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AFTERWORD

Reflexiones on Translanguaging: Across Contextos and in Concert with Teorías

Ofelia García

In the last decade, the concept of translanguaging has emerged as an important lens to study the language practices of bilinguals, and most importantly that of bilingual youth and their teachers. Translanguaging, as this book describes, is an epistemology that posits that bilinguals do not simply have two named languages, but one language repertoire that is their own and that can be deployed to make meaning and participate effectively in society and schools. This collection of articles, edited con cariño y respeto by Mileidis Gort, expands our conceptualizations of translanguaging by putting alongside each other different contextos in which translanguaging is used and in concert with diversas teorías. In the Introduction, Gort identifies language users as “agentive,” who “act upon—and sometimes against—socially constructed linguistic norms and standards.” This volume presents us with different contextos (from pre-schools to secondary schools) in which bilingual youth in schools and their teachers engage in complex and fluid discursive practices to make meaning, and learn/teach. By taking up diversas teorías—cultural-historical activity theory, distributive cognition, human capital theory, language ecology, phenomenology, postcolonial theory, poststructural theory—the authors of this volume present us with a complex view of translanguaging that is in itself dinámico.

This diversity of contextos y teorías is used in this volume to expand a most important issue en el contexto sociopolítico de Los Estados Unidos—the vidas of Latinx emergent bilingual students and of their teachers, especially in bilingual education programs. As I write this in early January 2017, a president-elect whose stance is anti-immigrant and anti-Mexican/Latinx is being sworn-in. The focus of this volume on Latinx emergent bilingual students who are schooled in the U.S. is not only important; it is extremely timely.

The Latino school population is growing, and yet, U.S. schools continue to behave as if their bilingual lives did not exist. In 2011, Latinos made up 26% of the country’s nursery school and kindergarten students, 25% of elementary school students and 21% of high school students (Fry & López, 2012). That is, in 2011, almost one-fourth of all US students in pre-K through 12th grade were Latinos (Fry & López, 2012). In California and Texas, the Latino school-age population is already about one-half of all students (Gándara & Contreras, 2009), and in Arizona and New Mexico they constituted more than 40% of all public school students in 2006. Latinos also comprised between 20% and 40% of all public schools in five additional states in 2006—Nevada, Colorado, Illinois, Florida, and New York (Fry & González, 2008). The US Census Bureau has forecasted that Latinos will make up a third of the nation’s 3- to 17-year old children by 2036. And yet, because of the ideología monoglósica that surrounds the role

of English (and Spanish) in the United States, there is little understanding of the language practices of Latino students, of their translanguaging, and of the role that this can play in educating them.

The different contexts of this volume moves translanguaging beyond the strict focus on academic language that is so prevalent in all schools, even bilingual ones. The book, for example, starts with the contribution by Garrity, Aquino-Sterling, and Day in which paralinguistic features such as gestures, identified as Baby Sign Language, simultaneously interact with linguistic features of what are named English and Spanish in order for very young bilingual children to make meaning in a dual language bilingual pre-school. Beyond a mediational tool, Baby Sign Language, as well as *inglés y español* become part of the children's meaning-making repertoire, as well as that of their teachers. It is this meaning-making and capital potential of translanguaging that Martín-Beltrán, as well as Smith and Murillo, explore in their chapters in this volume. These authors point to the multilingual literacies of Latinx adolescents in a lunchtime and afterschool literacy program, as well as in a marginalized community along *la frontera U.S.–México*.

Beyond the potential of translanguaging for emergent bilingual students, this book presents us with the tensions many bilingual teachers experience as they navigate strict language distribution policies of dual language bilingual programs. Both Gort and Sembiente's chapter, as well as Pontier and Gort's contribution, clearly demonstrate how successful bilingual teachers take up the role of meaning-maker, rather than *policía lingüística*, in effective bilingual classrooms. These bilingual pre-school teachers assume their agentive role as intelligent language users, offering their young bilingual students ways of making meaning and learning, and of engaging in literacy activities. That is, the bilingual teachers that Gort and her collaborators portray act on language not as named languages of states and classroom spaces, but as the language that young children do, extending the linguistic features that they already have in order to gain new ones and integrating them into a repertoire that can be actively used to learn and be Latinx.

The book also significantly notes that bilingual teachers themselves need to go beyond purist language ideologies and stop playing the role of *policía lingüística*. Bilingual teachers must understand the difference between *protection* of the minoritized language of *people*, and *isolation* as just the language of *books and schools*. In order for a minoritized language to breathe and sustain life, it has to do so in the mouths and hearts of speakers, not simply in academic books and constrained by school walls and assessments. This is precisely the point of the important chapter by Martínez, Hikida, and Durán. Bilingual teachers need to understand *el poder* of translanguaging as what their bilingual students *do* with language, but they also need to leverage translanguaging strategically so it doesn't end up simply upholding the hegemony of English, a fear raised in the chapter by Martínez-Roldán. Translanguaging, in acting upon—and sometimes against—socially constructed linguistic norms and standards, as Gort says in the Introduction, disrupts named languages, but it also acts upon these social constructions so that speakers, and not simply named academic languages, are in control of their languaging. Translanguaging is an agentive act, returning *el poder* to speakers, as they add new features to their language repertoire, which they embody and use.

As Gilmetdinova and Burdick remind us, schools need to place emergent bilingual students' translanguaging at the heart of their curriculum, and to have teachers act upon it. Even in programs that claim to be *bilingüe y multicultural*, this is rarely the case. U.S. school curricula encompass language only as legitimized by institutional authorities whose purpose has been to keep power and success in the hands of white English-speaking monolinguals. Only if U.S. school curricula

encompassed translanguaging, will our brown and black and white Latinx students be able to achieve some measure of success. Only if assessments truly measured what students know, and not simply their understandings of a named constructed language known as academic English, will Latinx students be given an opportunity to experience the academic success they so well deserve. In a truly democratic society, testing would assess not simply for access to privilege (or rather for exclusion of mainstream classrooms or gifted programs in the case of bilingual students), but for their success.

This book is important and timely because it makes valuable inroads in problematizing the language of U.S. Latinos as either *español* o *inglés*, and of the schooling of those considered “emergent” as either en programas de English as a second language or programas bilingües where language is conceptualized as being dual. Latino bilingual students need more than just developing English as a second language (L2) or Spanish as a first language (L1), native or heritage language.

English cannot ever be the L2 of Latinx youth. Linguistic features that are said to be from English become part and parcel of their lives, of their learning, of their communities, of their identities, of their present and future. These linguistic features cannot be isolated as solely those of a separate language that truly belongs to others—the so called native-speakers; they must be integrated into the bilingual speakers’ own language repertoire and appropriated as their very own.

Likewise, *el español* is not simply emergent bilingual Latinx students’ L1, or native or heritage language, for features of what is externally judged as *el español* interact with features of what is externally evaluated as English in all contexts. It is too simple to say that *el español* is these bilingual students’ L1 or native language, for many are simultaneous bilinguals, entering U.S. schools as young children using a linguistic repertoire that contains features of what is identified as English, as well as what is said to be Spanish. And yet, many of these very young simultaneous bilinguals become “English learners” in U.S. schools, for assessment of their linguistic prowess takes place only in English, and sometimes in some comunidades only en *español*, disregarding what Grosjean (1982) taught us so long ago—that bilinguals are never two monolinguals in one.

As with simultaneous bilinguals, *el español* cannot be claimed as the L1 of sequential bilinguals either. Immigrant students learn very quickly to use features that are said to be from English in their many interactions, socially in their communities, but also in their schools. They immediately have more access to print in English—from the linguistic landscape, as well as all types of media and books. In other words, despite U.S. schools labeling students as “English learners” (for the same reasons identified above, of assessments that do not acknowledge their translanguaging), many Latinx immigrant students use features from what is said to be English. Many Latinx emergent bilingual students may even claim to have a more Anglophone identity than a Hispanophone one, even if others do not give them permission to do so, labeling them as English learners, excluding them and segregating them from meaningful learning.

In our global societies and markets, *el español* has lost its association with the geographical space of América Latina, and even with that of U.S. Latinx communities and neighborhoods. Diasporic communities interact with different linguistic features and voices constantly, and the concept of first and native language, a privilege reserved for a white majority, has started to be disrupted. Even homes have porous walls today, with technology facilitating the dynamism of language practices that renders monolingualism meaningless in Latinx communities. Not only has geographical space lost its rigid borders in a globalized world, but the concept of time has also shifted meaning. For example, whereas first, second and third generation immigrants to the U.S. formerly were engaged in a linear process of language shift to English (Fishman, 1966),

now the bilingual process is a lot more complex y dinámico, fueled by the compression of time and distance made possible by technology. The concept of Spanish as a heritage language is also then not as clear cut today as it was in the past, for what we have are Latinx students whose dynamic language practices (both productive and receptive) are constituted by different degrees and number of features of the language named español or the language named English or of other named languages such as Quechua, Mixteco, Guaraní, etc. What can be considered the Latinx heritage is precisely their translanguaging, “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” (Otheguy, García, and Reid, 2015, p. 283).

If translanguaging is the usual languaging mode of bilingual youth, then a linguistically and culturally sustaining education for U.S. Latinos cannot solely focus on English, just as it cannot just focus on el español. Named languages are constructions of the nation-state, but bilingual speakers perform with, as Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) said so long ago, “neither English, nor Spanish, but both” (p. 77). The both, however, is not just a simple *adición* of English plus Spanish, but as Gort describes in this volume, a dynamic use of linguistic features that is simply Latinx’ own. What is needed then is “a massive uprooting of dualist thinking in the individual and collective consciousness” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 102), an uprooting of the concept of standard English and standard Spanish as the languages of U.S. Latinos.

Bilingual development for Latinx emergent bilinguals must honor the community and the students’ own linguistic practices—practices that, of course, reflect features of what U.S. society and its schools call English, and what Latin American society and its schools call español, as well as others. “Named languages” of nation-states and their schools are important because they are authorized and legitimized in textbooks and exams. All bilingual students need to be able to perform at times suppressing some of the linguistic features of their repertoire in order to experience school success. But if we want bilingual students to succeed in U.S. schools that insist on traditional construction of English and the concept of academic language, we must start elsewhere. We must start with the language practices of bilingual people, with their translanguaging. And at the same time, as bilingual educators we must unmask in true Foucauldian sense, the injustices that result when bilingual students are required to learn and respond to an assessment with only half of their potential repertoire. We must acknowledge the richness and complexity of the linguistic repertoire of bilingual people and the injustices that result from assessments that insist that they “do” language with only half of what they really have.

As bilingual education scholars we have often been guilty of reifying the concept of el español, paying lip-service to its role in educating bilingual Latinx, but in reality upholding nation-state constructions of language purity and academic language, as Martínez, Hikida and Durán warn in their chapter in this book. In so doing, we have been guilty of stigmatizing the language practices of Latinx youth, often referred to as Spanglish or by other names such as patois, slang, working class, dialects, which are then further named as Tex-Mex, Pachuco, Caló, etc. Although many scholars have tried to revindicate these terms, often used by speakers themselves (see, for example, Zentella, 1997), these words continue to be used to stigmatize and devalue varieties that are not considered “standard” or “academic,” an español and inglés deficiente. Bilingual educators often isolate the construct of Spanish in rigid dual language allocation policies, without recognizing that U.S. Spanish has to be protected, but not isolated, as we said before.

The difference between protection and isolation es importante. Protecting a minoritized language es importante for people’s lives and their identity. But en el contexto of today,

protection cannot simply mean language maintenance, an important concept coined by Joshua A. Fishman (1964) before globalization and the neoliberal economy of our times. If we were truly interested in honoring and leveraging the language practices of bilingual students to live and learn, we would be thinking of how language practices could be sustained, not in isolation, but en interacción with other language practices importantes for bilinguals. The concept of language sustainability is a more apt concept for the transnational and transcultural lives of our students today. Translanguaging is an important tool for language sustainability, ensuring that the language practices and features of speakers of different provenance are put alongside each other, disrupting the linguistic hierarchies that have long held U.S. Spanish captive and minoritized.

Translanguaging is epistemologically different from how language scholars have viewed code-switching and other language contact phenomena in the past. Even when the linguistic data might look the same, translanguaging refers to a very different internal reality of speakers. The pioneers of bilingual and language contact studies in the U.S.—Haugen (1953) and Weinreich (1953)—were working within a monoglossic ideology that viewed these ways of using language by bilinguals as mixing, as something that happens when speakers go *across* named languages. Despite recent scholarship that views these language contact phenomena as productive and affirmative, that is, as something that bilingual speakers can do, they maintain the construction of two or more named languages, used sequentially and most often existing in a hierarchical relationship, instead of valuing a heteroglossia. Translanguaging disrupts the reality of named languages that have been constructed by nation-states to solidify national power, going *beyond* the external societal construction of languages. Instead, translanguaging focuses on the internal language reality of speakers, speakers who use, as Otheguy, García, and Reid (2015) have made clear, their own idiolects, not named languages, but their own language.

The value of this book edited by Mileidis Gort is that it advances students and teachers doing language, so as to:

Call into question the validity of privileging monolingual linguistic norms in multilingual environments where individuals with wide repertoires of language practices and a range of bilingual expertise and experiences can naturally, purposefully, and effectively engage in a flexible bilingual pedagogy. (Gort, Introduction, this volume)

For Latinx youth who are being educated in all types of programs, including those deemed bilingual, translanguaging offers hope of a socially just education that understands the violence of having to become adept at always having to switch languages and modes. Schools must shed the rigid boundaries of lenguas y culturas that act to keep, as Anzaldúa (1987) says, “undesirable ideas out” because “only by remaining flexible is she [the mestiza] able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically” (p. 101). As we face a year of uncertainty in 2017 with promises by a president-elect of walls and deportation, it is important to recall the words of Foucault (1971):

It seems to me that the real political task in a society such as ours is to criticise the workings of institutions, which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticise and attack them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight against them. (n.p.)

Translanguaging is in one small measure a way to fight the violence that U.S. schools have exerted on Latinx mestiza youth by allowing education only through standard academic English,

and at best, in dual language bilingual programs, also in standard español académico. Unmasking this violence is precisely one of the tasks that Gort and her collaborators attempt in this book con valor y respeto for all Latinx youth.

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