Singularity, Complexities and Contradictions: A Commentary about Translanguaging, Social Justice, and Education

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1   Singularity, Complexities and Contradiction

This book, edited by Panagiotopoulou, Rosen and Strzykala, reminds us of the contradictions involved in enacting translanguaging pedagogical practices in schools. On the one hand, all the chapters describe a singular vision of the potential of translanguaging to enact a more inclusive and socially just education for language minoritized students and to disrupt what Panagiotopoulou and Rosen (2018) have called a "monoglossic hegemony". On the other hand, all the articles also point to the complexities in actually carrying out translanguaging pedagogical practices, and its relationship to the sociopolitical context in which they are carried out. In fact, in some contexts, and without proper familiarization with translanguaging theory and a social translanguaging stance, pedagogical practices that have been associated with translanguaging can actually acerbate the silence of language minoritized communities. The authors in this volume do not shy away from raising the criticism of translanguaging by authors such as Conteh (2018), Hamman (2018), Jaspers (2015, 2019), and Ticheloven et al. (2019). Thus, the main message in this book seems to be that the sociopolitical context and the degree to which official language policies promote what Panagiotopoulou and Rosen (2018) have called a monoglossic hegemony, are paramount to translanguaging practices being received as an asset or a problem. Translanguaging, as a political act (Flores 2014), cannot be simply considered a pedagogical practice.

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In order for it to be an asset, it must be seen as a tool to reverse the minoritization process and the structural inequities that subjugated minorities students face, as well as the monoglossic hegemonic policies prevalent in schools.

The contradiction inherent in translanguaging is clear. It has been used as an instrument of minoritization of language communities whose dynamic bilingual practices are perceived as "language mixing" and illegitimate. At the same time, it is now being touted as a way of including these same communities and providing them with a socially just education. How then can translanguaging be simultaneously an instrument of oppression and an instrument of liberation? This is an important question that is considered in this volume and that we attempt to answer in this commentary.

2   Complexities: Product of the Colonial Difference

The chapters herein present different educational contexts in which some forms of translanguaging pedagogical practices have been enacted—some are early childhood or pre-school contexts, others primary or secondary schools. Some are day-care settings, others are mainstream schools, yet others are bilingual schools. International schools, as well as national schools abroad are also considered. In some chapters how students use translanguaging to learn is highlighted. In others, however, how teachers leverage translanguaging to educate, as well as their pedagogical formation, are emphasized. But what this volume makes singularly clear is that in each context, students with language practices that differ from that of the national elite have undergone some form of "othering," a product of colonization and political formations that then enregister these students as inferior.

This minoritization process has not been limited to refugees and immigrants, but is much more encompassing, a result of power-struggles, domination over populations, wars, conquest and colonization. Some of the contributions in this volume address the growing refugee and immigrant population in schools (in Luxembourg, Kirsch & Seele; in Germany, Fürstenau et al., Knappik et al., Panagiotopoulou & Hammel; in Greece, Tsokalidou & Skourtou; in Switzerland, Kuhn & Neumann). But in many cases, the immigrant students of today have been displaced before, as for example, the Greek Pontians in Cyprus, now hailing mainly from Georgia, and speaking Turkish and sometimes Russian (Charalambous et al.).

In some cases, as in that described by Prax-Dubois and Hélot, the process of minoritization of the Réunion Creole-speaking population is more obvious, clearly a French colony "d'outre mer." But the geographic location of La Réunion in the middle of the Indian ocean and off the coast of Madagascar means that

many also speak Malagasy or Comorian languages, as well as others. In other cases, however, the process of minoritization occurred so long ago that it has been forgotten and the "othering" has been naturalized. This is the case, for example, of Latinx in the United States (Seltzer et al.), and of Frisians in the Netherlands (Duarte and Günther-van der Meij). In both the U.S. and Frisian cases, the continuum of minoritization experiences is obvious. In the U.S., some Latinx bilingual students are native-born, whereas others are immigrants with different histories and cultural and linguistic practices. In Friesland, the Frisian students have been born in the Netherlands, whereas in the same classroom there are immigrants who speak many other languages.

What is clear when we consider all these cases together is that it is not globalization that is responsible for what Vertovec (2007) has called superdiversity. True, scholars are paying more attention to multilingualism in society and education than we have in our past. Proof of this is just the mere number of projects dealing with multilingual education in this volume. It is important to acknowledge, however, that what we are witnessing is the effects of colonization and what Walter Mignolo (2002) has called "the colonial difference," the effects of long histories of oppression and continued experiences of minoritization and racialization (Flores and Rosa 2015).

3   Language and the Singularity of the Colonial Difference

Bauman and Briggs (2003) have shown how since the 17th century, theories of language as a structured entity (Park and Wee 2012) have operated as an instrument of colonialism and nation-building to produce and naturalize forms of social inequality and construct modernity. That is, the ideological invention of language by European elites has resulted not only in the imposition of rigid forms of using language that reflect their own, but also in branding those whose language practices are different as intellectually inferior and even dangerous. It is not just that, as Prax-Dubois and Hélot state, the languages of the South equal the vulnerability of its speakers; the liability of speech has to do with who is the speaker and who holds the power and controls the army and the navy. Some languages of the South have prestige in the mouths of dominant white elites. It is the conquered and colonized people of the South whose language is always stigmatized, relegated to a pidgin, a creole, a mixture, a hybridity without a constructed "purity." The decolonial theorist Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014, 2018) reminds us that the South is not geographical; it is epistemological, a metaphor of human suffering.

In coining his theory of "coloniality," the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano (2000) has pointed out that the exploitation and domination of racialized groups is now carried out not solely through labor, but through the structuring of knowledge-systems, race, language and sex into superior and inferior. The knowledges and ways of languaging of those racialized as inferior are then deemed to be inappropriate for education, producing failure for these students. Bilingual languaging is often perceived as "mixing," and enregistered (Agha 2005) as a mark of intellectual deficiency among these students.

The work of translanguaging in schools must attempt to make visible this process of minoritization and racialization. Despite the complexities, it is the singularity of being the product of the colonial difference that concerns us, and that the translanguaging work needs to put into stark relief.

4 Language Education Policies and Pedagogical Practices in Continuum

Language education policies in schools reflect the many different ideologies of nation-states and their schools. In fact, these policies act as instruments of governmentality (Foucault 2008), controlling the language behavior of people, and restricting language socialization to the ideologies of the nation-state. Panagiotopoulou and Rosen (2018) have referred to the effect of such language policies as upholding a monoglossic hegemony. Individual schools may also enact different language education policies when allowed by the state, often responding to the students, families and/or educators in the school.

In her work, Duarte (2018) has observed how the goals of multilingualism in education projects respond to societal ideologies. The goals, Duarte has explained, can be seen as in a continuum, from acknowledgement of language diversity to actual use. That is, some of the pedagogical practices described herein respond to a language education policy of acknowledgement, whereas others respond to a language education policy of use.

In some of the chapters in this book, translanguaging practices function as merely a bridge towards the dominant language and culture. In their chapter, Duarte and Günter-van der Meij name three different functions of translanguaging practices in school: 1) symbolic, that is, merely recognition; 2) scaffolding or transitional bridge towards the dominant language and culture; 3) epistemological or acceptance of different language practices.

At one end, the language awareness activities in Fürstenau et al. or Prax-Dubois and Hélot simply acknowledge the linguistic diversity in classrooms. At

the other end, other projects uphold actual use of minoritized languages, such as the bilingual education program described by Seltzer et al. and by Duarte, as well as in the Greek schools in Canada, the U.S. and Germany studied by Panagiotopoulou et al. There are also different degrees of usage, for example, in the chapter by Kirsch & Seele, the teachers are observed simply engaging in translations for the very young children. This diversity of pedagogical practices, encouraging different visions of multilingual utilization, support what Tupin and Wharton (2016) have called "pedagogies of variation."

The variations have to do with the negotiations that teachers must make in relationship to language education policies that are in place. Prax-Dubois and Hélot raise this question when they pose "What does inclusion and social justice mean in a French colonial context"? At a minimum, the pedagogical practices enacted by educators in this volume negotiate the language education policy of the nation-state so as to work with the students' funds of knowledge.

5   Language Ideologies in Continuum

It is interesting that many of the teachers involved in the many multilingual projects described herein did not develop a stance that supported multilingualism in education, despite much professional development. In fact, some of the teachers who wrote autobiographical texts considered in the article by Knappik et al. complained about the "adversary effect" of a practice that acknowledged and used the students' multilingualism. Unlike the Cyprus' context of "(in)securization," Germany is not a context of open conflict, yet, the teachers there expressed their hesitation in fully engaging with pedagogical practices that openly supported the linguistic diversity of their students because of its effect in marking students as deficient and needing help.

Panagiotopoulou et al. document here how teachers' words and actions in German schools abroad in Greece, Canada, and the USA reflect a spectrum of ideologies from monoglossic to heteroglossic. This was also the view of the Greek teachers in the chapter by Skourtou & Tsokalidou who viewed all of these multilingual pedagogical practices as a great challenge for all.

In all the cases described in this volume, teachers were involved in professional development to different degrees. The projects described by Duarte and Günter-van der Meij, for instance, made significant efforts to ensure that teachers were involved in developing, designing, implementing and evaluating the multilingual interventions. In the chapter by Seltzer et al., attention is paid to the professional development provided by the CUNY-NYSIEB project, and the formation of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) to discuss, design, implement and evaluate

the different activities. Yet, some of the negative ideologies of the teachers towards these bilingual students remained. In fact, one of the bilingual teachers called her Latinx pre-schoolers "nilingües," meaning they spoke neither English nor Spanish. It turns out that despite much effort, ideologies about bilingual students having "no language" remain.

6 A Translanguaging Stance. Singularity Again

A most important question raised in this volume is whether we can escape linguistic ideologies. Charalambous et al. remind us that children are socialized into language ideologies. In thinking about how translanguaging pedagogical practices can be put into effect, García et al. (2017) have called attention to how teachers must develop a translanguaging stance before they can design or put into practice different pedagogical practices.

But what is a translanguaging stance and how can teachers develop such a stance?

A translanguaging stance is grounded in uncovering the colonial difference and the ways in which language, bilingualism and multilingualism have been used, and continue to be used, to minoritize and racialize conquered and colonized populations.

The construction of languages as autonomous entities, and bilingualism as simply additive has worked against the language practices of minoritized bilingual communities. The bilingualism of Latinx bilingual students is not simply additive; it is dynamic (García 2009). Thus, merely acknowledging or even using what is seen as the students' first language in education does not in any way uncover the ways in which standard language and additive bilingualism have been used as instruments to minoritize the language practices of some bilinguals and rendering them as deficient. A translanguaging stance demands more than simple support of bilingualism and multilingualism, for as Kuhn and Neumann say in this volume, bilingualism is more likely to push back translanguaging than to support it.

A translanguaging stance has to do with the firm belief that minoritized bilinguals have the agency to fully leverage their unitary semiotic repertoire made up of linguistic and multimodal signs in ways that does not correspond to the strict parameters of one named language or another or one mode or another established by schools. The actions of bilingual students that go beyond those legitimated in schools are then perceived as virtuous, complex, fluid, creative and critical, and not simply as deficient. Teachers with a translanguaging stance trust that their

bilingual students have the potential to make meaning for themselves, even if the process is different from that followed by children with monolingual middle-class parents. They understand that even though named languages are important sociopolitical realities, psycholinguistically the two languages do not simply correspond to two dual cognitive or experiential realities (Otheguy et al. 2015, 2018). Accordingly, when a bilingual student uses their entire language repertoire in ways that go beyond the familiar ones in schools, teachers do not see them as "nilingües," but as capable of being and learning, even though they live with the structural inequalities that keep them living in a "tierra entre medio," in borderlands (Anzaldúa 1987) that are not only cultural and linguistic, but also economic.

Can we escape language ideologies? Mignolo (2007) tells us that to do so we must de-link from the colonial matrix of power, bringing to the foreground other epistemologies so as to de-center universal emancipating claims. To bring to the foreground other epistemologies, other knowledges, "a new common sense" (Santos 2014, 2018), would require that teachers learn to listen to their students anew. But this new "listening subject" (Flores and Rosa 2015) can only come into being if we provide minoritized bilingual students with opportunities to bring their translanguaging openly into schools. Language socialization for these bilingual students would then include translanguaging openly, not only in their homes and communities, but for academic tasks in schools. A combination of students' translanguaging socialization experiences for academic success, alongside teachers' socialization into listening experiences where students' translanguaging was openly used to think, reflect, create, and produce knowledge, might then produce some de-linking from the colonial matrix of power.

In working with teachers, I have often used Martin Luther King's saying: "You don't have to see the whole staircase. Just take the first step." To develop a translanguaging stance we cannot wait for educators to see the whole staircase. First steps to view the power of translanguaging are needed. The contributions in this book enable us to take first steps.

7   Translanguaging: From Instrument of Oppression to Instrument of Liberation

The only way to use translanguaging to liberate is simultaneously to recognize the ways it has been used to oppress and minoritize bilingual communities. In describing his "two-eyed" philosophy of education, Myles Horton, an American educator who founded a school known for its role in the Civil Rights Movement, once said:

> You have to build a program that will deal with things as they are now and as they ought to be at the same time. They go together, the "is" and the "ought.". … I have two eyes that I don't have to use the same way. When I do educational work with a group of people, I try to see with one eye where those people are as they perceive themselves to be… You have to start where people are, because their growth is going to be from there. … Now my other eye is not such a problem, because I already have in mind a philosophy of where I'd like to see people moving …I don't separate two ways of looking. … I look at people with two eyes simultaneously all the time" (1990, p. 131 f.).

The process of designing translanguaging pedagogical practices keeps one eye on schools as they are, with language policies that reflect monoglossic ideologies, and with language socialization practices that reflect those ideologies. But teachers have potential for growth. Speaking of this human capacity to grow, Horton (1990) adds that "it's in the seeds… This kind of potential cannot guarantee a particular outcome, but it's what you build on" (p. 133). The other eye then has to be anchored in a vision, a vision and ideology of what education could be if students were to be given experiences that de-link from the colonial matrix of power.

Translanguaging offers a vision to deal with what is and could be simultaneously. Translanguaging is not a method of technique, but a process with many strands. In this book we have viewed some of these strands that together with many others are building a tapestry of much complexity, but singularity of purpose—to liberate minoritized bilinguals and educate them fairly and justly, and to liberate ourselves from the monoglossic hegemony (Panagiotopoulou and Rosen 2018) of language education policies.

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