Translanguaging Is Here to Stay

Retos and Oportunidades for a Linguistically Sustaining Bilingual (and Non-Bilingual) Teacher Education

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> I began to realize that I had absorbed the strengths of two cultures and lifestyles. Was that good or bad?
> Pocho
> Good, que no. I have an innovative way of expressing myself that relates to both sides of the border.
> Pocho
>
> —*Los Alacranes Mojados, Pocho*

Ríos de tinta have been and will be written about translanguaging since it poses a paradigmatic challenge to business as usual in language education. Allow me to start with an anecdote in the context of a bilingual advocacy event in San Diego, California. As part of a group of seasoned and committed bilingual educators, I attended a presentation that problematized the cultural relevance of instruction for U..S-based populations modeled after the educational structures and pedagogies in nations where Spanish is the hegemonic language (i.e., Spain, Central America). In this event, we had been inspired by Ramón "Chunky" Sánchez and his *Alacranes Mojados*, his activism, and his song "Pocho," which brought echoes of Anzaldúa´s "*lenguas de*

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fuego," "*deslenguadas,*" and "*ni de aquí ni de allá*." Over lunch, a dear colleague leaned to me and said: "Clearly, we cannot be educating our Spanish ELs as if we were in Mexico, because we are here, and we cannot be teaching as if we were elsewhere." As this veteran educator honored the Chicano experience's heritage, I felt the need to add: "Well, this is related to what some of us are trying to convey when it comes to language use and sustaining the language practices of our communities here." Suddenly, this colleague reacted: "Ah no, but when we are teaching language, I want them to be speaking the language of the Real Academia or of the UNAM." A translanguaging controversy had just been served as the main course in this *almuerzo*.

The translanguaging debate transcends the outward-facing concerns to defend bilingual education against English nativism, which have pervaded the bilingual education literature in the last thirty years. Translanguaging demands that bilingual language educators engage in an inward-facing analysis into often deeply-seeded views of their world: What is bilingualism? What is bilingual education? Who is it for? Apropos translanguaging, Ofelia García (2019) stated:

> The question then is: *Cómo* is bilingualism best developed in school? There is no answer that is separate from people and comunidad. If *la educación bilingüe* is to serve *la comunidad bilingüe*, then a translanguaging approach *que refleje el modo de usar la lengua* of that *comunidad* is most *apropiado*.

These statements merit unpacking and posing the questions implicit in them: Is *la educación bilingüe* to serve *la comunidad bilingüe*? Who determines the *modo apropiado de usar la lengua*? In other words, who has the power? The translanguaging issue, in line with general calls to decolonize language education (e.g., García, 2019) and specifically to guard against the gentrification of dual immersion (e.g., Delavan et al., 2021), is then the bilingual question of our time, and not an easy one to be resolved.

Translanguaging as a concept is neither new, nor a fad. It was first used to describe language dynamics and pedagogies in Wales, United Kingdom, in the 1990s (García, 2017). However, it acquired its current relevance after García relaunched it in the late 2000s to tackle the perennial issue of appropriate linguistic minorities in the U.S. (García, 2009). Translanguaging counters oppressive theories such as semilingualism or incomplete acquisition (Montrul, 2011), which account for Spanglish and describe its users as not having a complete linguistic system, but rather fragments of English and Spanish. When internalized, these theories lead to linguistic violence (Ek & Sánchez, 2008),

the "*no sabo* kids," and the loss of countless teachers with bilingual skills that succumb to the belief that their "home Spanish" *no está a la altura del* "school Spanish," the "native or near-native proficiency" that the job postings call for (Briceño et al., 2018).

Translanguaging, as a paradigm-shifting conceptualization of language, reverts how the phenomenon of hybrid language practices is apprehended, moving from an external perspective where it is seen as an alternation of linguistic structures (a language hopscotch or "codeswitching") to an internal perspective that is, how bilinguals experience language (as flowing creatively to fit communicative needs) (Otheguy et al., 2019). Recognizing Spanglish as linguist prowess rather than faulty language, *una lengua chueca*, defies the canon and how language may be conceived in the UNAM or the Real Academia. How is the Real Academia (*que "limpia, fija, y da esplendor*," per its motto) going to deal with these *lenguas* so alive and so "*sucias*"? Nevertheless, let us first and foremost recognize that, before the term coinage and the academics that have brought translanguaging to boiling relevance, these *lenguas vivas* were already here. They are here to stay in our schools and society, outside of our academic quarrels.

Language conceived through a translanguaging lens questions the assumed borders of languages tied to nation-state projects (Makoni and Pennycook and "named languages," 2005). Once the theoretical tenets of translanguage as a real societal phenomenon "click together" to deconstruct modernist views of language, an essential and pragmatic question past theories is laid bare: What does it look like in the classroom? Even before that, should it be happening in classrooms? On the one hand, proponents of language separation have called for "staying true to the model" as portrayed in the Center for Applied Linguistics *Principles of Dual Language Education*, whose 2018 edition (Howard et al., 2018) is revered and often referenced by practitioners as the compass (vademecum) of current bilingual education. Using a percentage frame to talk about language allocation imposes a managerial and quantifiable view of languages as separate entities (despite openly admitting that there is less than empirical clarity when determining efficacy across its allocation models).

On the other, studies such as Henderson and Ingram (2018) document what I have called "the White lie," pun intended, of teachers serving as models of language X to their students while pretending that they are not proficient in language Y. Other articles, such as the call for reframing the language allocation debate by Sánchez and colleagues (2018) document the practical implementation of translanguaging-based pedagogy. The rift between these models two language

models, static allocation versus dynamism, runs deep and is unresolved in typical classroom bilingual practice.

At this controversy's core are paradigmatic ideological differences in the understanding of language ontology and its role in society. Monoglossic ideologies (Silverstein, 2018) approach language as an object that can be segmented, categorized, abstracted, and kept pure, as if these analytical exercises did not impact speakers' lives. Hence, notions such as "standard language" and "academic language" remain incontrovertible and commonsensical. Conversely, heteroglossic ideologies and their pedagogies adopt a fluid stance regarding language, rejecting constructed hierarchies purported to exist on purely linguistic merit. Translanguaging is not just about "mixing language" or not, but about how we conceive the role of language and its variation in the world, indissociably embodied in the speakers that use it. In this paradigmatic clash, it is possible to understand how Cummins considered that raciolinguistics (Flores & Rosa, 2015) is "unwanted baggage" tagging along the concept of translanguaging, while some of us see these two ideas as inherently interconnected because there is no language without embodied experience.

We, teacher educators, are confronted with the question of translanguaging praxis in our task to elevate the capacity of our schools to embrace and cultivate our youth's linguistic diversity and dynamism. More often than not, teacher educators are challenged by the degree to which our transformational practices during coursework can "rhyme" with the hands-on experiences of student-teaching, in the knowledge that hours of preparation work can be undone in an instant by the dissonance of a misaligned example in the "reality of the classroom." In a 2021 article, I conceived this transitional stage from theory into practice as a "friction space" where teacher candidates may get contradictory messages and get caught between heteroglossic stances at the university (i.e., embrace the language flow) and monoglossic structures in schools (i.e., languages are to be separated). One of the participants in the study, Julia, captured the essence of this external and internal tension in bilingual teacher candidates:

> *Pero también yo puedo decir que uso translenguaje si yo estoy estudiando en casa o estoy teniendo discusiones con alguna de mis compañeras [in the credential program]… pero como que mi mente los quiere separar*. (p.54)

Julia is torn between her actual usage and sense of language separation, having received well-meaning monoglossic messages from her close entourage. While she thinks that there is potential for translan-

guaging pedagogies "*para que las dos lenguas suban*," the program where she has completed her student teaching student teaching placement "*es muy estricto, como que se le penaliza al estudiante si está hablando inglés en un momento que se habla español, hasta que le quitan puntos*." At the local level, translanguaging fights countless battles like Julia's every day.

At the macro level, California's language policies in the last decade, while somehow satiating a bilingual thirst after years of Proposition 227 dessert, have remained relatively conservative (i.e., monoglossic) in their conception of bilingualism (Muñoz-Muñoz et al., 2022). Well-meaning additive bilingualism and utilitarian, social-mobility arguments sustain the bilingual arguments of recent policies like the El Roadmap or California 2030. However, the new edition of the *Bilingual Program Standards* and the newly-minted *Bilingual Teacher Performance Expectations* (CTC, 2021) to enter into effect in September of 2023 have made California programs' encounter with translanguaging an unavoidable and necessary rendezvous. Translanguaging is now policy. For instance, BTPE 4, item 2 states:

> Apply knowledge of research on the cognitive and metacognitive effects of bilingualism, biliteracy, translanguaging, and transliteracies as developmental processes when designing and implementing engaging instructional practices with all students. (p. 9)

While California has thus taken a stride in advancing translanguaging on the policy front, other systemic issues challenge the translingual project. Translating a freely-flowing human activity such as language into teaching practice (Valdes' curricularization, 2018) proves especially challenging when it comes to translanguaging, precisely because these practices do not easily conform to institutionalizing practices such as dictionaries, grammars, or language academies of nation-states. The conundrum of testing is particularly relevant: How does the standardized testing industry capture translingual dexterity? How do we renounce our inherited role of curators (i.e., police) of colonized linguistic practices in teacher education while having to prepare our candidates for the language proficiency standardized measures that are part of the bilingual teacher authorization process?

Systemically, we are now confronted with the need to have program-wide discussions about our stance vis-à-vis language, which entails discussions with instructors, field supervisors, mentors, and the entire community-ecology of educators that populates the formative trajectory of bilingual student teachers. Further, we need to press the question of whether these heteroglossic and linguistically-sustaining

stances are only the purview of compartmentalized bilingual teacher preparation programs or, on the contrary, the consequences should more than spill onto regular teacher preparation. Indeed, heteroglossic stances call for a more widely encompassing understanding of language variation, not just where different "named languages" come into contact but where individuals engage creatively across registers, sociolects, dialects, and their idiolects. In simple words, languaging is everywhere and concerns every single one of us.

There are certainly ways to move forward and advance this social and linguistic justice mission. When it comes to raising awareness in the field, the California Association for Bilingual Teacher Education (CABTE) has collaborated closely with the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) to maximize the official efforts to guide the transition to the new bilingual standard policy (CTC, 2022). Currently, the organization is engaged in the preparation of pedagogical materials to increase awareness about translanguaging and other critical advances in the BTPEs among all stakeholders in the bilingual teacher preparation ecology.

Concerted efforts to engage local district leadership in new heteroglossic perspectives are of the utmost importance, so cultivating district-university partnerships becomes a strategic cornerstone in advancing linguistic justice. At San José State´s *Bilingüismo y Justicia* we work with districts and schools actively pursuing to update their shared pedagogies and skillsets, often encountering Latinx administrators who find in translanguaging a healing response and just validation to their own lived experiences. Recently, a principal in a school in the Bay Area school that had attended a professional development that I conducted on the subject stated: "Even when I was a teacher, this is what I did, and I did not know how to call it, but I felt I had to hide it. Knowing about translanguaging and its potential gives all this a new meaning, and it touches me personally."

Examples speak louder, and more fluidly, than words. As such, San José State University and California State University Fullerton have just co-sponsored the *Tercera Conferencia de Enseñanza y Liderazgo a través del Translenguaje*. In this event, close to one hundred educators connected virtually to celebrate their linguistic prowess and that of their students, with practitioners that showcased their translanguaging praxis in elementary and secondary classrooms. Moreover, the complete consecration of this experience was that we were communicating profound intellectual ideas with our translanguaging repertoires. The presenters' depth and reach were not in any way diminished by their explicit disavowal of purism, but rather their message was *sublimado*.

One participant's takeaway was her reflection on "*el poder de la comunidad* in challenging/transforming our colonized minds/perspectives," while another highlighted the importance of "not being hard on ourselves and learning from students."

As academics and agents of change inhabiting el fértil cruce de caminos de la praxis, teacher educators are responsible for embracing and modeling linguistically sustaining pedagogies in our integrated agency within and outside our institutions. Our teacher education practice should be immersed in a love for the free and democratic language performance of our students. Our research should lead to publications that not only pay attention to advancing ideas, but how they do so by pushing the linguistic canon. Our contributions to the field should open ways for the agentic transformation of our educational institutions and the linguistic uninterrogated assumptions that undergird them. Translanguaging is here to stay, *porque no se le pueden poner puertas al campo o al mar*.

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