Translanguaging as a spontaneous online language learning strategy in an age of (im)mobility

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Abstract

This article starts from the premise that contemporary language education must engage with the realities of language use in a world characterised by mobility across boundaries and increasingly complex senses of belonging. The positive implications of translanguaging for learning experiences and engagement are already widely accepted. However, little attention has been paid to systematically capturing the language learning-oriented functions associated with this multilingual practice. Drawing on learners' written posts on the discussion forums within a mass-scale online German language course, we propose an emerging typology of language learning-oriented translanguaging functions. Our in-depth interactional analysis uncovers three ways in which adult learners use translanguaging for both self-directed and other-directed language learning purposes: (1) in acts of bricolage, in which learners draw strategically on their full communicative repertoires to compensate for a lack of appropriate resources in the target language; (2) in the form of language play, in which they creatively manipulate the boundaries between the languages in their repertoires; and (3) to enable peer teaching and learning. In so doing, we highlight the hitherto unexplored translanguaging strategy of covert bricolage (by which learners draw on their awareness of the conventions and structures of one language to produce another) and document the key role of translanguaging in the provision of corrective feedback. We conclude by calling for language educators to create opportunities for authentic, cooperative multilingual learner communication that can contribute to language learning gains, while mirroring that which learners will encounter in a world characterised by borders, (im)mobility and diversity.

Keywords: translanguaging, covert bricolage, language play, peer teaching and learning, online language learning

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1 Introduction

Recent years have seen growing scholarly recognition of the notable influence of (im) mobility and migration on language use across social contexts, with an increasing focus on translanguaging – the fluid harnessing of semiotic resources associated with more than one language – as a routine communicative practice among multilinguals. The benefits of translanguaging for educational experiences, in facilitating learners' full self-expression, affirming their linguistic repertoire, enhancing their sense of identity, and creating an inclusive classroom environment, have been widely acknowledged (e.g., García, 2009; García & Li, 2014; Li, 2024; Otheguy et al., 2015; Paulsrud et al., 2017; Straszer et al., 2022; Turner & Lin, 2024). However, while they have been variously noted, little attention has been paid to systematically capturing the language learning-oriented functions associated with this multilingual practice.

Commonly associated with in-person school-based learning, including bilingual classrooms, English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) settings, and content-and-language-integrated-learning (CLIL) contexts embracing a range of curricular areas, the majority of reports on pedagogic translanguaging have involved deliberate interventions to prompt this communicative practice, requiring the adaptation of activities, resources, and ways of working, together with the buy-in of stakeholders, including educational management, teachers, learners and parents (e.g. Cenoz & Gorter, 2021; García & Kleyn, 2016; García & Kleifgen, 2020). Complementing these intervention-based reports are accounts of spontaneous multilingual practices, including in heritage language learning community school settings, highlighting the parallels between translanguaging inside and outside the classroom (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; 2015; Li, 2011; Li & Wu, 2009). Whether planned or otherwise, the positive and transformative 'translanguaging spaces' (García & Li, 2014; Li, 2011b; 2018; Zhu et al., 2017) that can emerge in such educational settings offer learners from diverse backgrounds the 'safety' to engage creatively in this natural communicative behaviour, drawing fully on their individual semiotic repertoires in interacting and completing set tasks.

Yet the role of translanguaging in language learning environments per se remains underreported in the research literature (see Bonacina-Pugh et al., 2021). Reflected in the design of courses and patterns of classroom interaction, this gap in the literature may be explained by approaches to language learning continuing to be shaped by monolingual ideologies around notions of languages as pure, discrete and static, to which access is only granted through acceptable levels of proficiency (Canagarajah, 2019). Such ideologies can create what Bradley and Simpson (2019) call 'negative translanguaging spaces' from which certain language varieties – and hence individual expressions of identity and agency – are barred (Adinolfi & Tagg, 2024). These largely unspoken beliefs, to which learners are sensitised early, fail to acknowledge the lived experiences of individuals as they move between their existing and emergent semiotic resources and cultural identities in the process of language learning and do not prepare them to manage real-world multilingual contexts involving diversity and change.

Also lacking from existing studies is empirical evidence demonstrating whether and, if so, how translanguaging leads to learning gains, particularly in relation to language itself (Treffers-Daller, 2024). Moreover, there has been little attempt to systematically account for the language learning functions of translanguaging. That is to say, to the best of our knowledge, no study has formally captured the ways in which learners utilise translanguaging for language learning purposes. Rather, most studies have tended to adopt ethnographic, qualitative, non-comparative approaches to the study of translanguaging interventions, with a focus on learners' experiences and levels of engagement (Prilutskaya, 2021) or on specific examples of translanguaging practices, rather than the identification of wider patterns of use. In this article we begin to address these omissions by presenting an emerging typology of language learning-oriented translanguaging strategies not hitherto comprehensively documented.

The language learning context in which we ground our study and typology is that of an online mass-scale language learning course, or MOOC (Massive Open Online Course). We were prompted to explore translanguaging in this setting because our earlier investigations of the more regulated speech- and writing-based online language learning courses offered by our university (Adinolfi & Astruc, 2017) revealed a relative lack of learner translanguaging, which we attributed in part to the presence of the instructor, reinforcing the aforementioned expectations around the use of the target language in language learning contexts. Noticing a higher incidence of this multilingual practice within the distinct context of the MOOCs, due, in part, to the limited educator presence, we took the opportunity to explore how adult learners might draw spontaneously on their full communicative repertoires for the purpose of language learning when given the space to do so. Our research question was therefore 'What are the language learning related functions of learner translanguaging, as evidenced in the forum posts of a mass-scale open online instructed language learning environment?'. Note that our study did not set out to evaluate the benefits of these functions in terms of learning gains. However, it prepares the ground for future studies in this area.

Our study thus examines adult learners' written contributions to the discussion forums embedded within an online post-beginners' German language course. In a previous paper, we drew on a detailed interactional analysis of learners' forum posts to construct a typology of translanguaging functions, distinguishing initially between those instances that were oriented towards the bolstering of community, on the one hand, and those that appeared to be primarily implicated in language learning practices, on the other (Adinolfi & Tagg, 2025). In the current paper we focus on the latter function to further develop our typology by identifying and exploring three ways in which learners use translanguaging for both self-directed and other-directed language learning: (1) in acts of *bricolage*, in which learners appropriate elements from across their entire linguistic repertoires to compensate for insufficient target language competence; (2) in the form of *language play*, in which they creatively manipulate the boundaries between languages in their repertoires; and (3) to enable *peer teaching and learning,* including providing corrective feedback to their peers. This paper thus builds on our previous work by detailing the specific ways in which instances of translanguaging are harnessed for language learning purposes. Our analysis of this spontaneous learner practice demonstrates the role it plays in supporting individuals' language learning and that of their peers, thereby potentially contributing to learners' own learning gains and those of others. We conclude by pointing to the importance for educators of creating opportunities for spontaneous, authentic, cooperative multilingual learner communication to emerge within a range of educational contexts, whether online or in person, complementing those of more formal translanguaging-focused interventions.

2   Context of study

Our study draws on a suite of asynchronous language learning courses available on *FutureLearn,* a mass-scale online educational platform with which we have engaged as researchers since 2018 (Adinolfi & Tagg, 2019; 2024; 2025). As with similar providers such as *Coursera* and *EdX*, *FutureLearn* offers free global access to courses across a range of subjects and areas of professional development (Poquet et al., 2018), which either run regularly or can be accessed at any time, with payment required for optional graded assessment or certificates of completion. This and similar models of open online learning are key to current initiatives aimed at the expansion and internationalisation of higher education.

FutureLearn was designed around the principle of 'conversation as learning' (Sharples & Ferguson, 2019), which holds that online interaction can be facilitative of social learning. Writing-based 'discussion forums' embedded in the study materials are thus a

central element of these courses. These forums support asynchronous communication by enabling learners to contribute short written posts or comments (we use both 'post' and 'comment' interchangeably in this article). The literature on such online forums tends to focus on assessing the content of learners' comments (e.g., Wang et al., 2016), with few studies exploring their use of language. Collins (2019), for example, traces how learners take up taught concepts for discussion in forum posts, while Chua (2020) investigates how learners engage in meaningful dialogue through various discursive resources. Of the emerging literature focused specifically on mass-scale online language learning (Fang et al., 2019; Sallam et al., 2020), studies that examine the role of discussion forums point to the particular benefits of interaction for target language practice (Barcena et al., 2015; Jitpaisarnwattana et al., 2021; Martin-Monje et al., 2018; Rubio, 2015). Our study similarly assumes the importance of learning through interaction, as reflected in our focus on the discussion forums embedded in *FutureLearn's* language courses.

The courses that underpin our study comprise a series of units of learning called 'steps' which typically contain a language-focused instructional activity based around a learning object such as a video or audio clip, reading, or quiz. Although learners engage primarily in self-study, a suggested schedule provides a timetable for engaging with their cohort in the discussion forum that accompanies each step. Learners are typically prompted either to share answers to an instructional activity or to contribute reflections or experiences. This guidance notwithstanding, they are free to post what they wish, and our dataset included questions and comments about the material, general observations on the topic raised in the step, and informal interpersonal exchanges. As well as contributing new posts, learners can respond directly to another post by clicking on a 'Reply' button. Each post thus has the potential to elicit replies from other learners and initiate a comment thread.

We contend that the nature of mass-scale open online courses empowers learners to engage in experimentation and practices such as translanguaging which challenge the norms and expectations of many formal learning environments. Firstly, the discussion forums may be considered less regulated than conventional teacher-led learning settings, for, although they are monitored by educators, there is no identifiable instructor. The affordance of commenting resembles that of online chatting in social media contexts (Chua, 2020, p. 24), suggesting that learners may recreate familiar informal digital practices in this liminal socio-educational space by drawing on their understanding of non-educational social media platforms (c.f. Ho, 2022; Ho & Tai, 2021). Secondly, learners come together more fleetingly and remain more anonymous to one another than those who interact more regularly in synchronous speech-based group tutorials or asynchronous writing-based forums on more conventional university courses. Virtual anonymity in non-educational online contexts has been shown to reduce social inhibition and encourage playfulness (Danet, 2001; Vásquez, 2019). Thirdly, carrying out communication via written text may heighten learners' reflexivity and linguistic creativity as they plan, edit and reflect on their language use (c.f. Androutsopoulos & Stæhr, 2018). At the same time, interactional cues available in online contexts, including language choice and translanguaging, can take on greater pragmatic meaning than in offline settings in which interactants have access to facial expressions, modulations of tone and bodily gestures (Georgakopoulou, 1997; McSweeney, 2018). The affordances of the online discussion forums thus lead us to argue that learners may feel more able to draw fully on their communicative repertoires for learning purposes than in traditional language learning environments, but that understanding their online practices may have implications for other, offline, educational contexts.

3 Data collection and analysis

Our data is taken from the discussion forums of a post-beginners' German language course that ran in Spring 2018. According to a report on the same cohort (Clifford et al., 2019), of the 6422 adult learners from 150 countries who registered for the course, 1487 posted comments to the forums in Week 1, with 184 doing so in Week 4. The report highlights the participants' varied motivations for learning German and their different prior language learning experiences, as well as their diversity in terms of age, nationality and language background. Although, between them, learners had access to resources from a wide range of languages on which they drew in the discussion forums, the two dominant languages used were German, the target language, and English, the medium of instruction, and the course 'lingua franca'. Only on three occasions did the rubric explicitly encourage learners to write in any language other than German, namely the first activity in which learners were asked to introduce themselves and explain their motivation for learning German (Activity 1.1); a second one in which learners are asked to respond to questions about their personal experience and observations of workplace stress (Activity 4.6); and the final activity in which learners gave feedback on the course (Activity 4.31). We explore the possible implications of this rubric in the analysis that follows.

This study focuses specifically on the written learner comments posted in response to a sample of ten activities from across the 102 steps that make up the course, illustrating the range of activity types in which learners are engaged. The data, which was accessed in context on the platform and downloaded in text format, comprised a total of 1203 comments distributed unevenly across the steps, with, for example, Activity 2.5 (week 2) attracting 313 comments and Activity 4.2 (week 4) only 22 comments, and other activities falling between these two extremes.

Translanguaging is not only the phenomenon that we explore in this study but also constitutes the lens through which we approach our analysis of the data (Li, 2022). Our approach is thus shaped by our understanding that individuals draw from across their integrated repertoires, and that interpersonal or social meaning emerges dynamically in the course of unfolding interactions with others. A similar understanding guides much of the qualitative micro-analysis of interaction data explored across the translanguaging literature (e.g., Creese & Blackledge, 2010; 2015). In line with this approach, we draw specifically on Li's (2011b) 'Moment Analysis' which is concerned with examining semiotically significant and spontaneous actions as they unfold in talk-in-interaction. Our adoption of Moment Analysis rests on our understanding that instances in which languages collide or combine in the learners' posts are potentially transformative moments in which revelations about language(s) can be made. We build on the micro-analysis adopted by Li and others by combining it with attention to wider patterns of language use beyond the immediate moment being explored. Our analysis thus proceeded through three stages:

- Stage 1 consisted of a quantitative analysis of task types and patterns of language use which permitted us to chart trends in language choices across the course. Overall, this analysis revealed an uneven distribution of instances of translanguaging across course steps and task types.

- Stage 2 involved the identification and annotation of instances of translanguaging, defined for the purposes of the analysis as moments in which learners combined elements of conventionally distinct language varieties within the same post. We annotated each instance in terms of its function in the interaction, resulting in a typology of translanguaging functions (Adinolfi & Tagg, 2025). This typology included those that oriented towards bolstering the language community – such as expressing identity and connecting with others – and those that foregrounded language learning, the focus of the study reported on in this article.

- Stage 3 comprised a Moment Analysis of selected examples of language learning-

oriented translanguaging, exploring their immediate interpersonal and pedagogic meanings in the context of unfolding exchanges.

The project gained ethical approval from The Open University, UK (HREC/4440/ Adinolfi). Learners were informed when they signed up to the German language learning course that their activities might be monitored for research purposes, and thus they can be assumed to have given consent for this. The discussions forums might be described as semi-public, in the sense that they are openly accessible to others registered on the course. However, it is unlikely that learners who post online have future researchers or the wider public in mind as potential audiences but are focused instead on engaging with other learners. All names in the data have therefore been replaced by pseudonyms and identifying information (e.g., particular locations) has also been changed. Note that, for reasons of clarity, we refer to learners as 'he' or 'she' in the excerpts that follow, basing our assumptions on their forum usernames.

4 Findings

In this section we report on our typology of translanguaging functions that relate to language learning strategies, as developed in Stage 2 of our analysis: bricolage, language play, and peer teaching and learning, together with the following sub-practices:

1. Bricolage
   (a) Overt linguistic resource appropriation
   (b) Covert linguistic resource appropriation

2. Language play

3. Peer teaching and learning
   (a) Learner translations
   (b) Corrective feedback
   (c) Requests for information and advice

As illustrated in Figure 1, we envisage these three functions as moving from individual or **self-directed** strategies (whereby learners draw strategically on their full repertoires to produce language output) to **other-directed** practices (whereby learners request or offer support from or to their peers). Language play sits between these as a practice which benefits both the individual learner's own learning and that of their peers, as languages and the boundaries between them are playfully explored. In the analysis below, we describe and discuss these practices in turn, illustrating them with selected excerpts from learners' contributions to the online discussion forums in the German language learning course.

Note that we do not provide direct translations of each example but instead clarify the meaning of relevant German elements in italicised bracketing or in our analysis.
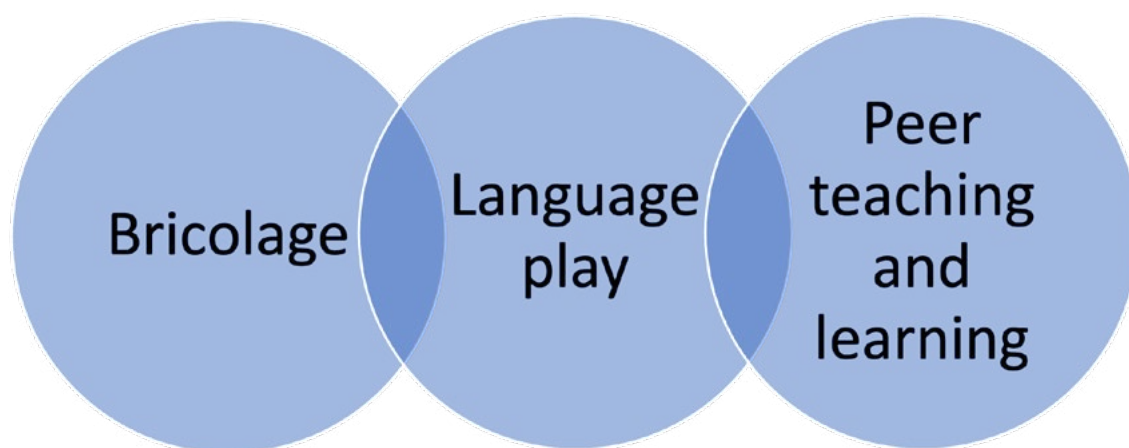
Figure 1: Moving from self-directed to other-directed language learning focused translanguaging practices

4.1 Bricolage

This first practice involves instances of **bricolage** in which learners appropriate linguistic resources from across their repertoires in a bid to fulfil a communicative or social goal in the absence of sufficient target language competence. This practice is akin to that of 'bilingual bootstrapping', a term coined by Gawlitzek-Maiwald and Tracy (1996) to describe learners' 'pooling' of resources across languages. Our use of the term 'bricolage' draws on Derrida's (2015, p. 79) definition of it as 'borrowing from one's textual heritage whatever is needed to produce new and different texts' to point to the way in which language learners draw strategically from across their individual repertoires to construct interpersonally meaningful utterances. We posit that this can occur overtly, as evident when learners incorporate a word or expression from another language, or covertly, as manifested by learners drawing on the syntactic, morphological and orthographic conventions of one language when producing another. Bricolage enables learners to use their target language resources, while also deploying other resources to fill in gaps, and thus communicate in ways that would not be possible using only the former (c.f. Bradley & Atkinson, 2020). In doing this, bricolage plays a key role in enabling participation by facilitating learner output and interaction, which are in turn deemed important processes in the learning of target-like forms (e.g., Gass & Mackey, 2020). Bricolage is thus a self-directed language learning strategy which supports learning gains. Below, we look at how this is realised in both overt and covert ways.

4.1.1 Overt linguistic resource appropriation

The first type of bricolage that we distinguish involves learners overtly combining resources from different languages to express meaning. Such a practice is well documented in the literature, albeit not always from a language learning perspective. Example (1) is taken from the first activity in which learners introduce themselves in the discussion forum and explain why they are taking the course. As mentioned earlier, they are invited to do so in whatever language they like: 'You can write in English or your own first language – or in German, if you already know enough'. Many learners start their post in German and then move to English to add further information. This

is exemplified here by Daisy, a learner who explains that she lives in Koeln (Köln in Germany) but works mainly in the UK and speaks a little German (*ein bisschen Deutsch*). She then moves to English to continue her post. Another learner, John, welcomes her to *FutureLearn* (*Willkommen bei FutureLearn*) in German, before using English to complete his contribution.

(1)   Hallo! Ich wohne in Koeln, aber arbeit meistens in UK. Ich spreche ein bisschen Deutsch. I find it really hard to try and fit in German lessons, so wish to give this a go! Good luck everyone! (Daisy, Activity 1.1, 23 April)

Hallo, Daisy. Willkommen bei Futurelearn. Hard to practice German for me also. (John, 23 April)

Daisy's post shows familiarity with German language expressions that might be expected of a learner at post-beginner level and which are sufficient for carrying out the first part of the activity, that of introducing oneself. The decision to write in English about her motivation for studying the course is likely prompted by her perception of the limitations of her German language resources in expressing the desired propositions (fitting in German lessons, giving it a go). Although alternative strategies may have been to express her ideas using more basic German phrases despite their not so effectively capturing the stance she wished to put across, or simply suppress her self-expression completely, Daisy may have felt encouraged by the permission given to learners to draw on their full repertoires to express herself by using English. In this case, the permission enables Daisy not only to complete the communicative goal and to create the language output necessary for language learning, but also to reach out to her fellow learners with informal and emotive language (*really hard*, *fit in*, *give this a go*) and a friendly sign off (*Good luck everyone!*). Her post attracts a response from John, who echoes the same sentiments and adopts a similar kind of bricolage practice, explicitly referencing the challenge of learning German and apparently seeking an opportunity to practise. Bricolage thus enables learners to participate in the online community in ways that facilitate learning.

This kind of bricolage also occurred in response to a later activity in which learners were invited to answer personal questions regarding their levels of work-related stress, writing 'in English or German' as they wished, as in Example (2).

(2)   Ich denke, Stress am Arbeitsplatz ist hier ein großes Problem. Viele Leute arbeiten sehr lange. I couldn't figure out a way to say this next part in German...It's hard for a lot of people to strike a good work/life balance when they work long hours. (Gail, Activity 4.6, 1 May)

Gail starts by drawing on German vocabulary and expressions provided within the activity rubric, as well as those used by other learners in their comments, to make two observations regarding her experiences of stress in the workplace ('I think workplace stress is a big problem. Many people work long hours'). She then prefaces her next contribution with an explanation as to why she has used English language resources (*I couldn't figure out a way to say this next part in German*). This constitutes an example of what we term **metacommentary** (Adinolfi & Tagg, 2025), by which people reflect on their own language output or writing process often either to acknowledge the limitations of their target language use or to justify their use of English. The German language equivalents for many elements of her English language sentence go beyond the language provided by the activity in this step and are likely not easily accessible to Gail. Her multilingual response thus enables her to produce the target language whilst also completing her contribution to the discussion and therefore engaging in meaningful participation. It may also serve to reassure her peers that others also struggle to express themselves in a target language.

These two examples show how the urge to communicate prompts learners to draw fully on their linguistic repertoires to express themselves, deploying resources from a dominant language to compensate for perceived limitations in a target language, while following as much as possible the conventions and expectations of the learning community. This kind of bricolage occurred more often in response to activities that set up a clear communicative goal (as opposed to an instructional one) which encouraged learners to share personal information and ideas and whose rubric gave them explicit permission to draw fully on their linguistic repertoires. This pattern points to the role that authentic interpersonal communication can play in prompting translanguaging as a language learning strategy.

4.1.2 Covert linguistic resource appropriation

Contrasting with 'overt bricolage', what we term 'covert bricolage' is another manifestation of this practice, which is generally not distinguished as a key language learning strategy in the research literature (but see Fuster, 2024, on lexical transfer as pedagogic translanguaging). As evidenced in our data, covert bricolage involves learners drawing on their awareness of the conventions and structures of one language to communicate or express meaning in another language (in this case, the target language, German), encompassing not only lexical transfer but a broader range of elements, including syntax and orthography. This process manifests itself in instances where the conventions and structures of the languages involved differ and the learner produces what might be described as an 'error' or a 'non-target-like form' caused by what is viewed elsewhere as the 'negative transfer' of linguistic elements from one language to another (e.g., Yu & Odlin, 2016; cf. Fuster & Neuser, 2020). Viewed as bricolage, such instances are not 'errors' but can be reconceptualised more positively as self-directed pedagogic translanguaging. Our use of the term 'covert' is not intended to imply that learners are deliberately concealing translanguaging practices, but rather that the bricolage may often be less obvious to a listener or reader than in overt cases and may not always be a conscious strategy on the part of the speaker or writer. As with the more overt combining of resources described in in section 4.1.1, covert bricolage similarly enables learners to produce output, thus engaging in language practice and participating fully in the learning activity.

As items of interest in the examples in this section may not be obvious to non-German users, they have been highlighted in bold. The following example, from the first activity in the course, involves the appropriation of expressions or phrases from other languages into German. In it, Marcelo introduces himself as a 56-year-old English teacher who works at the city hall in Rio de Janeiro. He is also learning Chinese and has some experience of Russian (3).

(3)   Hallo! Mein Name ist Marcelo und ich bin 56 Jahre alt. Ich arbeite bei Prefeitura do Rio de Janeiro. Ich bin **ein Englisch Lehrer**. Ich lerne Chinesisch und ich auch sprache Russisch. (Marcelo, Activity 1.1, 2 June)

Marcelo's expression *ein Englisch Lehrer* follows the English convention of including an article before a profession ('an English teacher'), which is absent in both German and Portuguese. In addition, *Englisch Lehrer* ('English teacher') is written as two separate words, as with the English and Portuguese equivalents, rather than as the compound noun that would be found in German. Thus, the comment is the result of translanguaging practices whereby English and Portuguese structures are appropriated in an attempt to produce German ones with a similar meaning.

Another common manifestation of this kind of bricolage in this learning space involves the adoption of one language's typical word order in the production of another. This is often evident in this forum because German differs from many other languages

in its conventional placement of the main verb at the end of a sentence when used in combination with an auxiliary or modal. Ibekwe writes that he is from Nigeria and wants to learn German (4), while Eloise reports that she once sent an envelope to a colleague in Austria (5).

(4)   Hallo, ich bin ibekwe aus Nigeria. Ich will **lernen** deutch (Ibekwe, Activity 1.1, 16 May)

(5)   Ich habe **geschickt** envelope nach Austria einmal, zu mein Kollegen (Eloise, Activity 3.13, 10 May)

In both examples the word order is not standard German, in which the infinitive (*lernen*, '[to] learn') or the past participle (*geschickt*, 'sent') would be placed at the end of the sentence. Rather, it mirrors the English equivalent, in which the main verb immediately follows the auxiliary, perhaps suggesting that both have been translated directly from English. (Note, however, that we have no evidence as to the full linguistic repertoires of these learners, who may be drawing instead on languages other than English.)

A final example of this kind of bricolage involves the adoption of typographical rules from one language to another. This is illustrated in Example (6), in which Jill reports she can sleep well but is disturbed by her dog and her son who snores loudly. Her sentence includes three German nouns without the capitalisation of the first letter that typically characterises their use (*hund* instead of the conventional 'Hund' ('dog'), *sohn* for 'Sohn' ('son') and *schlafzimmer* for 'Schlafzimmer' ('bedroom')). Thus these are German words in which the typographic conventions of languages such as English have been appropriated.

(6)   Ich kann gut schlafen aber nicht wann der **h**und vor mein **s**ohn in mein **s**chlafzimmer ist, er schnarche sehr laut! (Jill, Activity 4.6, 3 April)

This section has shown how translanguaging manifests as a self-directed language learning strategy, that of bricolage, by which learners are enabled to engage in language practice and communicate meaning using their available language resources both overtly and covertly, while also expressing themselves and connecting to others. In some cases, activities focusing on the meaningful expression of ideas and reaching clear communicative goals are key to prompting learners to draw fully on their linguistic repertoires to produce language and interact with their peers.

4.2 Language play

The second function in our typology is language play, which we define as a focus on language form or linguistic structure for interpersonal purposes. Bilingual language play has been widely documented within and beyond educational contexts (Li, 2022; Nicolarakis & Mitchell, 2023) and has long been seen as an intrinsic part of language learning (Cook, 1997; 2000). Although not as frequent across our data as other language learning strategies, this kind of communicative practice can be seen as a self-directed one that involves the playful exploration of the target language in relation to other known languages, comparing and contrasting linguistic features and conventions, and exploiting similarities and differences to amusing effect. However, engaging in playfulness also points to an awareness of the shared knowledge and understanding of the language learning community, as well as a desire to engage and entertain others, and, as such, we place it in the centre of our diagrammatic conceptualisation of these language learning-oriented translanguaging strategies.

In the previous section we saw how learners engaged in acts of bricolage which involved them drawing on their full linguistic repertoires to express themselves. In

Example (7), a learner from Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) draws on a similar practice but in a way that seems driven not by the limitations of her German language repertoire but by playfulness.

(7)   Ich komme aus BiH und Ich möchte verbesseren meine deutch and my english too.

Viel spaß! (Lazlo, Activity 1.1, 27 April)

Lazlo uses German to state his home country of Bosnia and Herzegovina (*Ich komme aus BiH*, 'I come from BiH') and his reasons for studying the course: *Ich möchte verbesseren meine deutch* ('I would like to improve my German'). The fact that he then finishes his sentence with English resources seems not so much because of lack of competence or confidence – there seems no reason he could not approximate *and my english too* in German – but rather a humorous attempt to underline meaning through language choice: he uses German to talk about improving his German; and English to talk about improving his English. There is a creative parallelism in *meine deutch and my english too*, perhaps emphasised by the failure to capitalise the name of either language; while the exhortation to other learners to 'have fun' (*Viel spaß!*) appears to confirm our reading of this as playful.

Example (8) is taken from the same activity and was posted a few days after Example (7). In contrast to other responses, which involve overt German-English bricolage, Gabriella writes primarily in English.

(8)   Hi!!! I'm Gabriella. I'm from Argentina. As many of you, I learnt Deutsch in the past but now I dont remember much...I can understand it yet, but I have lots of doubts when I have to speak it...I hope we all Viel Spass while learning have it!!! (Gabriella, Activity 1.1, 6 May)

In her last sentence, however, she uses the German phrase *Viel Spass* ('have fun') as if to playfully emphasise the fun she hopes the cohort will have learning German. This playfulness appears to be further signalled by her non-standard use of multiple exclamation marks. Although there is evidence of communicative runs, we can only speculate whether Gabriella's use of *Viel Spass* picks up on its earlier use in Example (7). The first letter of both words is capitalised, which reflects, somewhat inaccurately, the German convention of capitalising nouns. Gabriella also adopts a mock German word order by placing the English verb towards the end of the sentence, thereby highlighting the differences between English and German and drawing on an assumed shared knowledge of the latter within the learning community, while indexing a playful identity. Like the previous example, Example (8) reveals learners' knowledge of the target language and their ability to exploit this knowledge for amusing purposes, and thus to affirm and extend their language learning.

4.3 Peer teaching and learning

In this section we explore the role of translanguaging in facilitating peer teaching and learning among learners in the online German course. Peer teaching and learning involves learners 'helping each other to learn and by so doing, learning themselves' (Topping & Ehly, 1998, p.1) and can manifest in various ways, including as cooperative learning and peer modelling or more formalised peer tutoring. While some students resist these practices, the research literature points to the many benefits, including enhanced content recall, critical thinking skills, autonomy and overall learner satisfaction. Studies suggest that peer teaching and learning may be particularly suited to online, as compared to in-person, learning environments, in part because video recordings and forum discussions permit the repeated revisiting of learner contributions (Topping, 2023) from which others can learn. However, even those studies of peer teaching and learning that focus

on language learning (e.g., Tutyandari et al., 2022) do not specifically consider the role of languages other than the target language in facilitating this collaborative practice.

The role of translanguaging within peer teaching and learning in our data mainly involved learners asking for and providing support to one another, in the form of translations, language-focused peer corrective feedback and general requests for information and advice. Our analysis below shows how learners translanguage to collaborate with others and hence prompt enhanced language gains.

4.3.1 Learner translations

Across the forums, learners occasionally provide translations of their posts, normally from German to English (though there is one example of a learner providing German translations of Italian phrases). In some cases this can be interpreted as the learner seeking opportunities for language practice (with one learner mentioning a desire to improve both his German and English) or checking that they have used the right word or expression, but in most cases the aim appears to be to scaffold the comprehension and thus learning of others. Sometimes a parallel translation of a whole post is provided (see Adinolfi & Tagg, 2024). However, more commonly translations are offered for single words, as in the following.

Example (9) is taken from an activity in which students are asked to discuss the health benefits of herbal tea and other drinks and foods, with no stipulation regarding the language they should use. In his post Edward reports drinking lemon and ginger tea for his circulation and digestive system.

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(9)   Ich trinke Zitroneningwer (Lemon and Ginger Tea) Ich glaube das ist gut für Die Kreislauf (circulation) * und Das Verdauungssystem (digestive system)*.

   * Collins German Dictionary
   (edited) (Edward, Activity 4.16, 7 April)

This post reflects the practice adopted by other learners of clearly signalling translations by use of quotation marks or, as in this instance, brackets. The learner draws widely on typographical alongside linguistic resources, also deploying an asterisk to signal the source of the translations as being the Collins German Dictionary. This additional information may have two intended outcomes: firstly, to hedge authority and downplay expertise, but secondly to validate the veracity and accuracy of the translations. The rest of the comment is written carefully using German words and phrases that are either provided in the rubric or used by other learners. The translation practice reflects that used in an earlier comment posed by an educator who offers similar translations of *Ingwertee* ('ginger tea') and *Übelkeit* ('nausea'). It is also interesting to note that the post has been edited, suggesting that the learner may have written and posted his comment before reflecting on, and correcting, it. Overall, this appears to be a deliberate clarification of vocabulary that may be unfamiliar to other students in a way that serves not only to make the information provided more meaningful but to scaffold others' learning of potentially unfamiliar words and expressions.

4.3.2 Corrective feedback

Another way in which these online language learners support one another's learning is through requesting and providing peer corrective feedback. In their aforementioned evaluation of the same course and cohort, Clifford et al. (2019) find 172 instances of peer correction across the 6241 comments posted in the first week of the course, as provided by 34 learners (2.3% of forum contributors). Peer correction is not, then, a common practice,

and, according to Clifford et al. (2019, p. 15), learners on the German course express some ambivalence towards it. While they welcome corrective feedback from their peers, they are reluctant to offer it themselves, due to a lack of confidence and the 'fear of triggering resentment' (p. 15). Nonetheless, discussing language among peers has been found to be beneficial for language learning gains (Sato & Ballinger, 2016), not least because it encourages learners to think for themselves rather than accepting things as given (Liu & Hansen, 2002). Note that our interest in learners' requests for and provision of corrective feedback in our data is not concerned with evaluating their contributions or corrections for accuracy, but rather with examining how they collaboratively explore language and make meaning. There may therefore be instances in which an inaccurate usage has been overlooked or an incorrect correction has been made.

Example (10) is taken from an activity requiring learners to 'write about your own workplace or college, or a workplace you know well', which provided them with lists of relevant German vocabulary and sentence structures, and suggested they use a dictionary if needed. Perhaps prompted by its formal framing, most learners completed this activity using German language resources alone (91% of posts were in German only). The example illustrates the practice, evident more widely across the course, of learners carrying out a task using German language resources and then drawing on English to add a metacomment requesting peer corrective feedback. In her post, Alona explains that she works at a medical university with a large university clinic, seven faculties and over sixty departments, as well as a fantastic simulation centre.

(10)   Ich studiere an der medizinische Universität. Es hat eine große Universitätsklinik, sieben Fakultäten und über sechzig Abteilungen. Außerdem, gibt es ein fantastisches Simulationzentrum.

P.S. Any corrections are welcome! (Alona, Activity 2.5, 20 March)

There is a clear functional divide in (10) between languages, with English used to request support for the learning of German. This divide is in line with the implicit language policy of the course. It is interesting in this case that the distinction in function is marked not only by a change in language but by use of the English language resource *P.S.* ('postscript') which is historically associated with written or typed correspondence such as letters and email; and by an exclamation mark that frames the comment as being more informal and engaging than the German answer. Given the prevalence of German in this discussion forum, it might be argued that the use of English language resources is intended to attract the attention of learners scanning the discussion forum and encourage them to engage with the post. In this case, however, as with many such requests for correction, the post is left unanswered, perhaps due in part to learners' reluctance to correct their peers and their lack of confidence in providing conclusive answers.

Example (11) provides an instance in which a learner offers corrective feedback in response to a peer's language use, even though it was not requested by the original poster. In this instance, the initial poster, Suresh, uses German language resources to introduce himself as having come from India and now working in Germany as a software engineer. It may be his subsequent admission that he does not speak German well and hopes to practise during this course that prompts a peer to come forward with corrective feedback.

(11)   Hallo Leute,

Ich bin Suresh und komme aus Indien. Ich arbeite hier in Deutschland als software entwickler. Aber Deutsch sprechen ist schwer fur mich. Ich hoffe, Ich kann Deutsch sprechen mit diesem Kurs. (Suresh, Activity 1.1, 24 April)

Hey Suresh, In the last line wont spechen *[speak]* be at the end because of a modal verb kann being used? (Faquir, 24 April)

Would anyone can clarify this? (Suresh, 24 April)

Hi, I think it could be "Ich hoffe, dass ich mit diesem Kurs Deutsch sprechen kann"? *[I hope that I can speak German with this course]* But I'm not 100 per cent on that. Sehr toll dass du in Deutschland arbeitest! :) veil glück! (Elena, 25 April)

@Elena Vielen Dank (Suresh, 27 April)

Although the original post is in German, the discussion of the 'rule' that guides German word order is conducted in English. Faquir draws on informal and friendly English language resources, greeting Suresh with *Hey* and posing his correction as a question rather than an assertion: *wont spechen be at the end …?*. Also adding to the informal tone of the response are non-standard language choices – the capital letter after a comma (*In*) and the missing apostrophe in *wont*. It seems that this friendly approach may have been successful, to the extent that the original poster, Suresh, responds in a similar spirit by opening out the question to the wider cohort (suggesting also that he interpreted the question as a genuine one indexing Faquir's uncertainty) and doing so in the language chosen by Faquir – English.

What is most interesting with respect to the role of translanguaging in peer corrective feedback is the response that the exchange attracts from a third learner. Elena echoes the language choices made by Faquir, using a similar combination of English and German language resources, and starting her response with a greeting, *Hi*. Elena also similarly hedges her response, stating *I think it could be* and further adding *But I'm not 100 per cent on that*. Both respondents appear to have an eye to saving Suresh's face while downplaying their own expertise – perhaps due to the aforementioned lack of confidence that learners tend to feel when providing peer corrective feedback and their fear of stirring up resentment. Interestingly, however, Elena then draws on German language resources to respond to the content of the original post, *Sehr toll dass du in Deutschland arbeitest! :) veil glück!* ('It's great that you work in Germany! :) good luck!'). This change in function and language is also accompanied by a move to greater informality, as suggested by the exclamation mark, emoticon and formulaic expression (*veil gluck*). The misspelling of 'viel' as *veil* suggests an informal casualness not present in Elena's more careful suggested rephrasing of Suresh's German sentence. Suresh responds with a formulaic German language phrase, *Vielen Dank*, which is widely used across the forum and appears appropriate in response to Elena's post and in the wider language learning space. Overall, the learners negotiate the parallel activities of knowledge creation, learner scaffolding and affective relationship-building through a fluid intermingling of languages and registers, orienting towards a seemingly shared acceptance of the distinct functions of English and German and moving together towards a standard, target-like form.

4.3.3 Requests for information and advice

Throughout the course, learners request and provide help of various kinds, including technical support and language usage queries. The latter is illustrated below in Example (12), which is taken from an activity in which learners are asked to read a hotel leaflet and answer questions provided in German. In this case, Shirley draws predominantly on German language resources in asking how to say @ and – in German, using the English equivalents *at* and *dash* to clarify her question.

(12)   Wie sagt man die Symbole "@" und "-" in einer E-Mail Addresse? Auf Englisch würde Ich "at" und "dash" sagen! (Sharon, Activity 3.10, 10 April)

@ = das At-Zeichen so you would also say "at" in German e-mail addresses. - is Bindestrich (m) although my colleagues say „minus". For example, ah Punkt Meyer at Hotel minus Adler Punkt de eh for a.meyer@hotel-adler.de (Chloe, 11 April)

Vielen Dank! (Sharon, 12 April)

The posing of the question in German suggests some understanding of the value of practising the target language, whilst enabling Sharon to present the persona of a post-beginner learner with a good command of the language: she demonstrates control of word order in terms of verb placement and an understanding that nouns in German are capitalised (see sections 4.1.1 and 4.2), and is able to use her German repertoire to further develop her language resources. Nonetheless, Chloe chooses to respond predominantly by drawing on English language resources, interweaving appropriate German words to answer the query in a mix of German and English elements, drawing on English to explain the rules that are then exemplified in German. It is clear from her answer that Chloe has a good working repertoire of German language resources and an understanding of common usage, and so her language choices must be seen not as a reflection of her language ability but rather a recognition of the respective roles of German and English in this online learning space (as discussed earlier), along with a possible evaluation of her peer's linguistic competence. We might argue that Chloe is drawing fully on her communicative repertoire to be helpful, and that this includes not only different languages but also modes, in that she uses a variety of graphic symbols to demarcate the linguistic items she is discussing, including quote marks "" and =.

5   Conclusion

This study set out to identify the language learning-related functions of learner translanguaging, as evidenced in the forum posts of a mass-scale open online instructed language learning environment. In so doing, it proposes a typology that begins to systematically capture the various ways in which this multilingual communicative practice can support language learning in educational contexts. Through detailed interactional analysis of selected examples, we identify and explore three key ways in which learners spontaneously mobilise their linguistic repertoires as language learning resources. In one such manifestation, bricolage, translanguaging is deployed as a self-directed learning strategy in the absence of sufficient target language competence to complete activities and fulfil communicative goals. Our analysis is the first to distinguish between overt and covert bricolage, and to detail how what has previously been considered 'error' or 'negative transfer' works in learner interaction as a positive translanguaging practice. In a second manifestation, language play, translanguaging enables learners to exploit differences and similarities between languages for humorous purposes in ways that draw on the assumed knowledge shared by the language learning community. Finally, translanguaging is shown to contribute to peer teaching and learning in the form of learner requests for help on the one hand and the provision of language-focused corrective feedback and translations on the other, all of which are other-directed strategies known to be effective in promoting learning. Our study thus details how translanguaging can be harnessed for language learning purposes, while providing a framework for further study.

We end this piece by suggesting that the kind of mass-scale open online learning context which formed the basis of our analysis serves as a microcosm of the wider contemporary world, bringing together people from a range of backgrounds and experiences, and that educators working in more conventional pedagogic contexts have much to learn from how learners spontaneously navigate the boundaries, mobilities and diversities of new translanguaging spaces such as this. The distinct online context of our study is noteworthy in that the lack of instructor presence appeared to encourage the spontaneous use of multilingual communication among its dispersed participants, a practice that is commonly inhibited, especially among adults, in light of their prior experiences of negative translanguaging spaces in connection with learning in general and language learning in particular. The similarities between online learning environments

and informal social media use also appear to have contributed to the emergence of this learner-driven practice.

In addition, our analysis points to the learning activity and its associated rubric in shaping whether and how translanguaging is used as a self- and other-directed teaching and learning practice. A restricted focus on specific outputs in some of the activities examined, along with the provision of relevant target language words and expressions, may have discouraged learners from engaging in bricolage, which was more evident in response to activities that created opportunities for interpersonally meaningful and authentic communication, such as introducing oneself and discussing one's work-life balance. Both these activities also included explicit instructions to learners to draw on languages other than German, thus inviting them to prioritise communicative goals over specific language requirements.

Currently instructed language learning environments remain largely immersive, target language-only spaces, in which the use of elements from learners' wider linguistic repertoires is generally discouraged. However, despite the distinct nature of the online space that informed our research, we believe that our findings have implications for other, more traditional classroom settings. In particular, our study highlights the importance of creating and shaping opportunities for authentic, meaningful, cooperative multilingual learner communication across online and in-person language learning contexts, that is to say, communication that is not overly prescribed or closely regulated by the teacher. We invite researchers of translanguaging in a range of online and offline settings to adopt, adapt and extend our emerging typology to better understand how spontaneous learner translanguaging manifests itself differently across educational contexts, and how it contributes to language learning gains.

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