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Creative translanguaging in formative assessment: Chinese teachers' perceptions and practices in the primary EFL classroom

<https://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2023-0085>

Received April 28, 2023; accepted April 30, 2023;

published online May 25, 2023

Abstract: In Chinese primary EFL classrooms, translanguaging between English and Chinese is commonly used by teachers and students out of need for efficient communication, however, this practice has been and is still widely believed to hinder students' English development. Although recent studies have revealed the benefits translanguaging offers for teaching and learning, little has been done to understand teachers' perceptions and use of a translanguaging pedagogy in their formative assessment practices, which is expected to play a more important role than before in China's primary education due to recent policy reform. To close this gap, this exploratory study conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 Chinese primary EFL teachers, who are varied in their geographical location and teaching experience. Adopting an abductive thematic analysis approach, data analysis aimed at understanding how translanguaging was used to facilitate the implementation of formative assessment. Through the lens of creativity, three essential types of translanguaging practices – translanguaging for meaning-making (through preparation and expansion), collaboration, and empowerment – were identified, which have the potential to facilitate different procedures of formative assessment by accelerating understanding and expression, stimulating critical thinking and exploration, maintaining interest and engagement, and promoting autonomy and peer learning.

Keywords: creativity; formative assessment; primary EFL in China; translanguaging

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1 Introduction

The recent implementation of the “Double Reduction” policy¹ (General Office of State Council of China 2021) in China has deemphasized the role of summative assessments in compulsory education, especially in the junior phases, requiring primary school teachers to attend more to the role of formative assessment (FA), defined as activities used by teachers and learners to diagnose students’ current state of learning and to help them achieve learning objectives (Wiliam and Thompson 2008). However, FA requires extensive learner engagement, motivation, and autonomy (Black and Wiliam 2009; Wiliam and Thompson 2008), which may be challenging due to a lack of necessary cognitive and non-cognitive resources, including the named language for communication during the assessment process (Ascenzi-Moreno 2018; Chen et al. 2021). In an EFL context, numerous studies show that deficiency in English can significantly hinder classroom activities (Fang 2018; Jiang et al. 2019; Wang and Curdt-Christiansen 2019), and this factor could prove even more challenging in EFL classrooms at the primary level in China where students are still at the early stage of learning English. Consequently, it is not uncommon to see teachers and students speaking Chinese in English classes, but this is at odds with the monolingual ideology deeply-rooted in language education in China and the wider world (Canagarajah 2013; Cummins 2019; Hall and Cook 2012; Lin and He 2017; Mahboob and Lin 2016), and has generated doubts and confusion among teachers (Fang and Liu 2020; Wei 2021).

However, as a new way of conceptualizing linguistic resources in communication and education, translanguaging is being increasingly endorsed as a possible pedagogical solution to linguistic obstacles as it is believed to have the potential to facilitate meaning making (Wei 2018, 2021), improve engagement and relationships in the classroom (Fang and Liu 2020; Zhou and Mann 2021), and foster thinking skills (Li 2011; Wei 2018). These possible benefits also coincide largely with the goals of formative assessment. Nevertheless, to what extent and how Chinese primary school EFL teachers creatively incorporate translanguaging into their FA practices remains unclear. The present study aims to investigate this yet under-researched area with a focus on one, primary research question:

How is translanguaging used creatively in formative assessment practices by Chinese primary school EFL teachers?

¹ The policy was enacted in 2021 July and took effect in the autumn term of the same year. It aims to reduce students’ workload in compulsory education, particularly homework and off-campus tutoring. A related goal is to reform the evaluation and accountability system, by changing the status quo of (over)using summative tests and promoting the use of formative assessments.

To answer this question, interviews were conducted with 10 primary school EFL teachers in China about their translanguaging practices when engaging in formative assessment activities. Data analysis, using abductive thematic analysis, highlights the ways in which teachers employ translanguaging to enable students to be co-constructors of learning through formative assessment.

2 Literature review

2.1 Translanguaging practices in foreign language classrooms

Translanguaging has been proposed as a pedagogical approach to second language teaching that can mitigate the challenges related to communication and help cultivate a more learner-centred classroom (Canagarajah 2011; Creese and Blackledge 2015; García and Wei 2014). It refers to the systematic use of two (or more) languages to maximize communication during a teaching activity (Wei 2016). At the core of a translanguaging pedagogy are the tenets that teachers and learners are co-creators of knowledge and learning (Ticheloven et al. 2021); that language learning is a dynamic process of development which attends to how all linguistic resources are used for communicative purposes (Wei 2018); and that the ability to use the full range of one's linguistic repertoire fosters better participation and a greater sense of equality in the classroom (García and Wei 2014; Rabbidge 2019).

The growing attention to translanguaging as a pedagogical theory provides a fresh perspective through which moving between two or more languages, and even between linguistic and non-linguistic communication modes (García and Otheguy 2020), can be examined. To date, studies within different contexts have discovered that appropriate translanguaging practices can enhance classroom dynamism by increasing student engagement (Daniel et al. 2019) and by improving rapport between teacher and students and among students (Fang and Liu 2020; Wang 2019; Zhou and Mann 2021). In addition to creating a more inclusive, positive, and supportive learning environment, translanguaging has been used frequently to explain concepts or knowledge (e.g., vocabulary, grammatical rules, technical terms), check comprehension, and give instruction (Fang and Liu 2020; Wang and Curdt-Christiansen 2019; Zhang and Chan 2021; Zhou and Mann 2021; Zhou 2021).

Despite the advantages of translanguaging, a significant barrier to its implementation is the still prevalent monolingual ideology in China's EFL education that only English should be used in the classroom (Fang 2018). For instance, Fang and Liu (2020) found that EFL teachers felt an "unspoken principle" (p. 12) of using only English for instruction. This ideology asserts that the overuse and reliance on L1 will decrease exposure to and use of the target language (Fang and Liu 2020;

Wei and Wu 2009; Zhou and Mann 2021). With increased recognition of the benefits of using both/all languages, however, this view is being re-examined. García and Wei (2014: 28), for example, reconceptualize translanguaging from convenient code-switching to “the different ways multilingual speakers employ, create, and interpret different kinds of linguistic signs to communicate across contexts and participants and perform their different subjectivities.” Within this frame, teachers have a greater linguistic repository to draw from in their instructional and assessment strategies, which can aid in ensuring learning has taken place and in involving learners at all proficiency levels in their own development.

2.2 Formative assessment

Formative assessment (FA) is now broadly recognized as an important component of instruction, as it is believed to help facilitate learning progress and achievement (Andersson and Palm 2017). Different from summative assessments, which aim to collect and report evidence of students’ learning at the end of a program, FA is intended to gather information during the process of learning so that teachers and students can make informed decisions about subsequent teaching and learning (Wiliam and Thompson 2008; Yan et al. 2021). FA is defined in the present study as classroom procedures where evidence about student learning is elicited, interpreted, and used by teachers, peers, or students themselves to make decision of their next step so as to achieve learning objectives (Black and Wiliam 2009; Wiliam and Thompson 2008). This definition also emphasizes the fact that FA is process-rather than product-oriented.

In the past, various FA strategies have been practiced such as question-and-answer sessions, diagnostic tests, self and peer assessment, as well as various forms of feedback (Andersson and Palm 2017; Black and Wiliam 2009; Hattie and Timperley 2007). Based on previous studies, Wiliam and Thompson (2008) proposed an integrated framework (see Figure 1) summarizing the strategies typically involved in a FA activity. In addition to the three sub-goals of FA, each of the five strategies from the framework is also aligned with the three agents in the classroom—teachers, peers, and individual learners—with each having a role to play in FA practices. Effective FA requires teachers to clearly communicate learning goals and standards, design and introduce useful tasks, ensure student engagement, provide support when necessary, and generate feedback to inform future learning (Strategies 1–3) (Black and Wiliam 2009; Wiliam and Thompson 2008). Equally important are the roles of students themselves and their peers, who need to not only understand learning goals and standards, but also take responsibility for their own and each other’s learning through practices such as self and peer assessment and feedback

	Where the learner is going	Where the learner is right now	How to get there
Teacher	S1: Clarifying learning intentions and criteria for success	S2: Engineering effective classroom discussions and other learning tasks that elicit evidence of student understanding	S3: Providing feedback that moves learners forward
Peer	S1: Understanding and sharing learning intentions and criteria for success	S4: Activating students as instructional resources for one another	
Learner	S1: Understanding learning intentions and criteria for success	S5: Activating students as the owners of their own learning	

Figure 1: Key strategies of formative assessment (Wiliam and Thompson 2008, p. 63).

(Strategies 4 and 5) (Andersson and Palm 2017; Black and Wiliam 2009). Therefore, effective FA practices are those where teachers and learners feel engaged and empowered and work collaboratively to recognize ways to improve learning (Andersson and Palm 2017; Black and Wiliam 2009; Wiliam and Thompson 2008).

However, these aspects of FA may be challenging for young Chinese EFL learners, who are likely to lack the needed language ability to participate. For example, Chen et al. (2021) found that even for university EFL students in China, FA activities that require intensive student engagement could result in diminished participation due to deficiency in the target language. Consequently, students would rely on teachers and thus would not be able to experience the benefits of FA. In addition to potential passive engagement, or even resistance (Wei and Wu 2009), requiring students to use only the target language during FA may lead to the elicitation of inaccurate data as students are denied access to their full linguistic potential in solving tasks (Ascenzi-Moreno 2018). Such linguistic obstacles often necessitate language teachers to breach the stringent monolingual rule and embrace a more strategic and liberal language ideology in implementing FA.

2.3 Creativity in translanguaging pedagogy

There is evident overlap between FA strategies and the characteristics of creativity. First, like FA, creativity is process-oriented, involving trial and error, negotiation of

meaning, feedback, and continuous revision and exploration (Chappell 2016; Sawyer 2013). Further, teachers are important guides in the creative process and should help students develop their creativity by providing encouragement and support, while simultaneously stimulating autonomy and responsibility for one's own learning (Fang and Liu 2020). A major goal of creativity in language education is enabling learners to have a voice in their learning journey, to use language through novel activities and approaches, and to be co-creators of knowledge and linguistic development (Kharkhurin and Wei 2015; Richards and Cotterall 2016).

The challenges for implementing creativity in the language classroom are also similar to those of FA. In a study by Wang and Kokotsaki (2018) on teachers' perspectives of creativity in the EFL classroom in China, teachers reported low linguistic knowledge of pupils as a major obstacle to creative engagement, as well as other general hindrances such as traditional exam-focused teaching, practical factors like class size and desk arrangement, and difficulty in getting students to produce and share their own ideas. Although these challenges may seem predictable, it should be noted that for over two decades creativity has been prominently positioned in educational policy reform in China yet remains largely peripheralized in classroom practice (Pang and Plucker 2012; Wang and Kokotsaki 2018). However, according to a recent study by Fang and Liu (2020), many teachers do recognize what creativity is, acknowledge that it is important in EFL education, and understand that successful creative engagement requires the efforts of both teachers and students.

From the perspective of a translanguaging pedagogy, creativity is an essential element of the meaning-making process in communicative interaction (Bagga-Gupta and Messina Dahlberg 2018; Choi 2016; Kharkhurin and Wei 2015; Li 2011; Wei 2021). As Wei (2021) astutely notes:

The translanguaging approach to language learning aims to maximize learners' multilingual potential by fostering creativity through novel ways of combining, mixing linguistic structures, and creating new expressions with elements of different named languages and other social semiotic resources, and encouraging criticality by exposing the learner to different ways of thinking and doing, different traditions, practices and values, and different ideologies. (p. 10)

This sentiment was also captured by Choi (2016) in her exploration of students' multilingual texts, noting that the way her EFL students combined different semiotic codes, including visual images and different languages, allowed them to combine elements of themselves and their environment to "generate new identities, practices and values" (citing Li 2011, p. 1223). Choi (2016: 157) concludes that language education today must "find more meaningful and imaginative ways to productively channel and leverage learners' capabilities and sense of agency."

For teachers, this means constructively engaging students in the meaning making process, beginning with helping them understand the problem/subject and

continuing with further evaluation and exploration. This relates to the first and last stages, “preparation” and “verification,” respectively, of Wallas’ (1926) well known 4-Stage creative process model, in which preparation entails gathering information and verification refers to testing and expanding on ideas and possible solutions to a problem. In situations where linguistic barriers obstruct meaning making and exploration, translanguaging can not only serve as a compensatory strategy to overcome such barriers, but also amplify learner agency and enhance engagement in the learning process (Fang and Liu 2020). This sense of empowerment can be best catalysed when teachers create a student-centred environment, both in terms of prioritizing learner engagement and responding to feedback from students to make decisions about the needs of specific groups and individuals (Richards and Cotterall 2016). The two middle stages of Wallas’ model, incubation and illumination, also cognitively implicate translanguaging processes. Incubation is the personal contemplation of a problem or task through both conscious and unconscious processes and illumination refers to a moment of insight when a potential solution is realized and articulated. In both of these mental operations, language learners are typically employing both/all their available languages in working toward a solution (Choi 2016; Seals et al. 2020). Essentially, allowing teachers and students to use the entirety of their linguistic repertoire can help facilitate a greater sense of voice, responsibility, collaboration, and creativity in the language learning process (Canagarajah 2011; Creese and Blackledge 2015; Fang and Liu 2020; Kharkhurin and Wei 2015; Wei and Wu 2009).

Although there are many similarities and parallel goals between formative assessment, creativity, and translanguaging, the specific ways in which these constructs can be interactively employed in the EFL classroom has not been carefully examined and this provides the opportunity for the current study.

3 Methodology

3.1 Participants

Participants were purposively selected based on the location of the school they worked in and the grade(s) they were teaching. Variation in these two variables was sought to maximize the representativeness and richness of the data. In total, 10 primary school EFL teachers took part in the interviews (Table 1). All of them were female and had at least one-year teaching experience, with the longest-serving teacher having taught for eight years. Among them, four were teaching Y1, one teaching Y3, and five teaching Y5 and Y6, with relatively large student numbers for each class (ranging from 42 to 63). According to them, the English proficiency levels of

Table 1: Interview participants' background information.

Code	Education level	Teaching experience	Location of school	Students' grade	Class size	Students' English level
T01	MA	1 year	Shenzhen	Y6	45–47	Mixed
T02	MA	1 year	Shenzhen	Y6	45–50	Mixed
T03	MA	18 years	Guangzhou	Y6	42–45	Mixed
T04	MA	20 years	Rongchang	Y5 & 6	50	Low
T05	MA	12 years	Rongchang	Y5 & 6	49–63	Low
T06	MA	5.5 years	Chengdu	Y1	45–47	Mixed
T07	MA	4 years	Chongqing	Y3	45–50	Mixed
T08	MA	8 years	Chongqing	Y1	50	Mixed
T09	MA	1 year	Chongqing	Y1	50–51	Mixed
T10	MA	3.5 years	Shenzhen	Y1	50	Mixed

students were diverse for most classes. They were also located in five different cities in south China. Four teachers' schools were in Shenzhen and Guangzhou, which are coastal and economically more developed than the inland cities of Chongqing and Chengdu, where another four teachers lived and worked. Two teachers were based in Rongchang, a small and comparatively less developed county-level city.

3.2 Instruments

An interview guide (see Appendix) was developed through iterative discussions among the three authors. The questions were centred around each participant's teaching background, current teaching, their use of Chinese in class in general, theirs and their students' use of Chinese in formative and summative assessments, the factors they think were prompting or inhibiting their use of Chinese, and the strategies they employed to cope with the challenges for language choice in those assessment processes.

3.3 Data collection and analysis

The individual interviews, conducted by phone, were carried out over a one-month period between September and October 2021. Prior to the interview, participants were informed of the purpose of the study through a Participant Information Sheet (PIS) and signed a digital copy of the Consent Form (CF) via email. Questions asked in the interview generally followed the interview guide, but follow-up questions were

also asked when interesting points emerged. The interviews were all conducted in Chinese as the primary language and were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants.

The recordings were first transcribed by an audio transcription software, then examined against the recordings and corrected where necessary. Using abductive thematic analysis, theory-building was undertaken by examining and re-evaluating the phenomenon of translanguaging in FA practices within the sample, integrating analysis through a data reduction process, and providing evidence for the agreed-upon codes and subsequent themes (Thompson 2022; Timmermans and Tavory 2012; Vila-Henninger et al. 2022). Abductive reasoning is the use of bottom-up logic (as in inductive reasoning), but against the foundations of existing theories and models that provide a framework for observations and interpretations of the data set (Rose et al. 2019), thus, it “is neither data-driven nor hypothesis driven but conducts parallel and equal engagement with empirical data and extant theoretical understanding” (Thompson 2022, p. 1411). In conducting the data analysis, we began with a theoretical understanding of the concepts of creativity, formative assessment, and translanguaging and theories and models related to these constructs afforded analytical parameters for understanding the data. Given that examining a creative translanguaging approach in formative assessments practices is a novel undertaking, the main goal was to propose the construction of new themes based specifically on the context and dataset of this study (Tavory and Timmermans 2014; Timmermans and Tavory 2012).

To develop the properties and boundaries of theoretical categories, each transcript was closely read, and texts of interest were notated through highlighting, memo-taking, and labelling with concise descriptors that explained how participants understood and applied formative assessment, creativity, and translanguaging (Thompson 2022). Afterwards, a two-stage coding process was applied. In the first stage, highlighted texts were open-coded individually by each of the three researchers to identify the occasions of FA activities in which translanguaging was used or allowed to be used. Again, utilizing abductive logic, examination of the FA activities were informed by definitions and occasions of FA strategies put forth by Wiliam and Thompson (2008) and Black and Wiliam (2009), an understanding of translanguaging practices was premised on the works by García and Otheguy (2020) and Wei (2016, 2018), and a conceptualization of creativity was grounded on Wallas’ (1926) 4-stage model as well as studies that characterize translanguaging as a creative act (Choi 2016; Kharkhurin and Wei 2015; Li 2011; Wei 2021). The initial codes were discussed in conference by the research team, further refined through substituting, merging, and splitting, then summarized according to the main procedures of FA activities, leading to a structured codebook of the raw data (Guest et al. 2011) (see Table 2).

Table 2: Occasions of translanguaging during FA.

	Person count	Statement count
Before FA activity	7	12
Teacher giving instructions [S2]	7	11
Teacher clarifying assessment criteria [S1]	2	2
During FA activity	10	35
Students discussing in group work [S2 & S4]	7	11
Student answering teacher question [S2]	7	8
Student writing composition as homework [S2]	5	7
Student giving oral performance such as presentation and role play [S2]	4	4
Student asking teacher for help [S2 & S5]	3	3
Student writing class reflection [S2 & S5]	2	2
After FA activity	8	24
Teacher giving oral feedback on students' oral performance [S3]	7	12
Student giving oral feedback on other students' oral performance [S4]	6	9
Teacher giving written feedback on students' composition [S3]	2	3

In the second stage, coded instances of translanguaging were examined for participants' motivations for using or allowing their students to use translanguaging. Codes were again refined based on collaborative discussions as well as reference to the formative assessment, translanguaging, and creativity literature (Timmermans and Tavory 2012). As Lipscomb (2012) posits, abductive analysis occurs when researchers structure and make inferences (i.e., develop codes, categories, and themes) about the data, then interpretive constructions and new hypotheses are hinged on existing knowledge. Thus, after closely examining the relationship between our codebook entries and arranging them based on their capacity to effectively convey the salient perceptions and beliefs of the participants, themes were proposed and subsequently refined to explain “the story” of our data (Timmermans and Tavory 2012, p. 1416).

At the point of theorising, defined by Timmermans and Tavory (2012, p. 1415) as “the step in which you explain the relationship and story between your themes and your entire dataset,” three types of translanguaging practices were established: translanguaging for *meaning-making*, *collaboration*, and *empowerment*. Translanguaging for meaning making refers to switching to the first language (i.e., Chinese) to deliver information that may not have been as effectively conveyed through the target language (i.e., English). This may include description, explanation or clarification of focal concepts, instructions, standards, or criteria. A distinction is

made between meaning-making for preparation and expansion, with the former referring to using L1 to provide scaffolding for upcoming instruction and/or activities, and the latter indicating instances in which L1 is utilized to verify and gauge learning, and to extend classroom interaction to a more meaningful level with the purpose of stimulating critical thinking, reflection, and creativity (Wallas 1926).

4 Findings

Participants reported a variety of FA activities that they conducted in class to elicit learning evidence, such as question-and-answer, quiz, individual or group oral presentation, paired conversation or role play, and game playing. Participants teaching upper primary grades (i.e., Y5 and Y6) also mentioned written assignments as homework, such as writing compositions and designing posters. With the implementation of the “Double-Reduction” policy (General Office of State Council of China 2021), nonetheless, most teachers planned to remove written assignments in the future in compliance with the policy.

Translanguaging practices by both teachers and students were reported to occur on various occasions of those in- and out-of-class FA activities. The interview data also revealed a clear pattern regarding translanguaging use in different phases of FA and the key FA strategies presented in Figure 1 (see Table 2; FA strategies are shown in square brackets). In what follows, we will analyse and report specifically how translanguaging was used or allowed to be used in different situations and how those uses facilitated the FA process and manifest creativity in teaching and learning.

The different occasions’ relations with key FA strategies (see Figure 1) outlined by Wiliam and Thompson (2008) are also shown in brackets. As can be seen, translanguaging practices were reported to be employed for all five strategies of FA, with the most and least mentions of occasions associated with the second and first strategies, respectively.

Through qualitative abductive thematic analysis, three key themes—meaning-making, collaboration, and empowerment—describe how translanguaging was creatively used or allowed to be used in different formative assessment practices.

4.1 Translanguaging for meaning-making

Our interview responses show that translanguaging for meaning making can be clearly identified from two aspects in relation to FA: preparation and expansion.

4.1.1 Preparation

Translanguaging was most frequently reported to take place for meaning making by teachers when there was a need to clarify the instructions for assessment activities, particularly in the preparation phase. Nine participants mentioned that they needed to translanguage some provision of task instructions to ensure comprehension, especially when introducing relatively new or complicated activities. For example, T06, a Y1 teacher, articulated that

... every time when introducing a new game, neither teacher-student nor student-student demonstrations are enough; you also need to clearly explain the rules of the game, and that's where Chinese comes into play. The purpose is just for them to understand how to play the game.

Similarly, T05, a Y5 & 6 teacher, expressed that she found that her students would have a better understanding if she gave Chinese instructions on a complicated activity requiring students to work in different groups, as compared with English instructions. However, her switching to Chinese in this case seems to be a follow-up compensatory strategy in response to a lack of comprehension by students rather than a first choice, as she stated:

... because sometimes I'm well aware of the fact that it is an English class, which means that we should use as much English as possible. So, with that in mind, I would give the instructions in English first. If finding that there's no response from the kids, I would then explain them again in Chinese.

Such translanguaging as meaning-making may also occur in written form. For example, T04, a Y5 & 6 teacher, reported that as most of her students could understand English instructions for familiar activities (e.g., pair work), she would orally explain her instructions in English while supplementing them with both English and Chinese displayed through PowerPoint, and this strategy was adopted to prevent potential comprehension problems by some students and thus served more as reinforcement than a necessary strategy for meaning-making:

... for those instructions and requirements, usually I would explain them in English. Because I have been mentioning them in class over and over again, so I don't see serious comprehension problems by the students. But in case there would be some of them who can't understand, I would usually have both English and Chinese instructions shown on the PPT.

The interview data also suggests that switching between English and Chinese was not the only strategy they would apply when elucidating instructions while preparing students for assessment. The following from T01, a Y6 teacher, demonstrate how multiple strategies were employed in sequence to communicate effectively:

Sometimes when I finished [giving instructions], there would be kids asking what I meant. Then you would realize that they didn't get it. And then my first response would be to say again, trying to make them as clearer as possible, accompanied with some hand gestures. Instructions like "Student A you should do what, and Student B you can be what", with some hand gestures to illustrate. If I found that they still couldn't understand, then I would say: "Okay, let me make an example for you", like "Oh, who want to be my partner". So I would make a demonstration with a student. If somehow they still couldn't comprehend, then I would say them in Chinese.

Again, these remarks show that translanguaging may not be the first strategy for solving issues with meaning-making when communicating and clarifying instructions. Prior to that, other strategies, including both linguistic and non-linguistic ones (e.g., elaboration, demonstration, and body language), may be deployed from their strategy toolkit to make themselves understood.

Two teachers (T03 and T04) also explicitly mentioned incorporation of Chinese into assessment criteria used for evaluating oral performance in class, and such criteria were mostly presented in bilingual form (both English and Chinese) on either PowerPoint or a scoring sheet provided students (in the case of peer assessment). The criteria were either self-made by the teacher (T03) or adapted from the teaching syllabus (T04), and included aspects such as "voice", "fluency", "facial expressions", and "body language". Both teachers also pointed out that oral explanation of these criteria in Chinese was necessary when they were first introduced, as they were abstract and unfamiliar to students. As students became more familiar after repeated use, there was no longer a need for oral explanation.

In short, the responses above demonstrate that translanguaging for meaning making helps teachers prepare students for FA by ensuring that instructions and criteria for success can be understood by all students, including those with comparatively weaker language abilities. By scaffolding students' understanding of the FA process, it also facilitates student engagement and elicitation of learning evidence.

4.1.2 Expansion

In addition to preparing students for assessment, translanguaging was also used to stimulate critical thinking, reflection, and exploration, through providing meaningful feedback and expanding the discussion. Nine out of the ten participants reported that after FA activities, they would provide feedback to students. Among them, eight mentioned translanguaging involving Chinese during the feedback giving process. According to the interviewees, Chinese was mainly used when providing detailed feedback, while general and simple feedback such as "Wonderful!", "Well done!" and "Good job!" was provided in English, as the following excerpt from T10, a Y1 teacher, illustrates:

After finishing a task, I would say “Someone is excellent!” or something like that. These would be in English, because they could understand these simple comments. But when I found that a student did particularly well in some aspects, then I would use Chinese to explain why he or she did so well. It could be that his or her voice was loud enough, or some other specific comments that those kids couldn’t understand if they were given in English. Using Chinese here would be more efficient to let them know why he or she did well.

This excerpt shows that translanguaging was used to extend generic feedback to more specific, meaningful feedback. Such detailed feedback in Chinese helps clarify learning goals and provide guidance on closing learning gaps. T06, another Y1 teacher, agreed with such a view and explained that

Sometimes our feedback needs to be very specific. You can’t always just praise them by saying ‘You’re great!’ ‘You’re wonderful!’. You also need to praise on the right point, so that next time they would know what to do.

Beyond being employed to provide tailored feedback that moves learning forward, translanguaging can also serve as a way to extend a topic and stimulate student interest and critical thinking, as is evident in the following words from T07:

Sometimes I found there’s a need to deepen the discussion, instead of just giving some comments and ending it. So, when I found there is that need, I would follow students’ ideas and talk more in Chinese. I think English learning is not just about this bit [language learning itself]; if students’ thinking has reached this far, we should follow up and extend that [discussion] ... that’s why I would talk more based on what they said.

T07’s response indicates that translanguaging assist with energizing effective discussion and interaction, which again demonstrates that it can not only facilitate the elicitation of learning evidence, but also move learners forward through promoting exploration and critical thinking, embodying the “Where the learners are” and “How to get there” dimension of Wiliam and Thompson’s (2008: 63) strategies for formative assessment (see Figure 1). In summary, translanguaging allowed teachers to commend students on distinct aspects of their engagement and performance and to further engage them in group and class discussions about the language, topic, or theme, serving to better activate students interests and make them co-constructors in the FA process.

4.2 Translanguaging for collaboration

When translanguaging for collaboration, teachers permit the use of L1 to engage learners in peer and group discussion and feedback sessions about the content and/or activities. Collaborative translanguaging is also used by teachers when gathering

information from learners, either directly or indirectly through observation, to make informed instructional decisions about students' needs.

Seven participants reported instances where students would switch to Chinese during group discussion, which was noted by T02 as a very common phenomenon in elementary EFL classes. In these situations, translanguaging is not merely a way for meaning making, but also a means to foment collaboration within groups. The following words from T04 may illustrate this:

I remember the other day we played that “Spy” game, which was to check how well students have mastered the structure “pay attention to”. . . . they would be using Chinese most of the time when discussing with their group members about who might be the spy . . . The task was relatively difficult. They would spend a lot of time on the discussion if I insisted that they use English. I didn't really care so much about the Chinese, as long as they produced the key structure. (T04, Y5 & 6)

This demonstrates that Chinese is used as a more comfortable and easier means by students to achieve more efficient collaboration within a group, which was acquiesced by the teacher. Coordination among students through translanguaging was also mentioned by T09, who stated that whenever she asked her students to engage in group discussion, “they would be discussing in Chinese, such as ‘you read this, you read that’”. In addition, T07 further expounds on how translanguaging could be used by students to help each other and activate themselves as a learning resource for their peers:

Sometimes I found that in the middle of an activity, some students from a group would be telling other students in Chinese “You should do this, you should do this”, because those other students had no clue about what they should do, and they needed other students to help them through Chinese. (T07, Y3)

Translanguaging was also reported to occur when students were asked to give peer feedback. Seven participants mentioned that they would ask their students to share their thoughts on other students' performance with five reporting that they would allow such peer feedback to be given in Chinese. For instance, after group performances T05 would ask her students to vote for the best group. “They would shout out ‘Group one’ or ‘Group two’ in English, but when I asked for their reasons, they would blast them out in Chinese.” Expanding on her opinion regarding students' peer feedback in Chinese, T03 remarked:

I think although they couldn't give their comments in English, it is okay to speak Chinese, because they were actively taking part in the activity and were engaged in thinking. They were willing to watch their peers' performances, or their presentations, and then they had some reflections and their own thoughts and comments, it doesn't matter whichever language they use in the end [to give comments].

T02 also expressed that asking students to deliver peer feedback in English would “discourage their willingness to share their thoughts. Chinese would be different. They would be more willing to do that in Chinese. And they can say more using Chinese.” These words show that translanguaging during peer feedback cannot only facilitate critical thinking by reflecting on peer performance, but also promote student participation and collaboration, allowing more opportunities for students to become instructional resources for each other.

4.3 Translanguaging for empowerment

Translanguaging for empowerment relates to teachers’ conscientious use of the L1 to involve learners more fully in classroom processes and activities, to bolster confidence and reduce anxiety, and to instil a greater sense of ownership over how students’ express their needs and demonstrate progress, particularly for those with lower levels of motivation and/or L2 proficiency. Empowerment also encompasses the ways teachers enact their own sense of agency within a policy and culture of control and compliance and creatively overcome embedded monolingual ideologies through their instructional approaches (Richards and Cotterall 2016).

All ten teachers reported that during FA tasks, their students would utilize Chinese to compensate for their lack of the needed vocabulary or limited English language ability for meaning making, especially when answering questions. This was also considered acceptable by most participants, as evidenced by the following excerpts:

Oh yes, particularly for those students with relatively low levels of English. But it [translanguaging] does not usually happen during those [oral] performances, but when I ask them questions. When they are not able to express their ideas in English, they would use Chinese. And I would allow that, because their English hasn’t reached the level that can support them to express those ideas. (T07, Y3)

I think when children are learning English, their thoughts should not be restricted ... and sometimes there is even no fixed answers. As long as their answers sound reasonable, whichever language they use, I will give a thumbs up for their answers. (T04, Y5 & 6)

Permitting translanguaging use could also be an intentional empowering strategy employed by teachers during the FA process. Six teachers considered that allowing students to use Chinese in answering certain questions or giving peer feedback would help reduce anxiety and boost their confidence in voicing their opinions in class, and ultimately maintaining their learning interest and engagement, as T05, a Y5 & 6 teacher, remarked:

... if you insist that [students] use English, and because they haven't learned about (X), then they wouldn't open their mouth – they have to keep their mouth shut. They have something to say, but they don't know how, then they would keep silent.

Similarly, two teachers (T01 and T02) reported that they would sometimes ask their students to write, using Chinese, self-reflections of what they have learned in class as a form of self-assessment. Chinese in this case is considered a strategy for both meaning making and empowerment, as T01 articulated:

Every student is unique, and the ideas they want to express in their reflections are also unique. It is impossible for me to give them any scaffolding or language support [in English] in advance. And I don't want their reflections to be limited to be just the few scenarios that I can give them. I want them to freely reflect on their learning and truly express themselves.

Therefore, we can see that Chinese was permitted in such context to empower students with the language resources they need to express their thoughts and engage in reflective thinking, which is an essential formative strategy in activating students as owners of their learning.

This intended empowerment through translanguaging may also take place in teacher feedback. For example, T01 reported that she would provide both English and Chinese comments on performance from students with relatively low-levels of English, and the purpose of those Chinese comments was to boost their confidence, as she said: "For this group of students, compliments would be particularly important and mean a lot to them. And I also want other students to see their progress. So Chinese comments are necessary because every student can understand."

Yet, despite these actions of empowerment, almost all participants expressed that they tended to restrict such practices by various means, such as limiting the amount of Chinese, reminding students to switch back to English, and recapping students' Chinese output in English. The following account from T03 shows how she changed from allowing translanguaging in class to restricting this practice:

Sometimes when I was walking in the classroom observing their discussion, I found that they were struggling with a particular phrase. Then I would tell them to use Chinese, and I would translate that into English for them. But gradually I found they became increasingly reliant on Chinese, until the whole sentence or even the whole piece of talk would be in Chinese ... and then I told them to use English mostly, unless it was truly a word or phrase that they didn't know.

Several participants expressed the delicate balance between permitting students to engage their full linguistic repertoire to communicate effectively and the recognition that some constraints should be imposed to encourage students to communicate in English to the extent possible.

In sum, the interview data indicate that teachers used or permitted the use of translanguaging to accelerate the FA process in different aspects, including collecting

data on learning evidence, encouraging student participation in giving peer feedback that can be sources of learning for other students, as well as supporting the process of self-reflection and evaluation that enhances learner autonomy and agency.

5 Discussion

Using an abductive qualitative thematic analyse approach to explore the participants' perspectives and reported activities and practices (Timmermans and Tavory 2012), data confirms that teachers either intentionally or unintentionally use or permit the use of translanguaging to facilitate the different stages of FA (Wiliam and Thompson 2008).

Translanguaging accelerates the process of clarifying and understanding learning intensions and criteria for success. Some participants reported that translanguaging for meaning making was used before FA activities to articulate assessment criteria, which implies standards of performance and thus learning goals. Clarifying learning goals and criteria for success are critical steps in preparing students for FA, as they facilitate the entire process by specifying the target knowledge and skills (where the learner is going) and producing more relevant and reliable data, which in turn enable teachers to make more appropriate decisions (Andersson and Palm 2017; Black and Wiliam 2009). For students, clear goals help them gain better understanding of standards, enhancing their self and peer assessment as well as self-regulated learning (Andersson and Palm 2017). Preparation through translanguaging also helps students understand the content involved so that they can employ it productively in novel situations, and thus constitutes a hallmark of the creative process in learning (Wallas 1926).

Translanguaging facilitates the implementation of activities in eliciting learning evidence. Valid and reliable assessment data are unlikely to be collected if students are unclear about what they should do in an FA task, which could be a consequence of comprehension problems due to deficiency in the language by which instructions are provided (Chen et al. 2021). This is confirmed by the interview data, as the participants generally mentioned that they needed to use Chinese as one of the strategies to ensure comprehension of assessment instructions by all students, which is a key to guarantee that desired behaviours or responses can be elicited. While meaning making through translanguaging by teachers ensures understanding of assessment instructions across students, translanguaging also empowers students to provide answers that would not have been possible in a monolingual environment. Through using their L1 (Chinese in this case), students gain access to their entire linguistic repertoire and can thus produce more comprehensive or complete information about learning, which in turn may increase the accuracy of evaluation and decision-making

based on the learning evidence (Ascenzi-Moreno 2018). When it comes to group work, translanguaging also enables students to work cooperatively towards answers or solutions, which facilitates the elicitation of data on group performance and simultaneously promotes collaborative and peer learning (Black and Wiliam 2009). Without translanguaging, these would have been difficult to realize due to lack of engagement and discussion (Chen et al. 2021; Wei and Wu 2009).

Translanguaging also enhances teacher feedback that moves learners forward. The interview data shows that, after an FA activity, translanguaging for expansion was used by teachers to provide more detailed feedback. Ample evidence has shown that specific and tailored feedback is more effective for improving subsequent learning than general or simple feedback (Black and Wiliam 2009; Hattie and Timperley 2007). Indeed, some participants used translanguaging precisely to extend the topic of discussion and stimulate critical thinking. Through feedback and discussion, participants employed translanguaging for the purpose of stimulating thinking skills, reflection, and further exploration which embodies the verification stage of Wallas' (1926) creative process model. Both preparation and expansion are essential elements of creativity and can be incorporated into translanguaging pedagogy to commence the learning process by confirming students' comprehension and then building on their understanding by discussing concepts, extending knowledge and engagement, and performing self and peer assessments.

Finally, Translanguaging activates students as instructional resources for one another and as owners of their own learning. Translanguaging for collaboration and empowerment also authorize students to be instructional resources for each other by allowing them to give peer feedback and conduct group discussion (Wiliam and Thompson 2008), which could be inhibited in an English-only context. Permitting translanguaging for collaborative practices in FA also demonstrates teachers' effort to create a student-centred, synergetic environment (Richards and Cotterall 2016), which is essential for developing learner creativity and agency and promoting peer learning. Further, some teacher participants also empowered their students to conduct self-assessment through writing reflections in Chinese. Such self-assessment activities help teachers gather information about learning progress and prompt students to take ownership of their own learning by actively engaging in critical thinking and reflection (Andersson and Palm 2017; Wiliam and Thompson 2008). They may also help students convert unconscious knowledge and skills into conscious processes available for future learning (Black and Wiliam 2009), at the same time improving their engagement, motivation, and autonomy (Andersson and Palm 2017; Black and Wiliam 2009).

It is interesting to note that participants generally reported that they employed translanguaging as a back-up instead of a primary or integrated strategy and indicated that the overuse of translanguaging may hinder target language development,

and thus attempts were made to restrict students' translanguaging practices in FA. These point to teachers' internal conflict between permitting students to engage their full linguistic repertoire to communicate effectively and recognition that some constraints should be imposed to encourage students to communicate in English to the extent possible. Such a dissonance towards translanguaging calls attention to the undercurrent of ideology-laden and policy-driven control that exists in EFL education in China and continues to restrict teachers, actively and passively, in their pedagogical strategies and decisions (Fang and Liu 2020; Hall and Cook 2012; Lin and He 2017). Therefore, one implication from this study is that all stakeholders, particularly policymakers, should re-evaluate monolingual ideologies and acknowledge translanguaging as a facilitative and creative tool in a teacher's instructional repertoire rather than detrimental to target language use (Wei 2021). A second implication is that teachers need explicit training on how to use translanguaging effectively in FA practices, and this is particularly pertinent in China with the introduction of the "Double Reduction" policy. With specific guidance and awareness of translanguaging pedagogy, teachers can inspire creativity and empowerment within their students and simultaneously empower themselves to make contextually relevant decisions based on their learners' needs.

6 Conclusions

This study is among the first to investigate, through the lens of creativity, how translanguaging is perceived and enacted by Chinese EFL teachers through formative assessment practices in the primary grades. The results indicate that translanguaging is generally positively perceived and actively employed by the participants in order to facilitate different FA processes and to support students' learning. However, feelings of doubt, worry, and even resistance also exist. Such sentiments call for bolstering support for teachers, which warrants more systematic research on how to incorporate translanguaging into FA, such as how different dimensions and characteristics of creativity could help teachers design and implement effective FA activities and how translanguaging can be implemented in the assessment and learning process. It should be pointed out that the present study only collected interview data from ten participants, all of whom were female, and thus the generalizability of the findings presented above requires further exploration and verification by collecting data from larger samples using different data collection methods such as narrative inquiry and questionnaires. Future studies may also include classroom observation data to offer more detailed insights into how teachers and students engage in translanguaging practices during FAs and how those practices impact the effectiveness of FA as well as students' long-term language development and learning outcomes.

Conflict of interest statement: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Data availability statement: The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are available from the lead and corresponding authors on request.

Author contribution: All authors have materially participated in the research and article preparation and approved the final article.

Appendix

Interview Questions

1. Could you briefly introduce yourself (e.g., age, qualification, years of teaching, years of teaching at your current school, etc.)? 您可以简单介绍一下您自己吗（比如年龄、专业背景、教龄、在您目前所在学校的教学时间等）？
2. Could you please describe the English course and classes you are teaching (e.g., class size, students' program year, English language proficiency, learning motivation, classroom engagement, materials used, etc.)? 您可以谈一谈您目前所教的英语课程以及班级（比如班级大小、学生的年级、英语水平、学习动机、课堂参与情况、所使用的教材等）吗？
3. Could you talk something about your teaching (e.g., your main teaching approach and philosophy)? How do you normally interact with students in class? 您可以谈一谈您的教学吗（比如您主要的教学方法和理念）？您通常怎样跟学生在课堂上互动？
4. How often do you use Chinese in your English class? What is your attitude towards using Chinese in English class? What factors prompt/inhibit your usage of Chinese in your English class? Can you explain why (e.g., students' language proficiency, students' expectations/requirements, course leader/school's requirements/regulations, social expectations and values, etc.)? 您在您英语课上使用中文的频率如何？您对在英语课上使用中文怎么看？您觉得哪些因素促使/阻碍了您在英语课堂上使用中文？（您在英语课堂上使用/不使用中文是出于何种考虑？）为什么（比如学生的英文水平、学生的期望/要求、课程组长/学校的要求/规定）？
5. Do you know formative assessments (e.g., peer assessment, self-assessment, quiz, Q&A, portfolio, dictation, writings, oral presentations, etc.) and summative assessments (e.g., mid-term exam, end-of-term exam, etc.)? How do you commonly assess students' learning achievements and language abilities? Who are generally in charge of the design of those assessment tasks and/or papers? 您知道形成性评价（同伴评估、自评、小测、问答、档案袋、听写、写作、口头报告等）和终结性评价（如期中考试、期末考试等）吗？您一般怎样测试学生的学习进步情况以及语言水平？这些测评任务或者试卷一般都由谁设计？

6. Can you remember your latest formative assessment? What type of formative assessment was it? Did you use Chinese alongside English during its process? Why or why not? Did your students use Chinese alongside English during its process? 您还记得您最近的一次形成性评价吗？是什么样的形成性评价？在这个过程中您在英文之外使用中文了吗？为什么/为什么没有？在这个过程中您的学生在英文之外使用中文了吗？
7. During the processes of other formative assessments/evaluations, in what circumstances do you usually find that you need to use Chinese alongside English? Do you actually do so? Why? If not, what factors do you think are usually stopping you from using Chinese? 当您在进行形成性评价的过程当中，通常在什么情况下您觉得需要在英语之外使用中文（使用英文的同时使用中文）？您会这样做吗？为什么？如果不会，您觉得哪些因素阻止您这样做？（您主要是出于什么样的考虑？）
8. During the processes of other formative assessments/evaluations, in what circumstances would your students use Chinese alongside English? What are your normal responses to this? What are the main factors affecting your responses? 在形成性评价的过程当中，通常什么样的情况下您的学生会在英文之外使用中文（使用英文的同时使用中文）？对此您通常的反应是怎样的？您觉得哪些因素促使您做出这样的反应（您主要出于什么样的考虑）？
9. Can you remember your latest summative assessment? What type of summative assessment was it? Did you use Chinese alongside English during its process? Why or why not? Did your students use Chinese alongside English during its process? 您还记得您最近的一次终结性评价吗？是什么样的终结性评价？在这个过程中您在英文之外使用中文了吗？为什么/为什么没有？在这个过程中您的学生在英文之外使用中文了吗？
10. During the processes of other summative assessments/tests, in what circumstances do you usually find that you need to use Chinese alongside English? Do you actually do so? Why? If not, what factors do you think are usually stopping you from using Chinese? 当您在进行其它终结性评价的过程当中，通常在什么情况下您觉得需要在英语之外使用中文（使用英文的同时使用中文）？为什么？您会这样做吗？如果不会，您觉得哪些因素阻止您这样做？（您主要是出于什么样的考虑？）
11. During the processes of summative assessments/tests, in what circumstances would your students use Chinese alongside English? What are your normal responses to this? What are the main factors affecting your responses? 在终结性评价的过程当中，通常什么样的情况下您的学生会在英文之外使用中文（使用英文的同时使用中文）？对此您通常的反应是怎样的？您觉得哪些因素促使您做出这样的反应（您主要出于什么样的考虑）？

12. Overall/If you have to summarize in a few words, what do you think are the major challenges for you to use Chinese during your formative and summative assessment processes respectively? Can you explain why? What are your coping strategies? 总的来说/如果用几句话来总结一下，您认为您在施行形成性评价和终结性评价过程中的主要困难/挑战有哪些？请您分别进行说明。您通常采取什么样的措施来应对这些困难/挑战？
13. Do you have anything else to add regarding the use of Chinese during formative and summative assessments as well as English classes in general? 对于您在形成性评价、终结性评价以及英语课过程中使用中文的情况，您还有其它想要补充的吗？

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