1 Introduction. Collaborative research writing: Multiplicity of realities, texts, and translanguaging

This multi-authored volume is the first comprehensive, book-length discussion, complete with a set of online resources, to present evidence-based research on a translanguaging approach to bilingual Roma children’s learning in fundamentally monolingual school systems. Based on years of ethnographic research, the discussion takes as a starting point our observation that multilingual Romani speakers perceive language boundaries differently from speakers whose primary socialisation occurs in monolingual environments. In the context of the present study, teachers of multilingual Roma pupils are characterised by a monolingual background, which has important consequences for these children’s schooling. Alongside the authors’ ongoing participatory ethnographic research, a collaborative pedagogical implementation project was undertaken in Hungary and Slovakia, in which a group of primary-school teachers and bilingual Roma children and their parents, supported by researchers, university students, and teacher trainees, jointly developed a translanguaging approach to learning and, more broadly, to interacting in school. What enabled us to undertake the last stages of research, implementation, and most of the writing was an Erasmus-funded project, which lends its title to the present volume: Translanguaging for equal opportunities: Speaking Romani at school (hereafter the acronym TRANSLANGEDUROM will be used with reference to this project).

Our primary research site is a small town in Hungary (Tiszavasvári), where our long-term ethnographic research is based, and where the translanguaging project was executed in partnership with a local primary school called Magiszter. Our secondary research site is a village in Slovakia (Szímő in Hungarian, Zemné in Slovak) and its Hungarian-medium primary school, which was included in the TRANSLANGEDUROM project in order to review the effectiveness of our approach in a different setting. Both locations are characterised by bilingual practices in the intersection of a standardised, official state language, Hungarian and Slovak, respectively, and local ways of speaking Romani. These contexts, however, reflect a pattern which is detectable in numerous localities across Europe.
1.1 Methods: Participatory research and collaborative writing

The book delineates translanguaging education practices in a holistic manner. All chapters are based on the same project and they each bring a different aspect of translanguaging pedagogy to the fore by exploring empirical data from our research sites. Alongside ethnographic observational material, our data includes 35 short films, each consisting of video-recorded translanguaging classroom moments and commentaries on them. This repository (http://www.kre.hu/romanitranslanguaging/index.php/video-repository/) allows the reader to witness classroom moments directly, without having to rely merely on the researchers’ accounts. To take full advantage of the observational data available in the repository, chapters begin with a detailed analysis of classroom moments, thus moving inductively from the specific and empirically observable details to the broader theoretical points that can be brought to bear on the analyses. Due to this structure, the book is a suitable resource for practicing teachers who wish to adopt a translanguaging stance in their pedagogical toolkit.

Our intention was to unpack the complexities of developing an approach which embraces and engages the entirety of learners’ linguistic repertoires. Developing a pedagogical practice based on this commitment is essentially reflexive in nature; hence, it does not lend itself easily to be summarised in a step-by-step practitioner’s guide. Practice needs to build on the intricate local specificities of codified and practised language policy, the broader sociolinguistic and language-ideological environment, and the ways of speaking that characterise local stakeholders such as teachers, learners, and their families. Therefore, instead of devoting separate parts to research and practice, we structured the chapters of this volume in a way which recognises that pedagogical practice emanates from empirical evidence, and that teaching and research mutually build on, and enhance, each other through reflexivity, in all contexts.

The texts in this book are co-written by academic and non-academic participants, thus evoking the voices of the latter within the traditions of academic writing. Authors include teachers who, thanks to their long-standing commitment to the project, gathered the broadest range of experience with implementing translanguaging approaches; teacher trainees, university students, and doctoral researchers who participated in data collection and project implementation; local parents who were engaged in translanguaging activities due to their commitment to the school and the project. Research-active authors represent a variety of disciplinary perspectives, such as education science, teacher training, applied linguistics, and sociolinguistics.
The most important methodological commitment of the volume is that it regards members of all participant groups as co-authors whose contributions extend the scope of the discussion by providing a variety of perspectives on the questions covered. This methodological stance determines the non-linear and non-hierarchical structure of the volume: the chapters are all connected with each other in multiple ways and introduce different but equally important features of translanguaging. A system of cross-referencing allows the reader to absorb the findings discussed in the book, alongside the materials in the video repository, in the order and manner most relevant to them. Our commitment to representing various forms of knowledge, including academic and local knowledges, as equal in importance and interpretative strength, meant that all contributors were involved in the writing process and their writings are included in the main body of the text, without being marked to stand out typographically (e.g., by italicisation, quotation marks, spaces, or similar devices). This explains the high number of co-authors of this volume. Each chapter had a main author who was responsible for co-ordinating other contributor’s work, which included organising writing workshops, going over drafts, collecting and discussing the texts written by members of other contributor groups.

The consequences of these writing methods for the two editors’ tasks were threefold. First, while being main authors or co-authors of several chapters, we were also mindful of creating an overarching narrative for the entire book. Second, the largely coherent narrative, and the fact that the volume discusses findings from a single project, resulted in a text genre which exhibits features typical of monographs. At the same time, each chapter is an independent, individual research paper with a coherent subject matter and methodological approach. Third, texts included in the volume represent a variety of genres, including case studies, reflections, field notes, descriptive passages, as well as analytical expository prose. By bringing in multiple perspectives and text genres, our aim is to reflect on the diversity of knowledge practices within the participant groups. Our decision to present the various authors’ voices in the same body of text, without singling them out typographically or in the analysis, means that the transition between the different writing styles might feel abrupt or unsettling for the reader. This is, however, a sense of ambiguity which we intended to maintain in the hope that it may invite reflections on what knowledge is, and whose voice is validated by social conventions to articulate it.

The materials provided in this volume and in the online video repository are intended to support researchers, postgraduate students, pre- and in-service teachers of Romani-speaking learners in Europe and, more generally, experts working with pupils whose home language practices are different from the teachers’ or the school curricula’s. The book brings the results of current trends in translanguaging theory to bear on specific, live school situations and illustrates translanguaging as a stance on a rich collection of field materials. The chapters report on
the possibilities of translanguaging in a Central European context characterised by monolingual ideologies. Translanguaging is described as an opportunity for speakers of Romani, a language with only sporadic literacy, to enhance their success at school. Romani is the home language of hundreds and thousands of learners across Europe. These students are always taught, everywhere in mainstream school systems, in a language which is different from the language of their home, that is, in the official language of education in the country or region where they live. Romani is neither an official language nor the language of public administration or schooling anywhere in the world. This situation is in some respects similar to contexts of the global south, where students often speak local non-standardised language(s) different from the language of the school system.

What we label as “the project”, is made up of various activities undertaken by various participants, embedded both in Tiszavasvári and in Színő (Zemné) in particular sociocultural environments and surrounded by different ideologies circulating at local, national, and supranational levels. The TRANSLANGEDUROM project is, at the time of writing, nearing its end, but local participants continue their activities, just as they did prior to the project. Over the years, many of the activities have evolved or expanded. As a result of TRANSLANGEDUROM, the pre-existing collaboration between local schools and families started to include translanguaging among its foci in addition to other activities that these communities of practice had undertaken prior to the project. The range of participants has broadened as a result of the project, to include an increasing number of teachers and local parents. Some of these learning communities will continue expanding, while others may shrink after the completion of the project. It is possible to sustain the pedagogical good practices discussed in this volume as long as there is a will and a clear commitment on behalf of local actors to do so. This commitment can be made only if local actors, for instance the school’s leadership, are convinced that translanguaging as a pedagogical stance yields real results, impacting the life of their learners positively, even if its implementation stretches the limits of what is expected of educators in mainstream schools. This conviction, however, is more easily theorised than implemented in practice: educators and their leaders often come up against deep-rooted preconceptions and ideologies both in the administrative realities surrounding them – and of their own. The activities undertaken in the TRANSLANGEDUROM project were linguistic ethnographic in nature, but with language pedagogical implications, relating to minority language practices and to issues of language planning. The consequences of the work carried out so far shaped reality in the project sites. Linguistic ethnographic work will continue beyond the school’s walls after the publication of this volume (the details of this work are discussed in the conclusions).
1.2 Conceptual grounding and theoretical considerations

The key concept of the TRANSLANGEDUROM project is translanguaging, seen as a practical theory (Li 2018) in the description of human linguistic practices and the pedagogies built around them. The present volume centres on the connectivity of this concept, approaching translanguaging from different angles and highlighting its various features which came to the fore through our diverse project activities, ranging from ethnographic work and translanguaing pedagogy to story-book writing and theatre production. Below we shall discuss the conceptual framework which allowed us to collect, organise, and interpret data produced through such a broad range of activities in an interconnected, transdisciplinary, and coherent way.

Our team includes, apart from applied linguists, teachers, teacher education specialists, and local citizens with no specific linguistic or sociolinguistic training. The project is based on ethnographic research methods and on participatory approaches. A synthesis of academic (e.g., linguistic, pedagogical, etc.) and local knowledge emerged during project activities. The perspectives of all participants influenced the way we understand translanguaging. Rather than defining the pedagogy of translanguaging and the possibilities of its implementation among local Roma pupils, education theorists contributing to our project were concerned with the ways in which translanguaging complements insights gained from contemporary pedagogical approaches. As a result, project members see translanguaging at the schools as a stance which is part of contemporary pedagogical approaches and practices, and which reshapes teachers’ work and the ways they think about their work (cf. Chapter 15 on adaptive schooling). The activities involving non-academic participants, such as local Roma parents, have increasingly encouraged all participants to think of translanguaging not only as a pedagogical concept for schools, but as a possibility for organising cultural and social life as a whole (cf. Chapter 13 on community-based knowledge and culturally transformative education).

Models and analytical concepts whose ambition is to capture complex and diverse realities necessarily exhibit interdisciplinary characteristics. They reveal the fading boundaries between the various disciplines and remind us that individual research is always part of complex systems (cf. Larsen-Freeman and Cameron 2008). A position paper by the Douglas Fir Group (2016), a transdisciplinary research network made up of mainly SLA theorists and practitioners, presents such a holistic model of applied linguistics research in the field of language learning and teaching. The authors map the social environmental factors that influence second language acquisition on three levels (a micro level of social activity, a mezzo level of sociocultural institutions and community, and a macro
level of ideological structures). Hult (2019), recognising the virtues of this model, proposes an approach based on nexus analysis is (Scollon and Scollon 2004), which emphasises the embeddedness of applied linguistic research in complex realities, and highlights how elements of reality interrelate, with dynamic interactions and relationships within a single complexity. Social actions, which are at the heart of the proposed model, are embedded in the history of a person’s experience (historical body), in the normative systems of the person’s conversations with other persons (interaction order) and in the spaces and localities where these interactions take place (discourse in place). With this model, inter- and transdisciplinary research can not only take all these dimensions into account, but can treat them in their interconnectedness, as parts of a single integrated system. Hult argues that the nexus analysis approach can be extended beyond ethnographic description to the analysis of any social action and its context, in any field of applied linguistics (2019: 142).

The metaphor we have chosen to guide our thinking in both structuring this volume and representing our project activities as part of translanguaging shares many features of nexus analysis, and it helps us view translanguaging as an integrated but multi-faceted system. The proposed metaphor is that of the rhizome, which was brought into social-scientific thinking by Deleuze and Guattari (1987). Rhizome, a term in biology, describes a type of root system, which lacks a central stem and consists of multiple interconnected small roots, as seen in various types of grasses. These root systems have no boundaries: they have an extent, but no beginning and no end. Regarding their internal structure, they can’t be traced back to a single unit: there is no trunk or main root as in the case of many other plants. Rhizomatic root systems cannot be divided into clearly separable parts. When detaching a part of any size, a new rhizome is created. The rhizome is open in all possible directions due to the complex system of the small roots. As a result, it can come into contact with its environment in many ways.

In the introduction of their work A Thousand Plateaus Deleuze and Guattari (1987) claim that facts and phenomena of the world, instead of being structured into hierarchical order, are arranged in a rhizomatic way, with multiple and variable connections. This claim is ambitious yet simple, which is both its strength and its weakness. It aspires to explain how practically everything in the social world operates, and focuses on easy-to-understand characteristics: everything is connected, nothing is central, nothing is hierarchical, and there is no traceable ultimate unity. (Compare this to the term heterarchy, “where due to homologous dynamics, influence extends in both/many directions among the components of a complex system, rather than top-down or bottom-up” Larsen-Freeman 2019: 68). Certain aspects of this conceptual metaphor have become popular in the last
decades of sociolinguistic thinking. The image of the rhizome was used to describe the organisation of discourses (Pietikäinen 2015; Leppänen and Kytölä 2017), classroom practices (Prinsloo and Krause 2019) linguistic landscape (Milani and Levon 2016), the language performance of individuals (Canagarajah 2018), research methods (Heller, Pietikäinen, and Pujolar 2018), and translanguaging and translingual practices (Heltai 2021).

The rhizome-metaphor foregrounds that translanguaging is a concept in constant development, with interconnected theoretical and practice-oriented underpinnings, including its bearings on pedagogical issues and questions of language policy. It is also a tool to understand the relationship between the chapters in this volume. The diversity of voices and activities that characterise the project, which we intended to make an important feature of this book, can be both captured and understood by the metaphor of the rhizome. By adopting the rhizome as a metaphor, we reflect on our practice whose aim is not so much to capture the elements of reality, but the interconnectedness of phenomena: the transitions rather than the dimensions of reality. To mention but two examples, we think of translanguaging not as a particular reified way of speaking in the classroom, but as a practice which involves shifting in and out of various ways of speaking including translingual ways. Furthermore, ways of speaking within a particular group never evolve in isolation. They are embedded in a complex web of social practices, in which shift in a particular component, such as the children’s way of speaking in school, can happen only if a transformation is taking place simultaneously in other domains, such as the parents’ language ideologies about proper speaking at school and the entire community’s relationship to schooling as a whole.

We adopted translanguaging as a key concept of our working methods because of the failures, on the one hand, in the relationship of bilingual Roma communities and monolingual school systems, and, on the other, in the implementation of standardised Romani as the language of instruction. Standardisation is an endeavour of Roma intellectuals and, in most contexts, it has little appeal to those living in marginalised settings. The term translanguaging was originally coined as a concept of teacher-guided multilingual learning organisation (Williams 1994), promoting the use of two languages in a complementary way. The reshaped concept (García 2009; García and Li 2014; Blackledge and Creese 2010) has seen in the last decade a vigorous development and influenced thinking about both multilingualism and multilingual pedagogies.

The core idea of translanguaging is the unity of the linguistic repertoire (Vogel and García 2017), which suggests that multilingual speakers have a complex repertoire of linguistic structures at their disposal, which is not organised into named languages or language systems (Matras 2009: 4). Through a process of linguistic socialisation, involving a broad range of social activities, repertoire
components come to be associated with various types of activities, sets of interlocutors, topics, and institutional settings. The concept of the linguistic repertoire is helpful in developing our understanding of the ways in which a person operates all resources and skills which are needed for speaking and meaning making, and that these operations always occur in collaboration with other speakers. This means that the repertoire is not only psychologically embedded but also strongly linked to intercorporeality (Busch 2012a, 2012b) and interpersonal relationships. Translanguaging scholars promote the view that bi- and multilingual speakers do not have double, triple etc. repertoires according to the number of languages they speak. That is, the languages spoken by a person do not divide the repertoire into separate units. Instead, every single speaker has only one repertoire, independent from the number of languages she or he speaks. The unitary repertoire consists of many different linguistic resources (words, syntactic structures, stress patterns, phonological rules, etc. – cf. Blommaert and Backus 2013: 6; Matras 2009: 4), and, more broadly, semiotic resources. The latter includes non-verbal resources such as gestures, facial expressions, distance and even silence between the interaction partners. In our thinking, these resources are assigned to one or more languages, but also to situations, interlocutors, and types and subject matters of communicative events. This assignment defines when and how to combine repertoire components, but the repertoire itself is unitary. This is a point corresponding to the image of the rhizome, which is also a single unit consisting of different, multiply connected components, both unitary and diverse at the same time.

People speak in diverse ways. They all make use of different linguistic and semiotic resources. When speaking, speakers pay no attention to meta-linguistic constructs, such as “language systems”, or to the number of such constructed and labelled units (known as “named languages”) from which they select their resources. Instead, they select them in a way which is best suited for their communicative goals and intentions, their discourse strategies, and their processing capacities (cf. Matras 2009: 3), which are all involved in the process by which they come to be understood by their conversation partners. The unitary nature of the repertoire, however, does not mean that boundaries between languages and varieties do not exist; on the contrary, these boundaries are very real. This is, however, a social and cultural reality: the boundaries are formed due to social and cultural processes. As a result, these boundaries are in constant flux and evade clear definition, thus remaining open for being interpreted differently in different communities. Languages and varieties are seen as social inventions, resulting from social and cultural traditions (Makoni and Pennycook eds. 2006; Blommaert and Rampton 2011; Otheguy, García, and Reid 2015; Kleyn and García 2019). Translanguaging scholars argue that the boundaries between named languages are social in nature without corresponding mental representations: our cognitive system is structured, but this structuring does not correspond to the way in which languages structure social reality (Otheguy,
García, and Reid 2019: 626–627). The metalinguistic construct of named languages does not have a psycholinguistic reality.

This argument has far-reaching pedagogical consequences. Translanguaging scholars propose to acknowledge and to make use of learners’ entire repertoire in education, not only because it is socially just (García and Kleyn 2016: 24–25) but also helpful in learning. They recommend developing the whole repertoire in a holistic way (Blackledge and Creese 2010) instead of supporting only one or the other language exclusively. Translanguaging in pedagogy is the conscious utilisation of all linguistic resources that make up learners’ repertoires. It can be implemented by learners and/or initiated by teachers and often results in new language policy solutions in classrooms and schools (Cenoz and Gorter 2017; Prinsloo and Krause 2019).

In this volume, we consider translanguaging not as pedagogy per se, but as a pedagogical stance, an insight on behalf of educators that acknowledging learners’ unitary repertoire means to acknowledge their full personality. In our view, translanguaging as a pedagogy is based on a moment of recognition and change, a shift in behaviour and thinking, connecting entrepreneurial teachers with new pedagogical possibilities. These possibilities occur in many different areas of a teacher’s work. In the ten main chapters of this volume such areas will be explored. This volume introduces translanguaging as a rhizomatic multiplicity, constantly changing in nature, depending on local linguistic and cultural practices and broader policy and ideological environments.

1.3 Structure and scope of the study

The volume is divided into three main parts. The first one of these introduces the research sites and the social and language ideologies and practices characterising the people living in them. The second part introduces our working methods and theoretical commitments. The third part consists of chapters discussing a specific perspective on translanguaging educational practices in our project sites.

Chapter 2 reviews historical and contemporary language policies in Europe in general and in particular in Central Europe, in the context of global trends in language-policy making. It highlights that non-standardised and translingual ways of speaking exist on the margins of institutional frameworks in the monolingual and double monolingual contexts of Hungary and Slovakia, dominated by the named languages adopted as official languages (Hungarian and Slovak) of the states. Chapter 3 distances our analytical stance from named languages and focuses on ways of speaking involving Romani, describing them in a translanguaging framework as parts of heterogeneous repertoires. The chapter explains why
standardisation attempts targeting Romani are controversial and argues that the introduction of translanguaging-based education offers a more realistic chance for speakers of Romani to enhance their success in school. Considerations on concept and analysis are also introduced in this chapter, particularly the way in which the metaphor of the rhizome shaped our thinking about translanguaging and influenced the way we structured this book. Chapter 4, the last section of Part I, describes the main project site, Tiszavasvári, a town in Eastern Hungary, focusing on the intersubjectivities of people living in this setting. Synergies in the description unfold across three perspectives: that of the researcher, of a teacher representing the local majority's experience, and of parents whose voice represents the local minority's vantage point. The other project site, Szímó (Zemné), a village in Southern Slovakia, is described from a local teacher's and a researcher’s perspective.

Part II focuses on methodological considerations. In Chapter 5, we discuss linguistic ethnographic research activities and pilot projects which laid the foundations of our participatory approach and led to the launch of the TRANSLANGEDUROM project. The features and distinctive parts of this project are described alongside methodological and ethical considerations of data collection. Chapter 6 focuses on three aspects of data processing. First, we describe the principles and processes of surveying and selecting translanguaging classroom moments for filming. Second, we expand on the way we thematised the 35 short films based on the features of translanguaging which emerged from the raw recordings. The role of online working, which was largely due to Covid-19, and ethical and practical considerations on translation are explained here.

Part III of the book is divided into ten chapters, each thematising a different aspect of translanguaging. While looking at a particular chapter, the reader encounters a core element of translanguaging, but these are interconnected with other core elements discussed in other chapters. This structure is reinforced by the video material, as, for example, different chapters may refer to the same video recording from a different angle. Chapter 7 discusses the features of the linguistic repertoire specific to multilingual Roma through the example of the Tiszavasvári Roma neighbourhood, addressing also the question of how teachers’ translanguaging stance can be aligned to learners’ complex repertoire. Chapter 8 traces the ways in which a translanguaging stance restructures existing hierarchies in interactional practices in the classroom. Analysing discretely selected classroom moments, we uncover how exactly this restructuring happens. The impact of transformative classroom dynamics is discussed with regards to both the teacher and the learners, with special attention to how translanguaging serves as a tool of reflective pedagogical practices and increases intrinsic motivation in both educators and children. Chapter 9 elucidates types and tokens of cultural mediation and linguistic creativity in the translanguaging classroom. By activating construction patterns acquired in a set of contexts (e.g. the learners’ home) in
other contexts (e.g. the school), learners accommodate and appropriate technical discourses within their own ways of speaking, thereby reshuffling the boundaries of those discourses. Such practices are discussed through specific examples and with special consideration to the learners’ agentive role as mediators between their home- and institutional settings. Chapter 10 surveys the various forms of teachers’ translingual interactional practices and their reverberation in the classroom: the ways in which teachers’ translingual utterances and translanguage shifts enhance learning. We pinpoint the effects of teachers’ translanguage on the learning process in the changing partnership between teachers and learners, as their relationship becomes more supportive, built on shared trust rather than hierarchy. Chapter 11 elaborates how even just a few teachers’ translanguage stance can influence attitudes and policy in the entire school, extending the scope of translanguage beyond the classroom. The chapter includes the results of a translingual pilot assessment test evaluating children’s readiness for school, which showed that bilingual language socialisation does not influence disadvantageously emergent bilingual learners’ performance in an institutional setting which is increasingly welcoming towards translingual ways of speaking.

In Chapter 12, we explore the connection between translanguage and the schoolscape: the types of interaction between learners and the learning environment, which fosters learners’ communicative competence in multi-modal ways. A critical evaluation of the visual and physical components of the learning environment highlights ways in which translanguage approaches contribute to reshaping the schoolscape. Chapter 13 surveys possibilities for community-based learning, which takes into account local knowledge practices and epistemologies in the context of school-based learning activities. We exemplify through a variety of extra-curricular projects and recorded classroom moments the ways in which ethical care and transcultural learning approaches are instrumental in education, and argue that community-based translanguage approaches to education contribute to decolonising the curriculum at local levels. Chapter 14 describes local literacy practices and deals with issues of standardisation and heterographic writing. We highlight the potential that lies in reading and writing Romani texts using the Hungarian alphabet, already known to the pupils. Thanks to this approach, teachers can focus on developing literacy skills as general linguistic competences which are not tied to a particular named language. We shall discuss the children’s creative experience when given the opportunity to read and write texts in Romani. In Chapter 15, based on the videos, we analyse the ways in which translanguage and effective learning organisation mutually support each other. Learners’ home language practices are present in teacher-led learning situations as well, but in a covert way. In learner-centred activities, such as pair- and group-work, pupils’ home language practices are necessarily brought to the surface and teachers can build on them to a greater extent.
The discussion explores translanguaging learning approaches in the context of adaptive schooling. In chapter 16, we elucidate the potential of evoking a variety of voices in educational contexts. We look at translanguaging moments which involve stylisation of the other, such as pupils imitating adults’ speech, parents impersonating teachers and vice versa. Parents’ and teachers’ voices are analysed from a heteroglossic perspective, mapping them against social speech types (or social voices). School activities in which stylising occurs provide the opportunity for practising teachers, learners, and parents to adopt a reflexive approach to their own roles and positionality.

References


