From Researching Translanguaging to Translanguaging Research

Li Wei and Ofelia García

Abstract

Translanguaging research has recently increased in visibility. But research in what we now term translanguaging is not new. This chapter traces its development from its Welsh origins to worldwide translanguaging research today. It grounds this development in the increased questioning of monolingual practices, especially in education, that were the hallmark of twentieth century society. This chapter also makes visible the challenges that translanguaging research poses, as the language practices of multilinguals continue to be constrained by institutions in nation-states.

Keywords

Translanguaging • Dynamic bilingualism • Bilingual education • Multilingualism • Culture • Language

Contents

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Introduction

Researching translanguaging, that is, studying the language practices of bilinguals from their own dynamic perspective, rather from the static monoglossic one of monolinguals, and examining the ways in which those resources are deployed in teaching and learning, characterizes much multilingual research in the twenty-first century. In this chapter, we review how the concept of translanguaging emerged, as well as how it is being used today to research this "multilingual turn" (Conteh and Meier 2014; May 2013).

Translanguaging suggests that because bilingualism is dynamic (García 2009), researchers cannot assume that there are clear-cut boundaries between the languages of speakers whose language repertoire includes features that are associated with two or more national languages. Researchers who work with translanguaging distinguish between national languages as social constructions of nation-states and the language practices of bilinguals. In so doing, translanguaging research reminds us that although different languages do not have objective linguistic reality, they do have a social reality that impacts bilingual speakers. This is so especially when it comes to educational systems that function only in one language at a time, even in much bilingual education. Translanguaging research in education focuses then on whether flexible instructional arrangements that leverage all the features of the language repertoire of bilingual students can improve their academic engagement and outcomes, as well as develops their bilingualism and biliteracy. It also focuses on whether translanguaging can develop the metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness of bilingual students so that they can use appropriate features of their repertoire in different communicative circumstances. From the beginning, this has been the focus of much translanguaging research.

Early Developments

The term *translanguaging* comes from the Welsh *trawsieithu*. It was coined by Williams (1994) and popularized through Baker's textbook *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* (2001 and subsequent editions). In its original use, it referred to a pedagogical practice where students are asked to alternate languages for the purposes of receptive or productive use; for example, students might be asked to read in English and write in Welsh and vice versa. Lewis et al. (2012a, b) described the historical context in which translanguaging practices emerged. The Welsh language revitalization efforts began to show signs of success in the final decades of the twentieth century. Lewis et al. (2012a) explained:

> By the 1980s, the idea of Welsh and English as holistic, additive, and advantageous was beginning, allowing the idea of translanguaging to emerge – firstly, within education in North Wales and, subsequently, developing within that educational context especially at classroom level. (p. 624)

Williams (2012) emphasized the capacity of translanguaging in the Welsh classroom to reinforce understanding of what is being taught and to augment the pupil's activity in both languages. The cognitive processing involved in translanguaging was seen to be particularly useful for retaining and developing bilingualism. As Baker (2011) explained, "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'" (p. 289). Translanguaging as a pedagogical practice not only promotes a deeper understanding of content, but also develops the weaker language in relationship with the one that is more dominant. In addition, translanguaging promotes the integration of those who are emergent bilinguals with those who have fuller use of bilingualism in a classroom. Lewis et al. (2013) reported on a 5-year longitudinal research project in Wales, using a combination of observation and standardized measures, that showed widespread use of translanguaging in schools in Wales, as well as its academic advantages to develop students' bilingualism.

As we can see, the notion of translanguaging was tied with language policy, especially language-in-education policy, from the very start. Translanguaging was seen as a challenge to the one-language-at-a-time policies that were dominant in society and scholarship at the time. Despite the dominance of monolingual instructional pedagogy in the teaching of additional languages – whether in foreign language, bilingual, heritage, or second language classrooms – researchers started to question its validity at the end of the twentieth century, coinciding with globalization, technological changes, and increased movement of people throughout the world. The early development of the present concept of translanguaging also owed much to the work of other researchers in different contexts who did not use the term translanguaging, but challenged the monolingual assumptions in language education, researching what Cummins (2007) has called "bilingual instructional strategies."

As early as 1979, Cummins introduced his Interdependence Hypothesis, which posited that much crosslinguistic transfer occurs because languages are connected by means of a common underlying proficiency. There was substantial early research to support Cummins' Interdependence Hypothesis, including much in the teaching of US Latinos, for example, that of Moll and Díaz (1985) that showed that Latino students who were learning English increased their reading proficiency in English if they were allowed to discuss in Spanish. In the 1990s, in the United States, Jacobson proposed the "concurrent approach" in bilingual education of language-minoritized students, which required teachers to change languages, although only inter-sententially. Research into this approach was inconclusive and partial, but it opened the door to questioning the assumption of what Cummins (2008) has called the "two solitudes" in language education.

Around the same time, many researchers started to document the positive effect of what they labeled "code-switching" in the education of language-minoritized students in postcolonial contexts (see, e.g., Lin 1999; Lin and Martin 2005; Martin 2005). Lin's (1996) study of Cantonese-English code-switching in Hong Kong showed that it served important sociocultural, linguistic, and educational functions. Lemke (2002) questioned "could it be that all our current pedagogical methods in fact make multilingual development more difficult than it need be, simply because we bow to dominant political and ideological pressures to keep 'languages' pure and separate?" (p. 85).

Studying dual-language bilingual education programs in the United States during the first decade of the twenty-first century Fitts (2006) demonstrated how language separation had detrimental effects on students because it "illegitimizes the use of vernaculars" (p. 339). Lee et al. (2008) explained that "the strict separation of the two languages for instructional purposes appears to be diminishing opportunities to use both codes as resources to problem-solve or as an indexical strategy" (p. 90). Especially in literacy education, researchers in the United States documented how bilingual writers, young and old, use their home language during writing activities in English to cognitively manage tasks, as well as to leverage their multilingualism (Fu 2003; Gort 2006). In her study of literacy, Martín-Beltrán (2010) noted that bilingual students' languages "can go back and forth symbiotically as mediational tools and objects of analysis within the same interaction" (p. 256).

In Canada, the strict immersion approach also started to be questioned. Swain and Lapkin (2000) found that the use of the students' home language moved the task along, allowed learners to focus attention on vocabulary and grammatical items, and enhanced interpersonal interaction. In foreign language education, Anton and DiCamilla's research (1998) showed that using students' home languages facilitated the acquisition of an additional language.

All these studies demonstrated the potential of bilingual instructional strategies to teach. But most of these scholars still worked with the concepts of first language (L1), second language (L2), and code-switching, whereas the Welsh concept of translanguaging went beyond these monoglossic ideologies with regard to bilingualism. The Welsh concept of translanguaging was grounded on the linguistic repertoire of Welsh bilingual speakers.

At the same time, the concept of separate languages in additive bilingualism had also started to be seriously questioned. Grosjean, for example, had emphasized that the bilingual is not two monolinguals in one (1989). Cook (1992) elaborated his concept of multi-competence, positing that it is impossible to compare the linguistic competence of a bilingual in each language to that of monolinguals. Dynamic systems theory, as developed by Herdina and Jessner (2002) and de Bot et al. (2007), then argued that the psycholinguistic system of bilinguals is simply different from that of monolinguals.

It is this different way of conceptualizing bilingualism, of viewing bilingualism as dynamic, of language practices in interrelationship, and of a new and transformed linguistic system rather than the addition of two, which has led to the uptake of the term *translanguaging* in scholarship and research in the present.

Major Contributions

The term translanguaging was taken up by researchers worldwide a decade after it was first used in Wales. The concept was extended to adjust to different sociolinguistic contexts and the various language needs of bilingual people and students. The extension of the concept of translanguaging also owes much to our changing views of multilingualism and the ways in which bilingual people languaged, now made visible by globalization, increased immigration, and advanced technology.

Studying bilingual education across global contexts, García (2009) broadened the scope of translanguaging to mean "*multiple discursive practices* in which bilinguals engage in order to *make sense of their bilingual worlds*" (p. 45, emphasis in original), as well as the instructional practices that leveraged those practices. For García (2009), translanguaging refers to *new* language practices that make visible the complexity of language exchanges among people with different histories and releases histories and understandings that had been buried within fixed language identities constrained by nation-states. For Creese and Blackledge (2010), translanguaging enables the inspection of bilingual discourse for trace of the social, historical, and political forces that have shaped it. In education, translanguaging has been defined as a "a process by which students and teachers engage in complex discursive practices that include all the language practices of students in a class in order to develop new language practices and sustain old ones, communicate and appropriate knowledge, and give voice to new sociopolitical realities by interrogating linguistic inequality" (García and Kano, as cited in Conteh and Meier 2014, p. 261).

Based on extensive ethnographic research in the Bengali, Chinese, Gujarati, and Turkish complementary schools in Britain, Creese and Blackledge (2010) used the term translanguaging to describe a range of flexible bilingual approaches to language teaching and learning. Creese, Blackledge, and their colleagues argued for a release from monolingual instructional approaches and advocated teaching bilingual children by means of bilingual instructional strategies, in which two or more languages are used alongside each other. In examining the translanguaging pedagogies used in complementary schools, Creese and Blackledge (2010) stated:

> Both languages are needed simultaneously to convey the information, . . . each language is used to convey a different informational message, but it is in the bilingualism of the text that the full message is conveyed. (p. 108)

And in analyzing the pair work students do, they commented "it is the combination of both languages that keeps the task moving forward" (p. 110). In developing their argument, Creese and Blackledge took a language ecology perspective and sought to emphasize the interdependence of skills and knowledge across languages.

Canagarajah (2011) described the translanguaging strategies of a Saudi Arabian undergraduate student in her essay writing and how the feedback of the instructor and peers helped her to question her choices of strategies, think critically about diverse options, assess the effectiveness of the choices, and develop metacognitive

awareness. Canagarajah argued that it is possible to learn from students' translanguaging strategies while developing their proficiency through a dialogical pedagogy.

Situating their study in the US national policy context where standardized tests dominate curriculum and instruction and first language literacy is discouraged and undervalued, Hornberger and Link (2012) identified new spaces for innovative programs, curricula, and practices that recognize, value, and build on the multiple, mobile communicative repertoires, and translanguaging/transnational literacy practices of students and their families. They connected translanguaging to Hornberger's (e.g., Hornberger and Link 2012) notion of "continua of biliteracy," enabling the potential "to explicitly valorize all points along the continua of biliterate context, media, content, and development" (p. 268).

Coming from a different perspective and building on the psycholinguistic notion of languaging, a process whereby "language serves as a vehicle through which thinking is articulated and transformed into an artifactual form" (Swain 2006, p. 97), Li Wei (2011) defines translanguaging as going between and beyond different linguistic structures and systems including different modalities. 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 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. Li Wei calls this space – translanguaging space – a space for the act of translanguaging as well as a space created through translanguaging.

The notion of a translanguaging space is particularly relevant to multilinguals not only because of their capacity to use multiple linguistic resources to form and transform their own lives, but also because the space they create through their multilingual practices, or translanguaging, has its own transformative power. It is a space where the process of what Bhabha (1994) calls "cultural translation" between traditions takes place; it is not a space where different identities, values, and practices simply coexist, but combine together to generate new identities, values, and practices. The boundaries of a translanguaging space are ever shifting; they exist primarily in the mind of the individual who creates and occupies it, and the construction of the space is an ongoing, lifelong process. The idea of translanguaging space, as García and Li Wei (2014) point out, embraces two concepts, namely, creativity and criticality, which are fundamental to multilingual practices. Creativity refers to the ability to choose between following and flouting the rules and norms of behavior, including the use of language. It is about pushing and breaking the boundaries between the old and the new, the conventional and the original, and the acceptable and the challenging. Criticality is the ability to use available evidence appropriately, systematically, and insightfully to inform considered views of cultural, social, and linguistic phenomena; to question and

problematize received wisdom; and to express views adequately through reasoned responses to situations. These two concepts are intrinsically linked. Li Wei (2011) argues that one cannot push or break boundaries without being critical; and the best expression of one's criticality is one's creativity. Multilingualism by the very nature of the phenomenon is a rich source of creativity and criticality, as it entails tension, conflict, competition, difference, and change in a number of spheres, ranging from ideologies, policies, and practices to historical and current contexts. While rapid globalization has made everyday life in late modernity look increasingly routinized, repetitive, and monotonous, the enhanced contacts between people of diverse backgrounds and traditions provide new opportunities for innovation, entrepreneurship, and creativity. Individuals are capable of responding to the historical and present conditions critically. They consciously construct and constantly modify their sociocultural identities and values through social practices such as translanguaging.

For García and Li Wei (2014), translanguaging is not some new linguistic phenomenon to be investigated in the traditional way. Rather, it offers a brand new analytical lens that would alter our common understandings of language, bilingualism, and education. The emphasis on the "trans" aspects of language and education, as García and Li Wei (2014) claim, enables us to transgress the categorical distinctions of the past. In particular, a "trans" approach to language and education liberates our traditional understandings and points to three innovative aspects in considering language on the one hand and education on the other:

1. Referring to a *trans-system and trans-spaces*; that is, to fluid practices that go *between* and *beyond* socially constructed language and educational systems, structures, and practices to engage diverse students' multiple meaning-making systems and subjectivities.
2. Referring to its *transformative nature*; that is, as new configurations of language practices and education are generated, old understandings and structures are released, thus transforming not only subjectivities, but also cognitive and social structures. In so doing, orders of discourses shift, and the voices of others come to the forefront, relating then translanguaging to criticality, critical pedagogy, social justice, and the linguistic human rights agenda.
3. Referring to the *transdisciplinary* consequences of the languaging *and* education analysis, providing a tool for understanding not only language practices on the one hand and education on the other, but also human sociality, human cognition and learning, social relations, and social structures.

Translanguaging in education also pays attention to the ways in which students combine different modes and media across social contexts and negotiate social identities. For example, Kenner (2004) reported on how bilingual/biliterate young children in the United Kingdom learn different writing systems (Chinese, Arabic, and Spanish) at home, in complementary schools, and in the mainstream primary school. Her work illustrated how a focus on different modes, including the children's sets of linguistic resources, can foreground the different culture-specific ways multilingual children mesh the visual and actional modes (i.e., make use of shape,

size, and location of symbols on the page, directionality, and type of stroke) in the process of learning how to write in two languages. Moreover, such a focus shows the different ways multilingual children combine and juxtapose scripts as well as explore connections and differences between their available writing systems in their text making. By translanguaging, that is, drawing on more than one set of linguistic and other modal resources to construct bilingual texts in settings where multilingual communication was encouraged, Kenner argued, children could "express their sense of living in multiple social and cultural worlds" (p. 118).

Research on translanguaging in schools not only creates the possibility that bilingual students could use their full linguistic and semiotic repertoire to make meaning, but also that teachers would "take it up" as a legitimate pedagogical practice. Rather than just being a scaffolding practice to access content or language, translanguaging is transformative for the child, for the teacher, and for education itself, and particularly for language education. These have been the findings of some of the studies carried out by García and her colleagues (see, for example, Flores and García 2013; García et al. 2012). Velasco and García (2014) showed how translanguaging strategies promote a high sense of self-efficacy, as bilingual students also self-regulate their learning and their use of certain features from their repertoire in different contexts. Thus, translanguaging has come to mean a practice where two or more languages are used in a dynamic and functionally integrated manner to organize and mediate mental processes in understanding, speaking, literacy, and, not least, learning.

Lately, the concept of translanguaging itself has been taken up by many researchers. Especially in studies of pedagogy, researchers are increasingly using the translanguaging lens to study what is going on in multilingual classrooms (see, for example, Sayer 2013). The next section discusses the ways in which researchers are presently extending the concept of translanguaging.

Work in Progress

From its Welsh beginnings as purely an instructional practice in the context of education, the concept of translanguaging is being used today to study the fluidities of language and identity in many different contexts. A new journal appeared in 2015, *Translation and Translanguaging in Multilingual Contexts*, focusing not only on educational contexts, but also in the workplace and on travel. The Translation and Translanguaging research team involving researchers from Birmingham, Birkbeck, Cardiff, Leeds, and UCL in the United Kingdom is also investigating how multilingual speakers translanguage to communicate in business, sports, heritage, and socio-legal domains. The term translanguaging has also been taken up by scholars who study language socialization of bilingual children and especially those who study the use of language by bilingual children who serve as translators in what is called

"language brokering." *TESOL Quarterly* published an issue in 2013 on plurilingualism in the teaching of English to speakers of other languages. Many of the contributions in that issue make reference to translanguaging.

Translanguaging in assessing what bilinguals know is another area where work is progressing. Shohamy (2011) has long spoken about the need for multilingual assessments. López et al. (forthcoming) have developed a Math test for Spanish-speaking emergent bilinguals in US middle schools (six to eighth grade) that is delivered through a computer-based platform (CBT) and is based on translanguaging. The assessment encourages students to use their language repertoire fully to show what they know. For example, students have the opportunity to see or hear an item in both English and Spanish and to then write or say responses using their full language repertoire. To create the space for translanguaging and encourage student-to-student interactions, students are asked to select a virtual friend or assistant, while responding to content-related questions. This virtual friend can then, for example, provide a read aloud of the assessment item in the language preferred by the student, ensuring that the student can understand the content-related task. The translanguaged multimodal assessment creates a space for translanguaging by stimulating student-to-student interactions and promoting what López and his colleagues call "bilingual autonomy."

If translanguaging, as García and Li Wei (2014) argue, goes beyond our traditional concept of autonomous languages, focusing on the language features of a bilingual single repertoire which are always available and which bilinguals learn to selectively suppress or activate depending on the communicative context, then the concept of translanguaging can also extend to those who are considered speakers of minoritized varieties of what is considered one national language. In the United States, Barrett (2012) has used translanguaging as the lens to study participation of both Latino and African-American students in a classroom Hip-Hop media production.

Another area of potential is research on the neural bases of translanguaging. Research on cognition and multilingual functioning has supported the view that the languages of bilingual speakers interact collaboratively in listening or speaking (de Groot 2011). Beres (2014) is presently testing the effects of bilingual speakers responding to new knowledge when the response is in the same language as the input as opposed to when it is in a different language than that of instruction, following the Welsh definition of translanguaging. Preliminary findings indicate that when the input and output language are different, rather than the same, students engage in deeper thinking and more meaningful learning.

In New York, García and her colleagues have been deeply involved in development and research of translanguaging in teaching emergent bilingual students. The project, known as CUNY-NYSIEB, has paid attention to what Canagarajah (2011) believes is the area of greater underdevelopment – the pedagogical side. The project has developed a series of materials all accessible under the Publication tab on the project's website (www.cuny-nysieb.org).

Problems and Difficulties

School systems throughout the world have misled students as they have transmitted only national and selective values about the concept of "language." Elite students come to believe that the ways in which they use language, which most often reflects the characteristics of the language of school, are the only valid "language." Minoritized students are also taught that the language practices they bring from home are "corrupted" and inferior to those practiced in schools. In such situations, the definition of language has little to do with the language practices of individuals and everything to do with the will of the dominant groups of the nation-state to conserve their privilege by sanctioning only their language practices that we learn as children in schools. The concept of language that we have acquired has everything to do with its constructed and manipulated social reality and little to do with the complex linguistic reality of speakers, especially multilingual speakers. The language features of individual speakers which they use as they speak, read, and write have little to do with the definition of language as given by the nation-states and their education systems.

Precisely because the complex meanings of "language" have been preempted by the sole national definition, we find it difficult to use the word "language" except when speaking about the constructed concepts of English, Spanish, French, and so on. Translanguaging offers a way of speaking about these individual complex practices of multilingual speakers, although in recognizing multilingualism, it is resorting to the national definitions of language. Thus, the term translanguaging in itself contains a contradiction. On the one hand, it recognizes bilingualism/multilingualism, as languages constructed by nation-states, and validates the material and symbolic reality of this social construction to which bilingual speakers are subjected. But on the other hand, it goes beyond the idea of national languages as linguistic objects and recognizes the bilingual speakers' features of an integrated repertoire that they use to language.

Because it signals a different linguistic reality, translanguaging is not an easy concept to take up either by speakers themselves, students, or educators. Many resist and argue that only the "language" as defined in national school curricula and grammar books is important and needs to be used in schools. Just as the concept of translanguaging itself contains the contradiction of language as defined by nation-states and language as defined by speakers themselves, translanguaging has to be used not only to legitimize and leverage the fluid language practices of bilinguals to be equal participants in a just society, but also to make bilingual speakers conscious of when and how to use the different features of their repertoire. Research is beginning to emerge that shows that focusing on how to do language, regardless of features, is a much better way of acquiring the "standard" features of language that schools require, than drilling students only on those features. This is, for example, the point made by García et al. (2012) when they focus on developing students' general linguistic proficiency (i.e., the ability to use language to express complex thoughts, summarize, infer, find evidence, joke, etc.) regardless of specific language features.

Yet another tension in translanguaging research has to do with those who believe that accepting the fluid language practices of bilinguals will in some way weaken the non-dominant language. For example, although English as a second language teachers are often easily convinced of the value of translanguaging in their English-only classrooms, dual-language bilingual teachers in the United States have been more reticent to take it up. This in part has to do with their teacher training, which has in the past focused on complete language separation. But it also has to do with the fear that they will lose the little that they have accomplished in carving out a protected space for the minoritized language.

Future Directions

Some important future directions for research on translanguaging have been suggested throughout this chapter, and especially on the section on Work in Progress. With regard to pedagogy, much research needs to be conducted on what different translanguaging strategies work best with certain students at different times, for various contents. Because pedagogy includes assessment, research on the use of translanguaging in assessment is very much needed.

To date, much translanguaging research has been conducted on the language education of minoritized students, whether in bilingual or second language programs. There is now a need to also conduct research on translanguaging in other educational contexts with dominant language students. There has been much interest in the use of a first language in foreign language instruction, but the field has not embraced translanguaging wholeheartedly. The emergence of Content and Language Integrated Language Learning (CLIL) models in the European context is a fertile ground for the study of translanguaging. As noted above, taking the study of translanguaging beyond education contexts would be important.

Finally, our technological future will make more multimodal texts possible. Translanguaging research must take up multimodalities in order to understand how meaning is made as we integrate the very different modes of signification today – sound, image, print, different scripts, and language features. As research on translanguaging moves beyond classrooms, studies of translanguaging such as in texting, blogging, social media, gaming, and how these very different modes are simultaneously brought together to understand messages will be an important area of study.

Conclusion

Translanguaging has moved from what seemed to be a neologism to describe diverse multilingual practices to a new critical analytical lens that deals with multilinguals' languages not as discrete and separated systems, but that form an integrated whole, a

repertoire that is accessed for specific communicative purposes. Translanguaging research is just beginning to emerge.

Cross-References

► Code-Switching in the Classroom: Research Paradigms and Approaches
► Ethnography of Language Policy
► Researching Globalization of English
► Researching the Continua of Biliteracy

Related Articles in the Encyclopedia of Language and Education

Ulrike Jessner-Schmid: Translanguaging as a Pedagogical Tool in Multilingual Education. In Volume: Language Awareness and Multilingualism
Ofelia García and Angel M.Y. Lin: Translanguaging in Bilingual Education. In Volume: Bilingual Educatio

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