

John Benjamins Publishing Company



This is a contribution from Translation and Translanguaging in Multilingual Contexts 5:1
© 2019. John Benjamins Publishing Company

This electronic file may not be altered in any way.

The author(s) of this article is/are permitted to use this PDF file to generate printed copies to be used by way of offprints, for their personal use only.

Permission is granted by the publishers to post this file on a closed server which is accessible only to members (students and faculty) of the author's/s' institute. It is not permitted to post this PDF on the internet, or to share it on sites such as Mendeley, ResearchGate, Academia.edu.

Please see our rights policy on <https://benjamins.com/content/customers/rights>

For any other use of this material prior written permission should be obtained from the publishers or through the Copyright Clearance Center (for USA: www.copyright.com).

Please contact rights@benjamins.nl or consult our website: www.benjamins.com

COMMENTARY

The curvas of translanguaging

Ofelia García

The Graduate Center, City University of New York

1. Introduction

Linking translanguaging with other teorías críticas is the goal of this collection of articles editada por Tian and Link. As the poema “Tren,” co-creado by Latinx estudiantes in the article by Link y Arango says, “La vida tiene muchas curvas,” and so does translanguaging. By linking translanguaging to Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics, Freire’s pedagogía crítica, feminism post-estructural, and critical literacies, translanguaging is taken for a viaje with curvas in which it is aired, deepened y transformado.

This translanguaging viaje is not straight. It has, as el poema “Tren” says, ups and downs, speed y paradas because everyone is diferente, and “todos van a su propio ritmo.” The rhythm changes, sometimes slowing down to atender a la forma lingüística, other times to the poetry, y otras veces to essays and videos. But the viaje in which this issue takes us ends up revealing two very important issues:

1. that the bilingüismo of students is seldom taken up in other teorías críticas;
2. that translanguaging work has often lacked the acto político y crítico of other critical theories.

That is, whereas many teorías críticas have taken up the subject of language and literacy education as political acts, the emphasis on estudiantes bilingües minorizados has seldom been un objeto de interés. At the same time, translanguaging work in escuelas has often not been transformativo, working only as scaffold toward one destinación – the dominant language only. In the United States and Canada, the contextos of the estudios in this issue, the destinación is English only.

Los autores in this issue take up translanguaging and a different critical theoretical framework together/juntos in translanguaging espacios diferentes. Khoté and Tian base their estudio using what they call “culturally sustaining systemic functional linguistics” in an English Language Arts 10th grade in rural Georgia with many inmigrantes. Link and Arango’s study takes up Freire’s pedagogía crítica to work in a bilingual community education organization for inmigrantes

Latinx in Pennsylvania. Elizabeth Robinson introduces the tenets of feminism post-estructural to think about educar teachers of ESL in Massachusetts. Finally, Sunny Man Chu Lau traces the links between critical literacy and translanguaging en una clase de ESL en Toronto, Canada.

2. Teorías críticas sin bilingüismo: Adding translanguaging

The main contribución of translanguaging here is that none of these teorías críticas started out by putting bilingual ways of speaking, being, and doing at the center. Linking them to translanguaging reveals their monolingual bias, even as they are critical. Despite the important contribuciones teóricas y prácticas that these four theories have had, neither Systemic Functional Linguistics, pedagogía crítica, feminism post-estructural or critical literacies, have disrupted the foundational traditional understandings of bilingualism that have been so harmful to minoritized bilingual students. This is surprising, given the linguistic sophistication of many of these theories. That is, la concepción of bilinguals as having two separate sistemas lingüísticos is not questioned or disrupted. And thus, bilingual minoritized students continue to be seen by educators as having a linguistic system in the dominant language that is “incomplete,” while little attention is paid to the lengua minorizada. This lack of atención to bilingualism is made obvio in each of these teorías críticas, as the authors in this issue link them to translanguaging theory.

M. A. K. Halliday, the proponent of Systemic Functional Linguistics, defines language use as “a continuous process of semantic choice, a movement through the network of meaning potential” (Halliday and Hasan 1989, 10). This choice is characterized by the topic (the field), la relación con la audiencia (the tenor), and the way of organizing talk (the mode). As Khote and Tian describe in their contribución, translanguaging theory fits within this paradigma semiótico, alleging that all users of language select and deploy particular features to make meaning. But Halliday only considera “varieties of language.” Although la teoría de Halliday posits that language use is not hierarchically structured and his propósito is precisamente to ensure the valuing of all practices lingüísticas, he has little to say about bilingual use. Bilingual speakers are simplemente considered monolingües dobles. The meaning-making choice is considered to be done within each of the separate language codes.

Bilinguals, however, live and use language differently from monolingües. In the mid 20th century, the percepción that bilinguals were using la lengua differently led to the pioneering work by Weinreich (1953) and Haugen (1956). These scholars started describiendo bilingual phenomena that they considered a result of “languages in contact” and “interference” of one lengua en the otra. Scholars

interesados en la lengua de los bilingües identified and studied loans, calques and code-switching. Eventually, a line of scholarship evolved which defended these bilingual phenomena as socially or functionally motivated, and not a result of ignorancia. But regardless of the defensa, bilinguals were seen as having two codes which they often “mixed.”

Translanguaging theory went one step further, proposing that despite la importancia of bilingualism and multilingualism as sociocultural concepts, people who have two or more named languages (that is, English, Spanish, Mandarin, Arabic, etc.) have a unitary linguistic system from which they select features. Otheguy, García, and Reid (2015) define translanguaging as “the deployment of a speaker’s full linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named (and usually national and state) languages” (281). Translanguaging posits that the myriad lexical and structural features used by bilingües occupy a cognitive terrain that is not fenced off into anything like two codes, despite the fact that named languages are real and important objects socially and politically. That is, on an external level, named languages are important objetos both socioculturally and socio-politically, but for bilingual speakers, they do not have a separate psycholinguistic reality internally. Thus, bilinguals select features from their entire repertorio lingüístico to make meaning and to communicate with others.

Combinando translanguaging theory with Systemic Functional Linguistics, Khote and Tian extienden the meaning-making potential in Halliday’s original concepción to bilingües who now are seen as selecting from their repertorio unitario, according, of course, to the topic, relationship with audience, and the way of organizing talk. Khote and Tian show how taking up a translanguaging stance enables the bilingual youth in a 10th grade English Language Arts class to use their full unitary meaning-making system and repertorio de signos, resulting in more persuasive essays. La combinación de translanguaging with systemic functional linguistics is “culturally sustaining” for these immigrant students. That is, by being encouraged to use their entire meaning-making repertoire, students’ different ideologías and worldviews find expression. At the same time, the use of Systemic Functional Linguistics en la instrucción develops the students’ familiarity with dominant school genres, such as, in this case, the students’ use of the passive voice in writing persuasive essays.

The lack of atención to bilingüismo is also prevalent in the other teorías críticas that are addressed in this issue, whether language/literacy based or not. And so, linking them to translanguaging enriches them, as they open themselves up to the diversidad multilingüe of the world, and especially in classrooms. Systemic Functional Linguistics was developed in the English-speaking world of M. A. K. Halliday, but critical literacy, the theory that has been most influential in studies

of literacy for poor disenfranchised communities around the world was developed in Portuguese-speaking Brazil by Paolo Freire, and followed up in the multilingual world of Sudáfrica by Hillary Janks. Paolo Freire's dialogical approach to literacy was generated from interacciones with poor and illiterate peasants and workers, including those of descendencia africana and from comunidades indígenas. But even this Brazilian educador who taught us to engage students' critical conscientização to understand their own power did not make any referencia explícita to minoritized bilingual students, in Freire's case, indigenous Brazilians, who were being taught exclusively en la lengua dominante de la escuela, el portugués. Link and Arango nurture Freire's work with translanguaging theory, and use it to develop pedagogías críticas de translanguaging that stem from the lives and lengua de inmigrantes latinx. Their work at the community center, Revolución Arte, is precisely centered on Freire's critical literacy paradigm, but the work described is enriched with its focus on translanguaging.

Despite the fact that the work by Janks on critical literacy was based on the highly multilingual context of Sudáfrica, Janks has said little about estudiantes africanos multilingües who speak many of the 11 official lenguas of the country. Janks' concepto of critical literacy focuses on una crítica ideológica of what counts as legitimate knowledge, but does not raise the question of what cuenta as legitimate language prácticas when students are multilingües. By combining Janks' critical literacy framework of dominación, acceso, diversidad and design with translanguaging, Lau in her article transforms our understandings of how to pursue critical literacy con estudiantes multilingües.

Finalmente, feminist poststructuralism, as Robinson reviews in the article in this issue, questions dominant forces of masculinidad and looks at la construcción social of gendered subjectivities, as well as the contingent and discursive nature of identidad. Although focusing on how gender and identidad are constructed through discourse, feminist poststructuralism does not concern itself with el bilingüismo or los estudiantes bilingües. By linking feminist postructuralist theories with translanguaging, Robinson challenges dominant structures in schools, especially el inglés and the boundaries that have been tightly drawn around English in ESL instruction.

Translanguaging has made it possible for these teorías to see eye to eye with minoritized bilingual people, especialmente estudiantes in ESL, ELA, and even programas bilingües. At the same time, as we will see in the next sección, these teorías críticas are good for translanguaging theory, afirmando its political stance, and protecting it from the ideological drift that Link and Orango see as the danger of translanguaging work.

3. Translanguaging sin criticalidad: Adding teorías críticas

As Jaspers (2018) has said, the popularidad of translanguaging theory and pedagogía has not come without a price. As translanguaging has been taken up by scholars, applied linguists and educadores, the foundational political propósito of translanguaging – questioning language boundaries that have become normalizadas as a way to keep power in the hands de la élite monolingüe – has become attenuated. Linking critical theory, especially la pedagogía crítica de Paolo Freire with translanguaging, ensures that it continues to be a political act (Flores 2014), creating caminos and humanizing spaces that decentran la autoridad of modes of being dominantes.

The importancia of this issue is that in many ways it reroutes translanguaging, ensuring that as it travels and inhabits new rooms, it stays true to its formulación original. Link and Arango, citing Freire, expresan this clearly: “My role in the world is not simply that of someone who registers what occurs, but of someone who *has an input into what happens*” (1998,73, my italics). The goal of this issue is not only to show the many curvas of translanguaging, but more importantly to have input into ensuring that translanguaging theory and pedagogy remain critical. Link and Arango, deeply influenced by Freire’s critical philosophy know that, as Freire said, “The word is not finished. It is always in the process of becoming” (1998,72). And so, in this becoming, in this dynamism as translanguaging interrumpe las boundaries, the fronteras, las fences, it is important that it stays on the path of creating critical espacios that promote igualdad and transformación social. Knowledge, emerges, as Freire has said, through “invention and reinvention,” and so putting these teorías críticas alongside each other is an effort to reinvent translanguaging, as well as the teorías críticas, with a deeply critical bilingual lens. It is in the process of looking awry, through its many curvas, from otro ángulo, that new knowledge and understandings can be produced.

Like life in the poem and video co-created by the students at Revolución Arte in which Link and Arango conducted their work, translanguaging “tiene un destino. Pero te puedes equivocar.” The destinación of translanguaging is one – the liberation of marginalized bilingual students. But as scholars take up the term, “te puedes equivocar,” you can make a mistake. This collection of articles is then a wake-up call to scholars and educators, to ensure that the criticality of translanguaging, its destino, is clear. Translanguaging must open up caminos for alternative meaning-making and the well-being of bilingual students who are minoritized in schools. To do so, its praxis must result in construir knowledge alternativa by changing the locus of enunciation (Mignolo 2000). Translanguaging pedagogy must transform the relaciones of minoritized and racialized

bilingual students with instituciones and estructuras that have kept everyone following the same monolingual standardized path without/sin oportunidades.

Disruption of estructuras dominantes and boundaries, and fluidez, are good, but only if this creates cracks that challenge epistemologías dominantes and ilumina non-dominant voices and experiencia. In her article in this issue, Robinson confiesa, “I have more work to do. In all my other education courses I teach about the social construction of race and class and gender. In my TESOL courses, however, I don’t teach these concepts.” Race, social class and gender are often packaged as important sociocultural factors in education. Language, however, is always left out, not given the same value as other factores socioculturales, and instead percibido as a simple estructura of linguistic features that makes up an autonomous whole. However, as Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) has pointed out, language emerges from the acciones of speakers with certain perspective and ideological positioning. All language practices are enmeshed en sistemas de poder. And all named languages are mere social constructions (Makoni and Pennycook 2007). And so, translanguaging must be engaged in important ideological critique, focusing on ways to open up closed espacios, and, as the students said in the poem “Tren,” seeking oportunidades for transformación estructural for minoritized racialized bilingual students.

4. El translanguaging viaje

Translanguaging transforma the teorías críticas described in this issue by centering the experiencias of multilingual students in society, and especially in schools. But not all the teorías críticas in this issue nurture translanguaging with criticality to the same extent. And neither is the relationship or the direction of translanguaging to these teorías the same, with translanguaging enriching some teorías at times, and other teorías enriching translanguaging at other times. For example, Systemic Functional Linguistics shares with translanguaging the focus on the ability of students to move through a network of meaning-potential, but it is translanguaging theory that provides Systemic Functional Linguistics with bilingual prácticas and knowledge. Feminist poststructuralism shares with translanguaging the challenge to dominant structures and boundaries, and the privileging of process over product. But again, it is translanguaging that opens up feminist poststructuralism to bilingüismo and that produces the cracks in Sheltered English Immersion classes and the education of ESL teachers. Conversely, it is critical pedagogy/literacy theories that grandemente impactan translanguaging, enabling it to become un acto creativo and of rebeldía. La transformación of

prácticas come from acción colectiva based on praxis, on reflexión, on critical dialogue, and acción.

Translanguaging must continue to push back the efectos de colonialismo y nation-building on minoritized bilingual communities. It must always be a way of culling greater power and liberación for these communities. Translanguaging de-naturalizes languages codified by nation-states to develop sujetos gobernables, and that continue to work para excluir those who have come out on the short end of the processes of nation-building, coloniality, and capitalism global.

Besides an acto político, translanguaging must also be creativo. Nurtured with the philosophy of love and hope of Paolo Freire, translanguaging becomes more than simply counterstories told in English, allowing bilingual people, and especially students in English-only classrooms or bilingual spaces that have been constructed with monoglossic ideologies, the ability to control their own voices, their own experiences, their own bilingual identidades.

My intervention here is in dialogue con las ideas developed by Khote and Tian, Link and Arango, Robinson, and Lau. Específicamente, however, my voice in this piece is a response to Link and Arango's important question: "What are ways scholars can incorporate their own translanguaging practices into their research, writing, and presentations with other translanguaging scholars?" I hope that in some small measure, I have started in the viaje that Link and Arango have charted for all of us.

References

- Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1981. *Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Flores, Nelson. 2014. "Let's Not Forget that Translanguaging Is a Political Act." *The Educational Linguist (blog)*, Accessed July 19, 2014 <https://educationallinguist.wordpress.com/2014/07/19/lets-not-forget-that-translanguaging-is-a-political-act/>
- Freire, Paolo. 1998. *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy and Civic Courage*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Haugen, Einar. 1956. *Bilingualism in the Americas: A Bibliography and Research Guide*. New York: American Dialect Society.
- Halliday, Michael, and Ruqaiya Hasan. 1989. *Language, Context, and Text: Aspects of Language in a Social-semiotic Perspective* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jaspers, Jürgens. 2018. "The Transformative Limits of Translanguaging." *Language and Communications* 58: 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2017.12.001>
- Makoni, Sinfree, and Alastair Pennycook, eds. 2007. *Disinventing and Reconstituting Languages*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Mignolo, Walter. 2000. *Local Histories/Global Designs. Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Otheguy, Ricardo, Ofelia García, and Wallis Reid. 2015. "Clarifying Translanguaging and Deconstructing Named Languages: A Perspective from Linguistics." *Applied Linguistics Review* 6 (3): 281–307. <https://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2015-0014>

Weinreich, Uriel. 1953/1974. *Languages in Contact, Findings and Problems*. The Hague: Mouton.

Address for correspondence

Ofelia García
The Graduate Center, City University of New York
365 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10016
USA
ogarcia@gc.cuny.edu