Language Education and Multilingualism

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Abstract

This chapter reviews developments in the language education of multilingual students. Following an account of the historical development of the field, we summarize recent research on multilingualism which has moved away from an understanding of languages as separate, bounded entities to a view of communication which puts the speaker rather than the code at the center. We show how multilingual speakers deploy repertoires rather than languages in communication and do not have separate competences for separately labeled languages. In considering the implications of these conclusions, we focus on the notion of translanguaging as pedagogy, bringing together recent and current research on multilingualism with attention to the constraints on language education classrooms and the potential for change. We reflect on challenges still to be met in the application of sociolinguistic research to language education and conclude by pointing to future developments.

Contents

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Introduction

This chapter considers the limitations of an approach to language education and multilingualism that relies on the naming and separation of languages – that is, an approach that insists on the separation of languages to describe the language competence of speakers in educational settings. We reflect on what we mean by "multilingualism" and on the implications of this understanding for language education. We review early developments in the adoption of bilingual and multilingual pedagogy and examine contributions to new ways of thinking about language and languages in and beyond education. The chapter summarizes recent research on multilingualism and language education which has proposed that educators should make available to learners whatever language resources are at their disposal. In pointing to the potential of new approaches to language education and multilingualism, we consider the potential of *translanguaging* as pedagogy and practice. We also reflect on some of the limitations and challenges of this approach and consider future directions of research, practice, and pedagogy in language education in multilingual settings.

Early Developments

For many years language educators have struggled with the question of how best to teach multilingual students. Despite considerable recent progress in understanding the nature of multilingualism, there is generally still a tendency to approach the teaching and learning of languages as if monolingualism were the norm (Hélot and Ó Laoire 2011). A view persists in language education that only one language should be permitted in the classroom or at least that only one language at a time should be permitted in the classroom. In this section we briefly review developments in thinking that have led to calls for monolingual language education to be replaced with multilingual pedagogies.

García and Flores (2012) point out that language education is not the same in all multilingual contexts. They summarize four types of language education: foreign language education, second language education, bilingual education, and multilingual/heteroglossic education. In foreign language education, a language that is not predominant in society is taught as an additional language. Second language education describes the teaching of a language that is dominant in society, for example, in immigration and post-immigration contexts. In such contexts pedagogies usually pay little attention to the students' first language, focusing instead on the target language. Bilingual education programs aim to support additive bilingualism by using two languages for instruction. Students and teachers are expected to keep the

two languages apart, teaching and learning the languages separately. García and Flores conclude that foreign language, second language, and bilingual education programs are no longer (if ever they were) sufficient for the linguistically heterogeneous classrooms of the twenty-first century. They propose as a more appropriate alternative, a heteroglossic multilingual approach that responds to the more complex, dynamic multilingualism found in many classrooms. This proposal for a shift to a multilingual approach to language education in multilingual settings is based on research in multilingual settings in and beyond education (Blackledge and Creese 2010; Creese and Blackledge 2011; García 2009).

Major Contributions

Sociolinguistic study of multilingualism has moved away from a view of languages as separate, bounded entities to a view of communication in which language users employ whatever linguistic features are at their disposal to achieve their communicative aims as best they can (Jørgensen et al. 2011). Heller (2007) views language(s) as "sets of resources called into play by social actors, under social and historical conditions which both constrain and make possible the social reproduction of existing conventions and relations, as well as the production of new ones" (p. 15). Blommaert and Rampton (2011) point out that languages are ideological constructions, historically tied to the emergence of the nation-state in the nineteenth century. Makoni and Pennycook (2007) argue for an understanding of the relationships between what people believe about their language (or other people's languages), the situated forms of talk they deploy, and the material effects – social, economic, and environmental – of such views and use. Recently, a number of terms have emerged, as scholars have sought to describe and analyze linguistic practices in which meaning is made using signs flexibly. These include, among others, flexible bilingualism (Creese and Blackledge 2010), code meshing (Canagarajah 2011a), polylingual languaging (Jørgensen 2010), contemporary urban vernaculars (Rampton 2011), metrolingualism (Otsuji and Pennycook 2011; Pennycook and Otsuji 2015), translingual practice (Canagarajah 2011b), and translanguaging (Creese and Blackledge 2011; García 2009). The shared perspective represented in the use of these various terms considers that meaning making is not confined to the use of "languages" as discrete, enumerable, bounded sets of linguistic resources. Rather, signs are available for meaning making in communicative repertoires (Rymes 2014) which extend across "languages" and varieties which have hitherto been associated with particular national, territorial, and social groups. These terms, different from each other yet in many ways similar, represent a view of language as a social resource without clear boundaries, which places the speaker at the heart of the interaction.

Globalization has compelled scholars to see sociolinguistic phenomena and processes as characterized by mobility. Blommaert (2014) argues that adopting mobility as a central concept creates a degree of unpredictability in what we observe, and we can only solve this unpredictability by close observation. In "superdiverse"

environments (both on- and off-line), people appear to take any linguistic and communicative resources available to them and blend them into complex linguistic and semiotic forms. Old and established terms such as "code-switching" and even "multilingualism" exhaust the limits of their descriptive and explanatory adequacy in the face of such highly complex "blends." Taking mobility as a principle of sociolinguistic research challenges several major assumptions of mainstream sociolinguistics and invites a more complex, dynamic, and multifaceted view of sociolinguistic realities.

Blommaert (2014) points out that a sociolinguistic system is a complex system characterized by internal and external forces of perpetual change, operating simultaneously and in unpredictable mutual relationships. He therefore proposes that in addition to *mobility* we take *complexity* as a paradigmatic principle of sociolinguistic analysis. Bailey (2012) engages with the limitations of an approach to linguistic analysis which emphasizes "code-switching," arguing that a focus on linguistic features that are officially authorized codes or languages, e.g., "English" or "Spanish," can contribute to neglect of the diversity of socially indexical resources *within* languages. Bailey points out that if the starting point is social meanings, rather than the code or language in use, it is not crucial to ask whether a speaker is switching languages, alternating between a dialect and a national standard, register shifting, or speaking monolingually in a variety that highlights language contact.

Language, whether monolingual or multilingual, carries social meanings through phonological, lexical, grammatical, and discourse level forms: "these forms index various aspects of individuals' and communities' social histories, circumstances, and identities" (Bailey 2012, p. 506). Canagarajah and Liyanage (2012) have noted that even so-called monolinguals shuttle between codes, registers, and discourses and can therefore hardly be described as monolingual. Just as the traditional distinction between languages is no longer sustainable, so the distinction between "monolingual," "bilingual," and "multilingual" speakers may no longer be sustainable.

Canagarajah (2013) adopts the term "translingual practice" to capture the common underlying processes and orientations associated with the mobility and complexity of communicative modes. In doing so he argues that communication transcends individual languages and involves diverse semiotic resources and ecological affordances. He points out that languages in contact mutually influence each other, and so labeling them as separate entities is an ideological act. Multilingual speakers deploy repertoires rather than languages in communication and do not have separate competences for separately labeled languages. Canagarajah elaborates on these points, arguing that language is only one semiotic resource among many and that all semiotic resources work together to make meaning. Separating out "language" from other semiotic resources distorts our understanding of communicative practice. Canagarajah points out that further research is needed to understand the complexity of communicative strategies that make up translingual practice, to explore the implications for meaning construction, language acquisition, and social relations. He also points out that the pedagogical implications of translingual practice warrant further attention.

Work in Progress

In this section we consider how language education has responded to these shifts in thinking about multilingualism. In doing so we discuss language education and multilingualism through the lens of "translanguaging." García and Leiva (2014) define "translanguaging" both as an act of bilingual performance and as a bilingual pedagogy for teaching and learning. Coined initially in the 1980s (Williams 1996), and subsequently developed in response to changing linguistic phenomena in schools and communities, the term has recently gained currency in discussions of multilingualism, especially in educational contexts (Baker 2011; Blackledge and Creese 2010; Creese and Blackledge 2011; García 2009; Li Wei 2011). For García and Leiva (2014), "translanguaging" refers to the flexible use of linguistic resources by bilinguals as they make sense of their worlds. They propose that translanguaging as pedagogy has the potential to liberate the voices of language minoritized students. A translanguaging approach to teaching and learning is not about code-switching, but rather about an arrangement that normalizes bilingualism without diglossic functional separation. Baker (2011) defines translanguaging as the process of "making meaning, shaping experiences, gaining understanding and knowledge through the use of two languages" (p. 78). In the classroom, translanguaging approaches draw on all the linguistic resources of the child to maximize understanding and achievement. Thus, both or all languages are used in a dynamic and functionally integrated manner to organize and mediate understanding, speaking, literacy, and learning (Lewis et al. 2012). García and Leiva argue that bilingual families and communities translanguage in order to construct meaning. They further propose that what makes translanguaging different from other fluid languaging practices is that it is transformative, with the potential to remove the hierarchy of languaging practices that deem some more valuable than others. Translanguaging, they argue, is about a new languaging reality, a new way of being, acting, and languaging in a different social, cultural, and political context, allowing fluid discourses to flow, and giving voice to new social realities (2014).

Li Wei (2011) makes a similar argument that the act of translanguaging "is transformative in nature; it creates a social space for the multilingual language user by bringing together different dimensions of their personal history, experience and environment" (p. 12223). Hornberger and Link (2012) further conceptualize translanguaging in educational contexts, proposing that educators recognize, value, and build on the multiple, mobile communicative repertoires of students and their families. Translanguaging leads us away from a focus on "languages" as distinct codes to a focus on the agency of individuals engaged in using, creating, and interpreting signs for communication. Lewis et al. (2012) argue that the distinction between code-switching and translanguaging is ideological, in that code-switching has associations with language separation, while translanguaging approves the flexibility of learning through two or more languages: "Particularly in the bilingual classroom, translanguaging as a concept tries to move acceptable practice away from language separation, and thus has ideological – even political – associations" (p. 665).

Hélot (2014) explores the learning potential of translanguaging, as she describes the deployment of texts by translingual authors to make trainee teachers aware of new ways of understanding bilinguals' experiences and engagement with the world. Aware of the constraints inherent in restrictive language policy, Hélot argues for translanguaging as a means to counteract linguistic insecurity in the classroom, to ensure teachers understand that balanced bilingualism is a myth, and that translanguaging is a linguistic resource available to bilinguals to communicate in a creative and meaningful way. Noguerón-Liu and Warriner (2014) suggest that the notion of translanguaging expands existing theories of multilingualism by focusing on the social practices of individuals. They adopt this term to move away from a focus on abstract, idealized notions of "a language" as a set of skills and to emphasize the fact that multilingual users deploy a variety of resources while engaging in everyday practice. They explicitly link translanguaging and identity practices, saying: "For Latino communities in the USA, translanguaging practices have been an integral part of identity and belonging" (p. 183).

García and Li Wei (2014) propose that the concept of translanguaging is based on radically different notions of language and bilingualism from those espoused in the twentieth century, "an epistemological change that is the product of acting and languaging in our highly technological globalized world" (p. 20). For García and Li Wei (2014),

> translanguaging does not refer to two separate languages nor to a synthesis of different language practices or to a hybrid mixture. Rather 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. (p. 21)

That is, translanguaging is the enactment of language practices that use different features that had previously been independently constrained by different histories, but that now are experienced in speakers' interactions as one new whole. García (2010) points out that multilinguals translanguage to include and facilitate communication with others, but also to construct deeper understandings. Translanguaging includes but extends what others have called language use and language contact among multilinguals. García (2010) argues that rather than focusing on the language itself, translanguaging makes it apparent that there are no clear-cut boundaries between the languages of bilinguals. Furthermore, translanguaging emerges from social practices between two or more "languages" that are neither static nor linked to one national or ethnic identity. For García and Leiva (2014), "translanguaging refers to social practices and actions that enact a political process of social subjectivity transformations" (p. 204).

For García and Li Wei (2014), translanguaging differs from code-switching in that it refers not simply to a shift or a shuttle between two languages, but to the speakers' construction and use of original and complex interrelated discursive practices that cannot be easily assigned to one or another traditional definition of a language, but that make up the speakers' complete language repertoire.

Translanguaging starts from the speaker rather than the code or "language" and focuses on empirically observable practices. Translanguaging practices are not viewed as marked or unusual, but are rather taken to be the normal mode of communication that characterizes communities throughout the world. A translanguaging lens proposes that, rather than making decisions about which "language" to use in a particular social setting, people have a linguistic repertoire from which they select resources to communicate. García and Li Wei (2014) claim that translanguaging is transformative in its creative and critical potential. In its transdisciplinarity, translanguaging enables speakers to go beyond traditional academic disciplines and conventional structures, in order to gain new understandings of human relations and generate more just social structures, capable of liberating the voices of the oppressed.

Turning more explicitly to education, García and Leiva (2014) argue that translanguaging goes beyond code-switching and translation in education because it refers to the process in which students perform bilingually in the myriad multimodal ways of classrooms – reading, writing, taking notes, discussing, signing, and so on. In education, propose García and Kano (2014), translanguaging is a process by which students and teachers engage in complex discursive practices that include all the language practices of all students in a class. Translanguaging goes some way beyond the question of which "language" is, or should be, in use in a particular pedagogical event. Rather, it refers not only to practice but to ideology, to beliefs about the value of students and teachers deploying the full range of their linguistic repertoires in educational settings.

García and Li Wei (2014) argue that creativity and criticality are key features of the transformative potential of translanguaging. Creativity is the ability to choose between obeying and breaking the rules and norms of behavior, including the use of language. It is about challenging boundaries and making something new. Criticality refers to the ability to use available evidence to inform considered views of cultural, social, political, 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: boundaries cannot be challenged without a critical orientation; and creativity is often an expression of criticality. García and Li Wei (2014) point out that translanguaging, as a socio-educational process, enables students to construct and constantly modify their sociocultural identities and values, as they respond to their historical and present conditions critically and creatively. Translanguaging in education also pays attention to the ways in which students combine different modes and media across social contexts and negotiate social identities. García and Li Wei (2014) note that translanguaging as pedagogy contributes to identity investment and positionality to engage learners.

Creese and Blackledge (2010) similarly found that student translanguaging established identity positions which were both oppositional to, and encompassing of, institutional values. In a translanguaging pedagogy language practices belong neither to the school nor to the home. Instead, languaging is situated within the practice of the learner, as it emerges through social interaction (García and Li Wei 2014). Li Wei (2011) argues that the notion of *translanguaging space* embraces the

concepts of creativity and criticality, which are fundamental but under-explored dimensions of multilingual practices. García and Li Wei (2014) point out that in producing a trans-subject, translanguaging is capable of transforming subjectivities and identities. Palmer et al. (2014) present classroom examples which demonstrate that modeling and engaging in dynamic bilingualism, celebrating hybridity and moments of metalinguistic commentary, and positioning children as competent bilinguals can be potentially powerful translanguaging pedagogies. They argue that translanguaging pedagogies open up spaces for students to engage in sensitive and important topics and take risks to express themselves in developing languages (e.g., attempting to translate).

García and Li Wei (2014) set out teachers' goals for translanguaging pedagogy. These include adapting instruction to different types of students in multilingual classrooms, building background knowledge to provide a familiar context so that students can make meaning of the content being taught, developing critical thinking and critical consciousness, extending metalinguistic awareness and cross-linguistic flexibility, and interrogating linguistic inequality to disrupt linguistic hierarchies and social structures. Translanguaging offers a pedagogy in a range of educational settings to open up transformative spaces for the performance and embodiment of identities which contribute to critical and creative learning. García and Flores (2014) describe translanguaging as an approach to bilingualism that is centered not on languages, but on the observable communicative practices of bilinguals.

García and Li Wei (2014) argue that translanguaging does not refer to two separate languages nor to a synthesis of different language practices or to a hybrid mixture. Rather translanguaging refers to new language practices that make visible the complexity of language exchanges among people with different histories. Moreover, translanguaging is commonplace and everyday. These researchers view translanguaging as not only going between different linguistic structures, systems, and modalities, but going beyond them. Going beyond language refers to transforming the present, to intervening by reinscribing our human, historical commonality in the act of languaging. García and Li Wei conclude that "translanguaging enables us to imagine new ways of being and languaging so that we can begin to act differently upon the world" (p. 42). A translanguaging repertoire is shaped by biographies and learning trajectories; it includes aspects of communication not always thought of as "language," including gesture, dress, humor, posture, and so on; it is a record of mobility and experience; it includes constraints, gaps, and silences as well as potentialities; and it is responsive to the places in which, and the people with whom, semiotic resources may be deployed. García and Li Wei (2014) demonstrate the transformative potential of translanguaging in educational contexts in particular.

Problems and Difficulties

Despite the transformative potential of translanguaging and of multilingual, heteroglossic pedagogies, there is still much to be done to bring about change in education systems and policies and in classrooms. Weber and Horner (2012) review García's

description of translanguaging pedagogies and find it to be "over-optimistic" (p. 116), given that linguistic oppression and language separation still have a strong foothold in language education policy and practice in the United States and elsewhere. Weber and Horner also question whether those nation-states that appear at first sight to have multilingual education policies (Singapore, Brunei, Luxembourg) are breaking free of standard language ideology and the strict compartmentalization of languages. There is a further challenge to convince teachers that they should move outside of traditional pedagogies in language education. García and Li Wei (2014) concede that notwithstanding theoretical progress, it is rare to find schooling situations in which students' understanding of how to do translanguaging as a legitimate practice is being developed.

Canagarajah (2011b) points out that the pedagogical side of translanguaging remains undeveloped in general. Hélot and Ó Laoire (2011) acknowledge that there have been pioneering initiatives to validate students' multilingualism in classrooms, but conclude that the reality for many multilingual learners is that their languages are all too often silenced, unheard in the classroom, or perceived as an impediment to learning. Hélot and Ó Laoire point to the special responsibility of teacher educators to take societal multilingualism seriously and to put it at the center of their professional development agenda. García and Li Wei (2014) note that assessment of translanguaging in language education is likely to require a shift in orientation, away from standardized assessments administered in one language only. They accept that despite the potential of standardized translanguaged assessments, they do not currently exist. García and Li Wei (2014) consider that this calls into question the intentions of policy makers, "since the consequence of monolingual standardized tests becomes the highlighting of differences among those who language differently and the rendering of those differences as deficiencies" (p. 134). It is clear that challenges remain not only in the classroom but also (and perhaps more so) at the level of policy.

Future Directions

May (2014) points to the monolingual bias of language education in multilingual settings, which has often ignored multilingual repertoires of students or viewed them in deficit terms. The related linguistic competencies of multilingual groups have similarly often been viewed negatively. In proposing future directions in the language education of multilingual students, educators must engage with these powerful monolingual ideologies in society. This set of ideologies produces and reproduces education systems that privilege the few and constrain the success of the many. It might be argued that teachers are in no position to change these powerful societal discourses. However, every time a teacher introduces transformative pedagogies that enable students to imagine new ways of being and languaging, small steps are taken to nudge these ideologies away from the hegemonic and toward the transformative.

García and Flores (2014) suggest that teachers can make a difference when they hold a language philosophy that encourages voice, regardless of language features. Further areas in which ideological shifts must be made if the potential of students' linguistic resources is to be achieved are teacher education and assessment. Teacher educators are in a strong position to encourage the next generation of teachers to engage with recent research and to open up spaces in classrooms for translanguaging. Also, if assessment criteria credited, and required, translanguaging in the curriculum, it is likely that pedagogy and practice would focus on translanguaging in practice. García and Flores (2014) review emerging evidence that translanguaging builds deeper thinking, affirms multiple identities, engages bilingual students with more rigorous content, and at the same time develops language that is adequate for academic tasks. Translanguaging, they argue, "can in fact enhance cognitive, language, and literacy abilities" (p. 147). In establishing the future direction of language education in multilingual contexts, it is here that research, practice, and pedagogy must start. More evidence is required if policy makers, teacher educators, and curriculum designers are to be persuaded that the complex communicative repertoires of students are an untapped resource with immense potential for creativity, criticality, and educational success.

Cross-References

▶ Language and Power in the Classroom

Related Articles in the Encyclopedia of Language and Education

Jasone Ceñoz: Translanguaging as a Pedagogical Tool in Multilingual Education. In Volume: Language Awareness and Multilingualism
Ofelia García: Translanguaging in Bilingual Education. In Volume: Bilingual and Multilingual Education
Li Wei: Research Perspectives on Bilingualism and Bilingual Education. In Volume: Research Methods in Language and Education
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