



# Translanguaging at the Workplace

Practice Catalogue

Curated by Alicja Fajfer

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## Introduction

Thank you for downloading “Translanguaging at the Workplace: Practice Catalogue”. This publication is a collection of translanguaging techniques used by people in situations where officially used languages and linguistic skills may be mismatched. As you will see, there are different ideas how you can support colleagues in your organization when they do not share a common language with the others. We compiled the list based on the LangWork mixed method research. If you would like to know more about our research, we invite you to read our working paper.

## How to use the catalogue?

The catalogue is a list of ideas to share with your professional community. We divided the techniques into five categories, based on their objective:

1. Practices that enhance learning
2. Practices for language barriers
3. Practices that enhance participation and belonging
4. Practices that help organize
5. Practices for reflection

The catalogue is not a complete list of translanguaging activities, but we hope that it will inspire you and your organization to pursue linguistic inclusion activities. Because communication is a two-way street, we recommend that initiatives should target anyone at the workplace, regardless of their linguistic background. Implementing the techniques does not require special training. However, if you need assistance, consult resources on translanguaging, language awareness, language attitudes and plain language.

## Practices that enhance learning

First, we present the techniques that support language learning outside of the classroom. In a language aware environment, learning happens anywhere. The techniques presented in this chapter are applicable for group and individual study.

### Casual conversations

Smalltalk and casual conversations are a good way to practice speaking in a relaxed environment. The absence of stress improves fluency, and facilitates remembering. A smoothly flowing conversation gives learners a sense of achievement, which improves motivation. Organizing social events at work helps the team to get to know each other better, which may have a positive impact on team spirit and the sense of belonging.

An example is a language café. Language café is an informal event during which participants practise group conversation in a specific language. Language cafés typically have a structured program. The activity is lead by a facilitator who prepares the program (e.g. a list of questions to discuss), and stimulates the conversation, according to each participants' language skills. Outside of the workplace, one could participate in hobby groups or clubs.

### Collaborative Copy-Editing

The more proficient speaker copy-edits a text written by a less proficient speaker, by entering into a dialogue with the latter about the choices made and through questions eliciting the intended meaning. Additional tools (dictionaries, style guides, grammars, etc.) can be used to let the learner find solutions themselves. The leading copy-editor becomes more aware of the limitations of the learner, who is improving their writing skills by learning how to better rephrase and structure their text. The copy-editing can also be undertaken by a small group which members make suggestions for improving the text that are then discussed by the group.

The practice can be implemented by having recourse to other languages if the tutor has some fluency in them, and to discuss possible borrowings from the writer's first language. The learner will be able to expand their linguistic repertoire, discover new vocabulary and new syntactic forms. The practice implies that the learner has something valid and useful to say (recognition) but is constrained by their limited language skills.

### Comparing multilingual texts about the same topic

The text comparisons can be done in two different ways. Either compare a text in one language with the same text translated into a home/mother tongue, or compare two different texts on the same subject or theme in two languages. The comparison can be done as a discussion and/or in writing.

The tool helps to analyse how two or more texts deal with similar themes or topics to build knowledge or compare the approaches taken by the authors. It also helps to evaluate how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text and to identify the central ideas or

themes of a text and analyse their development; to summarise the main supporting details and ideas.

When comparing multilingual texts on the same topic, learners' aim is to compare both language and content. The different languages can provide different insights into a topic. In addition, comparing in discussion provides opportunities to improve listening and speaking skills and serves as a scaffold or starting point for writing.

## **Creative writing**

Creative writing in a second language is a good way to learn new vocabulary and practice grammar independently. Creative writing can be practised as a hobby. The topics to write about overlap with the writer's interests, which helps maintain motivation, and develop linguistic expertise in specific topics. Although writing can seem like a demanding task, the writer can choose a short plain language genre that is suitable for learners with lower fluency, like blogs or tweets.

The added value of using social media to showcase writing is networking through comments, or personal branding.

If needed, you can experiment by writing one text in several languages. This is called translanguaging with independent writing. The tool scaffolds a person's ability to write in the national language, it strengthens the ability to write in the person's mother tongue/family language and it also provides a way for people to express their ideas and identity more fully.

## **Glossaries**

Every group has their own signature phrases. These may be repeated routinely, or these may be examples of industry specific vocabulary. Collecting these phrases in an organizational phrasebook may help speed up newcomers' onboarding. With regards to industry-specific vocabulary, the glossary will help avoid misunderstandings or confusion.

Developing glossaries may require the help of professional lexicographers, but it may also be organized as a grassroots community project.

## **Multilingual notes**

When taking notes, multilingual people may notice that they are thinking about the different terms in all of their languages. By letting these thoughts be written down as they appear, you are practicing all your languages at the same time.

## **Language mixing**

Mixing words from different languages is an efficient way to continue the conversation despite communication obstacles. Even so, many people believe that it is inappropriate, preferring instead strict language separation. However, in translanguaging frameworks, speakers only have one linguistic repertoire from which they select needed resources. So, mixing is normal.

Encouraging this behaviour can build confidence, and provide a way to go beyond the limitations of rudimentary skills.

Another behaviour worth supporting is linguistic creativity, as people use their existing knowledge to come up with words they have not learned before. Although the likelihood of getting the word right is rather low, the new word can still be understandable.

## **Pocket language journal**

Recording new words in a pocket-size notebook is a good way to memorize new words used in fast-paced everyday situation. The idea is to write the word(s) down, and check their meaning later, at a more suitable moment. To check the meaning, you can consult a dictionary or a machine translation service. However, you can also use your glossary to start a conversation with a colleague who is a fluent speaker already. Conversations about the meaning or the correct use of specific words and structures are an efficient way to learn.

## **Reading**

Reading is another activity that supports independent language practice. Useful authentic language resources include newspaper news for learning timely vocabulary. Elementary school textbooks are also a great resource for language learners. Children's schoolbooks are especially suitable for intermediate learners. Many novels are not suitable for learners, but novels adapted to plain language are a good alternative.

Choosing the right material may be tricky. If the text is too difficult, motivation will suffer. On the other hand, too easy texts will not introduce any new material. To keep the activity enjoyable, the reader should be able to understand about 90% of the text. As looking up new words can be cumbersome work, the reader should already be familiar with core vocabulary. Unknown words should not get in the way of understanding the text. A similar rule applies to listening and watching videos and films.

## **Tandem: multilingual partners**

Learners or colleagues are divided into pairs or small groups for a common task or training. Their family language/mother tongues may or may not be the same. The facilitator or a leader of the process strategically pairs or forms small groups of learners/colleagues to help each other grow in both English (as an example) and their home languages. As they engage in multilingual conversations, they hone their listening and phonic skills and speak in an authentic way. A shared task, common interests and direct contact can play a positive role in better understanding a new language or give them the freedom and confidence to use their family language/mother tongue with a partner or within a small group.

The aim of the tool is to give freedom to communicate and discuss a topic in the way a pair or a group wants/chooses. This approach ensures that all participants have a chance to speak and be heard and that the discussion is more fruitful without being limited by vocabulary.

If there is an issue to find a partner for a certain learner, an external partner can be invited to facilitate the conversation.



## Practices for language barriers

In this chapter, we present techniques for situations where there is no shared language. We propose to resort to communication mediation – it can be a human interpreter or a computer.

### Artificial intelligence

By using an appropriate prompt for AI software like ChatGPT, a text may be transformed into plain language that is understandable by less proficient listeners-readers. Spoken text can be recorded and subsequently transcribed by appropriate software before feeding it into the AI software. The user learns how to express themselves in easy language and how to make texts easier to understand for a less proficient audience or, in the second case, benefit from reduced complexity to better understand the original text. This works well for texts that contain a lot of unfamiliar jargon, colloquialism or technical terms or are syntactically complex.

### Passive skills in conversations

If you have a hard time with speaking, but can otherwise understand what you hear, try communicating truly bilingually. So, speak in your language, but listen in another language. This technique is suitable for speakers with so-called passive language skills.

### Bilingual and picture dictionaries

These dictionaries are linked to the “anchor concepts” – a selected set of the key words needed to understand critical concepts. By focusing on the keywords in the context of the text or as a thematic context, the learners increase their understanding of the topic.

Bilingual dictionaries help students develop their vocabulary base for general academic and domain-specific words. Many bilingual picture dictionaries have content-area versions to build student’s vocabulary in math, science, and social studies.

### Interpretation

Interpretation is the act of translating speech from one language to the other. It usually involves the involvement of a third person – the interpreter – who knows both languages. Interpretation can be organized in different ways. In consecutive interpretation, the speaker pauses so the interpreter can repeat chunks of the speech. The interpreter usually stays in close proximity to the speaker, e.g. on stage. In simultaneous interpretation, the speaker and interpreter speak at the same time. The interpreter may sit in an interpretation cabin and use audio equipment, or they may sit behind the person who needs their services (chuchotage). Interpretation can double the duration of an event, as the information must be repeated. So, it is a good practice to reserve enough time.

## Machine translation

Machine translation services, like DeepL or GoogleTranslate, are popular solutions for groups who do not have a common language. The tools are free and easy to use. They work with written and spoken language, and they even employ image recognition technology to 'read' text from pictures. Although they are very accessible, machine translation tools usually serve as emergency solutions, when other attempts at communication fail. The reason for this may be a high risk of mistranslation.

## Multilingual discussion groups

Running a discussion group where members do not have a lingua franca is a challenge. However, there are ways to activate all participants and give them voice. A facilitator uses different means of communication such as pictures, objects, body movement, pantomime, always encouraging participants to use their own language in situations to name objects or phenomenon/scene. Participants write or speak. If needed, the facilitator can use digital translation tools, like Google Translate, to react and ask questions. For discussions and more in-depth reflections invite language mediators. Present the results in different languages.

## Receptive multilingual discussions

The tool is for persons who have only a passive fluency in a language used for formal and informal communication. Everybody uses their first language or a language in which they are sufficiently fluent but that is also understood by the audience. This is a practice that can be observed in communication between speakers of closely related languages (e.g. Swedish and Danish, Italian and Spanish) or in certain professional settings (e.g. classical scholars with a knowledge of at least English, French, Italian and German) where the audience is passively fluent in several languages. Despite occasional misunderstandings or lack of nuance, communication is generally very effective.

The practice illustrates that communication can take place when different languages are used at the same time and even though listeners do not have an active command of the language. Minor idiosyncrasies are tolerable. Speakers can use the language they are most proficient in and avoid the limitations of rudimentary skills in a lingua franca. Persons who do not speak another language can express themselves confidently with a very high chance of being well understood.

## Practices that enhance participation and belonging

Language aware communities employ techniques that enable access to information and enhance a sense of belonging. In this chapter we included techniques that aim at making people feel like they are part of a community.

### Buddy program

A buddy is a peer-assistant that supports a language learner in typical communication situations. A buddy may translate, but their role may also include researching useful information, or acting on learner's behalf (e.g. in phone conversations). Although the organization may have a structured buddy program, some buddies work unofficially on a voluntary basis. Unofficial buddies can become overwhelmed or burnt out, so it is important to plan a support system.

### Lingua franca

Lingua franca is a common language for a group of people. Lingua franca enables direct communication. It is an efficient tool to communicate in a linguistically diverse group, though varying levels of fluency mean that not everyone participates on equal footing. In Europe, a typical lingua franca is English. Some organizations cite concerns over expanding the use of English, as it may discourage the use of other languages.

### Multilingual awareness and empathy

Language barriers may be strengthened by a lack of empathy, or an attitude of withdrawal. Understanding what another person is going through may help people act in a more friendly or proactive way. Multilingual awareness is a framework made up of practices that support the flow of information and opportunities for participation for linguistic minorities.

### Inclusive language policies

An inclusive language policy considers the community's linguistic needs. Knowing these needs will help choose the right mode for communication. If members of the community have a strong interest in learning the local language, it will help to give them opportunity to operate in this language as much as possible. In situations where members of the community cannot use the local language, linguistic mediation services may be more suitable.

### Metalinguistic Awareness

Learners use two or more languages in the same class and focus on analysing and reflecting on languages cross linguistically. This practice is a strong form of pedagogical translanguaging because it works on language reflection and also because it uses two or more languages for activities in the same class.

Metalinguistic awareness practices aim to develop metalinguistic awareness by activating prior knowledge and identifying cognates so that learners can make more progress in developing their

multilingual skills. Learners are asked to focus on specific aspects of language by looking at similarities and differences between texts in different languages. A significant benefit is that learners have greater access to information when they can use different languages and become aware of the benefits of being multilingual.

The tool can be used in a corporate setting as a team building activity to celebrate and recognise the multicultural and multilingual nature of the company

## Practices that help organize

In this chapter, we present techniques that aid linguistically inclusive planning. The list includes ready-made solutions, like the meeting structure. There are also ideas for activities to inform strategy development.

### Body mapping: language portraits

This is an exercise where the person draws a graphic representation of their linguistic repertoire using an outline of a body. The objective is to fill in the silhouettes with coloured pencils, ensuring that each language is given a distinct colour and a designated location in the silhouette. The objective of the task is to determine which languages the learners speak and what ideas and feelings they associate with each language. The facilitator can ask the learners questions based on their objectives, such as proficiency in speaking or writing, the order in which they draw the languages, or the amount of space a certain language occupies in the silhouette.

The language portrait done in this way is used as an instrument for language awareness and self-reflection. The tool is also known as "body-mapping" and is used in art-based practices to reflect on personal and emotional experience and cultural identity. The language portrait doesn't represent the individual language repertoire as such, but rather as a contextual and situational production that emerges from the interaction between the participants, framed by the requirements and the setting. Participants in the Body Mapping exercise have given feedback that it's a wonderful tool that stimulates thought and self-reflection on many aspects. The best thing about it is that you don't necessarily need a lot of words, you can make it self-explanatory with drawings, or you can use metaphors and have a long, enjoyable conversation.

The tool can help learners understand the importance of different languages in their lives and the emotions associated with them. One can trace and reflect on the frustration of learning a new language. At the same time, the tool celebrates multiculturalism and multilingualism. The activity may be incorporated in the process of drawing up the communication code or the organizational language policy.

### Language strategy

In diversifying societies, many organizations have yet to develop sustainable linguistic management. Without that, there is no organizational support, and no institution that can provide ready-made and tested solutions. While the need for good practices exists, employees are left alone to figure it out. So, they solve problems intuitively, and the responsibility for making decisions can become a hot potato. Perhaps one reason for this has to do with confusion about how to behave in a multilingual context. There are legal issues to consider, but culture and sociolinguistics are also important. One way to address this challenge could be through the development of a strategy. Such a strategy needs to be based on organizational values. The strategy can be a detailed instructions about where to use what language, or how to run presentations for multilingual participants. It can also be a set of guidelines that emphasises certain communication values, instead of imposing rules. The former will be used to enforce specific regulations. The latter will be used to promote a cultural shift to multilingual awareness.

The language strategy is an organization-level plan that outlines the means to secure linguistic cohesion at the workplace, in line with DEI principles and basic human rights. A good language strategy will be speaker-centred. It will create opportunities to develop new language skills, but it will also leave space for the person's entire linguistic repertoire.

To develop the language strategy, you may consider a Lego Serious Play workshop. LangWork resources include a proposed Lego Serious Play workshop syllabus.

## Linguistic landscape walk

The linguistic landscape walk can be used to enhance multilingual awareness. The aim of the walk is to critically observe and document language present in the space, such as signage, conversations, and other sounds. The data collected during the walk may reveal whose linguistic needs are supported in the space. The linguistic landscape walk may inform what reform is needed. For example, whether there is a need for multilingual signage.

## Meeting structure

Participating in meetings that do not use your strongest language can be challenging. However, these meetings can be great learning opportunities, as long as they are organized in a way that supports learning. Adopting a language aware meeting structure helps to maximize the learning potential. Misunderstanding or confusion can happen, but there is space for them to emerge and a mechanism to rectify them. A linguistically supportive meeting has the following three stages:

1. **preparation:** inform the participants in advance by sending an agenda that includes key terminology.
2. **presentation:** during the meeting, speak clearly and at a pace that participants are able to follow comfortably. Structure your talk to include a proper introduction and summary, so key points can be repeated and remembered. Use visual aids for more complex points.
3. **follow up:** send out minutes or notes with the main points of the meeting. Allow extra time for people to come forward with questions or comments. Proactively approach colleagues who may need extra help.

## Practices for reflection

Language shapes who we are. It empowers or limits access to opportunities. This chapter presents ideas to process experiences and emotions that language use evokes.

### Artistic documentation

Means of artistic expression, like photo or video, may be used to document translanguaging experiences and translanguaging itself. The [Handy Hands](#) is a video project that involved six locals, seven migrants and a cultural mediator in a four-day meeting of socialization and work that used the Italian language as a vehicle to the development and the shooting of this short film. The series of encounters was held in a domestic space in order to foster the exchange and make it more fruitful and direct. Handy Hands plays with a polysemy of meanings. It can refer to 'practical hands', able to do almost anything.

The gestures, understood as small daily activities, bind us to the culture of the territory in which we live in. Besides, hands represent our identity and they have always been our instrument of contact and communication with the inhabitants and things of the world. This video tells stories, actions and daily relationships, voluntary movements or involuntary tics, leisure or work activities. The grazing light almost completely eliminates the colors of the skin to underline the universality of non-verbal communication. In the video you will not find captions that explain the gestures presented, whose reading is left to the free interpretation of the viewer.

*You are welcome* was a photographic project by Ivo Corrà in collaboration with Voltaire European Education Centre, with the support of the Autonomous Province of Bolzano, Department of Italian Culture. The aim of the project was to produce a collection of photographic images with a strong narrative/visual and linguistic character. The course fostered the linguistic development of the participants by following the logic of "learning by doing", in which the action of photographing is accompanied by finding the words to describe one's own reality. The driving theme of the entire course was hospitality, and the images produced have been turned into an exhibition, which was inaugurated at the Centro Trevi on Monday 8 April 2019.

### Linguistic diary

The linguistic diary is a reflective exercise, like journaling. The diary can take many forms, from text to drawing. Also, any language can be used. The objective of the diary is to put experiences and emotions into a certain structure (a story), which makes it easier to process them. The diary can be an individual activity, or a group activity. The aim of diary groups is to offer support. First, members can offer their insights about others' entries, suggesting alternative courses to solve problems. Second, sharing diary entries can illuminate that certain experiences are commonplace, and one is not alone with the problem.

Multilingual encounters evoke all kinds of emotions, from unpleasant stress to a sense of pride. Keeping a diary forces a language user to put a structure on an experience, making it easier to understand. Reflection thus gives language users more control over how they respond to

linguaging practices. Language diaries may take different forms, from a text written in any language (or a mixture of languages), to drawings. One way to reflect on linguistic encounters through art is to draw a 4-panel comic strip.

At the LangWork training for trainers we tried art therapy activities targeting linguistic insecurity. We also drew 4-panel comics about it. We used instructions developed by [World Comics Finland](#) for minority language activists. The instructions were adapted, and workshops were offered as a 1 or 2 hour session, instead of the whole day event.

The participants produced different types of stories. Some were about overwhelming insecurity while others had a happy ending. There was also a follow-up activity for active reflection about the story. Drawing comics regularly works as a linguistic diary.

Look again at your comics. What happens in your story? Now, pick an instruction that best fits your story or seems most interesting at this time:

- If your story is about insecurity that had overwhelmed you, can you think of an alternative course of events, where you overcome it? What would you need in that moment to avoid being overwhelmed?
- If your story is about managing insecurity successfully, can you identify what made this possible? Is it about resources, attitude, support, tools that were available to you?
- If there are extra characters, can you re-tell the story from their perspective? Does this change your perception of the situation?

Feel free to answer by drawing/painting, or make a concept note. This is for you, so you can do this in a language of your choice