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DECOLONIZING FOREIGN, SECOND, HERITAGE, AND FIRST LANGUAGES

Implications for Education

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Introduction

Language has been used as a tool of domination, conquest and colonization throughout history. This paper argues that the divisions of language into those that are said to be “foreign,” “second,” “heritage,” and even “first” are constructions of western powers, and especially their schools, to consolidate power and create governable subjects. If language was seen not as an autonomous whole, where one whole can be added to another whole, but as a system of complex and dynamic language practices in which speakers engage to make meaning, then named languages, as we know them today, would lose their power.

This paper explores the reasons why in the past, as well as in the present, the dynamic language practices of most people in the world have been viewed with suspicion, as powerful elites have imposed a way of using language that is constrained by artificial conventions and that reflects their own language practices. Nation-states have co-opted the human potential of language as a meaning-making semiotic tool, relegating many speakers to a position of speechlessness.

The conception of autonomous languages constructed by nation-states and their schools has also co-created the concepts of bilingualism, multilingualism and plurilingualism prevalent in the world today. The expectation continues to be that languages could be “added” as separate wholes, without taking into account the notion that true multilingual speakers never behave in this way.

Because named languages are constructions of nation-states, they are identified, especially by schools and in education, as *first* (having been born into it in one land) or *foreign* (belonging to another land). And as many nation-states are lured by the supposed economic benefits of acquiring especially English, and as some minoritized groups gain recognition in the 21st century, new nomenclatures have

emerged—*second, third, heritage language*. This chapter reviews the types of language education programs that fit those categories and suggests that they fail to leverage the actual language practices of learners, called here *translanguaging*.

Taking up the example of Latinx in the U.S., this paper argues that these language divisions are artificial and take up an external nation-state point of view. Seen from the individual speakers’ perspective, the language practices in which speakers engage are simply theirs—not first, second, third, heritage or foreign. But language education programs are implemented as being foreign language, second language, heritage language, bilingual education or multilingual education programs. Taking the perspective of speakers, and not of these constructions, we describe how different Latinx students in U.S. classrooms experience language education programs in ways that leave out their own language practices. We describe how these different programs are inadequate for these minoritized bilingual learners, for their language practices go beyond what is billed as “Spanish” or “English.” The result is the production of an inferior subjectivity that justifies their academic failure as their inability to use language “correctly.”

Named Languages: Historical Origins

That the named languages of nation-states were constructed is a well-known fact. Makoni and Pennycook (2007) insist that we refer to this construction as “inventions,” so as to recognize that the process was not innocent, but that, in the naming, categorizations of exclusion were created. The naming of Spanish, English, Portuguese etc. as the only legitimate language practice of nation-states has always been purposeful, a way of excluding those who were conquered and colonized. Language standardization has been accompanied by military victories and successful colonial and imperialistic ventures. A brief history of the historical construction of Spanish and English, the named languages assigned to US Latinx, helps contextualize the process.

Construction of Castilian Spanish

What was named Castilian Spanish started to become the standard in the Iberian Peninsula concomitantly with the Reconquista against the Moors (718–1492) (Hall, 1974). Its orthography was codified, following the speech of the upper classes of Toledo, in the compilation of Castile’s legal tradition of Alfonso X the Wise (1221–1284), known as his *Siete Partidas* (1265). But it wasn’t until the marriage of the Catholic monarchs, Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon, in 1469 that Castilian Spanish gained more power and authority. In 1492, as the last Moors were expelled from Granada, Antonio de Nebrija published his *Gramática de la Lengua Castellana*, the first grammar of any Romance language. Nebrija dedicates the grammar to Queen Isabella by saying: “*Siempre la lengua fue compañera del imperio*” [Language always was the companion of empire]. Speaking about Nebrija’s purpose

in writing this grammar, Walter Mignolo (1995) argues: "He knew that the power of a unified language, via its grammar, lay in teaching it to barbarians, as well as controlling barbarian languages by writing their grammars" (p. 39). This Castilian Spanish was then used in the *catequización* of the Indigenous population to Catholicism (Briceño Perozo, 1987) throughout the 16th century. In 1596 King Phillip issued an edict that authorized some indigenous languages to be used in evangelization—*lenguas generales* studied and named by Jesuit missionaries as Náhuatl, Quechua, Chicha, and Tupí-Guaraní. The linguistic practices of many white Europeans who accompanied the missionaries and conquistadores, as well as those of the indigenous people, were ignored.

In 1713 the Real Academia Española was founded on the instructions of Philip V, the first Bourbon ruler of Spain, to guarantee a Spanish norm and to "*velar por que los cambios que experimente [...] no quiebren la esencial unidad que mantiene en todo el ámbito hispánico.*" ["to watch that the changes that it undergoes [...] do not disrupt the essential unity that it maintains in the entire Hispanic context"] (http://noticias.juridicas.com/base_datos/Admin/rd1109-1993.html#a1). That is, the Academy's principal task was to ensure the unity of Spanish throughout what was constructed as being a "Spanish-speaking world," although many different ways of using language were prevalent. Thus the motto of the Academy was "*limpia, fija y da esplendor*" ["cleans, fixes and gives splendor"]. A year later, in 1714, Castilian was declared the language of the state. Castilian Spanish served as the way to suppress the rights and laws of people who were not in power, both in the Old and in the New World. In 1768 King Charles III of Spain decreed that there should be one language and one currency in his kingdom, including its colonies, and engaged in a mission to eradicate all other ways of speaking. Today the struggle to control the language practices of those who speak differently both in Spain and in the Americas continues (for more on this history, see Del Valle, 2013; García, 2008, 2011; García & Otheguy, 2015).

Construction of English

The economic and military might of the Kingdom of England did not require the language named English to be protected by a prescriptive grammar or a language academy. It was the ways of speaking of the Germanic invaders to the British Isles that originally gained ground, pushing the ways of speaking of the Celts north and west. The multilingual origins of modern English have been well documented (Baugh & Cable, 2002); especially important was the influence of the speech of the Norman kings that ruled the Kingdom of England after William the Conqueror defeated King Harold at Hastings in 1066. But as the Kingdom of England started to project itself as a powerful state within the British Isles and then beyond its borders, the construction of English as an entity (Park & Wee, 2012) became paramount. Publishers started preferring the dialect of the dominant class in London, where the king resided.

In 1588 England defeated the Spanish armada, consolidating the might of British maritime power. The plan of the growing power was to acquire the many people and their riches in a territory over which the sun never set. To do so, English as constituted by the ruling class was seen as the only legitimate way of speaking.

The British Empire grew in the next three centuries, and the constructed English language was used to categorize people so as to produce the "governable subjects" (Foucault, 2008; Flores, 2013) that the empire needed. Only white people of means, born in England, were considered native English-speakers. Other whites were said to speak "dialects." The Welsh, Scots and Irish were branded as "bilingual," and therefore their speech was delegitimized. When the British Empire expanded to the New World, enslaved blacks and Native Americans were not given access to the language named English, thus they were rendered "speechless." This was the same treatment offered to the brown and black people of Asia, Africa, and the Pacific. Only those who were at the top of the colonial social class were given the privilege of learning English and participating as second-class citizens in the life of the colony. The others were not recognized as legitimate speakers. The imposition of the language named and recognized as English was an important tool for the colonization and oppression of many (for more on this history, see García & Lin, forthcoming).

More constructions

As the powerful class of both the Spanish and British empires came into contact with Others who spoke differently, they legitimated only their own language practices, which were named Spanish in one case and English in the other, and these were carefully restricted. The powerless Others, most often brown and black, were rendered without language, and their linguistic practices described as "jumbled." The ideologies about the superiority of named languages were used as racist tools to exclude and oppress.

But named languages were not sufficient to exert the racist policies that were needed to continue colonizing people as the colonies gained independence. Also involved in this process was the construction of bilingualism and multilingualism. As we will see in the next section, the "parallel monolingualism" (Heller, 1999) that was expected had little to do with the multilingual practices of the colonized populations, delegitimizing once again the practices of minoritized multilingual speakers.

Bilingualism and Multilingualism: Other Constructions

It was precisely around the time that many Asian, African and Pacific countries were achieving their independence that the scholarly pursuit of what we call today bilingualism/multilingualism became prevalent. Multilingual learning had always

been a sign of enrichment for the wealthy. For example, from the second century onwards Greek-Latin bilingual education was the way to educate boys from Roman aristocratic homes (Lewis, 1977). Bilingualism and multilingualism were understood as simply the learning of an additional named language that was standardized, written, and that was the language of another “foreign” power. Through most of the 20th century “foreign language education” provided the impetus for this type of bilingualism. This was the understanding of bilingualism/multilingualism with which scholars faced the growing voices and sounds of multilingual people in many of the newly formed nation-states.

In the 1950s Uriel Weinreich (1953), a Yiddish-English speaker, and Einar Haugen (1956), a Norwegian-English speaker, published their now famous monographs on bilingualism, comparing the bilingual speech to the monolingual constructed norm. Despite their interest in bilingualism, both Weinreich and Haugen identified what they termed “interferences” in the speech of bilinguals, and spoke about borrowings, loan shifts and code-switching, phenomena in the speech of bilinguals that differentiated them from the monolinguals who were considered the norm.

Also around this time, the study of sociolinguistics was formalized. What became known as the field of *language planning and language policy* came into being, proposing ways of solving what was seen as the linguistic problems of the newly constituted multilingual states. The thinking was that the ways people spoke in these new states could also be controlled; their corpus and status planned (Fishman, 1972; Rubin & Jernudd, 1971). Monolingualism in one named language was not going to work in the new social order, and so another system of governmentality had to emerge. An elite version of bilingualism/multilingualism, a simple addition of western languages always used separately, was seen as the answer. This ensured that this type of multilingualism would continue to expand among white elites, whereas the multilingual practices of black and brown people would be further stigmatized.

Working in Canada, Wallace Lambert (1974) called for schools to develop what he termed “additive bilingualism”—an addition of a second language (L2) to the first language of the child (L1). In the U.S., Joshua Fishman (1967) reformulated Charles Ferguson’s definition of diglossia, claiming that, for bilingualism to be maintained, speakers had to use the two languages for different functions or in different territories. The focus on nation-states and social groups prevented Fishman from describing what was common knowledge in the eastern world—that the linguistic practices of multilingual speakers are not constrained by the boundaries of named languages and that these had existed for centuries (Canagarajah & Liyanage, 2012; Khubchandani, 1997).

As the 20th century came to a close, the world was experiencing the hold of a neoliberal economy that supported privatization and the free flow of capitalism in ways that benefited transnational corporations and economic elites (Flores, 2013). One named language was no longer sufficient in this globalized world, and so our

understandings of multilingualism took yet another turn in order to establish itself as a linguistic regime that consolidated power among white Europeans of means.

One obvious product of the push toward a globalized neoliberal economy was the formation of the European Union. In a united Europe one European language was not going to be sufficient, so the Council of Europe coined the concept of “plurilingualism.” Plurilingualism was defined as the ability of European citizens to “use several languages to varying degrees and for distinct purposes” (2000). The term multilingualism was reserved for social groups; for example, classrooms were said to be multilingual. The concept of plurilingualism extended the conventional vision of multilingual individuals as being those who are “two monolinguals in one,” a notion that had been debunked by Grosjean (1982). But as a concept coined to assure the unity of the countries of the European Union, plurilingualism does not question the construction of named European languages, reifying them even when “partial competence” in a second or third language is promoted.

It is these named languages and these visions of bilingualism/multilingualism that schools, the instruments of nation-states, have promoted. Languages are branded as “first,” “foreign,” “second or third,” “heritage.” Language education programs build bilingualism/multilingualism as additive with a goal of bilingual/multilingual development, meaning two or more western named languages, and usually including English. For minoritized people, language education programs, even those that use two languages as medium of instruction, often cultivate what Lambert (1974) called “subtractive bilingualism,” that is, transition to a dominant named language(s) other than what is considered the learner’s “first” language. And even when the schools’ expectation for minoritized multilingual speakers is that of “additive bilingualism,” the enforcement of named languages as wholes to be used separately stigmatizes even further their more dynamic and fluid multilingual practices. The linguistic reality of most learners is a lot more complex than all of these categories suggest.

In the next section we suggest that language education programs often fail because they’re operating in concert with the category assigned to the named language, instead of adjusting their practices to the linguistic reality of students. We first review different types of language education programs as we reflect on why these boundaries between programs do not work.

The Construction of Language Education Programs

Language education programs in schools today respond to the nomenclature that we have created for named languages, languages that are seen as belonging to nation-states or social groups, and not to people. We briefly describe the most prevalent language education programs today, focusing only on mainstream education financed by nation-states. These programs all have a monoglossic ideology even when they promote bilingualism; that is, they protect the named dominant

language of the nation-state, and they “add” other languages that are also standardized and named.

Native Language Arts

Native language arts refers to the teaching of reading, writing and composition, speaking and the analysis of literature. It is assumed that all students are “native-speakers” of the language that is the subject of instruction, and thus only the standardized version of that language is validated.

Foreign Language Education

These programs, common throughout the world, focus on the learning of a language that is not in any way associated to the nation-state in which the subject is taught, usually at secondary and tertiary levels. All students are considered to have the same “first” language of the dominant society and to engage in the learning of this “foreign” language as speakers of that dominant language. The focus is on the “foreign” language as a subject—its structure, as well as how it can be used either in the “native” land or when traveling or during sojourns in another land.

Heritage Language Education

The realization that increasingly students who are required to take a “foreign language” as a subject are either speakers of that language, live in homes where that language is spoken, or have an ancestral relationship to that language has led to the development of “heritage language programs.” Students who are categorized as “heritage-language speakers” are grouped for instruction in the language, usually taught as a subject. The focus is on the development of that language for academic purposes.

Bilingual/Multilingual Education

Bilingual/multilingual education programs have proliferated in the last half-century. The difference with first, core, foreign and heritage language education programs is that the additional language is used as a medium of instruction, instead of being taught as a subject. These programs are of different types. Regardless of the type of students in the programs, or the linguistic goal of a program, languages in these programs are also taught as natural entities, their construction or invention never questioned (for more on these programs, see García, 2009):

- *Immersion bilingual education*, where speakers of a named majority language are taught *initially* only through the medium of what is considered a “second” language, although there is also “first” language instruction. This type of pro-

- gram originated in Québec in the 1960s. Some minoritized groups, who want to revitalize what are seen as their “heritage languages” after achieving some measure of power, have modeled their educational programs after immersion. This is the case, for example, in the language nest programs among the Māoris and other indigenous groups.
- *Developmental bilingual/multilingual education*, where two or more named languages—one considered “first,” the other(s) considered “second” or “third”—are used as medium of instruction, generally in a 50/50 allocation, although the proportions of language used may vary and the languages may be introduced simultaneously or sequentially. Both majority and minority groups who want their children to be bilingual have developed programs of this type. Recently in the United States, because of the push back against the term “bilingual,” developmental bilingual programs are known as “dual language.” Most often these programs are “two-way,” meaning that half of the students are speakers of the majority language, whereas the other half is not.
- *Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)* has increasingly taken the place of core “foreign language” programs deemed insufficient to make students bilingual, especially in Europe. In CLIL programs the learner’s “second” language is used as a medium of instruction, generally for one to two periods of instruction.
- *Transitional bilingual education*, used with minoritized populations, where the students’ “first language” or “mother-tongue” is used only initially and where students are expected to transition to the dominant language of society.
- *Mother-tongue-based multilingual education*, used with minoritized populations, especially in Asia and Africa, where the students’ “mother-tongue” is used only initially, with the goal of developing two dominant named languages in the society.

It is clear from the description of the language education programs given above that different types of languages have been assigned to school learners in an effort to control access to opportunities. And it is also evident that both elite and minoritized populations have participated in legitimizing these constructions. The reason for the acquiescence of minoritized people in this educational pretense has to do with what Quijano (2007) has called the “coloniality of power” (see also Mignolo, 2007). The only system of knowledge accepted today continues to be a Eurocentric one, circulated precisely through standardized named languages, and thus even minoritized speakers desire to “have” the powerful codes of society. Named languages are not in any way revealed as a most important tool in the racialization of those whose labor had to continue to be exploited for the economic profit of the elite after political “independence.” Minoritized black and brown speakers had to be created in order to protect the hierarchical structure of white European superiority. Standardized named western European languages, and especially English, have been the key to the continuation of this “coloniality of power.”

Bilingualism/multilingualism have certainly entered the scholarly discourse today, identified as a multilingual turn (May, 2013). And yet multilingualism continues to be interpreted through a European lens that ignores the multilingual practices of the many black and brown people of the world. Today the commodification of multilingualism has become a fundamental ingredient in a neoliberal economy with deregulated markets. But this multilingualism excludes the fluid multilingual practices of brown and black bodies, especially in language education programs that purport to develop multilingualism. To show how this categorization of languages and language education programs works against minoritized students, we describe some of the practices we have observed in schools serving Latinx populations.

Latinx and Language Education: Decolonizing Understandings

Latinx students are a very complex group—some are new to what schools call English, some are new to what schools call Spanish, others have had lots of experience with what schools call English and/or Spanish, others have less, and this varies according to whether they are listening, speaking, reading or writing. Some Latinx students are born in Latin American countries, although Spanish may, or may not be, their “first” acquired language. Some are born in the U.S. and, again, English may or may not be their “first” acquired language. To describe the great diversity that there is among Latinx students, we introduce four Latinx students in a middle school.

Alexis, Yahaira, Alejandra and Kabil are categorized as “English language learners” and are in the same “English as a *second* language classroom,” although they are extremely different. Even though Alejandra and Kabil have recently arrived from Argentina and Mexico respectively, Alejandra had gone to a private school in Argentina where she studied English, whereas Kabil, from an indigenous Tsotsil-speaking family in Chiapas, had never had any contact with English and spoke Spanish only when he accompanied his mother outside of the community. Although Alejandra and Kabil are considered “newcomer English language learners,” they are differently situated in the same “English as a second language” class. The other two students, Alexis and Yahaira, were born in the United States. There is nothing “second” about English for Alexis and Yahaira. Both grew up in homes where English was spoken from birth, and it is English that they most frequently use in their communities and homes. The four very different students sit in the same English as a second language classroom. The teacher, Ms. Heston, is a white, middle-class monolingual-speaker of English, and views these four students through the lens of the “English language subject” she is teaching. She follows the official “ESL curriculum,” ignoring the actual varied language experiences and practices of the students and the ways in which they “do” language.

These four students also sit in the same “Spanish as a heritage language” class taught by a bilingual Spanish-English teacher, Ms. Medina. But Spanish is not Kabil’s “heritage” language—Tsotsil is. Ms. Medina is baffled by what she considers Kabil’s “poor” “native-language” abilities. She recommends him for evaluation, believing that he has a learning disability. Ms. Medina also knows that Alexis and Yahaira have been born in the United States, so she expects and looks for “English influences and interferences.” She constantly compares their use of “Spanish” with that of Alejandra, who has been schooled in Spanish in Argentina. Knowing that Alexis and Yahaira are categorized as English language learners, she complains that they do not have language, for, compared to Alejandra, they cannot use Spanish either. Ms. Medina is particularly worried about Alexis. She notices that Alexis’ use of Spanish in oral argumentation is much weaker than that of Yahaira’s. But Ms. Medina fails to take into consideration that, whereas Yahaira is the oldest sibling in the family and her mother doesn’t speak English, Alexis is the youngest sibling and is growing up in a bilingual family. Ms. Medina assumes that because both Alexis and Yahaira are “English language learners,” their “first language,” spoken at home, must be Spanish. However, Alexis understands Spanish but he almost always uses English at home. Ms. Medina decides to send Alexis to the “Spanish as a foreign language” classroom because he is getting lost in her class.

After a week the teacher of the “Spanish as a foreign language” classroom, Ms. Maconi, objects strenuously to this placement for Alexis. She claims Alexis gets bored in this classroom because he understands Spanish, whereas the other white, Asian or African American students in the class do not. But there is more going on to fuel Ms. Maconi’s objection. Ms. Maconi, who learned Spanish in college, doesn’t understand anything when Alexis rambles on and speaks! Alexis uses Spanish not according to some textbook norm, but to the ways of using language in his community. This puts Ms. Maconi in an uncomfortable position, for she is threatened as a speaker of Spanish. To maintain the superiority of the structural forms of Spanish she has learned in books over the “Spanish” as done in a bilingual community, Ms. Maconi excludes Alexis from her classroom.

Alexis’ mother becomes fed up with the treatment that Alexis is getting in school, for she has been told that he is not making progress in standardized tests in English and she has become aware that her son doesn’t fit the Spanish language program either. She has heard that there is a good developmental bilingual education program in the school, so she insists that they transfer Alexis there. In the “dual language” bilingual program, Alexis also becomes a “problem.” The program is two-way, meaning that half of the students are monolingual English speakers and have started learning Spanish that year, whereas the other half are categorized as English language learners, which Alexis is. The teacher, Ms. Gutiérrez, has been taught to insist that the two languages be always used separately. After all, the program is “dual language” and requires “dual” proficiency in two separate languages. But Alexis’ language practices in what is said to be “Spanish” are very different from those of the Spanish-speaking newcomers in the program. And

although Alexis speaks English, his English literacy, as measured in standardized tests and performed in school, is very different from that of the mostly white, monolingual students. Alexis is between two worlds—an English world and a Spanish one—that do not represent his life in the borderlands, in the interstices and spaces in which language practices are fluid and always available, and in which all bilingual minoritized students live. The school's insistence that Alexis "have" English and use it exclusively in the English part of the "dual language" program, and "have" Spanish and use it only in the Spanish part of the program, violates his bilingualism, his fluid language practices that are the norm in bilingual communities. Only "dual languages" are used and expected, as if these were entities that could be "had," instead of promoting bilingual children's ability to "do" language for the learning of math, science, social studies, art, music, theater, etc. Success in academic tasks should not require standardized language conventions; they should instead require thinking, criticality and creativity. Alexis and his mother are left helpless. There are no educational programs that recognize her son's fluid multilingualism.

Latinx students' language practices go beyond those of named English and named Spanish, and thus, no matter who they are, whether immigrant newcomer or native-born in the United States, their language practices do not fit the artificial boundaries created by different educational programs. Because their language practices are not in any way recognized and legitimized, Latinx students are made to fail in schools, whether in foreign language, heritage language, second language or bilingual education programs. The knowledge-power (Foucault, 2008) of invented named languages and elite bilingualism continues to marginalize many multilingual communities of brown and black bodies. To disrupt this cycle of failure, the ways in which named languages have been used in society and schools, and their relationship to racism and governmentality, need to be unmasked. If we were truly interested in the academic success of Latinx students we would be accepting of what we call here their *translanguaging*, and not insist on monolingual performances, especially in English, in order to give them access to educational and economic opportunities. In the next section we explore translanguaging, one of many terms used today that have the potential to decolonize our conception of language and, especially, language education.

Translanguaging

It is a well-known fact that linguists have never been able to make decisions *on structural or lexical grounds* about the boundaries of named languages. Decisions on what constitutes a language, a dialect, a creole, etc. are always social and political, having to do with power and will. Once the boundaries of a named language have been set, then linguists can, of course, describe its structure, phonology, morphology, syntax, etc. (Otheguy, García & Reid, 2015), but not before. The dictum of Max Weinreich about language being a dialect with an army and a navy is

instructive in this regard. For example, Afrikaans could be identified as a creole, or as a dialect of Dutch, but the authoritative demands of a racist apartheid regime required that it be named as one of two official languages of South Africa in 1961. And Luxembourgish, formerly considered a dialect of German, was named the national language of Luxembourg in 1984, in part a reaction against the occupation of the country by Germany from 1940 to 1944. So if named languages are indeed social and political constructions, what is left? What is it that people engage in as they communicate?

In the recent past the fluid language practices of speakers have been increasingly recognized in western sociolinguistic scholarship, stimulated especially by the heteroglossic conceptualizations of language that the translation of Bakhtin's work (1981) brought to our attention. Multilingual speakers are today said to have mobile resources (Blommaert, 2010) or flexible bilingual practices (Blackledge & Creese, 2010). And many terms have been coined to refer to speakers' fluid multilingual practices—polylinguaging/polylingual languaging (Jørgensen, 2008), metrolingualism (Otsuji & Pennycook, 2010; Pennycook & Otsuji, 2015), translingual practices (Canagarajah, 2013) and translanguaging (Blackledge & Creese, 2010; García, 2009; García and Li Wei, 2014; Otheguy, García & Reid, 2015).

I prefer the term *translanguaging* for two reasons. One, translanguaging has been used both to refer to the fluid language practices of multilingual communities, and to the pedagogical practices that leverage those practices (Flores & Schissel, 2014; García, 2009; García & Li Wei, 2014). Without education, the more heteroglossic scholarly conceptions of language will have little impact in the lives of people. Two, and even more important, translanguaging was coined in bilingual borderlands, in Welsh (see Baker, 2011), and its use has been extended in work with other language-minoritized groups (García & Li Wei, 2014). Thus the use of the term translanguaging is political, disrupting the hierarchies of named languages that were installed by colonial expansion and nation-building (see Mignolo, 2000). The goal of translanguaging pedagogical practices is to liberate sign systems that have been constrained by socio-political domination, attempting to give voice to all and redress power differentials among speakers.

If named languages are external societal constructions, translanguaging refers to the internal mental grammar of speakers shaped in social interaction, and the ways in which features in their complex linguistic repertoire are deployed. As Otheguy, García and Reid (2015) have said, translanguaging refers to "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" (p. 283). Rather than possessing two or multiple autonomous language systems, speakers viewed as bilingual/multilingual select and deploy particular features to make meaning and to negotiate particular communicative contexts from a *unitary linguistic repertoire*. For example, just earlier as I wrote this I heard my daughter say: "¿Dónde está el tray? If we don't hurry up, vamos a eat frío, frío." And I replied: "Está somewhere. Mira en el drawer." Now, my daughter

would have known to say “Where is the tray?” if she had been in her monolingual friend’s house, and “¿Dónde está la bandeja?” if she had been in her grandmother’s house in Puerto Rico. Likewise, I certainly would have known how to say “It’s somewhere,” or “Está en algún lugar.” But there is no need to adhere to the boundaries of standardized English and standardized Spanish in my bilingual home. My daughter and I are simply communicating, and these are *our* words, our own words, and not those of a nation-state or of a school. They are simply ours, used effectively to communicate in our bilingual context. Seen from an internal perspective, my daughter and I are not code-switching, as the external viewpoint would have us say. Instead, we are simply deploying all the features of our repertoire; we are translinguaging.

When speakers said to be bilingual or multilingual are *not* exhibiting what are interpreted as “fluid” language practices (that is, emitting features that are said to be from one language or another because the receptor of the message is monolingual), they are suppressing some linguistic features and selecting others. Speakers said to be bilingual/multilingual learn to do this *suppression and selection* very early in life, but they do not do it always. In unmonitored or less monitored settings, the unsuppressed flow of the bilingual’s entire unpartitioned linguistic inventory will often be unleashed because all of it is “their” language, not one named and legitimized by a political state.

As agents of political states, schools are the *monitored* settings par excellence. In them, children whom the society calls bilingual or multilingual are asked to engage in severe acts of suppression of about half the contents of their linguistic repertoire, whereas white, monolingual students are asked to suppress just a little. Bilingual and multilingual students are then assessed with instruments that forbid the use of the full content of their linguistic system, whereas monolingual students are allowed to enlist almost its full content. Not only is the instruction and assessment of students said to be bilingual or multilingual deeply *biased*, it is then given as the reason for their academic failure, their achievement gap, and even their poverty!

Rather than starting with students to whom a named language is assigned, a *translinguaging pedagogy* starts with the language practices of multilingual learners. By leveraging the multilingual learners’ entire language repertoire, translinguaging returns the power of language to speakers and engages their communicative potential, rather than authorizing only the conventions of named languages that have been codified by the nation-state to develop governable subjects. Teachers who engage with translinguaging pedagogical practices see students who have been linguistically minoritized for their *language potential*, that is, their ability “to do” language—to make arguments orally and in writing, to find text-based evidence, to explain a theorem, to describe the rain forest, to historicize facts, to create art and music, to imagine myths and fictions, to conceptualize problems and solutions for today, to express compassion and tolerance, to have deep understandings of scientific, mathematic, historical, artistic and social phenomena. This is the

language potential that we will need in the future, shared by all and not just by white, powerful speakers who have the “appropriate” features of language. Human language gives us the capacity to imagine abstractions and to be critical and creative human beings, and we are wasting that capacity in schools by insisting that language can only be used, and students can only be successful, if they can express their knowledge with conventions of standard named languages, whether one or the other.

García, Johnson and Seltzer (2017) have identified three components of a translinguaging pedagogy—stance, design and shifts. Teachers who leverage students’ translinguaging have a *stance*, a deep belief that their students’ language practices are a resource that transcends the standardized named language(s) of schools and can be used to make meaning of academic tasks and learn. Besides a stance, these teachers also *design* units, lessons, instructions and assessments that integrate home and school languaging practices. But beyond the translinguaging design, a translinguaging pedagogy also relies on *shifts*, the appropriate moment-by-moment decisions teachers make to respond to learners’ languaging.

If the four teachers mentioned above—Ms. Heston, the “ESL” teacher; Ms. Medina, the “Spanish as a Heritage Language” teacher; Ms. Maconi, the “Spanish as a Foreign Language” teacher; and Ms. Gutiérrez, the bilingual teacher—had taken up translinguaging pedagogical practices, Alexis, Yahaira, Alejandra and Kabil would have been taught as human beings with linguistic potential, and not simply as speakers or not of English, and as speakers or not of Spanish. For example, Alexis would be recognized for his engineering potential, for he is great at applying science and math to solve problems; and Kabil would be celebrated for his ability to imagine fictional stories and create poetic images. Instead of not giving Alexis and Kabil access to rich instruction because they do not fit the language education paradigm installed in schools, they would be educated for success as scientists, mathematicians, writers, poets, etc. It would then be their meaningful participation and engagement in these real and interesting pursuits that would drive the extension of their language practices, as they engaged with others in activities significant for them.

Translinguaging pedagogy is a tool for social justice, disrupting the linguistic hierarchizations of named languages and people that nation-states and their schools have created. Only by leveraging the real language practices that make up the linguistic repertoire of students who are linguistically minoritized, and building their critical understandings of how the invention of named languages has worked to produce governable subjects, will multilingual youth be able to engage in their education and become agentive learners.

Conclusion

We have described the construction of named languages by the powerful elite of nation-states. We have also analyzed how the construction of a version of

bilingualism and multilingualism ensures that only the use of two or more named languages separately is legitimated. This has also contributed to consolidated power among white majorities while stigmatizing the practices of multilingual speakers. We have also seen that it is these conceptions of named languages and bilingualism/multilingualism that are used in the many language education programs that exist in society today.

Using the example of Latinx students, we have shown how categories of language and educational programs based on those categories do not fit their needs. Attempting to fit them into these categories then excludes them from successful schooling experiences. We have proposed that taking up translanguaging, an epistemology that takes the point of view that language is what speakers do, rather than what nation-states legitimate and schools teach, could transform the present reality of language and education.

The road ahead is difficult, for the transformation of language education programs will not happen without a political struggle for structural change that has the potential to push white, monolingual speakers from their present position of power. As I write this it seems unlikely that the neoliberal climate in which we educate would be transformed. For Latinx students, the election of Donald Trump in the United States has unleashed a racism that may, more than ever, divide us, even without building a physical wall. The walls of named languages and categories of students are more solid today than ever. The raciolinguistic ideologies (Flores & Rosa, 2015) that have been at play since language was made a proxy for race and oppression are very much present.

And yet we must continue to denounce the coloniality of power that keeps named languages as walls and barriers to opportunities. We must poke at the cracks that are evident in the walls. Decolonizing languages might not be feasible in the present climate, but decolonizing our knowledge about languages and the language education programs that exist might destabilize the support that many language education programs enjoy today, exposing them for their role in restricting opportunity for minoritized learners instead of expanding it.

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7

FROM TRANSLANGUAGING TO
TRANSLINGUAL ACTIVISM

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Recent work on translanguaging has opened up a range of insights into contemporary language use, helping us rethink the ways we talk about languages, bilingualism, and language mixing. As García and Li Wei (2014: 2) explain, translanguaging is an approach to bilingual language use and education that “considers the language practices of bilinguals not as two autonomous language systems as has been traditionally the case, but as one linguistic repertoire with features that have been societally constructed as belonging to two separate languages.” This move toward translanguaging is part of a wider shift exploring new terminology beyond bilingualism, multilingualism, code-mixing, and the like, since these appear to suggest a rigidity of languages, a set of fixed codes that people choose between. Canagarajah (2013: 6) has argued along similar lines for a need to look at *translingual practices* where communication transcends both individual languages as well as more traditional accounts of what is considered to be a language, thus involving “diverse semiotic resources and ecological affordances.”

The recent growth in studies of translanguaging in education has created several important avenues for research and pedagogy. It has opened up, for example, more useful ways of thinking about why using varied linguistic resources matters beyond the reductive discourses of the “bilingual advantage.” While studies of bilingualism based on word and sentence manipulation in cognitive isolation, or positing increased executive control functions in order to manage two or more languages (Bialystok, 2007), have enabled well-intentioned attempts to persuade parents, educators, and institutions that bilingualism is an inherently good thing (King & Mackey, 2007), they tend to operate as if languages are easily identifiable objects operating in a social vacuum. If we view bilingualism only in additive and cognitive terms (speaking more than one language brings benefits), we miss the point that bilingualism is more usefully understood in terms of “resources which circulate in unequal ways in social networks and discursive spaces” (Heller, 2007: 2).