



# Talking Lion and Bird – Translanguaging and Embodied Learning in Bilingual ECEC in Finland

Jonna Kangas<sup>1\*</sup>, Margita Sundstedt<sup>1</sup>, Hannah Kaihovirta<sup>1</sup> & Heidi Harju-Luukkainen<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Helsinki, Finland

<sup>2</sup>University of Jyväskylä, Finland

\*Contact corresponding author: Jonna Kangas, e-mail: [jonna.kangas@helsinki.fi](mailto:jonna.kangas@helsinki.fi)

## Abstract

Embodiment and bodily experiences are vital parts of communication and learning in the early years. Children are believed to develop their thinking processes and language skills through sensory and motor experiences in early childhood education while they show, touch, mimic, and think by doing; in other words, they are learning by doing. In this paper, embodied and playful learning activities are explored through a translanguaging approach.

The embodiment experiences in education can be understood as modalities of learning; this especially concerns play. Thus, the pedagogical scaffolding of these modalities by teachers can be analysed through a translanguaging approach. In Finnish early childhood education, there is a whole-child approach that considers children to be active agents in learning. Moreover, recognizing the whole child and viewing their development from social, physical, and mental perspectives have been rooted very strongly in pedagogical philosophy and practices in ECEC Finland through the playful learning approach.

In this paper, we emphasize the expression of children's embodiment and non-verbal communication when combined with spoken verbal languages and fantasy animal languages using a translanguaging approach. We focus on children's translanguaging practices and embodied expressions. Embodiment in learning practices is essential for children in their sensory-motor or pre-operational phase of development because they show, touch, mimic, and think through an active approach.

**Keywords:** *embodiment; translanguaging; playful learning*

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## Introduction

When considering small children's communication style, it is central to keep in mind that the body is the first tool that children use to examine how they relate to themselves and others (Björklund & Palmer, 2018). According to Björklund and Palmer (2018), the concept of bodily learning can be explained by the fact that the whole body is involved in learning, and communication is based on a wider range of expressions than just spoken language. It can, for example, be bodily movements when children are actively involved in play. Involvement and active learning are considered definitions of playful learning (Kangas & Harju-Luukkainen, 2022). The concept of involvement refers to intense mental activity, where a child is functioning at the very limits of his or her capabilities, with an energy 'flow' from intrinsic motivation (Csikszentmihalyi, 1985; Vygotsky, 1978). Embodiment and bodily experiences are vital parts of development and learning in the early years. Children are believed to develop their thinking processes and language skills through sensory and motor experiences when participating in education (Sommer et al., 2009). The way children express themselves physically through movement and expression can be understood to indicate their intense mental activity and participation in shared meaning-making processes (Laevers, 2003; Nyland, 2009). In early childhood education settings, especially where young children's activities include play, playful learning is understood to offer the best opportunities for participation, involvement, and meaningful learning (Bae, 2009; Kangas et al., 2019; Kangas & Harju-Luukkainen, 2022).

To date, these aspects of communication have not been the focus of translanguaging research, which has often focused on linguistic approaches to communication – and not on the interaction itself. The origins of the translanguaging concept can be traced to bilingual education in Wales, where it originally meant the purposeful and well-designed use of two languages for teaching, studying, and classroom communication inside one lesson (Lewis et al., 2012). Later, translanguaging practices have also been understood to mean the use of several languages in learning situations and educational settings through the whole child approach and children's agency. Thus, learning is understood as a holistic, kinaesthetic, tactile, and social process through the various means of communication, initiatives, actions, and emotions children experience in their daily life (see Kangas & Lastikka, 2019; Martín-Bylund, 2018; Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008).

In Finland, bilingual education has been studied extensively; for example, Harju-Luukkainen and Stolt (2016) have shown that while early bilingual language programs are effective, there is still a need for specific pedagogical practices as well as legislative support. Finland is a bilingual country (Finnish and Swedish) (Constitution of Finland, 1999), which has its roots in Swedish and Finnish joint history (Harju-Luukkainen et al., 2019). The Swedish speakers in Finland form a minority, constituting approximately 5 per cent of the country's entire population. The majority of the population, approximately 90 per cent,

are registered as Finnish speakers. The long history of having two language groups living side by side in the nation and enjoying equal rights from childcare up to university level in education has made an impact on Finnish policy documents, making them more language oriented than in many other countries (Garvis et al., 2018). Therefore, there are also multiple language immersion and second language learning opportunities for young school-children in Finland (Garvis et al., 2018; Harju-Luukkainen, 2013).

Next, Finnish early childhood education and care (ECEC) is known for its EduCare approach. Children are considered to be active agents in their learning process, and the whole-child approach is considered to be the basis of all educational activities and interaction (Kangas et al., 2015). Recognizing the whole child and viewing their development through social, physical, and mental aspects have been rooted very strongly in pedagogical philosophy and practices in ECEC Finland through the playful learning approach (Kangas et al., 2019). In this paper, we emphasize the role of the environment, interaction, and expression of young children's embodiment in learning as a part of the translanguaging approach in the early childhood education context in bilingual early childhood education (see Baker, 2011; Garvis et al., 2018).

Another starting point for learning through play lies in embodiment, where the whole body is used in play and learning processes. Embodiment refers to combining various physical actions with higher cognitive activities like thinking, reasoning, perceiving, and reflecting (Price & Rogers, 2004). Physicality, overall, is seen as being important for children's well-being and academic achievement, including conceptual thinking, communication, and use of language. For this reason, it is recommended in early childhood education and beyond that the active learning approach be applied across the curriculum (DuBose et al., 2008).

In this study, we focus on 3–4-year-old toddlers' visual and kinaesthetic expressions of bodily learning and embodiment from a translanguaging approach, namely translanguaging practices. Bodily learning means active learning experiences that early childhood education should include in everyday interaction and learning environments. Embodiment in learning practices is essential for children in the sensory-motor or pre-operational phase of development because children show, touch, mimic, and think by doing; in other words, they are learning by doing (Dewey, 1916; Leinonen & Sintonen, 2014).

The research questions are the following: (1) How do animal languages emerge in the concept of translanguaging in playful learning situations? (2) How do children use embodiment as a tool for communication and interaction?

## **Translanguaging in early childhood education**

As previously mentioned, the concept of translanguaging initially focused on the use of two languages in addition to well-designed learning and communication in the classroom

(Lewis et al., 2012). Conceptually, translanguaging resonates with the idea of common underlying proficiency where the communication and ability to become understood and understand are considered as important as the characteristics and structures of the language itself (Conteh, 2018; Cummins, 2009). Cummins (2009) has stated that interdependence in language emphasizes the positive benefits of transfer and transversality in learning. This is especially true in the early years when children are both learning the meaning-making processes of language(s) and assimilating vocabulary of the language(s) used in their everyday contexts; therefore, the focus of language learning should not only be limited to grammar and vocabulary but also to communication and, through this, the individual's thinking processes (see Vygotsky, 1987). As the well-known theory by Vygotsky (1987) suggests, the development of language skills is intertwined with thinking abilities and skills through social and cultural meaning-making processes.

Current Nordic research has argued that language should be considered multimodal and embodied; consequently, it should not be seen as a bounded system. From this point of view, the traditional understanding of the concept of translanguaging has been re-developed (Pesch, 2021). By observing children's communication from a framework of a semiotic repertoire, all spoken languages, sign languages, gestures, as well as multilingualism and embodiment, can be applied in research on multimodality (Kusters et al., 2017). For example, in play activities, children mimic and gesture non-human interaction, for instance communication between babies or animals; thus, they make meaning through the interaction (see Harju-Luukkainen et al., 2019; Howe et al., 2005). In the ECEC context, translanguaging practices and pedagogy have been studied by Pesch (2021) as well as Kultti and Pramling (2017). In Norway, Pesch (2021) has shown how the holistic view of pedagogical practices in kindergartens meets translanguaging in several respects and is adapted through mutual respect and the high value placed on childhood. In Sweden, Kultti and Pramling (2017) have found that translanguaging practices in the Nordic context take place through child-centred interaction in addition to active and play-oriented activities.

Teachers in bilingual kindergartens can use translanguaging practices and their bilingual resources to strengthen children's minority language, even in situations where the children themselves do not master the minority language (Kleemann, 2021). Children in Finland are allowed home-language education with a native teacher to support their motivation and connect the learning areas with their home language (Leinonen & Niemelä, 2012). In Norway, the importance of children's play with language, texts, symbols, and linguistic curiosity is highlighted in the context of translanguaging (Pesch, 2021).

Finally, there are challenges in considering translanguaging in research, policy, and practice (Conteh, 2018). If the concepts of code-switching and mixing forms of expression offer a tentative framework to define and contextualize multilingual practices, where would we then need translanguaging concepts (Goodman & Tastanbek, 2021)? However, it has

been shown that code-switching, interpretation – and even translation practices – could be located under translanguaging as an umbrella concept (Heugh, 2021). At the same time, Blackledge et al. (2014) have pointed out the limitations of this position. Especially in early childhood education, there is a meaningful role of multilingualism in daily communication. This is because non-verbal interaction, intended and unintended gestures and movement play an important role (Kaihovirta & Furu, 2019; Leinonen & Sintonen, 2014; Martín-Bylund, 2018). Blackledge et al. (2014) have shown that all humans are multilingual, and we have at our disposal a range of different ways of using language, even if we only speak and write in one way. Finally, the issue of children's rights and agency is always present when we are focusing on different means of communication (Conteh, 2018; Pesch, 2021). It is essential to ask if these rights are available only for those who master the use of spoken language as a means of showing initiative, negotiation, conviction, or emotions. This issue relates to the discussion on translanguaging with social justice in education (Blackledge et al., 2014) and with children's participation in the context of early childhood education (Kangas et al., 2019). In the context of translanguaging practices, we understand embodied learning as visual and bodily expressions of action, participation, and learning. These aspects are understood in turn as modalities of interaction, language, and communication, in our case involving fantasy or play languages such as animal language registers.

Regarding young children, it has been shown that translanguaging takes place through movement, gestures, expressions, and emotions as well as (a) spoken language(s) (Leinonen & Sintonen, 2014). Thus, in this study, we consider translanguaging practices. When considering early childhood education and starting with Vygotsky (1987), it has been shown that the development of language and cognitive abilities is strongly linked with the imagination and the social surroundings where the education is taking place. The embodiment and embodied experiences in education can be understood as modalities of learning. This is especially true concerning play; thus, the pedagogical scaffolding of these modalities by teachers can be analysed through using a translanguaging approach (see Kaihovirta & Furu, 2019).

## **Contextualising embodiment in the context of translanguaging**

Playfulness is considered to include different aspects of communication, participation, learning, and being in a united group of learners. The elements of playfulness include features of narration, insight, communication, creativity, embodiment, and action (Hyvönen & Ruokamo, 2005). Out of these elements of communication, narration and insight are more closely linked with children's cognitive abilities, while creativity, embodiment, and action include motor, social, and emotional competencies together with kinaesthetic

awareness and abilities (Kangas & Harju-Luukkainen, 2022). In short, narration refers to the use of imagination and storytelling and -making competencies, which are supported by both creativity and communication skills and abilities to listen, negotiate, and narrate the experiences forward. Insight is a form of problem-solving competencies and the ability to think creatively, or “out-of-the-box” (Hyvönen & Ruokamo, 2005). Active communication in play involves physical exercise and opportunities to show and use gestures and non-verbal notions (Leinonen & Sintonen, 2014). During play, non-verbal communication and body language, including sequences with a lack of verbal speech, are also present when children are encouraged to be active participants. These silent phases with a lack of speech can be active with respect to communicating using non-verbal communication (Martín-Bylund, 2018). After playing, children reflect on collaborative action where the meaningfulness of action inspires discussion and communication among them; as a result, play helps children to conceptualise abstract concepts and communicate verbally about them afterwards (Hyvönen & Ruokamo, 2005). Ledin and Samuelsson (2016) have identified the concept of bodily play and argue that the multi-modal interaction, which takes place during collaboration under bodily play, enables extended participation for all children. This is beneficial for children’s understanding of their social world; it also supports language development in bilingual children (Ledin & Samuelsson, 2016).

Embodiment and embodied experiences in education can be understood as modalities of learning; this especially concerns play (see Kaihovirta & Furu, 2019). The modalities of body presented in Table 1 shape the contextualisation of translanguaging practices in pedagogical practices and play in ECEC. Starting from the body in translanguaging practices, children express one or more languages using body language, including gestures or movements of the play’s character, whether human or animal. The body is understood as an important tool in playful learning in the contexts of action and embodiment when children mimic the movements and emotions of their role characters, which could be humans but might also be vehicles or animals (Hyvönen & Ruokamo, 2005). For example, when a child explains an experience involving an airplane, they lift their hands excitedly when representing wings (Leinonen & Sintonen, 2014). In the context of embodiment, the aspect of touch as a tool for translanguaging practices can also be considered (Samuelsson, 2022). The development of meaning-making around bodily learning as translanguaging practice brings to the surface the following knowledge (Table 1). The relationship between the translanguaging approach and embodied learning can be understood through critical-creative analysis. This involves examining the available resources and how meaning is created through actions that oscillate between what is visible and what is not; what is manifested and what remains unexpressed; and what is constructed through context. These interpretations are viewed as being brought into existence through context.



Table 1. Modalities of body, bodily experiences, and embodiment in learning (Kaihovirta & Furu, 2019, p. 178).

The body	The body is present and/or absent. The body includes the touch and material, concrete, and abstract (borrowed, symbolized touch in image). The body is the knowledge that can be shaped through visible and mental relationships in a paraphrase.
Bodily knowledge	Bodily knowledge is non-symbolic knowledge that can be embodied through symbols, archetypes, composition, contrast, and additions. Bodily knowledge can be conveyed multimodally or complexly through visual elements (direction and movement), metaphors, and visual narrative structures (foreground, middle ground, and background). Bodily knowledge is to become aware that through visual practices, one can try to shape body perceptions of bodily identity (for example, age or gender).
Embodiment in learning	Embodied learning does not take place in a vacuum, but always in an interaction, for example historical, cultural, sociological, or biological. In the paraphrases, students express the agent of co-creation in time and space. In visual practice, different people show different interpretations of visually reproduced physical activity in a wide range of perceptions, experiences, experiences, or references. Through embodied learning, the body emerges as part of the identity, expression, and existence; how embodiment learning experiences are shaped and communicated shows itself in diverse ways, even though the visual practice's tools and surface for expression are concrete (technique and material). Embodied learning is a multimodal narrative in a continuous and dynamic flow.

## Methods

The study was conducted as a video observation of the learning design of two kindergarten groups with one teacher and 6 to 7 children in each group. The children in the ECEC groups were between 3 and 4 years of age. All of them had been involved in the language immersion setting for less than three years, some of them for only a few months in the Swedish language kindergarten. The study took place in the Playful Learning Center (PLC). The PLC is a learning laboratory at the University of Helsinki that is specially designed to scaffold young children's active exploration and expression through play and playful activities (Sefton-Green et al., 2015). The observation data were analysed through content analysis using researchers' triangulation to discuss visual communication and embodiment themes. Ethics approval for the research was provided by the University Helsinki Research Ethics Committee, and signed written consent was obtained from the children's teachers and parents. The names of participants are coded for the analytical process and the faces are blurred from the images in the findings section to anonymise the participants.

The video data of this study consists of short video clips having a length between 14 to 300 seconds (table 2). The cameras were movable, and researchers controlled them with their wristwatches. The teachers were free to organise the class in a manner so that in one of the groups, the teacher led a longer morning session with a mathematical sorting activity, while in the other group, the teacher-led meeting was only about saying "good morning" to one another and introducing the Playful Learning Center, after which children were free to explore. While the children were focusing on self-initiated play in the learning environment, the teacher organised an artistic activity and interacted with children who wanted to paint (group 1) or create designs using sticks or paint (group 2) for a couple of children. While

some children were focusing on art education activities, the rest were focusing on playing. The researchers used the one camera to follow the artistic activity and the other to follow the play.

Table 2. Overview of the video data.

	Number of video clips		Including	Length variation seconds
	Group 1	Group2		
Morning session	11	2	Teacher-led meeting	42–300
Pair and small group artistic activity	6	8	Painting, building with sticks	42–120
Self-initiated play	13	16	Role play, motoric play	14–300
Other	1	2	Washing hands, etc.	42–240
Total	31	28		8,238 (2 h, 17 min and 18 sec)

Methodologically, the analyses are based on a hermeneutic interpretation (Ricoeur, 1988). Through the analytical process, we attempted to interpret and describe the children's experiences, respectfully, in terms of the meanings, intentions, and actions that characterise children's shared play in the preschool context (Kangas & Lastikka, 2019). The analysis was conducted through using the abductive approach, which is a process of systematized creativity in research to create "new" knowledge (Andreewsky & Bourcier, 2000) together with identifying and respecting the voice of every participant. In the analysis, children's interaction and communication during different activities were approached through their voices, actions, and meaning making. The combination of the theory, analysis, and, ultimately, the findings of this research is designed to form a holistic viewpoint to discuss the phenomenon of children embodied and translanguaging practice with a focus on early childhood education practices. In the process, specific observations and theoretical knowledge are discussed together to determine the different aspects of this phenomenon (Kovács & Spens, 2005).

Both video data sets were viewed by the researchers several times over, and pseudonyms were given to the children. The video data was then coded using a content analysis process with code names such as "expressing an idea," "communicating," "continuing interaction," or "expressing an idea about action." This coding was done in interaction with the theories using abduction to create systematic output phenomenon (Kovács & Spens, 2005). In the first step of the analysis, we looked for the use of fantasy and play languages in translanguaging and embodiment practices. At this point, we discovered a third interesting and recurring variable; this was animal language registers, where children were communicating through their play characters, and animals, using both sounds and non-verbal gestures as well as expressions. Finally, three excerpts were chosen to represent the overall data, where practices of translanguaging, embodiment, and animal language registers were all present. As researchers, we were trying to understand ongoing communication through its meaning while maintaining an analytical distance. Through this analytical process, it is possible to identify the shared meanings created by the children at play and describe how to comprise meanings beyond the children's intentions (Ricoeur, 1988).



## Findings

In the findings section, we focus first on the video data excerpts. To answer the first research question, we show the translanguaging practices that take place in the bilingual environment and the selected playful learning situations. We have chosen to write the children's speech first in the used language, for example, Swedish (Swe) or Finnish (Fin); after that, we provide an English language translation. Italic letters are used for all spoken languages: Swedish, Finnish, and animal languages. For the second research question, we highlight the use of the body, expressions of bodily knowledge, and bodily meaning-making representing learning. In the summary of the findings, we describe the connection between the practices of translanguaging, embodiment, and animal language registers.

### Video clip 1

In this first excerpt, three children are participating: Bella, Dana, and Eliot. They are focusing on self-initiated role-playing. They have explored the pillows and are now building blocks around the indoor mountain slide. In the clip, we are focusing on three simultaneous excerpts.

Eliot climbs up to the mountain slide and announces the start of the play: "*Jag va(r) pappa lejon och ska lite rutchka, jag komma ner...*" (Swe) [I'm a daddy lion, and I'll slide down a bit, I'll come down...]. Then he looks around for playmates, talking Lion: "*Grrrrr... roar. ROAR!*"

Bella enters the play by making eye contact with Eliot. She says: "*Beep, beep, beep,*" now talking Bird – and throws a yellow ball representing a flying bird towards Eliot, who is sitting on the mountain (image 1).



Image 1. Bella throws a yellow ball at Eliot.

Simultaneously, Dana wants to join the game and tries to build a second mountain using the big blocks (image 2, phase 1) and trying to reach the top; but she fails to climb up. The teacher supports the construction while Dana is climbing: *Blev det lite snett det där tornet?* [Did that tower become a little crooked?]. Dana answers by nodding and meowing and manages to get on the block. She then climbs up to a lower part of the mountain (image 2, phase 2). She observes the height where Eliot's daddy lion sits and talks "lion": "Roar, rooaaar!", adapts to the situation and decides: "Jag var lillasyster. Jag våga int klättra så här högt!" (Swe) [I was the little sister. I didn't dare to climb that high!]. Then she falls from the block and remains on the floor, lying on her back while waving her hands and legs (paws) in the air "heeheehee!!!" [laughing]. Eliot, the daddy lion, makes eye contact with Dana and waves his hand like a paw: "Ja du våga inte klättra så här högt" (Swe) [No, you didn't dare climb this high] (image 2, phase 3).

Sitting at ground level, Dana notices Bella, and both are crawling under the mountain between the blocks (image 2, phase 4). Bella still has the yellow ball in her hand. Dana comes up with a role for Bella, saying "...olla Äiti pallolejon" (Fin and Swe mixed in the same word) [...to be a mother, a ball lion]. Bella answers: "Ei. Mä oon vauvaleijona." (Fin) [No. I'm a baby lion]. Then Dana says herself: *Minä on pikkusiskolejon* (Fin and Swe mixed in the same word) [I'm a little sister lion]. Dana and Bella speak 'lion language,' saying, "meow, meow", and related growl-like speech sounds. Dana decides: "Jag vill kunga här och leka." (Swe, Swe and Fin mixed in the same word *kunga*, which in Swedish would be *gunga*) [I want to swing here and play]. Eliot, the daddy lion, scares the baby lion, Bella, back into the cave under the mountain. Then he makes himself big by opening his arms: "Akta er, räyh!" (Swe) [Watch you, Roar!].



Image 2. Eliot, Dana and Bella in lion play. Interaction phases 1–4.

Dana continues to create the play session with Bella. They collect the pillows and blocks lying around them. Dana shows sizes with her hands and upper body, saying: “*Sä teet pie-nen ja mä ison*” (Fin) [You make a little one and I make a big one]. Eliot comes down from the mountain and walks to the other side of the classroom, declaring: “*Vi flyttar nu!*” (Swe) [We’re moving now!]. Dana, who is already under the indoor tree [their new home], confirms “*Jo, vi flyttar nu. Till ett fint trädhem!*” (Sve) [Yes, we’re moving now. To a nice tree home!]. She shows the importance of moving by using body language. This is seen when she raises her hands and tenses her muscles (image 3).



Image 3. Moving to a new home.

In the lion play, children use three, even four, verbal languages: Swedish, Finnish, Lion, and Bird, and some words that are not quite any of these. Children communicate with each other by simultaneously using linguistic vocabulary, animal language, and body language. They interact naturally, and they seem to understand each other perfectly in all of these four languages. By roaring and beeping, they seem to mimic long conversations simultaneously when interacting through embodiment and movement in playful activity.

## Video clip 2

In the second excerpt, children are using paints around a table. The teacher prepares a finger-painting activity with the children.

Albin and Dana collect aprons, and the teacher asks Albin to pull up his sleeves, saying: “*Så Albin, dra upp dina ärmar!*” (Sve) [ Albin, pull up your sleeves!] [Swedish words *ärm* have two meanings, sleeve and arm].



Image 4. Dana imitates Albin’s movement.

Dana checks out what Albin is doing and pulls up her own sleeves. Simultaneously, Albin imitates Dana and pulls up his other sleeve (image 4).

Teacher: *Där var din hand!* [There was your hand!].

Albin reacts to the teacher's comment and shouts: "*Titta nu... så här högt*" (Swe) [Look now... this high] and shows his arms and hands to the teacher, who smiles and asks, "*Blir det nåt, Albin?*" (Sve) [Will it be anything, Albin?] (image 5). It is possible that Albin understood the meaning of "*dra upp dina ärmar!*" through both meanings as 'sleeves' and 'arms,' and when the teacher then refers to hand(s), he confirms that both his sleeves and arms are lifted up.



Image 5. *Så här högt!* [This high!] shows Albin.

The children in the background next to the mountain are loudly playing the lion game and roaring, "*WOAA, ROAR...*" Albin is influenced by the sound of the rough play in the background. He looks over at the lion and then back to his finger painting while mimicking the roaring sounds with his lips (image 6, phase 1).

The teacher seems not to be aware of the noise the "lions" are making: *Är det mycke färg? Hur känns det? Är den kall?* [Is that a lot of colours? How does it feel? Is it cold?]. Albin



Image 6. Curved fingers mimicking lion paws, interaction phases 1–2.



presses his hand to the paint and laughs. The boy who is in the lion play in the background shouts: *Jag vågar klättra så här högt!* [I dare to climb this high!]. He sits on the mountain and seeks contact with Albin by looking towards him. Albin turns around when hearing the lion boy and raises his hands towards the paper with fingers and nails curled like lion paws. He starts to tap the paper with these paws instead of just his fingertips and mimics the movement of a lion using his claws (image 6, phase 2).

The teacher notices that Albin is not focusing on the painting and asks: *Är du färdig? Vi går och tvättar händerna. Jag tar din stol.* [Are you ready? We go and wash our hands. I am taking your chair]. Albin gets up and walks towards the sink, then exclaims in Lion, roaring with a wide open mouth a faint but long-lasting *Woaa.*

Dana notices that the teacher and Albin have left her alone to paint. She seeks eye contact with the teacher, who is focusing on washing Albin's hands. Dana announces: *Janna jag e färdig* [Teacher, I'm done]. She walks over to the sink and puts her hands under the running water. She keeps her hands and fingers open, as she is fascinated by the water flowing between her fingers. The teacher turns her palms downwards and instructs: *Vi tvättar naglarna!* [We wash our nails!].

In the painting episode, the children are using both body language and embodiment in the painting activity as well as the lion play activity. Albin in particular is balancing between both activities and seems in his imagination to be slowly transforming into a lion. This transformation can be observed by focusing on how he changes his verbal communication with the teacher to non-verbal and silent communication. He also changes the way he touches the paper in front of him. The excerpt also shows how imitation is present during playful activities. This excerpt shows how translanguaging practices can involve silent communication, and small movements of, for example, the hands. It is also noteworthy that the teacher uses three different concepts when referring to hands *ärm* [arm], *hand* [hand], *naglar* [nails] during the interaction; it seems possible that Albin especially might assign several different meanings to these expressions. It also awakes consideration of teachers' observation skills and competence to recognize languages other than spoken ones, thereby seizing the opportunity to support these bilingual children when they are expressing themselves.

### Video clip 3

In the third video excerpt, four children are playing with tiny marshmallows and toothpicks. They pierce soft candies with sticks, making bunches of them. Kate is eager to taste one. She smells one and then tries to put some marshmallows in her pocket. The teacher says to Kate: *Vi tar inte hem nåt härifrån, men som jag sa tidigare att nu när ni har lärt er så kan ni göra detta hemma.* (Swe) [We don't take anything home from here... but as I said before, now that you've learned, you can do this at home, too].

Kate is still keen to taste the marshmallows. She smiles slyly and glances at the teacher, holding the candies in her hands, but is aware that the teacher has said she must not.

*Kate*: “*Dom ser så goda ut! Vill ta hem dom.*” (Swe) [They look so tasty! I want to take them home] She shows the marshmallow stick to her teacher. Teacher: “*Ja det förstår jag*” (Swe) [Well, I understand that]. Nikki, who is sitting on the opposite side of Kate, continues piercing the candies with toothpicks and says aloud: “*Jag kommer inte ta hem.*” (Swe) [I will not take home]. Jada listens to the conversation and nods: “*Vi leker att vi tar hem!*” (Swe) [We’ll play that we take home!]. Kate agrees with Jada: “*Ja! Vi leker att vi tar det*” (Swe) [Yes! We play that we take it [ home]. Teacher: “*Ni leker ja, ja med då är ju allting möjligt*” (Swe) [If you’re playing...yes...well then, in play everything is possible!]

Kate tries in several ways to get a taste of the marshmallow; she smells it, touches her lips to it, mimics swallowing some invisible candy and putting some candies in her pocket to take home. The teacher reminds her that materials are not allowed to be brought home, then leaves the marshmallow activity to participate in the play at the other end of the room. Kate, who is still very keen to taste the candies, seems very alert when the teacher goes away. She can’t resist the temptation and takes a quick taste with the tip of her tongue, licking the top of the marshmallow skewer (image 7, phases 1–2).



*Image 7.* Kate cannot resist the temptation to taste the candy, and offers a taste to her teacher, too. Interaction phases 1–3.

Kate quickly jumps up, being now quite excited by the sweet taste she has just felt in her mouth; she offers her teacher a tasting opportunity as well (image 7, phase 3). Smiling slyly and glancing at her teacher, Kate appears to be a bit overconfident because she knows that the teacher has not figured out that she has tasted the marshmallow. *Kate*: “*Nu ska du äta den här på riktigt. Jag gjorde en godispinne åt dig*” (Swe) [Now you’re going to eat this for real. I made you a lollipop!]. Teacher: “*Tack snälla, var den gratis?*” (Swe) [Thank you dear, was it free?]. *Kate*: “*Jo! Nu skall du äta den på riktigt!*” (Swe) [Yes! Now you must eat it for real!]. Kate claps her hands repeatedly and shows that now something has been done! She looks satisfied and shows the emotion, “I tasted, and I know what it tastes like” with her body, gestures, and facial expressions.

Meanwhile, Jada has also stealthily smelled and licked her marshmallow stick. She also rises from the floor and raises the hand that is holding the candy stick to her teacher (image 8, phases 1–2). Kate looks at Jada, seeming happy that she has also joined the game



and made a marshmallow lollipop for their teacher. The teacher takes the 'lollipop' and thanks Jada, who takes a few steps backwards while smiling broadly and holding her hands behind her back.



*Image 8.* Jada joins the play. Interaction phases 1–2.

In the third episode, the translanguaging practices were shown to involve the sensory-motor area of observation and learning. Smell and taste are not often areas teachers and other ECEC staff member consider when they are focusing on scaffolding language learning. The children were participating in the activity using their senses, embodiment, and movement. Playfulness and excitement were especially visible not only in the children's silent and embodied communication, but also in other emotions like Kate's confident expression. In this excerpt, the teacher was aware of embodiment and interacted with the children; he showed emotions by moving his body and using it to mimic children's experiences.

### **Summary of the findings**

In the summary of the findings, we describe the connection between translanguaging practices and embodiment. During the action taking place in the Playful Learning Center, children moved around and used their body and embodiment as well as several languages over the course of different activities: painting around the table, building blocks on the floor, or playing at places that lay higher up (like the mountain element). They were also expressing emotions and intentions through their verbal communication by using three – or even four – languages mixed together (lion and bird included). The four languages (lion and bird included) were blended and formed an important part of these children's

communication and interaction while being at the same time interrelated with embodied learning and meaning-making processes.

Finally, play language can be identified from children's actions and communication, including their spoken language, silent communication, non-verbal expression, and body language. An intention to enter the lion game was expressed by throwing a yellow ball representing a bird. Moving a house included purposeful walking and movement around the room. The excitement of transforming from a painter to a lion was expressed with claw-shaped hands. And finally, the intention to taste forbidden candy was hidden behind a playful invitation made directly to the teacher.

The children who participated in this study communicated a large range of expressions both in free play and planned learning situations. All these ways of communicating with their bodies about events, feelings, purposes, and wishes should be considered in ECEC more strongly, as an embodiment is essential in learning practices when children show, touch, mimic, and think by doing; in other words, they are learning by doing.

## Discussion

The translanguaging approach was created for bilingual education, and it was based on the idea of teachers using two or more languages in the classroom in well-designed and purposeful ways (Lewis et al., 2012). Current Nordic research has argued that language should be considered multimodal and embodied; as a result, it should not be seen as a bounded system. Seen from this point of view, the traditional understanding of the concept of translanguaging has been re-developed (see also Pesch, 2021). In this study, we have shown how children use these modalities of language through animal language and embodied expressions. When the translanguaging approach was transferred from teacher-led classroom assignments to Finnish early childhood education programs, where children more often use play and other self-initiated activities in small groups and different playgroups, the function and meaning of the translanguaging approach changed. ECEC in Finland follows the Nordic tradition, where children are understood as active and competent members of the education practices which shape meaning-making processes in play (Bennett, 2005; Kangas et al., 2019). However, in previous research studies, children's invented languages (like Lion or Bird) and their communication expressed through embodied functions are briefly discussed. In this study's first research question, we examined the forms of translanguaging that emerged through playful activities. We could show how the translanguaging approach, when considered along with embodiment and non-verbal communication, was also part of the linguistic entity in these activities. This study has shown how children used creative animal language, Lion and Bird, in communication and meaning making. The children used embodied approaches as they moved around, used gestures

and facial expressions and shaped their fingers into claws; they also, climbed, built blocks, made sticks, and painted with their “paws.” These findings are in line with the observations of Kusters et al. (2017) concerning the semiotic repertoire of translanguaging practices in ECEC; they are also in line with the Nordic ECEC approach where whole child participates in education (Kangas et al., 2019).

Regarding the modalities of learning in the area of embodiment, the findings suggest that the children were using their body, bodily knowledge, and embodied learning through the flow of individual activities and points of interest. Embodied learning cannot be separated from the body and bodily knowledge because children express their logic and emotions through body language, including gestures, movements, and bodily expressions (Kaihovirta & Furu, 2019). The second research question concerning embodied and active communication showed how the non-verbal and verbal expressions were dynamically connected in the reported examples in the findings. Children not only communicated through spoken languages, such as Finnish and Swedish, but also Lion and Bird; further, they communicated through gestures and expressions such as showing their lion “paws and claws.” Children also communicated about sizes, directions, and positions (behind, next to, etc). The embodied learning formed a continuous and dynamic flow through the narrative(s) of the play and play language, Simultaneously, the activities’ playful nature was constructed through active meaning-making (see Kaihovirta & Furu, 2019; Kangas et al., 2019).

The identified excerpts from the data also show children’s capability for multilingual communication. Children can be shown to develop their thinking processes and language skills through sensory and motor experiences, a notion which has also been stated in previous research (Sommer et al., 2009). The way the children expressed themselves bodily and physically not only through movement but also through two recognised languages combined with animal languages shows the existence of intense mental activity and participation in shared meaning-making processes (see Kaihovirta & Furu, 2019; Martín-Bylund, 2018).

In this research study, the translanguaging approach connected to bodily learning was identified through a critical-creative analysis where researchers observed children’s use of the resources they had at hand. This included their eye contact, initiative, actions, and animal languages. The researchers’ purpose was to understand the meaning-making of the acts while moving between what appears, what does not appear, what is brought into being, and what is not articulated, thus interpreted as being brought into existence through the context and interaction in play. The development of meaning-making around bodily learning as translanguaging brings to the surface the following knowledge as shown in this study’s three video excerpts (see also Table 1). Embodied learning does not take place in a vacuum; rather, it does so through interaction, for example historical, cultural, sociological, or biological interaction (Hyvönen & Ruokamo, 2005). To paraphrase, the children express the agent of co-creation in time and space (Leinonen & Sintonen, 2014). Through

embodied learning, the body emerges as a part of the identity, expression, and existence, showing us how embodiment learning experiences are shaped and communicated, and how children build their agency and participation in playful action (Kaihovirta & Furu, 2019; Kangas et al., 2019).

It is essential to ask if these rights are available only for those who master the use of spoken language as a means of showing initiative, negotiating, making decisions, or showing emotions. Play language and playful activities in children's self-initiated classroom interaction have not been previously considered through translanguaging research. However, because the research considers the translanguaging approach in learning in ECEC, we suggest that the languages and types of communication linked with play and embodiment would be essential elements in a more holistic support and scaffolding of young children's learning. Further, more research is needed in the field of small children's embodiment as well as on the concepts of translanguaging and multimodality in ECEC learning. We suggest studying what distinguishes these three concepts, including possible similarities and differences, in order to demonstrate how they could be best applied to young children's multimodal learning and development in ECEC.

## Author biographies

**Jonna Kangas** is a Docent and PhD of Education. She works as a University Lecturer and joint research member in Playful Learning Center, Faculty of Education Science, University of Helsinki. Her research focus is on play-based learning and pedagogy in early childhood education. She aims to understand learning processes through joy and participation both in children's learning and in teachers professional development. She uses her findings for designing innovative teacher training and mentoring programmes in Finland and developing countries. She is a director of blended teacher training program in University of Helsinki.

**Margita Sundstedt** is an University Instructor in early childhood education in a blended teacher training program in the University of Helsinki. She is interested in communication and learning in teaching and pedagogical practices. She develops teaching and pedagogical quality in bilingual education and act as project coordinator for the blended program. She uses her findings for designing innovative teacher training and mentoring programmes in early childhood education pre- and in-service training programs.

**Hannah Kaihovirta** is an Associate Professor (Docent) and a senior lecturer in the field of aesthetic didactics in education at the Swedish speaking teacher education department at the Faculty of Education at University of Helsinki. Her research focus includes visual arts, drama education, contemporary art, sustainable didactics, and multi-literacy. Her research

aims are crossing boundaries in contemporary arts education, digital and multimodal literacy in arts-based, arts-led, and arts-informed education.

**Heidi Harju-Luukkainen** is a Professor and has published more than 250 scholarly papers and worked in more than 30 projects globally. She has attracted more than 7 million euros of funding in her research teams. Harju-Luukkainen has worked in multiple countries in top research universities (UCLA, USC) as well as in many Nordic research universities (HU, JYU, GU, NORD). She has developed education programs for universities, been a PI of PISA sub-assessments in Finland. At the moments she leads two international research groups and has been working in different academic leadership positions for more than a decade.

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