ESL classroom interactions in a translanguaging space

Abstract

There has been a recent proliferation of studies pertaining to translanguaging. This impetus is largely driven by the increasing acknowledgement of daily communications as translingual practice. In fact, the closely related construct of plurilingualism has been incorporated into the development of the companion volume of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe 2020). Despite the rising awareness towards translanguaging and plurilingualism in European and Northern American contexts (cf. Vallejo and Dooly 2020), scepticism remains, especially in classroom settings.

Through detailed analyses of extracts taken from 27 hours of recordings of UK university ESL classroom interactions among Taiwanese L1 Mandarin students transcribed based on Jefferson (2004) and supplemented by Matsumoto (2019) and Zhu et al. (2017), we aim to demonstrate the complementarity effect of various multimodal resources in progressing classroom instructions. Our analyses reveal that the different linguistic and non-linguistic resources deployed contribute to scaffolding and the development of a layered understanding of the concept in discussion (e.g. phrasal verbs). We argue that the translanguaging space enables students to engage in deeper learning. Students are empowered to break down the rigid power structure and actively participate in knowledge co-construction. We end our paper by calling for research that bridges current understanding of translanguaging and policy and assessment strategies development.

Key words: translanguaging; translanguaging space; L2 classroom interaction; scaffolding; multimodality

1 Introduction

Recent years have seen an increased recognition of the complexity of daily communications as translingual practice. Strict linguistic boundaries are blurred and various linguistics and non-linguistic resources are deployed to make meaning (Blackledge and Creese 2010; Li 2018, 2020; Wicaksono and Hall 2019). This is reflected through the ever-rising number of specialist articles (e.g. Danjo 2018; Tai and Li 2020, 2021 a, b; see also Prilutskaya 2021),
journal special issues (e.g. Jones 2020; Payant and Galante 2022; Vallejo and Dooly 2020) and edited volumes on topics related to translanguaging and plurilingualism (e.g. Moore et al. 2020; Piccardo et al. 2021; Tian et al. 2020). There is also evidence of wider interest as translanguaging studies begin to feature in publication outlets which target non-specialist audiences as well (e.g. Brooks 2022 - ELTJ review issue; Lovell 2019 – in the Conversation). Despite the apparent enthusiasm, especially in the European and Northern American contexts where translanguaging and plurilingualism have most resonance (Vallejo and Dooly 2020), hesitancy of embracing such practices, particularly inside the classroom persists (e.g. Martin 2005; Probyn 2009). Even though a rich body of empirical work has long documented the prevalence of L1 use (e.g. García and Otheguy 2020; Hall 2020; Pennycook 1989, 2008; Smith 2003) and indeed their potentially facilitative functions (e.g. Hall and Cook 2012; Lin and Martin 2005), the utilisation of a person’s full repertoire of resources in the classroom (Zhu et al. 2020) including their L1 remains the elephant in the room, something to be frowned upon (Hall 2020) and translanguaging practice is considered “inappropriate” (Li and Lin 2019). The reluctance to use or even resistance to using non-target language inside the classroom is arguably attributable to the perpetuating “(mono)lingual bias” in the field of language learning and teaching (see Block 2014; Liu et al. 2020; Zhu et al. 2020) as well as the misapplication of second language acquisition research findings (see Spada 2015). There is thus a need to communicate and raise awareness of the strong evidence base that supports the normalcy and the potential benefits of translanguaging practices to language learners and teachers (Coffey and Leung 2020; Hall 2020; Tian and Sherpardin-Carey 2020).

Our study aims to speak to the theory and practice divide by providing analyses of Taiwanese (L1 Mandarin) English as a second language (ESL) university classroom discourse in a translanguaging space, which demonstrate the beneficial effect such a space can have on progressing classroom instructions (including scaffolding). We argue that when a liberating translanguaging space is allowed, learners can benefit from the complementary effects that different deployed resources bring which in turn facilitate negotiations and understanding. We also illustrate how the translanguaging space and the translanguaging stance it espouses together allow students to take on non-traditional roles inside the classroom to challenge authority and engage in deeper learning. The discussion of our data below contributes further supporting evidence, as called for by Lin (2022), to convince
educators of the possibilities that can be opened by embracing the translanguaging space where language users’ full repertoire of resources is utilised.

The remainder of this article first provides a brief account of translanguaging and translanguaging space. It then reviews research on translanguaging in classrooms, and scaffolding before providing contextual information about Taiwanese ESL classrooms. The methodology is then discussed, followed by data analyses. It ends with some concluding remarks advocating translanguaging practices inside classrooms, highlighting the deeper student engagement it stimulates and their possibility of disrupting the traditionally rigid power structure.

2.1 Translanguaging and translanguaging space

William’s (1994) and Baker’s (2001) pioneering work in Welsh classrooms, which reported observations of apparently seamless communications in and across English and Welsh, spearheaded investigations into translanguaging (see Lewis et al. 2012 a, b for the development of the term; see also Mufwene 2001). In addition to exploring translingual exchanges, later translanguaging work has extended their scope to include mutli-/trans-modality, and the relationship between language and semiotic repertoires in and outside classrooms (e.g. García and Li 2014; Tai and Li 2020, 2021 a, b; Zhu et al. 2017). For example, Pennycook and Otsuji (2014: 161) highlighted how linguistic resources and urban space are interlinked when they coined “spatial repertoires”. Li’s (2011, 2018) “translanguaging space” aims to capture the creativity, fluidity, multimodality, multi-historicity, and multifaceted nature of (multilingual) communications and language. He describes a translanguaging space as:

a space that is created by and for Translanguaging practices, and a space where language users break down the ideologically laden dichotomies between the macro and the micro, the societal and the individual, and the social and the psychological through interaction. A Translanguaging Space allows language users to integrate social spaces (and thus ‘linguistic codes’) that have been formerly separated through different practices in different places (Li 2018: 23).
It is a space where speakers “bring together different dimensions of their personal history, experience and environment, their attitude, belief and ideology, their cognitive and physical capacity into coordinated and meaningful performance” (Li 2011: 1223). Translanguaging is, therefore, not only about going between various linguistic, cognitive, semiotic systems and modalities, but going beyond them (e.g. Li 2020). We argue below that translanguaging and translanguaging space provide a useful lens to understand ESL/EFL classroom interactions where various multimodal resources (e.g. linguistic and paralinguistic codes, gestures, realia, etc.) are deployed and “orchestrated” (Zhu et al. 2020) to make meaning and perform pedagogical functions.

2.2 Translanguaging and the classroom

Underscoring the facilitative functions of translanguaging and a translanguaging space, Lin and He (2017) demonstrate that translanguaging is practised by a science teacher in a content and language integrated learning (CLIL) classroom in Hong Kong (HK) to motivate and engage South Asian ethnic minority students despite the monological school and governmental policies. They argue that translanguaging helps “to bridge communication disconnects, to activate creative thinking […] to motivate learning, and to affirm learners’ ethnic/cultural identities” (243) and should therefore be embraced. Similarly, Tai and Li (2020 a, b, c) suggest that a safe space for co-learning is created by translanguaging practice in a secondary English as a medium of instructions (EMI) mathematics classroom in HK. Students are able to use multilingual, multimodal, multisensory resources and real-world knowledge to learn new maths concepts collaboratively and negotiate meaning. Moreover, in the translanguaging space, learners are able to utilise playful language to challenge or even “transgress” the imbalanced classroom power relationship. It is also worth noting, however, that translanguaging and plurilingual practices are not always welcomed because of entrenched “either-or”, “binary” thinking (i.e. either L1 or L2) in curriculum design, assessment, and more generally the conceptualisation of language (Lin 2020).

In Taiwan, EMI has been promoted by the government and school stakeholders (National Development Council Ministry of Education 2021). But there is evidence that multilingual and multimodal resources are being deployed in different classrooms. Kao’s (2022) recent study of 422 in-service teachers shows that although translanguaging is a new
concept to many in Taiwan, various language and semiotic/para-linguistic resources are used daily among teachers of different subjects to a varying degree. While elementary and middle school English teachers employ English and other semiotic resources, middle school content teachers prefer using L1 to reinforce subject learning. Kao suggests that the “translanguaging approach has expanded the linguistics practices and empowered the use of other meaning-making signs that are typically less valued in school” (1). Lin (2022) discusses the variability and complexity of language use and choice in Taiwanese university engineering and science lab meetings among culturally and linguistically diverse students and professors. Through 53 interviews, Lin discovers that “language choice was subject to constant negotiations among all lab members, leading to dynamic flows and configurations of translanguaging” but “not all language choices are equally inclusive and conducive to learning for all members” (117) because of the local-global tension between Taiwanese students’ preference of (Mandarin) Chinese and international students’ preference of using lingua franca English, each choice including/excluding certain groups. Lin ends by calling for more research with discourse data to identify “optimal” translanguaging practices. Hence our study attempts to provide classroom data and explore pedagogical functions/scaffolding in a translanguaging space.

2.3 Scaffolding

Scaffolding was initially described as an “interactional instructional relationship” between adults and learners that “enables a child or novice to solve a problem […] beyond his unassisted efforts” (Wood et al. 1976: 90; Bruner 1983). In a classroom setting, it can be understood as “a type of teacher assistance that helps students learn new skills, concepts, or levels of understanding that leads to the student successfully completing a task, a specific learning activity with finite goals” (Maybin et al. 1992: 88). Scaffolding can take many forms, from clarification check to error correction, so long as they are aimed at assisting learners.

Translanguaging practice can also be used as a means of scaffolding, such as progression of lesson and clarification of misunderstanding/confusion (Li 2011, 2018). Feller’s (2022) longitudinal investigation of a third-grade bilingual classroom in Portugal provides a recent example of how translanguaging is used to teach content and establish communication in natural and social sciences and English language lessons. Feller shows
that scaffolding is not limited to teacher-initiated sequences, but learners also actively scaffold each other’s contributions to advance their understanding of a target concept/structure, concurring with our analyses below.

Our study is guided by the overarching question: how does a translinguaging space facilitate scaffolding in an ESL classroom in higher education in the UK? This is addressed through examining: (1) how scaffolding is carried out in the translinguaging space, and (2) how the teacher and students co-construct learning and (3) how students share their perspective to challenge the classroom power structure.

3 Methodology

This study is based on two UK university ESL classrooms informed by ideas from Cognitive Linguistics taught by the first author. Data came from three-week video-recorded observations, totalling 27 hours. Semiotic resources, including cognitive maps, semantic tables, and in-class tasks were utilised while designing the teaching materials (see Appendix). The classroom is a translinguaging space by design, as the materials tapped into similarities and differences between concept constructions across L1 Mandarin and L2 English (e.g. conceptualisation of metaphors, categorisation, etc.). Materials focused on the conceptual understanding of the adverbial particles or prepositions used in phrasal verbs (multi-word constructions). ¹

Translinguaging practice is evident in the entire corpus of recordings. For this paper, we focus on episodes of scaffolding and classroom interactions where verbal and non-verbal resources are employed (i.e. gaze, facial expression, gesture, hand movement, and object manipulation). We have selected two extracts that belong to two different modes in Walsh’s SETT framework that are characterised by different interactional features to demonstrate 1) the prevalence of fluid and dynamic use of speakers’ diverse communication repertoire in

¹ The data set came from a larger study that aims to investigate the effect of ESL materials designed based on key notions in cognitive linguistics such as conceptualisation of metaphors and categorisation on the learning of phrasal verbs. In this paper, we specifically focus on the interactions in the translinguaging classroom space that’s created. Readers interested in the details of the cognitive linguistics design can refer to Author 1 [in press].
the translinguaging classroom space and 2) how they act as scaffolding to progress instructions (see section 4).

3.1 Participants, materials and procedures

13 L1 Mandarin Chinese UK university students aged 18-28 (Mean=22.9, SD=3.20) participated. Eight were undergraduates and five postgraduates. The average length of living in English-speaking countries was 3.3 years (SD=3.98) (see Table 1).

Table 1: Participants’ demographics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education (UG = undergraduate; PG= postgraduate)</th>
<th>Years of learning English</th>
<th>Years spent in an English-speaking country</th>
<th>IELTS scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FS01</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>UG</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FS02</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>PG</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>PG</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FS04</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>UG</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FS05</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>UG</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FS06</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>PG</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>20</td>
<td>UG</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CG01</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>UG</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CG02</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>PG</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>CG03</td>
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<td>UG</td>
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<td>CG04</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>PG</td>
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<tr>
<td>CG05</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>UG</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CG06</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>UG</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*FS=frame semantics class, CG=categorisation class

Participants reported having at least seven years of English learning experience. Their level was between intermediate and upper-intermediate according to IELTS scores. However, one participant did not report their English proficiency level.

Three sets of worksheets (see Appendix) were used in class. They followed an identical organisation, containing four main sections: (1) a list of ten target phrasal verbs
involving two target particles, (2) two radial category diagrams and a semantic table (3) a table of example sentences, and (4) two in-class tasks: word map drawing and story creation.

The project received ethical approval from the authors’ university. Participants consented to partake and be video recorded. A small camera was used to minimise disruptions.

To identify relevant interaction episodes, each author first viewed the recordings and transcribed the data individually. Interaction data were transcribed in accordance with Jefferson’s system (2004). We modelled our transcription after Jefferson’s convention in order to capture interactional details relevant to our analyses textually as adequately as possible. This is supplemented by Matsumoto’s (2019) and Zhu et al.’s system (2017) which captures both verbal and non-verbal behaviours. Screenshots were used to demonstrate multimodal interactions. We then selected the two episodes on which to focus (see below) and coded the data with reference to Walsh’s (2011) Self-Evaluation of Teacher Talk (SETT) framework of classroom discourse. Next, we compared and resolved transcription discrepancies by repeatedly watching recordings together. We then collectively and iteratively interrogated the data to analyse the moment-by-moment interactions and pedagogical functions achieved in the translanguaging space to reach the interpretations offered below.

4 Data analysis and discussion

Here, we present our analysis and commentary on two selected extracts. The extracts representing different modes in the SETT framework (Walsh 2011: 113) are marked by distinctive pedagogical goals and interactional features. Extract 1, containing 4 episodes/sections, is largely representative of the skills and systems mode where there is attention to forms. Extended teacher turns and instructions scaffolding are some of the interactional features involved in this mode. Extract 2, comprising two overlapping episodes/sections, is a mixture of the materials-oriented mode and classroom context mode.

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*We also note the recent work by Tai (2023) which may provide an even more detailed framework for analysing our data, which we aim to incorporate for our future work.*
where language is practised and learners express themselves. Its interactional features include both learners’ and teachers’ turns and clarification requests. We demonstrate that naturally flowing translanguage practice contributed to the scaffolding of instructions, such as progression of lesson, clarification of misunderstanding/confusion, stimulating (non)verbal responses and co-construction of knowledge.

4.1 Extract 1: Scaffolding of instructions

Extract 1 is a transcript of the explanation of the difference between *off* and *away*. It came from a session that aimed at establishing a conceptual understanding of English particles *on* and *off* in phrasal verbs. Teacher-student interactions took place multilingually and multimodally aided by verbal (L1 and L2) and non-verbal resources (e.g. nods, gestures, and realia). Teacher (T) initiated the sequence by discussing a question raised by FS01 in the previous turn: how to distinguish the uses between *off* and *away*. T’s explanation utilised a real-life object, a flask, as well as multilingual resources including Mandarin Chinese. Detailed analyses below demonstrate that scaffolding is achieved by translanguaging.

**Extract 1:** Constructing concept of *off* and *away* through a flask (i.e. realia) in a translanguaging space.

[Transcript to be inserted (Extract 1.1-1.2)]

4.1.1 Episode 1: Similar concept of “off” and “away”

In turn 1-2, T responded to FS01’s question by uttering “OK. I would like to mention it here. The differences between *off* and *away*” and by raising her hands to make a circle in the air (turn 3). In turn 3-5, T first discussed the shared concepts between *off* and *away* by saying “Most of their meanings are similar. Just not touch. Loss of contact.” Simultaneously, T clapped her hands (turn 4) and used her left hand to tap the desk twice to attract students’ attention. After the similarity was introduced, T continued by offering an account of the conceptual difference between *off* and *away* (turn 6-17). To clarify students’ understanding,
T had an extended turn while holding a flask with its lid on hand to demonstrate the different spatial configuration of *off* and *away*. Initially, T placed the lid on top of the flask to remind students of the spatial concept of *on* and said “I put this, I put the lid on the cup” (turn 8). T recapitulated the concept of *on* (i.e. confirmation check) by saying “This is on, right?” (turn 9). All students responded to T’s question by gazing at the teacher (turn 10) to confirm their understanding. T moved on to *off* in turn 11 by uttering “So I take it off” to contrast its opposite spatial relationship with *on* while simultaneously removing the lid from top of the flask. Joint-attention and common understanding are achieved, signalled by students’ gaze at the teacher’s direction (turn 12).

**4.1.2 Episode 2: Different concept of “off” and “away”**

In turn 13, T directed students’ attention back to *off* by using her finger to point to the surface of the desk. These verbal and gestural resources provided the setup for explaining the spatial concept of *away* in turn 14 which is accompanied by visual and semiotic references, i.e. holding the lid further away from the flask. Again, all students gazed at the teacher as joint-attention is achieved (turn15). T then provided further explanations of the spatial concept of *away* in turn 16-17 by uttering “probably somewhere else” and “but not ready to access”. After an extended teacher turn, T attempted to check students’ understanding by the confirmation check, “Got it?” (turn 18) and holding up her right index finger. In response to T’s initiation, FS01, FS03 and FS06 nodded (turn18). In turn 19, T complemented the spatial meaning difference between *off* and *away* previously established by verbalising, “This is the difference between *off* and *away*” and reinforcing through referencing semiotic resources, i.e., moving the lid backward and forward towards the flask (see Image 1).

**4.1.3 Episode 3: 聽懂嗎? (tīng dǒng ma)/ Understood?**

In turn 20, T attempted to concept check by asking “聽懂嗎 (tīng dǒng ma)? (understood?)” in Mandarin to invite students’ responses. FS06 nodded in response. Others responded in the subsequent turn to confirm their understanding (FS02’s “Mm Hm”, FS01’s and FS02’s nod, and FS06’s nod continued from the previous turn). *tīng dǒng ma* (understood?) functions to open up the floor for learners’ contributions and clarification requests, and it
also serves as a discourse marker that focuses/grabs students’ attention on the content/explanation to follow.

4.1.4 Episode 4: Translanguaging practice: multimodality

After the concept check question, T reiterated the spatial concept of off in Mandarin by uttering “Off 的話就是, 我就是分開但是我可能馬上又可以拿得到 (Off means separate but then the thing can be retrieved immediately)” in turn 22 and concurrently moving the lid back and forth towards the direction of the flask. In turn 23, T restated that away is different from off by saying “但是 away 是分開但是它有距離 (but away, it means separated with distance)” in Mandarin and holding the lid further away from the flask. Upon hearing T’s explanation, FS01 gazed at FS04 to seek confirmation. FS04 nodded in response to confirm her understanding (turn 24). T elaborated on away by uttering “而且可能不是我馬上, 我要拿我就可以 (and I cannot access it immediately)” in Mandarin while continuing to hold the lid away from the flask to highlight the distance (turn 25). T added “懂我意思?” (Got what I mean?) in turn 26 as a gap-filler and a concept check question to allow students to ask questions if they do not follow. It also acts as a bridge for a further illustrative verbal example in turn 27, “I throw things away”. It is noteworthy that T continued to deploy spatial resource to supplement/complement her verbal explanations by maintaining the position of the far-away held lid. FS01 nodded and continued doing so till the next turn to acknowledge her understanding. T repeated her verbal explanation in turn 28, but reconfigured her semiotic resources by virtually grabbing with her left hand and then performing a throw-away motion to reinforce the “away” position of the right hand. FS03 confirmed her understanding by nodding. Finally, T uttered “有距離了 (It has distance)” in turn 29 and “distance” in turn 30 while waving the lid in the air with her right hand to complete her response/explanation to FS01’s question regarding the use of off and away.

Through the four episodes above we saw how scaffolding is carried out in the translanguaging space (sub-RQ1). It can be seen that instructions progressed naturally and understanding is achieved through the meaningful “orchestration” (Li 2018; Zhu et al. 2020) of linguistic and semiotic repertoires (i.e. linguistic cues, gestures, hand movements,
pointing, eye contact, and realia) in the translanguaging space (see also Tai 2022 for teacher’s translanguaging in dealing with contingencies or lack of student response). Importantly, the deployment and coordination of multimodal and multisensory resources are not simply an act of “translation” (translating L2 into L1), but a progressive scaffolding act that adds different layers of meaning to the overall explanation, thereby creating the opportunity for potentially engaging learners in deeper processing and learning through the activation of various cognitive functions (i.e. visual, spatial, (para-)linguistic). This resonates with the perceived benefits of multimodal practices including retaining and deepening knowledge reported by Li (2020).

4.2 Extract 2: Co-construction of learning through discussion

Unlike the previous extract involving extended teacher turns, Extract 2 involves multi-directional exchanges, therefore it provides opportunities for us to illustrate how the teacher and students co-construct learning (sub-RQ2) and how students share their perspective to challenge the classroom power structure (sub-RQ3). The extract was taken from the exercise phase of the class when students tackled the worksheet assigned which targets the adverbial particles/prepositions taught. The analyses below illustrate how students are empowered to contribute and cross-validate their understanding with their teacher and/or their peers to co-construct understanding. It is also useful to note that the horseshoe seating arrangement which conveys a more egalitarian stance contributed to opening up the possibility for students to “challenge” authority, thereby reinforcing the idea that a translanguaging space affords the utilisation of linguistic (i.e., linguistic repertoires) and non-linguistic resources (e.g., spatial repertoires, semiotic resources) in the meaning making process.

Extract 2 compromises two overlapping episodes. The first episode involves CG01’s contributions to cross-check her understanding of the ego perspective and container metaphor with the teacher. Concurrently, CG05 was disputing 退 (tuì) as down with his peers, foregrounding the horizontal dimension of 退去 (tuì), i.e. out. As opposed to classroom discourse work that largely focuses on interactions where turn-taking is relatively smooth, the extend overlaps or rather multiplicity of interactions this extract features and
captures reflect the “messiness” of classroom, something with which research have not always honestly engaged (Jones 2020: 536).

**Extract 2: Co-construction of learning through discussion of coming in and out**

[Transcript to be inserted (extract 2.1-2.4)]

**4.2.1 Episode 1: Cross-checking ego perspective and container metaphor**

Prior to this stream of interactions, T introduced an English particle, *in*, as a container metaphor that can be used to describe waves coming onshore with the shoreline being the boundary of the container. In turn 1, T attempted to contrast the representation of the wave movement in English and Mandarin by a display question “你看我們中文是退, 對不對? (i.e. You see in Mandarin Chinese it means decline, isn’t it?)” and sought agreement/confirmation in the following turns. However, in turn 8, 9, and 11, CG01 raised and clarified her question in English and Mandarin as “那個叫什麼東西! (What is it!) Come out, come in.” T rephrased CG01’s question in turn 12: “Come in 那個 (particularly) waves.”

CG01 confirmed that her question was understood in turn 13 by saying 對 (yes) thrice. CG01 continued her utterance in turn 14: “可是它是進入那個地方 (But it enters that place)” and turn 15 (see Image 2): “可是對它來說它是出去啊! (But for it, it means going out). It was unclear for T what the pronoun (i.e.  it) referred to, so she asked: “對它? (i.e., For whom?)” in turn 16. CG01 clarified her question: “對於 wave 本身來說 (i.e., from the wave’s perspective)” in turn 17. T responded to CG01’s question by uttering: “可是你要看你對應的 (It depends on what you compare and contrast)” in Mandarin (turn 20). T repeated her explanation in English: “Because we say big waves come in where?” (turn 21) and added in a combination of Mandarin and English: “這有個 container (There is a container)” (turn 22). Also in turn 26, T briefly emphasised that the shoreline is considered as the boundary of the container in Mandarin and English: “所以 container 是海岸線 (So the container is the shoreline), which illustrated that T aimed to ensure the student’s uptake.
of the container concept. CG01 checked her understanding by uttering in English and Mandarin: “所以對它來說它是 in (So for waves, they are coming in)” in turn 27. As soon as T realised CG01’s previous ego perspective on the container concept, she said: “就是我懂 (I got it) in turn 30 and then went back to the student’s previous opinion about the container concept by uttering in English and Mandarin: “你是覺得 big wave 是一個 container (So you think the big wave is a container)” in turn 31. In this episode, both the teacher and CG01 were translanguaging in formulating the clarification request and subsequent scaffolding acts in lockstep. At the same time, real-world knowledge about the movement of waves was drawn upon to aid understanding and establish common ground, in manner similar to how out-of-school knowledge was called upon to understand mathematical concepts in an EMI maths class in Hong Kong (Tai and Li 2020).

4.2.2 Episode 2: Disputing the concepts between “down” and “out”

While CG01 was interacting with T on the left side of the room, CG05 was disputing the contrast previously set up by T (i.e. the equivalent of 退 (tuì) is down) with his peers on the right. In turn 11, while CG01 was asking a question to T, CG05 initiated his query/dispute by verbalising a declarative sentence in Mandarin: “退是往後走 (Retreat is moving back).” Acknowledging the potential validity of CG05’s contribution, CG03 and CG06 exchanged eye-gaze with each other and CG05 without attending to the exchange between CG01 and T that was happening concurrently. CG06 responded to CG05 in Mandarin: “退回去嗎? (Retreating?)” (turn 13). CG05 replied in Mandarin: “對啊! 退不就是回去嗎? (Yes! Isn’t retreat moving back?)” (turn 14). CG05 had an unintelligible utterance and moved his hands toward himself in turn 16. Later in turn 17 while gazing at CG05, CG06 offered her elaborated interpretation by saying: “回漲 (huí zhǎng) (Move back and go up)” in Mandarin (see image 3). CG05 insisted on his opinion by saying: “就是退啊! (That is retreat!)” in Mandarin and gradually raising his right hand and lowering his left (turn 18) (see image 4). At that point, CG05 and CG06 tried to establish eye-contact with T and CG01 to bid for attention, potentially attempting to bring in T to resolve the dispute/debate (see image 5), but T and CG01 were still engrossed in their discussion until turn 34, so that bid for attention was not successful.
Upon the completion of the interaction between T and CG01 in turn 34, T then bid for the attention of the entire class by asking another display question “所以它如果退潮呢? (What if the tide is moving away from the shore?)” (turn 35) in an attempt to direct their attention back to the similarities and differences of using in and out as well as up and down in English and Mandarin. T regained the whole class’s attention between turn 37-9. Following T’s question, some students looked at her to show their awareness and CG05 responded: “coming out” (turn 37) and T added: “Or going out” (turn 38). Most students acknowledged their understanding by gazing at T or nodding. T further clarified the use of up and down in English, distinguishing them from the ones used in Mandarin, so she uttered in Mandarin and English: “因為中文的漲和退是 up and down (Waves coming in and out is described as up and down in Mandarin)” (turn 42) and added: “它講的是中間 (The meaning is based on the middle of the wave motion)” (turn 43). She then contrasted that with English where the attention of the motion is given to the beginning of the process in her Mandarin utterance, “可是英文反而講的是最前面的這個動作 (But in English the meaning refers to the beginning of the motion)” in turn 44. CG05 latched onto the opportunity in turn 46 to raise his query “退不是指前後的退嗎? (Doesn’t retreat mean moving back and forth [in the horizontal sense]?)” in Mandarin and moving his hands back and forth (turn 46-47). T agreed by responding in English: “Ya! So in and out can be horizontal” (turn 48) and continued to utter in Mandarin (turn 49): “有沒有? (Right?)”; simultaneously, CG05 responded in Mandarin: “對 (Yes)”. T realised that the student might have been confused over the polysemous Mandarin Chinese character “退 (tuì)” as it can refer to declining (the concept of down) or retreating (the concept of out). Thus, T highlighted the spatial sense of in and out in terms of linear movement in Mandarin (turn 53): “直線的移動 (zhí xiàn de yí dòng)” when she finally attempted to resolve CG05’s dispute between 退 (tuì) as down and 退 (tuì) as out.

In this episode, we saw that students are actively engaging in multi-lingual and multi-modal translanguaging to clarify understanding and dispute concepts presented in class, and in turn co-construct knowledge with both their peers and the teacher. We noted above that the seating arrangement might have facilitated the disruption of the traditional power structure (i.e. high-power, teacher dominated classroom). GG05’s vocal and gestural
contributions could have been viewed as face-threatening, but arguably the “translanguaging stance” (Zhu et al. 2020) adopted by the teacher verbally as well as spatially has transpired. This signalled to students that this classroom is a safe space for them to question or even challenge in order to reach common understanding. Thus, in a translanguaging space, students are able to take advantage and truly engage with/ initiate knowledge co-construction instead of being a passive learner merely “receiving” knowledge. The learners’ deeper engagement is reflected through the multi-directional flow of interactions and the heavy overlap of turn-taking (i.e. the messiness of the classroom).

Similar practice has been observed in other classrooms where learners are empowered to actively engage in the co-construction of knowledge afforded in the translanguaging space (e.g. Tai and Li 2021a) as well as in linguistic field work where the power imbalance between “researcher” and “the researched” can be redressed through translanguaging practices (e.g. Nemouchi and Holmes 2022).

5 Conclusion and implications

Our study set out to address the question: how does a translanguaging space facilitate scaffolding in an ESL classroom in higher education in the UK? It is among the first to answer the plead by Lin (2022) who calls for much needed empirical evidence based on analyses of actual classroom interactions. Our paper has demonstrated how “flexible multilingual practice” (Li and Zhu 2013) is naturally employed in L2 classrooms. In addition to documenting the translanguaging episodes, we have identified and analysed the pedagogical functions translanguaging helped perform. Our analyses show that the teacher and learners utilise both linguistic and non-linguistic resources at their disposal to make sense of the learning content and co-construct knowledge in situ. On that basis, we argue that opening up the translanguaging space aids the scaffolding of instructions and understanding, which in turn helps achieve the pedagogical goal, i.e. enhancing understanding of the phrasal verbs/multi-word constructions. By providing excerpts and analyses that illustrate the facilitative functions of a translanguaging space and translingual practices, we are calling for the acknowledgement and acceptance of the power of translanguaging pedagogies. Educators who subscribe to such a view can help unlock the potentials afforded by such practices (García and Kleifgen 2010; Jones and Lewis 2014).
As seen through our analyses, translinguaging encourages and empowers all participants (students and teachers) to share their knowledge and experience, co-construct knowledge, and even challenge authority in a classroom (e.g. Extract 2), which in turn allows participants to embrace the beauty of linguistic diversity (García and Li 2014). The spontaneous and smooth-flowing translinguaging practices analysed above supported various pedagogical goals, such as scaffolding instructions, seeking clarifications/validation (e.g. Extract 1). The translinguaging stance empowers students to break the cultural stereotype of the “reticent Asian/Chinese student” and take ownership of their learning. Learners and the teacher in our study did not follow a script (cf. Tai 2022), but are nonetheless able to reach common ground in the translinguaging space. Therefore, once we are able to see past the straitjacket of monolingual pedagogy/(mono)lingual bias, it becomes obvious that these seemingly “innovative” deployment of and seamless shuffle between linguistic (various named languages) and non-linguistics resources are simply the normal day-to-day reality of multilingual communications and situated sense-making inside the classroom (see literature review) and beyond (Canagarajah 2022; Li 2020; see also Danjo 2018 on Japanese-English multilingual family interactions; Li 2018 for examples of multilingual exchanges among Singaporeans).

That said, one should also recognise that although research on translinguaging has made great strides in recent years, in some contexts a translinguaging space is not always available if not outright prohibited due to constraints imposed by the national/local policy, for instance, in target-language-only EMI schools. That is not to say that translinguaging does not take place in those contexts, but whether or not teachers and students have the agency to decide how they can benefit from translinguaging might be more restricted than in a setting such as the present study where participation was voluntary and the stake was low (i.e. non-credit bearing). Arguably, this discrepancy and disconnect between policy and practice is what led to the imbalanced status of and values attached to different communicative resources (cf. Canagarajah 2022) which in turn lead to some of the dilemmas that teachers face (see introduction). This divide is something that teacher educators and applied linguists must attempt to confront and tackle.

The data we presented help illustrate that there is much to be gained from adopting a translinguaging classroom vis-à-vis enhancing participation and depth of learning. These,
in our view, provide a strong pedagogical rationale to support the opening up of a translanguaging space in the teaching and learning context. Through contributing more empirical evidence that supports the normalcy and facilitative functions of a translanguaging space, we hope to help turn the tide and reframe the utilisation of all resources (including the L1) in a more positive light. In fact, Tai and Dai 2023 have recently argued that translanguaging or the ability to be able to translanguage and utilise one’s full communication repertoire constitute an integral element to a person’s interactional competence. By advocating the translanguaging stance, we hope to help relieve teachers from the sense of guilt for “deviating” from the strict monolingual education policy (Hall 2020; Macaro 2006). Acknowledging opportunities that translanguaging offers in the classroom and the realities of translanguaging embedded in many TESOL classrooms can not only help narrow the gap between theory and practice in TESOL but also challenge the perpetuation of the monolingual ideology. This “unlearning” of entrenched ideologies can in turn contribute to a more equitable and socially just teaching and learning environment (Li 2023), one of the goals we should all aim for as the field of language learning & teaching and applied linguistics is attempting to “decentre” and “decolonise” (Kumaravadivelu 2016; Ortaçtepe Hart 2023; Phipps 2021). It is encouraging to see recent development of teacher training materials with a translanguaging/plurilingual orientation (e.g. Galante et al. 2022). Emerging research which targets policy changes/rethink in both pedagogy and assessments (e.g. Cenoz and Gorter 2020, 2022; Wang 2022), we believe, is the next logical endeavour towards fruitfully embracing translanguaging practices.

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank the editor and the anonymous reviewers for their kind comments which help enhance the clarity of our paper. We would also like to thank [redacted] for kindly offering their comments on our earlier draft.

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**Appendix**

See attachment in the submission system not for review
Transcripts and diagrams

Extract 1.1

Extract 1: Constructing concept of off and away through a flask (i.e., realia) in a translanguaging space

Video/record UK-FS-2-20170207_00.14.38-00.15.46

S: T (teacher), FS01 (student 1), FS02 (student 2), FS03 (student 3), FS04 (student 4), FS05 (student 5), FS06 (student 6), FS07 (student 7); All (all 7 students)

Extract 1.1 (turn 1-19)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turn</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Verbal/ non-verbal action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>Ok. I would like to mention it here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>The &lt;differences&gt; between &lt;off&gt; and &lt;away&gt;.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>Most of their meanings are similar. (raisings her hands to make a circle in the air))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>Just (her right touching the surface of the desk) not touch (clapping both of her hands to make a sound-emphasising not touch)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>Lost of contact (using her left hand touching the surface of the desk twice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>But: the differences between off and away is like (.) (moving her hands forward and backward)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>For example: (picking up a lid and a flask in front of students) (1.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>I put this (pointed at the lid) I put the lid on the cup (placing the lid on top of the flask) (2.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>This is on, right? (0.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>(all students gazing at the teacher))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>So, (0.5) I take it off (removing the lid from top of the flask) (1.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>(all students gazing at the teacher))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>But: off would be here (indicating the surface of the desk) (1.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>But: if I say, I took this away (holding the lid to be further away from the flask) (2.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>(all students gazing at the teacher))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>Probably somewhere else (1.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>But: not ready to access: (2.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>&gt;Got it&lt;? (the right hand's index finger indicating up) (FS01, FS03, FS06 nodded)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>&gt;This is the difference between off and away (moving the lid forward and backward towards the direction of the flask) (1.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Extract 1.2

20 T 聽懂嗎？("ting dòng ma")
Understood?
((FS06 nodded – continued to the next turn))

21 FS02 Mm, Hm
((FS02, FS01 nodding))

22 T 原的話就是()，就是分開()，但是()，我馬上又可以拿到。
Off de huà jù shì, wǒ jù shì fēn kāi dàn shì wǒ kě néng mǎ shàng yōu kě yí ná dào

23 T 但是 away () 是分開(), 但是它有距離。
dàn shì away shì fēn kāi dàn shì tā yǒu jù lǐ
But away, it means separate with distance.

24 FS01 (gazing at FS04 and also nodding her head)

25 T 而且()，可能不是()，我馬上 (0.5) 我要拿我就可以。
ér qié kě néng bù shì wǒ mǎ shàng wǒ yào ná wǒ jù kě yí
And I cannot have access to something immediately
(holding the lid to be further away from the flask)

26 T >懂我意思嗎<?
dōng wǒ yì sī ma?
Got what I mean?

27 T <throw things away> ::
(right hand holding the lid to be further away from the flask)
((FS01 nodded – continued to the next turn))

28 T I throw things away.
(left hand virtually grabbing motion, then throw-away motion to reinforce the held away position of the right hand)
((FS03 nodded)):

29 T 有距離了，
yǒu jù lǐ le
It has distance
(1.0)

30 T Distance.
(waving the lid in the air)
(1.0)

31 T And () not ready () to access.
(showing the lid)

32 T And () that’s away.
**Extract 2.1**

Co-construction of learning through discussion of coming in and out

**Speakers:** T (teacher); CG01 (student 8); CG02 (student 9); CG03 (student 10); CG04 (student 11); CG05 (student 12); CG06 (student 13); All (all 6 students)

### Turn 1-13: Extract 2.1 (turn 14-27): Extract 2.3 (turn 28-43): Extract 2.4 (turn 44-55)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turn</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Verbal/ non-verbal action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1    | T       | 你看我們中文裡邊 >對不對<?  
     |         | nǐ kàn wǒ men zhōng wén liăn tuí, duì bù duì?  
     |         | You see in Mandarin Chinese it means decline, right?  |
| 2    | CG01    | mhm, mhm  
     |         | ((nodding her head))  |
| 3    | T       | 話已經掉下心頭  
     |         | huà yǐ jīng diào xià xīn tóu  
     |         | In other words, decline is down.  |
| 4    | T       | 但是英文不是呢!  
     |         | dàn shì yīng wén bù shì de  
     |         | But it does not mean the same in English!  |
| 5    | CG01/CG05/CG06 | ((looking at the direction of the teacher))  |
|      | T       | 英文是  
     |         | yīng wén shì  
     |         | in English it  
     |         | (1.0)  |
| 6    | T       | 我剛剛問你講<come in>  
     |         | wǒ gāng gāng wèn nǐ jiāng lái cún  
     |         | I just told you about come in  |
| 7    | T       | 所以當然go=  
     |         | suǒ yǐ dāng rán go=  
     |         | Of course! it means go  |
| 8    | CG01    | 可是你不是說那個  
     |         | kě shì nǐ bù shì shuō nà ge  
     |         | But you just said  |
| 9    | CG01    | 那個叫什麼東西? Come out  
     |         | nà ge jiào shì me dòng xi lái cún  
     |         | What is it? Come out  |
| 10   | CG01/CG05 | ((CG01 is raising her right hand and CG05 is paying attention to her))  |
|      | CG05    | [沒有!]  
     |         | méi yǒu shì  
     |         | No  |
| 11   | CG01    | [Coma in]  
     |         |  
     |         | [Tui shi wang hou zou]  
     |         | retreat is moving back  
     |         | (moving his both hands towards himself and looking at the direction of the teacher at the same time)  |
| 12   | CG03/CG06 | [[[looking at CG01]]]  
     |         | come in 那个 waves  
     |         | come in nà ge waves  
     |         | particularly waves come in  |
| 13   | CG01    | [對對對]  
     |         | duì duì duì  
     |         | Yes yes yes  |
|      | CG03/CG05/CG06 | [[[looking at each other]]]  
     |         |  
     |         |  
     |         |  

---

**CG06**  
[tui hui du ma?]  
Moving back?
Extract 2.2

14 CG01
[它是 (它) 是進入那個地方]
kē shì tā shì jìn ru nà gè de fāng
But it enters that place

CG05
[對嗎? 這不就是回去嗎?]
duì ma? zhè bù jiù shì huí qù ma?
Yes! Retreat is moving back?

15 CG01
[可是 (可是) 對它來說, 它是出去啊!]
kě shì (kě shì) duì tā lái shuō, tā shì chū qù ā!
But for it, it means going out!

16 T
對它?
duì tā?
For whom?

17 CG05
(moving his hands towards himself)

18 CG01
[對於 waves 本來來說]
duì yǔ waves běn lái lái shuō
Waves por su

CG06
[自然 (looking at CG05)]
huì zhǎng
Move back and go up

CG05
[just then!]
jiù shì tā ā!
That is retreat!

19 T
[gradually raising his right hand up and left hand below]

20 T
是你要看你看螃蟹。
sì ni yào kàn ni yào xīng pài.
It depends on what you compare and contrast

21 T
Because we say (.) big waves come in where?

22 T
這是一個容器
zhè yī gè qún yì
There is a container

23 CG01
就是要看它前面那個-
jìng shì kàn yào tā miàn qián nà gè
Look at what is behind it!

24 T
[using her right hand drawing a circle in the air]

25 T
針對就是它的容器
duì zhè jiù shì tā de qún yì
Yes, then it would be the container

26 T
你要看看是容器?
ni yào kàn shì qún yì?
You have to check what the container is?

27 CG01
所以對它來說 (.) 它是在
suǒ yì duì tā lái shuō, tā shì zài
So it means that waves are moving into the container
Extract 2.3

28 T Yes.
dui

29 T 你是認真有沒有?
tā shì jìnlǐ yǒu méi yǒu?
They are coming in, right?

30 T 就是說是
jiù shì wǒ dōng
I got it

31 T = 你是覺得 big wave 是一個 container.
nǐ shì jiào de biāo wéi shì yī gé container
So you think big wave is considered as a container

32 T 但是 (,) no
dàn shì no
But no

33 T In here (,) in this sentence
34 T We say () it's coming in
(1.0)

35 T 所以 (,) 它如果變動呢?
suǒ yǐ tā rú guò tī biàn dòng ne?
What if the tide is moving away from the shore?

36 CG01/CG04 ((looking at the direction of the teacher))
37 CG06 Coming out
38 T Or () going out
39 CG01/CG03/ CG04/CG05/ CG06 ((looking at the direction of the teacher, CG01 and CG04 nodding))

40 T [不是 up and down].
bú shì up and down
It's not up and down

41 T [這跟中文的<上下>和<進>是不一樣的]
zé gèn zhōng wén de zhàng hē tī shì yī yàng de
In and out are different from what we use up and down in Mandarin Chinese

42 T 因為中文的進和進是 up and down
yīn wèi zhōng wén de zhàng hē tī shì up and down
Waves coming in and out is described as up and down in Mandarin

43 T 它講的是中間
tā jiàng de shì zhōng jiān
In Mandarin the meaning is based on the middle of the wave motion
Extract 2.4

44 T

Tough, tough! ( ) 反而弄的是()<是前面越>的這個動作。
Kō shi yīng wén tān 4 ré jíng de shì zú qǐ èr miàn de zhè gè dòng zuò.
But in English the meaning relies on the beginning of the wave motion
(2.0)

45 T

Yah?

46 CG05

這不是堆<前後的這>嗎?
Tui bù shì zhì qián hòu de tui me?
Doesn’t retreat mean moving back and forth in the horizontal sense?

47 CG05

((moving two hands back and forth))

48 T

Ya! So "in" and "out" can be horizontal.

49 T

【有沒有?】
yóu méi yóu?
Right?

50 T

平衝的。
píng shōng de
Balanced motion

51 CG01/CG05/CG05

((looking at the direction of the teacher)))

52 T

【那邊直接的】
nà gè zhí xián de
That is linear

53 T

移動。
yí dòng
Movement

54 T

【直線的移動】
zhí xián de yí dòng
Linear movement

55 All

((looking back to the teaching materials))

Transcription conventions

The video-recorded interactions were transcribed according to the list below. It mainly follows the Jefferson's (2004) transcription system, and the notation for multimodal transcription were adapted from Misumoto (2018).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Representation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>( )</td>
<td>labeled pause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( )</td>
<td>brief pause, less than 0.2 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>overlapping speech/ non-verbal actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=</td>
<td>the break and subsequent continuation of an interrupted utterance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>interruption in utterance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.</td>
<td>falling intonation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:</td>
<td>continuing intonation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>rising inflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>!</td>
<td>exclamation pitch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:</td>
<td>prolongation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;text&lt;</td>
<td>speech delivered more rapidly than usual for the speaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;text&gt;</td>
<td>speech delivered more slowly than usual for the speaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>underline</td>
<td>emphasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>italics</td>
<td>transcriptions of Chinese in pinyin &amp; broad translation in English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(moving hands)</td>
<td>non-verbal action that is not synchronised with speech, transcriber's description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(moving hands)</td>
<td>non-verbal action that is synchronised with speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>worse</td>
<td>transmigration, translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( )</td>
<td>the unspoken talk, unintelligible speech</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Image 1:** The teacher is using a flask to demonstrate the concept of *off* and *away* and indicate the movement of directions.

**Image 2:** The students are gazing at the teacher during a clarification sequence.
Image 3: The student is disputing the use of 退 (tui) with his peer.

Image 4: The student is using hand movements to express his opinion.
Image 5: CG05 and CG06 are trying to bid for T’s attention through eye contact.