In the 1980s I often appealed to the image of a language garden to refer to the colorful and rich diversity of the languages of the world (see, for example, García, 1992). I raised the question: “What would a garden be without color diversity?”

In so doing, I pointed to the importance of cultivating language diversity in the world. Languages, I claimed, were like flowers—beautiful, colorful, whole, and grounded in native soil. And a manicured garden had to be planned, cutting back the growth of those languages that spread quickly, like weeds, threatening the existence of flowers that were less dominant. To maintain the color in the garden, some plants had to be trimmed and pruned, others transplanted artificially, yet others extirpated. And bilingual education had an important role in planning the language garden.

But in the thirty years that have elapsed since I first wrote about the language garden, the garden itself, as well as our epistemologies about language in society, and the ways in which we approach its study have been transformed, the product of a globalized world. In this short paper, I look at the changes in our epistemologies about language and society in the 21st century.
In so doing, I appeal to a different image than that of the language garden—that of sustainable languaging—as I question traditional understandings of language in society and language education. As the reader will see, the shift in image provides us with a more dynamic understanding of language itself, of macro-sociolinguistics, of language policy, and of language teaching and learning. Our understandings of bilingualism and bilingual education are also affected by this shift so as to support the sustainable languaging needed in the 21st century.

The Language Garden: Sociology of Language and Bilingual Education in the 20th Century

In many ways, the modern era of bilingual education paralleled the growth of the field of Sociology of Language (Fishman, 1972a, 1972b). Spurred by the scholarship of Joshua A. Fishman, the study of language in society came to the forefront in the late 1960s, as the world was experiencing an ethnic revival, and the US was engulfed in the era of civil rights (Fishman, 1985). Bilingual contexts were the perfect situation to study language in society, for differences in language use and behavior, language attitudes, and language proficiency were magnified through bilingualism.

One of Fishman’s early contribution was the extension of Ferguson’s definition of diglossia to include the “societal allocation of functions to different languages” (1972b: 145). Diglossia was then used to argue that “socially patterned bilingualism can exist as a stabilized phenomenon only if there is functional differentiation between two languages” (Fishman, Cooper & Ma, 1971: 560). The concepts of language maintenance and language shift were then tied to a diglossic theoretical framework, claiming that only if there were strict language compartmentalization could an ethnolinguistic group maintain its language. In this early conceptualization, languages in society were seen as autonomous and differentiated among themselves, belonging to one people who were linked in a single identity through language, and who used their two languages for different functions or in different geographical spaces. The field of language planning and policy evolved from these understandings of language in society. Sociolinguists involved in language planning worked to organize the use of the two languages of bilinguals in society so as to stabilize the maintenance of a minority language linked to ethnic identity, while guaranteeing the dominance of a national language linked to nation-state identity. The diglossic arrangement that language planning/policy activities promoted during this early time normalized bilingual language use in ways that preserved the dominance of a majority language, while also guaranteeing the survival of a minority language.

The bilingual education movement that accompanied the greater rights granted to language minorities as a result of ethnic movements and civil rights, likewise followed these understandings of language in society in developing models, curriculum, and pedagogy. Bilingual schooling paid most attention to the development of the dominant language of the nation-state. In cases when minority groups had achieved some measure of control, maintenance bilingual education programs developed diglossic curricula. In these maintenance bilingual education programs the dominant language was used for certain subjects or periods of time, and the minority language used for others. Each of the two languages assumed a different functional role, thus protecting the dominance of the language of the nation-state and preserving the maintenance of the minority language as a link to the identity of a single ethnolinguistic group. In cases when minority groups were more subjugated, transitional bilingual education used the minority language only temporarily in non-diglossic and increasingly less measure, so that the dominant language would win the unequal competition set up within the same space.

The language garden was then seen as a planned space in which the flowers that represented language were enclosed in patterned ways of displaying colors. It was precisely the separate plots for different flowers that preserved the color.
patterned ways of displaying colors. It was precisely the separate plots for different flowers that preserved the color. Likewise, the compartmentalization of languages by function preserved the language diversity in society and enabled the maintenance of a language other than the national one within the enclosed space of the nation-state. In maintenance bilingual education it was the strict separation of languages that enabled language minorities to preserve what was seen as their “mother tongue,” their “ethnic language,” while developing a “second language” that would never be a “first” or a “native” one, for those designations were reserved for the language majority which inhabited a separate space. Even when language minorities lost their “mother tongue/ethnic language” and shifted to the “second” language, it was never their “native” one or their “first” one. The language garden couldn’t be monochrome, but its colorfulness came from languages that were constrained in carefully planned enclosed spaces and whose colors were not always equally valued.

**Sustainable Languaging**

In the 21st century, as technology has spurred globalization, the intensive flows of people, capital, goods, images, and discourses have thrown open the enclosed spaces of nation-states which have become much more permeable. Globalization has led not only to geopolitical changes, but also to geocultural ones which have affected the sociolinguistic patterns of language in society, including the advent of super-diverse patterns of multilingualism and the emergence of new multimodal forms of communication (Blommaert, 2010).

The mere existence of languages as we understood them in the 20th century has been questioned. Makoni and Pennycook (2007) have pointed to the invention of language by European ideologies founded on the notion of territorialization. Rather than focusing on whole system differences that correspond to the enumerable languages of nation-states, the study of language in society has increasingly focused on people’s *languaging*; that is, the social *features* that are called upon by speakers in a seamless and complex network of multiple semiotic signs. That is, language is not something that human beings have, but an ongoing process that exists in languaging. The different linguistic features are not bounded by geographical territories and national spaces, but rather they represent complex local practices of interactions that are dynamically enacted by human beings (Mignolo, 2000).

The super-diverse patterns of languaging go beyond our conceptualization of bilingualism and multilingualism of the past. While bilingualism in the past was seen as having full command of two languages, and multilingualism as having full command of more than two languages, languaging in society today is much more complex. Jørgensen (2008) refers to the combination of features that are not discrete and complete “languages” in themselves as “polylingualism.” Jacqumet (2005) speaks of “transdiomatic practices” to refer to the communicative practices of transnational groups that interact using different communicative codes, simultaneously present in a range of local and distant communicative channels.

The focus of bilingualism is not simply to maintain two languages as manifestations of nation-states or ethnolinguistic identities. Rather, the focus of languaging bilingually (what Mignolo has called “bilingualing” and I call “translanguaging,” García, 2009) is “redressing the asymmetry of languages and denouncing the coloniality of power and knowledge.” (Mignolo, 2000, p. 231)

The globalized world we presently live in has thus enabled us to question not only the concept of language itself, but also the concept of diglossia as traditionally proposed. People “language;” that is, their language practices take up features that are “soft-assembled” in order to communicate. And their languaging appropriates different features as it accommodates to the multiple communicative situations at hand. Additive bilingualism, or even trilingualism is no longer relevant. Bilingual use is not linear, not compartmentalized, not balanced. Rather, bilingualism is dynamic, and perhaps better understood as translanguaging (García, 2009). *Translanguaging* refers then not to the use of two separate languages or even the shift of one language or code to the other, since there isn’t “a” language. Rather, translanguaging is rooted in the belief that speakers select language features and soft assemble their language practices in ways that fit their communicative needs (García, 2009).

In today’s globalized world, the neat use of two or more languages will no longer suffice. Rather, what will be needed will be the ability to engage in fluid language practices and to soft-assemble features that can “travel” across the internet and space to enable us to participate as global citizens in a more just world.

The language garden has thrown open its doors, has lost its enclosure. For this flexible languaging, this translanguaging, to be sustained what is needed is not protection, nor compartmentalization, but rather fluidity. Language maintenance is no longer an applicable concept, for it refers to the perpetuation of a static definition of language as autonomous and pure, as used by a specific group of people whose identity depends on it. Rather, it is the sustainability of language that we must encourage.

The difference between maintenance and sustainability is telling in itself. Maintenance refers to activities required to conserve as nearly, and as long, as possible the original condition of something. Language maintenance is thus an effort to retain the language as spoken “originally” by the group, before it came into contact with other languages, before the diaspora came into being. On the other hand, sustainability refers to the capacity to endure, but always *in interaction* with the social context in which it operates. The concept of sustainability contains in its core the grappling with social, economic and environmental conditions by which systems remain diverse and productive over time. That is, the concept of sustainability is dynamic and future-oriented, rather than static and past-oriented. Language sustainability refers to renewing past language practices to meet the needs of the present while not compromising those of future generations. Thus, the sustainability of languaging is a *new* copy of the past, a dynamic relocalization in space and time, a fertile performative mimesis that brings us to a creative emergence, a new and generative becoming (for more on this idea, see Pennycook (2010)).
As such, bilingual education today must follow more heteroglossic practices than in the past. That is, today bilingualism must be understood as more than $1 + 1 = 2$, and bilingual education types and pedagogies must respond to the greater complexity of the world in the 21st century (for more on this, see García, 2009). For example, many types of bilingual education programs today incorporate children with very different linguistic profiles. Whereas in the past, our understandings were that children in bilingual education programs started out as monolinguals either in transitional bilingual education programs or maintenance bilingual education programs for language minorities, or prestigious bilingual education programs or immersion bilingual education programs for language majorities, today many bilingual education programs incorporate language minority and language majority children and children with different language profiles. In the US, these bilingual education programs are often called “dual language.” And yet, although these dual language bilingual education programs educate together children with different language practices, the curriculum they follow is as “monoglossic” as that of the past, attempting to keep one language separate from the other in a diglossic arrangement. I argue in the next section that it is time to question these “dual language” practices for they simply normalize the dominance of English, while maintaining the other language as simply the “heritage” or minority language.

**Maintenance of Separate Dualities or Sustainability for Bilingual Americans?**

Just like the maintenance bilingual education programs of the past, dual language bilingual education programs compartmentalize languages strictly. Sometimes that language allocation depends on two separate teachers, one who uses English, the other the minority language. Other times the separation is by time of day, or day, or week, or subject. It is the contradiction between the more fluid language practices of the students in these programs—some monolingual in English, others monolingual in the minority language, yet others bilingual—the flexible languaging and translanguaging in actuality observed in these classrooms (see García, 2011, forthcoming), and yet the strict language compartmentalization that these programs try to observe that may account for our failure to truly educate bilingual Americans.

Although the world has changed, and our epistemologies have been transformed as technology has altered our sense of time and space, our language education practices in the US have remained the same. We took a step in the right direction in adapting our bilingual education programs to encompass the entire continuum of language practices that American children bring to school today. But we continue to insist on a duality of languages, of identities, of space and time that have little to do with the dynamics of today.

Even though American children enter school with multiple language practices, we insist in only acknowledging two whole autonomous languages—English and a minority language—and two national and linguistic identities. We set up dual language programs based on the myth that 50% of the children are speakers of English and 50% of the children speakers of the minority language. In reality, the reality is a lot more complex, with most children falling anywhere in the bilingual continuum and very few falling close to the two monolingual ends. The “English speakers” are...
often bilingual themselves, either of the other language being used for instruction, or of other languages. And those who are categorized as “speakers of the other language” are often born in the US. I have captured this complexity in referring to these programs as poly-directional bilingual education programs (García, 2009). Space in our globalized world is not horizontal and homogeneous, but is also vertical, layered, and stratified with all sorts of socially, culturally and political distinctions that are indexical of differences (Bloommaert, 2010). The multilingual repertoires of children in our classrooms are made up of bits and pieces of language, of features, that reflect different life-trajectories such as gender, class, race, immigration status, experience, rights, as well as spatial ones such as community or nation-state.

We set up dual language bilingual education programs insisting on dualities—of identities, of time, of space and territory. The goal is to have 50% of the time taught through one language as medium of instruction, the other 50% in the other language. And we attempt to keep the languages separate. Some call these programs “dual immersion” or “two-way immersion.” But especially for language minority students, the time spent in English cannot be considered “immersion,” but submergence. Many proponents of bilingual education argue against submersion in English-only for language minority students; and yet, they uphold the complete separation of languages that submerge language minority children for one whole day or one half-day in English. Because so many have lauded the dual language education model, educators use it without questioning the time in which language minority children, especially very young children in early childhood centers, spend being taught through a language they don’t understand. Clearly, the ways in which we have set up dual language education programs reify the two languages as autonomous systems, as they normalize a diglossia that keeps English dominant and that relegates the other language to a position of inferiority, of minority status, of “heritage”. Dual language education programs, besides silencing the word “bilingual” continue to perpetuate an American identity that is English monolingual, while relegating bilinguals to a position of the Other.

In working with the language diversity of American children, dual language bilingual education programs have taken an important step in acknowledging our country’s language diversity. But in acting as if the two languages respond to two completely different realms, dual language bilingual education programs are missing the point. These programs have the potential to educate bilingual American children in ways that do not assign two languages to two different national and ethnic identities, but to a bilingual American identity. To do so, they would have to build some spaces where the translanguaging of all emergent bilingual Americans would be seen as an important resource to imagine, learn, read, write, and do research. It would mean encouraging children to use multiple languagings to learn and to perform, thus breaking the link between language majorities and language minority identities that are perpetuated when the languages are treated as such. And it would mean that the teacher would not be afraid to build up and use the children’s entire linguistic repertoire to educate and extend their language practices to encompass academic ones, without creating the asymmetry of power between English and the “other” language that exists today. Translanguaging holds much promise both as an act of communication in a global world, as well as a pedagogical practice for emergent bilinguals.

To accept translanguaging in bilingual education would mean abandoning the language garden image and cultivating a sustainable American language that redresses the language inequalities that have been created through the invention of separate and autonomous languages—one English all dominant and spoken by insiders, the other minority, heritage, and always the language of outsiders. Bilingual Americans translanguaging as they creatively perform their languaging and acts of identity in ways that are encompassing, fluid, interrelated, and that sustains a renewed future of possibilities that is whole and not dual. To separate languages and identities is indeed to segregate and maintain bilingual Americans as the Other. Sustainability of the complex language practices of bilinguals in functional interrelationship with the social and academic context in which they are performed is what we must aim for in the 21st century.

**Conclusion**

A language garden with separate spaces and language colors that refer to another national space and a former time is no longer appropriate in the US. Although this might have been sufficient in the past, in our globalized world it has the effect of keeping English dominant, while marginalizing and keeping the other language as simply “heritage,” as pointing towards the past. What we need today is to work on sustaining language so that the many colors create one integrated context that does not separate or exclude, but remains diverse and productive over time and within the US context.

To sustain bilingualism in the US, we would need to stop talking about the maintenance of heritage languages and take up the dynamic bilingualism that would renew past language practices to meet the needs of US children in our global world today, and of those of future generations. The image of the language garden must give way to the image of sustainable languaging.

**References**


