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# Translanguaging practices of Macau junior-one students in a remedial class

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## Abstract

This qualitative study analyzes the use of translanguaging in co-learning activities involving four junior-one students in an English remedial class. The school advocates a policy of English immersion in the regular English class, although students may have difficulty understanding the teachers and interacting with them during the classes. In the remedial class, however, the policy is not strictly enforced, and, hence, students can leverage semiotic resources from their linguistic repertoires without restriction. All four learners constantly engage in translanguaging in interactive, co-learning activities, drawing upon semiotic resources from not only different languages (i.e., English, Cantonese, Japanese, Mandarin) but also non-academic registers (i.e., trendy expressions, internet slang) and non-verbal modes (e.g., body gestures, facial expression). In this particular context, the major purpose of translanguaging is to enable the subjects to take up multiple roles (i.e., as a peer and as a 'little teacher') and enact different relationships with classmates/groupmates (i.e., peer-peer and teacher-student) in the class (i.e., Excerpts 1 and 2). In the case of a low achiever, translanguaging allows him to actively seek help from the other 'little teachers'; moreover, his use of Japanese, in which he takes pride, serves as a face-saving strategy. The preference for particular expressions (e.g., internet slang, trendy expressions, Japanese) reflects the students' hobbies, personal experiences and cultural preferences, thus building their individual image and identity in relation to the teacher and other students.

**Keywords:** Translanguaging, Macau, Separate bi/multilingualism, Co-learning, Remedial class

## Introduction

This paper analyzes the practice of translanguaging (García & Li, 2014; Li, 2018) by junior-one students in a secondary school in Macau. By *translanguaging*, this paper refers to the dynamic and fluid use of meaning-making resources across boundaries of 'named languages' (e.g., English, Chinese, Portuguese, etc.) and modes (i.e., speaking, writing, gesture, etc.) which cover what is more conventionally known as *code-switching* or *code-mixing*—the alternation of languages within a communicative situation (Beres, 2015; García & Li, 2014; Li, 2016, 2018—see more discussion below). While there is no dearth of research on classroom translanguaging in recent years (see Leung & Valdés, 2019 for an overview), most studies have focused on teachers' translanguaging practice—what

Cenoz and Gorter (2022) have called *pedagogical translanguaging*—but this paper investigates students' translanguaging practice.

Furthermore, the context of the present study is intriguing in manifold ways. Firstly, there is no question about people in Macau being fairly multilingual (which subsumes bilinguals). Most notably, in the latest 2021 Census results (DSEC, 2022), only 4.7% and 3.6% of the population speak Mandarin Chinese (or Putonghua) and English, respectively, as the usual (or home) language, but 45% and 22.7% of the population can speak them respectively. The huge differences suggest that the majority of Putonghua speakers and English speakers use these languages alongside their own usual language, most likely as a second language in more public domains such as the school and the workplace. These speakers may belong to the majority of local residents who speak Cantonese as their usual language (81%), or they may speak a minority language as their usual languages, such as a non-Cantonese Chinese dialect (5.4%, e.g., Hokkien), Portuguese (0.6%) or Tagalog (2.9%). Although the disparity is not as marked as in Putonghua or English, in all other language categories (Cantonese, Portuguese, Other Chinese Dialects, Tagalog and Others), the number/percentage of those who can speak a language also exceeds that of usual-language speakers to various extents. In other words, there are also bi/multilingual people speaking these languages alongside their usual/home language.

Despite some degree of individual multilingualism in the population, studies on translanguaging practices in Macau have hitherto been scant and sporadic, especially in comparison with neighboring Hong Kong, where code-mixing or code-switching has been much more frequently documented and analyzed (see Chan, 2021 for a recent overview). The pervasive ideology in Macau is one of 'separate multilingualism' (Blackledge & Cresse, 2010; Zhang & Chan, 2017), under which one language is indexically linked to one particular social group (i.e., Chinese language standing for Chinese people, Portuguese language for Portuguese people, English language standing for foreigners). It is thus plausible that Macau people generally tend to adhere to one language in a communicative situation. However, a few works have suggested that Macau locals, especially within the younger generations, do mix languages—primarily Cantonese and English but sometimes Putonghua/Mandarin Chinese and other languages—in ways similar to those attested among Hong Kong Chinese, whether in spoken interaction (Kuok, 2020; Shen, 2018) and on the internet (Chan, 2015; San, 2009; Yang, 2018). According to Zhang (2019), code-mixing among Macau university students is so infectious that students from mainland China have picked up the language practice—if they mix not Cantonese but Putonghua and English—and came to evaluate it more positively.

There is also a sense of ambivalence and hidden complexity when we zoom in on Macau's education system, which is decentralized and diversified. Given the small size of Macau (Moody, 2008) and its being a predominantly Chinese community (Chan, 2015), such diversity is rather disproportionate but understandable in terms of the *laissez-faire* policy adopted by the former Portuguese colonial government—or, put more bluntly, a lack of government investment and commitment—in the sphere of education (Bray & Koo, 2004; Moody, 2008). The majority of schools are privately run by non-government organizations, such as Christian (Catholic and Protestant) missions and charities, and school language policy varies. The latest government figures from the Education and

Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ)<sup>1</sup> show that 100 non-tertiary schools are Chinese-medium, 15 are English-medium and 5 are Portuguese-medium. The picture, however, is deceptively simple, since many of the so-called Chinese-medium schools run a Chinese section and an English section in parallel under the same name, a phenomenon apparently not found elsewhere in the Greater Bay Area (e.g., Hong Kong or Shenzhen). Moreover, Putonghua or Cantonese may be used to different extents as the medium of instruction (MOI) across different Chinese-medium schools (Yan, 2017). Moreover, official MOI is not always implemented in actual language practice.

The school where the present study was conducted is officially an English-medium school in Macau where English is supposed to be the MOI in all subjects except Chinese and Chinese History. However, many local teachers have been using Cantonese as the principal MOI.<sup>2</sup> It is commonplace for teachers to use Cantonese in explaining content from English textbooks or other teaching materials, thus often switching between the two languages intra-sententially. Those who avoided Cantonese in their teaching preferred drawing symbols or writing Chinese words on the chalkboard to help students learn the concepts. In addition to MOI, official documents in this school are primarily written in Chinese. Extending Moody's (2008) suggestion that in Macau Portuguese is the *de jure* (i.e., by law) official language, but English is the *de facto* (i.e., in actual practice) one, we may conceive this school as English-medium *de jure* but Chinese-medium *de facto*.

For the classes of General English, the current English panel chairperson of this school underscores the importance of immersion, so all English teachers are required to use the target language (i.e., English) exclusively in the regular English class. The chairperson is of the opinion that when students have enough exposure, they can acquire the target language easily. Accordingly, students are also required to use the target language under all circumstances in the regular English class. In reality, many junior-one students find it difficult to cope with the English immersion policy. They are reluctant to use English in class and find it stressful to do so. Therefore, some English teachers have stressed the necessity of holding English remedial classes for those low achievers or students who have learning difficulties. Aiming at creating an environment in which students may improve their English proficiency in a less stressful manner, the remedial classes are less intense without the restriction of using the target language (i.e., English) only. Despite the possible stigma attached to its name, students, especially low achievers, are eager to join the remedial class.

As an after-class program sanctioned by the government, the remedial class for English has been run in this school since 2010 for junior-one students, many of whom encounter difficulties in learning English. Having just graduated from primary school where the principal MOI is Cantonese and the teaching materials are in Chinese, many of them are not capable of using English and following the learning progress set by the teacher. The remedial class thus offers a suitable platform for students, especially low achievers, to keep up with the curriculum. Students can apply to join the remedial class,

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<sup>1</sup> See [https://portal.dsedj.gov.mo/webdsejspace/internet/Inter\\_main\\_page.jsp?id=8525](https://portal.dsedj.gov.mo/webdsejspace/internet/Inter_main_page.jsp?id=8525).

<sup>2</sup> Being an alumnus of the school and having worked as an English teacher there, the second author is familiar with the language policy and practices in that school.

although low achievers in junior one are given priority. Teachers who are teaching junior one can recommend that students participate in remedial classes. In the past, the remedial class was teacher-centered, as the teacher assigned some language tasks to students individually. Students needed to finish them under the teacher's guidance, and the teacher checked the answers within the same period. Most recently, however, the class has been transformed. Co-learning has been introduced into the remedial class so that students work on language tasks together with their fellow classmates in pairs or in larger groups. The teacher has become more of a facilitator who helps students complete their work smoothly. Students work not only individually but also with different classmates collaboratively. In interacting with groupmates or teachers, students are free to use their preferred languages. Many students actively and spontaneously engage in translanguaging in performing different co-learning tasks.

As mentioned above, *translanguaging* rather than *code-switching* or *code-mixing* is adopted in this study to investigate the practice of language mixing. The former term stresses multilingual speakers' ability to use and switch their languages freely and spontaneously (García & Li, 2014, 32), drawing upon all available resources in their semiotic repertoires for the purpose of meaning-making, including words and phrases from various languages and other meaning-making resources such as body gestures (Li, 2018). The research questions of this study are as follows:

- (1) How do the students make use of different semiotic resources in their translanguaging practice in a remedial class?
- (2) What are the purposes of the students' translanguaging practice in the remedial class?

### **Translanguaging in co-learning activities**

Derived from the Welsh term *Trawsieithu* proposed by Cen Williams in his unpublished Ph.D. thesis (Lewis et al., 2012b), *translanguaging* was initially utilized to describe pedagogical activities involving two languages (i.e., English and Welsh) within a bilingual lesson in Wales. The term, however, has undergone much subsequent development in the current literature (García & Li, 2014; Li, 2016, 2018). Instead of the more traditional conception of *language* as a discrete, enclosed system of words and rules, *linguaging* underscores language as an *action* used 'to gain knowledge, to make sense, to articulate one's thought, and to communicate about using language' (Li, 2016, 4); in addition, the prefix *trans-* means to go beyond or to transcend (Li, 2016: 8; Li, 2018, 27). Accordingly, translanguaging is a practice that transcends the boundary of 'named languages,' by which language users exploit their semiotic repertoire without strictly adhering to boundaries between languages and those between semiotic systems (Lewis et al., 2012a; Li, 2018; Otheguy et al., 2015). Canagarajah (2011, 401) concludes that 'translanguaging is the ability of multilingual speakers to shuttle between languages, treating the diverse languages that form their linguistic repertoire as an integrated system.' In classroom contexts, translanguaging aims 'to maximize learners' and teachers' linguistic repertoires in the process of problem-solving and knowledge construction' (Li, 2018, 15). It also emphasizes the 'interconnectedness between the traditionally and conventionally

understood languages and other human communication systems' (Li, 2016, 7), such as spoken language, written texts, facial expressions, body gestures and visual prompts.

Before recent enthusiasm for the merits of translanguaging in education, the paradigm for language-in-education, particularly teaching/learning English as a second/foreign language, was one of English-only immersion. Researchers such as Cummins (2005) and Jacobson and Faltis (1990) claimed that immersion in the second language environment is most beneficial to second language acquisition. Students' linguistic repertoire should be restricted in class to avoid cross-contamination of both languages (Cummins, 2005; Jacobson & Faltis, 1990, 4; also cited in Creese & Blackledge, 2010, 104). The ideology of monolingual strategy/separate bilingualism has often been embraced in school policy and regulations (Creese & Blackledge, 2010). Due to the policy, students are restrained when discussing the class tasks with their fellow classmates and the teacher, as they are only allowed to use the target language (i.e., English) in the regular English class. There have been alternative views as to whether such a monolingual strategy is always desirable across all types of students. Swain and Lapkin (2013, 123) point out that it is just natural for learners to use their first language collaboratively in their conversations because it expresses their ideas and conveys their actual meaning more efficiently and faithfully. Their first language also helps them form complex concepts and thoughts before they become proficient enough to express these ideas in the target/second language (e.g., English).

In the remedial class, there is no restriction on using English only, and hence translanguaging provides a way for language users, especially children, youths, and low achievers in this study, to open up their language world (García, 2017, 256). In addition to learning and socializing with their fellow classmates, students can also project their personal identity by leveraging their multilingual repertoire (Poza, 2019, 93). On the other hand, under the theory of pupil-directed translanguaging, bilingual students attempt to work out translanguaging activities independently and directly (Jones, 2017). Emergent bilinguals can flexibly use 'translanguaging' to communicate and convey their ideas to other speakers (Beres, 2015), thus building up their confidence in language learning (Martin et al., 2019, 30). In addition, García (2009, 45) points out that translanguaging is 'the discursive practices which bilinguals engage to make sense of their bilingual world'. In using two or more languages flexibly, students avoid considering them separate languages, yet translanguaging allows them to regulate their linguistic repertoire and draw on the relevant resources for communicating and gaining knowledge most efficiently (Beres, 2015; García & Li, 2014). Furthermore, Li (2011) suggests that bi/multilinguals maintain and cultivate the relationship among themselves by translanguaging, as they feel more comfortable connecting among themselves because of the flexibility in using languages and moving across language boundaries.

Co-learning is a method for new language learners in which they have opportunities to make full use of their own linguistic repertoires (Hansen et al., 2020). It is also a process in which several agents simultaneously try to adapt to their behavior to produce desirable global outcomes that would be shared by the contributing agents (Li, 2014, 169). Li's (2014) conception of co-learning highlights the mutual understanding, benefits, and growth of different participants (also cited in Tai & Li, 2020, 2). Teachers' initiations and interactions with students are also important in co-learning activities, helping students

focus on different tasks (Rosier et al. 2016). On the other hand, Tai and Li (2020, 24) highlight 'equity in knowledge construction' in co-learning activities. Co-learners need to show respect, trust, and learn from other partners. In addition, they also need to share all their knowledge among them, as it is valuable to the whole group of learners (Li, 2014: 170). In co-learning activities, translanguaging encompasses different linguistic or non-linguistic semiotic resources, such as body language, gestures, drawings, and other modes. Co-learners can be motivated as they draft and discuss their work through translanguaging, invoking multimodal resources to come up with the final products (Velasco & García, 2014, 20). García-Mateus and Palmer (2017) add that translanguaging provides students with a fair learning opportunity to develop their bilingual identities in second language acquisition. Lin and He (2017, 235) conclude that translanguaging appears spontaneously and naturally through interaction and activities among students in the classroom as they are engaged in meaning-making about the tasks' topics. Students can also perform like a 'little teacher' to explain, share and reinforce concepts within the same peer group. In sum, new knowledge is co-constructed via co-learning. Wells (2018) expounds that in collaborative learning, translanguaging encourages students to show their creativity, engagement, and participation. The semiotic resources involved include not only language but also body movements and other paralinguistic devices, such as eye contact, hand gestures, and intonation.

## **Methodology**

### **Criteria for subject selection**

There were 16 participants in the remedial class. The second author—who is a teacher of a remedial class but not this particular one—observed the remedial class several times, and then 4 students aged between 13 and 14 were selected. All of them were talkative, and they actively participated in the class. They always worked with classmates who are either low achievers or who are deemed by the teacher to be more passive in class. Since most of the participants had low motivation to study English, these 4 students always worked among themselves or encouraged others to become involved in the discussion. Seeing this, the teacher asked the passive students or low achievers to work with these 4 students whose English proficiency level was relatively higher.

### **Data collection**

In the remedial class observed from May to June 2019, the teacher assigned students some language tasks to discuss in pairs or in larger groups. Regarding data collection, students' learning attitudes and performance were observed within 3 periods of the remedial class. Then, those active and talkative students were chosen because most of them were passive; they listened to the teacher but were reluctant to speak up. Four students (Aska, Marco, Nathaniel, and Joshua) were then invited to participate in this study. After the second author presented the purpose of this research, they became interested, accepted the invitation, and signed the consent forms. The selected students then completed a questionnaire and attended an interview. The questionnaire and the interview aim to elicit information on their personal background, study experiences, language use in their families, personal hobbies, the languages they can speak, and their level of proficiency in these languages.

This study focuses on 3 different recordings in the remedial class. In the class, the teacher used the target language (i.e., English) most of the time, and his data are not focused on. Before the recording sessions, the intention of this research was explained to the subjects and the teacher. After that, the recorders were set to record their conversations. The recording spanned two months from May to June 2019. A total of seven clips that were 2 to 6 min long were recorded. The length of the recording is based on what they discussed in each language task in the remedial class. After recording all the audio clips, their conversations were all transcribed and saved in a Microsoft Word file. During the recording process, the second author walked around the room to ensure that the subjects were working on the same task.

### **Personal profiles of the subjects**

The following information is gleaned from the questionnaire findings and interviews.

#### ***Nathaniel***

Nathaniel is a 14-year-old student. Born in the United States, he returned to Macau with his parents when he was two. Then, he received early childhood education and primary education in the school.<sup>3</sup> When Nathaniel was a child, his father communicated with him in English only, whereas his mother used Cantonese to talk to him. Now, he is good at speaking both English and Cantonese. His Mandarin Chinese is fair because he has learned it from other students and Chinese animation. In his family, his parents and some of his relatives can speak English fluently. Therefore, for daily conversation, he always communicates with them in English. However, his grandparents cannot speak English well. He needs to speak Cantonese when he interacts with them in daily life. He does not know any other Chinese dialects. At school, he prefers to use mainly English to communicate with teachers and his classmates. If they did not understand his ideas during the in-class discussion, he would use Cantonese to communicate with them. He likes listening to English pop songs, reading English novels, and watching English TV programs during his spare time, especially the TVB Pearl Channel. He thinks that English is very important as it is an international language. In his opinion, students must study English well in secondary school.

#### ***Marco***

Born in Macau, Marco is also a 14-year-old student who finished his early childhood and primary education in other schools (see footnote 3). He lives with his parents (father and mother and little sister) and a Filipino domestic helper. His father used to study in the United States, and his mother is quite proficient in English. On the other hand, his sister is studying in an English-medium school in Macau, so he usually uses English to communicate with them at home. Moreover, he always interacts with the domestic helper in English in daily communication. He always uses Cantonese with his classmates at school, except in the English Club and the regular English class. When he asks teachers questions, he prefers using English, as he thinks that English is very important. He treats

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<sup>3</sup> The same school also runs a primary section and a kindergarten section. All subjects except Marco (see below) studied in the primary section of the same school.

it as a good opportunity for him to practice his speaking skill with the English teachers. On the other hand, he can speak Mandarin Chinese, but he seldom uses it because he cannot find an appropriate situation. Listening to English and Japanese songs and watching various English TV dramas with his family members are his hobbies. He also likes producing some Japanese words or phrases in front of his classmates and friends in daily conversation.

### ***Joshua***

Born in Macau, Joshua is 13 years old, and he has an affection for English. When he was a child, he always chose to read some English comic books. Even though his parents (father and mother) cannot speak English well, he tries to cultivate his English proficiency by practicing it with his younger brother. He used to be a member of the English Club. In addition, he always uses English as his prior language choice to communicate with his teachers and classmates. Only when his classmates do not feel comfortable does he switch to Cantonese. Sometimes, he makes funny jokes in Mandarin Chinese in front of his best friends, and he may also speak Mandarin when he is annoyed. During the interview, he expressed the view that English and Mandarin Chinese are the mainstream languages in the world and that people must learn them well. When he has spare time, he likes watching English movies on Netflix and surfing different internet websites and forums, such as 'Golden HK'.

### ***Aska***

Born in Macau, Aska is a 13-year-old boy from a family where several Chinese varieties are used. His father and mother can speak Cantonese, Mandarin Chinese, and Hokkien. His father can also speak English, although he seldom speaks English to him. He mainly uses Hokkien and Cantonese as his mother does at home. At school, Aska seldom communicates with his teachers and classmates in English because he is not good at speaking English. His English teacher recommended that he participate in the remedial class. Being one of the low achievers, he always tries to understand English in terms of Chinese/Cantonese words and syntactic structures. That is why he is keen on asking questions and discussing the language tasks with his partners by using Cantonese in the remedial class. During his spare time, he is passionate about Japanese culture, and he is now studying Japanese. He likes infusing some Japanese words or phrases into his utterances when he communicates with his classmates. He also enjoys playing online games and watching Japanese animations.

### **Findings**

One salient feature of the remedial class is that interaction is much more multilateral, with the teacher interacting with students and the students interacting among themselves in pair/group discussion. The conversational sequence of initiation-response-feedback, which is typical of classroom discourse, is commonly found in the data, and yet the exchange is often extended.



**Excerpt 1—The teacher (T), Nathaniel (N) and Marco (M)**

Turn	Speaker		
1	T:	Next one, how to pronounce the word S-A-C-H-E-T? (What is the pronunciation of the word S-A-C-H-E-T?)	
2	N:	<emphasized the word by reading it aloud> SKETCH	
3	T:	<pronounced the word> It is sachet /sæʃet/	
4	M:	<laughed at Nathaniel>	嘩! 唔掂囉! 你“好雷”呀! (Tsk! You are very weak. You are such a slacker.)
5	N:	<replied to Marco seriously>	你話我“雷”! (You say that I am such a slacker!)
6	T:	<chuckled> Students! Don't argue Focus on your textbook and discuss it with your partner	
7	M:	<felt irritated> Umm...	

In excerpt 1, 2 students Marco and Nathaniel discuss the pronunciation of ‘sachet’. The teacher prompts Nathaniel to pronounce the word ‘sachet’ /sæʃet/ (turn 1—Initiation), but he pronounces the word as ‘sketch’ /sketʃ/ (turn 2—Response). The teacher then corrects Nathaniel’s pronunciation (turn 3—Feedback). The sequence came to a close, but Marco adds another evaluation in Cantonese (turn 4). With the trendy expression ‘好雷’ (hou2 leoi4),<sup>4</sup> which means that the person is a ‘slacker’, the evaluation captures the attention of the teacher and Nathaniel, effectively extending the conversation as Nathaniel and the teacher respond in the next two turns (turn 5 and turn 6). Nathaniel is apparently upset by the description—turn 5 ‘你話我雷’ (nei5 waa6 ngo5 leoi4/*you said I’m a slacker*) is less likely a confirmation of what Marco said but more of a complaint about being humiliated. By asking the students to stop arguing (turn 6), the teacher aims to end the conversational sequence and move on, but the fact that he chuckles after hearing ‘好雷’ (hou2 leoi4/*very weak, implying a slacker*) suggests that he is amused by the expression too.

In evaluating his groupmate’s performance (turn 4), Marco is taking up the role of a ‘little teacher’ (Lin & He, 2017), but by the language choice (Cantonese), the register/style (i.e., trendy expression) and the tone (playful teasing) he somehow differentiates himself from the teacher and acts as a peer who has been embarrassed by his groupmate’s wrong answer. Given the background that the four subjects are always more active, it is possible that the ‘confrontation’ between Marco and Nathaniel is deliberately performed to arouse other students’ attention and interest. Be that or it may, the exchange between Marco and Nathaniel (turns 4 and 5) activates a *peer conversation frame* in addition to a *teaching/learning frame*, thus making the class funnier and more entertaining. It is important to note that one frame is not activated after another, but they are simultaneously projected—In his negative evaluation of Nathaniel (turn 4), Marco behaves as not only an embarrassed groupmate but also a ‘little teacher’ at the same time, as the comment consolidates the idea that Nathaniel’s answer (turn 2) is incorrect. The activation of multiple frames is accompanied by translanguaging, in which participants draw upon

<sup>4</sup> See <https://hkdic.my-helper.com/%E5%A5%BD%E9%9B%B7/> and <https://womany.net/read/article/16953>. Interestingly, the word ‘雷’, literally *thunder*, means something else on internet forums in mainland China, i.e., *very striking*—see [https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E9%9B%B7\\_\(%E7%B6%B2%E8%B7%AF%E7%94%A8%E8%AA%9E\)](https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E9%9B%B7_(%E7%B6%B2%E8%B7%AF%E7%94%A8%E8%AA%9E)).

resources from not only multiple languages (e.g., Cantonese and English) but also multiple registers (i.e., academic language and trendy expression). In addition to language, the tone and the facial expression (turns 4, 5, and 7) also spice up the confrontation, making the exchange more entertaining to other students, the *overhearers* in the exchange (Goffman, 1979).

Excerpt 2 involves the other two subjects, Joshua and Aska, but not the teacher. However, similar to excerpt 1, there is also peer evaluation and playful teasing in this episode.

#### Excerpt 2—Joshua (J) and Aska (A)

Turn	Speaker	
1	A:	< chuckled and pointed to the pictures on that page > 呢度有三包薯片, 呢度兩罐唔知乜野魚, 好難食. 仲有兩樽唔知咩, 跟著一打三文魚 (Here are three bags of crisps, and here are two tins of fish that I do not know how to call; they taste bad. There are also two bottles of unidentified things and a dozen salmon sashimi.)
2	J:	< chuckled > 嗰個係唔係解一打三文魚呀? (Does it mean a dozen of salmon sashimi?)
3	A:	A dozen 呀嗎 (It is a dozen.)
4	J:	< chuckled > [係一千呀? (Is it a thousand?)
5	A:	咦, 唔係. A dozen係一打定半打呀? (No. Does 'a dozen' mean a dozen or half a dozen?)
6	J:	< spelt the word > D-O-Z-E-N 呀, 一打呀. (3.0) < murmured to himself > 咁“辣雞”嘅 (D-O-Z-E-N. A dozen. A dozen. You are a piece of 'spicy chicken'.)
7	A:	咩“辣雞”呀? (What does 'spicy chicken' mean?)
8	J:	< repeated the words > 你咪“辣雞”囉! 垃圾! (You are a piece of 'spicy chicken'. Rubbish!)
9	A:	< showed Joshua an irritated facial expression >

Aska figures out the meaning of *a dozen* in the textbook (turn 1). Joshua challenges Aska on his understanding (turn 2), although Aska is apparently not moved (turn 3). Presumably, to confuse Aska further, Joshua suggests that *a dozen* means *a thousand* in Cantonese (i.e., ‘一千’ (jat1-cin1)) with *thousand* in English actually sounding similar to *dozen* (turn 4), and Aska’s response becomes shaky (turn 5). Finally, Joshua tells him that *a dozen* means ‘twelve’, and immediately afterward, he murmurs the word ‘辣雞’ (laat6 gai1—literally ‘spicy chicken’) in Cantonese, evaluating Aska’s performance (turn 6). Aska does not understand the meaning of the phrase and asks what it means (turn 7). Joshua eventually reads aloud the word ‘垃圾’ (laap6 saap3) in Cantonese, which is homophonic to ‘辣雞’ (laat6 gai1) in Mandarin (i.e., ‘垃圾’/lā jī) (turn 8), thus upsetting Aska (turn 9). Moreover, ‘辣雞’ is an expression often used in the popular online game *Honor of Kings* (王者榮耀) developed by the Chinese social media conglomerate *Tengxin*.<sup>5</sup> As gamers play in groups in *Honor of Kings*, the slang vents Joshua’s embarrassment by his groupmate exactly as ‘好雷’ (very weak/a slacker) does for Marco in excerpt 1.

<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.geyisu.com/1405.html>. Interestingly, the expression is often used in the popular online game – *Honor of Kings* (王者榮耀).

Although the teacher is not involved in this episode, interestingly, Joshua acts as a teacher and does exactly what the teacher did in excerpt 1. Specifically, he elicits a response from Aska (i.e., turn 2—Initiation), and, after some response from Aska (turns 3 and 5), he gives feedback (turn 6). However, like Marco in excerpt 1, Joshua speaks more Cantonese to differentiate himself from the teacher. Then, he behaves exactly as Marco did to Nathaniel in excerpt 1, teasing Aska (turn 6) and outsmarting him (turn 8). Here, Joshua acts as a peer in teasing Aska, although in a way he continues being a teacher, as the teasing can motivate Aska to work harder through *negative reinforcement* (i.e., Aska may work harder on his English to avoid being humiliated in public again). The teasing expression ‘辣雞’ (laat6 gail/meaning *rubbish*) is a bilingual pun that cannot be pinned down as Cantonese or Mandarin (see similar examples in Li, 2011, 2016); thus, Joshua is practicing translanguaging here. The term also conveys his public image as a fan of online games and a teenager who spends much time surfing the internet.

In excerpt 3 below, Aska fails to provide the correct answer to questions in the language tasks. Nonetheless, he regains confidence by translanguaging to Japanese, which he takes pride in.

### Excerpt 3—Nathaniel (N) and Aska (A)

#### (Sentence 1—He makes us happy)

Turn	Speaker	
1	N:	< asked Aska > 你試下define 個 ‘happy’ 先 (You can define ‘happy’ first.)
2	A:	< felt confident > ‘happy’ 好肯定係另一個 object. Pattern three 喎, SVOO, 仲唔係答案? (I am sure that ‘happy’ is another object. This is pattern three, SVOO. Is it the answer?)
3	N:	< chuckled > 你呢個係一個很好嘅嘗試, 但答案係錯嘅! (You have made a good try, but the answer is wrong.)
4	A:	< felt surprised and said Japanese > なに..... (What?)
5	N:	梗係唔係啦. ‘Happy’ 係adjective, 唔係noun呀 (It is wrong. ‘Happy’ is an adjective. It is not a noun.)
6	A:	< looked at the handout > (3.0) Pattern [fo...]
7	N:	[Pattern four 呀. 咁即係咩呀? (It is pattern four. So what is ‘happy’ in this sentence?)
8	A:	< read the word > Complement. /kɔmplɪmɛnt/ < wrote the phrase ‘object complement’ on the answer paper >

In excerpt 3, Nathaniel and Aska discuss the structure of sentences, and the sentence they are working on is ‘*He makes us happy*’. This time, it is Nathaniel who acts as the ‘little teacher’ prompting a response from Aska (turn 1—Initiation). Aska gives a response (turn 2), but Nathaniel says the answer is wrong (turn 3—Feedback). Suddenly, Aska utters a Japanese word (turn 4—“なに” (Nani)), which means ‘*what?*’ in a surprised tone. This term is always used in Japanese animation, colloquial Japanese, and online forums, showing surprise, doubt, and disbelief when one makes mistakes.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, the turn

<sup>6</sup> See <https://zhidao.baidu.com/question/131523063.html>.

effectively avoids further negative evaluation from Nathaniel (i.e., which he received from Joshua in excerpt 2—see turn 6) and Nathaniel goes on to explain the grammar point (turn 5). With more encouragement from Nathaniel (turn 7), Aska finally gets the correct answer but without being criticized this time (turn 8).

## Conclusion

The language policy in Macau has tended toward separate multilingualism (Blackledge & Creese, 2010), under which schools are officially classified by their principal, monolingual MOI, and the same school may run two separate sections with different MOIs. The language practice of teachers and students, however, is quite often inconsistent with the policy. This paper examines the translanguaging practice of four junior-one students in a remedial class, with the backdrop of an official English-medium school and English-only immersion being enforced for the regular English class. It turns out that all four subjects constantly engage in translanguaging in interactive, co-learning activities, drawing upon semiotic resources from not only different languages (i.e., English, Cantonese, Japanese, Mandarin) but also non-academic registers (i.e., trendy expressions, internet slang) and non-verbal modes (e.g., body gestures, facial expression). The purpose of translanguaging is to allow the subjects in this study to assume multiple roles (i.e., as a peer and as a ‘little teacher’) and enact different relationships with classmates/groupmates (i.e., peer-peer and teacher-student) in the class (i.e., Excerpts 1 and 2). In the case of Aska, whose English is weaker, the use of Japanese, which no one else is studying in the class,<sup>7</sup> helps him regain his pride. The preference for particular expressions (internet slang for Marco, Nathaniel, and Joshua, Japanese for Aska) reflects the students’ personal hobbies and cultural preferences, thus building their individual image and identity in relation to the teacher and other students. Although the little teachers’ shame tactic in excerpts 1 and 2 may not be the optimal teaching strategy, the activation of a *peer conversation frame* and a *teaching/learning frame* makes the class more entertaining and less stressful. Sometimes, co-learning with translanguaging yields very positive results; for instance, in excerpt 3. Aska, who is not fluent in English, would most likely stay silent and passive in an English-only class. On the broader implications, this study calls for reconsideration of promoting English-only immersion in all Macau secondary schools as the key to improving students’ learning of English.

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### Author contributions

BC is largely responsible for the writing of the paper and the data analysis. CC collected the data, transcribed them, and wrote an earlier draft. Both authors reviewed and edited the paper.

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<sup>7</sup> Marco also likes listening to Japanese popular songs and may infuse Japanese words in conversation, but Japanese does not show up in his speech in the data. On the other hand, Aska is studying Japanese now.

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