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The Translanguaging Current in Language Education

I detta kapitel beskrivs teorin bakom translanguaging och förklarar på vilket sätt denna bryter upp de traditionella föreställningar om språk och tvåspråkighet som finns. Här diskuteras också hur teorin kan användas praktiskt i undervisningen i ett flerspråkigt klassrum. Därefter diskuteras principerna för det som kan kallas translanguagingpedagogik och dess utgångspunkter, utformning och förändring. Avslutningsvis redogör författaren för hur en tillämpning av translanguaging i teori och praktik förändrar den traditionella frågan "Hur lär vi ut ett andraspråk?" till "Hur uppmuntrar vi elever att införliva språkliga drag från skolspråket i sin egen unika repertoar?" Även om en sådan förändring kan tyckas hårfin, får den enorma konsekvenser för språkpedagogik.

The world and the ways in which language is used are rapidly changing. With the increasing deterritorialization of people and deregulation of markets, the question of how to teach the language of the dominant society to refugees and migrants is most important. Up to now, language education has followed traditional understandings of language and bilingualism that are the products of modernist structuralist understandings. But in the superdiversity, mobility and fluidity of today, these understandings have to be questioned.

Conceptualizing language in the era of globalization

It is impossible to understand the role of *translanguaging* in language pedagogy without understanding macro-level changes and shifts in our ever-globalizing society. As our society experienced the continued effects of racism, linguisticism and coloniality (Quijano, 2000) within a neoliberal economic regime in the 21st century, traditional sociolinguistic concepts started to be questioned (see García, Flores & Spotti, forthcoming). The deregulation of markets that was accompanied by increased privatization and the withdrawal of the state from social provisions, led to increased displacements of people from all over the globe (Harvey, 2005). Aided by new technologies, there was also increased transnational circulation of capital, commodities, labor and people. Thus spaces that had been previously seen as bounded and separate started to become experienced as interconnected. On the one hand, many marginalized communities started to break out of bounded restricted spaces, both geographic and subjective ones, to which they had been confined by their colonizers. Subtractive bilingualism became questioned as language minoritized groups claimed their language rights. On the other hand, elite and powerful dominant majorities also started to break out of their national borders, and additive bilingualism was no longer sufficient in an increasingly interconnected world.

The concept of *plurilingualism* taken up by the Council of Europe in the early 21st century (2006) disrupted additive bilingualism by positing that what was important was to be able to use different languages for authentic purposes to the extent needed, offering a more flexible appreciation of bilingualism and multilingualism. García (2009) proposed that the bilingualism of groups around the world could be better understood with the concepts of *recursive bilingualism* (for language minoritized groups that were reclaiming ancestral ways of languaging) and *dynamic bilingualism* (for all those who were adding new ways of languaging to their existing repertoire). In both recursive and dynamic bilingualism, language use is recognized as dynamic and fluid, as multilingual speakers use new language features in interrelationship with others. It is this more heteroglossic perspective on multilingual use that has led to the recent burgeoning of the concept of translanguaging, the idea that there is a difference between socially-constructed, named languages and the language system or mental grammar of bilingual speakers (García & Li Wei, 2014). Translanguaging recognizes that bilingual speakers can

deploy their full linguistic repertoire “without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named (and usually national and state) languages” (Otheguy, García & Reid, 2015).

Language education of minoritized students

Language minoritized students, and especially refugees and migrants, are required to learn the dominant societal language in schools. But the way in which this usually takes place shows how little interest there is in changing the social standing of minoritized students vis-à-vis majority students. The ways in which the dominant language have been taught in schools reinforces the idea that only “native speakers” have legitimate practices, and that the “second language” that is acquired is in competition with the students’ “first language.” The dominant language is said to belong to the “native speakers,” who usually belong to the group with the most political and social power. This dominant language is then taught only as a “second language” to racialized minorities who will be evaluated by “native” listeners for whom only their own features are legitimate. By categorizing the new language as “second”, and the old language as “first” and in interference with second language acquisition, the language practices and features of language minoritized students are stigmatized and excluded from the language classroom. In this way, bilingual minoritized students are excluded from ever appropriating features of the new language as their own. The new language is expected to always be a “second language.” And the myth is maintained that bilingual students only speak their “first” language at home, instead of recognizing the dynamic and non-diglossic use of languages in bilingual homes, that is, their translanguaging.

Translanguaging theory has the potential to transform speakers and listeners, as privilege is taken away from “native speakers” and appropriated by all. By focusing on language features of the speaker’s repertoire, and not on named autonomous languages per se, translanguaging has the potential, as we will see, to provide all learners with equal educational opportunity and build a more just society. But before we describe the translanguaging classroom and its pedagogy, it is important to clarify the concept of translanguaging.

Clarifying translinguaging

If you are bilingual and you own a smartphone, you will understand the difference between the concept of translinguaging and the concept of named languages in language education. When typing or texting, your smartphone allows you to change or switch languages simply by pressing a key and switching your keyboard, following the concept that there are named languages. But when bilingual speakers use their phones to text with other bilinguals, they use their entire language repertoire of features, their own language, with some words and phrases associated with one named language and other words and phrases associated with the other. The result is that the smartphone autocorrects words in one language to words in that of the language you're typing in, often to very frustrating – or humorous – effect! Translinguaging is the ability to precisely ignore this kind of language function on the smartphone, and to use all language features fluidly because they are part of the bilingual speaker's repertoire. The reality is that bilinguals communicate without regard to whether their language features are categorized as belonging to one language or another. However, society – and most importantly, the school – educates bilinguals according to a named-language view, not this translinguaging view.

The translinguaging behavior in which all bilinguals engage when they are not compelled to act according to certain social norms is precisely the type of behavior in which learners of a new language engage. The examples that follow come from two five-year-old emergent bilingual Spanish-speakers who are learning English in a bilingual classroom—Adolfo and Alicia.¹

One day Adolfo is having snacks at a table with other five-year-olds who do not speak Spanish. He looks up and sees that it is raining, and says out loud, “Está lloviendo mucho” [It is raining a lot.] He immediately realizes that he is not understood by the other children and says: “Look. It's washing. There's washing afuera” [outside] (10/19/2007). On another day, the class has been taken out to the playground as the teacher of English as a Second Language uses comparatives, her attempt to get the children's attention to that grammatical construction. The teacher repeats: “This tree is bigger. That tree is smaller,” and asks the children

1 These examples come from García, (2011).

which tree is bigger or smaller. Alicia tries it out under her breath: “This tree is *grander*.” Clearly neither Adolfo nor Alicia are simply switching from one language to another, for they are not going from one language to another. And they are not simply adding “English,” a whole language, to their “Spanish.” Instead, they are using their own language features in interrelationship with new ones to communicate and make meaning. That is, Adolfo and Alicia are constructing their dynamic bilingual repertoire by adding features to those they already have. Through translanguaging they are extending their repertoire and appropriating new features as their own. In the process, however, they are also learning the social differences between the features.

Translanguaging does not merely refer to going *across* languages, shuttling or switching between one language and another, as in the concept of code-switching. Translanguaging is about going *beyond* the concept of named languages to recognize the single language system of bilinguals. In the words of an eleven-year-old bilingual student (García, 2009): “Even though Spanish runs through my heart, English rules my veins.” If bilingual students’ language practices flow through their veins and heart, how can we teach them without stopping the circulatory flow? The next section explores how we might do exactly this, by enacting what we call a translanguaging pedagogy.

A translanguaging pedagogy

Although a translanguaging pedagogy can be used in any situation of dynamic bilingualism, it is especially important when teaching immigrants and refugees. A translanguaging pedagogy refers to the strategic deployment of a speaker’s full linguistic repertoire to learn and develop their language repertoire, and at the same time work toward social justice by equalizing positions of learners. García, Johnson, and Seltzer (2017) speak about the *translanguaging corriente*, the current that is always present in a classroom with multilingual speakers, although sometimes it is not on the surface. That is, even if the class is being conducted in the dominant majority language only, students are constantly making sense of the new language through what they already know in their language, as Alicia and Adolfo did in the examples above.

A translanguaging pedagogy does not require a bilingual program (although it is appropriate for bilingual education also). It also does not require a bilingual teacher. What translanguaging requires is trust that bilingual students' existing linguistic repertoire is not a threat to learning the new language, but must be leveraged to appropriate and integrate new features into an expanded repertoire.

Any teacher, including a monolingual one, can take up translanguaging to enable their bilingual students to make deeper meaning and legitimize their home language practices. In the superdiversity in which we live today (Vertovec, 2007), classrooms are increasingly multilingual. It is impossible for teachers to know all the languages of students. But it is possible for teachers to build a classroom ecology where there are books and signage in multiple languages; where collaborative groupings are constructed according to students' home language so that they can deeply discuss a text written in the dominant school language using all their language resources; where students are allowed to write and speak with whatever resources they have and not wait until they have the "legitimate" ones to develop a voice; where all students language practices are included so as to work against the linguistic hierarchies that exist in schools; where families with different language practices are included.

To describe the components of a translanguaging pedagogy, we take you into Andy Brown's fifth grade classroom, an English-medium classroom for emergent bilingual students in a New York City borough. Mr. Brown considers himself monolingual, although he is learning Spanish with his students and studying American Sign Language.²

Creating a translanguaging space: Andy Brown's classroom

About half of Mr. Brown's fifth grade class came to the United States from Bolivia, Egypt, Mexico, Morocco, Poland, Ukraine and Yemen, less than two years ago. Although English is the main language of the instruction, Mr. Brown provides opportunities to see and hear the languages of the children — Spanish, Polish, Arabic, Ukrainian, and English. There are two things to notice in Mr. Brown's translanguaging classroom. One is

² The portrait of Andy Brown is taken from Woodley (2017).

the translanguaging space that he creates in his classroom and how he uses it in instruction. Another is how he plans the lessons according to the translanguaging principles discussed above.

Mr. Brown builds the *translanguaging space* of the classroom by ensuring that the linguistic landscape includes all the languages of the children on walls, signs and labels, on the digital whiteboard, and in students' notebooks, even though this is officially an English-medium classroom. There is also a multilingual word wall with all the appropriate vocabulary, as well as a cognate list. Mr. Brown describes how he started to construct the multilingual landscape of the classroom and take up translanguaging in instruction (Woodley, forthcoming):

At the beginning of the year, I kind of would just label things in English. Then after a couple of translanguaging professional developments, I started putting things in different languages and the kids would correct me on those. They would help me translate them themselves. Just having the essential question and the actual problem itself in their languages gets them more involved and engaged in the lesson. They see something in a language they know, in their language and they are more into whatever the topic may be.

What is important about the translanguaging space that Mr. Brown builds is that it is not about languages of instruction, but about the language practices of the children, as they interact with the language of instruction, English. A most important aspect of this translanguaging space is that the languages do not appear separate, in different colors and different spaces, as they often do in traditional bilingual education classrooms. Instead, the languages appear in conversation with each other, so that the children can use them in interrelationship. This enables the children not only to perceive and use English in contrast to their own language and vice-versa, but also in relationship to the languages of the other children in the classroom. The students' metalinguistic awareness about their own language resources is thus enhanced, as they learn to find similarities and differences in the ways ideas are expressed, and words are used; and as they learn to look for cognates and other connections across languages. But beyond this increased metalinguistic awareness, the children in Mr. Brown's classroom are learning about different scripts, about literacy directionality, about differences in the world. They are also becoming conscious of the different ways in which languages are constructed and valued in different societies.

In building this translanguaging space, Mr. Brown is working against linguistic hierarchies that exist socially, as he levels the playing field among speakers of different languages. For example, among the school community, Polish and Ukrainian, languages of white immigrant children, are more valued than Arabic and Spanish. Among Arabic speakers, the language practices of those coming from Yemen are less valued than those coming from Morocco or Egypt. In putting the children's language practices in conversation with each other, Mr. Brown's students learn to disrupt these linguistic hierarchies. The speakers from the different Arabic-speaking countries learn about their different varieties of Arabic, about what they understand and what they don't. They learn, in this English-medium classroom, about fusha (Classical Arabic) and its relationship to different Arabic varieties. Arabic-speaking students share their national differences with students from Spanish-speaking countries. Together students start to question who decides what counts and doesn't count as a language; which practices are more valued and which are not; which practices are included in schools and which are not. In this way, students start to develop not only metalinguistic awareness, but *critical* metalinguistic awareness. The students become critical sociolinguists as they raise the question of why these linguistic hierarchies exist and who benefits from these decisions. Students then deal with the features of English with the same critical lenses that they apply to their own language practices.

In building this translanguaging space, Mr. Brown integrates home and school spaces and questions the strict division that has been formulated. Instead of asking students to move across these separate spaces, Mr. Brown enables children to work *beyond* these two separate social spaces, within their own internal integrative translanguaging space, to create the dynamism that will propel their learning of new language features and content forward.

A robust translanguaging space can only make a difference if it is used to *teach with purpose* in order to ensure that emergent bilingual students have equal educational opportunity. Andy Brown uses the translanguaging space with intention. First of all, he creates groupings that have some shared home language practices, so that students have the possibility of using their full repertoire to make sense of what they are learning. He always starts the day by putting up the lesson objective in at least two of the languages of students on the digital whiteboard. He does that with the help of Google translate and sometimes with the help of families, par-

ents or other teachers in the school. On the day that we describe he has put up the lesson's objective in Spanish and Arabic.

He first asks students to read the objective in English. He then tells his Spanish-speaking students to read it in Spanish. Together, the Spanish-speakers read the Spanish, as they become very agitated. It turns out that Mr. Brown has translated "means" as "medios," a meaning he has gotten from the electronic translation, but which is used incorrectly in the sentence. The students tell him immediately it is wrong, and provide the word "significa." One of the students goes up to the digital whiteboard and corrects it, while the rest of the class, those who are Spanish-speakers as well as others, read along the Spanish. Then Mr. Brown turns to the objective in Arabic. This time it is the Arabic-speaking children who become agitated. The translation he has offered has words in the wrong order. Hamid is called up and uses a marker to write the objective again. The students are mesmerized. They want to know about word order. Mr. Brown engages them in noticing how words in English and Spanish are read from left to right, and Arabic is written from right to left, as well as how the different words are arranged in the three languages. The students help Mr. Brown with this task.

Mr. Brown recognizes and builds on students' linguistic strengths to teach. He does not simply rely on the authority of dictionaries and online translations. He acknowledges the students as the experts, as knowers of important linguistic and cultural information that is lost in an English-medium classroom. Instead of simply learners, students are recognized as savants. In fact, Mr. Brown recounts how the students give him a notebook and tell him to write down all the words he would like to know in their languages, and that they would supply it for him. By making himself a co-learner, Mr. Brown authorizes his students to teach because they have important knowledge to share, and taking on the role of teacher increases their confidence. Only confident learners who are not threatened in their linguistic and cultural identity can take up new language practices, such as English.

In short, by bringing forth the students' linguistic practices Mr. Brown is ensuring that he brings forth the translanguaging corriente, that he makes it visible, so he can work with it, and not against it. It is much easier to swim downstream, in the direction of the current, than upstream, against it. All of Mr. Brown's pedagogical choices normalizes the classroom's linguistic diversity. He engages his bilingual students with their own language practices as he puts them alongside the new ones in

English. Mr. Brown helps his students feel empowered as emergent bilingual students, instead of being threatened by the English-medium classroom. Thus, emergent bilingual students open themselves more to new learning, new language and cultural practices. They are able to appropriate these new practices without giving up their own. A translanguaging pedagogy provides these possibilities.

A New Direction: Taking up a Translanguaging Pedagogy

To help teachers take up this kind of a translanguaging pedagogy, García, Johnson, and Seltzer (2017) offer three interrelated strands: the *stance*, the *design*, and the *shifts*. We can see each of these strands at work in the vignette from Andy Brown's classroom. His *stance*, his set of beliefs about bilingualism and bilingual students, informs all of his classroom work. For example, rather than hierarchize English, Mr. Brown's stance leads him to level the playing field, bringing forth all his students' languages and making them a part of the learning process. His *design*, the way he organizes both the physical space of the classroom and all instruction, brings the translanguaging corriente to the surface and leverages it for student learning. Thus, students' languages appear in print around the classroom space as well as in the instruction, which normalizes linguistic diversity and helps hone students' metalinguistic awareness. Lastly, Mr. Brown's *shifts*, his moment-by-moment "moves" that go with the flow of the translanguaging corriente, enable him to be flexible and responsive to bilingual students' specific needs as well as to become a co-learner with his students.

Conclusion

In order to teach bilingual students in today's superdiverse classrooms, we must move past the traditional question of how we teach a second language. Instead, teachers must ask themselves a different question: how can we engage students in appropriating language features associated with a school language into their own unique repertoire? Acknowledging that students have but one linguistic repertoire whose myriad features are *always* at work throughout *all* learning can help teachers build

on the language that students already have in order to help them expand their repertoire.

It is only by tapping into the translanguaging corriente, by honoring and leveraging the students' existing language practices, that teachers can successfully educate language minoritized students today. In doing so, teachers can make students aware not only of new language features and practices, but also of their societal meaning and the reasons for their diverse valuing. Teachers who engage in translanguaging are not only expanding the minoritized students' existing language repertoire; they are also creating a social context with greater opportunities and social justice for all.

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