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RESEARCH ARTICLE



# Language beyond flags: teachers misunderstanding of translanguaging in preschools

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## ABSTRACT

Based on an analysis of the video recording and transcript of one lesson chosen by preschool teachers in Luxembourg as an example of translanguaging pedagogy, this article shows the teachers' limited understandings of translanguaging. As a result of a new 2017 multilingual education policy for early childhood, the first author designed a professional development project in which the teachers in this preschool participated. During a lesson, the teachers insisted that these young children had a home language associated with a national affiliation depicted by a flag, despite the children themselves telling them repeatedly that their home language practices were complex and included Luxembourgish, which was part of their identity. The teachers' actions and discourse reveal raciolinguistic ideologies and misappropriation of the term translanguaging to simply implement what could be better described as a multilingual awareness activity. On the surface, the teachers have shifted from monolingual instruction to one that recognizes the children's multilingualism. Yet, teachers continue to associate the notion of language with flags and political states, instead of taking up an inside-view of the bilingual speaker, the kernel of translanguaging theory.

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## Introduction

Pedagogical practices bound to translanguaging theory have been increasingly tried out in different world contexts to educate bilingual children. The problem, however, is that not every sociopolitical context has the same socio-educational goals; and neither does every teacher have the same ideologies regarding the role of schooling and language, race, nationhood, citizenship, and immigration.

In this article we focus on Luxembourgian preschools, sites that have recently been open to changes, as a new 2017 policy encourages the teachers' acknowledgement of the young children's multilingualism. As a result of a professional development project on translanguaging carried out by the first author and her team, teachers designed lessons that were said to follow a translanguaging design. However, many of the teachers' pedagogical designs revealed a misunderstanding of translanguaging that is evident in the case that is the focus of this article.

We start by defining what translanguaging means to reconceptualize multilingualism in education, especially for very young children. We review other scholarship that presents the challenges of implementing translanguaging pedagogical practices. We then focus on a case in a Luxembourgian preschool where teachers had been engaged in professional development, and yet had failed to understand translanguaging theory. Together we analyzed how teachers' actions and discourse reveal raciolinguistic ideologies and misappropriation of the term translanguaging to simply

implement what could be better described as a multilingual awareness activity. On the surface, the teachers have shifted from monolingual instruction to one that recognizes the children's multilingualism. Yet, teachers continue to associate the notion of language with flags and political states, instead of taking up an inside-view of the bilingual speaker, the kernel of translanguaging theory.

## Translanguaging

The term translanguaging was coined in Wales by Cen Williams, an educator who developed a pedagogical practice where in the same room, and with the same teacher, the language of input and the language of output were different. He labeled this practice with a Welsh term, *trawsieithu* (Williams 1994), translated by Baker (2001) into English as *translanguaging*.

Translanguaging, as Otheguy, García, and Reid (2015) summarize, stands for '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' (283). But because translanguaging emerged and has since been rooted in contexts of dominance and oppression by dominant powers, it has also been entrenched in the struggle to liberate minoritized bilinguals from the constraint of what has been normalized as language, language that reflects only the practices of a few monolingual, and usually white, dominant speakers.

Translanguaging theory supports two main postulates – (1) the recognition that named languages are socio-political constructs and that bilingualism/multilingualism is not the addition of two separate linguistic systems, but the dynamic leveraging of a *unitary linguistic repertoire* to make meaning, and (2) the recognition that *language ideologies*, and especially *raciolinguistic ideologies* that have to do with the preservation of privilege and power for dominant groups, produce the racialization of minoritized speakers and the stigmatization of their language practices.

The first translanguaging postulate reminds us that translanguaging differentiates between named languages (the external sociopolitical perspective) and the speaker's own language (the internal perspective). Translanguaging theorizes that speakers *do* language with a unitary linguistic/semiotic system whose assignment to different named languages is only a result of social decisions. The prefix *trans-* in the term translanguaging illustrates that 'when bilingual speakers translanguage, they *transcend* named languages by going *beyond* them' (Otheguy, García, and Reid 2019, 71, our italics).

Second, as a decolonial approach, translanguaging recognizes that our present conception of language and race have been products of colonization. These *raciolinguistic ideologies* (Flores and Rosa 2015), with language and race conflated, have continued to play an important role in today's continuing *coloniality* (Quijano 2000), produced by acknowledging only the knowledge/cultural/linguistic systems of populations who exert power over others. Raciolinguistic ideologies link racialized bodies with linguistic deficiency (Flores and Rosa 2015).

By presenting an alternative conceptualization of bilingualism consisting of bilinguals' actual linguistic practices not bounded by named languages, translanguaging disrupts language hierarchies (Otheguy, García, and Reid 2015). In so doing, translanguaging deprives named languages of their dominance and influence, and especially of the role they have had in the minoritization and racialization processes of some speakers.

## Translanguaging in early childhood

Very young children are *natural translanguagers* in the sense that they are comfortable using their entire semiotic repertoire to make meaning, including multimodalities. For young children, language is not just verbal; it is gestural, musical, visual. Before they are socialized in schools with teachers from the dominant cultural, language, and racial group, and in ways that uphold monolingual children from the same group as the only model of linguistic and social behavior, young bilingual children use translanguaging practices naturally to make meaning of their lives.

To make sense of the school environment and the new tasks, all young children bring to preschool their knowledge of family, cultural and linguistic practices, as well as concrete experiences. The difference between young monolingual and emergent bilingual children, however, is that all these experiences are conveyed through language, and in most preschools, the ways of doing language is restricted to only the forms validated in school. Early childhood teachers see the development of the children's verbal and written school language as paramount. But in doing so, they often neglect to build on the existing language practices of the very young children, and translanguaging pedagogical practices are misunderstood.

## Translanguaging pedagogical practices

A translanguaging pedagogical approach does not consist of simple strategies. Instead, it creates in-school translanguaging spaces (Li Wei, 2011) that leverage the language and knowledge systems of *all* students. A translanguaging pedagogical approach emerges from the interaction of three elements – a translanguaging *stance*, a translanguaging *design*, and translanguaging *shifts* (García, Johnson, and Seltzer 2017). When teachers develop confidence that multilingual students can assemble the different features of their entire semiotic repertoire to make meaning, they are acting on their translanguaging *stance*. They then can act on a translanguaging *design*, developing curricula and practices to activate students' full linguistic repertoire. But translanguaging pedagogical practices also activate *shifts*, moments of teachers' unplanned, moment-by-moment changes as a response to children's fluid translanguaging.

A translanguaging pedagogical approach is initiated by a teacher, but its success lies in the interplay with students' own translanguaging. As teachers enact translanguaging pedagogical practices, they shift their understandings as they follow the bilingual students' own translanguaging current (García, Johnson, and Seltzer 2017), and as they open up translanguaging spaces (García and Li Wei 2014) within their instruction. Translanguaging also asks teachers to go beyond traditional understandings of language and multilingualism that often have been ingrained in them as students, and then in their teacher education preparation programs. For translanguaging designs to take root in classrooms, it is not enough for teachers to simply become aware of multilingualism. Understandings of bilingualism and multilingualism could also follow nation-state wishes for homogeneity, rendering multilingualism as simply monoglossic. This limited understanding is responsible, for example, for the relative success of language awareness programs even in monolingual schools, whereas translanguaging pedagogical practices are much more difficult to implement.

## Prior studies and translanguaging challenges

Although many teachers have taken up pedagogical practices based on translanguaging theory (e.g. CUNY-NYSIEB 2021), its use has not been without controversy. Translanguaging pedagogical practices go against the grain of the homogenizing goal of nation-states and their schools.

Scholars in different national contexts have reported on the difficulties of implementing translanguaging pedagogical practices and of teacher's misunderstandings of translanguaging theory. Ticheloven et al. (2019) in the Netherlands, Omidire and Ayob (2020) in South Africa, Vaish (2019) in Singapore, Rajendram (2021) in Malaysia, Charalambous, Charalambous, and Zembylas (2016, 2020) in Cyprus, and Hamman (2018) in the U.S., all report on these challenges. Ticheloven et al. (2019) point out the challenges of implementing translanguaging practices in four multilingual high schools in the Netherlands. And yet, an analysis of the translanguaging practices they identify reveal that these were not all practices that supported the students' leveraging of their unitary semiotic repertoire, but rather the acknowledgement of their different languages, creating an artificial use of translanguaging, rather than following the students' own translanguaging corriente. This reveals teachers' misunderstandings of the *trans* aspects of translanguaging, understood as simply

going *across* named languages, when translanguaging acknowledges the languaging of bilinguals *beyond* the strictures of named languages.

Likewise, Omidire and Ayob (2020) in South Africa reported on the challenges of implementing a curriculum where IsiZulu and Sepedi were used in class in addition to English. And yet, the simple use of students' home languages, without attention to the colonizing role of colonial linguists in naming and describing these separate languages does not constitute a translanguaging pedagogical approach. A translanguaging approach would validate *all* language practices, emphasizing the role that these named languages have had in the systems of oppression that included apartheid.

The ideological clash between implementation of translanguaging-oriented classroom practices and language ideologies in the country in which it is being carried out has also been reported in Vaish (2019) in multilingual Singapore. There, pedagogical practices cannot reverse the negative attitudes towards languages other than English and other named languages that have been assigned to certain populations as 'mother tongues.' This factor of language status prestige in education, especially of English, has also been noted by Rajendram (2021). In Rajendram's study, translanguaging pedagogical practices empowered the students by asserting their identities and cultures. And yet, parents' beliefs about the higher socio-cultural-economical relevance of English prevailed on students, who then perceived languages as unequal and were reluctant to use their full linguistic repertoire in the classroom.

Translanguaging pedagogical practices that address only aspects of language and multilingualism, without rooting themselves on historical and ideological consciousness so that students discern the political and structural aspects of domination through language, will always fall short. This was also found in a study of a bilingual English/Spanish program in Midwestern U.S. by Hamman (2018). Ideologies are also at the center of Charalambous et al. (2020) work in Greek-Cypriot schools. These scholars have demonstrated how discourses of (in)securitization, stemming from the interethnic conflict between Greek- and Turkish-Cypriots, affect translanguaging classroom practices for Turkish-speaking students who then constantly suppress what the researchers call 'their polylingual creative performances' (Charalambous, Charalambous, and Zembylas 2016, 327) and lead them to experience emotional discomfort, hesitation, and self-censorship.

In all of these cases, the authors refer to the little time that teachers have had to reflect on the lives and practices of their students, develop a translanguaging stance, and then be able to design translanguaging spaces within lessons that truly benefit bilingual learners who live in what Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) has called the 'entre mundos/borderlands', where identities are questioned, and groups are deprived of equitable resources.

Even when teachers have been educated about multilingualism, much study of multilingualism reifies the concept of a named language, holding on to a purist and monoglossic ideology that sees multilingualism only as the addition of multiple languages, and not having anything to do with how simultaneous bilinguals do language and translanguaging (García et al. 2021).

The development of teachers' translanguaging stance so that they can design translanguaging instructional spaces has led to much interest around the world in providing teachers with strong professional development. For example, in early childhood in Luxembourg, Kirsch et al. (2020) have engaged teachers in professional development training on translanguaging-oriented pedagogies, as they have investigated the translanguaging practices naturally occurring in both formal and non-formal early childhood education. To do so, they have focused not only on promoting an inclusive classroom ecology, but also in disrupting language hierarchies.

### **A research-based design for professional development in Luxembourg preschools**

Luxembourg has a trilingual system of education. Children traditionally start preschool in Luxembourgish, the national language. They learn to read and write in German, and then continue learning in French from the third grade on. From the beginning, a major concern of the trilingual system of

education has been the education of preschool children who were not being raised in homes where Luxembourgish was spoken.

Luxembourg has a high percentage of immigrants. Sixty-five percent of 4-year-old children do not speak Luxembourgish as a home language, and 28% of these speak Portuguese (MENJE 2018). To support these non-Luxembourgish-speaking young children, a policy supporting *multilingual education* in early education was passed in 2017. Until then, the focus of preschool teachers had been the development of Luxembourgish. Since 2017, the law requires teachers not only to develop children's Luxembourgish but also to familiarize them with French, and at the same time include and value their home languages (MENJE 2017).

To assist in the implementation of this new multilingual education policy, this professional development project was designed to support preschool teachers. The aims of the professional development project were to: (1) provide professional development (PD) in translanguaging for preschool teachers, (2) actively include children's families to foster home-school collaboration, and (3) reinforce children's cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional engagement in the classroom.

The present project was framed as a *design-based research* (Cobb et al. 2003). The goal of a design-based research is to explore an innovative instructional design with the goal of advancing a theory, as well as teaching practice. In the present case, the goal was to advance understandings about translanguaging theory, as well as the development of translanguaging pedagogical practices among preschool teachers in Luxembourg.

The team first engaged 40 teachers of four different groups in more than 17 hours of professional development that was delivered in seven-sessions of approximately two and a half hours each, over six months. The criteria for teacher selection included that they taught in classrooms where more than 60% of children were multilingual. The schools in which they taught were socioeconomically and linguistically diverse and located in the south, north, east, and west of Luxembourg. The professional development course in translanguaging covered topics such as multilingualism and the classroom, home-school collaboration, the multilingual brain, the importance of oracy, multiliteracies, and pedagogical practices. The course was based on practices developed in the New York project known as CUNY-NYSIEB (2020) and described in their translanguaging guide (Celic and Seltzer 2013). We also included the guide for multilingual classrooms (Chumak-Horbatsch 2019). The course was accredited by the Luxembourg Ministry of Education and teachers applied online via the Ministry website. Parallely, the study has been approved by the Ethics Review Panel of the University of Luxembourg (ERP 19-020). After these sessions, the teachers were asked to design a lesson where they used a translanguaging pedagogical practice. Teachers were asked to volunteer if they wanted their lesson video-taped. These teachers then participated in an eight session for collaborative reflection on their practices. In this session the classroom video material was presented and the teachers gave each other feedback. We cover the topic of teachers' attitudes in detail in another paper (Aleksić and Bebić-Crestany [forthcoming](#)). In this article, we focus on the lesson designed by a team of preschool teachers in one of the schools. All the informed consents were obtained by the teachers, parents, and children participating in the study.

## A Luxembourgish preschool

The preschool in which the lesson took place is located in central Luxembourg. Most of the children who attend this school come from immigrant background and lower social class homes. The most represented languages in the classrooms are Portuguese and Serbian. Prior to our professional development, in this school the children's language resources had never been acknowledged, and the teaching focus had only been the development of Luxembourgish. Thus, for the teachers, even the recognition of the children's differences was new and felt important.

## Data and analysis

We focused on the lesson that was selected by the teachers for videotaping as an example of the implementation of translanguaging pedagogical practices. To conduct our analysis, we

subjected the videorecording of the lesson to what Li Wei (2011) calls 'moment analysis.' Moment analysis goes beyond traditional research in applied linguistics which focuses on identifying patterns. Li Wei argues that it is important to understand how language really works, and that to do so requires looking deeply at a moment, a moment of significance. That is, moment analysis emphasizes the 'spontaneous, impromptu, and momentary actions and performances of the individual' (Li Wei, 2011, 1225). Li Wei (2011) writes that a moment can be 'a point in or a period of time which has outstanding significance' (1224).

A moment by itself may not be significant, but these teachers had volunteered to be taped and had themselves selected the lesson for videotaping. The teachers were confident that they were implementing a translanguaging design in their lesson. It is important to reflect on what the lessons selected by the teachers and the activities mean for translanguaging theory and research, and especially for any meanings that may be gleaned from other projects that are based on *design-based research* (Cobb et al. 2003), as this one was.

There are three teachers involved in the lesson who are white Luxembourgian females with more than 10 years of working experience. All are speakers of Luxembourgish, French, and German. The teachers tried to implement the activities proposed in the professional development project, but admitted they had difficulties detaching from Luxembourgish and their monolingual stance. The moment of significance that we selected for our analysis below reveals that despite the teachers' efforts, they had limited understanding of translanguaging theory, even after being engaged in professional development on the topic.

### A moment of significance

The transcript below is of a moment in which four young Luxembourg children of Portuguese (Martim, Rodrigo, and Helena) and Serbian (Nikola) backgrounds are asked to select a card with the flag that represents the language used in their home. Three of the children say they speak Luxembourgish at home and want to pick up a Luxembourgish flag. The teachers, however, insist that they do not speak Luxembourgish at home and require that Nikola pick up the Serbian flag, and that Rodrigo and Helena select the Portuguese flag.

Children (with pseudonames) arguing for Luxembourgish as their home language			
1	Nikola	Ech schwätzen och ebessen Lëtzebuergesch mat mengem Brudder.	I also speak a little Luxembourgish with my brother.
2	T1	Mee och mat der Mamma an mam Pappa?	But with mommy and daddy?
3	Nikola	Och Lëtzebuergesch.	Also Luxembourgish.
4	T1	Wierklech? (gëtt dem Kand e verdächtege Look)	Really? (gives a child a suspicious look)
5	T2	Säit wéini?	Since when?
6	T1	Wierklech?	Really?
7	T1&T3	Mamma schwätzt ni Lëtzebuergesch mat der Joffer.	Mommy is never speaking Luxembourgish with the teacher.
8	Nikola	Well hat schwätzt mat ...	Because she talks with ...
9	T1	Hat versteet ebessen Lëtzebuergesch, e puer Klenggekeeten mee wann du doheem bass mat der Mamma an dir ässt, schwätzt Mamma net Lëtzebuergesch dann.	She understands Luxembourgish a bit, a couple of things, but when you are at home with mommy and you are eating, mommy is not speaking Luxembourgish then.
10	Nikola	Jo.	Yes.
11	T1	Wat schwätzt d'Mamma dann?	What does she speak then?
12	Nikola	Op ...	In ...
13	T1	Jo, Serbesch.	Yes, Serbian.

(Continued)

Continued.

		Children (with pseudonyms) arguing for Luxembourgish as their home language	
14	T2	Genau wei hat d'Lidd fir äis geschriwwen huet, dat ass wéi du doheem schwätz.	Just like she wrote us the song [the mother had taught the teachers a Serbian song to perform with the class], that is how you speak at home.
15	Nikola	Mh.	Mh.
16	T2	Dat ass Serbesch.	That's Serbian.
17	T1	Dat heiten, jo, dat heiten, Serbesch.	This one, yes, this one, Serbian.
18	Nikola	(d'Kand hellt den serbesch Fändel)	[The child hesitantly takes a Serbian flag]
19	T1	[Addressing Martim] Wéi sch1wätz du mat Mamma an Pappa doheem?	[Addressing Martim] How do you speak at home with mommy and daddy?
20	Martim	Portugisesch. (d'Kand hellt den portugiseschen Fändel)	Portuguese. [the child takes a Portuguese flag]
21	T1	Portugisesch och mat der Boma an mam Bopa?	Portuguese. Also, with grandma and grandpa?
22	Martim	(d'Kand wénkt 'io')	[the child nods 'yes']
23	Rodrigo	[Rodrigo interjects] Ech schwätzen mat mengem Brudder.	[Rodrigo interjects] I am speaking this with my brother.
24	T1	Dat [laacht].	This [laughs].
25	T3	Wéi heescht dat?	What is this called?
26	Rodrigo	Lëtzebuergesch.	Luxembourgish.
27	T3	Jo.	Yes.
28	Rodrigo	(spréngt op a seet méi zouversüchtlech) Ech schwätzen Lëtzebuergesch mat mengem Brudder!	[Jumps up and says more confidently] I speak Luxembourgish with my brother!
29	T2	An Mamma an Pappa? An wéi schwätz du doheem normalerweis?	And mommy and daddy? And how do you normally speak at home?
30	T1	Vläicht spillt et net (weist op d'Kaart).	Maybe don't play it [pointing to the card].
31	T2	Wann du um Dech mam Mamma an Pappa setz. Fir dass d'Mamma dech versteet, wéi schwätz du dann?	When you are sitting with your mommy and daddy at the table at home. For mommy to understand you, how do you speak then?
32	Rodrigo	Portugisesch (séier).	Portuguese [quietly].
33	T2	Dann misst du vläicht den portugiseschen Fändel huelen.	Then you should maybe take the Portuguese flag.
34	Rodrigo	Mee ech schwätzen mat mengem ...	But I speak with my ...
35	T2	(D'Joffer shushes d'Kand a weist op de portugiseschen Fändel)	[the teacher shushes the child and points to a Portuguese flag]
36	T2	Jo, mee ech well wëssen wéi du mat Mamma an Pappa schwätz. (weist op den portugiseschen Fändel).	Yes, but I want to know how you speak with mommy and daddy. [Points to the Portuguese flag again].
37	Rodrigo	(d'Kand hellt den portugiseschen Fändel).	[Rodrigo hesitantly takes the Portuguese flag].
38	Helena	[Helena interjects] Meng Schwëster schwätzt och Lëtzebuergesch.	[Helena interjects] My sister also speaks Luxembourgish.
39	T2	Jo, ech wees, den Schwëster ass an der grousser Schoul, mee wéi schwätz du, wéi schwätzt dir all wann dir doheem sidd? Wéi schwätz du dann?	Yes, I know, your sister is in the big school, but how do you speak, how do you speak when you all speak together at home? How do you speak then?
40	Helena	(d'Kand hellt de portugiseschen Fändel)	[Helena takes a Portuguese flag]
41	T2	Wéi heescht dat?	How is it called?
42	Helena	Portugisesch.	Portuguese.
43	T2	Portugisesch.	Portuguese.
44	T1	An der Schoul schwätzen mir all Lëtzebuergesch. Mir wëssen all wéi een Lëtzebuergesch schwätzt.	At school, we are all speaking Luxembourgish. We all know how to speak Luxembourgish.

## A translanguaging pedagogical practice? Teachers' actions

First, teachers' limited understanding of translanguaging practices is revealed through the activity chosen. Language for these teachers continues to be associated with nationhood, to flags, to lives in one space, to belonging. By not recognizing that these children have a sense of a Luxembourg identity and identify with Luxembourgish as part of their language, the teachers' practices drive them to an Otherness, to a space other than the legitimate one of school and of nation.

The teachers accept the child who selects the Portuguese flag as representing what he speaks 'at home' with 'mommy and daddy,' and with 'grandma and grandpa' (Martim). Yet, they refuse to accept the argument of three children that the right choice for them is the Luxembourgish language and flag. The teachers' message to the children is that they cannot be a Luxembourg if you are of Portuguese or Serbian background. To be a Luxembourg, you can speak Luxembourgish, and then



French or German, languages of Empires, but not languages of colonies or poorer countries. Children are thus pushed to an existence of being a foreigner in their own land.

In the case of the Serbian boy, Nikola, the teachers simply deny the child's claim that his parents speak Luxembourgish, stating that the child's mother only understands Luxembourgish 'a little', but does not speak it. This demonstrates an incomplete understanding of how all bilinguals do language, always with features that are sometimes assigned by monolingual outsiders to a language other than how the bilingual views them. By denying the Luxembourgish in the mother's communicative repertoire, these teachers are pushing the mother out of existence. The mother only embodies Serbian, foreignness, immigrant, poor. The mother is rendered languageless (Rosa 2019), and the richness and complexity of her linguistic repertoire and her knowledge of Luxembourgish are made invisible.

The teachers' thinking is an example of what decolonial theorist, Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2007), has named abyssal thinking (see García et al. 2021). A line is drawn between what is considered the people with the only valid knowledge system, and people on the other side of the line whose knowledges are rendered primitive, deficient. This causes an invisibility effect, an epistemological abyss, so that knowledge and understandings only emerge from the dominant side of the line.

Even though the teachers have participated in translanguaging professional development, they continue to hold raciolinguistic ideologies that render the people on the other side of the line invalid and their knowledge invisible. It reveals the teachers' persistent use of the concept of dominant named languages, and hence their artificial reification, to render the others inferior.

Rodrigo states unequivocally that he speaks Luxembourgish at home when he talks to his older brother. Yet, the teachers refuse this argument, insisting that he can only speak Portuguese. One of them laughs. Another teacher questions whether the child might not even be aware of what Luxembourgish is. When the child complains, jumps up, and raises his voice (line 28), another teacher clarifies that they want him to consider what he speaks with 'mommy and daddy,' what he '*normally* speak[s] at home.' By appealing to the adverb '*normally*,' the teachers are also giving this four-year old a cruel message – it is not normal for someone who looks like him to speak Luxembourgish at home.

The teachers naturally assume that the child '*normally*' speaks one language at home. But the four-year old is smarter than the teachers in recognizing that he does not have a 'home language' and a 'school language' (Seltzer 2019). He has language practices at home which may be different from those in school, but his bilingualism is not diglossic, that is, he does not just speak one language at home, and neither does he use only one language at school. But the teachers do not follow him. The child reacts angrily and suggests that he just won't play, that he will not engage further with the lesson. And then the teacher does the unimaginable – she suggests that for his 'mommy and daddy to understand [him]' (line 31), he must speak something other than Luxembourgish. This is a pointed case of linguistic shaming and of raciolinguistic microaggression. Not only does the teacher not acknowledge the child's complex linguistic repertoire, but she makes him ashamed of his parents who are now presented as unknowing, ignorant, foreigners, non-Luxembourgers. It is only then, when the parents are pushed out of the child's life at four years of age, when he quietly acquiesces by taking the Portuguese flag. The child's linguistic identity as a foreigner and a non-knower is produced for him by teachers who refuse to grant him his own complex languaging practices and assign him only one foreign identity as Portuguese.

Similarly, the teachers also disregard Helena's interjection, perhaps in response to the silencing of Rodrigo, when Helena states that her older sister also speaks Luxembourgish. A teacher insists on the differentiation between what she assigns as the child's home language (Portuguese) and the school language (Luxembourgish). The teacher clarifies for the child that the only reason why her sister speaks Luxembourgish is because she is in an upper grade in school, further creating a wedge between the language of school (also called second language, additional language) and the language of the home (also called first language, mother tongue). In school, she repeats, 'we are

all speaking Luxembourgish. We all know how to speak Luxembourgish.’ The only knowledge that is valid and valuable is the one that is rendered in Luxembourgish in school. Not only does this produce a wedge between the language of school and the language of the home, but it separates and alienates the home from the school. At home, other language practices may be used, and children may be familiar with using their full repertoire to make meaning. In school, however, only practices associated with Luxembourgish are permitted by the teacher, creating a disruption of the children’s sense-making system, one that has drawn on their full semiotic repertoire for their early years of life. The language development of these young bilingual children is then arrested. Language development depends on the degree to which children’s own language practices are extended, not separated as only of use at home.

### **A translanguaging pedagogical practice? Children’s reactions**

But not only the teachers’ actions are questionable; the children’s reactions to their actions are painful to watch. As seen in the video, children do not positively react to the teacher’s persuasion to take the cards that teachers believe are ‘correct.’ All three children seem to be quite confused and lost to some extent.

Nikola has a lost and dazed look in his eyes, as the teachers question him suspiciously – ‘Really?’ [said twice], ‘Since when?’ The teachers challenge the truth of what the child says, as he defends himself and gives an explanation: ‘Because she talks with ...’ But the teachers interrupt him again. They provide the answer they want to hear: ‘When you are at home with mommy and you are eating, mommy is not speaking Luxembourgish then,’ to which the child can only quietly assent, as he lowers his head and shoulders and coils inward. The child never asserts that the mother at the dinner table speaks Serbian. The child is shamed into agreeing with the teachers, although he tried to defend his arguments. The teachers have no way of knowing what language is spoken in his home at the dinner table, for they have never visited him at home; yet they insist that they know the truth. They are not only acting as ‘white listening subjects’ (Flores and Rosa 2015), but also as the only thinking subjects, the only holders of truth. Truth for these teachers is not the reality that exists for others, but what they imagine it to be based on their own raciolinguistic ideologies. There is neither moral nor cognitive justice in the truth the teachers are imposing, for the child is rendered not only languageless, but also empty of knowledge, with a void look. Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls attention to this cognitive injustice (2018), which happens when people with power claim theirs to be the only truth and ignore the epistemes of other people.

Rodrigo also looks quite enthusiastic at the beginning when he states that he speaks Luxembourgish with his brother, indicating his pride in that act. However, his confidence is shaken and is visible in the video when the teachers start insisting that he should take another card with the Portuguese flag. The child starts shuffling his feet and lowering his eyes. His voice becomes a low whisper.

Helena, the Portuguese girl, also seems to be quite discouraged when the teachers tell her that the only reasons why her sister speaks Luxembourgish is because she is in the big school. The use of ‘big’ contrasts with how small the girl is made to feel by the teacher. In fact, in the video she looks deflated, smaller, as the teachers insist in getting only the answer she wants by questioning her three times: ‘How do you speak?’ The use of ‘wéi’ in these questions, instead of the more usual ‘wat?’ is significant. The teacher seems to have some consciousness that the family speaks in ways that are different from those of the classroom, and yet, she refuses to even consider that those ways may include what she calls Luxembourgish. Instead, the teacher asks the question: ‘How is it called?’ She wants to make sure that the child concurs with her assessment that however the child and the family speak, it is called ‘Portuguese.’ The child’s practices at home are diminished, considered to be only the practices of a foreigner, marking her body and her voice as small and insignificant.

## Discussion

The teachers' misunderstandings in the Moment presented above are product of their own experiences with multilingualism, usually of the sequential learning of a European prestigious language in school. But as we have said, these young racialized children are simultaneous bilinguals and are not developing their multilingualism to go to another foreign land, but for use as multilingual Luxembourgers.

Furthermore, these teachers fail to understand the difference between a named language tied to representations of belonging in a political state, and language practices or the act of languaging, an important difference in translanguaging theory. People language, they *do* language in ways that go beyond boundaries of named languages. People don't just *have* a named language; they do language, but that languaging does not correspond neatly to what political states and schools call A language or even MANY languages. The linguistic repertoire that bilingual people use to make sense of their complex and interrelated worlds goes beyond the definition of named languages in society and schools. At the same time, bilinguals' complex and unitary linguistic repertoire is made up of features that are socially associated with different named languages. Thus, the young learners in the moment described above are not lying. They, and sometimes their parents and siblings, do indeed use features of what the teachers perceive to be Luxembourgish within the home, especially to express messages that have to do with Luxembourg society.

Despite participation in the professional development project, these teachers have been unable to shed understandings of bound autonomous languages, and of Luxembourgish as separate and clearly delimited from the other languages of the state. They continue to believe that teaching a 'pure' and 'standard' Luxembourgish is the main goal of the preschool classroom. They only acknowledge the children's other languages at home, keeping Luxembourgish protected as belonging only to non-immigrant descent Luxembourgers. Luxembourgish cannot be, in the minds of these teachers, the home language of those considered foreigners. The teachers shut out the dynamic use of the children's emergent bilingualism which includes what they call Luxembourgish. Rodrigo attempts to tell them. He does not just use Portuguese at home; just as he does not solely use Luxembourgish at school. And yet, the teachers, as 'white listening subjects' refuse to hear these practices and validate them to learn. They interrupt him. They correct him.

These teachers have not developed a positive translanguaging stance and do not understand why and how to leverage the child's full linguistic/semiotic repertoire in teaching. Furthermore, the teachers lack a proper understanding of the essence of translanguaging and the concept of linguistic/semiotic repertoire, which makes their pedagogical practices look quite artificial. In fact, they negate the children's translanguaging.

Translanguaging pedagogical practices are not simply bridges or links between home and school spaces that remain separate. Instead, to enact true translanguaging pedagogies teachers would have to step into a third space, the borderlands, the *entre mundos* (Anzaldúa 1987), in which minoritized bilingual learners live. The teachers in this case never leave their safe school space; they don't step out, and they don't step with the children and families. They not only maintain the artificial division between home and school; they widen the gap, the distance. They attempt to build a bridge, but the bridge only lengthens the distance.

Language in the form of flags on cards may represent the linguistic diversity of classrooms. The activity acknowledges the presence of the many languages of students in the classroom. However, the teachers misunderstand the concept of a repertoire of linguistic/semiotic features and practices that bilingual children use fluidly to negotiate their lives.

The teachers demonstrate that they have not developed a translanguaging stance. They seem to lack the necessary belief that a bilingual's meaning-making process is not bounded by separate named languages but is unitary (García and Kleifgen 2019; Otheguy, García, and Reid 2015). These teachers also clearly still focus on named languages, but not on the fluid linguistic repertoire of children, their siblings, and parents. In some cases, activities like these are first steps for teachers who

then continue to grow and develop. However, we have seen no evidence in the actions and words of these teachers that they will continue to move their understandings along a translanguaging stance.

Readers may be wondering what teachers of preschoolers who have a developed sense of their translanguaging stance might have been able to do differently. And the answer is simply to provide the children with a safe space where they could be themselves and act as natural translanguaging Luxembourgers. That is, the answer is in not teaching directly, but in maintaining a co-learner spirit (Li 2014) as teachers follow the children and amplify their stories, imagination and actions, rather than lead them through narrow passageways that always are dead ends for minoritized children. That is why the third important element of a translanguaging pedagogy are the shifts, as teachers shift their own understandings, their own steps, their own direction, as they follow the children's translanguaging corriente/current (García, Johnson, and Seltzer 2017).

Young emergent bilinguals need to engage in authentic and multimodal play, art and dramatizations in school. These are natural spaces for translanguaging and teachers should provide these openings in their curriculum. In these spaces, children would be paired or put into groups so that they can each share their understandings with their peers and the teacher as they wish and as is meaningful for *them*. To facilitate the stepping into the children's world, teachers could invite families and community members to participate in storytelling and multimodal performances, again displaying their full knowledge systems and language repertoire. Language, dominant or minoritized, is never taught as a skill in isolation. Instead, children are encouraged to expand their ways of wondering through complex languaging, while teachers are encouraged to expand their own knowledge systems in interrelationship with those of the children they teach. Thus, future professional development courses should involve children's families and community members with whom teachers can interact and actively examine their own beliefs and attitudes (Aleksić and Bebić-Crestany [forthcoming](#)) as well as raciolinguistic ideologies that they might not be aware of, like our foci teachers.

Teachers need sustained support over a long period of time in order to understand how to work with language and multilingualism in ways that acknowledge other language practices as important in the child's cognitive development. Opening up translanguaging spaces in classrooms runs counter to the ways in which teachers have understood and taught language. To develop the stance, the intuition, the courage, and the design expertise to acknowledge and support racialized multilingual children and their families' translanguaging takes sustained assistance and collaboration to think differently and acknowledge other alternative sources of knowledge and knowledge making. For this transformation to occur in the teaching profession, more would be needed than simply the willingness and collaboration of teachers. The national school system and the curriculum would need to engage with the ways of understanding and doing language that a translanguaging lens opens up.

## Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to consider teachers' misunderstandings of the concept of translanguaging and to comment on lesson designs that are produced without having developed a translanguaging stance. Over the course of six months, these teachers followed professional development in translanguaging pedagogical practices. And some, despite their good intentions, were unable to shed raciolinguistic ideologies that prevented them from truly enacting a translanguaging stance.

When children of immigrant background proudly said that they spoke Luxembourgish, the teachers shut them down, and insisted that they should choose another flag corresponding to their home language. They did not listen to children's justifications of why they chose Luxembourgish as their home language; and they did not understand that the school language can also be a home language and can belong to children's linguistic repertoire. The children's body language – their averted eyes, their silencing, their frowns, their shaking – clearly indicated their shutting down, their diminishing. One wonders how this can result in children's greater engagement in

learning. Instead, we argue, misunderstanding translanguaging theory in designing instruction can be harmful, especially to young children, diminishing their capacity to learn, to imagine, to stand tall, to become proud citizens who belong in the classroom space. Teachers can re-design the classroom space for minoritized children to fit. But to do so requires that they transform themselves, that they gain critical consciousness of how language has been used in schools to create differences, to exclude. It is then that teachers can design instructional spaces where translanguaging can be leveraged constructively, and where assessment does not require bilingual children to perform as monolinguals, using less than half of their linguistic repertoire. It is only then that translanguaging pedagogical practices can move us not only toward social justice, but also toward epistemological justice.

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