

15 Afterword:

Translanguaging Voices that Stand for Themselves

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Introduction. Voices that Stand for Themselves

The editors of this book are unapologetic about advocating for translanguaging voices and the role that they can play in the lives and education of multilinguals. Centering the translanguaging voices of multilinguals and emergent multilinguals, Krompák, Meyer and Makarova, and the contributors to this volume, advocate letting these voices stand for themselves. Whether the people involved are of the dominant majority or migrants or Indigenous minoritized people, their translanguaging voices are heard in their lives and education. Whether learning and/or using other dominant languages or minoritized languages in the street, in their families, communities or classrooms, leveraging these translanguaging voices is important because of their role in identity-building, expressing ideas and emotions, communicating and learning.

Translanguaging voices, as Creese and Blackledge say in their chapter, must ‘stand for themselves’, ‘without authorial explanation’. This statement, said about the everyday experience of multilingual interactions in a butcher shop, remind readers that translanguaging cannot simply be considered a pedagogy. Translanguaging is what happens in multilingual communities and families, and it also refers to what happens in educational institutions when educators give multilinguals, whether they are emergent or experienced multilinguals, the freedom to language for themselves in order to communicate meaningfully and learn. Translanguaging disrupts the ways in which language scholars and educators have ‘authored’ language in ways that maneuver it to create societal and power differences. In what follows, I consider how categories have been created to exclude. We then look at the many ways, some of which highlighted in these chapters, that translanguaging attempts to let all voices stand for themselves without ‘authorial’ guidance or explanation.

The Production of the ‘Languageless Less than Human’ through ‘Named Languages’

The work of decolonial scholar Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2007) reveals how the processes of colonization established a rigid line/boundary, an abyssal line, that created an abyss between populations perceived to be ‘civil’ and those declared as ‘non-existent’ and ‘uncivilized’. Along with race, language was used precisely to assign people to different sides of this line. Language, a system of human communication that is widely distributed (Maturana & Varela, 1984), was then narrowly defined as what colonizers spoke, and not as the ways in which others, including Indigenous peoples and the enslaved, languaged. As a result, language became synonymous with the ‘named language’ of nation states, a situation that persisted during the period of nation-building in the 19th century and of the independence of many Asian and African countries in the early 20th century. The powerless, who spoke languages that did not have status in a nation-state, were then perceived as being ‘less-than-human’ (Wynter, 2003) and thus as ‘languageless’. Sometimes they were said to be speakers of jargon or dialects, but these were never recognized as languages. Therefore, these ‘other’ ways of speaking were said to have no place in the institutions of the state, including its schools.

The Production of Deficiency through School or ‘Academic’ Language

Education has been an important mechanism in the continued reproduction of the abyssal line. Because education was, in its origins, within the purview only of those with institutional power, the language of school became synonymous with the language spoken by the powerful in society. School language was institutionalized, standardized and then termed ‘academic’.

The notion of academic language contrasted with ‘street language’ and reified the idea that the language used outside of educational institutions is not academic. Although for those with institutional power, there is little difference between their languaging practices in community and families and what schools have defined as academic language, the same cannot be said for language-minoritized communities. The language practices of these communities are distant from the monolingual standard language that has been constructed as ‘academic’. Thus, speakers from minoritized groups are rendered deficient not only linguistically but also cognitively. The voices of minoritized people in interaction could not stand for themselves but had to be ‘authored’ by a teacher in order for them to be controlled and silenced.

In the scholarship on teaching racialized, minoritized bilinguals the dominant language, this idea was perpetuated by the distinction made between basic interpersonal communication skills and cognitive academic

language proficiency (Cummins, 1979). Bilingual students were often said to have basic interpersonal communication skills in the dominant language, but not the ability to use that language in cognitive, academic ways (cognitive academic language proficiency). Bilingual voices were listened to as basic, street-like, useful for communication but not for thinking. A teacher had to intervene because the language practices in bilingual communities and families could not stand for themselves; they needed to be suppressed.

In the 20th century, bilingualism and multilingualism was mostly understood as simply the addition of two or more languages as autonomous entities. Interestingly enough, for dominant-language majorities who wanted to become bilingual, the emphasis of language education was on communication. These speakers of other dominant languages were said to already use one language in cognitive academic ways, and so for them, language education could focus on improving communication skills. However, the language practices of bi/multilingual students were considered mixtures and full of interferences; as such, they could not stand; they needed to be suppressed.

The Production of Western Colonial Logic through ‘Named Languages’

Voices transmit thought, cultural values, feelings, emotions. By focusing on named languages as constituted by nation states, and privileging languages that are written and thus considered ‘logical’, a Western colonial logic was produced that perceived voices that expressed feelings and different cultural values as illogical, magical, primitive.

Thinking of language without this colonial White logic can liberate voices, enabling them to stand as they express the aesthetic and create an important emotional space. In many ways, this emphasis on feelings is consonant with the concept that Latin American decolonial scholars have called *sentipensar* (Fals-Borda, 2003): intuitions led by feelings and emotions and an appreciation for the aesthetic. It also reminds us of Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1987) call for bringing the body back to occupy affective space. One of the chapters in this book, for example, gives space to transmusicking. Language includes all modalities and sensory experiences. The human being is capable of voicing thought, emotions and feelings in ways that go beyond what has been constrained as a named language. In so doing, another logic is performed, a logic that makes room for that of groups other than dominant Western White populations.

The Production of Inferiority through Education

In life, as in classrooms, different language practices have always co-existed. But we tend to privilege dominant voices, perceiving the voices

of racialized people through what Flores and Rosa (2015) have called raciolinguistic ideologies, and rendering them deficient or unimportant. We are simply deaf to the voices of others, the racialized voices of those who speak in ways that are different. We want to manipulate those voices, pass them through a narrow sieve, cure them of their impurities, eradicate their differences. And in that process, schooling that points only to 'academic language' is key.

Bilingual education, world language education, foreign language education, second language education, multilingual education and mother-tongue education have all been organized to develop students' acquisition of two or more languages. Sometimes, students are acquiring powerful languages like English or other dominant languages; at other times, they acquire the so-called 'heritage' languages of immigrant or Indigenous communities. But many of these programs also suffer from thinking of language as a single entity that can be 'had', rather than something that all human beings 'do' in interaction. Schools often see their job as teaching a second (L2) or third or fourth language (L3/L4) as additional autonomous entities, and suppress translanguaging voices in classrooms. Heltai and Tarsoly (2023) remind us of the challenges and benefits of letting translanguaging voices, such as those of Romani, stand in classrooms when languages have not undergone standardization.

In life, as in all types of classrooms, there are always voices being suppressed, since people engage differently depending on the content, context and participants in the interaction. Most educational institutions privilege one named language, or two named languages, but do not know how to deal with the multiplicity of voices that exist within classrooms. Not accepting the polyphonic nature of individual and collective voices in classrooms always means the suppression of some, as schools force students to use only one or two languages and not their own voices, which are often not represented in classrooms.

All types of educational programs that conceive of bi/multilingualism as simply the addition of one or more named languages, without regard for the very different heteroglossic voices in the classroom, act to suppress and control different voices. These programs are of value because they move away from simple monolingual education. But without raising the critical consciousness of educators so that students understand how named academic languages have been constructed, and without leveraging translanguaging in school lessons, these programs are insufficient to reverse the subjectivities of inferiority that have been shaped by monolingual instruction.

Consider, for example, the bilingual education project in the Philippines or the multilingual education project in India. In the Philippines, English and Filipino, a standardized version of Tagalog, were decreed to be official and used in bilingual education programs. But this has meant that approximately 20 million Cebuano speakers, as well as

those speaking other languages of the Philippines have been deprived of instruction that includes their own language practices. In India, the multilingual education projects carried out with tribal populations have also proven futile, since selecting a tribal language to be taught in early elementary grades alongside English and Hindi has only created conflicts between the many tribal people who speak differently and are being schooled together.

Beyond Pedagogical Translanguaging to a Translanguaging Pedagogy

To allow translanguaging voices to stand for themselves, without authorial guidance or explanation, requires courage and trust that the speakers/learners are knowledgeable and capable. Rather than the teacher taking on an active role as the author of the lesson, the chapters in this book show students themselves acting during the specific interactional moment with ideas, with each other, with teachers, with texts and with others in their own unique ways. A translanguaging pedagogy refers to giving all students the freedom to make meaning of their learning and to develop their multilingualism in ways that go beyond the nation-states' and schools' definition of the language or languages being taught (see [García & Li, 2014](#); [Li, 2011, 2018](#); [Otheguy et al., 2015](#)). It privileges the students' voices and their agency.

Although this book shows the very different attempts by educators in countries in Europe and Africa as they leverage translanguaging in education, it also demonstrates that a translanguaging pedagogy does not simply consist of planned strategies. Translanguaging questions the idea of 'a' language. It acknowledges language as a sociocultural construct that is important for all, but that nevertheless responds to the social demands of nation states to control diversity. In the same way, translanguaging questions the idea of 'a' pedagogical strategy or of planned pedagogical translanguaging, although it calls for pedagogies that open up translanguaging spaces where students can leverage their own translanguaging voices. Of course, it is the teacher who has the authority to open up the translanguaging space. But unlike what happens with scripted curricula, lesson plans and pacing calendars, translanguaging does not consist of simple planned strategies that can be determined a priori to the students' encounter with a specific text produced by other speakers, their classmates, the teacher, or other authors.

A translanguaging pedagogy must respond to what [García et al. \(2017: 21\)](#) call the students' 'translanguaging corriente'. By encouraging shifts away from static instructional design and curricula and towards meeting the students' translanguaging voices, transformations occur that lead not only to improved communication but also to greater creativity and openness towards others.

Lessons Advanced in this Volume

Translanguaging for human relationships

This volume shows how educators are responding to the lack of imagination in education policy that narrowly designs language education policy without spaces for the translanguaging voices of students. The failure of monolingual education policy, or traditional bilingual education policy for migrant students, has been well documented. Less well known are the difficulties of elite bilingual or language education programs for language majorities who want to become multilingual. A case in point are the programs in Zurich described by Blons-Pierre and Maechler-Dent. As in most elite multilingual education programs, the families choose these programs so that their children can compete in global markets. Success is then tied to monolingual performances in examinations in three languages. The parents are, of course, suspicious of translanguaging in these monolingual classrooms. However, the work makes us conscious of the fact that the purpose of translanguaging in education cannot simply be to improve language proficiency or even content competence. Translanguaging is important because of the integrated and relational worldview that working within translanguaging spaces provides students. This is especially important for students who will inherit social and political power. Their relationships with others are especially important.

Translanguaging as work in tandem

One of the concepts that this book advances is that of programs in tandem. This concept of being in tandem is analogous to the *juntos/*together that shapes the work of the City University of New York – New York State Initiative on Emergent Bilinguals collective (2020). Work to advance translanguaging has to be done in tandem, as the different heteroglossic voices present in classrooms are allowed to stand for themselves. Sometimes this tandem situation refers to student voices within a classroom (as in the chapter by Kirsch and Bebić-Crestany in Luxembourg with preschoolers), or in writing (Pfeiffer on writing in South Africa). At other times, the word ‘tandem’ refers to ensuring that multimodalities are considered as language and thus an integral part of the pedagogy (Saner). On yet other occasions, it refers to pedagogical cooperation across two different educational projects (Zingg in Switzerland) or across national borders (van der Worp and Etxebarria Lekanda).

Inadequacy of teacher education for translanguaging transformations

A topic that emerged in many of the chapters in this book (see, for example, Schaubert and Pogranova regarding Switzerland) is the

inadequacy of teacher education. Teachers who are engaged in extensive professional development may develop a translanguaging stance, but that does not often translate to translanguaging practices in the classroom. This is the lesson we learn from Erling, Siwik, Haslacher and Foltz's chapter about teachers of German and English in Austria. Likewise, although having been exposed to less professional development, teachers of mathematics in rural Rwanda develop positive attitudes towards translanguaging that do not simply translate to translanguaging practices in their teaching (see, for example, Bowden, Dushimimana, Uwineza and Uworwabayehe).

Although developing a translanguaging stance is the first step to being able to open up translanguaging spaces in instruction, it is insufficient in letting translanguaging voices stand as valid and academic in different instructional spaces.

Translanguaging in multilingual states and instruction

As I read this volume, I thought about the different ways in which multilingualism is understood and addressed in schools. For example, both Switzerland and South Africa are considered multilingual societies, although their multilingualism is completely different. Switzerland is the example par excellence of a multilingual/diglossic country, with its languages being described as geographically compartmentalized (Fishman, 1967). One-third of the contributions in this book are from Swiss scholars, competently describing translanguaging in classrooms to include English, French, German, modern and migrant languages. And yet, there has not been an extensive national effort to include the many language practices of Swiss citizens in national instruction. Romansh, for example, is hardly taught to Swiss children, and English as an additional language of instruction is sometimes displacing the prevalent role that French and German as a second language have had. Another example of how geographically diglossic arrangements are working against the multilingualism of citizens is the case of the Basques. The chapter about Basque collaboration between Spain and France (van der Worp and Etxebarria Lekanda) reveals there has been little effort to teach Basque to others in Spain and France. How relevant are diglossic multilingual arrangements today in a globalized interdependent world? What would it mean for nation-states to let go of diglossic compartmentalized relationships between languages established to control power? What would be advanced by making the language boundaries of diglossic multilingual societies flexible, allowing multilingual interactions to take place naturally?

As we said before, South Africa's multilingualism is very different from that of the Swiss diglossic arrangement. In 1996, South Africa adopted 11 official languages but, unlike Swiss people and schools, their

multilingualism, like that in other African countries, follows an ubuntu simultaneity, with most citizens able to communicate naturally in several of the languages deemed to be official. Makalela (2022) has explained that the language labels were, in many instances, the product of apartheid to keep people separate. Groups were assigned to different townships and given a separate identity and a named language. Today, these identities have been shaped as separate, although they are a product of segregation policies. In other words, these arrangements are not natural. South African scholars today have begun increasingly to think of how translanguaging can possibly become a way to bring forth the naturally translanguaging voices of South Africans (Makalela, 2022).

Conclusion

With this volume on advocacy in educational translanguaging, Krompák, Meyer and Makarova call for letting students' voices stand in schools. It redirects the translanguaging corriente in classrooms away from teachers as controllers and toward students' performances. Whether in elite educational programs to develop an additional language, or in refugee/migrant programs to develop the dominant language of the state, or Indigenous or migrant 'heritage' language programs, teachers must learn to 'let go'. To let go requires faith in the students and trust that they have the intellectual and affective capacity to use their translanguaging voices to advance their plurilingualism. This volume reminds us of how difficult this is, even when the educators are advocates of translanguaging. To include everyone's voice and let them stand in a classroom requires courage, faith and trust that everyone is capable of languaging and learning.

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