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## ► To cite this version:

Indiwaree Ethpatiyawe Geadra, Claire Chaplier. Translanguaging: a probable phenomenon among Sri Lankan students in a spontaneous speaking situation. *Etudes en didactique des langues*, 2022, La dispute / Arguing, 39, pp.55-76. hal-04397805

**HAL Id: hal-04397805**

**<https://hal.science/hal-04397805>**

Submitted on 16 Jan 2024

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# **Translanguaging: a probable phenomenon among Sri Lankan students in a spontaneous speaking situation**

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## **Introduction**

Sri Lanka is a multicultural and multilingual country where people use different languages, such as Sinhala, English and Tamil, from their repertoires in order to communicate in different situations. In this study, we evoke a spontaneous speaking situation in which Sri Lankan university students speak on a specific topic using their initial language, Sinhala. “Code-switching” is a popular term that has attracted attention in discussions on cross-cultural communication, but here we refer to “translanguaging” or “translinguistic production” (Narcy-Combes, 2018), a more recent construct when elaborating language production in a multilingual context. “Codeswitching implies the existence of two language systems, while translanguaging implies one integrated language system” (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021: 11). We believe that this analysis reveals internal processes preceding discourse, of which translanguaging is the consequence.

People’s cross-cultural experience may hinder their learning of a language. In the present contribution, we focus on the Sri Lankan context, where the presence of multiple languages and cultures is a common phenomenon and cross-cultural experience causes translanguaging. Therefore, it is crucial to study the transcultural behavior of individuals and its link with translanguaging in order to develop transcultural pedagogy. The aim is to respect and value one another’s otherness (Ouari, 2015) and to help individuals understand what their experience means (Jean-Paul Narcy-Combes & Marie-Françoise Narcy-Combes, 2019a).

This article is based on the results of a PhD project (Ethpatiyawe Gedara, 2022). Through an analysis of the speech and behavior of Sri Lankan students during longitudinal and multimodal focus group discussions (FGDs) and self-confrontation

interviews (SCIs), we examine whether translanguaging is present and what promotes transcultural behavior in the Sri Lankan context. Thus, we follow Jean-Paul Narcy-Combes' highlighting (2018) of the need to understand the constructs of translanguaging and also transculturing through research on people's discursive and behavioral interactions

Our epistemological position is that language, thought, conscience, discourse and culture do not have a separate existence, but are linked together in "transductive relationships" (Narcy-Combes *et al.*, 2019b). This study rejects the notion of monolithic culture on the assumption that there is no determinism. Even if, at the start of this study, the cultural norms established by a religion or the political context are the elements on which individuals rely, they are not the only elements that compose the environment. Beyond cultural differences, the individuals are attached to their different histories and environments.

The concept of translanguaging highlights the individual's ability to go beyond named languages. However, Jean-Paul Narcy-Combes (2018) shows a link between translanguaging and transcultural behavior. He argues that transculturing causes us to interpret events and react to them at the level of "thought", but this is less conscious than assumed. It is the dynamic complexity of the cultural experience of individuals that causes transculturing, which is reflected through speech. Essentially, transculturing is related to behavior and translanguaging is related to speech.

The research with students in the present contribution has shown that behaviors, identities and cultures are constructed according to contexts that are plural, linked to the moment lived, to feelings, according to each person's own experience. In the interactions we studied, the discourse has been shown to be built at the same time as a co-culture<sup>1</sup> that "reflects" the participants and their thinking. A consciousness develops that is linked to the experience lived by the individual and expressed in discourse.

## Context

Sri Lanka is an island located in the Indian Ocean and very close to the peninsular landmass of India, which makes it one of the most important commercial centres in Asia. Sri Lanka has been a major target for many invaders due to its geographic location. It now has a population of approximately 21,670,000 people. The Sinhalese constitute the major ethnic group in the country, with 74.8% of the total population, while Sri Lankan Tamils are the largest minority, with 11.2% (Department of Census and Statistics, 2012). The Moors represent 9.2% and there are also small ethnic groups, such as the Burgers (of mixed European descent) and southeast Asian Malays, along with a small population of Vedda, who are believed to have been the first group to have inhabited the island.

The history of Sri Lanka has been marked by multiple invasions, including Indian attacks and Portuguese, Dutch and British colonizations. These invasions

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<sup>1</sup> In intercultural studies, co-culture is defined as a collection of geographical, economic, social, religious, ethnic, or other cultural groups that have a significant impact on the society in which they live.

influenced the languages, religions, cultural practices and behaviors of Sri Lankans. With the influence of Buddhism, Sri Lankan society and the lives of Sri Lankans have undergone a further profound change; the behavior of Sri Lankans has also been modified according to the five precepts of Buddhism<sup>2</sup>. Additionally, Christianity, Hinduism and Islam have all been introduced into Sri Lankan society by the invaders, colonizers and merchants.

Colonization caused many linguistic and socio-cultural changes in Sri Lanka. The use of English in Sri Lanka was one of the major effects of colonization and this language now plays a vital role in administration and education beside the two official languages, Sinhala and Tamil. Additional language<sup>3</sup> teaching is included in the education system of Sri Lanka, but it does not seem to be very popular. A very small number of students study additional languages, such as French.

We will provide some details on the topic discussed during the FGDs (see below): homosexuality and same-sex marriage.

Homosexuality is illegal in Sri Lanka. According to Section 365A of the Penal Code, inherited from the British colonial era and dating from 1883, homosexual acts carry a penalty of imprisonment of up to ten years. This law, which criminalizes homosexual behavior, is not consistently enforced (Equal Ground, 2008). However, although this law is not enforced, gay rights groups claim that its discriminatory nature has had the effect of stigmatizing homosexuals. According to the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2006, “human rights organizations have alleged that police in Colombo and other areas have harassed, extorted money or sexual favors from and assaulted gay men” (US 6 March 2007, sect. 5).

In 1995, after an intense campaign by a gay rights group, the government agreed to revise the Penal Code. But instead of removing the controversial article, it extended its scope to women.

On 18 January 2017, the Sri Lankan government rejected a text proposing to ban discrimination based on sexual orientation, believing that this would amount to legitimizing homosexuality, which is illegal on this South Asian island. Health Minister Rajitha Senarathne said the measure could be “interpreted in their favor” by homosexuals, who would use it to create “social problems”. The island’s influential conservative Buddhist clergy is also said to be opposed.

## Theoretical considerations

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<sup>2</sup> The five precepts are as follows:

1. Refrain from killing any living creature;
2. Refrain from stealing;
3. Abstain from sexual misconduct;
4. Refrain from false speech;
5. Refrain from using drugs (Thera & Geiger, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> According to the Douglas Fir Group (2016), the denomination “additional language” makes it possible to consider that language learning does not take place in a chronological and successive manner (L2, L3, L4), the initial language being L1.

### *Language action*

The word “action” is very familiar and omnipresent in our lives and we find it difficult to define precisely because of this familiarity. We live with action all the time; eating, standing, sitting, walking and talking are all actions. Our whole life is made of actions and our daily habits prove our existence through our actions. Indeed, according to Austin and Searle (“Speech Act Theory”)<sup>4</sup>, the use of language is one of the fundamental human actions.

Jean-Paul Narcy-Combes (2018: 57) states that “discourse is the crucial instrument for carrying out social activity.” As our research is based on discourse, we highlight the discussion of language action. How we use our language in speech can describe individuals’ actions. When it comes to language action, this concerns representation and communication; thus, it plays a vital role in action for social activity. Since speech is also action-oriented, the way individuals act is identified as the basis of language. Behavior and representation are projected through language actions. Generally, the speech can be better understood by observing the action (that is not language). Therefore, these two elements are interconnected and one helps to give meaning to the other.

In a situation where there are many speakers, their discourse is constructed with the effect of the outside world. Speech is undeniably affected by the context, socio-cultural aspects and history, as well as personal experiences, behaviors and other factors. The language used by individuals is a production of what they experience. As the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis points out, language plays a powerful role in shaping human consciousness, affecting everything from private thought and perception to larger patterns of behavior in society. Language is a social product that is characterized by the environment in which it is used. When individuals change context and environment, their language may also change.

### *The cognitive unconscious*

Individuals are not always aware of their actions; as actors in this vivid language world, we perform spontaneous actions and are not always aware of what we say and do. In this regard, Norman (1993) describes two types of cognitive modes. The first is the experimental mode, in which our (re)actions occur efficiently and effortlessly (as operations); the second is the reflexive mode, where individuals mobilize their knowledge and experiences to find new solutions, which implies the presence of reasoning, decision-making and creativity.

Individuals cannot react in the same way as they expect in all situations; and as Cicurel & Combes (2014) note, when individuals act urgently or in surprise, they do not think, at least not in the way they verbalize the thought. In the process of language production, individuals perform in both experimental and reflexive modes and they need to have a dire exigency if they want to change the way they use and produce their language.

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<sup>4</sup> The speech act theory was introduced by philosopher J. L. Austin in *How to do things with words*, first published in 1962, and further developed by American philosopher J. R. Searle.

### *The link between consciousness, thought and language*

Language is a system that responds to the need for communication. The brain is trained to use language and this language is used in social interactions. Brain and language evolve simultaneously. This co-evolution can be understood as a complex adaptive system (Beckner *et al.*, 2009): each mutually influences the development of the other.

Martinet (2001: 51) contends that “language is not made to think”; rather, thought results from “communication needs that had to be satisfied by means of language.” (*ibid.*). According to Lahire (2001: 122–31), “it is difficult to separate language from consciousness because it is difficult to imagine a consciousness without language.”

As Jean-Paul Narcy-Combes & Marie-Françoise Narcy-Combes (2019a) further explain, it is impossible to be aware of objects, people and situations without a past. Our emotional reactions are linked to our past and combine directly with our consciousness. Thinking depends on individuals and their contexts. We cannot tell what individuals think without referring to their individual, cultural and social contexts. A thought is born in the brain and reconstructed “from behaviors and in behavioral, artistic, scientific achievements that are observable” (*ibid.*: 5). Consciousness emerges when this thought meets language (Vygotsky, 1934).

According to these definitions, we understand that language is a faculty specific to any individual and even a social fact. It is formed according to the capacity of an individual and according to social interactions. The social dimension plays a major role in language. It is, therefore, important to work on the usefulness of language and its link with thought and consciousness in learning an additional language.

### *Emergentism*

Emphasizing the informational and communicational model, Castellotti (2017) remarks that emergentist theories mainly focus on complex systems. Early studies of emergentism (Hilton, 2017) focus on the social, motor or conceptual development of children, notably their behaviors and productions (Bates, 1979). A few publications indicate the moment when the emergentist paradigm began to take hold in the field of language acquisition research: (Tomasello 1998; MacWhinney 1999; Kail & Fayol 2000). These researchers focus on language development in the mother tongue, but they all tackle bi- or multilingual individuals.

Like the nativist perspective, the emergentist perspective recognizes that language is quite complex. Emerging language research identifies how relatively simple component mechanisms can drive complex patterns of language acquisition. Emergence research has progressed through the interaction of different approaches, including connectionist models and behavioral or experimental evidence. Emergentism is on the side of the connectionist model, according to which language is considered an emergent property.

The emergentist approach shows that language can be learned “from interactions at all levels, from the brain to society” (Ellis, 1998: 631). Even if it

emphasizes the richness of interactions and maintains that “simple learning mechanisms suffice to drive the emergence of complex language representations” (*ibid.*), this approach has limitations on some points (see § *Complex dynamic systems theory*). The treatment of the most complex aspects of syntax, phonology and lexicon is always at a primary stage in the emergentist approach. Although the emergentist process has opened new perspectives in the field of language acquisition, there is a need for an approach that complements the limits of emergence.

### *Complex dynamic systems theory*

Complex dynamic systems theory is a recent contribution to the field of language acquisition that completes the emergentist approach “by relying on the concept of dynamic development over time (Lowie, 2017)”.

This theory responds to some of the limitations discussed in the previous section. Each stage in the development of a language system depends on the previous state of the system in dynamic interaction with other relevant (sub)systems. However, the development of an additional language is not limited to the combination of predetermined elements. Complex interrelations among history, context, perception, intention, action and reaction occur while the result is stabilized through social action. This theory further clarifies that there are no specific learning mechanisms but rather networks that revolve around a logic whose complexity escapes us (Narcy-Combes *et al.*, 2019b). When linked to emergentism, this theory reminds us that context and individual histories must be taken into account in language development, as this is a “process rooted in the context of language use and integrated cognition, body and world” (Lowie, 2017: 3).

Complex dynamic systems theory also emphasizes the importance of the communicative structure of interactions, including body language as an integral part of the interaction. McWhinney & O’Grady (2015) add that development can also be affected by embodied roles and the communicative structure of the interactions, and Wehbe (2017) notes that this explains why language and gestures are strongly interrelated and why body language constitutes an integral part of multimodal communicative interaction.

Another important aspect of this theory is that it explains that the different languages of a multilingual user are interrelated in complex ways. Lowie (2017) presents translanguaging and the activation of all codes as examples of the complex language productions of multilinguals that we encounter in the empirical study conducted here. An individual may produce new forms in the language acquisition process depending on how the interlocutor responds (*ibid.*). Indeed, there is great variability in the use and acquisition of languages, which should not be identified as a negative aspect of the language learning process; on the contrary, it indicates that learning is taking place.

Complex dynamic systems theorists point us in a new direction of language acquisition, one that is more liberal. This theory can be identified as an unrestricted approach that accounts for or can cover the limitations of language acquisition. It can both support us in designing new tasks to enable learners to succeed in their

learning process and also help us to understand the complex language processes of the plurilinguals in our research and the various aspects that influence them.

### *Translanguaging*

The term “translanguaging” was first used by Williams in 1996 to refer to the pedagogical practice in Welsh bilingual schools where the input is offered in one language and the task is carried out in another. García (2009) described translanguaging as a set of processes that encompasses multiple discursive practices and is the norm in multilingual communities. Wei (2017) has expanded on this by adding that translanguaging includes all the linguistic performances of plurilingual speakers and asserting that the speakers go beyond their limits when communicating. Otheguy, García & Reid (2015) add that the speaker’s full linguistic repertoire need not have watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named (and usually national and state) languages.’

This trend has radically changed traditional concepts of language learning. Baker & Wright (2017) explain it as a process of creating meaning, having experiences and understanding with the use of two languages. Canagarajah (2011), meanwhile, emphasizes that translanguaging is not limited to two languages; it is an ability that plurilinguals have to shuttle between languages, to use them in their repertoires as a single integrated system.

### *Transculturating*

The term “transculturation” was first devised by Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz in 1947. Ortiz outlined this term as the phenomenon of merging and converging cultures. This term has been expanded from the earlier uses of Ortiz, in different disciplines, to refer generally to transnational or cross-cultural<sup>5</sup> encounters; however in this context it has not been properly defined. Indeed Schiller (2021) contends that culture needs to be redefined in a transcultural context as it can no longer be envisaged as a hermetical, coherent and singular system. According to Imbert (2014), transculturality results in the creation of a new (hybrid) culture as the sum of all cultures present, in the absence of conflict between cultures, and based on listening and knowing otherness, including our own strangeness.

Baena (2006) chooses the term “transculturating” in her book *Transculturating Autobiography: Forms of Life Writing* after examining the effects of pluricultural lives on thoughts and behaviors. She privileged the term “transcultural” to refer to the manner in which the dominant culture

becomes part of a larger, looser structure within which literary texts which foreground the experience of “minority” as opposed to “dominant” groups both present themselves and are received as representative, even paradigmatic forms for an entire social formation, and not just for the ethnic or racial group with which the text’s author is associated (Keefer, 1993: 265).

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<sup>5</sup> “dealing with or offering comparison between two or more different cultures or cultural areas” (*Merriam-Webster dictionary*).



Baena highlights the dynamic form of transculturing: it is a term that “accommodates a series of interrelated dynamics of the formal negotiation of cultural perspectives” (2006, viii). The term initially referred to the process of understanding speech in one language and expressing oneself in another, but its scope has gradually extended to include linguistic functioning where none of the codes available to the individual can be totally deactivated during reception or production.

We have adopted the definition of Jean-Paul Narcy-Combes who borrows this term from Baena (2006), who used it to explain complex life experiences where undefined choices appear. Transculturing concerns the transcultural behavior of individuals (*ibid.*) and expresses the dynamism of the gerundive form (“[verb]-ing” in English) rather than the abstract noun “transculturality,” as envisaged by Dervin (2011). It should be mentioned that there is rather little theoretical research on the subject of transculturing, which limits our theoretical references.

The idea of transculturing is more recent and less frequently used than that of translanguaging, but the assumption is that the former triggers the latter.

## Methodology

Translanguaging plays a major role in most spontaneous speaking situations involving Sri Lankan university students. We assume that the influence of several cultures and transcultural behaviors can be identified in many Sri Lankans and that these can be major causes of their translanguaging. Thus, the plurilingualism and pluriculturality of Sri Lanka trigger transculturing in Sri Lankans. Sri Lankans live with multiple cultures and languages, with Sinhala and Tamil being the official languages and English playing the role of *lingua franca*. With its many ethnic groups, the cultural environment of Sri Lanka can have a considerable influence on an individual and can affect their behavior and language production.

This research was a qualitative study based on the observation of a spontaneous speaking situation. The objective was to examine the words and behavior of the participants to identify the presence of *translanguaging* and *transculturing*. We aimed to identify the behaviors and attitudes exhibited (the way the students reacted to ideas, referring to their smiles, postures, gestures, etc. and the attitudes they had on controversial topics), which reproduced the cultural patterns linked to the Sri Lankan environment as well as those which did not conform to the common patterns in this environment. The transcultural behaviors result from this ability to resist the reproduction of cultural patterns rooted in childhood or selected among competing cultural patterns themselves borne of several experiences.

The focus here was also on seeing how the participants became aware (conscious evaluation) of their behaviors and attitudes, of what triggered one behavior rather than another or what caused them to have a particular attitude at a specific time and whether they identified the cultural or personal (*e.g.*, emotional) factors giving rise to these cross-cultural attitudes and behaviors.

Appropriate methods are needed to understand the behaviors, discourses, conflicts and values that emerge. Two methods were used for this: two semi-structured FGDs (Van der Maren, 2010) followed by six SCIs (Theureau, 2010).

Several advantages of the focus group method are now recognized in qualitative research, in particular its flexibility. This flexibility makes it possible to identify the social representations that are constructed in the interaction, and the importance they have on the participation of the individuals concerned to define their realities and to develop solutions adapted to their needs (Leclerc *et al.*, 2011). The FGD does not generally aim at consensus, but rather the facilitation of interactions and inter-influence processes from which social representations are derived (*ibid.*). We will take the most revealing examples of individuals and will not generalize. Moreover, language learning is a complex process of interacting subsystems that changes over time, which corroborates its highly individual nature. This is why emergentist research into dynamic development makes use of individual case studies (De Bot *et al.*, 2007).

Twelve students took part in the study, from two universities in Sri Lanka, the University of Sri Jayawardenapura, in Gangodawila, Nugegoda and the University of Kelaniya, near Columbo. The intention of this micro-level study was to identify whether translanguaging and transculturing were explicit results in instances of spontaneous speaking among the students. The two FGDs were conducted in Sinhala and filmed. We chose two controversial subjects for Sri Lankans for the discussions: homosexuality and selling Sri Lankan land abroad. The whole idea was to select a subject that is controversial in Sri Lanka and see how the Sri Lankan students react to it. We observed their discourse and behavior. The first one was chosen because homosexual relations are illegal in Sri Lanka and the subject is very rarely discussed in public. Before beginning the discussion, an excerpt from the 2015 Indian film *Unfreedom* was shown to the students so that they could identify the theme. This film was banned in India because of homosexuality. This excerpt contains a lesbian scene where a girl named Leela confesses her homosexual feelings to her father and afterwards declares her love to her girlfriend. Legalization of same sex-marriage was a topic raised by the students.

All the students attempting to share their ideas had had contact with different languages and cultures. Four students spoke Sinhala, English and French, four spoke Sinhala and English and four spoke only Sinhala but had a basic level of English. The goal was to have the students speak openly and freely, enabling us to see who would talk about the topics and who would not and to observe their reactions. To this end, we did not push or guide the students while they were speaking and endeavored to ensure that they had enough freedom to express their ideas. The discourse and behavior of the participants would depend on the context; if they were comfortable during the discussion, they would be able to give their true opinions without any hesitation. We analyzed the speech of each participant and we noted the presence of his or her language production and behavior.

In this context, it is important to note how motivation is conditioned. In order to explain the origins of a behavior, prior cultural and emotional experiences, such as travel, studies, cultural broadcasts and family relationships that may explain it, are taken into account, as context and individual histories must be considered in language development (Lowie, 2017). It is helpful to highlight the unconscious

evaluative function that directs intentionality in terms of gains and losses in the behavior performed (*the cognitive unconscious*) and to note whether some form of backing off or consciousness development has appeared. Here, the participants were the focus of the analysis and we considered their personal and linguistic biographies.

The FGDs (see Annex 1) were followed by six individual SCIs (see Annex 2) in Sinhala, based on the filmed discussions to allow students to comment on their own behavior and activities. The aim was to examine whether the students were aware of their language production, reactions and behavior during their spontaneous speech. This, in turn, would help us to comprehend the occurrences of translanguaging and transculturing and whether the students were aware of the presence of those constructs in their discourses and behavior.

#### *How to understand the effect of translanguaging among Sri Lankan students*

The twelve students participated in the FGD on homosexuality at the University of Sri Jayawardenapura; it provides the focus for the remainder of the methodology and the analysis (below). The discussion lasted for two hours. We organized this FGD very carefully, selecting the students after learning their initial and additional languages, the subjects they were studying and their experience abroad and after talking with professors from the two universities. We also attended some courses at Sri Jayawardenapura to choose a dynamic group to lead the discussion.

All twelve students spoke Sinhala as their first language and had English as a second language (some students were also learning French at the university). Two students were in the first year, five in the second year, three in the third year and two in the fourth year. Ten of the students were taking a special degree (a four-year degree): five in English language, two in mass communication, one in history, one in business statistics and one in French; the remaining two students were taking a general degree with English and French as the main subjects. All the students in our group study were in the Faculty of Arts, which, in Sri Lanka, has more female than male students. The latter rarely study languages at university. Our group of twelve students thus comprised eight female and four male students. Seven of the students had lived abroad.

We selected this mixed group of students for their varied language practices and the diverse ideas they might have about one another's different social, religious and cultural values. Understanding the language and behavioral differences of participants, therefore, required knowledge of this contextual information, which was important for further analysis. We sought to verify that the individuals had had pluricultural experiences but reacted cross-culturally (*i.e.*, their behaviors were in some way mixed according to their emotions and their interpretations of situations).

The exchanges aimed at favoring the emergence of knowledge, opinions and experiences through the meeting of various personalities, which brought to light controversial opinions. However, not all participants took part in the discussion in the same way. Some interacted actively and others did not, while the body expressions and reactions of the participants were different from person to person.

We observed shyness and reluctance to express personal ideas in a public forum as a “blocking” aspect of group discussion.

A few weeks after the homosexuality FGD, the participants were interviewed individually to identify what had prompted their ideas, behaviors and verbal and physical reactions. Six participants were chosen for the SCIs, based on three criteria: gender, speaking time and pluricultural/plurilingual contacts. Four of the six were female and the other two male. Two of them had actively interacted in the FGD, two had had average interaction and the other two had not interacted at all. Three of them had previously had contact with the outside world by visiting foreign countries and the other three had not.

The video of the FGD was shown to the participants and questions were asked to further investigate their opinions, behaviors, reactions, speech and the use of different languages. Although these interviews were conducted in Sinhala, the discourse was peppered with English words and there was the presence of translanguaging, which deserved further investigation.

### Analysis of results

We identified common themes in the discourses of each participant and counted the numbers of occurrences (FGD). The most discussed subjects were considered as the common themes. Table 1 is the example of a participant we named C1 who is a third-year student in mass communication. He only spoke Sinhala and had lived abroad.

Themes	Occ.	Behavior	Int.	Orie.	Special observations
Perspective of the society	1	He uses a lot of hand gestures.	+	+	
Tradition/culture	1		0	+	
Freedom	1		0	+	
Biological condition	2		00	++	
Hormonal aspect	1		0	-	He sees homosexuality as a “hormonal problem”. <sup>6</sup>
Mental aspect	3		000	000	He thinks that homosexuality is a result of a psychological condition.
Influence of Buddhism	2	Aggressive tone when talking about the intervention of religion in the administration of the country.	++	+	He is against the comfortable life of Buddhist monks.
Political system	2		00	++	
Sexual exploitation	1		0	+	

<sup>6</sup> The phrases and words in inverted commas represent what the students said.

Post-independent Sri Lanka <sup>7</sup>	1	The whole group laughs when he gives this idea.	+	+	For him, Independence destroyed the discipline and the good state of the country.
Sri Lankan law	1		+	+	According to Sri Lankan law, homosexuality is not a crime but legalization of same-sex marriage will never be legalized in Sri Lanka.
Live together without marriage	1		0	+	
Psychological help” as a remedy against homosexuality	1		0	-	He says that homosexuality can be cured and he adds: “All the problems we have from birth can be controlled by the mind”.

*Table 1 – Participant C1*<sup>8</sup> (Occ.: Occurrence – Int. = Intensity – Ori. = Orientation)

These discussions revealed controversial opinions. The participants did not participate in the same way, some expressed themselves and others did not. Table 2 gives an overview of the student profiles and some of the results of the FGD.

Student	F/ M	Year/ study	Subject	Speak English	Speak French	Lived abroad	In favor of homosexuality	Interaction	Transculturating effect
C1	M	3 <sup>rd</sup>	History			Japan, India & Africa	No	X	Yes
R1	M	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Mass communication				No	X	No
D2	F	1 <sup>st</sup>	English & French	X	X	Japan, India	Neutral		No
S2	F	2 <sup>nd</sup>	English	X			Yes	X	Yes
D4	M	2 <sup>nd</sup>	English	X		England, Australia, India	Neutral	X	No
G1	F	2 <sup>nd</sup>	English	X			Yes		Yes

*Table 2 – Students’ language biographies, interaction, opinion and transculturating*

<sup>7</sup> Homosexuality does not have a good reputation in Sri Lanka. It became very popular in Sri Lanka after its independence.

<sup>8</sup> The voice and intensity of each theme are accompanied by symbols: +, 0, -.

[+] = strength of voice and enthusiasm for the theme.

[0] = a neutral voice and a neutral reaction to the theme.

[-] = a negative reaction and the voice does not reveal interest in the subject.

The direction of discourse was marked with symbols -, 0, +.

[-] = a negative orientation towards the topic of discussion.

[0] = a neutral orientation toward the topic

[+] = a positive orientation toward the topic.

The majority of participants expressed their ideas in Sinhala and English, and *codeswitching* and *code-meshing* were features of their discourse and were obviously spontaneous and implicit. Here are some examples:

- Adding a Sinhala suffix “-la” at the end of English words in plural forms “*students*” and “*girls*” such as “*studentsla*” and *girlsla* (“la” is a plural mark that is not used with Sinhala words). Sinhalese speakers use this mark more often when using English words (example of *code-meshing*). The way the language is used in the linguistic repertoire of Sinhalese speakers can be identified as *translanguaging* even if it contains a form of *code-meshing*.

D2 added *la* to plural words in English. It was sometimes justified by the context: “we are studying English literature.” Here is an extract from D2’s discourse<sup>9</sup>.

ගොඩක් අය සිවුරු අරිනවා. ඒ කියන්නේ **studentsලා** ඒ ගොල්ලො සිවුරු අරිනවා. සිවුරු ඇරලා **girls ලා** එක්ක ඉන්නවා. Phone පාවිච්චි කරනවා. එහෙම...ඉතින් ඒ කියන්නේ හොඳ භාමුදුරුවො කෙනෙක් කියලා මම දකින්නැහැ.

- Adding the syllable “mə” to the English word *serious*, which gives “seriousmə”, to mark intensity (case of C1). Used with Sinhala and English words.

- Adding the syllable “eka” meaning “one” to the English word *boarding*. The Sinhala word for “boarding” does not exist. It is a habit of Sinhalese speakers (e.g. R1).

We give an example of the presence of *translanguaging* in G1’s discourse. When G1 was asked what caused her not to answer the host’s question, she replied:

So, there’s a lot to discuss about “**lesbian issue**”. It’s not a one-sided issue. It’s very broad. I decided to speak out if this discussion came to a certain conclusion. Before a participant said that homosexuality is a problem, she identified it as an “**issue**”.

As the film was about love between two girls, G1 used the English word “*lesbian*” but added the English word “*issue*”. Although G1 said she had a positive view of homosexuality, from her first sentence in the SCI she showed that she saw it as a problem. The word “*lesbian*” does not exist in Sinhala, that is why they borrow it from English.

R1 used fewer English words than other participants who studied English as a major or had direct contact with English. However, he used English words that are very common in the discourse of speakers whose first language is Sinhala. R1 also used English words that are most commonly used by Sinhalese speakers (especially students) such as “*interview*”, “*situation*”, “*internship*”, “*audience*”, “*communication*”, etc. Although there are words for these English words in the Sinhala language, they are not commonly used in the spoken language. Sometimes, if the speaker speaks only in Sinhala, the interlocutor might not clearly understand the meaning of what he or she is saying.

<sup>9</sup> Translation: Many monks disrobe. It means that the student monks get disrobed. After disrobing, they stay with the girls. They use the mobile phones. I don’t see them as well-mannered monks.

In order to stimulate awareness, participants were asked questions about their behaviors or attitudes at specific times in the FGDs. Beyond the arguments, we observed the bodily movements – position of the legs, movement of the hands or head (if they agreed with an idea, they nodded and if they disagreed, they nodded in a different way) – along with the clothes, the facial expressions – in particular smiles and laughter – and the interplay of speeches and silences in order to explain what they meant and how one’s environment has a direct impact on one’s behavior and attitudes, which reminds us of emergentism.

For example, smiling plays a major role in communication as it projects several meanings, depending on the speaker. The first participant (D2) was shown extracts from the FGD during the SCI and asked the reasons for her smile at times. When she was shown a video in which another participant talked about “the children of Independence”, she was asked the following question: “What made you smile here?” and she replied: “Because Independence is “ironical” (*smiles*). Even though we are called the Children of Independence, we have no independence.”

The first participant smiled because of her personality. Sri Lankans use iconic expressions like “Children of Independence” but, in reality, there is no independence. She remembered her situation and smiled because even though she is 23 years old, she is still not free to make her own decisions: “I cannot make any decision by myself. I’m 23 but still not. I thought that when I grew up it would change. I still can’t”.<sup>10</sup> She said she is not free or independent because her parents do not let her make decisions for herself at 23. Even though D1 did not use words in the FGD, her smile at this point means that she is smiling at the phrase “Children of Independence” which is not true for her. Therefore, D1’s smile is her way of sharing an idea that she does not want to express publicly. The smile allows her to express her disagreement with tradition.

We noted that most of the participants in the SCIs had a different opinion than in the FGD: they had evolved, but we did not know the reason for this or its origin. Whether male or female, whether they had travelled or not, they moved toward speech (attitude) and behaviors (*e.g.*, smiling, nodding) in favor of homosexuality, suggesting the meeting had caused a change in attitude, having previously revealed opposition, explicit, implicit, or both, with such behaviors as a voluntary silence (unlike some first-year participants who said they did not dare to express themselves, because of the senior students and university ragging), a sarcastic smile and certain positioning or attitude, such as making provocative remarks. This was the result of the combination of factors chosen by the individual, including studies (*e.g.*, English literature) that allow intellectual encounters and cultural conditioning (*e.g.*, traditions), often loaded with affect (parents who strongly influence their children even though they are students<sup>11</sup>), with a variable intensity according to the individual that oscillated between the social weight and emotional load.

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<sup>10</sup> This extract has been translated from Sinhala into English.

<sup>11</sup> In Sri Lanka, the students are not free to take their decisions.

For example, when the first participant (D2) was asked for her opinion (in SCI) on the legalization of homosexual marriages, she revealed that “It was disgusting” to her at first during the SCI (she did not speak at all during the FGD). The use of the English word “disgusting” showed her negative opinion. Her family influenced her thinking because her mother also advised her to be careful at school and not associate with homosexual people. She began to develop a positive attitude when she learned of the stories of her friends who are homosexuals. After hearing their experiences, she understood that it is something normal. She only started to have a positive feeling towards homosexuals after knowing them, which allowed her to step back from this experience. Otherwise, she heard about gays and lesbians in her family as something “disgusting”.

That means, during the days of preparation for the A/Ls<sup>12</sup>, now the mothers<sup>13</sup> [...] That means that there were cases of lesbians at school. When there were things like that, my mother always told me to “be careful, be careful”. **“It was disgusting”** back then, but when I think about it now, I feel like it’s something **normal**”<sup>14</sup>.

It was observed that the participants did not verbally express the emotional intensity that led to a change (individual’s choice/cultural conditioning). What was due to cultural conditioning was verbalized in a fairly neutral way, which is a characteristic of the Sri Lankan environment. A male student, D4, did not directly show his disagreement on the legalization of same-sex marriage in Sri Lanka. However, during the SCI he said that Sri Lankans did not have enough knowledge to talk about this subject. The following extract has been translated from Sinhala into English. The bold words are the exact same English words used by the participant and they indicate *translanguaging*. D4 said that his exposure to literature changed his view regarding homosexuality. Literature and exposure to other cultures cause *transculturing*.

*Indivaree*: That means what is your idea of homosexuality? The legalization of homosexuality in Sri Lanka... **“generally”** what is your idea?

*D4*: Aa... I think, I have no problem but I feel that Sri Lankans have no idea about this subject.

*Indivaree*: What makes you think like that?

*D4*: Because we didn’t talk much in this group. We’ve all talked about **“gossip”** of other people. So they don’t have enough... to access a **“scientific discussion”** [...]

*(Indivaree interrupts)*

*Indivaree*: So what kind of things should we discuss?

*D4*: Aaa... the law...aaa... “biology” aaa... **“rights”** like that.

*Indivaree*: So do you have any idea of the situation in Sri Lanka? Regarding same-sex marriages... do you have any idea of same-sex relations in Sri Lanka? Any idea?

*D4*: I don’t have a great idea but we are studying the works of **“literature”**. I have an **“idea”** that comes from these works.

Another example concerns G1. During the FGD, G1 reacted to the different ideas by smiling, laughing and using body gestures more than the other participants.

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<sup>12</sup> Equivalent to High school diploma.

<sup>13</sup> It is customary to use plural in this case in Sri Lanka.

<sup>14</sup> This extract has been translated from Sinhala into English.



She reacted this way because it is her way of accepting the ideas of the other participants:

*Indiwaree*: And even if you don't speak, you at least make a hand gesture. Let's see [...] what these gestures mean.

(Indiwaree shows the video to G1)

Did you see that?

G1: Yes.

*Indiwaree*: Even though you did not speak (...)

G1: I "accept" [...] (G1 uses the English word "accept")

*Indiwaree*: You move your head. Does this movement also say that you agree?

G1: Acceptance. Yes, I agree. I think I have got used to this way. Wherever I go, I have got used to saying "yes" with a lot of affection<sup>15</sup>.

Therefore, it seemed that G1 used her smile and body movements to show that she agreed with other people's ideas and situations. Even if she did not say in words that she agreed with others, her physical expressions showed that she accepted the ideas expressed.

We also noted that it was not clear whether there were only individual choices for one participant and only cultural conditioning for another. We can only say that this FGD made the participants verbalize what they were thinking and thus allowed them to ask themselves questions (as some stated during the interviews). Most positioned themselves as not being like the majority of Sri Lankans, who hold a negative view of homosexuality.

## Discussion

We identified the presence of either *translanguaging* and *transculturating* or both in the comments of all the students.

All the students who showed *transculturating* effects had been abroad and were fluent in English. Likewise, the dominant Sri Lankan culture was observed to have an impact on transculturating; the cultural experience of the students cannot be separated from their original culture and their initial language. Thus, level of education is a key factor enabling transculturating. We noticed that *translanguaging* was present in the speech of the students in the form of *codeswitching*. All the students who exhibited *transculturating* effects in their behavior also showed *translanguaging* effects in their speech.

We also assessed the students' level of awareness of transcultural behaviors and translinguistic production. They were found to be unaware of the presence of *translanguaging* in their speech and not fully aware of *transculturating* as a common phenomenon. The main causes of *transculturating* in a given situation were their experience abroad, knowledge of English and additional languages, their education and the dominant Sri Lankan culture. The analysis of the discussions with the students in the SCIs showed that individuals first build the interaction in themselves and the environment. Then, their behavior tends to evolve in their way of experiencing the interaction (per emergentism and the theory of complex dynamic

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<sup>15</sup> This extract has been translated from Sinhala into English.

systems). Therefore, we see the link between *transculturing*, emergentism and complex dynamic systems.

The students' speech in the FGDs revealed a *translanguaging* effect, while their behavior showed a *transculturing* effect. The FGDs and SCIs involved students who both spoke and did not speak English and who had both lived and not lived abroad. Notably, the students who had not lived abroad also showed a *transculturing* effect in their speech. Likewise, students who had not lived abroad and who did not speak English also showed a *transculturing* effect in their speech.

In fact, in a university context in Sri Lanka, all students have some knowledge of English because it is a compulsory subject and although not all the students spoke English, they had at least a beginner's level. Thus, we must not forget that there are characteristics that influence the learning of an additional language (Narcy-Combes, 2005). These characteristics can have an impact on the different levels of students' knowledge of English and the university context creates a framework for students to manifest the effects of *transculturing*. We noticed a *translanguaging* effect in the spontaneous speeches of all the participants. Therefore, we can conclude that *transculturing* was the main cause of *translanguaging*. The dynamic complexity of the student's discourses was triggered by *transculturing*.

## Conclusion

Our results showed that the effects of *translanguaging* and *transculturing* may be present among Sri Lankan students when they are in a situation of spontaneous speaking. We can synthesize the results gained here to infer that *translanguaging* is a probable result in the spontaneous speech of Sri Lankan students and that the cause is *transculturing*. Their cognitive development is cultural. Their discourse is complex (see emergentism and complex dynamics theory) due to the way they use the language and how their language repertoire functions. A person with the knowledge of both Sinhala and English can understand what they mean. This complexity is caused by *transculturing*, which we identify as a social construction.

This research can be expanded by holding further FGDs with a different group of students who are studying in different contexts. This would allow for more results that would give a comprehensive view of the presence of *translanguaging* and *transculturing* in the students' speech and behavior. A quantitative study with a larger sample of Sri Lankan participants would provide a complementary view to the qualitative study on specific participants and thus give a more holistic view of the phenomenon.

Our conclusions lead to didactic and pedagogical recommendations, which will make it possible to trigger intercultural reflection and to organize co-cultural work in order to ensure collaboration, such as promoting the establishment of tandems and videoconferences with partners from other cultural environments. Indeed, it is necessary to offer virtual mobility when physical mobility is not easily available.

We believe that the two constructs, *translanguaging* and *transculturing*, should be used as assets to develop additional language teaching. Instead of neglecting both constructs and considering them as obstacles to additional language learning, they

should be taken into account when considering an appropriate pedagogy. In order to make this task a success, language-teacher training on the pluri-intercultural dimensions of education is necessary. It would be beneficial if it is possible to arrange intercultural exchanges to link intercultural group discussions with SCIs. It would also help us to better learn from our cultural determinations and more fully free ourselves from them through the development of reflection and reflexivity.

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## *Annex 1 - Questions asked during the FGD on homosexuality and examples*

The common questions asked were:

“What do you think about these types of human feelings? ... Towards same sex?”

“What do you think about the legalization of homosexual marriages in Sri Lanka?”

“What is your opinion on homosexuality?”

Once the discussion had started, the students gradually started giving their opinions even without the interference of the researcher. For example:

*Animator*: You watched the video. What do you think of this type of feeling? What do you think about these types of human feelings?... Towards same sex? And opinions? What are your opinions? Speak! What do you think? As soon as you watched it, what kind of feelings did you have?

(The students smile. They look at each other. T raises her hand and gives her opinion in English. A few students look at T.)

T: (In English) I think it's aaaaaaa... people should accept people the way they are. They should aaaaaa... accept their aaaaaaa... whether they like the same sex, gender or not. It's all about the traditions and cultures which other people think about. And it's about the society that some people don't come out in the world. So... ya... I think it's ok.”

## *Annex 2 - Questions asked during the SCI*

The questions were previously prepared after keenly observing the behavior and attitudes of the students during the FGD. One example is: “What prompted you to start your discourse in Sinhala and then suddenly switch to English and then to Sinhala? (Participant “S” begins her discourse in Sinhala and after saying a sentence in Sinhala, she switches to English. Afterwards, she speaks again in Sinhala).

*Example*:

*Indivaree*: You start talking and you speak in Sinhalese. Afterwards, you say a little in “English”. You are speaking in Sinhalese again. Like this... do you want to watch again?

S1 (female student): No, I remember.

*Indivaree*: So, aaa... what makes you talk like that?

S1: Maybe, I studied in “English medium” for “10 years”. Aaa... “background” too... I am in “background” where we “use” “English”. So, I am “comfortable” to say a few words in “English” instead of saying them in Sinhalese but sometimes, “English” does not have a “direct word” which can express this “feeling”. I don't have these words in my “vocabulary”. Aaa... so I certainly “use” the Sinhalese “word”.