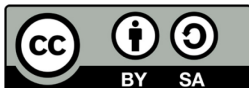# Living the Idea
That All Languages Are Equal? –
Teachers' Perspectives on
Translanguaging in the ELT Classroom

An Interview Study with English Teachers in Germany and Finland

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Abstract: As part of ongoing processes of globalization, multilingual landscapes are increasingly becoming visible, not least in educational settings. This article deals with translanguaging as one of many possible pedagogical responses to linguistic diversity in the classroom and beyond. It focuses on the empirical investigation of teachers' perspectives on translanguaging and its role in the English Language Teaching (ELT) classroom in international contexts. To do so, this article presents selected results of comparative case studies comprising of expert interviews with teachers of English in Germany and Finland. The studies aim at reconstructing teachers' perspectives on translanguaging in order to contribute to a better global understanding of approaches to multilingual education and analyze implications for critical, social justice-oriented ways of teaching and learning in the light of current approaches to (teacher) education. The results indicate that teachers' linguistic ideologies are strongly influenced by monolingual norms that are deeply rooted in social and educational systems in both Germany and Finland. Thus, the results point towards the need for systemic transformation and professional collaboration across different levels of the (teacher) education system.

Keywords: translanguaging; social justice; language ideologies; linguistically just pedagogies

1   Introduction

Ongoing processes of globalization with an increase in physical and virtual mobility have not only been changing societies and cultures worldwide significantly, but have also led to diversified educational settings. Among various dimensions of diversity, one whose immediate relevance for education quickly becomes obvious is that of linguistic diversity. Multilingual landscapes are visible in schools and beyond, and education is bound to adapt to societal changes to match our lived realities. In addition, building an awareness of current developments in societies around the world also means building an awareness of injustices caused by the unequal distribution of power. In educational contexts, languages are for one thing powerful in the sense that they are closely linked to students' identities (García & Lin, 2017, pp. 6–7), and at the same time, language plays a crucial role in the accessibility of education as it is the medium of communication. Since the use and desirability of different languages and language varieties in public spheres mirrors power relations (García & Lin, 2017, p. 5), all linguistic practices applied in the classroom are a matter of social justice.

As the need for and the engagement with Social Justice Education is growing, the academic discourse has been discussing "culturally and linguistically sustaining approaches […] in education that integrate the lived realities of multilingual students" (Shepard-Carey & Tian, 2023b, p. 1). One of these approaches that has been under study "across a variety of educational contexts" (Shepard-Carey & Tian, 2023b, p. 1) in the past few years is translanguaging. By making use of *all* students' full linguistic repertoires for teaching and learning, translanguaging pedagogies aim at destabilizing existing linguistic hierarchies and monolingual practices in the classroom to turn it into an open, critical, and just space for everyone. Teachers may operate as activists for linguistic justice and initiators of processes of transformation in the context of translanguaging pedagogies by including dominant as well as non-dominant language practices – such as minoritized immigrant and Indigenous languages and varieties – in their teaching (García & Li, 2014, p. 68).

When it comes to English Language Teaching (hereafter: ELT), a subject that revolves around a language, linguistic ideologies that shape classroom practices become particularly visible and relevant. Considering the fact that English is a colonial language that is commonly thought of as a global lingua franca and valued highly in various educational contexts worldwide (e.g. Paulsrud et al., 2023, p. 70), this becomes even more significant. Research is assertive of multilingual teaching approaches, but these are not yet widely reflected in practice across various educational contexts ranging from early childhood education up to university (May, 2017; Shepard-Carey & Tian, 2023a). In Germany and Finland, for example, which are going to be the main contexts of interest in this article, prior research has demonstrated the prevalence of monolingual norms and ideologies in educational settings, and linguistically sustaining approaches are rarely implemented in ELT and beyond (e.g. Ennser-Kananen et al., 2021; Montanari & Panagiotopoulou, 2019). This reveals a gap between research and practice: Despite the fact that empirical research has highlighted assets of translanguaging pedagogies in various contexts, pre- and in-service teachers in Germany and Finland seem to have internalized monolingual ideologies and perpetuated them in their practice (e.g. Alisaari et al., 2019; Panagiotopoulou & Knappik, 2022; Pitkänen-Huhta, 2021; Skintey, 2022).

Thus, the crucial role of teachers in linguistically just pedagogies becomes apparent: Apart from policies and curricula, teachers are, in the end, managers and decision-makers when it comes to classroom practices (see Schildhauer, 2023); yet, centering their perspectives and expertise has been identified as a

methodological gap, especially in comparative research contexts (e.g. Louloudi, 2023, pp. 107–130). Teachers' linguistic ideologies and attitudes towards students' multilingualism inform their didactic decisions, which is why their perspectives are crucial to the implementation and development of translanguaging pedagogies. However, research on educators' understandings of multilingualism and multilingual teaching, particularly on social justice-oriented approaches, is scarce, even more so in ELT and in an international comparative context (e.g. Hall, 2020). In addition, an aspect that is significantly understudied is the distinct status of English and teachers' perspectives on translanguaging in ELT in contexts where English is *not* the language of the system, but an additional language, such as in Germany and Finland (Louloudi, 2024).

Drawing on data collected as part of a master's project (Hopfendorf, 2024), this article will focus on some of the results from a comparative interview study centering the perspectives of English teachers in Germany and Finland on translanguaging. First, a brief overview of the underlying theoretical background and current research on translanguaging will be provided, followed by methodological considerations of the research project. Afterwards, some of the results that are representative for each of the observed contexts will be summarized in order to draw a conclusion on in-service teachers' perspectives on translanguaging in ELT and how such findings might lead the way for current and future developments of linguistically just approaches to language teaching.

2   Theoretical background

2.1 Defining translanguaging and its role in ELT

Linguistic as well as educational conceptualizations of bi-/multilingualism have been discussed in different fields of research for decades (May, 2017). Definitions of bilingualism vary from narrow understandings such as subtractive or additive bilingualism (García, 2009, pp. 51–52) to broader understandings like recursive and dynamic bilingualism as well as plurilingualism (pp. 52–55). Correspondingly, the way bilingualism is conceptualized in educational settings affects pedagogical approaches to it. As I pointed out elsewhere (Hopfendorf, 2024), the concepts are therefore "ideologically charged" (p. 3) because stances towards different languages and varieties are reflected in those understandings and practices, making them a matter of linguistic and social justice.

Taking the diversity and individuality of linguistic practices into account, García and Lin (2017) suggest a definition of bilingual education as "the use of diverse language practices to educate" (p. 2). Bilingualism is thus understood on broader terms, conceptualizing language(s) and bilingualism "as complex, dynamic, diverse systems" (Hopfendorf, 2024, p. 4). Students' full linguistic repertoires comprising of all their linguistic knowledge and skills without limitations to certain named languages or varieties are thus taken into account. García (2009) also points out that bilingualism is characterized by "all language practices that include features beyond those described by linguists and educators as forming a single autonomous language" (p. 158), so bilingualism is something that *everyone* does in one way or another. Bilingualism and bilingual education therefore concern *all* students' full linguistic repertoires and practices, not just singular aspects of language(s) and certainly not just language-minoritized students. Supporting this view means adopting a critical perspective towards monolingual norms and taking a stance for social justice in doing so (García & Lin, 2017, pp. 2–4).

As 'bilingualism' and 'bilingual education' have become quite ambiguous terms due to divergent definitions, García (2009) puts forth the concept of *translanguaging*. Originally coined by Cen Williams (1996), the term was introduced to characterize a "pedagogical practice where students are asked to alternate languages for the purposes of receptive or productive use" (García & Li, 2014, p. 20). Putting this into practice would mean for the parties involved to not only position themselves towards the use of multiple languages in classroom settings, but also towards linguistic diversity and bilingualism in general. Therefore, the concept of translanguaging entails both a sociolinguistic and a pedagogical dimension:

> "From a sociolinguistic perspective it describes the fluid language practices of bilingual communities. From a pedagogical perspective it describes the process whereby teachers build bridges between these language practices and the language practices desired in formal school settings." (Flores & Schissel, 2014, pp. 461–462)

Regarding the sociolinguistic perspective, the term translanguaging thus reflects the idea that from the point of view of multilingual speakers, languages and linguistic skills are not to be thought of as separate systems but rather as the aforementioned complex, dynamic linguistic repertoire of the individual speaker. In other words, translanguaging refers to the "multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage in order to make sense of their bilingual worlds" (García, 2009, p. 45). Any linguistic resources available to the speaker can be adapted to the specific communicative context and can be used

flexibly and creatively, "transcending and disrupting boundaries between named languages" (Hopfendorf, 2024, p. 5).

Regarding the pedagogical perspective, translanguaging is the flexible, purposeful use of multiple languages in the classroom in order to be able to leverage *all* students' entire linguistic repertoires for learning and incorporate them in a holistic translanguaging pedagogy that is targeted at *all* students, meaning those that are language-minoritized just as much as those that are not:

> "Translanguaging in instruction means that you *purposefully and strategically* design your classroom space, your unit and lesson plans, and your pedagogical strategies with the translanguaging corriente and students' general linguistic and language-specific performances at the center." (García et al., 2017, p. 79; original emphasis)

A translanguaging pedagogy is therefore student-centered, tapping into the *translanguaging corriente*, the natural, omnipresent flow of linguistic practices produced by students (García et al., 2017, pp. xi–xii) to make use of it for learning. In doing so, prevalent monolingual, hierarchical linguistic practices are *trans*formed and boundaries are *trans*cended by opening up teaching and learning to diverse language use. Language(s) and *languaging* are thus acknowledged as "situated social practice" (Tian et al., 2020b, p. 9) in a translanguaging pedagogy. The power of languages and language use in shaping identities and mirroring power relations and ideologies is thus taken into account with the aim of making linguistic practices in the classroom inclusive and oriented towards linguistic justice (García & Li, 2014, p. 8; Seltzer, 2023, p. 303).

In ELT, the deliberate use of *all* students' linguistic repertoires for learning has the unique function of contributing to the decolonization of English and ELT: In many European countries, English is taught from a colonial perspective, and its status as a global lingua franca is not yet prominently connected to opportunities of decolonization in and through the language itself. The monolingual bias in ELT is mainly rooted in and perpetuated by three central conceptualizations: "'English' as a monolithic entity, 'native-speakerism' as a pervasive ideology, and 'English-only' as monolingual approaches" (Tian et al., 2020b, p. 8; see also Pimentel Lechthoff's contribution, pp. 42–77 in this issue). Through a translanguaging lens, these orientations are challenged by holding three key assertions against such monolingual biases: First of all, English is to be defined as a diverse linguistic system comprising of a large number of equally valuable varieties – English*es* –, which can dynamically

be used and adapted in communicative contexts to account for languaging as a situated social practice – English*ing* (Tian et al., 2020b, pp. 8–9). Secondly, translanguaging "problematiz[es] the false dichotomy of 'native' vs. 'non-native'" (Tian et al., 2020b, pp. 9–10), building onto the notion of English*es* and the idea that hierarchical views on different varieties of English are socially constructed. Thirdly, by adopting a translanguaging stance (García et al., 2017, p. xii), 'English' as both a language and a subject is reimagined. The ELT classroom is thought of as a linguistically diverse inclusive space where linguistic practices can be negotiated among students and teachers as co-learners (Canagarajah, 2014), which leads to an essential shift in the conceptualization of ELT:

> "The goal of English teaching and learning in the post-multilingual era is no longer acquiring the native-like form of English and becoming another monolingual, but becoming a competent, multilingual language user who are [sic!] aware of and sensitive to the context and could perform fluid, dynamic, and complex language practices with creativity and criticality to achieve their expressive and communicative needs." (Tian et al., 2020b, p. 10)

The idea is to thereby destabilize monolingual 'English only' approaches and language hierarchies and empower (language-)minoritized students in particular, adopting a social justice agenda. Thus, translanguaging can be understood as a holistic, flexible, purposeful pedagogy that aims at decolonizing ELT by taking an affirmative, social justice-oriented stance towards linguistic diversity. It is particularly important to understand this underlying objective of translanguaging in countries and contexts where English is still conceptualized and taught as a 'foreign' language to transform current practices into linguistically just approaches (Louloudi, in print).

2.2 Current research on translanguaging in Germany and Finland

Concerning current research on translanguaging, it can be said that theoretical and empirical studies are predominantly supportive of the concept with only a few exceptions. In the German context, studies in early childhood education and primary schools have revealed positive effects of translanguaging pedagogies on creating opportunities for engagement and joint learning as well as on the self-conception and empowerment of multilingual students (Fürstenau et al., 2020; Panagiotopoulou & Hammel, 2020). Similarly, studies in the Finnish context have shown that translanguaging can empower students and foster joint meaning-making processes (Slotte & Ahlholm, 2017). In addition, incorporating translanguaging elements into multilingual school projects was

found to affect students' motivation positively and cultivate a cooperative learning culture (Lehtonen, 2019).

Despite such reassuring findings, translanguaging practices are only slowly establishing themselves and are still overshadowed by the prevalence of monolingual approaches to teaching both in Germany (Montanari & Panagiotopoulou, 2019, pp. 17–20; see also Pimentel Lechthoff's contribution in this issue) and in Finland (cf. Pitkänen-Huhta, 2021). Not only does this make the gap between theory/research and actual practice visible, but it also demonstrates that a growing awareness of multilingual realities does not guarantee the implementation of translanguaging pedagogies. The fact that multilingualism is (at least marginally) represented in curricula (see Reckermann et al.'s, 2024, analysis of the recent *Bildungsstandards*) and intended to be put into practice by an increasing number of educators does not automatically mean that the approaches are linguistically sustaining and oriented towards social justice; in other words: it needs to be "problematiz[ed] […] that multilingual pedagogies are, by definition, equity-oriented" (Ennser-Kananen et al., 2021, p. 201) because the ways they are put into practice might not reflect such ideologies.[1] This becomes particularly visible when examining teachers' perspectives on translanguaging and related concepts: In the German context, for example, both pre- and in-service teachers' interactions with multilingual students showcase negative, deficit-oriented attitudes towards students' multilingualism and an orientation towards monolingual norms (cf. Panagiotopoulou & Knappik, 2022; Skintey, 2022). Exploring in-service teachers' views on multilingualism in contexts of language education in Finland, Pitkänen-Huhta (2021) finds "the most prominent way of constructing multilingualism [to be] that of a problem" (p. 239), evoking insecurities as to how to cater to multilingual students' needs and focus on the target language(s). In another study, Finnish teachers' perspectives on linguistic diversity are contradictory as they deem it relevant to account for students' multilingualism on the one hand but display negative, problem-oriented beliefs when it comes to the implementation of multilingual approaches on the other hand (cf. Alisaari et al., 2019).

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[1]   A similar observation like Ennser-Kananen et al.'s (2021) in the Finnish context has been made in the German context, where Wilken (2021) shows that ingrained norms as well as English teachers' habitus are a crucial part of the problem; while a change in curricula might be powerful, curricular changes alone do not guarantee a change in practice.

This study aims at exploring German and Finnish teachers' perspectives on translanguaging further, specifically in the ELT context, in order to build on what has been researched before and look into implications for Social Justice Education from an international perspective. In the following section, methodological aspects of this endeavor will be outlined.

3 Methodology

Building onto the theoretical background and status quo of research on linguistically sustaining approaches to education, this study aims at exploring in-service teachers' perspectives on translanguaging in the ELT classroom by pursuing the following research questions:

I. How do English teachers define multilingualism and/or translanguaging in their own words?

II. What are their experiences with and beliefs about the implementation of translanguaging in everyday teaching?

III. How do they view the role of multilingual teaching approaches like translanguaging in their teaching and, in hindsight, in their teacher training?

By seeking answers to these research questions, the underlying aim is to find out how teachers' perspectives on translanguaging connect to social justice and to draw conclusions on how they might shape current and future ways of educating. The intention is to thus contribute to filling a research gap that has been identified by Ennser-Kananen et al. (2021): "In Finland, studies with an explicit social justice framework are scarce, particularly in the field of language education. Teaching and learning English does not have a tradition of being viewed as a sociopolitically sensitive endeavor" (p. 202).

While this refers to the Finnish context, the same goes for other national contexts and even more so for international comparative research in the field. Therefore, to answer the research questions, the study presented in this paper was conducted as a comparative case study (cf. Flick, 2018; Yin, 2014) consisting of expert interviews (cf. Yin, 2014) with in-service teachers of English at comprehensive schools in Germany and Finland. These two countries have been selected for several reasons: Other than aspects of practicability, the German educational context is particularly interesting for a study on translanguaging because while the German society is culturally and linguistically diverse in many regards, the school system is very selective, and equity-

oriented approaches to (language) teaching are only marginally represented in curricula and policies. Finland, by contrast, has the reputation of having quite a progressive school system with good academic achievements and advanced approaches – at least in the international discourse (cf. Kumpulainen & Sefton-Green, 2020). From the Finnish perspective, researchers have been raising criticism of the alleged progressiveness of their educational system (cf. Ennser-Kananen et al., 2023; other contributions in Thrupp et al., 2023).

For those reasons, the data for this study was collected in the form of comparative case studies to be able to draw comparisons between teachers' perspectives on translanguaging in Germany and in Finland. When it comes to ELT and the role of translanguaging in the respective context, the two are well-suited for comparison because their curricula are competence-based and English is a second language that starts being taught early at schools in both contexts. Both systems and curricula conceptualize and approach English as an additional – even 'foreign' – language that is not the language of the system or potentially treated as not a direct part of students' lived realities in other ways, but rather a separate linguistic entity.

As for the participants of this comparative case studies three teachers of English at a German comprehensive school (grades 5–13) in the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia were interviewed in June and July 2023. Then, three teachers of English at two different Finnish comprehensive schools (grades 1–9) in the province of Pohjois-Pohjanmaa were interviewed in November and December 2023 (cf. Table 1).

Table 1: Overview of the interviewees and interviews of both case studies (own research)

Interviewee	Interviewee's subjects	Date of the interview	Duration
Case Study I: Interviews conducted in Germany			
Tina	English, German	14.06.2023	00:25:21
Lisa	English, German, Arts	20.06.2023	00:25:16
David	English, Maths	07.07.2023	00:32:33
Case Study II: Interviews conducted in Finland			
Pekka	English, German, Swedish	09.11.2023	00:36:53
Veera	English, German, Spanish	24.11.2023	00:34:05
Sanna	English, Swedish	05.12.2023	00:16:31

The comparative case study is thus comprised of two cases made up of three semi-structured ethnographic expert interviews each, aiming at exploring in-service teachers' perspectives and centering their voices. Teachers in this study are understood as experts because of their professional experience and their explicit and implicit knowledge in the field of education (Bogner et al., 2009). In addition, their perspectives are particularly valuable as they play a crucial role in transforming education (García & Lin, 2017, p. 12).

Concerning the analysis of the generated set of data, all interviews were transcribed shortly after having been conducted, and then analyzed by means of Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) (Flick, 2018; Mayring & Fenzl, 2019) with a coding frame (cf. Table 2). The coding process was conducted repeatedly and the categories were revised several times in close collaboration with fellow students and my supervisor.

Table 2: Summary of the coding frame for both case studies (own research)

Main Code	*Categories: Case Study I (Germany)*	*Categories: Case Study II (Finland)*
Theme I: Definition of multilingualism and/or translanguaging	• Multilingualism as the command of several languages • Translanguaging in the classroom • Translanguaging as a pedagogy	• Translanguaging as internal multilingualism • Multilingualism as determined by external factors
Theme II: Implementation of translanguaging in the classroom	• Connecting to students' identities through translanguaging • Building roles in the classroom through translanguaging • Translanguaging as multilingual methods and materials	• Translanguaging as mediation • Translanguaging as part of the curriculum • Translanguaging as a challenge • Translanguaging as a chance
Theme III: Translanguaging in teacher education	• Shortcomings of university studies regarding translanguaging • Teacher training (Referendariat): one-language policy	• Translanguaging coming short in teacher education • Relevance of translanguaging in teacher education

Main Code	Categories: Case Study I (Germany)	Categories: Case Study II (Finland)
	• Translanguaging in one's own research and practice • Translanguaging at different types of schools	
Theme IV: Language ideologies, attitudes, and social justice	• Personal attitudes towards translanguaging • Language ideologies, attitudes, and social justice • Translanguaging clashing with 'English-only'/focus on target language approach • Representation of a variety of languages in the classroom through translanguaging	• Teachers' critical role in translanguaging • Translanguaging for social justice • Translanguaging as a hindrance to ELT • Translanguaging as a way of navigating through a globalized world

4 Results

4.1 Summary of the Case Studies

Four overarching themes have been identified in both of the case studies:

Theme I: Definition of multilingualism and/or translanguaging

Theme II: Implementation of translanguaging in the classroom

Theme III: Translanguaging in teacher education

Theme IV: Language ideologies, attitudes, and social justice

The categories within these themes, however, are distinct for each of the case studies and center the individual aspects raised by the participants.

As for the case study carried out in Germany, the data reveals three dimensions of multilingualism/translanguaging identified by the interviewees (theme I): Firstly, multilingualism is defined as the command of several languages as seen from an introspective point of view; secondly, the participants characterize multilingualism by how it is represented in the classroom; and

finally, they consider translanguaging as a pedagogy. Referring to the implementation of translanguaging in the classroom (theme II), the German teachers take two different levels into account: "The impact of translanguaging on identities, relationships and roles in the classroom as well as multilingual methods and materials that they understand as translanguaging" (Hopfendorf, 2024, p. 28). Recalling their experience with multilingualism and/or translanguaging in teacher education, the participants point out shortcomings of their studies and their practical training with regard to approaches to linguistic diversity and emphasize that monolingual policies were advocated in their training. Finally, concerning language ideologies, teachers' attitudes and their connection to matters of social justice (theme IV), the interviewees have been found to express interest in multilingualism and an awareness of students' multilingual realities to varying extents. On the one hand, they see translanguaging as an opportunity to promote linguistic diversity and the representation of a variety of languages in the classroom. Moreover, they think of it as an impediment to the 'English-only' approach and the focus on English as the target language.

In the case study in Finland, the participants define multilingualism/translanguaging on two different levels (theme I): Firstly, they understand it as internal multilingualism seen from the perspective of the individual speaker; secondly, they think of multilingualism as a category that is determined by external factors. When it comes to the implementation of translanguaging in the classroom (theme II), the interviewees interpret the concept mainly as types of mediation and construct a translanguaging pedagogy as both a challenge and a chance for teaching and learning. In addition, curricular aspects are taken into account. Concerning teacher education (theme III), the participants also expose shortcomings of Finnish teacher education programs regarding multilingualism and multilingual education in the theoretical and practical parts of their studies. Moreover, they evaluate the relevance of translanguaging in teacher education and relate it to their specific contexts. As for language ideologies, attitudes, and social justice (theme IV), the interviewees take the critical role of teachers in a translanguaging pedagogy into account and point out ways in which translanguaging can promote linguistic equity, accessibility and inclusion and how it might contribute to a shift of attitudes towards multilingualism. Besides, they highlight the potential of translanguaging for navigating through a globalized world, but they also consider it a hindrance to ELT and the focus on English as a target language.

4.2 Key results of the case study in Germany

4.2.1 Multilingualism as fluency/accuracy in different languages

Teachers' understanding of multilingualism shapes their perception of the potential of translanguaging for ELT. This is why analyzing their definition of the concept can contribute to a better comprehension of their attitudes. For example, one of the German interviewees describes multilingualism as fluency or accuracy in different languages:

> *Maybe you could say that someone is already multilingual if he or she is able to understand the language or communicates [...] maybe in parts. [...] But to be really multilingual, I would expect someone to be fluent in, or nearly fluent, in more than one language.* (Lisa, interview: 20.06.2023)

Lisa does not seem to be sure whether someone who does not speak a language 'fluently' can be considered multilingual. This seems to reflect a conceptualization of languages as separate, self-contained entities: Multilingual repertoires are not considered 'complete' unless several languages are spoken fluently and without errors. Lisa also speaks of 'passive bilingualism', meaning the ability to understand another language but not being able to speak it fluently. Such understandings resonate with popular notions of a native-speaker ideology in which languaging and multilingualism are not thought of as situated social practice (Tian et al., 2020b, p. 9) and a dynamic, emerging linguistic repertoire but rather as monolithic entities (p. 8). The determining factors of fluency and accuracy indicate an outside perspective on the students' linguistic knowledge and skills. The way in which Lisa phrases her statement also indicates, however, that she is unsure about the definition of multilingualism and is in the process of negotiating potentially contradictory concepts. This understanding may, in turn, reflect back on how (language) teaching is approached.

With regard to her own multilingualism, Lisa also describes herself as a 'passive bilingual' because she is not able to speak Italian, her second family language, fluently. Later in the interview, however, she ponders on whether she might not be multilingual because she speaks German and English fluently and uses both of those languages in teaching on an everyday basis. This critical reflection on her own multilingualism as well as on her initial understanding of the concept shows that she is in the process of (re-)negotiating her views. While the points she raises are in line with common perceptions of multilingualism – such as speaking languages on a 'native-like' level –, putting it into words seems to encourage a reflection process.

4.2.2 Translanguaging as multilingual methods and materials

The most prominent way in which the German participants think of translanguaging as a classroom practice is in the form of multilingual methods and materials:

> *You have to organize a lot. So, when I create my own task, I think a lot about the wording. Which words do I use? Do I need annotations in tasks or in texts? Um, I usually highlight important keywords and tasks.* (Tina, interview: 14.06.2023)

> *[Translanguaging] could be a way of scaffolding if you like. [...] There's something called "sprachsensibler Unterricht" in German, where you really have to not only teach content, but make sure that your students also develop their knowledge of the German language further.* (Lisa, interview: 20.06.2023)

It becomes apparent that Tina and Lisa acknowledge the need for education to account for students' multilingualism, and one way they can think of translanguaging being implemented is by means of language-sensitive material design, making materials in the main language of teaching more accessible. From the quotes above, the focus seems to be put on the German or English language as the main target language of the respective classroom and translanguaging seems to be understood as a *"scaffolding"* strategy that is used as a means to promote the first. One could argue that such a perspective revolves around a deficit-oriented understanding of multilingualism: Language-sensitivity in this case rather means using other languages to foster the main target language rather than making use of students' linguistic repertoires to include and foster their identities in the classroom. This negotiates linguistic hierarchies in educational settings and shows how the interviewees make sense of translanguaging in a system that perpetuates monolingual ideologies by default.

4.2.3 Connecting to students' identities through translanguaging

Concerning the implementation of translanguaging and the role it plays in her teaching, Tina argues that a major aspect for her is to connect to students' identities by

> *showing respect and appreciation for what's a part of my students, and language is a part of them.* (Tina, interview: 14.06.2023)

She thus acknowledges the impact of language(s) on shaping identities and points out the potential of translanguaging to make students feel seen and

show them that this aspect of their identity is appreciated at school. In addition, she links this to matters of representation in the classroom:

> *It could be quite nice for students to see their language, their first language, in their classroom. I mean, it's just a simple gesture, but it could show them, "Hey, my language has a place here, too."* (Tina, interview: 14.06.2023)

Making sure that linguistic diversity and all her students' languages are represented in the classroom is a way for Tina to empower especially those students that are (language-)minoritized and show them that their languages and identities are valued. Even though the connection is not made explicit, she thus also acknowledges linguistic hierarchies and makes clear that she intends to embrace *all* her students' languages and include them in her teaching, not just those identified as 'target languages' in contexts of basic education. In doing so, Tina is taking a translanguaging stance (cf. García et al., 2017, p. xii) which conveys her awareness of linguistic inequality and her intention to make students feel they are heard and valued by including all their languages in her teaching.

4.3 Key results of the case study in Finland

4.3.1 Multilingualism as determined by external factors

Other than internal perspectives on multilingualism, a decisive aspect by which the interviewees in Finland define multilingualism and determine whether or not they would consider a setting multilingual is that of external factors. For example, they mention factors such as linguistic demography and (assumed) immigrant backgrounds of students and people in the area to explain why they would (not) describe the school they work at as multilingual:

> *It's kind of a homogenic [sic!] group of students. We don't have that many who have, like, an immigrant background or something like that. [...] Of course [...] there are students who speak other languages too, in addition to Finnish or English and Swedish. But, um, it's quite rare.* (Sanna, interview: 05.12.2023)

Judging by the number of students who she knows speak other languages than the country's official languages (Finnish and Swedish) and a (prestigious) additional language (English), Sanna argues she would not consider the school she works at a multilingual setting. Even though students may speak two or all three of these languages, she does not classify them as multilingual and, therefore, seems to connect the concept not only to the number of languages a person can speak but also to further factors like an immigrant background and/or being able to speak a 'foreign' minority language. Sanna's argument

can be characterized as a form of what Pitkänen-Huhta (2021) calls *elite multilingualism*: English is valued more highly in comparison to other 'foreign' languages and considered so 'normal' that Sanna would not even regard English-speaking students as multilingual. 'Other' languages are not seen as a part of the *"homogenic group"*, but rather as separate linguistic entities that are *"quite rare"* and therefore not specifically fostered in the educational setting.

While Sanna mentions local demography as a reason not to describe her school as a multilingual setting, another interviewee argues the opposite:

> *[This] is definitely a multilingual area because there are other languages. We have, for example, a Swedish private school here in [the city]. And of course, because of the international companies [...]. There's also the International School here [...]. I think we don't have many immigrants here [in the area of our school], but still the people are, or the pupils can speak a lot of languages.* (Pekka, interview: 09.11.2023)

Both Sanna and Pekka evaluate the linguistic configuration and setting of their respective school based on demographic aspects and local geographies (cf. Bernelius et al., 2021). Even more strongly than Sanna, Pekka draws on his perception of the city, the school's neighborhood, and the school itself, taking bilingual institutions in the city as well as demographic aspects in and around the school into consideration. Those factors show that the perceived interdependence of the school and the neighborhood has a strong impact on how teachers view their students' multilingualism and, consequently, how relevant they deem it for their teaching practice. In the Finnish context, the "local geographies of education" (Bernelius et al., 2021, p. 155) thus inform teacher's views strongly.

4.3.2 Translanguaging as a challenge: linguistic configuration of the class

Building on the understanding that multilingualism is partly determined by external factors such as linguistic demography, the Finnish interviewees identify the linguistic configuration of the class as a challenge for translanguaging in terms of who and how many people in class speak the same language(s):

> *If there are only like one or maximum of two students who are bilingual, for example, I don't know how I could utilize that for my work. [...] It would be easier if it's a language I know too.* (Sanna, interview: 05.12.2023)

> *I feel, if I think about the usual profile of students, of multilingual students, who are at our schools – that maybe they don't speak the same languages that I do,*

so I don't know from a teacher's perspective how I will be able to support that. […] if there's only this one kid speaking that language, there's no other speaker of that language in the classroom, then I don't know how you would be able to use that and to help. (Veera, interview: 24.11.2023)

This reveals that translanguaging is primarily thought of as a potential support measure or scaffold for language-minoritized students, not so much for students who have always been speaking Finnish primarily. The linguistic configuration of the class in terms of what kinds of languages are spoken by students, by how many of them, or by the teacher is seen as a challenging factor. This also connects to the idea of linguistic expert knowledge and the prevalent conceptualization of the teacher as the 'expert': The teachers feel they would have to know the same languages as their students to be able to monitor their learning or they would need several students to speak the same language(s) other than the majority language in order to be able to use students' entire linguistic repertoires as a resource for learning. The teachers thus express concerns that are prominent in most critical, social justice-oriented approaches to education: the fear of losing control, which is reflected in other studies as well (e.g. Alisaari et al., 2019; Tian et al., 2020a). This fear might be rooted in the common perception that teachers are knowledge-keepers (see Louloudi, 2023, p. 179), which is a role that they are called to abandon in pedagogies like translanguaging. It seems the interviewees are unsure about positioning themselves as co-learners and seeing it as a chance for learning that "their students' linguistic repertoires never completely match their own or each other's" (García & Li, 2014, p. 71). Rather than seeing the learning opportunities of translanguaging "for deep cognitive engagement and for development and expansion of new language practices" (García & Li, 2014, p. 71), teachers seem to be influenced strongly by ideologies that are deeply rooted in the system (see also Pimentel Lechthoff's contribution in this issue). The widespread idea of the teacher as the all-knowing authority seems to have a negative effect on teachers' self-perception in pedagogies like translanguaging that aim at disrupting and transforming established practices.

4.3.3 Promoting linguistic equity through translanguaging

Despite concerns about how to implement a translanguaging pedagogy and hesitancy to make the necessary shifts, Veera thinks of translanguaging as a way to promote linguistic equity inside and outside of the classroom. She thus acknowledges the transformative potential of the concept in changing attitudes and promoting social justice:

I like the diversity of [translanguaging]. Especially to see and to live the idea that all the languages are, um, have the same prestige or are equal. [...] I really hope that by just living it, you know, that people's attitudes might change [...] if they're aware that the people they work with, that they go to school with, do speak different languages. Maybe [...] then you notice, "oh, that's a valid language". (Veera, interview: 24.11.2023)

Veera thus recognizes translanguaging as a holistic pedagogy, 'living the idea' of linguistic equity and destabilizing prevalent language hierarchies in how teaching and learning are conducted. Later in the interview, she emphasizes that schools play an essential role in promoting linguistic equity and that culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogies like translanguaging might lead the way for inclusion and transformation. She believes this process can be initiated by actively making linguistic diversity an integral part of everyday life at school, thus allowing students to connect to it on a personal level and eventually changing common perceptions of multilingualism in- and outside of school.

4.4 Comparison of the case studies

A comparison of the results of the two case studies in Germany and Finland reveals intra- and inter-case similarities and differences: Central aspects raised in the German study are, for example, the potential effects and challenges of translanguaging in classroom settings that the teachers consider highly multilingual, especially with regard to language-minoritized students. In the Finnish context, the participants focus rather on the practical implications and challenges of translanguaging from the teachers' perspective in a setting where they do not see many minority languages represented.

In both case studies, the interviewees take inside as well as outside perspectives on multilingualism into consideration to define the concept. Five out of six participants define multilingualism primarily as a sociolinguistic phenomenon rather than a pedagogy, characterizing it by the command of several languages and bringing up aspects such as native-like fluency in different languages (German context) or multilingual communicative skills and everyday practices (Finnish context). The linguistic configuration and nationalities of students in the classroom are connected to multilingualism as well, more so with a focus on local geographies (cf. Bernelius et al., 2021) in the Finnish context. Overall, the participants tend to understand languages as separate entities and hierarchize them contextually – ranking official national languages

highly, followed by other prestigious, mostly European languages, then further minority languages such as Indigenous and immigrant languages (cf. Paulsrud et al., 2023).

Concerning the implementation of a translanguaging pedagogy, the participants identify various challenges and the "most prominent way of constructing multilingualism was that of a problem" (Pitkänen-Huhta, 2021, p. 239). While the German teachers do consider benefits of translanguaging for multilingual students such as the empowerment and appreciation of students' linguistic skills and identities, they also identify challenges "like a lack of time, restrictions of the curriculum, a lack of training and knowledge, and difficulties to bring many different languages together" (Hopfendorf, 2024, p. 65). The interviewees in Finland also mention various challenges with regard to the practicability of translanguaging but they do not consider their curriculum or lack of time particularly restrictive. Generally, both case studies reveal an understanding of translanguaging as singular methods and strategies rather than a holistic pedagogy. Even though the participants express an openness to their students' multilingualism, they are hesitant when it comes to the implementation of translanguaging as a classroom practice and can mostly imagine it merely as a scaffold.

All participants point out shortcomings of their studies and practical teacher training with regard to multilingualism and multilingual teaching approaches. In both contexts, the interviewees report a focus on English as the target language in ELT teacher training, particularly in the German context, where the 'English-only' approach was advocated in the practical *Referendariat*.

As for the underlying language ideologies, it thus becomes clear that most of the participants have adopted the orientation towards English as the target language. They deem certain types of languages more relevant for their respective context than others, both with regard to the multilingual realities of their students and to the languages desired in formal school settings, which mirrors prevalent contextual linguistic hierarchies (cf. Paulsrud et al., 2023). The transformative potential of translanguaging for linguistic and social justice is not taken into consideration as strongly as practical implications for teaching. To varying extents, the interviewees acknowledge language minoritization as a social justice issue and express interest in linguistically sustaining pedagogies like translanguaging; but all in all, the two case studies reveal similarly prevalent monolingual ideologies and argumentations in the observed contexts in Germany and Finland, which I had initially expected differently.

5   Conclusion and outlook

Key takeaways from this comparative case study include the result that monolingual ideologies, an orientation towards English as the target language, and contextual language hierarchies prevail among English teachers in the observed contexts in Germany and Finland. As I summed up in my thesis:

> "[Teachers] often see the incorporation of multiple languages as a challenge for the ELT classroom for different reasons, but many of them seem particularly skeptical to the use of languages they are least familiar with, which are often those that are hierarchically low. For example, European 'global languages' like English or Spanish are frequently connotated positively while non-European languages are, regardless of their global significance, connotated negatively and 'foreign'. In each of the two case studies, one of the participants argued, however, that these circumstances might change in the future due to an increasingly pluralistic society, which they think should be seen as a chance for teaching and learning despite the challenges that they have identified." (Hopfendorf, 2024, p. 71)

The teachers' argumentations suggest that their ideologies and attitudes are strongly influenced by systemic structures that perpetuate monolingual ideologies, such as educational policies and curricula, but also teacher training programs and social structures beyond the educational sector. These results are mostly in line with previous research on linguistic ideologies and teachers' perspectives on multilingualism and multilingual pedagogies in the German context (cf. e.g. Montanari & Panagiotopoulou, 2019; Panagiotopoulou & Knappik, 2022; Skintey, 2022) as well as the Finnish context (cf. e.g. Alisaari et al., 2019; Ennser-Kananen et al., 2021; Pitkänen-Huhta, 2021).

Therefore, one of the conclusions is that systemic changes are needed to initiate a shift towards linguistically sustaining pedagogies with a specific orientation towards social justice. Since the task of this profound shift "cannot be left to the responsibility and goodwill of individual teachers" (Ennser-Kananen et al., 2021, p. 212), systemic aspects like teacher education programs, policies, curricula and materials need to be targeted to support teachers in the endeavor of transforming education towards social justice. In other words: "If micro-level practices are not supported by macro-level organisation, it is difficult to create collaboration and dialogue between researchers, policymakers and practitioners" (Pitkänen-Huhta, 2021, p. 242).

Still, the need for individual teachers to reflect on their stances and teaching practices becomes clear as well. Critical (self-)reflection is essential to recognizing, deconstructing and changing potential biases and practices in order to decolonize education, making it inclusive and just, and adapting it to social changes and the lived realities of students.

Thus, comparative case studies like this one also point towards the benefits of local, national and international peer-to-peer collaboration as well as teacher-researcher collaboration in education because it "may help further the aims of translanguaging pedagogies through mutual support in addressing everyday issues, sharing information on best practice and the expertise of educators and their knowledge of their context" (Shepard-Carey & Tian, 2023b, p. 2).

A professional and personal exchange among teachers and researchers can thus contribute to the shifts that are necessary to transform practices, ideologies and attitudes inside the classroom but also beyond the classroom level. This can foster a critical praxis of constant reflection, feedback and transformation by connecting the levels of teaching, research and activism for social justice. In the end, teachers have the power to make use of the transformative potential of approaches like translanguaging in order to reimagine school as a just learning space for *everyone* by negotiating practices among researchers, teacher educators, teachers and students. It starts with the reassurance that everyone's voice should be heard and valued equally:

Your language has a place here, too.

Acknowledgements

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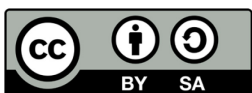Yin, R.K. (2014). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (5th Ed.). SAGE.

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