KEY CONCEPTS IN APPLIED LINGUISTICS/CONCEPTOS CLAVE DE LA LINGÜÍSTICA APLICADA

TRANSLANGUAGING

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Translanguaging has emerged in the last two decades as a major theory in applied linguistics that has impacted on policy and practice in a number of fields. This short essay outlines the origins and developments of the concept, and explores its key contributions to language education.

The current conceptualization of Translanguaging originated from four related but different fields of enquiry: minority language revitalization; bilingual education; second language acquisition; and distributed cognition and language. Cen Williams, an experienced teacher trainer in Wales, observed in the Welsh revitalization programmes in the 1990s a classroom practice where the teacher tried to teach in Welsh but the students tended to respond in English. The students were expected to do their assignments in Welsh but often they referred to English language sources. The policy of the Welsh revitalization programmes was, as it is now, that only Welsh should be used, whereas the reality was that all the teachers and learners knew English and used it in many different contexts. Rather than

seeing the alternation between the languages only in a negative way, Williams argued, against the stated policy, that it could be used to the benefits of both the student and the teacher, as it helped to maximise the learner's bilingual capacity in learning. Williams' doctoral thesis (1994) was on this practice which he described as 'trawsieithu', in Welsh. Colin Baker, who was Williams' supervisor, introduced his work to the English-speaking world in the textbook *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* (Baker, 2001), by adding the 'trans' to 'languaging' as Translanguaging.

The term became widely known across the world largely due to Ofelia Garcia's work on bilingual education policy and practice in the United States, especially the education of minoritised children of Hispanic background who are labelled 'bilingual'. These children are often assumed to be in need of remedial education because they had incomplete exposure to English and therefore their English proficiency was lower. Their Spanish was assumed to be interfering with their English, which impacted negatively on their content learning and general school attainment. Garcia argued that there was no evidence that the Hispanic children's apparent under-achievement was caused by their English language skills. Rather, it was the linguistic and educational ideologies that favoured one-language-only (English in this case) or one-language-at-a-time and the policy that no home language was allowed in the classroom that discriminated against those children and disadvantaged their learning. Translanguaging - 'multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage in order to makes sense of their bilingual worlds' (Garcia, 2009: 45) - would empower the learner and maximize their potential for learning. It would also empower the instructor and

transform the way we teach and support our students in the process of knowledge construction.

When Baker added the 'trans' prefix to 'languaging', he also alluded to the sociocultural theories of second language acquisition where the idea of languaging had existed for some time. In particular, Swain (2006) used the term to describe the cognitive process of negotiating and producing meaningful, comprehensible output as part of language learning as a 'means to mediate cognition', that is to understand and to problem-solve (2006: 97) and 'a process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language' (p. 97). She gave specific examples of advanced second language learners' cognitive and affective engagements through languaging, whereby 'language serves as a vehicle through which thinking is articulated and transformed into an artefactual form' (Swain, 2006: 97). She also mentioned Hall's work on languaging in psychotherapy (Hall 1999) where 'talking-it-through' meant 'coming-to-know-while-speaking' (Swain and Lapkin, 2002). The connection Swain and the others made between languaging and thinking is a particularly useful one when it comes to understanding the cognitive capacities of bilingual and multilingual language users. By adding 'trans' to 'languaging', it would capture their 'talking-it-through' in multiple languages, but emphasizing the entirety of the learner's linguistic repertoire rather than knowledge of specific structures of specific named languages separately as other prefixes such as 'multi-' or 'poly-' might be able to do.

Another field where the concept of 'languaging' has been developing for some time is that of distributed cognition and language, sometimes known as 'ecological psychology'. The key argument here is that 'human languaging activity is radically

heterogeneous and involves the interaction of processes on many different time-scales, including neural, bodily, situational, social, and cultural processes and events' (Thibault 2017: 76). Language as we ordinarily know it in the form of conventionalised speech and writing is a second-order product of this continuous activity of languaging. Fundamentally, this particular perspective on cognition and language invites us to rethink language not as an organism-centred entity with corresponding formalism such as phonemes, words, sentences, etc., but as 'a multi-scalar organization of processes that enables the bodily and the situated to interact with situation, transcending cultural-historical dynamics and practices' (Thibault, 2017: 78). It sees the traditional divides between the linguistic, the paralinguistic, and the extralinguistic dimensions of human communication as nonsensical and emphasises what the researchers call the orchestration of the neural-bodily-worldly skills of languaging. In particular, it highlights the importance of feeling, experience, history, memory, subjectivity and culture. Although they do not talk about ideology and power, it is entirely conceivable that these too play important roles in languaging. On language learning, it advocates a radically different view that the novice does not 'acquire' language, but rather 'they adapt their bodies and brains to the languaging activity that surrounds them'. And in doing so, 'they participate in cultural worlds and learn that they can get things done with others in accordance with the culturally promoted norms and values' (Thibault, 2017: 77).

I first started using the term Translanguaging in my 2011 article in the *Journal of Pragmatics*. My main concern there was to develop an analytic framework that would capture the fluid, dynamic and instantaneous creations of linguistic expressions by bilingual and

multilingual language users that playfully manipulate the boundaries of named languages as well as boundaries between what is conventionally understood as language and other semiotic cues. To me, the *trans-* prefix emphasizes multilingual language users' capacity to transcend boundaries, and the *-ing* suffix highlights the momentariness of their creative practices. It keeps the term 'language' in it because it is intended to broaden the concept of language not narrowly as a set of code but as a social practice and as an assemblage of meaning-making recourses that goes beyond the linguistic vs non-linguistic, or verbal vs non-verbal dichotomy. It was placed in the *Journal of Pragmatics* as I wanted to develop an approach to 'inferencing' in social interaction, especially by multilingual language users.

One of the most frequently asked questions regarding Translanguaigng is: how is it different from code-switching or other newer terms such as polylanguaging, metrolingualism, etc.? All terminologies have their theoretical and conceptual rationales. Code-switching, for example, pays more attention to the structural differences between named languages, and a code-switching analysis would start by identifying how many languages are involved and what they are. Polylanguaging and other similar terms emphasize the involvement of multiple languages. Translanguaging, on the other hand, regards the concept of named languages such as English, German, Dutch, etc. as primarily socio-political and highlights the human capacity to transcend the boundaries between named languages in meaning making. In fact, it emphasizes human beings' ability to deliberately break the boundaries of named languages to create novel ways of expression and communication, in bilingual puns, literacy and artistic works, as well as in everyday social

interaction. There are three senses of the 'trans' prefix that are particularly important:

- Transcending boundaries between named language and between language and other cognitive and semiotic systems

- Transformative potential of the act of Translanguaging for the language user not only with regards to their linguistic capacity but also their identities and worldviews

- Transdisciplinary approach to human communication and learning, breaking the traditional boundaries between linguistics, psychology, sociology, education, etc.

It is important to emphasize that Translanguaging does not deny the existence of named languages as socio-political entities, but challenges the assumption that named languages reflect social or psychological realities. Research on language evolution and in historical linguistics show that all human languages evolved from fairly simple combinations of sounds, gestures, icons, symbols, etc. (Mufwene 2008). Social groups form speech communities by sharing a common set of communicative practices and beliefs. But language contact, borrowing and mixing have always been an important part of evolution and survival process. What is more, the naming of languages is a relatively recent phenomenon. It was the invention of the nation-state that triggered the invention of the notion of monolingualism and the association between one language and one nation (Gramling, 2016). In the meantime, there is ample research evidence from neuroscience that differently named languages are not represented or controlled by different parts of the brain (Grosjean, 2010). The mixing and switching between named languages by

bilingual and multilingual speakers in everyday social interaction is fluid and dynamic. Efforts to identify and location a 'language switch' in the brain proved to be futile. We also fully accept that there are many language users whose environment and experience led them to a heightened awareness of the differences between named languages, who consequently keep their languages separate. Their 'language awareness', however, is not purely of linguistic structures, but includes the sociocultural and political histories and values of the named languages. They will therefore exercise different cognitive control in 'selective language use' (one language at a time) vs fluid language use (as in Translanguaging). Their cognitive representation includes this awareness, is at least in part a result of experience and environment, and is subject to change over time.

Whilst Translanguaging has expanded as a theoretical concept and an analytical framework that has been applied in a number of related fields, its primary concerns remain in language-related education, particularly the education of learners who have multiple languages in their repertoire and who may also be socio-economically and culturally minoritized or disadvantaged. Following Garcia's work with the Hispanic communities in the U.S., researchers and practitioners all over the world have explored the use of Translanguaging as a pedagogy in the education of bilingual and multilingual learners where the medium of instruction is officially in English or some other dominant international or national language (e.g. Garcia et al., 2017). Most of the studies use linguistic ethnography and focus on the degree of participation and engagement in learning by bilingual and multilingual learners. The key issue that these studies aim to address is the role of the so-called 'home' or 'community' language in the children's learning. Researchers argue

that if we regard education as a process of knowledge construction rather than simply transmission of information, facts and skills, then the language in which knowledge is constructed become highly significant. Language is not simply a set of abstract codes; it carries a specific history and cultural heritage. Knowledge constructed through a specific named language evokes history and culture in particular ways. Restricting or denying access to knowledge in particular languages would amount to discrimination. It is a moral and ethical issue that all educators must consider. Such issues aside, there is no scientific evidence to suggest that the use of home or community language has any detrimental effect on the children's learning. In fact, all available evidence points to the contrary, and that is, home or community languages can be a useful facilitator in learning as it maximises the learner's opportunities to access information and understand concepts (e.g. Genesee, Paradis and Crago, 2010). As such they can contribute positively to knowledge construction as well as to building confidence and identity. A review of the role of the first language in English medium instruction is freely downloadable at: https://elt.oup.com/feature/global/expert/emi?cc=gb&selLanguage=en. And another practical guide to the use of home language for EAL can be found at: http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/home-language-english-language-learners-most-valuable-resource.

Research evidence further supports the use of multiple languages simultaneously as in Translanguaging because it maximises the opportunities for the bilingual and multilingual language user to exercise their executive control and manage their linguistic repertoire for effective communication and learning (e.g. Bialystok et al., 2014). Barac, et al. (2014) carried out a systematic

review of studies that showed consistent findings that active engagement with two named languages, no matter how short and regardless of the language pairs involved, contributed positively to non-verbal executive control and theory of mind. In a series of studies of social cognition of bilinguals and multilingual who habitually mix and switch their languages, Dewaele and Li (2012, 2013) and Kharkurin and Li (2015) found language mixing and switching correlated with their scores in standardized empathy, tolerance of ambiguity, and creaty (as assessed by Torrance test of creavitity) tests. More evidence is merging that the positive effects of language mixing and switching on executive control and other cognitive capacities occur not only in early bilinguals but also in later learners of additional languages. The reported effects of dynamic multilingual practices apply not only to the use of home or community languages by minoritised learners, but also to second, foreign and additional language learning in general. That includes, of course, English L1 users learning modern foreign languages. We must not forget that the purpose of language learning is to become bilingual or multilingual, not to become another monolingual in a different language. And the most bilingual and multilingual language users mix and switch between named languages for communicative purposes. Yet in modern foreign language education, we rarely consider using the bilingual and multilingual who mix and switch their languages as the model for learning, and instead we use idealised monolingual native-speaker as the model and regard language mixing and switching as examples of incomplete or deficient learning.

Language educators sometimes find it easier to understand and accept the moral, ethical and scientific arguments than to tackle

the practical and pedagogical challenges posed by policy and the school and classroom environment. In most parts of the world, the school curricula are designed to serve the interests of the assumed majority and tend to be associated with the dominant national language. Monolingual ideologies of one-language-only or one-language-at-a-time dominate the language-in-education policies. Students get categorised by nationality and ethnicity, with a corresponding language. It is very rare for multiple ownership of multiple languages to be recognised in the school curriculum. Assessment regimes further exacerbate the situation with insistence on monolingual practice. Rarely do we see school examinations conducted in multiple languages simultaneously. Language tests do not test the learners' ability to coordinate their linguistic repertoire in the form of language mixing and switching, nor the higher level executive controls, but to focus on monolingual standards and completeness-based models of linguistic competence. The latter are those that assume that native speakers have the complete knowledge of their native language and can produce error-free forms and structure, and that is the model for second language learners to aim to achieve. The idea of complete knowledge of a language is a fallacy. Nobody can claim the complete knowledge of a language, whether one is classified as a native speaker or not. And a completeness-based model for teaching and assessing language can only result in learning deficits. A competent language user is one who makes the best of what they know of a language for effective communication, and for a competent bilingual and multilingual language user, that includes the ability to mix and switch between languages as well as the ability to make the appropriate assessment of which language to speak to whom, when, why and how. We need to devise assessment regimes that best demonstrate this multi-competence of the bilingual

and multilingual by assessing their abilities to integrate, rather than to separate, features from different named language into meaningful wholes. There are many psychometric and cognitive tests for combination abilities. It is entirely conceivable to design a test with different parts of speech in different languages (say nouns and adverb in English, verbs and adjectives in Spanish) and ask the test takers to make up grammatical sentences with elements from both named languages and see what structural adaptation (e.g. gender and number agreements) they make in order to do so. Some ideas of assessment adaptation for Translanguaging can be found at: https://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Resources/Journals/LA/0956-jul2018/LA0956Jul18Translanguaging.pdf. We also need to challenge the monolingual education policies that neglect or even discriminate against multiple ownerships of multiple named languages to provide the learners with opportunities to maximise their linguistic and cultural potential in schools and in the classroom.

The practical challenges for implementing a Translanguaging pedagogy are usually more serious to the teacher rather than the learner. Although teachers agree in principle it is beneficial to bring more languages into the school and the classroom, they find it hard to manage so many different languages that the teacher themselves do not know. In many parts of the world, and in inner city schools in industrialised countries, this is often the reality. The teachers are concerned that not all languages could be given equal opportunities to be used. Moreover, teachers are given limited class time but challenging targets, often in the form of exam results and league tables. Again these are realities that teachers have to face on a daily basis. The key here is how we see the roles and responsibilities of the teacher. If we continue to see the teacher as the

main, if not the sole, source of knowledge in the classroom and their role as the transmitter of knowledge, we would then expect the class time to be mostly spent on teacher-centred teaching. But if we regard the teacher as what Brantmeier (2013) calls 'joint sojourners on the quest for knowledge', the teacher would become a learning facilitator, a scaffolder and a critical reflection enhancer, while the learner becomes an empowered explorer, a meaning-maker and a responsible knowledge constructer. As Brantmeier points out, 'a facilitator doesn't get in the way of learning by imposing information. A facilitator guides the process of student learning. A scaffolder assesses the learner's knowledge and builds scaffolding to extend that knowledge to a broader and deeper understanding. And a critical reflection enhancer asks the learner to reflect on what is being learned and the process of learning (meta-reflection about process)'. In the meantime, an empowered explorer is 'an independent or collective explorer of knowledge through disciplined means. And a meaning-maker and responsible knowledge constructer is one who engages in meaningful knowledge construction that promotes relevancy to her/his own life'. Adopting such an education philosophy would then open up spaces for the teacher to explore pedagogical alternatives together with the learners, a crucial part of which involves the use of multiple languages in the classroom. A Translanguaging pedagogy requires not the same linguistic and cultural knowledge as the learners but an open mindset and willingness to be a co-learner who believes that they can learn just as much, if not more, from the other learners.

Again it should be pointed out that a Translanguaging pedagogy does not assume that all the named languages that the learners bring into the classroom are the same or of equal status in society. It in fact encourages the development critical language

awareness which includes not only awareness of the structural features and pragmatics of specific named languages but also the socio-political histories of the differently named languages and their symbolic values. Translanguaging was never coined with the intention to replace terms such as code-switching. It has clearly caught the imagination of lots of people, not least language teachers, with an unintended consequence that more and more people have started using Translanguaging instead of the other terms. Translanguaging is not a thing in itself! As a descriptive label it refers to communicative practices that transcend the boundaries between named languages and between languages and other cognitive and semiotic systems. As an analytical perspective it questions the notion of language as systems of discrete structures (Garcia and Li, 2014; Li, 2018).

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