, 1951, n.p.).

The above definition demonstrates the adversity of the situation refugees must deal with. These life-threatening experiences invoke different levels of stress and trauma that many refugees live with even after being resettled into a new country. Research shows that trauma responses persist in the minds and behaviour of people for a long time after the traumatic experience has ended (Medley, 2012). Trauma is defined as "a response to a stressful experience in which a person's ability to cope is dramatically undermined" (Cole et al., 2005, p. 18). Many refugees might have gone through stressful experiences such as exposure to armed conflict, constant shelling, human trafficking, loss of close relationships and experiencing violence such as torture and rape. It is trauma that most notably differentiates refugees from the majority of EFL learners and trauma is more likely to lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than accidental stress (Charuvastra & Cloitre, 2008). PTSD and depression are highly prevalent in refugee populations and also among refugees resettled in high-income Western countries (Fazel et al., 2005; Tinghög et al., 2017; von Haumeder et al., 2019). Symptoms of PTSD might include difficulty beginning new tasks, blame, guilt, depression, disturbed sleep, eroded self-confidence, and an inability to concentrate (Kerka, 2002). Different studies have shown that trauma and PTSD can have negative effects on academic success in general and language acquisition in particular (Saigh et al., 1996; Sondergaard & Theorell, 2004). Steven's (2001) study of Cambodian refugees in Australia showed that 91 per cent of the participants to be experiencing at least one PTSD symptom, including trouble concentrating, memory loss and headaches.

Trauma and PTSD not only affect the mental wellbeing of refugees, but also negatively affect their language learning abilities. In a review of 43 articles from 1998 to 2015, Clayton (2015) investigated refugees' language learning and PTSD, and concluded that the articles "strongly

support the hypothesis that PTSD has a direct effect on refugee language learning but that English-as-a-second-language (ESL) educators can implement procedures to minimize impediments to learning" (Clayton, 2015, p. 2). For example, in a longitudinal study of 49 Iraqi refugees in Sweden, Söndergaard and Theorell (2004) indicate that refugees who showed severe symptoms of PTSD learnt L2 at a slower speed. The authors also found that the speed of language acquisition is more highly correlated with the cumulative PTSD symptom load over time than the number of hours of language classes taken. In a more recent study, Masri and Abu-Ayyash (2020) explored the difficulties that face 45 Syrian refugees in nine countries while learning an L2. Being forced to flee their country and relocate to a new one is one of the stress factors refugee learners could face. One of the refugee participants in the study suffered from depression caused by the stressful kind of life he experienced in Sweden. "Such circumstances weakened the participants' self-confidence and made them feel shy to speak up in the new language in order not to make mistakes that the society may mock them for" (p. 380). Similarly, Ying (2001) reports a case study of a Vietnamese man who suffered from severe headaches and anxiety and was later referred for treatment because he had complained of poor concentration which made attending his ESL classes a difficult task.

The Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (2002) explains the relationship between trauma and language, noting that the process of language learning requires noticing, control and meaning, and adults experiencing PTSD experience particular challenges to learning a new language as the effects of trauma interfere with many areas of cognitive processes, including all aspects of education and learning a new language.

Cognitive approaches to L2 learning placed much emphasis on the centrality of the processes of attention, noticing and memory (Ellis, 2015). These mental and cognitive processes are directly affected by trauma, as shown above. Specifically, traumatic experiences may alter neural pathways within the brain and impair working memory (Johnsen et al., 2008), which is critical for both processing and sorting new information such as grammar and vocabulary. One prominent hypothesis related to this discussion is the Noticing Hypothesis. Schmidt (2001) proposed that nothing is learnt unless it is noticed. In this regard, comprehensible input will not lead to successful language acquisition if the language learner is not aware of a particular language feature. Other approaches to language learning, such as the sociocultural perspective, assume that cognitive development, including language development, arises as a result of social interactions. Interaction facilitates giving access to language input that learners need to activate internal processes that play a major role in language learning (Vygotsky, 1986). However, refugees may struggle to take part in such social interactions. Studies such as Steel et al. (2002), who interviewed over 1,000 Vietnamese refugees in Australia, and Carlsson et al. (2006), working with 63 refugee survivors of torture, show that traumatic experiences and subsequent PTSD inhibit normal daily functioning and contact, reducing exposure to the L2 outside the classroom.

Finally, one more stressor that could trigger trauma and is of a central importance is linguistic discrimination that is led by monolingual ideologies. Language is one of the greatest assets that asylum seekers and refugees have and depriving them of this could result in emotional distress.

Although languages are viewed as practices, "they are practiced with socio-political norms and influences" (Duran, 2017, p. 24). Woolard (1998) notes that languages and their speakers are positioned in and through talk. In this sense, the dominant society (the host community in the case of refugees) views *nativism* as a preference, and deviation from monolingual practices could lead to exclusion and discrimination. Refugees' linguistic practices often work as markers of their ethno-cultural identities, which eventually leads to social comparisons, "in which the [language of] the in-group [dominant society] is perceived as better than that of the out-group [refugees/migrants]" (Bhatia, 2018, p. 423). This particular stressor is the main one to be discussed here. The argument, which is aligned with the research aims of this study, is that allowing teachers and learners to use all languages available at their disposal in the EFL classroom creates a seed for growing a safe space that is much needed for refugees' psycho-social support.

The next section will discuss monolingual bias and its effects on refugee language learning.

3. MONOLINGUAL IDEOLOGIES

Refugees are resourceful when it comes to languages. Their migration trajectory makes learning languages throughout their journey to the destination country a necessity. Most refugees had previous formal or informal education in another language (Duran, 2017). In addition, many of them are bilingual and can use two or more languages effectively. However, these linguistic resources are not recognised at schools in the host communities. The main reason for this non-recognition is the divergence of refugees' linguistic practices from those of the host communities, which brings the issues of socio-economic hierarchy, educational opportunity and social injustice that coexist with mass migration to the forefront (Blommaert, 2010).

Having arrived at their host communities, they are usually faced with monolingual bias and educational institutions that frown upon utilising their full linguistic repertoires and look at languages as separate, autonomous, and bounded entities. Recent research has advocated for translanguaging in L2 and FL contexts, where the language-of-instruction and the languages of the learners diverge (Al-Masaeed, 2020; Fallas Escobar, 2019; Li & Lin, 2019). These research projects provide rich examples of how multilingual practices enhance the learning process in the classroom, as they consider multilingualism to be the linguistic norm nowadays. These practices challenge and even resist monolingual ideologies that are prevalent in numerous L2/FL contexts. These same ideologies perceive switching between languages as a deficit and employing full linguistic repertoires as a dysfunction. This is evidenced in several studies that were published in a special issue edited by Li and Martin (2009). They show the conflicts and tensions between multilingual practices and language policies that prohibit using any language but that of the schools. Therefore, classrooms that celebrated multilingualism and allowed languages to breathe in classrooms were deemed to be unprofessional and accused of disrupting the pupils' learning.

One of the main drivers of these monolingual policies is the traditional understanding of bilingualism, where bilinguals were seen to have two separate language systems (Grosjean, 1989). This leads to defining bilinguals as L2 deficient learners, where employing a multitude of

linguistic resources for communication is viewed as an error not a resource. Recently, Li and Lin (2019) argue that the "conflicts between everyday flexible multilingual practices of the individual, including teachers and pupils, and the societal-imposed policies of language-of-instruction in schools still remain in most parts of the world" (p. 209).

Although these conflicts may still exist, Larsen-Freeman (2018) notes that maximising the use of multiple linguistic resources will be on the rise in L2 classrooms because of the growing number of research studies that favour these practices. This means opposing the view that languages are separated following the philosophy of *separate bilingualism* (Creese & Blackledge, 2010), and emphasising that people's linguistic and semiotic resources can work as a whole, moving across and beyond languages for meaning-making and knowledge construction (Busch, 2012; Jonsson, 2019). In doing so, the monolingual bias (Block, 2003) is disrupted and the fluidity of languages, transcending boundaries, is highlighted.

4. TRANSLANGUAGING IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

Viewing multilingualism as a resource draws on the flow of languages at larger community and international levels. This view has been developed because of living in *superdiverse* communities, which impose new dynamics on late modern society that require us to take account of mobility, fluidity, mixing and historical narratives (Creese & Blackledge, 2015). Meanwhile, a more popular language such as English has been widely used as a lingua franca among people from linguistically different backgrounds (Crystal, 2003).

Translanguaging is defined as "the deployment of a speaker's full linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named languages" (Otheguy, García, & Reid, 2015, p. 283). It is the flexible use of linguistic and non-linguistic resources by students to make sense of the world around them (García & Li, 2014). García and Li (2014) argue that translanguaging as a pedagogical practice could liberate the voices of minority students, whose languages are different from those of the local community. In educational contexts, Hornberger and Link (2012) propose that educators value the multiple communicative repertoires of the students and their families. Perhaps many still question the reasons for the distinction between code-switching and translanguaging. Lewis et al. (2012, p. 665) stress that such a distinction is ideological, where code-switching has associations with language separation. They note that especially in bilingual classrooms "translanguaging as a concept tries to move acceptable practice away from language separation, and thus has ideological, even political associations." Creese and Blackledge (2015) propose that translanguaging goes beyond code-switching, but it also encompasses it. A translanguaging lens focuses on the full deployment of linguistic resources and the discursive practices by individuals that cannot be assigned to one code or another, and that make up the full communicative repertoire (García & Li, 2014).

This new understanding of languaging in the classroom is derived from the transformative nature of translanguaging as it has the potential to challenge old understandings and generate new configurations of language practices in the classroom (Zhu, Jankowicz-Pytel, & Li, 2020).

According to García and Li (2014), the transformative nature of translanguaging is characterised by creativity and criticality. They argue that students, through translanguaging, construct and modify their identities as they respond to their historical and current conditions critically and creatively. Translanguaging focuses on the different ways in which students and teachers use their communicative repertoire across social contexts to negotiate their identities. Translanguaging brings together the different dimensions of the students' linguistic, cognitive, and social skills, and this in turn transforms their skills, values and beliefs, thus creating a new identity for these multilingual students (Li & Zhu, 2013). Palmer et al. (2014) investigated the practices of two bilingual teachers in a dual language programme in the USA. Drawing on the notions of identity positioning and investment, the teaching practices of the teachers suggested effective strategies to promote bilingual identities. These practices, translanguaging pedagogies, included modelling fluid language practices, positioning students as bilinguals, and celebrating language crossing. Language crossing "involves code alternation by people who are not accepted members of the group associated with the L2 that they are using (code switching into varieties that are not generally thought to belong to them)" (Rampton, 2010, p. 485). This is further illustrated by a research project by Langman (2014), who investigated how teachers organised their practices and how these practices compare with state expectation. She found that teachers initiate agentic actions (i.e., the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act) and engage with their learners in creative ways through translanguaging and transcultural connections. The current study (Section 6) draws on the notion of teacher agency in the second discourse topic and shows how agency is tightly linked with the theory of translanguaging (Li, 2018).

5. TRANSLANGUAGING SPACE AND TRAUMA

Li (2011) suggests that translanguaging creates a social space for the users by bringing in different dimensions of their personal experience and environment into one coordinated and meaningful performance. It is a space where different identities and ideologies not only coexist, but also combine to generate new identities. Thus, the boundaries of the translanguaging space are *ever shifting*, and the process of space construction is an ongoing and lifelong one, for the space exists in the mind of the individual who creates it.

Translanguaging space highlights the dynamic nature of multilingual practices, while showing the interconnectivity between multi-modal and multi-sensory resources that are deployed in communicative interactions. Translanguaging space is "a space where various semiotic resources and repertoires, from multilingual to multisensory and multimodal ones, interact and co-produce new meanings" (Zhu, Li, & Lyons, 2017, pp. 412–413). The transformative nature of translanguaging space can generate new configurations of language practice and new understanding and social structures. In this sense, these are spaces where different identities and ideologies (i.e., refugees and even language educators) not only coexist, but also combine to generate new identities in the sense that they are spaces where various semiotic resources and repertoires, from multilingual to multi-sensory and multi-modal ones, interact and co-produce new meanings. This means that the transformative power of translanguaging space would also

extend to challenge and transform old configurations and understanding of language practices. This is also true in educational contexts, in which classrooms and schools can be spaces, created for and by translanguaging practices, where both teachers and learners deploy a multitude of meaning-making semiotic resources and systems to incite new configurations of language and education practices.

One question that arises here is how these spaces could be used as safe spaces for refugees and asylum seekers. UNICEF (2016) suggest that safe spaces ensure positive identity and feelings through self-regulation as well as self-esteem and self-appraisal. They also suggest that safe spaces provide refugees with a voice and meaningful engagement and interaction with others. Safe spaces refer to physical or social spaces that allow vulnerable groups to meet and discuss challenging circumstances they experience (Harpalani, 2017). Safe spaces, in this sense, provide a platform to tackle difficulties in a supportive manner to alleviate anxiety, reduce isolation, and make connections with people who have similar experiences (Dryden, Tankosić, & Dovchin, 2021). In this context, safe spaces encourage their users to use their linguistic diversity fully and engage in greater linguistic and cultural practices. In this article, I apply the work on "translanguaging spaces to refugee settings where displaced learners' embodied repertoires can be called on to create a translanguaging space that is a safe space" (Capstick & Ateek, 2021, p. 4). This is because displaced learners often feel a disconnection from their linguistic and cultural heritage when they are displaced as their host schools and neighbourhoods may use different varieties to those of their countries of origin (Capstick & Delaney 2016). Symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1977) can result from this, compounding the trauma that many refugees seek to overcome in their psycho-social programmes. Outcomes of this trauma include poor memory, concentration and processing of information and increased anxiety, which interfere with language learning (Gordon, 2011) (see Section 2 for details). As mentioned above, displaced people may experience cultural and linguistic shock at the stage of pre-settlement as well as during the settlement process. To further complicate this, refugees are expected to use English only as it is the language of instruction in schools, university or work settings, not only in English-speaking countries, but in many EFL/ESL classrooms. Consequently, they are under constant pressure to think, write and communicate through standard English in both institutional and non-institutional settings in the host society (Piller, 2016). As a result, these stressful experiences can largely impact refugee EFL learners' emotional state and could cause foreign language anxiety, which interferes with learning and is one of the most accepted phenomena in psychology and education (Zheng, 2008). This means that language learning environments need to be safe rather than stressful. Gordon (2011, p. 2), for example, emphasises that "it is imperative for the ESL field to recognise and investigate trauma as a factor in language learning".

Dryden, Tankosić and Dovchin (2021) argue that the teacher's use of translanguaging may create emotional safe spaces to mitigate the negative reactions of foreign language anxiety. Such spaces permit them to manage and negotiate their emotions and feelings related to their lived linguistic and cultural experiences in a new country. The four participants in their study demonstrated calmer tones, emotional releases and semiotic actions that demonstrate relief, when they use translanguaging practices. In fact, translanguaging could travel beyond EFL/ESL

classrooms to provide refugee EFL learners "with an emotionally and linguistically safe space where they feel comfortable in managing their negative emotions through employing multiple entangled layers of linguistic and paralinguistic resources" (Dovchin, 2021, p. 1). However, to what extent might translanguaging practices facilitate the creation of a safe space for reducing anxiety at times of increased trauma for refugee learners and asylum seekers? The next section will draw on one case study of an English language programme for refugee and host community students in a non-profit organisation (NGO) in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) to answer this question.

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY (DESIGN, METHODS AND SETTINGS)

The case study presented here is based on a previous research project (Capstick & Ateek, 2021) that investigates the linguistic and non-linguistic resources used by refugees, internally displaced people (IDPs) and host coaches and beneficiaries (i.e., language learners) who teach and learn English in an international NGO that runs language programmes as part of its psycho-social support initiatives in the KRI. The EFL classes are made up of refugees from Syria, IDPs from Iraq and members of the host community from KRI, which constitutes a complex linguistic setting. The medium of instruction in schools in Kurdistan is Kurdish (Sorani dialect) and is therefore highly politicised as Kurdistan fights for independence from the Arabic-dominant central government in Baghdad (Shanks, 2016). Different languages compete for space in the education centres visited for this study.

The NGO's Advancing Adolescents Programme, which is designed to "strengthen the resilience of the host community and Syrian refugee young people through equitable access to psychosocial support, protection and informal learning opportunities" is made up of structured group-based activities (Mercy Corps, 2016, p. 2). These activities draw on the Profound Stress and Attunement framework in which a safe space is created, and prolonged stress is mediated in classroom activities (Macphail et al., 2017). Profound Stress and Attunement "provides a holistic platform for young people to develop empathy and resilience in response to their needs, and supports measurable psychosocial improvement" (Mercy Corps, 2016, p. 3). Elsewhere, it can be reported that this NGO demonstrated the need to create safe spaces that facilitate the conditions for post-stress attunement through English language lessons for the beneficiaries (Capstick & Ateek, 2021). Safe spaces in this context are of a significant importance to alleviate the anxiety that refugees and IDPs may face when trying to interact in English (Back et al., 2020), for their cognitive processes to still function so learning can take place. In the NGO centre where the study was carried out, English language lessons had been developed into a vehicle for *post stress attunement* programmes as English is a popular subject with adolescents in the region, though learners from low socio-economic groups (such as those in this study) will have had little or no access to English language teaching. The NGO claims that the implementation of these psycho-social support programmes through language lessons could increase the levels of diversity of social networks, trust and perceived confidence for learners.

The coaches who deliver the NGO's Advancing Adolescent Programme have been trained to understand the impact of trauma and stress on brain functions and how to respond to these issues to facilitate experiential learning. They had received two weeks of English language teacher training before starting their 8-week English language courses with the beneficiaries (learners). Six coaches, all under the age of 30 as a requirement for the programme, were observed twice and interviewed twice for the study: two from Syria (refugees), two from Kurdistan (host community) and two from the southern parts of Iraq (IDPs). While interviews provide rich data about the phenomenon under investigation and give the opportunity for the participants to provide their "story," a unique strength of classroom observations is that they yield more authentic data than mediated methods (Cohen et al., 2018). Furthermore, they serve as a reality check because people's actual behaviour may not correspond with what they say they do (Robson, 2002). In addition, detailed fieldnotes were recorded during the field visits. Having selected the six participants for this research (convenience sampling), the study was explained to them, and consent forms were obtained. The data analysed for this study consists of ten English language lessons which were video and audio recorded (a total of 8 h 3 m 36 s) with fieldnotes and copies of course materials – tailored and designed by the coaches. The number of students observed in each of these lessons ranged from 13 to 18 with an average of 15 students per lesson. Each lesson lasted approximately 45 minutes while post-lesson interviews with coaches lasted approximately 50 minutes. Semi-structured interviews with the coaches were conducted in English to explore their attitudes, opinions and thoughts about using language as a vehicle for psycho-social support and to investigate how their understanding of translanguaging practices compares with their actual use of these practices in the classroom. The principal reason for choosing this type of interview is that it provides information that is difficult to obtain by other means, and the social interaction during the interview provides in-depth discussion of the issue under investigation (Dörnyei, 2007).

6.1 DATA ANALYSIS

To analyse the data, thematic analysis was followed in both the interviews as well as the video-recordings (classroom observations) to identify discourse topics that the coaches orient to in their interviews and to explore the links between these discourses, the coaches' practices, and the beneficiaries' responses in the classroom. Thematic analysis is a common technique that is used mainly in qualitative research, and can be used to identify the important themes, derived from data, to answer the research questions (Gries, 2009). The main aims of the study, as mentioned in the introduction, are to investigate translanguaging practices in the EFL classroom by both coaches and beneficiaries and whether these practices create safe spaces for learners. To identify the discourse topics in the study, from interviews and classroom observations, coaches were all asked the same questions about language use in the classroom. Drawing on Krzyżanowski (2008), discourse topic is the basic analytic category and emerges through several sentences and appearances in discourse. In other words, a discourse topic is the salient theme that underlies a series of sentences in the interview data. Having established the themes from interview data

(macro-level), a thorough analysis of the fieldnotes and observations of the classroom practices was conducted to make links between the macro and micro levels of discourse. Five discourse topics emerged from the data and all topics are related to home language use while learning the target language (i.e., English). These discourse topics are English first, translation, language and identity, coaches' agency through translanguaging and the last one is related to using movement and non-linguistic cues to support learning. Due to space limitations, I will present one extract from the interviews and another from classroom observations in relation to two discourse topics: *English first* and *coaches' agency through translanguaging* for their relevance to the research aims. These extracts and examples were selected to represent two discourse topics that appeared regularly in the larger dataset.

6.1.1 ENGLISH FIRST

This discourse topic about using the English language first in the EFL classroom was a common discourse topic in the interviews as well as the interactions between coaches and beneficiaries. In the interviews, the coaches describe the need to use English first before switching to a variety which is more familiar to the beneficiaries.

EXAMPLE FROM THE INTERVIEWS

> **Lanya:** Ok first I pronounce the word in English and then I translate into Kurdish then after pronouncing it in English I would tell them the meaning of that specific word in English and then in Kurdish.

The excerpt above is taken from an interview with one of the host community coaches (Lanya), who is from the KRI. Lanya usually teaches English with the presence of another Syrian Kurdish teacher assistant (Zakia) who also helps her to translate into Kurmanji (Syrian Kurdish dialect) and Arabic (so all students feel included in the learning process) when they feel that using English only is not enough. As shown in the above example, coaches lean into using English first before switching into either Arabic or Kurdish when there are communication breakdowns. This practice reflects the common preference among the NGO coaches to use the target language first. The monolingual ideology of using target-language only is dominant in EFL settings. Although using only one language at a time "may maximise exposure to the target language, it also leads to teacher-centred and textbook-focused pedagogies, due to limited, or even lack of, opportunity for students to engage in class interactions" (Zhang et al., 2020, p. 3). As a result, EFL learners, especially vulnerable groups such as refugees, might feel marginalised in the classrooms, which could lead to anxiety especially given that FL learning involves traumatic experience, thus leading to failure in creating safe spaces for learning, which the use of learners' L1 may have aided in setting up such spaces.

EXCERPT FROM THE CLASSROOMS

Bold= Modern Standard Arabic (MSA)
Italics/underlined: Syrian Arabic
Two underlines: Kurdish (Kurmanji)- Only in the second extract
Normal font= English
In between []: Translation

1   **Zakia:** The word tea. Nouns that are uncountable like tea, we cannot count tea. Can you count tea?

2   **Students:** (Nodding their heads but no response to the question).

3   **Zakia:** *ما فينا نعد الشاي لأن مو معدود. صح؟* [We cannot count tea because it's uncountable. Right?]

4   **Students:** **نعم لأنه** [Yes because] uncountable.

5   **Zakia:** We say a cup of tea for example. **يعني كلمة نضيفها قبل الشاي** Quantifier [means a word that we add before tea]. *منقول كاسة شاي مثلا* [We say a cup of tea for example].

6   **Student:** A cup of tea *كاسة شاي* [a cup of tea], two cups of tea *وهيك* [and so on].

This excerpt features translanguaging among Syrian Arabic, Modern-standard Arabic (MSA) and English. The dominant language at the beginning was English, in accordance with the NGO's policy. Zakia initiated her question in turn 1 in English, to which the students (beneficiaries) nodded their heads without any response, signalling some confusion and lack of comprehension. Zakia sensed this and that is why she resorted to using Syrian Arabic, in turn 3, to paraphrase the question she had initially asked in English. In doing so, the students showed more willingness to communicate and responded using Modern Standard Arabic, which is the official, high variety to mark the nature of content which is language grammar. Also, they used the last word (uncountable) in English to reference key content. The next turn (5) witnesses a complex use of multilingual repertoires. Zakia starts her turn by using English to adhere to the NGO's policy. Then, she employs MSA to explain the rule of using quantifiers before uncountable nouns, before using a shared variety (Syrian Arabic), as this could be a variety that both might feel most comfortable with. Zakia positions the student here as bilingual through transferability between resources of named languages. Zakia's effortless and successful use of translanguaging resulted in one student repeating Zakia's example (a cup of tea) and elaborating on another using English first and Arabic second, marking Zakia's use of translanguaging. All students started sharing examples of their own after that in the lesson.

The teacher's use and permission for the students to use Arabic in the EFL classroom could be seen as an act of resistance against the monolingual ideologies and an act of support to draw on their linguistic repertoires, build on their background knowledge and "engage in cross-linguistic transfer in order to improve their future learning" (Gynne, 2019, p. 359). Similar to Escobar's (2019) participants, what is noteworthy here is that students follow Zakia's practice of using English first and the initiation of translanguaging starts with the teacher, as shown in this example, which means that students do not have complete agency over using their full linguistic

and semiotic repertoires. This shows the challenge that educators face to empower their learners to take more control of their learning (Gynne, 2019). Canagarajah (2011, p. 8) has criticised educational contexts in which "acts of translanguaging are not elicited by teachers through conscious pedagogical strategies."

This excerpt shows the integration and coordination among named languages for meaning-making, which happens in what Li (2011) calls the translanguaging space. Both the coach and the beneficiaries moved across different varieties and languages effortlessly when they felt a safe space was made available to do so. This space was not created randomly though; it is the teacher's translanguaging practice herself and her assurance to the student that made not only this student, but others as well engage in translanguaging. This translanguaging practice, as shown in the above excerpt, builds confidence and mutual trust between Zakia and her students, which could lead to reducing anxiety and traumatic symptoms. It is their personal histories and shared identities and experiences in displacement and refuge coming into contact with one another, which feed into Zakia's understanding of the vulnerability of this group and the impact of taking away parts of their linguistic repertoires on their self-concept and resilience. Blommaert (2015) points out that interactants employ their various and available resources to achieve their communication goals, and limiting these resources in the L2 context, guided by the influence of monolingual ideology, may limit the students' agency and the richness of interactions which are important for language learning (see Section 2 for details). The employment of the multilingual practices of MSA, Syrian Arabic and English for meaning-making and knowledge construction by Zakia and the students works as a tool of empowerment and an act of resistance to the English-only policy. In so doing, personal histories and shared identities not only come into contact with one another in this translanguaging space, but also develop together to create a safe space that could mitigate traumatic experience while learning.

6.1.2 COACHES' AGENCY THROUGH TRANSLANGUAGING

This discourse topic is about coaches' activation of their agency in the classroom through translanguaging practices. It relates to the psycho-social support that coaches provide to their students through pushing the boundaries of language use and resisting established ideologies that might hinder the creation of safe spaces.

EXAMPLE FROM THE INTERVIEWS

> **Mustafa:** If they [students] don't accept…in the English language we offer other languages. If not, we offer him music and if he didn't like music, we offer him football. We don't let him go.

The above example is taken from an interview with one of the coaches (Mustafa) – a Syrian Kurdish coach – who could speak in all the varieties existent in the EFL classroom (English, Sorani, Kurmanji and Arabic). Mustafa received training from the NGO and attended Skype

sessions with UK-based language educators who acted as mentors for the coaches in the NGO. During the interview, Mustafa shows that he is willing to explore all options while teaching and change his techniques to build a good rapport with the beneficiaries to create a safe space for learning. This does not only include his *playful mix* of languages in the classroom, but also his use of body gestures and movement. His main reason behind such use is to *"show psycho-social support for everyone...and that I am here to support you"* (data from interview).

EXCERPT FROM THE CLASSROOM

1   **Mustafa:** if you cannot write it [word] you can draw it.
2   **Mustafa:** (sensing some confusion): اذا ما بتعرف في الكلمة ارسميها [If you do not know the word, you can draw it] (while drawing a car on board).
3   **Student to another:** Heger tu Peyvê nizanê bê, tu dikarê wê xêz bike [if you don't know the word, you can draw it].

Image 1. Picture taken from Mustafa's lesson.

This excerpt is taken from an EFL lesson delivered by Mustafa about "picnics." Mustafa divided the 14 students in the classroom into four groups. The task is for each group to talk about a picnic that the group went on. They had to discuss food, games, conversations and other activities they engaged in on their last picnic. As with Zakia in the first example, Mustafa used English first to explain the rules of the task and what students are expected to write (turn 1). He wanted to maximise communication and involve all semiotic repertoires (linguistic and non-linguistic) in the task so students could be as much involved in the activity as possible. He managed to do this by employing not only English and Kurdish (Kurmanji), but also by drawing when he told students to draw any word they do not know (turn 2). This is also evidenced in Image 1 which shows the presence of various written languages and also Mustafa's drawing in the classroom. It is through translanguaging that Mustafa showed agency creatively and it is

through his resistance to conform to classical understanding and activation of the English-only policy in the EFL classroom. This agentic action allowed the fluidity of languages in the classroom. It was mediated by the social, cultural and historic context in which it took place.

Tao and Gao (2021) note that teachers may display resistance against using a particular policy and this is a manifestation of agency. Relevant to this discussion on agency is translanguaging and how language teachers make agentic linguistic and non-linguistic choices and actions creatively and critically. This is manifested in the above extract through using translingual practices and drawing. Following Mustafa's use of different named languages, students were encouraged to follow his path and one of the students positioned herself as a more capable peer (turn 3). According to Vygotsky, instruction and learning should occur in the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which is defined as "the distance between the actual development level… and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (1987, p. 86). Learners construct meaning through social interaction, and experts play a facilitating role and assist the less capable learners in their learning and cognitive development. Therefore, ZPD is "a space for social interaction, which links learning with development" (Cirocki, 2016, p. 37).

7. CONCLUSION AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Based on this case study and other research studies, some pedagogical implications and recommendations are proposed for EFL/ESL practitioners about how to implement translanguaging while linking it to trauma and emotionality of refugee language learners. First, English language teachers should take refugee EFL learners' social-psychological state into account when they teach. They must be sensitive to the traumatic stress that these groups of learners have experienced and are still experiencing. Refugees who have experienced trauma take longer to acquire an L2 (e.g., Gordon, 2011). Traumatic experiences may also have an adverse impact on motivation to learn an additional language (Iversen et al., 2014). Therefore, proper teacher training programmes should be set in place for language teachers who work with students suffering from trauma. In this study, we have seen how coaches received training using the Profound Stress and Attunement framework and how such training raised their awareness of the impact of trauma on refugees and how to alleviate its effects. Teachers and educators need structured packages of training on the psychological and physiological effects of trauma. This could be provided through continuing professional development and in pre-qualification training. Such programmes could aim at reducing trauma symptoms that have a direct impact on learners' academic achievement and progress. Training should also include methods to organise and deliver teaching that is sensitive to the specific needs, strengths and difficulties of students who have experienced significant trauma. Training for teachers of refugees should include specific information about the context and experiences of the refugees with whom they work; this may include aspects of culture, politics, and displacement history.

Second, teachers should note that having to lose a culture and home is disempowering, and this can threaten to upset the balance of the relationship and trust with teachers who are not

displaced. Being invited or allowed to exploit their full linguistic and non-linguistic resources to express their concerns could reset the power balance, so students feel that they have control over their agency. Self-expression is also very important to deal with the effects of trauma. Self-expression is not only manifested in linguistic means, but could also be shown through other communicative repertoires such as drawing, music, arts and other means, similar to what we have seen in Mustafa's classroom. This also brings the concept of teachers' agency to the fore and sheds light on the importance of these agentic actions to challenge established mandates and policies in EFL in general and in refugee settings in particular.

Having said that, it has been noted that foreign language teachers are reluctant to engage in translanguaging practices (Zhang et al., 2021). However, research shows that when students collaboratively draw on their linguistic repertoire and employ their L1 in L2/FL learning, more positive learning experiences take place (Capstick & Ateek, 2021). To put this into practice, Rowe (2018) suggested six practices which teachers could use to promote translanguaging: (1) discussing students' language backgrounds and potentially cultural backgrounds explicitly; (2) providing multilingual learning materials in students' various languages; (3) encouraging collaborative translation; (4) encouraging students to collaborate in order to create multilingual text; (5) providing opportunities for translanguaging through meaningful activities, such as encouraging discussion of curriculum content in relation to individual experience; and (6) designing projects that enable students to connect with multilingual audiences such as family members and the community. To add to this list, opportunities for students to disclose elements of their personal journey, using multiple languages, can be incorporated into lesson plans, but there will be variability in how ready individual students are to share that information. To this end, teachers need skills to provide non-directive support for students in distress and to signpost them to the available resources.

Finally, the L1 is an essential component of a learner's identity and a source of pride and cultural value. Therefore, making space for home languages in multicultural classrooms is important (Coelho, 2012). Different studies show that the L1 is a foundation for L2 learning and a tool for learning when there is a lack of L2 competence. Knowing more than one language may enhance cognitive abilities to learn an L2. Different activities could be designed to this end. As an icebreaking activity, coaches in this study asked students to do a pair activity where A's asked B's about their names, how they are pronounced and what they mean in their language. Students, then, tell the class about their peers' names. Another activity could be writing sentences or sayings in different languages on a board or screen. The teacher picks up a theme (e.g., study, sports, work, etc.) and asks students to provide sayings in their own languages. Students share these sayings/proverbs in their language with the class. There are many examples of such activities that teachers could find and use in different teachers' resources. Teachers are also encouraged to design their own activities based on their students' interests and language proficiency levels. Last, but not least, more research on the translanguaging practices of refugee language learners inside and outside the classroom is needed to check whether there is any transferability of these practices and whether they mirror each other.

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