



Article

Gamtoomina Asset... They Know-How... Eesatti Sana: **Evidence of Translanguaging in SME International Business Interaction**

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A B S T R A C T

Multilingual communication is a central feature of international business interaction in small and medium enterprises (henceforth SMEs), where multilingual speakers often need to negotiate meaning across linguistic and cultural differences. However, studies of meaning negotiation among these speakers in business interaction is still relatively scarce. This article, therefore, examines multilingual speakers' use of translanguaging in naturally occurring international business meetings to sustain communication, mediate understanding, and accomplish professional tasks. Participants were four SMEs practitioners and their six international interlocutors, all of whom were involved in intercultural communications discussing product and business promotions. The six international interlocutors were prospective buyers, business representatives, and partners. Drawing on qualitative analysis of audiovisual recordings from four face-to-face business meetings, the study explores how participants translanguaged Minangnese, Indonesian, English, and Swahili, together with bodily postures, gaze, material artefacts, and digital resources in the course of multicultural interaction. The findings showed that translanguaging functions as a strategic multilingual resource for establishing shared understanding, supporting mediation and negotiation, building trust and intercultural alignment, and enabling creative meaning-making in professional encounters. The study also revealed that English does not operate as a self-sufficient and autonomous medium, but as one resource within a broader communicative ecology in which local and global repertoires coexist and are mobilized according to interactional needs and communicative purposes. By examining multilingual business communication in the Indonesian SME context, this article contributes to research on multilingual communicative practices and highlights the importance of translanguaging as a flexible communicative resource in professional life.

I. INTRODUCTION

In global business interaction, practitioners often need to communicate in different languages and use different tools of communication to negotiate meaning, coordinate action, manage relationships, and complete professional tasks

in real time. Although English often functions as a shared resource in cross-border encounters, communication in such contexts does not depend on rigid structure and native-speaker norms. What is important is whether a business partner can reach a mutual understanding, maintain an interactional

flow, and accomplish professional goals across diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Jenkins, 2015; Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2014; Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2012). In multilingual settings, the use of a mix of different languages and ways of communicating is shaped by their life experiences, where they have been, and what they need to say (Blommaert & Backus, 2013; Blommaert & Rampton, 2011; Jørgensen et al., 2011). Here, language is not just something people use to convey information, but a dynamic and constantly changing part of who people are and how people interact with each other. This suggests that international business communication is collaborative in nature, and that an understanding of each other in an effective communication situation among different kinds of environments beyond a monolingual system governed by fixed linguistic boundaries is essential. This is important because it shifts the focus on linguistic boundedness to semiotic resources in communicative practices.

This reconceptualization shaped the part of a broader development that challenges structuralist assumptions about language as stable, autonomous, and separable system. Construed in this way, verbal language alone is insufficient in accounting for how meaning is constructed and achieved. Gestures, bodily orientation, gaze, material objects, spatial arrangements, and digital resources do more than simply support verbal interaction; they actively contribute to the ways meaning is produced, negotiated, and given a degree of stability (Blackledge & Creese, 2017; Canagarajah, 2018; Jonsson & Blåsjö, 2020; Wei, 2011). This perspective is particularly important to a pluralistic understanding of language because it approaches communication as the fluid coordination of available repertoires rather than as the separate use of distinct named language.

Within this broader orientation, translanguaging provides a specific, useful lens for understanding how multilingual speakers mobilize and draw on their full range of communicative resources in specific interactions. It involves more than switching between supposedly distinct languages and is not confined to classroom practice. Instead, translanguaging describes the flexible use of linguistic, embodied, spatial, and material resources through which multilingual speakers construct meaning, establish shared understanding, and respond to the demands of particular situations

(Canagarajah, 2012; Garcia & Wei, 2014; Otheguy et al., 2015; Wei, 2018). These viewpoints redirect the focus from concern about linguistic purity to communicative effectiveness. It shows how speakers draw on whatever resources are at their disposal to maintain interaction, particularly in the context where interlocutors do not share equally comparable linguistic repertoires.

This perspective is highly relevant to international business. A study on Business English as a Lingua Franca has shown that English in global business communication is not a single uniform entity, but a flexible contact resource shaped by the communicative purposes of its users (Jenkins, 2015). In business settings, this insight has been developed through the concept of Business English as a Lingua Franca, or BELF, which describes English as used among professionals for whom intelligibility, efficiency, and relational management often matter more than grammatical conformity to native-speaker norms (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2014; Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2012). Multinational workplace communication cannot be understood in terms of “English only”. Research in this field shows that professionals often draw on several languages and communicative strategies to establish shared understanding within particular institutional and interpersonal contexts (Hua, 2014). Even in organization where English is positioned ideologically as “the language of business,” everyday communication remains multilingual in practice and it is also influenced by local norms, language policy, and institutional expectations (Cogo & Yanaprasart, 2018).

Recent research has provided more evidence that translanguaging is central to interactions in business and workplace settings. Ai, Hao, and Qiao (2022) find that multilingual professionals use translanguaging to facilitate meaning-making, express intended messages more clearly, and manage intercultural communication. Jonsson and Blåsjö (2020) have pointed out that workplace communication often involves the flexible and dynamic harmonisation of multilingual and multimodal resources, especially in contexts where written, visual, and interactional practices intersect. In a similar vein, Langinier and Ehrhart (2020) have argued that the growing presence of English in organizations does not simply rationalize communication; it can also disconcert

existing multilingual practices. Takino (2020) highlights how the use of BELF is tied to issues of competence, power, and professional legitimacy, while Tsuchiya (2020) shows that mediation and translanguaging are central to sustaining interaction in BELF meetings. All of these studies indicate that global business communication is not simply transactional, rather it is relational, negotiated, and significantly shaped by the flexibility of the repertoire.

A translanguaging perspective must also take multimodality into account. In everyday interaction. Canagarajah (2018) argues that multilingual communication must be analyzed through spatial repertoires, mobility, and the situated organization of communicative resources. From an interactional perspective, communicative alignment is produced through the ongoing coordination of such resources in context. Bucholtz and Hall (2004, 2005) draw attention to the embodied nature of translanguaging, meaning that social relations emerge through situated linguistic and semiotic practices rather than through language alone. Li Wei's (2011) concept of translanguaging space is especially helpful in this respect because it describes how multilingual speakers create communicative environments in which diverse linguistic, cultural, and experiential resources can be combined and brought into meaningful relation (Wei, 2011)

These insights are especially relevant for SMEs engaged in international trade. In such settings, interaction may take place in meetings, trade fairs, product demonstrations, factory visits, or digitally mediated communication through WhatsApp, Instagram, Telegram, and email. Communication often involves not only spoken language, but also images, videos, catalogues, labels, samples, measurements, and mobile-phone displays. In this sense, multilingual business communication is inherently multimodal. It is also deeply mediated. Where participants do not have comparable linguistic resources, understanding frequently relies on paraphrasing, rewarding, repetition, clarification, translation, and shared interpretation. In this setting, mediation is not merely the transfer of information. Mediation in such contexts is not simply the transfer of information from one language to another; it is an interactional process through which the meaning becomes accessible despite linguistic and cultural differences. This is in line with current research

in the multilingualism field, which emphasizes intercultural communication, language-sensitive interaction, and the practical importance of linguistic diversity in workplace or organizational contexts.

Although identity is not the central discussion of this research, which focuses primarily on business communication, it remains an important supporting dimension of the analysis. In professional encounters, participants do more than exchange information; through their communicative choices, they also establish positions associated with authority, expertise, authority, solidarity, professionalism, and cultural affiliations. Such identity is not treated here as a stable characteristic that speakers simply bring into an interaction. Rather, they are perceived as socially produced and continually restructured through discourse and situated practice (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004, 2005). This processual understanding of identity has become increasingly prominent in translanguaging research. Lee and Wei (2024) introduce transpositioning to describe how multilingual speakers move between subject positions while drawing on different communicative resources. Tai (2025) likewise indicates that multilingual encounters may involve ongoing changes in participants' role, shifts in alignment, and identity. In the present study, however, these concepts are used selectively rather than adopted as the main theoretical framework. Their values lie in clarifying how participants position themselves and one another through the multilingual and multimodal practices of business interactions.

Small and medium-sized enterprises operate under communicative conditions that may differ considerably from those of large multinational corporations. Whereas larger companies may have formal language policies, professional translation services, and structured language-training programs, SMEs often depend on flexible practices developed through experience and adapted to local circumstances. Their international interactions may therefore combine English with national, regional, and community languages, alongside non-verbal and digitally mediated resources used to manage differences in communicative access.

These conditions are particularly relevant in Indonesia. The communicative orientations and language attitudes of Indonesian SME practitioners are shaped not by English alone,

but by the interaction between local, national, and global resources (Listiana, et al, 2005). English itself also acquires meaning through local language ideologies, public discourses, and the wider sociolinguistics environment in which it is used (Sugiharto, 2025). Indonesia thus provides an important setting for investigating how multilingual professional communication develops through the negotiation of both locally grounded and internationally circulating resources

Despite the burgeoning scholarly interest in translanguaging, Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF), workplace multilingualism, and multimodal interaction, relatively limited research has examined how these practices operate in the international activities of SMEs, especially in multilingual, non-Western contexts. This limitation is significant because communication in smaller enterprises is often spontaneous, relational, and closely associated with the linguistic resources available within their particular communicative practices. Examining such settings can therefore extend current understanding of international business communication beyond the practice of large corporations.

The present study addresses this issue by focusing on business interaction involving Minangnese, Indonesian, English, and Boran or Swahili. The presence of these linguistic resources demonstrates that professional communication cannot be adequately explained through English alone. Instead, participants draw strategically on local, national, and transnational repertoires in response to their roles, immediate communication demands, and the interaction's evolving direction. This research reveals how practitioners manage unequal access to linguistic resources, mediate intercultural differences, and construct professional meaning through multilingual and multimodal practices. In this way, the study contributes not only to research on international business communication but also to wider linguistic discussion of multilingualism, intercultural mediations, dialogue, and the continuing importance of local languages in professional life.

Therefore, this study examines how Indonesian SME practitioners use translanguaging in naturally occurring international business interactions. Rather than treating translanguaging as a phenomenon associated primarily with educational settings, this

article approaches it as an interactional resource in multilingual professional life. More specifically, it investigates how participants deploy linguistic and multimodal repertoires to negotiate meaning, mediate understanding, sustain relationships, and maintain communication across linguistic and cultural differences. By doing so, the study contributes to scholarship on multilingualism in professional settings and shows how communicative competence in SME international trade is co-constructed through pluralistic, situated, and semiotically rich interaction.

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do SME practitioners use translanguaging and multimodal resources to achieve meaning-making in international business interaction?
2. How does translanguaging function as mediation for business collaboration, negotiation, and intercultural understanding in multilingual SME business meeting?

II. METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design informed by ethnographic sensibilities and interactional sociolinguistics. It is aimed at examining naturally occurring multilingual business interaction rather than language use elicited through interviews or experimental tasks. The concern was related to how translanguaging operated in real-time international business encounters involving Indonesian small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) practitioners and their international interlocutors.

The study viewed business communication as situated social action accomplished through talk, embodied conduct, material artefacts, and digitally mediated resources. Although English appeared as an important shared resource, communicative effectiveness was not measured against native-speaker norms. Instead, it was examined in terms of how participants used multilingual and multimodal resources to negotiate meaning, mediate understanding, maintain relationships, and accomplish professional tasks.

Participants

The participants consisted of four Indonesian SME practitioners and six of their international

business interlocutors who took part in four naturally occurring face-to-face business meetings. These four Indonesian SME practitioners (anonymized as EA, PM, KO, and KB1) were selected based on three categories of the length of their experiences in doing import-export business: KB1 as a beginner (1 year), KO and PM as middle (10 years), and EA as an expert (more than 19 years). In the present study, they were involved in product explanation, business promotion, negotiation, and intercultural communication with potential or existing international partners. The six international interlocutors included prospective buyers, business representatives, and partners who interacted with the Indonesian SME practitioners in professional settings (anonymized as KN1, KN2, NG, MT, MM, and OP).

The meetings took place in offices, meeting rooms, and trade-expo environments. Across the dataset, participants drew on Minangnese, Indonesian, English, and Boran or Swahili, together with gesture, gaze, object handling, printed materials, product samples, and mobile-phone displays.

Participants were included based on the

following criteria: they were directly involved in an international SME business encounter; the interaction occurred naturally as part of business activity; the meeting involved multilingual and/or multimodal communication; participants provided informed consent to be recorded; and the recording captured interactional moments relevant to meaning-making, mediation, negotiation, or relationship-building. All names of participants, companies, products, and other identifying details were anonymized. Participants are referred to using coded abbreviations throughout the analysis, as can be seen in detail in Table 1 below.

Research Instruments

The main research instrument was an audiovisual recording of naturally occurring business meetings. A handheld smartphone camera was used to record spoken interaction and visible semiotic resources such as gesture, gaze direction, body movement, object handling, product samples, brochures, packaging, and phone screens.

In addition to the recordings, the study used an observation note sheet and a transcription-and-coding matrix. The observation notes helped document the setting, participant roles, visible

Table 1. Participant master list

Code	Status	Age	Gender	Business / Product	Role in SME / Interaction	Market Countries	Years in SME	Language abilities	Appears in meeting(s)
EA	case participant	45	male	Eco-friendly plastics, coffee, export aggregation	Owner / exporter-aggregator	Africa; Middle East; Central Asia; Indian sub-continent	19	English; Indonesian; Minang	M1
PM	case participant	48	male	Food products (banana chips, flour)	Producer / Indonesian SME practitioner	NA	NA	English; Indonesian; Minang	M1
KB1	case participant	45	female	Cooking spices	SME Owner (Indonesian)	Philippines; Africa	3	English; Indonesian; Balinese	M4
NG	business interlocutor	50	male	Trading	President, Indonesian Nigerian Chamber of Commerce and Industry	NA	NA	English; Igbo	M4
KO	Case participant	50	male	Coffee export	Indonesian SME owner	Indonesia	NA	English; Indonesian	M3
OP	Business interlocutor	45	make	Coffee (Coffee café)	Buyer/café owner (Oman)	Muscat, Oman	2	English; Arabic	M3
KN1	business interlocutor	45	male	Food	Trader/business partner (Kenya)	NA	NA	English; Boran	M1
KN2	business interlocutor	55	male	Food	Business partner of KN1 (Kenya)	NA	NA	English; Boran	M1
MA	business interlocutor	NA	female	Food	Trader / business partner (Kenya)	NA	NA	English; Swahili	M2
MT	business interlocutor	NA	male	Food	Business partner of EA (Kenya)	NA	NA	English; Swahili	M2

artefacts, and general interactional context. The transcription-and-coding matrix was used to organize excerpts, identify languages and semiotic resources used, record English glosses or translations where needed, and code the interactional functions of translanguaging. No questionnaire was used because the study focused on naturally occurring interactions rather than self-reported perceptions.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted in several steps. First, naturally occurring international business meetings involving Indonesian SME practitioners were identified. The researchers ensured that the meetings were relevant to business-related activities such as product explanation, negotiation, collaboration, clarification of specifications, and intercultural exchange.

Second, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, the recording procedure, and the use of anonymized excerpts for research publication. Consent was obtained before recording.

Third, the meetings were recorded using a handheld smartphone camera positioned to capture both spoken interaction and relevant visible resources. Since the study focused on naturally occurring interaction, no interview prompts, questionnaires, or experimental tasks were introduced during the meetings.

Fourth, the recordings were reviewed repeatedly. Interactional episodes were selected when multilingual or multimodal resources played a visible role in business-related meaning-making. These included moments of clarification, repair, lexical search, product explanation, artefact-supported demonstration, confirmation, negotiation, and relational work.

Finally, selected episodes were transcribed using an interaction-oriented format. Spoken utterances were transcribed in the language in which they occurred, with English glosses or translations added where necessary. Pauses, overlap, hesitation, emphasis, and relevant embodied actions were marked selectively when they contributed to the analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis combined interactional sociolinguistics, translanguaging analysis,

multimodal analysis, and reflexive thematic analysis. Interactional sociolinguistics was used to examine how participants mobilized linguistic and contextual cues in real time. Translanguaging analysis was used to identify how participants moved across Minangnese, Indonesian, English, and Boran or Swahili to accomplish communicative work. Multimodal analysis was used to examine how gesture, gaze, product samples, documents, and mobile-phone displays contributed to meaning-making. Reflexive thematic analysis was used to identify broader patterns across the four meetings.

The analysis was done in several stages. First, the recordings were watched repeatedly to identify interactional episodes relevant to the research questions. Second, each selected episode was bounded sequentially, beginning with the turn that initiated the focal issue and ending when participants displayed understanding, agreement, or movement to another activity. Third, the excerpts were coded according to the functions of translanguaging, including clarifying product information, stabilizing technical specifications, mediating understanding, managing negotiation, building rapport, and supporting intercultural alignment. Fourth, the codes were compared across meetings to identify recurring themes.

The analysis was aligned with the two research questions. For the first research question, the analysis focused on how SME practitioners used translanguaging and multimodal resources to accomplish meaning-making. Main central of the second research question focuses on the mediating role of translanguaging in supporting collaboration, facilitating negotiation, and promoting intercultural understanding in business interaction.

Particularly complex and rich interactional episodes were examined through moment analysis, which served as the main analytical approach in this study. These episodes were selected because processes of meaning-making, coordination, and participant positioning were especially prominent within them. The analysis considered the sequencing and timing of utterances, movement between languages, embodied actions, the use of material objects, and changes in participant alignment. Transpositioning was used as a supplementary interpretive concept to explore how participants located themselves and others in relation to professional authority, expertise, solidarity, and

legitimacy.

All transcription, coding, and interpretation were completed manually through a transcription-and-coding matrix rather than with qualitative analysis software such as NVivo or ELAN. Several procedures were used to strengthen the trustworthiness of the analysis. Recording was reviewed repeatedly, and the selected extracts were interpreted in relation to the wider interactions from which they were drawn, and coding categories were revised through comparison across different meetings. The resulting interpretations were therefore grounded in patterns that reoccurs throughout the dataset, rather than being based solely on individual or exceptional instances.

III. RESULTS

This section addresses the research questions by examining translanguaging as a form of practical communicative work. The findings are presented across four naturally occurring international business meetings to be compared more clearly. Across the dataset, participants did not merely alternate between languages. Instead, they drew on their multilingual resources to establish shared understanding, manage negotiation, develop rapport, and position themselves in relation to expertise, cooperation, and professional legitimacy.

The interactional outcomes were also strongly multimodal. Spoken contributions were coordinated with gesture, gaze, the handling of objects, printed documents, and display on digital screens. Translanguaging, therefore, emerged as part of a broader process of meaning-making in which linguistic, embodied, material, and visual resources worked together to support communication.

The analysis presented in this section draws on the selected excerpt that illustrates the most significant patterns identified across the data findings. Longer interactional sequences in business meeting interactions is included in the appendices and linked to the discussion through segment labels. Figures are used selectively where visual evidence contributes directly to the interpretation of multilingual conduct and participant alignment.

Translanguaging for shared understanding

In some of the episodes in this research, SME participants draw on English, Indonesian, and Minangnese, together with visible material resources. This communication strategy is done

in order to stabilize reference, clarify product specifications, or confirm information relevant to product evaluation. A particularly clear illustration appears in the Nairobi meeting, where the term flour proves to provide participants with a shared point or shared references. Rather than resolving the issue through a single translation, the participants step by step narrowed the meaning by moving between English, Minangnese, and Indonesian. As can be seen from excerpt 1. term such as *tepung*, *tapuang*, *talas betung* and *yam* were introduced and tested until the discussion in that meeting reached an interpretation that was sufficient precise for evaluating the product.

Similar patterns can be observed in several other episodes across the finding dataset. Participant combined multilingual resources with visualizations to clarify specifications, verify product information, and stabilize reference during the meeting. The significance of these sequences lie less in achieving exact lexical equivalence in the collaborative process within which meaning was progressively refined. What was ultimately important was whether the participants in the Nairobi business meeting could establish a workable understanding that allowed them to continue the business activity.

Excerpt 1. M1: Shared reference building through translanguaging

KN1 : ... it is a very... very... **healthy food**.

EA : **The flour?**

KN1 : Yes.

EA to PM: O... *tepung... tapuang... tapuang*.

(Indonesian/Minangnese: "Oh... flour... flour... flour.")

Intended meaning: EA is rephrasing KN1's reference to identify the product category as flour, to confirm whether his understanding of healthy food is correct for the flour products he offers)

PM : *Tepung tapioka?*

(Indonesian: "Tapioca flour?")

Intended meaning: PM confirming to EA whether the flour being discussed is the tapioca flour product.)

EA to PM: No... no... no... *tepung... talas betung...*

(Indonesian/Minangnese: "No... no... no... flour... talas betung.")

Intended meaning: EA rejects tapioca as the category and specifies that the product is flour made from talas betung, a tuber/root crop similar to yam.)

KN2 : It is like wheat? I don't think it's wheat...

EA : ...Indonesian does not grow wheat. It is *talas betung*

(Indonesian/Minangnese: "It is taro.")

Intended meaning: EA try to give understanding to KN2 that the healthy food is coming from the taro plant).

EA : It is more like yam...

KN2 : Yam? ... like sweet... potato?

EA : Yes, like that, it is from ground.

In excerpt 1, when the participants in this business meeting do a translation, is not only a linguistic transfer but also a process of shared reference building. The movement from “flour” to *tepung/tapuang*, then to *talas betung*, while also using phone images, hand gestures, and product packaging, as shown in Figure 1, to construct shared understanding, helps participants narrow the meaning from a general product category to a specific local ingredient. The intended meaning of *talas betung* is not simply “flour,” but a locally known tuber-based product that the participants make understandable through comparison with “yam” and “sweet potato.”

In this episode, understanding is achieved cumulatively through the different roles taken by the participants. KN1 is an international business interlocutor who is trying to explain the product in English to KN2 by describing it as “a very healthy food.” However, this description is still general and does not identify the product clearly. EA, an Indonesian participant who mediates between the international interlocutors and the local SME side, then checks the meaning by asking, “The flour?”

This question shows that EA is trying to narrow KN1’s broad description into a recognizable product category. When KN1 confirms “Yes,” and while still pointing to his handphone’s image, EA shifts into Indonesian and Minangnese by saying *tepung/tapuang*, meaning “flour,” to make the reference accessible to PM as the local Indonesian business partner.

The subsequent turn demonstrates that the category “flour” is still not detailed enough. PM offers *tepung tapioka* (“tapioca flour”), but EA rejects this candidate with “No... no... no...” and refines the reference into *tepung talas betung*, meaning flour made from *talas betung*, a local tuber/root crop. KN2, another international interlocutor, then tries to understand the product through a more familiar category by asking whether it is like wheat. EA responds by clarifying that Indonesia does not grow wheat and then compares *talas betung* to yam. KN2 further checks the meaning through the phrase “like sweet potato,” and EA accepts the approximation by saying, “Yes, like that, it is from ground.”

This exchange shows that shared understanding is built gradually through questioning, candidate offering, rejection, refinement, comparison, and confirmation. KN1 introduces the product in broad English terms, EA mediates across English, Indonesian, and Minangnese, PM

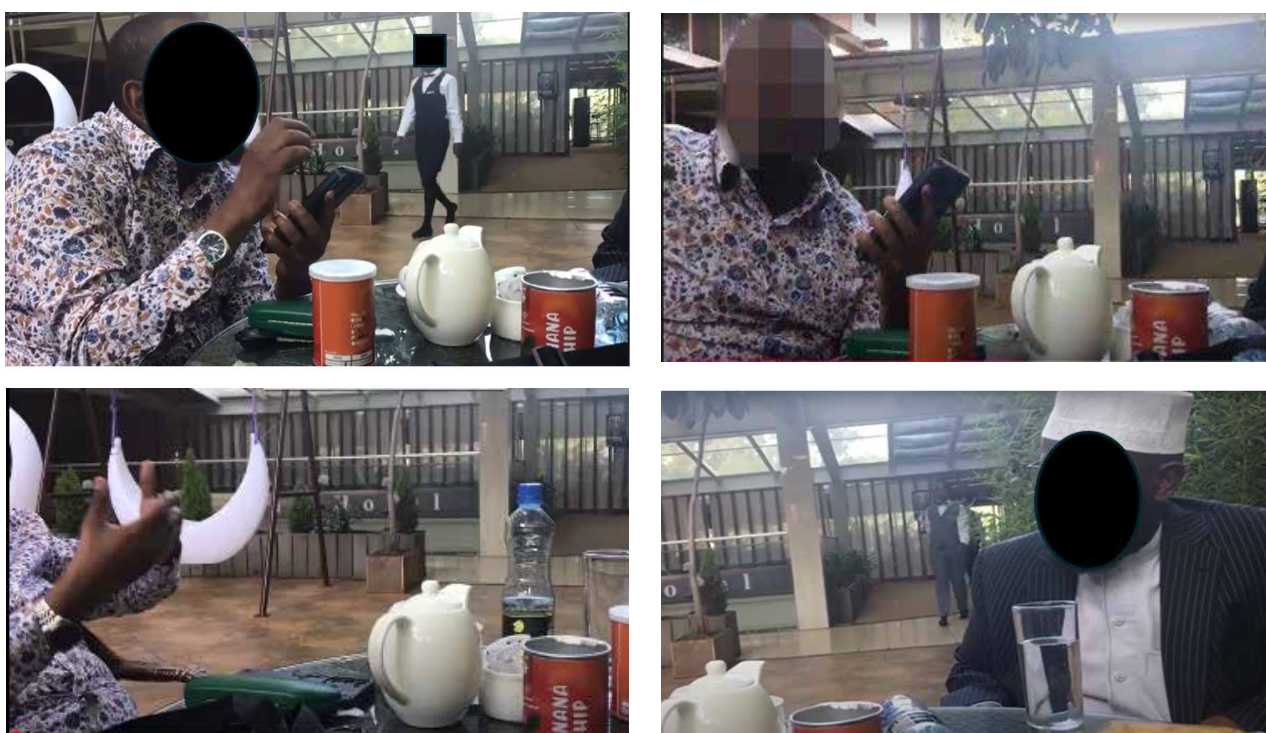


Figure 1. Multimodal anchoring during shared reference building

offers a local candidate category, and KN2 tests the meaning through familiar food categories. Translanguaging, therefore, supports more than lexical approximation. It enables the participants to stabilize a business-relevant product reference by moving from “healthy food,” to “flour,” to *tepung/tapuang*, to *talas betung*, and finally to “yam/sweet potato” as an approximate shared understanding.

A comparable pattern emerges in a separate SME business meeting during a discussion of the coffee’s growing altitude as can be seen from excerpt 2. Unlike the earlier issue of identifying a shared referent, this exchange concerns the clarification of a technical product specification. To obtain the required information, the buyer’s question is briefly reformulated in Indonesian and directed to the participant who was able to answer it. The response is then rendered back into English in concise form for the buyer. Shared understanding becomes evident when the buyer repeats and accepts the information while simultaneously examining the coffee sample. Verbal confirmation and embodied evaluation, therefore, work together to show that the answer is adequate for the purposes of the interaction. The episode illustrates that translanguaging does not necessarily remove every possible ambiguity. Instead, it enables participants that involved in the conversation to establish a sufficiently clear understanding for the business discussion to continue productively.

Excerpt 2. M3: Specification alignment through reformulation and confirmation

OP: What’s the sea level of this?

KO: *berapa...*

(Indonesian: “... how high...”)

Intended meaning: KO starts to process OP’s question, but it has not yet completely reformulated it.)

EA: what the sea... oh sea level?

(Intended meaning: EA checks and clarifies OP’s phrase “sea level” before translating it.)

EA to KO: *berapa ketinggian dia, Bang?*

(Indonesian: “What is its altitude or its height, brother?”)

Intended meaning: How high are the coffee trees from the KO supplier’s coffee plantation above sea level, while “Bang” is a respectful address term.)

KO: *ketinggian biasanya di atas one thousand two hundred... seribu dua ratus...*

(Indonesian: “The altitude is usually above one thousand two hundred... one thousand two hundred.”)

Intended meaning: KO delivers the technical specification by referring at which the altitude where the coffee is cultivated, mostly at 1,200 meters above sea level.)

EA: One thousand two hundred... one thousand two hundred.

(Intended meaning: EA reproduces and restates the key specification for OP.)

OP: One thousand two hundred... I see.

(Intended meaning: OP receipt the information and shows the understanding that the altitude of the coffee tree is 1,200 meters above sea level.)

This excerpt shows how translanguaging functions as specification alignment in a business encounter. OP’s question, “What’s the sea level of this?”, is not a casual question. It appeals more to a technical point relevant to product evaluation, especially in coffee business communication, where altitude can index quality, origin, and market value. Nevertheless, the phrase “sea level” requires interactional work prior to be fully accessible to all participants.

As shown in Figure 2, the participants are physically oriented toward the product and the ongoing business discussion. The figure helps demonstrate that the talk is not abstract anymore, in fact, it is attached to a visible product and a real-time evaluative moment. OP says “good” while physically engaging with the coffee sample, then asks, “what’s the sea level of this uh?” His evaluation is not produced through speech alone: it is connected to smelling the coffee, holding the cup, orienting his body toward the product, maintaining eye contact, and asking for altitude information as a marker of coffee quality. The participants’ bodily orientation, gaze, and attention to the product support the confirmation and reformulation that “sea level” is being treated as a product specification.

When EA first repeats and checks the phrase, “what the sea... oh sea level?”, he is displaying a moment of lexical processing. Then, he reformulates the question into Indonesian: *berapa ketinggian dia, Bang?* This reformulation is important because EA does not translate the phrase mechanically. Instead, he alters “sea level” into *ketinggian* or “altitude/height,” which is more telling in the local business context. The pronoun *dia* refers to the coffee/product, while *Bang* creates a respectful and familiar tone toward KO. In this way, EA mediates both technical meaning and interpersonal alignment.

In response to the question, KO’s the says, “*ketinggian biasanya di atas one thousand two hundred... seribu dua ratus...*”. It provides the needed specification. EA then repeats “one

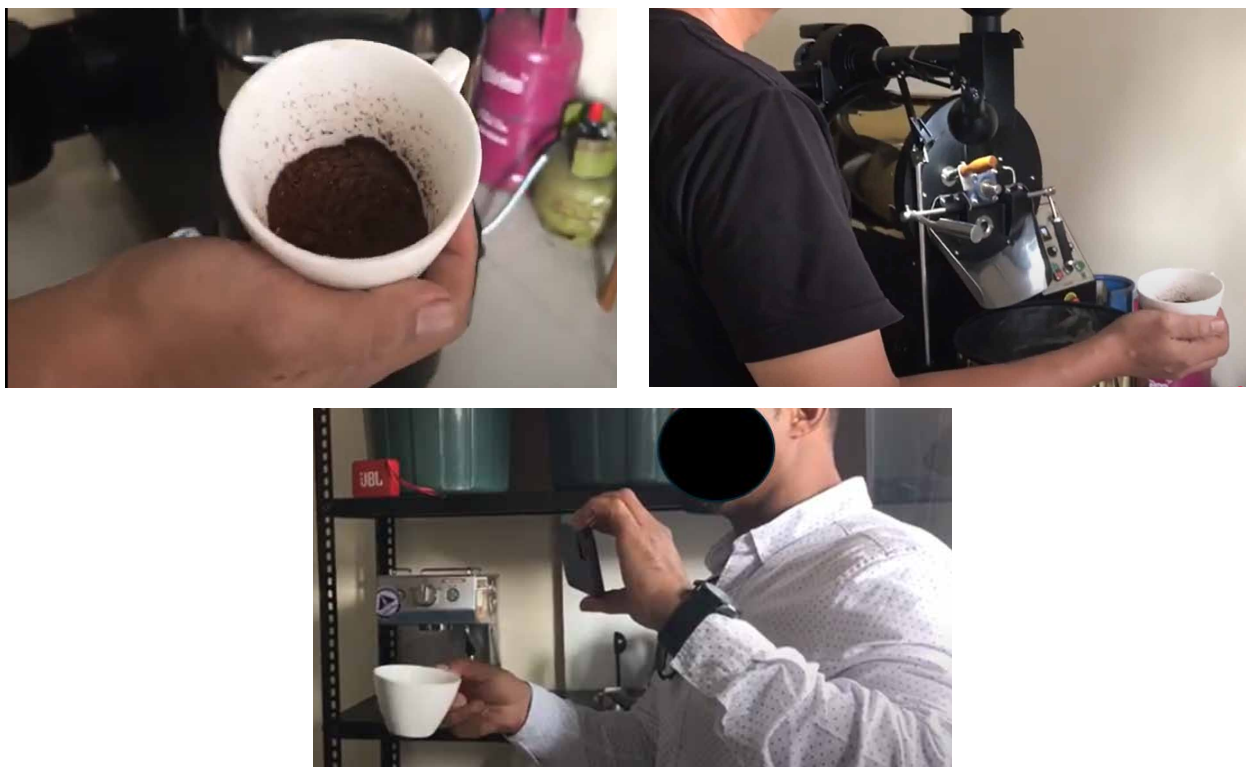


Figure 2. Embodied evaluation during specification talk

thousand two hundred” in English, making the information available to OP. OP’s response, “I see,” confirms that the specification has been understood. The excerpt 2’s sequence, therefore, moves from question, clarification, reformulation, answer, translation, and confirmation.

Translanguaging as mediation in negotiation

In the findings of this study, one notable example involves a discussion of percentage share, which has the potential to become the most important and sensitive point of disagreement. Instead of allowing the percentage itself to dominate the discussion, one participant repeatedly shifts attention back to the importance of collaboration, emphasizing that “the percentage is not even an issue.” Within this interaction, the SME participant in Nairobi meeting does not resolve the disagreement completely but reduces its interpersonal sensitivity and creates space for the negotiation to continue. In this episode, repetition should not be interpreted simply as hesitation or lack of fluency. Rather, it operates as a deliberate interactional strategy that reinforces the speaker’s stance, softens a potentially face-threatening issue, and helps stabilize the direction of the discussion in the Nairobi business meeting. This pattern shows the broader tendency in the dataset for multilingual resources to be utilized when participants manage

sensitive topics, redirect discussion, or present their positions in ways that remain acceptable to others.

Excerpt 3. M1: Reframing percentage through collaborative stance

KN1: It’s... it’s not about the percentage... (.) It’s about the collaboration...

(**Intended meaning:** KN1 tries to reduce the significance of profit-sharing percentage and redirect the focus toward building a lasting partnership based on long-term cooperation.)

EA: ...even if the ten percent is too big... we can... bring our own people to invest...

(**Intended meaning:** KN1 suggests that, should the proposed percentage be considered too high, the Indonesian side could mobilize its own investors or leverage its network to support the arrangement.)

KN1: The issue... of the percentage is not even an issue for us...

(**Intended meaning:** KN1 emphasize that percentage should not be allowed to become the obstacle or the barrier to collaboration.)

From Excerpt 3 above, it can be observed how KN1 uses repetition and reframing to manage a potentially sensitive negotiation issue. The phrase “**It’s not about the percentage**” directly backgrounds the financial percentage as the central topic. KN1 then immediately redirects the interaction toward “**collaboration**,” which changes the frame of the discussion from transactional

bargaining to partnership-building. This kind of move is important because percentage-sharing can easily become a face-threatening topic in business negotiations. By saying “It’s about the collaboration,” KN1 softens the tension and keeps the business negotiation continued.

The second line reinforces this collaborative stance. When EA says, “even if the ten percent is too big... we can... bring our own people to invest,” he does not turn down the concern directly. Instead, he offers an alternative solution. This reveals Indonesia’s willingness to remain flexible and to contribute resources through its own networks. In the context of the interaction, this statement serves as a mediator: preventing disagreements from escalating into failure and transforming potential obstacles into negotiable options.

The third line, “the issue of the percentage is not even an issue for us,” repeats the earlier point with a stronger emphasis. KN1 repeatedly positions the Indonesian side as cooperative, flexible, and oriented toward joint business growth, rather than narrow profit calculations. Through this repeated perspective, the speaker builds trust and projects professional goodwill to stabilize the position.

Figure 3 also illustrates how translanguaging is not only verbal but also embodies multimodality through gestures, posture, and shared participation. The visible hand gestures of the participant on the left indicate active conversational engagement,

emphasizing affective engagement and relational alignment. These gestures support the mediation function to build trust in the interaction by conveying sincerity, attentiveness, and emotional investment. This is not simply “small talk” on the sidelines of negotiations; it is part of how participants make the negotiation itself feasible by stabilizing affiliation before moving forward (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2012; Cogo, 2016). KN1’s verbal emphasis on “collaboration” is supported by the visible interactional context: participants remain oriented to one another, and the discussion continues despite the potentially delicate issue of percentage-profit sharing.

Another negotiation-related pattern appears when local-language deliberation is repackaged into a more public proposal. In one meeting conversation, as can be seen from excerpt 4, participants first discuss machine affordability and possible business directions in Swahili before the core reasoning is revoiced in English for the wider group. In this case, translanguaging creates a two-step process: local-language discussion allows participants to test an idea with less interactional pressure, while English revoicing turns that emerging position into a negotiable proposal for the broader encounter. This shows that translanguaging is not only a way of clarifying meaning, but also a way of organizing participation and managing the movement from internal alignment to shared decision-making.

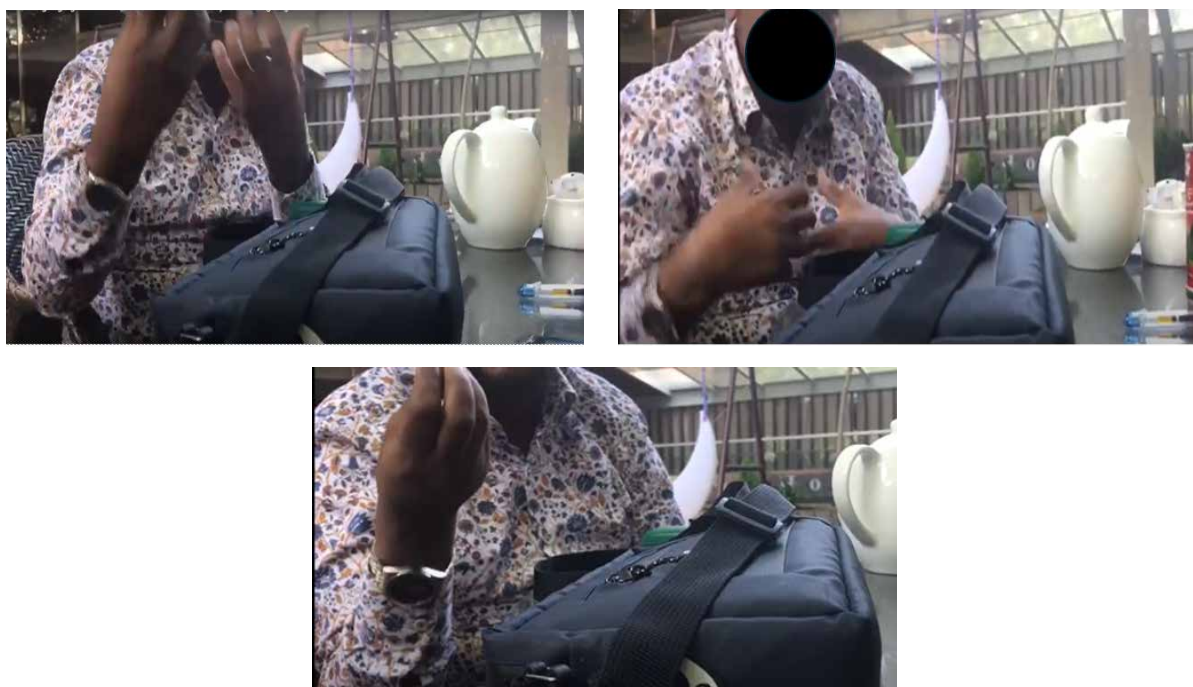


Figure 3. Cooperative negotiation stance during reframing

Excerpt 4. M2: Local-language deliberation and English revoicing

MT to MA: *Sasa, elfu nne dollar anacharge kwa hiyo machini... siyo kubwa... kila mtu anaeza nunua.* (Swahili/English: “So, he charges four thousand dollars for that machine... it is not expensive... everyone can buy it.”)

Intended meaning: MT judges the machine price that EA offers as affordable and starts positioning it as commercially viable.)

MT to MA: ...So that means *tutajibadilisha kuwa traders wa machini.*

(Swahili/English: “So that means we will transform ourselves into machine traders.”)

Intended meaning: MT proposes a shift in business role, from possible buyers/users of the machine to sellers or distributors of the machine.)

MA: ...*tunaeza fanya*... target different counties...

(Swahili/English: “We can do it... by targeting different counties.”)

Intended meaning: MA broadens MT’s proposal by recommending a larger market strategy across multiple countries.)

MT (English revoicing): So, \$4,000.00 he is charging for that machine... anyone can afford to buy. So that means we will transform into machine traders...

(Intended meaning: MT’s translation renders the local-language discussion in English so the broader group can understand the business proposal that is beginning to take shape.)

Excerpt 4 shows a clear movement from local-language deliberation to English revoicing. In the first line, MT uses Swahili with embedded English business terms such as *dollar*, *charge*, and *machine*. This mixed repertoire allows MT and MA to evaluate the affordability of the machine quickly and naturally. The phrase *siyo kubwa* (“it is not big/expensive”) frames the price as manageable, while *kila mtu anaeza nunua* (“everyone can buy it”) expands the discussion from personal affordability to market potential.

The second line marks an important shift in

business thinking. When MT says *tutajibadilisha kuwa traders wa machini* (“we will transform ourselves into machine traders”), he reframes the machine not merely as an item to be purchased but as a new commercial opportunity. This is a moment of strategic repositioning. MT and MA begin to imagine themselves as traders, not only as customers. Translanguaging here supports business ideation because it allows participants to test a proposal in a familiar linguistic space before presenting it more broadly.

MA’s response, *tunaeza fanya*... target different counties, builds on this idea. The phrase “target different counties” introduces a marketing strategy and indicates that the proposal is becoming more concrete. The local-language exchange, therefore, functions as a space for internal alignment: MT and MA negotiate the logic of the idea together before it is shared with others.

When MT repeats the key points in English, by saying “the machine costs \$4,000, the price is affordable, and they can transform into machine traders, these revoicing makes the locally developed proposal accessible to participants who may not understand Swahili. It shifts the idea from private or side deliberation into the shared business floor. As shown in Figure 4, the participants (MT and MA) are positioned within a business discussion setting where the machine or product-related topic is being jointly evaluated. This figure shows that the discussion, combined with a sustained gaze toward the interlocutor and the gesture, creates an interactional alignment in which meaning is jointly negotiated. The negotiation is not expressed verbally alone but emerges through the coordination of multilingual talk, gaze, and embodied action. Top of FormBottom of Form Their orientation to each other during the Swahili exchange indicates local alignment, while MT’s later English revoicing



Figure 4. Repertoire orchestration in negotiation and decision-making

opens that alignment to the wider group.

Translanguaging for trust-building, rapport, and intercultural alignment

Several episodes show that communicative success in these meetings depends not only on informational clarity but also on the creation of a cooperative and respectful relational atmosphere. In one interaction, the discussion shifts from transactional talk toward explicitly affiliative language through expressions such as *collaboration* and *brotherhood*, followed by the evaluative phrase *very pleasly people*. Although *pleasly* is non-standard, it is not treated as problematic. Instead, it is ratified by the other participants and taken up as an adequate and socially meaningful expression. Its value lies not in grammatical form, but in the relational work it performs. It publicly positions the Indonesian side as a trustworthy and desirable partners, while also reducing social distance between the parties. The Boran phrase “*tumpanse sana, kumpanse asset ... gamtoomina ... asset ... they know-how*” is also significant because it encapsulates the proposed business model in culturally rooted terms: one party contributes assets, while the other contributes knowledge. Although the Boran form is described as verbal rather than written, its use remains interactionally meaningful because it demonstrates a shared background between KN1 and KN2, local legitimacy, and an emic understanding of partnership.

Excerpt 5. M1: Affective alignment through evaluative language

KN1: (Boran language) *tumpanse sana, kumpanse asset,gamtoomina asset... they know-how... eesatti sana...* (.)

(Boran/English mixed utterance: a form of cooperation, where the assets come from us and they have the expertise.

(**Intended meaning:** according to KN 1, this is spoken language, not written language. He evaluates the Indonesian side positively and refers to their knowledge, capacity, or know-how).

(*note: according to KN 1 this is verbal language, not a language that can be written)

EA: no.. currently they know-how....they know-how... (.) actually...(1.0) actually...It's...(.) it's not about the percentage...(.) It's about the collaboration (.) yes (.) even... even...(.) I have to say that even uh (.) even if the ten percent is too big for our guy...(.) I can...(.) we can... (1.5) bring our own people to invest (.) with... yeah (.) hehehe...

(**Intended meaning:** EA reflects KN1's favorable evaluation and redirect the discussion away from

percentage-sharing toward collaboration. EA further provide a possible solution by stating that, if necessary, the Indonesian side can bring investors if needed.)

EA to PM: *Tapi tak lapeh begitu saja.*

(Minangnese/Indonesian: “But it should not be let go just like that.”

(**Intended meaning:** EA privately inform PM that the opportunity should not be disregarded or released too readily.)

KN1 to KN2: yeah yeah (.) collaboration... brotherhood...

(**Intended meaning:** KN1 endorses EA's framing and extends it in an affective register by portraying the relationship as collaboration and brotherhood.)

KN2: I have seen in that Makkah all day yeah... **very pleasly people... very pleasly people.**

(**Intended meaning:** KN2 offers a positive evaluation of some Indonesia people he met in Mecca, characterizing them as pleasant or kind people. Although “pleasly” is non-standard, it is interactionally understood as a favourable and positive affective assessment.)

EA: (.) You got the point.

(**Intended meaning:** EA confirms that KN2 has grasped the relational meaning of the business meeting discussion's points.)

KN1: It is right.

(**Intended meaning:** KN1 concurs and confirms the shared affective alignment.)

Excerpt 5 above, shows that translanguaging in the meeting is not only used to clarify business information, but also to build affective alignment and relational trust. The opening Boran utterance by KN1, “*tumpanse sana, kumpanse asset, gamtoomina asset, eesatti sana*” mixed with English expressions such as “they know-how,” appears to evaluate the Indonesian side positively. Even though the exact Boran translation needs confirmation, the interactional direction is clear: KN1 is positioning the Indonesian participants as capable and knowledgeable business partners.

EA then takes up this positive evaluation and develops it into a collaborative business stance. His repeated phrase “they know-how” aligns with KN1's evaluation, while the following statement, “It's not about the percentage... It's about the collaboration,” reframes the negotiation from financial calculation to relational partnership. This bears significance because percentage-sharing can become a delicate issue in business negotiations. By shifting the focus to “collaboration,” EA reduces potential tension and keeps the interaction cooperative.

The Minangnese/Indonesian aside, *Tapi tak lapeh begitu saja*, adds another layer to the interaction. While EA publicly emphasizes collaboration in English, he privately tells PM that the opportunity should not be “let go just like that.” This shows how translanguaging allows EA to manage two participation frames at once: an outward-facing collaborative frame with the international interlocutors and an inward-facing strategic frame with the Indonesian participant.

KN1’s response, “collaboration... brotherhood,” confirms that EA’s framing has been accepted. The word “brotherhood” moves the interaction beyond business transaction and into moral-affective alignment. KN2’s phrase “very pleasly people” continues this affective work. Although the form is grammatically non-standard, it is not treated as an error. Instead, EA validates it by saying, “You got the point,” and KN1 closes with “It is right.” This shows that communicative success is measured by relational meaning and mutual understanding, not by native-like accuracy.

As shown in Figure 5, the participants are positioned in a shared face-to-face business space, where gaze, bodily orientation, and turn-taking support the movement from negotiation to relational alignment. The figure helps show that the evaluative phrases “collaboration,” “brotherhood,” and “very pleasly people” are produced within an ongoing interpersonal exchange, not as isolated comments. The visible co-presence of participants strengthens the interpretation that affective alignment is being built through both verbal and embodied participation.



Figure 5. Affiliative uptake during trust-building talk

Multi- and trans modality and creative meaning-making

Throughout these meetings, participants were regularly seen relying on objects, visuals, product samples, brochures, mobile phone images, labels,

and concrete actions to support discussions. These resources often become central to how products are identified, compared, evaluated, and made intelligible across linguistic differences. In the earlier example involving *talas betung* and *yam*, a phone image helps stabilize the referent when spoken explanation alone is insufficient. In the coffee-specification sequence, embodied inspection of the product accompanies verbal confirmation and contributes to the buyer’s displayed understanding. These moments show that meaning emerges through the coordinated use of speech, objects, and bodily conduct rather than through verbal language alone.

Furthermore, we cannot rule out the role creativity plays in these interactions. One instance is the repeated use of *pleasly* people, a non-standard expression that nevertheless gains functionality because its intended meaning is immediately recognizable. Another appears in the trade-expo interaction involving *cabe Jawa*, where participants collaboratively come up with the label *Java long pepper*, the Nigerian local term *Tacase*. Here, the speakers are not simply translating a fixed item from one language into another. They are assembling a workable commercial label that can travel across markets while remaining connected to locally meaningful terminology. Creativity in this sense is not ornamental. It is part of the communicative labor through which products become speakable, recognizable, and marketable in multilingual business settings.

Excerpt 6. M4: Creative naming across markets

KB1: *Cabe Jawa bahasa Inggrisnya apa? Long pepper ya?*

(Indonesian/English: “What is *cabe Jawa* in English? Long pepper, right?”)

Intended meaning: KB1 was looking for a name that could be marketed in English for an Indonesian ingredient product, Javanese chili, and was a little unsure about it so she confirmed it with the audience.)

KB2: Pepper?

(**Intended meaning:** KB2 offers a partial English equivalent, but the answer is still too general.)

KB1: YAA (↑) JAVA LONG PEPPER!

(Indonesian/English: “Yes, Java long pepper!”)

Intended meaning: KB1 arrives at a more specific English product label that combines local origin, “Java,” with an internationally recognizable product category, “Java long pepper.”)

NG: ...the local name is *Tacase*.

(**Intended meaning:** NG refers the local Nigerian term

for the same Indonesian comparable term, linking the Indonesian product label to a term recognizable in the NG's (buyer) local market.)

KB1: *Tacase?*

(**Intended meaning:** KB1 repeats the Nigerian local term to check pronunciation and confirm understanding.)

NG: Yes... *tacase*.

(**Intended meaning:** NG confirms the local Nigerian name to KB is Tacase for Java long pepper.)

From Excerpt 6 above, it is observed that creative naming as also a form of translanguaging across global markets. KB1 begins with the question, *Cabe Jawa bahasa Inggrisnya apa? Long pepper ya?* This utterance moves between Indonesian and English because KB1 is trying to make a local Indonesian product understandable in an international business context in front of her business partner from Nigeria. The phrase *cabe Jawa* is locally meaningful, but it may not be immediately recognizable to an international interlocutor. By asking for the English equivalent, KB1 is not merely translating a word. Instead, he is searching for a product label that can travel across markets.

KB2's response, "Pepper," provides a general category, but it is not yet specific enough. KB1 then upgrades the label into "JAVA LONG PEPPER." The raised intonation and emphatic form suggest a moment of discovery or confirmation. "Java long pepper" functioned as a marketable name

because it preserves the local identity of the product through "Java" while making it intelligible through the English category "long pepper." This is a good example of creative meaning-making: the participants do not simply transfer a fixed term from Indonesian into English; they build a commercially useful label through interaction.

NG then adds another layer by saying, "the local name is Tacase." This introduces the buyer-side local term. The interaction now links three naming systems: Indonesian *cabe Jawa*, English "Java long pepper," and the Nigerian local name "*Tacase*." KB1's repetition, "*Tacase?*", functions as a confirmation check. NG's response, "Yes... *tacase*," ratifies the term and stabilizes shared reference.

As we can see in Figure 6, the naming process occurs within a product brochure-oriented business interaction. The figure shows that the talk is attached to a concrete object rather than an abstract vocabulary exercise. The participants' attention to the brochure product supports the interpretation that naming here serves business negotiation, product explanation, and market positioning. From Figure 6, it can be observed that KB2 uses finger movements to help define words when talking to NG.

Across these themes, identity positioning emerges as an outcome of multilingual mediation



Figure 6. Multimodal support for product naming and market mapping

rather than as a separate process detached from the interaction. The episodes above suggest that participants position themselves and others in relation to expertise, cooperation, authority, and professional legitimacy through the communicative work they perform. In Excerpt 2, for example, EA moves into a mediating role by reformulating the buyer's question, directing it to the relevant participant, and then packaging the answer back into English for wider uptake. In Excerpt 5, affiliative language such as collaboration, brotherhood, and *very pleasly* people helps participants project moral credibility, respect, and collaborative intent.

These interpretations of identity positioning were made only where there is a change in participants' that produced clear and observable consequences within the interaction. Language alternation alone was not treated as sufficient evidence of a change in identity or social role. This more measured approach makes it possible to recognize identity-related meanings while avoiding claims that extend beyond what the data can support.

Viewed across the dataset, translanguaging emerges as a collection of practical communicative abilities used in the case of international SME interaction. Participants rely on these abilities to establish mutual understanding, manage negotiation, develop trust, navigate cultural differences, coordinate multimodal resources, and adopt appropriate positions as business encounters unfold. Although English plays an important role, it is not used as an independent or all-encompassing medium. Instead, it forms part of a wider communicative environment that includes local, national, and transnational linguistic resources. The findings, therefore, suggest that successful multilingual business communication and global business connectivity depend less on linguistic uniformity than on the flexible coordination of available repertoires, material objects, visual resources, and embodied action.

IV. DISCUSSION

This interpretation of the previous findings section is consistent with translanguaging research among scholars, which understands multilingual communication as the flexible use of speakers' full range of resources rather than as movement between clearly bounded language system (Garcia & Wei, 2014; Otheguy et al., 2015; Wei, 2018).

The interactions examined in this study also show that effective communication extends beyond spoken language. Participants coordinate speech with gesture, gaze, product sample, brochure, material artefact, mobile-phone displays, and features of the immediate setting to construct and confirm meaning (Blackledge & Creese, 2017; Jonsson & Blåsjö, 2020; Kimura & Canagarajah, 2017). Multilingual business communication for international SME practitioners, therefore, can be understood as relational, multimodal, and practice-based, in which meaning develops through the coordinated use of linguistic, embodied, visual, and material resources.

A central contribution of the study is the moves of translanguaging beyond a narrow understanding as a response to lexical gaps. In these SME business encounters, translanguaging functions as an organized bundle of communicative practices through which participants stabilize meaning, coordinate knowledge, manage interactional uncertainty, and keep business activity moving forward (Ai et al., 2022; Canagarajah, 2012; Wei, 2018). Translanguaging was central to how participants made business interaction workable under conditions of unequal linguistic access. By reformulating terminology, revoicing proposals, linking meaning to material artefacts, and presenting stances in ways that others could recognize and respond to, participants did more than address gaps in vocabulary. These practices helped structure participation, circulate knowledge among speakers, and create the conditions needed for negotiation to proceed. Translanguaging should therefore be understood not as a secondary feature of business communication, but as one of the key processes through which such communication is achieved the goal (Ai et al., 2022; Tsuchiya, 2020).

The findings are broadly consistent with earlier research on English as a Lingua Franca and Business English as Lingua Franca. This scholarship has emphasized that successful professional communication depends less on conformity to native speaker norms than on intelligibility, accommodation, and the ability to complete the task at hand (Jenkins, 2015; Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2014; Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2012a). A similar pattern emerged in the present research, where participants of international SME appear to judge communicative success according to practical interactional

outcomes. Understanding is treated as adequate when it allows the discussion to continue and open, and when product information becomes sufficiently clear for evaluation. Also, when proposals can be taken up or negotiated through the ongoing activity. The exchanges involving *tapuang*, *talas betung*, and *yam*, as well as the formulation *sea level seribu dua ratus*, illustrate this point. In both episodes, participants do not pursue linguistic precision as an end in itself. Instead, they work toward a level of shared understanding that is sufficient for the immediate business purpose. Communicative success is therefore reflected in participant uptake, mutual alignment, and the continued progression of the business assignment.

Although English remains an important communicative resource in these meetings, the findings suggest that it cannot fully account for how participants achieve alignment. Key moments of understanding emerge through the combination use of English, Indonesian, Minangnese, Swahili, local naming practices, and multimodal support, when English functions as one component of a broader communicative ecology rather than as a complete and independent medium (Hua, 2014; Kimura & Canagarajah, 2017). This observation both supports and extends previous research findings on Business English as a Lingua Franca. BELF research is useful for explaining why participants tolerate non-standard forms and prioritize communicative progress over grammatical correctness (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2014; Takino, 2020). However, an English-centred account offers only a partial explanation on how that progress is actually produced during interaction. The data show that meaning depends on the coordination of local, national, and transnational resources rather than on reliance upon a single dominant code. In this point of view, the findings of this study support a pluralistic understanding of language use in which communication develops through the coexistence and flexible combination of multiple repertoires (Blommaert & Backus, 2013; Garcia & Wei, 2014).

The findings are particularly relevant to research on multilingualism because they present it as something that can be observed in everyday professional interaction rather than merely as a broad social condition. Participants do more than draw on several languages as separate resources. They move across their repertoires to

clarify products, negotiate terms, and preserve collaborative connectivity. Multilingualism, from this point of view, is a situated practice in which speakers flexibly coordinate the resources available to them in order to sustain interaction and accomplish a professional task.

Mediation emerges from the findings as the main important feature of multilingual business interaction. In this context, it extends more than the instant translation of meaning between two clearly bounded languages. Instead, mediation is a tool to access the information among SME participants whose linguistic repertoires, knowledge, and immediate communicative needs are not equally distributed (Canagarajah, 2012; Tsuchiya, 2020). This process is observed when participants reformulate questions for others, relay local-language discussions in English, or combine speech with gestures, material objects, and visual resources to establish a shared point of reference. Such practice allows communicative gaps to be managed without requiring all participants to possess the same level of linguistic competence. Translanguaging can therefore be understood as mediation enacted through interactions, sustains participants' participation, limits potential misunderstanding, and creates the conditions necessary for the possibility of intercultural dialogue in business encounters.

Intercultural interactions in these encounters are not separate from the transactional work of business. Rather, it develops through the interactional practices that allow cooperation and negotiation to continue. Expressions such as *gamtoomina asset...they know how...essati sana...collaboration and brotherhood*, and evaluative expressions such as *very pleased people* indicate that participants are doing more than exchanging the newest information. They are also creating a relational environment in business discussions. This kind of business discussion will bring sustainability to their SME business (Hasanuddin and Lestari, 2026). From this perspective, trust is not simply a pre-existing condition that participants bring to the meeting. It actively produces through affiliation. Other than that, repletion, mitigation, compliments, and the careful handling of potentially sensitive matters are also becoming manageable effectively. For example, the repeated assertion that "the percentage is not an issue" functions as more than a statement of opinion. It temporarily redirects

attention away from a potentially divisive topic, helping to preserve relational balance and leaving room for further negotiation. Trust-building and mediation are therefore closely connected in multilingual business interaction, as both contribute to maintaining cooperation across linguistic and cultural differences.

One contribution of this study is the reconsideration of the role of the local languages in international business communication (Yusriadi et al, 2026). Within the data, Minangnese, Indonesian, and Swahili are neither barriers to professional interaction nor temporary substitutes used only when English proves insufficient. Instead, they remain valuable resources within global business settings. SME business participants in this research draw on them to clarify references, establish mutual understanding, coordinate perspectives, and manage negotiations. The findings here point to a dynamic language ecology in which communicative resources gain meaning through their relationship with one another. Although English continues to have an important role, its effectiveness often depends on how its combined with other languages, local languages, and with the semiotic resources in the immediate context (Cogo, 2016). Multilingual repertoires, from this perspective, are not arranged according to a fixed hierarchy, but are assembled flexibly in response to interactional demands (Jørgensen et al., 2011; Wei, 2018).

The analysis of this research also demonstrates that business meaning is produced through more than speech. Participants are proven to combine spoken language with body language, gestures, material objects, sensory experience, and features of the surrounding environment. For example, by displaying images on mobile phones, consulting brochures, and assessing coffee through touch and smell, all contribute directly to what participants can explain, recognize, verify, and negotiate. These actions should not be treated as secondary support for verbal communication. Rather, they form an important part of the communicative competence displayed throughout the meetings. An analysis limited to spoken language would consequently overlook much of the interactional work through which shared understanding is achieved. This supports an expanded approach to multilingual interaction that gives serious attention to embodiment, multimodality, materiality, and

contextual resources (Blackledge & Creese, 2017; Canagarajah, 2018; Jonsson & Blåsjö, 2020). In this research, multimodality can be understood as part of the basic tools of business communication rather than additional features.

Creativity represents another significant dimension of these encounters. Creative language use does not function merely as stylistic decoration. In fact, it can acquire both relational and commercial value. A non-standard expression, such as *pleasly* people, for example, becomes meaningful because participants accept it within the interaction and use it to support positive and respectful social relations. Similarly, the joint use of the label *Java long pepper* alongside the Nigerian local term *Tacase* shows how naming practices may enable the business product to penetrate the new markets without disappearing its local relevance. This kind of creativity arises from practical communicative needs. Participants develop workable labels, explanations, and formulations when the business products must be made recognizable and commercially meaningful across linguistic differences. Multilingual creativity can be viewed as a form of problem-solving shaped by relational and commercial demands of business interaction.

The findings data in this research also call for a cautious interpretation of translanguaging. Although it enables participants to work flexibly across linguistic differences, it should not be presented as an automatically empowering form of communication. Repeated clarification, reformulation, revoicing, and relationship management often give focus to underlying inequalities. SME participants do not necessarily enter these encounters with the same command of English, the same authority, or equal recognition as legitimate contributors. As a result, some speakers may carry a greater share of the communicative burden by repeatedly explaining, mediating, or bridging gaps between others. Translanguaging in SME business interaction is therefore better understood as skilled communicative labour performed within conditions that may remain unequal.

This perspective also changes how the competence of communication can be understood in international SME settings. Competence is not only a matter of proficiency in one named language (Kurniasari et al., 2022). But it involves the ability to coordinate linguistic, embodied, and

material resources strategically while interaction is unfolding. Participants demonstrate competence when they can establish a workable interpretation, protect relationships, present proposals in negotiable conditions, and guide the business discussion toward a practical goal. This kind of competence is therefore distributed across participants. Moreover, it is also shaped by the immediate context, including linguistic skills and knowledge, also the capacity to mediate, improve, align with business partners, and use the objects or visual resources effectively.

Taken together, these findings present translanguaging as a practical, pluralistic, and mediated form of professional communication. It allows SME practitioners to handle linguistic differences, maintain intercultural communication, and bring local to global resources into productive relation and achieve business objectives (Ai et al., 2022; Garcia & Wei, 2014; Wei, 2018). This study contributes to research on multilingualism in practice by showing that English does not operate independently. Also, local language continues to hold value in international business spaces. Moreover, the communication success depends on the coordinated use of multiple repertoires and semiotic resources. In this way, the analysis also speaks to broader linguistic debates concerning mediation, language ecology, multilingualism, and the place of linguistic diversity in contemporary professional life.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the naturally occurring data from four international business meetings, this study explored the use of translanguaging in communication among SME practitioners. Throughout the meetings, participant combined resources of their linguistic repertoires with gesture, bodily conduct, material objects, and features of the immediate context. These resources cooperate together to support product explanations, negotiate business terms, maintain the flow of interaction, and strengthen business cooperation. The analysis result shows that participants did not use translanguaging only when a linguistic problem arose. Rather, it formed part of their routine communicative practice and provided a flexible means of managing business interaction. Translanguaging can therefore be understood as a practical and strategic resource that makes possible multilingual business communication in real time.

Although English plays a significant function

in the business interactions in this research, it does not operate as a complete or independent tool of communication. Instead, participants combine it with Minangnese, Indonesian, Swahili, and a range of multimodal, embodied, visual, and material resources. These elements form a wider communicative ecology in which local and global repertoires are used according to the immediate demands of the business meeting discussion. This pattern underlines the continuing importance of local languages in international professional settings and supports a pluralistic view of communication in multilingual contexts.

Within this ecology, translanguaging makes several closely connected forms of communicative work possible. Reformulation, revoicing, and explanation allow information to move between participants, while shifts in tone and stance help preserve trust and relational balance. Participants employ them to elucidate procedural information, establish stable points of reference, and make meanings accessible when linguistic repertoires are unevenly distributed. Translanguaging also facilitates creativity, especially when speakers need to develop workable product labels, explanations, or expressions that can function across linguistic and cultural differences. Communicative effectiveness in SME encounters therefore depend less on adherence to standardized language use than on the flexible coordination of multilingual and multimodal resources.

These practices also have implications for identity. Identity negotiation is therefore best understood as an interactional outcome of multilingual business communication, not as a separate process operating outside it. Participants are not only transmitting information, but they are also continually positioning themselves and their business partner in relation to expertise, credibility, cooperation, and professional legitimacy. Such positions emerge through the practical work of explaining, mediating, persuading, and aligning with others, rather than through language choice in isolation.

Moreover, this study also contributes to the research on multilingual business communication by demonstrating that mediation, alignment, trust, and intercultural dialogue are not secondary features of professional exchange but are central to how communication is sustained across linguistic

differences. The findings corroborate the perspective that multilingual communication in professional life is best understood through a pluralistic lens that recognizes the alignment of languages, bodies, objects, and material environments. They also show that translanguaging allows participants to negotiate understanding, preserve working relationships, and coordinate action in situations marked by linguistic diversity. Multilingualism, therefore, emerges not as a hindrance that must be overcome but as a practical resource that supports communication in contemporary professional environments.

Because the study draws on a relatively small dataset and concentrates on selected episodes from a particular SME setting, its findings should be interpreted in relation to that context, rather than treated as widely generalizable. The analysis is also qualitative and interpretive, even though close attention is given to multimodal evidence. Despite this limitation, the study helps generate valuable insights into how meaning-making in multilingual business communication can be accomplished in practice.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The authors have read and followed the ethical requirements for publication in the **Jurnal Arbitrer** and confirm that (a) user-generated data were fully anonymised in order to ensure confidentiality and

to protect the identities of platform users; and (b) all data were collected, processed, as well as reported in compliance with the data redistribution and usage policies of the respective platform involved in this study.

CREDIT AUTHOR STATEMENT

Tri Ananti Listiana was responsible for the conceptualisation of the research, data analysis, investigation, funding acquisition, as well as writing of the original draft of the manuscript. **Setiono Sugiharto** was involved in the conceptualisation, methodology, resources, data analysis, investigation, validation, and manuscript revision. **Yanti** contributed to the conceptualisation, data curation, project administration, analysis, investigation, supervision, validation, and manuscript revision. All authors approved the final version of the manuscript.

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DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTERESTS

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