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Translanguaging in Multilingual English Classrooms

An Asian Perspective and Contexts

With an Introduction by Angel Lin

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Chapter 1
Introduction: Translanguaging and Translanguaging Pedagogies

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In this chapter the historical origins of the term translanguaging and the different contexts in which the term has subsequently been developed, contested, and applied will be discussed. The distinctively different theoretical assumptions entailed in the term translanguaging and the traditional terms of code-switching/code-mixing will be delineated. The most recent literature on translanguaging pedagogies will also be reviewed with a view to clarifying the difference between a focus on translanguaging as a spontaneous human communicative phenomenon and a focus on translanguaging pedagogies as a set of design-based principles for scaffolding bi-/multilingual development.

Historical Origins of the Term *Translanguaging*

Cen Williams first coined the Welsh term *trawsieithu* in 1994 (Williams 1994) to refer to a pedagogical practice in Welsh/English bilingual education classrooms where students are asked to alternate languages for the purposes of receptive or productive use. For instance, the Welsh/English bilingual teacher can intentionally use both English and Welsh as the languages of input (e.g., allowing students to read diverse sources of readings on a topic including the student's familiar language–English) while maintaining Welsh (the target language) as the language of output (e.g., requiring students to write up a summary on the topic in Welsh). This practice is seen as having pedagogical functions of using what is more familiar to the students (English) to help them learn what is less familiar (Welsh). Despite traditional language pedagogies that prescribe separation of languages in the language classroom (see review by Creese and Blackledge 2010), the Welsh educators, with a

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strong commitment to a bilingual identity, understood that bilingualism itself was precisely an important tool in the learning and development of bilingual proficiencies. Lewis et al. (2012a) further explained that the term translanguaging referred to using one language to reinforce the other in order to increase the leaner's understanding of, and ability to use, both languages.

Colin Baker, one of the most influential scholars in the field of bilingual education, explained the pedagogical functions that translanguaging can have, "To read and discuss a topic in one language, and then to write about it in another language, means that the subject matter has to be processed and 'digested'" (2011, p. 289). To Baker (2011) translanguaging may have at least four pedagogical functions:

1. It may promote a deeper and fuller understanding of the subject matter.
2. It may help the development of the weaker language.
3. It may facilitate home-school links and cooperation.
4. It may help the integration of fluent speakers with early learners.

A 5-year research project in Wales has found that translanguaging was used as the only or dominant approach in approximately one third of the 100 lessons observed (Lewis et al. 2012b). Lewis et al. (2012b) also found pedagogically effective examples of translanguaging in Welsh classrooms in senior primary education in the arts and humanities subjects. The researchers concluded that in translanguaging, "*both languages are used in a dynamic and functionally integrated manner* to organise and mediate mental processes in understanding, speaking, literacy, and, not least, learning" (2012a, p. 1, italics added).

Since the publication of Ofelia García and Li Wei's seminal work *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education* in 2014, translanguaging has gained great momentum in the fields of bi-/multilingual education and language education at large. In international conferences and symposiums in applied linguistics and TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), for instance, translanguaging has become one of the most frequent topics presented upon. However, this has also aroused some unease about whether this is just another fad in the field of language education and how translanguaging research differs from traditional research under the terms of code-switching, code-mixing, or code-alternation (Lin 2013a, b). In the next section, I shall focus on a discussion of these difficult debates.

"Translanguaging"—How Is It Different from "Code-Switching/Code-Mixing/Code Alternation"?

Code-switching is a term that has been used in sociolinguistics to refer to the alternating use of more than one linguistic code. Both code-mixing (intra-clausal/sentential alternation) and code-switching (alternation at the inter-clausal/sentential level) are usually referred to by the umbrella term code-switching. However, whether we say code-mixing, code-switching, or code alternation, this *code-X*

terminology begs the question of whether language should, in the first place, be conceptualized as discrete "codes" with stable boundaries. The term "code" in linguistics has come from information theory:

> In information theory, a code is a mechanism to pair two sets of signals in non-ambiguous, reversible, and context-free ways. ... Inferential views of communication propose that most understanding depends on the particulars of the relationship between literal contents and contexts… this has led to a disabling of the applicability of the 'code model' to human communication. (Alvarez-Caccamo 2001, p. 23–24)

The recent literature has further supported increasingly dynamic views on language and human communication, seeing language not as static "codes" with solid boundaries but rather as fluid resources in meaning-making practices (Pennycook 2010; Blommaert 2010; Thibault 2011; Lemke 2016). These more dynamic views on language and human communication are captured in the recent blooming of the terms that tend to move away from or at least destabilize the "code" model of language. As Lewis et al. (2012a) commented:

> A plethora of similar terms (e.g., metrolingualism, polylanguaging, polylingual languaging, heteroglossia, codemeshing, translingual practice, flexible bilingualism, multilanguaging, and hybrid language practices) makes this extension of translanguaging appear in need of focused explication and more precise definition. Such varied terms are competitive with translanguaging for academic usage and acceptance. (Lewis et al. 2012a, b, p. 649)

What all these overlapping terms point to is a destabilizing of the "code" model of language. However, how can translanguaging researchers explicate to the general audience and educator who has grown familiar with the traditional ways of understanding bi-/multilingual interactions in terms of code-switching and code-mixing? Superficially, translanguaging might look like code-mixing/code-switching, but the term "translanguaging" does commit the researcher and educator to a much more fluid and dynamic view of language. On this issue, Jim Cummins, one of the most influential scholars in the field of bi-/multilingual education, has made the following comments:

> Languages are clearly social constructions with arbitrary boundaries (e.g., between a 'language' and a 'dialect') but these social constructions generate an immense material and symbolic reality (e.g., dictionaries, school curricula, wars, profits for corporations that teach and test languages, etc.). It is entirely possible to reconcile the construct of translanguaging, which highlights the integrated conceptual/linguistic system through which plurilingual individuals process and use language, with the social reality of different languages, understood as historical, cultural, and ideological constructs that have material consequences and determine social action (e.g., language planning, bilingual programs, etc.). (Cummins 2016, pp. 111–112)

Along with Cummins, translanguaging researchers have made great efforts in explicating the dynamic view of language and argue for moving away from the traditional view of bounded language codes (Otheguy et al. 2015). There, however, remains great puzzlement about the nature of translanguaging. For example, in a symposium on translanguaging in the 2016 AAAL (American Association of Applied Linguistics) Conference, there were recurrent questions from the audience such as: "But we do have different languages! How is translanguaging analysis

different from code-mixing and code-switching analysis? Is it just a new term for old theory?" These questions reflect the steadfast psychological attachment to the idea that there are different separate language systems. There is a need to develop a social semiotic theory that can explain both the psychological reality of "different language systems" and the dynamic nature of human meaning-making and the relationship between the two. In a recent discussion on these issues (Lin and He forthcoming), I draw on Lemke's (2016) recent theoretical framework for understanding issues of speech/action events associated with co-occurrence of different language systems. This framework provides a new theoretical angle on issues of language, languaging, and translanguaging. It questions the traditional view of language, which presumes separate and isolated language systems as *preexisting realities*. Lemke draws on the social semiotics scholar Paul Thibault (2011)'s work and explains that in naturally occurring processes of human meaning-making, trans-/ languaging is a *first-order* reality in which multiple linguistic (and nonlinguistic) resources are *distributed* among the participants, media, and artifacts. The multiple linguistic resources are later on reflected upon, codified, reified (e.g., by grammarians and national authorities), and categorized as different languages. In this sense, these different languages are *second-order* realities, not *first-order* realities. People including students, teachers, parents and teacher educators themselves are generally familiar with *second-order* realities. Translanguaging researchers, however, argue that in analyzing the *first-order* realities of actual human meaning-making, this codified view falls short of capturing the dynamic, fluid, and integrated sets of resources that people mobile in doing the moment-to-moment interactions. From this dynamic view of interactions, speakers (including their bodies), linguistic, and multimodal resources, tools, and artifacts (both physical and symbolic ones) are all entangled in the flow of speech/action events (as speech events are almost always embedded in action events) (Lemke 2016). From this dynamic perspective, classroom interactions are unfolding speech/action events across multiple materials, media, and time scales. All participants involved in the speech/action events, including their human bodies and brains, the immediately available artifacts in the environment, as well as their past histories and ongoing developments, are all interconnected, entangled, and coordinated to enable the speech/action events to unfold in the dynamic material flows of matters, energy, and information that encompass utterances and variations along multiple historical/time scales. Lemke further explicates this dynamic view of human interactions using his metaphor of "envelopes":

> History is not just something which existed in the past and does not exist materially now. Past events, past participations, past unfoldings, past undergoings, leave their traces in material mediums including human bodies, arrangements of furniture, wear and tear, habit formation, action tendencies, dispositions, etc. In many cases envelopes of prior events leave traces which make it more likely for new instances to fit within those envelopes. This is the basis of what we call learning, habit, and *habitus*. But these are not phenomena internal to individual organisms. They are in all cases phenomena of the entanglement of material flows across multiple mediums, which may include human bodies but always also include other bodies, artifacts, features of the landscape and setting, etc. Complex material

systems remember. That is to say, their histories are relevant to the probability of different outcomes on future occasions. (Lemke 2016, pp. 3–4)

During the unfolding of speech/action events, traces of prior events in different "envelopes" (or patterns) are adjusted (or "entrained") to new speech/action events and facilitate the intake of the new instances that fit into (and expand) the envelopes. These "envelopes" can be seen as what are conventionally perceived as linguistic systems (e.g., phonological systems, grammatical systems) or separate languages (e.g., L1, L2, L3). However, these envelopes in ongoing interactions are actually much more open, porous, and fluid than they are conceived of under the conventional categories of separate languages or linguistics systems (or "codes"). The newly increased traces of events become the prior event traces (i.e., prior "envelopes") for future speech acts. Hence, with "envelopes" remaining open and unsealed, the knowledge and prior experiences of the learner also grow and become new traces in "envelopes within envelopes within envelopes" across different time scales. Lemke uses the metaphor of *open and unsealed envelopes* to capture the dynamic, fluid, unbounded, *first-order* reality of human meaning-making. However, when these "envelopes" are sealed (e.g., by grammarians, or the national/educational authorities) as separate, bounded language systems and taught as such to students and teachers, we develop the notion of separate linguistic systems and believe that we are operating with isolated languages (i.e., bounded codes). These beliefs can lead to actual teaching and learning practices that treat languages as stable codes, and thus the research literature on classroom code-switching/code-mixing can still have its analytical value (Lin 2013a), although I have increasingly found that the "code" concept cannot successfully destabilize the traditional "markedness" of code-switching/code-mixing, i.e., the traditional assumption that using a monolingual code is the natural, normal mode of human communication while code-switching/code-mixing is the "marked," unusual mode. The value of translanguaging theories lies precisely in overturning this traditional assumption. Language and human communication has always been hybrid, dynamic, and free-flowing as a *first-order* reality (i.e., open, unsealed envelopes, using Lemke (2016)'s metaphor) before it becomes codified and taught to school children as a *second-order* reality (as sealed envelopes—stabilized codes). After discussing the dynamic view of human communication underpinning the term translanguaging, in the following I shall discuss recent research on translanguaging pedagogies.

Translanguaging Pedagogies: "Spontaneous Translanguaging" and "Planned Translanguaging"

Recently researchers working on developing translanguaging pedagogies to scaffold bi-/multilingual development in bi-/multilingual education have started to differentiate between "spontaneous translanguaging" pedagogies and "planned translanguaging" pedagogies (Cenoz forthcoming). Spontaneous translanguaging

pedagogies take place without planning or design as the bi-/multilingual teacher spontaneously translanguages (or allows students to spontaneously translanguage or both) to scaffold students' learning in the ongoing dynamic interaction. This is the more familiar type of translanguaging pedagogy analyzed in the research literature (e.g., Creese and Blackledge 2010; Lin and Wu 2015; Lin and Lo 2016). On the other hand, *planned* or *design translanguaging* takes systematic planning on the part of the teacher (and curriculum designers) and requires an intimate knowledge of the students' multilingual linguistic resources. Cenoz (forthcoming) reported on a study in the context of the Basque Country where students speaking Spanish as their most familiar language (L1) need to learn the Basque language (as their heritage language) and English (as a foreign language). Cenoz and her colleagues have developed a systematic, planned translanguaging pedagogy to help students to draw out the similar linguistic features common to Spanish, the Basque language, and English. *Planned* or *design translanguaging* pedagogies thus require the teachers and curriculum designers to be intimately familiar with the linguistic features of all these languages in order to develop learning materials that can scaffold students' learning of all three languages instead of confusing them. In Cenoz's study, a translingual language arts program has been set up in the participating school with the explicit purpose of linking literacies in all these three languages that the students are learning in the school curriculum, and so, there is no clash of different learning agendas in the lesson.

Similarly, I have reported on the "bilingual notes approach" that science teachers in a secondary school in Hong Kong have designed to scaffold the students' learning of English academic language via Chinese academic language (Lin 2013b, 2016). In the context of Hong Kong, many students have developed a foundation of standard Chinese literacy in their primary school, and so, it is possible to draw on their Chinese literacy to scaffold their development of English literacy. Caution, however, needs to be exercised if the students' Chinese literacy is not well developed, and in that context this kind of pedagogy might not be suitable, or it will need to be carefully planned and designed (see discussion Chap. 6).

It is apparent from the discussion above that translanguaging pedagogies cannot be taken as a panacea. Translanguaging pedagogies need to be carefully designed and adapted to suit the different needs and demands of diverse educational settings and contexts. In that sense, there is no one single translanguaging pedagogy that can be taken as universally applicable, as this is true with any other pedagogy. However, the principles and spirit of translanguaging pedagogies can provide useful ideas for teachers and curriculum planners to adapt or innovate these pedagogies for their own unique contexts. These principles are summarized below:

1. Translanguaging is practiced by bi-/multilinguals in their natural communication, and it is the norm rather than the exception.
2. Human meaning-making is first and foremost experienced as fluid, dynamic activity flows (Lemke 2016), and we draw on all of our linguistic and semiotic resources when we are engaged in making sense of/to one another; this *first-order* reality is however reflected upon, analyzed, codified, and reified later on,