

EDITORIAL

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Foreword: translanguaging LPP

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Abstract

For me, language policy and planning (LPP) is both a field of practical enquiry and a field of theoretical enquiry. As a practical field, LPP is about actions; actions that are taken by various agents and agencies on the structure, use and acquisition of language. As a theoretical field, LPP critically assesses these actions and further our understanding of why individuals and society decide to take certain actions at certain times in certain ways with regard to language structure, language use and language acquisition. Ultimately, this will help to further our understanding of society. Crucially, LPP as a theoretical field of enquiry needs to raise critical questions about the actions, rather than simply describing and documenting what the actions are. In doing so, LPP studies need to adopt specific theoretical stances. In the present case, the theoretical perspective that the contributors to this special issue have adopted is that of Translanguaging. I am grateful to the editors of the special issue for their invitation to write this short foreword to introduce and contextualise the special issue. I want to do so by highlighting what I think the potential contributions of Translanguaging as an analytical concept are to the studies of LPP, with reference to the Greater Bay Area of China that I would describe as an emerging and evolving Translanguaging Space.

Keywords: Language policy and planning (LPP), Translanguaging, Language contacts, Sociolinguistics, Translanguaging space, Multilingualism

But first, I would like to ask the question why people's language behaviour matter? I raise this question because the whole field of LPP, whether we regard it as primarily a practical one or a theoretical one, is about managing people's language behaviour through planning and policy (Spolsky, 2004, 2009). The fact that society, through its institutions, feel the need to manage people's language behaviour shows that people's language behaviour matters, and it matters because of its diversity. If everybody behaves linguistically the same way all the time, there is no need for management, planning or policy. But life is more complex, and more interesting, than that. Here are some basic sociolinguistic facts:

1. no one person uses their language in the same way in all contexts; and
 2. no one person uses their language in the same way over their lifetime.
- Consequently,
3. no two people behave linguistically in the same way in all contexts and over time.

People's variable use of their language synchronically and diachronically, results in language variation and change, the core sociolinguistic research. People make choices and decisions, for a specific context at a specific time, of the language they use and the way they use in, in terms of accent, word, style, etc. These choices and decisions are social choices and decisions in the sense that they are influenced by a variety of social factors including, for example, age, gender, educational and cultural background, social group membership, as well as medium, topic and setting of communication (see Coulmas, 2013). Of course choice and decision making is a complex cognitive process. But it is essentially social because the influencing factors reside broadly in social environment. The linguistic choices and decisions people make also have social consequences, on their own identities and subjectivities and on other people's attitudes towards them. The so-called 'language attitudes' are attitudes towards the choices and decisions people make linguistically, which can lead to stereotypes about groups of people (Garrett, 2010).

What is interesting is that people's attitudes towards, or judgements on, others' language behaviour are not always and uniformly positive and accepting. Hence we have notions of 'appropriateness' and 'competence' associated with individuals' language behaviour. We also tend to categorize language with dichotomies such as 'formal' vs 'informal', 'standard' versus 'non-standard', 'academic' versus 'social', or 'good' versus 'bad', etc. Such language attitudes have social consequences for individual language users, their social groups, and the languages they use. They, languages and language users, are put on a hierarchy: some gain special socio-politico-economic prestige and privilege, whilst others are minoritized, incompetenced and disadvantaged. Interventions, in the form of LPP, may be necessary, though it is not entirely clear how much effort of LPP is typically devoted to challenging and transforming the ideologically constructed hierarchies and norms as it should be.

A key factor in language variation and change is language contact. Language variation and change begin with language contact; without contact language will not change, and without change no language can survive. It is important to remind ourselves though that the so-called language contact is contact between users of different languages and language varieties—languages do not get into contact with one another, but their users do; and language does not vary or change itself. It is people, the language users, who vary and change language! Language contact can result in various forms of bilingualism and multilingualism. Borrowing and mixing are common bilingual practices, which are key mechanisms for language innovation and change: new varieties, even new languages, emerge with innovation and change. Typical spaces where language contact takes place, therefore bilingualism and multilingualism and therefore linguistic innovation and change, include (see further Li, 2000):

- border regions;
- migration, forced or voluntary;
- education;
- faith, religion, and cultural identification, and
- in the twenty-first century in particular, technology.

These are contact zones, or I would call, Translanguaging Spaces (Li, 2011), spaces where different linguistic practices encounter each other and where people interact by drawing on diverse communicative and semiotic means including different named languages, i.e. Translanguaging (Garcia and Li, 2014).

In transcending boundaries of various kinds—between different named languages, between language and other semiotic systems, between different educational structures and knowledge systems, between different cultural traditions, Translanguaging disrupts the hierarchies and dichotomies that I have mentioned above, but especially of language status, language attitudes and ideologies and authorities, and power relations that are associated with languages and language varieties. Despite the extensive discussions of the social and cognitive benefits of bilingualism and multilingualism, monolingual ideology still dominates much of people's thinking and societies' policies. There is still a popular belief that named languages are real psycholinguistic realities and bounded structural entities and that mixing elements from different languages is a bad thing. A great deal of LPP efforts are still being made to police language borrowing and mixing and other forms of everyday dynamic bilingual and multilingual practices. Translanguaging argues that all human languages are contact languages and emphasizes the importance of pushing and breaking boundaries of various kinds, between named languages and between language and other semiotic means of communication, in linguistic innovation and change. A Translanguaging approach to LPP, as the studies in this special issue demonstrate, highlights the sociolinguistic realities of the communities under investigation and asks the critical question should the LPP actions be aimed at policing innovative behaviours of the multilingual language user in Translanguaging Spaces or to effect change through facilitating, even encouraging, such behaviour.

The Great Bay Area is a key strategic area in China's development blueprint. Its significance lies in the fact that it exists to showcase the country's commitment to reform and opening-up and the implementation of innovation-driven policies and initiatives. Its success depends crucially on deeper interactions and cooperations amongst three regions with quite different histories and systems. Multilingualism is a reality of the Great Bay Area. But multilingualism has rather different connotations to different groups of people in the different regions within the Greater Bay Area due to different developmental trajectories. To fully leverage the composite advantages of the different regions and promote in-depth integration and coordinated development of the Area as a whole, one needs to think creatively and critically how planning and policy, including language planning and policy, can deal with the diversity and difference that exist, to use them as a recourse for further development or to see them as a barrier to development and try to level-up. The latter would risk stifling innovation. Studies in this special issue show that Translanguaging can be a positive facilitator in the social life of Greater Bay Area, through recognising and valuing the multilingual reality of the different places and utilising it as a force of innovation and change, provided that sociolinguistically sensitive and sensible policies are in place through schools, families and other social institutions. It seems to be that this is an important part of the process of confidence building—confidence in the sociolinguistic realities of the Area and confidence in its systems and cultures.

Translanguaging also enables those working in LPP, either as a practical field of social actions or as a research topic, to find a new language, a new narrative, for LPP, moving away from managing the structure, use or learning of named languages to interrogating the histories of contacts between people, the political ideologies behind existing policies regarding language and language use, and the impact of policy initiatives on individuals' lives and society. In doing so, Translanguaging can help to transform the way we see LPP as a promoter for linguistic diversity and contact, linguistic innovation and change, and ultimately linguistic equity and justice.

Author's information

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Author contributions

The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Declarations

Competing interests

The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

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