

ΡΟΥΛΑ ΤΣΟΚΑΛΙΔΟΥ / ΡΟΥΛΑ ΤΣΟΚΑΛΙΔΟΥ

ΣιδαYes

Πέρα από τη Διγλωσσία στη Διαγλωσσικότητα
Beyond Bilingualism to Translanguaging

TE VOLET

'EdBTZ'

ALICE KOPELIS

hi KIFAK
SA WA

Δε θυγ άηηο

MY LUCK
IS MANY

DOESN'T MERA,
DOESN'T NICHTA

TRANSLANGUAGING

JUST
NOT
IT

GUTENBERG

TRANSLANGUAGING IN THE CROSSROADS OF CIVILIZATION

Ofelia García

GREECE IS CONSIDERED the cradle of Western civilization. It is said that the seminal work of the western canons were written in Greek – *The Illiad* and *The Odyssey*, the Platonic dialogues and the works of Aristotle, *The New Testament* of the Bible, treatises in mathematics and astronomy. But what is less recognized is that as the Greek independent city-states, the polis, acquired power in the 8th Century B.C., its people must have had great experience translanguaging. Today, we have been taught that there are historical layers of what is named as Greek – Ancient or Classical Greek, Hellenistic Greek, Medieval Greek, Modern Greek. But it is important to keep in mind that what was going on linguistically before the emergence of Modern Greece in 1830 was that people were translanguaging across what was the crossroads of Europe, Asia and Africa, and that Greece was the motor for all of it. Indeed we may say that Greece, with its continuum of ways of using language from the Balkan peninsula and the Greek isles to Egypt to India to Rome, was also the cradle of translanguaging.

Roula Tsokalidou's book does more than introduce the concept of translanguaging to Greek scholars and students. It questions not only our conception of language today, but places Greece as an important place from which to understand translanguaging. Translanguaging is not a concept that emerged in the 21st century; it is ancient; it has always been part and parcel of any group of people who have had contact with others. The concept of translanguaging was introduced in the 21st century to disrupt the conceptions of language and society that have been forged since nation-states started using language as proxy for other social reasons. On the one hand, a standardized language was said to be necessary for socio-political unification. On the other hand, classifying people according to whether

they used what was then seen as the «standardized real valued» language meant that those who did not share those features and characteristics were stigmatized. Thus, it was simple to make social distinctions that had to do with social class, race, gender, religion, etc. Schools, as guardians of the «faith» in a standardized language, then worked to ensure that the elite, whose language features overlapped mostly with those sanctioned by governments and schools, succeeded, whereas others failed. Named standardized languages were used to justify exclusion of those who were said to be different, poorer, darker, more rural, less followers of officially sanctioned religion, etc.

The work on translanguaging that Roula Tsokalidou introduces to Greece is also most important because of the traditional association of Greek with the concept of diglossia. After all, in his famous article on diglossia Ferguson (1959) gave the example of the relationship between Katharevusa and Dhimotiki in Greece as the epitome of classical diglossia. And the word diglossia is precisely seen as Greek. But the situation, as all Greeks know, is a lot more complex. After the creation of the Greek state in 1830, Katharevusa was brought back because scholars felt that speakers were using words from what was seen as Turkish or Slavic languages. To the Greek people who were using those features, these were their own words, their language. This was a clear attempt by a nation-state to impose a standardized, seen as «purified» language, which had nothing to do with the language as spoken by Greek people. Of course, this was not the first time that this attempt to control the linguistic features people used was carried out in this geographic territory. Hellenistic scholars upheld that only certain features said to correspond to the glorious culture of the Greek Golden Age were to be used.

But the fact is that all these measures were taken precisely because people were indeed translanguaging. Translanguaging refers to the unitary language system that all speakers construct for themselves, a dynamic system made up of a repertoire of features that have been acquired through social interaction with others. Seen from the speaker's *internal* perspective, speakers construct their own repertoire, their idiolect, as they add features to their repertoire through their contact with others. But this linguistic semiotic repertoire is not compartmentalized into «good» linguistic features of Greek and «bad» ones, or those belonging to «Katharevusa» or «Dhimotiki», or «Greek» and «English». Speakers do make those judgments, but these are based on *social knowledge* of what is considered appropriate and non-appropriate, Greek or English or Turkish or Slavic languages. That is social knowledge; it has nothing to do with speakers' own cognitive linguistic system. Speakers make use of their repertoire of features according to social norms and knowledge that is *socially* acquired.

The recent scholarship on translanguaging has been motivated by the recognition of many linguistic minoritized groups in different societies, and by the increased movements of people across linguistic borders – refugees but also transnational citizens, especially Europeans. The recognition that speakers internally have a repertoire of features that only *socially* (and not linguistically) correspond to a named language is important. But it is especially important in education endeavors, where translanguaging scholarship has created the most interest, and yet the most opposition. Translanguaging, as Tsokalidou relates in the last chapter, has important educational dimensions.

Roula Tsokalidou not only makes a strong contribution to the Greek scholarship on translanguaging, but it is important for the rest of the world. Most translanguaging scholarship takes as examples languages that have the same script. Tsokalidou not only uses Greek, sometimes by itself, sometimes in examples, but also relies much on examples that combine what we call «Greek» with what we call «Albanian», «English», «Roma», «Lebanese Arabic», «French» etc. Besides providing us with texts written by students, images drawn by children, texts on walls, literary texts, Tsokalidou makes herself the text in this book, starting with sharing her child's understanding of «Si/ДаYes», and continuing with her own personal identity text.

I am always curious about what scholars with different linguistic and cultural experiences have said about sociolinguistic phenomena that interest me. Because I do not know Greek, I am unable to make sense of that scholarship. The importance of Roula Tsokalidou's text is then not only that Greeks learn about translanguaging, but that we learn about Greek thought and experiences about translanguaging, multilingualism, sociolinguistics. The impact of «Polydromo», spearheaded by Tsokalidou, cannot be underestimated, since not only has it published multilingual articles, but also important children's identity texts.

Roula Tsokalidou in this text provides us with a typology of translanguaging that relies on a continuum of bilingual knowledge ranging from none to deep understandings. What is important about this typology is that translanguaging is related to greater bilingual knowledge. Tsokalidou shows that regardless of the degree of bilingualism that students possess, whether it is minimum or maximum, speakers are always translanguaging, always selecting features. In her level A type, for example, the speaker says «it shows from the way I speak». So even if it doesn't come to the surface, translanguaging is there.

It is also important to consider that acts of translanguaging are not always conscious, that is, speakers are not consciously code-switching from

one named language to another. In fact, multilingual speakers often do not have the social knowledge to say where the features fall in the named language categories. For example, Roula Tsokolidou reports that her mother-in-law wants her to «use Arabic expressions with the child, say, for instance “bonjour”, “bonsoir”». And Roula’s child whose experience of speaking «Arabic» is within the family, also believes that the word «bonjour» is Arabic. This is an excellent example of how features of a linguistic repertoire are used, sometimes without the appropriate social knowledge of which words belong to one named language or another. For bilingual speakers, words are just what they use. Of course they make social distinctions if they have been socialized with monolingual speakers; but if they haven’t, they often do not know what features are said to be from one named language and what features are said to be from another. One important point is that all speakers are always translanguaging, selecting features from their repertoire that they consider appropriate hints to send a message to their interlocutors. In the familial context of Roula’s family, «bonjour» is Arabic to them. They know that the word is not Greek because they have learned that Greek is the language of society and school, and it is not understood there.

Perhaps the most important part of Tsokolidou’s book is the importance she assigns to the role of translanguaging in creativity and how speakers feel about it. Chapters 3 and 4 are important in this regard. To me, Chapter 4, where Tsokolidou focuses on the creative use of language in poetry and the arts, was important not only because of what it reveals about translanguaging, but also because of what it teaches the rest of the world about the Greek-Australian poet Π.Ο., the multilingual French-speaking Arab poet and painter Etel Adnan, the work of the poet Shailja Patel who was born and raised in Kenya as a third generation East Africa of Indian Gujarati heritage, and of the Lebanese-French author and contemporary philosopher Amin Maalouf. Patel tells us that her work «migrates freely across continents and languages, independent of my physical body». And taking up the criticality and the social justice aspects of translanguaging, Maalouf reminds us that «no one should be forced to become a mental expatriate every time s/he opens a book, sits down in front of a screen, enters into a discussion, or thinks».

Translanguaging, as you will see in this book, offers all of us the opportunity to always be at the crossroads in which we language, think, and make things in the world. Translanguaging has the potential to enable all of us to be in that borderland in which all of us dwell, as we move across spaces, geographic and social. The question for all of us as scholars and students is whether we can let ourselves be open to just being in the bor-

derlands, inclusive borderlands, without being forced to cross borders. Only then will we be able as human beings to experience liberation and creativity, as we bring down the walls that separate us. Translanguaging is one way to start with a most important one—the linguistic one—and to show the potentiality of language as a human concern.