Translanguaging in Higher Education

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Beyond Monolingual Ideologies

Edited by
Catherine M. Mazak and Kevin S. Carroll

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1 Introduction: Theorizing Translanguaging Practices in Higher Education

Catherine M. Mazak

Translanguaging is many things. It has become a rather trendy and at times controversial term as it has gained traction in academia over the last several years. However, the way in which it has been taken up by researchers, particularly in education, is evidence that it is filling a gap in our descriptions of language practices in educational settings. This introduction reviews the history of translanguaging as an evolving term, relates it to current thinking in socio- and applied linguistics and answers the question 'what is translanguaging?' as this author understands it. It then goes on to explain the importance of this volume's special focus on translanguaging in higher education and finally previews each chapter in the volume, particularly emphasizing what the chapter contributes to our ever-evolving understanding of translanguaging.

The Development of Translanguaging as a Term

The history of translanguaging is firmly rooted in the field of bilingual education, though it has developed alongside several other terms that use the prefix *trans-*, including translingualism (Canagarajah, 2014). The term *translanguaging* was first coined in Welsh as *trawsieithu* by bilingual education researcher Cen Williams (1994, 1996). Baker (2006: 297), in *Foundations of Bilingual Education*, states that when translanguaging in the classroom, 'the input (reading or listening) tends to be in one language, and the output (speaking or writing) in the other language, and this is systematically varied'. He further explains that Williams's research found that this type of translanguaging worked well as a teaching strategy in Welsh high schools to 'develop both languages successfully and also result in effective content learning' (Baker, 2006: 297). Research on translanguaging continues to be produced in the Welsh context, and scholars there have published several excellent reviews of the term and its development, including Lewis *et al*. (2012a, 2012b) and more recently Beres (2015). The definition of translanguaging that first came out of

Bangor, Wales, essentially described a *teaching strategy* that worked well in developing *both language and content knowledge*. This is part – but not all – of our current understanding of translanguaging. For that we need to turn to the work of Ofelia García.

García (2009: 45) first explained the concept of translanguaging in her book *Bilingual Education in the 21st Century* as the *'multiple discursive practices* in which bilinguals engage in order to *make sense of their bilingual worlds'*. This definition emphasizes existing bilingual *practices*, not *teaching strategies*, as in the work of Williams and Baker. Though it is often cited, the definition is rather broad and open to interpretation. Since 2009, García has worked to refine this definition, articulating the theory behind the term. She argues that 'language is an ongoing process that only exists as languag*ing*' (García & Leiva, 2014: 204; emphasis added). This ongoing process of languaging both shapes and is shaped by people as they interact in specific social, cultural and political contexts. The emphasis on process – the *–ing* – purposefully shifts the focus away from discrete 'languages' and makes the act of meaning-making central. Thus, García argues, translanguaging refers to the constant, active invention of new realities through social action.

Translanguaging and Poststructuralism

In *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education*, García and Li (2014) attach translanguaging to recent shifts in the fields of socio- and applied linguistics. They situate translanguaging particularly within the poststructural turn that interrogated the notion of languages as discrete, separate entities. This notion is perhaps best articulated by Makoni and Pennycook (2007), who argue that the concept of a 'language' was an invention of colonialism. The Romantic notion that one state equals one culture equals one language was essential for nation-state building, and in that sense separate languages are 'inventions' that met the needs of the colonial project. The idea that languages are discrete entities is further questioned by Canagarajah (2014) in his theory of translingual practices, where he describes global semiotic practices that defy the supposedly rigid borders between languages. García and Li (2014) argue that in fact bilinguals do not have two distinct linguistic systems in the brain, but rather *one integrated repertoire of linguistic and semiotic practices* from which they constantly draw. Thus, the idea of 'code-switching' does not fit neatly into the theory of translanguaging because bilinguals are not shuttling between separate codes, but rather performing parts of their repertoires, which contain features from all of their 'languages'. The 'one system' idea is perhaps the most controversial aspect of current notions of translanguaging, particularly among linguists studying code-switching, but it is precisely where García and Li link translanguaging to the poststructural turn in applied linguistics.

This poststructural paradigm shift, also referred to as the 'trans turn' in applied linguistics, has refocused research away from 'homogeneity, stability, and boundedness as the starting assumptions' in favor of 'mobility, mixing, political dynamics, and historical embedding' as 'central concerns in the study of languages, language groups, and communication' (Blommaert & Rampton, 2011: 3). As a result, the ideology of 'one nation one language' has been critiqued as leading to monolingual ideologies of language and the 'two solitudes' approach to bilingualism (García & Li, 2014; Makoni & Pennycook, 2007). Canagarajah (2014: 6) claims that understanding translingual practice involves two key concepts: (1) 'communication transcends individual languages' and (2) 'communication transcends words and involves diverse semiotic resources and ecological affordances'. García and Li (2014: 21) posit that translanguaging 'refers to *new* language exchanges among people with different histories, and releases histories and understandings that had been buried within fixed language identities constrained by nation-states'. This definition captures the historical, political and social embeddedness of language practices and how these practices are and have been intertwined with ideologies. When we use the term *translanguaging*, we are indexing this poststructural paradigm shift in applied linguistics.

What is Translanguaging?

The previous sections help us to understand the theoretical underpinnings of translanguaging, but the question remains: What is translanguaging exactly? What do researchers actually mean when they use the term? The answer is, of course, that it means different things for different researchers in different contexts. Creese and Blackledge (2010) explore the relationship between translanguaging practices and identity in complimentary schools in the UK. They use the term *flexible bilingual pedagogy* and argue,

> This pedagogy adopts a translanguaging approach and is used by participants for identity performance as well as the business of language learning and teaching. … we think the bilingual teachers and students in this study used whatever signs and forms they had at their disposal to connect with one another, indexing disparate allegiances and knowledges and creating new ones. (Creese & Blackledge: 2010, 112)

Thus, they argue that translanguaging is a *pedagogical approach* that at once serves to enhance teaching and indexes the speakers' shifting multilingual and multicultural identities.

Canagarajah (2011) investigates multilinguals' use of 'whatever signs and forms' are available to them and the deep connections that this use has to identity enactment in texts. In one of the few studies of translanguaging

in texts, and one of even fewer looking at higher education, he explores how one graduate student used code-meshing to make meaning by employing Arabic, English, French and symbols in her academic writing. His emphasis on the process of the graduate student exploring the ways in which she could use all of her communicative repertoire as an integrated system shows how translanguaging in texts is strategic, and at the same time he raises important questions on how to assess translanguaging competence in academic settings. In Canagarajah's (2011: 408) synthesis of research on translanguaging, he notes that 'what current classroom studies show is that translanguaging is a naturally occurring phenomenon for multilingual students'. That is, in bi- and multilingual environments, translanguaging is *when students (and often teachers) use their entire linguistic repertoire strategically to teach and learn*, which they do with a keen awareness of the identity consequences of linguistic performance. Hornberger and Link (2012) reinforce this notion from a biliteracy perspective. They conclude,

> Two things are clear from the research though, in connection with fostering transfer, and both of them suggest the significance of translanguaging for biliteracy development: one, that individuals' biliteracy develops along the continua in direct response to contextual demands placed on them; and two, that individuals' biliteracy development is enhanced when they have recourse to all their existing skills (and not only those in the second language). (Hornberger & Link, 2012: 244–245)

Li (2011: 1233) describes translanguaging practices as 'creative', 'critical', 'flexible' and 'strategic' in his 'moment analysis' of multilingual Chinese youth in the UK. He describes translanguaging spaces as 'interactionally created' and emphasizes the performative nature of these spaces:

> For me, translanguaging is both going between different linguistic structures and systems, including different modalities (speaking, writing, signing, listening, reading, remembering) and going beyond them. It includes the full range of linguistic performances of multilingual language users for purposes that transcend the combination of structures, the alternation between systems, the transmission of information and the representation of values, identities and relationships. The act of translanguaging then is transformative in nature; it creates a social space for the multilingual language user by bringing together different dimensions of their personal history, experience and environment, their attitude, belief and ideology, their cognitive and physical capacity into one coordinated and meaningful performance, and making it into a lived experience. I call this space 'translanguaging space,' a space for the act of translanguaging as well as a space created through translanguaging.
>
> (Li, 2011: 1223)

Thus, for Li *translanguaging is linguistic performance* that not only includes the use of different features of the speakers' repertoire, but also creates something new that 'transcends the combination of structures' and creates a 'translanguaging space'.

In Sayer's (2013) ethnographic study of the classroom language practices of Mexican American second graders and their teacher in San Antonio, Texas, he refers to *translanguaging as method*. He argues that a

> translanguaging lens is less focused on language per se, and more concerned with examining how bilinguals make sense of things through language…. The excerpts illustrate how translanguaging through TexMex enables teacher and students to create discursive spaces that allow them to engage with the social meanings in school from their position as bilingual Latinos.   (Sayer, 2013: 84)

Although he emphasizes translanguaging as a method, he also argues that it is (1) 'a *descriptive label* that captures the fluid nature of [students'] language practices' and (2) 'a theoretical and *analytical tool* that allows researchers to portray the multifaceted ways that the children's bilingualism is not merely monolingualism times two' (Sayer, 2013: 85; emphasis added). Thus, Sayer includes multiple understandings of translanguaging: as a method, as a descriptive label for language practices and as an analytical tool.

In sum, based on the research cited here and my own work (Mazak & Herbas-Donoso, 2014a, 2014b, 2015), I see translanguaging as the following:

(1) Translanguaging is a *language ideology* that takes bilingualism as the norm.
(2) Translanguaging is a *theory of bilingualism* based on lived bilingual experiences. As such, it posits that bilinguals do not separate their 'languages' into discrete systems, but rather possess one integrated repertoire of languaging practices from which they draw as they navigate their everyday bilingual worlds.
(3) Translanguaging is a *pedagogical stance* that teachers and students take on that allows them to draw on all of their linguistic and semiotic resources as they teach and learn both language and content material in classrooms.
(4) Translanguaging is a *set of practices* that are still being researched and described. It is not limited to what is traditionally known as 'code-switching', but rather seeks to include any practices that draw on an individual's linguistic and semiotic repertoires (including reading in one language and discussing the reading in another, and many other practices that will be described in this book).

(5) As such, translanguaging is *transformational*. It changes the world as it continually invents and reinvents languaging practices in a perpetual process of meaning-making. The acceptance of these practices – of the creative, adaptable, resourceful inventions of bilinguals – transforms not only our traditional notions of 'languages', but also the lives of bilinguals themselves as they remake the world through language.

Translanguaging in Higher Education

Even with the groundbreaking research described above, much remains in question about translanguaging. Almost no literature exists on translanguaging in higher education, since most (though not all) of the existing literature explores translanguaging in primary and occasionally secondary classrooms in the US and the UK. Thus, there is also a lack of research on translanguaging in global bi- and multilingual contexts. This volume hopes to fill this gap by showcasing the complexity and illustrating the various ways in which translanguaging practices exist within higher educational contexts around the world. ~~In doing so we have included studies with a wide range of research methods that exemplify translanguaging.~~ Furthermore, the final two chapters from the United Arab Emirates and the Basque country of Spain remind us to think critically about the advantages but also the limitations of adopting a translingual approach and ideology.

In our compilation of this book, we sought to include studies that would both shed light on international contexts rarely discussed in the translanguaging literature and, by doing so, further contribute to the development of translanguaging as an educational and linguistic concept. Our selection of work from diverse sociocultural contexts necessarily employs many different types of research. The work collected here uses research methods that vary from ethnographic case studies to historical/social analysis. Data collection techniques include observation, focus groups, interviews and document analysis among others. Research stances range from advocacy research to ethnographic report. The incorporation of such a range of different research and rhetorical styles and approaches, we think, adds to the value of this volume as a truly diverse collection of deeply contextualized research on translanguaging.

Higher education is increasingly characterized by the global movement of people and ideas. For this reason, it is a particularly ripe context for translanguaging. English dominates as the indisputable international language of science and technology. In many institutions, publications in English are privileged as the only ones that 'count' for promotion and tenure. English-language texts and English-medium classrooms have become part

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of internationalization efforts meant to attract students from around the world for their higher tuition dollars. The privileging of English also means that even students who remain in their own countries may find themselves studying in higher education in English.

Combine this with monolingual ideologies that still dominate university language policies (even unwritten ones), and tensions often occur between the everyday multilingual practices of students and university classrooms that can become artificially 'monolingual'. In Chapter 2, Makelela addresses this by implementing the concept of *ubuntu* translanguaging pedagogy (UTP) in a Sepedi language course for preservice teachers in South Africa. He argues that UTP is meant 'to disrupt perceived language boundaries among preservice student teachers and to recreate complex multilingual spaces that reflect the *ubuntu* principles of ecological interdependence' (x). Central to his argument is that we 'need to reconceptualize classroom spaces as microcosms of societal multilingualism' (x). Thus, UTP is essential for higher education in the dynamically multilingual Limpopo Valley, where 'human and linguistic separations are blurred while interdependence is valued over independence' (x). Enacting UTP in a higher education classroom where preservice teachers are trained serves to break down monolingual ideologies for these teachers, who will then potentially enact UTP in their own classrooms.

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In a similar effort to bring students' multilingual practices into the classroom and build on them academically, in Chapter 3 Daryai-Hansen and her colleagues in Denmark describe Roskilde University's 'language profiles' program. Created as a grassroots effort within the university and supported by the administration, the program is specifically designed to reinforce students' plurilingual and intercultural competences as students 'are invited to use translanguaging strategies in order to achieve interactional and social aims' (x). In the European context, where developing mobile, prepared students often – but not always – means English-medium instruction, students in this program choose to work with other students in their fields on projects using their choice of French, German or Spanish. The authors emphasize that this program challenges the prevailing monolingual ideology of higher education in Denmark and uses translanguaging to meet both language and content learning goals.

Monolingual ideologies of language also dominate in the Ukrainian university where Goodman's Chapter 4 study takes place. She explores translanguaging practices and attitudes within three languages: Ukrainian, Russian and English. As she documents the dominant use of Russian as an academic language in these contexts, she states, 'It is appropriate, however, to consider whether translanguaging practices in this context can serve as an act of resistance—or at least a counternarrative—to the hegemony of English as a global or international language' (x). Her findings suggest that the use of additional languages (other than English) through

translanguaging in classrooms 'may not be a threat to multilingualism in the Ukrainian context' (x) as one might suspect.

In Chapter 5, my colleagues and I investigate the translanguaging practices of three professors at an officially bilingual university in Puerto Rico. In this context, English is both the colonial language and the privileged language of science and technology, though Spanish remains the language of everyday communication among students. We argue that the way in which these three professors navigate the complex waters of classroom language use in this context by using translanguaging respects students' entire linguistic repertoire and acknowledges Spanish as a legitimate academic language.

He *et al.* (Chapter 6) deeply explore a math education professor's translanguaging and trans-semiotizing practices during a tertiary mathematics education seminar in Hong Kong. One example of how translanguaging and trans-semiotizing practices worked together in the presentation was in the professor's explanation of 'scaffolding'. He *et al.* argue,

> translanguaging between Chinese and English, together with intercultural background knowledge (e.g., the comparison between mathematics education in mainland China and in the US), acted as a meaning-negotiation strategy to explain the intercultural differences between the Chinese concept *pudian* and the Western concept of scaffolding. (He et al. this volume: x)

Their chapter reminds us that translanguaging includes the use of many meaning-making resources to negotiate understanding in multilingual and multicultural higher education contexts.

In Chapter 7, Groff explores language in higher education in India, a context where monolingual ideologies are actually not as common as in other contexts in this book. She aims

> to describe multilingual language policies and practices in India within their historical and ideological context, showing that the use of multiple languages within one institution, within one classroom, and within one speech event is quite common in higher education in India. (Groff, this volume: x)

In contrast to South Africa, for example, Groff argues that in India translanguaging in higher education is quite common and expected.

In contrast, Carroll and van den Hoven (Chapter 8) document the very strict – though unwritten – monolingual language policies in higher education in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). In the UAE, higher education classes are expected to be taught in English only, a belief reinforced by the hiring of many non-Arabic-speaking professors from abroad. Through

interviews with professors and administrators, Carroll and van den Hoven explore the tension between the institutional pressure to give classes only in English and the demands of students who expect the professor to use some Arabic to help them succeed in the course. The authors paint a picture where translanguaging is actually prohibited, and the potential of using translanguaging to access students' entire linguistic repertoires goes largely untapped. The chapter asks us to examine the tensions between student expectations and administrative mandates when it comes to language use in classrooms.

In contrast to the UAE context, Doiz and Lasagabaster (Chapter 9) investigate professors' beliefs about translanguaging in English-medium classrooms at the University of the Basque Country. As part of a push toward internationalization, this university, which offers programs in both Basque and Spanish, is now offering English-medium programs. Since these courses are chosen by students specifically to help develop their content *and* language knowledge by using English-language instruction, many – though not all – professors in the study felt obligated to avoid translanguaging in class. This chapter presents a context that contrasts many others in this volume: Students choose English-medium higher education rather than have it imposed on them. Thus, we are reminded that the use of translanguaging in higher education is highly contextualized and sometimes may not actually meet students' needs. In this sense, we must think critically about the use of translanguaging as always 'good' for students.

The conclusion of this volume (Chapter 10), written by coeditor Kevin S. Carroll, looks at translanguaging through a language policy lens. Carroll argues 'that one of the fundamental necessities in increasing access and equity in higher education is prestige planning among non-dominant languages' (x). Tying all the chapters together, he offers evidence from each to support his claim that translanguaging in higher education can help influence both primary and secondary education language policies and open space for non-dominant languages across levels of education. He also critiques translanguaging and reminds us that translanguaging itself is an ideology and must be examined through a critical lens.

Translanguaging as a concept shifts focus from the structural analysis of language itself to what people *do* with language in their everyday lives. But translanguaging does not stop there. It asks us to rethink bilingualism as the norm and take our analysis as socio- and applied linguists from that starting point. To do this, we as researchers, educators and policymakers need to put monolingual ideologies of language aside and adopt beliefs about language that put bi- and multilingual practices at the center of our investigation, teaching and policymaking. As we do so, we must consider critically the use of translanguaging for students in particular contexts with certain aims. We hope that this volume will contribute to this effort in the context of higher education worldwide.

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