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Challenges in decolonizing linguistics: the politics of enregisterment and the divergent uptakes of translingualism

<https://doi.org/10.1515/eduling-2021-0005>

Received November 29, 2021; accepted January 16, 2022; published online February 1, 2022

Abstract: This article traces the roots of translingualism in the Global South, with particular relevance to the author's South Asian heritage. After narrating his attempts to practice this orientation in his research and scholarship, the author analyzes the problematic ways in which translingualism is appropriated in the academic, economic, and political contexts in Global North. Employing the conceptual orientation of enregisterment, the article theorizes the challenges for decolonizing discourses in negotiating a critical and transformative uptake. It concludes by outlining some strategies that can help in entextualizing translingualism to preserve its decolonizing potential. It identifies areas of research that will expand the communities, contexts, and communication that will facilitate more pluriversal epistemologies and practices.

Keywords: decolonization; indexicality; South Asia; translingualism

1 Introduction

Decolonization is risky business. If delinking indigenous¹ thinking from dominant epistemologies is challenging, constructing alternate epistemologies for transforming social and academic discourses is even more unpredictable. Scholars like Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh (2018) and de Souza Santos (2016) have discoursed in detail on the complex theoretical work involved in translating indigenous thinking for resisting academic discourses in the Global North and developing solidarity with other colonized communities in the Global South. However, acts of *delinking* are only one half of the process. *Relinking*, the other protracted process,

¹ I am using “indigenous” in the lower case, as I am using the term to include diverse local discourses in the Global South, some of which don't belong to Indigenous (or aboriginal) communities.

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is imaginative and strategic with diverse possibilities. Furthermore, how such discourses of relinking are taken up is not always in the hands of progressive scholars. Relinking involves an unpredictable social and historical trajectory of enregisterment that involves many parties, networks, and conditions. Relinking decolonial discourses needs more discussion in progressive circles. The current distortions of critical race theory in US politics are a good reminder of how progressive discourses get redefined. It is not only the willful misrepresentations of cynics that we have to be attentive to. Progressive circles must also be wary of the inevitable mediation of dominant ideologies and established discourses that shape their own representation of resistant epistemologies. Tuck and Yang's (2012) "Decolonization is not a metaphor"² is a caution on such distortions of meaning even among well-meaning progressive scholars and activists.

An examination of the way decolonial constructs are enregistered for meanings in academia is important when decolonization is quickly becoming a slogan with a lot of cache in both academic and activist circles. As we see a proliferation of conferences, edited collections, and journal special issues on this theme, it is good to pause and take stock of the variable uptakes and representations of this orientation in our field. It is not surprising that the marketization of everything in the neoliberal order involves turning radical ideas into profitable enterprises, if not appropriating them to sustain the status quo. There are new programs, faculty positions, and courses on decolonization to attract students to privileged universities. Conferences and publications generate income for publishers and professional organizations. It is sobering to recognize that radical thought paradigms are always entangled in diverse market forces, political regimes, and ideological discourses. The purpose of this article is to explore how progressive linguistic paradigms have to negotiate these entanglements in an ongoing manner to always reposition themselves strategically and maintain their critical edge.

Though there are many useful projects that have been identified in linguistics for decolonization (Deumert et al. 2021), I wish to examine the political and intellectual trajectory of translingualism in this article. Since its enregisterment is what is in focus, I will discuss its changing definitions as we proceed. Though translingual practices developed as a resistant orientation for many linguists in the Global South, it is now treated in some academic circles in the Global North as ineffective for interests of diversity, inequality, or structural injustices (Block 2018; Jaspers 2018). Some understand this discourse as a profit making enterprise for

² I am aware that I am using decolonization as a practice that relates to larger epistemological and social transformation beyond only repatriation of land. Though Tuck and Yang are right to make that argument in the context of settler colonialism in North America, my context and politics are different. However, I share with them the concern for material investment in decolonial struggles.

both academia and the industries (Kubota 2016). Still others treat it as a neutralizing and universalizing discourse that is no different from dominant academic paradigms (Pavlenko 2018). Yet, many communities in the Global South treat translanguaging as empowering and affirming their own communicative resources and practices (Makalela 2017; Milu 2021; Sousa and Pessoa 2019; Sugiharto 2015). Some minoritized scholars in the Global North appreciate its decolonizing potential, though they argue for expanding its application (see Native American scholar Cushman 2016, and African American scholar Gilyard 2016). It is useful to analyze these variable uptakes to understand the workings of power in shaping resistant paradigms. The differences in the meanings of translanguaging in different social, geographical, and academic contexts will thus help us understand the challenges in decolonizing linguistics. Though I take a close look at translanguaging, there are lessons for other progressive paradigms that aim to disrupt dominant epistemologies for transformation. I treat enregisterment—a sociolinguistic construct on the ways in which semiotic resources index identity, values, and meanings—as the process through which progressive discourses also gain their uptake. Therefore, I begin with an overview of enregisterment.

2 Theoretical framework

Enregisterment evolves through the meanings indexed by semiotic resources in everyday interactions. Though indexicality has a long and rich tradition in philosophy, semiotics, and linguistics, I draw from a focused tradition in sociolinguistics, emerging from the work of sociolinguists Agha (2005), Johnstone (2016), and Silverstein (2014). Wortham and Reyes (2015) offer a synthesis that should be useful for activists outside academia and scholars outside sociolinguistics. Indexicality simply means how words “point to” (index) meanings, values, and identities. Wortham and Reyes (2015) remind us that this is an “iterative” process that involves dynamic and ongoing interactions between words and contexts (p. 172). While words gain their indexicality from contexts, the contexts can themselves be gradually changed through creative language use. In this way, the “indexical” (word, symbol, or artifact) and its “typification” (what it points to) are always only “stabilized for now.” How meanings get stabilized takes a complex social and historical process. There should be social “uptake” of the words a speaker deploys or signs represent (2015: 12) for them to be communicative. That uptake depends on the indexical acquiring typification through repeated use in particular contexts for particular meanings over time. This process of typification is called “entextualization” (i.e., “the process of coming to textual formedness”—Silverstein 2019: 56). Indexicality studies are open to meanings, values, and

identities changing over time for a variety of reasons. However, indexicals also sediment into patterns with other semiotic repertoires and typifications to represent predictable identities, values, and meanings. It is such sedimentation of values attached to sets of indexicals that is referred to as enregisterment.

As in the case of indexicality, enregisterment is also an iterative, dynamic, and ongoing social and temporal process. Agha defines enregisterment as “processes through which a linguistic repertoire becomes differentiable within a language as a socially recognized register of forms” (2003: 231). Agha has demonstrated how a particular articulation of English from South East England became enregistered as “standard English.” It took many years of promoting this corpus through the ideological work of handbooks, dictionaries, and textbooks, and institutional agents such as teachers, moral authorities, and political leaders. Such reflexive commentary on meanings and values is labeled “metapragmatic.” We must also realize that the semiotic resources themselves are insufficient to index meanings. They are strategically deployed in association with other texts to gain relevant meaning associations. The latter is the “co-text” that builds enregisterment (Silverstein 2014; Wortham and Reyes 2015). I will use these terms in my analysis of the variable uptakes of translanguaging later.

Before that, it is also important to get our bearings on how decolonial projects engage with dominant and marginalized discourses and practices. I will remind us briefly of some of the principles articulated by decolonial thinkers such as Mignolo and Walsh (2018) and de Souza Santos (2016) which I draw for my argument:

- Delinking doesn’t mean a nativism or pastoralism, which withdraws to a past of idyllic cultural or linguistic purity in ancient times. Decolonization acknowledges the need to engage with dominant ideologies, especially those of European modernity that facilitated colonization. De Souza Santos calls this an “enabling contradiction” which sometimes involves having to use the colonizer’s language and engaging with colonizing epistemologies even to resist them: “An enabling contradiction is a contradiction that recognizes the limits of thinking or action in a given period or context but refuses to view them at a distance or with reverence, as is typical of conformist thinking and action” (de Souza Santos 2016: 238).
- While engagement with diverse other discourses and epistemologies is necessary, the terms of such engagement needs caution. To begin with, it is important to give consideration to our locus of enunciation—i.e., the point from which we discourse in our theorization. Santos treats this positioning as based outside of centers of power and facilitating transformative agendas. Such engagement involves “intercultural translation” (de Souza Santos 2016) or “border thinking” (Mignolo and Walsh 2018). It doesn’t involve finding similarities and equivalences between conflicting paradigms, but

generating diverse possibilities between available discourses for “pluriversal” alternatives.

- Relinking with new meanings and possibilities is an imaginative but risky process, as no alternative will be perfect. Relinking is vulnerable to appropriation and contestation, which will call for constantly changing the positioning and configurations of decolonizing discourses. Relinking and delinking will therefore be iterative and ongoing, involving constant self-questioning and recalibration, as new alternatives are imagined.
- The decolonial project is undertaken in an embodied and grounded manner, with a locus of community involvement. Decolonial scholars are explicit that this mission cannot be led solely by intellectuals, political statesmen, governments, or institutions. Though the project has relevance to all of them, it is motivated by the concerns, discourses, and interests of marginalized communities. Mignolo argues: “There is no master plan led by a privileged elite, avant-garde intellectuals or ego-identity politics that could do the job. Nor can it be done via state politics and regulation. Instead, it requires [...] people’s organizations and creativity, that could be thought of as part of a communal decolonial horizon” (Mignolo and Walsh 2016: 126).
- As decolonization is motivated by the concerns of minoritized communities in the periphery who were victimized by modernity and its discourses for centuries, it is inspired by their intuitive and embodied knowledge that might not have been explicitly theorized. Decolonization projects have to respect the intuitive, affective, and embodied knowledges of indigenous communities, though they might not always demonstrate a scholarly or reflective theorization. Decolonial academic *discourses* are a contemporary invention of the Global North, even when they involve scholars from the Global South. Decolonization as *practice* is ancient and ongoing.
- The separation in modernist discourses such as mind/body, reason/affect, experience/institution, and structure/agency conflict with decolonizing work. Decolonial traditions are ready to embrace the interconnections between diverse domains and constructs to accommodate multilateral and nonlinear trajectories for transformation, as they are influenced by epistemologies of nonduality shared by many indigenous communities. Indigenous cultures, religions, and customs have a productive role to play in such pluriversal alternatives, contrary to modernist secular thinking which would treat cultural and spiritual traditions as false consciousness and inimical to the more important rational inquiry and action. Decolonization calls for an “intersectional activism” (Nixon 2006–2007) of treating political resistance and social transformation as holistic, involving diverse social domains such as family, school, and temple, and the intersectional identities of gender, caste, regionalism, and age.

Next, I will introduce how translingualism is enregistered as an embodied decolonial project for communities in the Global South. As there are diverse loci from which translingualism is enunciated, I provide a personal and embodied account of what translingualism has meant to me and my community members in South Asia. Other scholars might provide a different trajectory from other communities in the Global South. It is in the interest of pluriversality to foster multiple narratives on the development of the translingual orientation. In that regard, it is important to acknowledge that there are also narratives of translingualism with a European locus of enunciation, in relation to superdiversity and disrupting modernist discourses (Blommaert 2013; Creese and Blackledge 2010). After I develop an orientation to translingualism as influenced by epistemologies and practices in the South Asian region, I articulate my engagement with other scholars and discourses in attempts at intercultural translation, border thinking, and enregisterment to decolonize linguistics in academia. That will be followed by a sampling of how translingualism has been taken up in the Global North, finding alternate enregisterment. I will conclude with an analysis of the different uptakes in these variable loci, and reflect on paths forward to continue the work of decolonizing linguistics.

3 The South Asian story of translingualism

Growing up in the island of Sri Lanka, I was always conscious of the diversity of languages and communicative practices around me, long before I engaged in conscious scholarly analysis or adopting labels like translingualism. In fact, I was also sensitive to the resistant potential in our communicative practices, as my community had been colonized by the Portuguese, Dutch, and English in successive waves, starting from 1505. While I come from a Tamil-speaking household, I had family members who spoke Sinhala, Malay, and Dutch creole as their heritage languages. Tamil and Sinhala communities had migrated to the island from different parts of India around the 5th century BC. Tamil has become the heritage language of the largely Hindu community in the north and east of the island, while Sinhala is the heritage language of the Buddhist community. Malay was introduced by the Islamic community from Java which arrived around the 11th century in the island. The Dutch/Portuguese creole is spoken by a mestiza community that developed after European colonization. Playing with cousins or friends from these backgrounds as young as 3 years old involved shuttling in and out of these languages, or using Sri Lankan English as a lingua franca, or fashioning new pidgins out of our vernaculars when not everyone spoke English.

While we Tamils worked creatively with our multiple languages to construct community, we also developed strategies to resist unfair imposition of other people's norms and values. We grew up with stories from our oral history on how our community members outwitted the colonizers through our multilingual resources. The jokes, puns, and playful insults on the colonizers were the “weapons of the weak” (Scott 1985) and part of our popular culture. One story which we dramatized as sketches in church summer camps and youth retreats is about a Tamil man who outwitted the Christian missionaries and British colonial officers by codeswitching. After many years in a Boarding School to learn English and the Christian faith, and indoctrinated to stamp out his Tamil and Hinduism, he was to be baptized as a successful product of the colonial educational system. However, he inadvertently uses Tamil and shouts for help from his Hindu Gods as he panicked during his immersion into the water. He quickly does damage control by switching to English and thanking Christ for saving him from drowning. While the local onlookers would have inferred from the man's Tamil that the baptism was a sham and the man was going through the motions to vie for better education and jobs, the British would have assumed from his English that he was still faithful to the colonial order and rewarded him with their privileges (see the full oral narrative in Canagarajah 2000). While codeswitching was used as a resistant strategy in this example, consider also the implications for us Tamil Christian children acting out this story in our churches. It shows our teachers and priests that we are aware of the colonizing functions of English and Christianity. In fact, both we and our elders embraced these experiences as part of our legacy, as we continued to seek ways to translate Christianity and English in relation to our own traditions and values. We constructed our own metaphors creatively to make Christianity relevant for us. Metaphors such as “Bread of heaven” were translated as “Rice of the earth,” and paintings of Christ in our altars had him depicted in loin cloth, bare body, and brown skin like us.

These strategic uses of semiotic resources went beyond language to include diverse multimodal repertoires and different practices of communication and interpretation. As children, we looked forward to all-night performances of கூத்து (i.e., *kooththu*, which is an indigenous tradition of drama that included song and dance, and often featured Hindu epics if performed in temples and Biblical narratives if performed in a church). They were always performed outdoors in make-shift stages for the whole community free of charge. Though the narratives were well known from the reading of these texts in schools and places of worship, and from repeated dramatizations year after year, we never found them boring. This is because our appreciation of these performances was not based solely on the text or the script. It was based on the whole performance—including the different renditions of the script by the different actors and in the different settings. We approached the performance as embodied. David Shulman (2016) observes that

the Tamil சங்கம் (*Sangam*) poetry, starting to be composed around the second century BCE, was valued more for its rendition in embodied performances, though it was written on palm leaves and stones. அபிநயம் (*abhinaya*) valued how poets rendered the text with theatrics and gestures that characterized the poem's meaning and significance. Needless to say, these embodied renditions were entextualized by the performance ecology. Audiences were sensitive to the setting, performers, and theatrics for the way they entextualized the meaning differently in every performance. Since the words were always the same in performances that spanned centuries, it was the affective experience அனுபவம் (*anubhavam*) that received more significance, and provided meaning and value to the text. Shulman emphasizes that "Sound, syllables, words—all are inscribed not so much in ink-borne graphemes as in the performer's body and in visible space" (p. 131).

It is not that we were unaware of the communicative norms in the West. We were colonized by them for more than 500 years. They still influenced the institutionalized practices in certain elite contexts, such as schools, administration, and professions. We also had many local people who leaned more towards colonial epistemologies and pointed out the limitations of our indigenous practices. They would insist on an English that approximated the British or American "native speaker" norms as the legitimate variety; language purity that disparaged our pidgins and nativizations; disembodied close analysis of texts for objective interpretations; and a logocentrism that valued the rationality and precision of linguistic communication over other modalities.

For many of us, these communicative practices were intuitive and embodied, not theorized in detachment. However, though our *practice* was shaped by our indigenous norms, our *policies* were influenced by the West. Also, many overlapping discourses lived side by side. These tensions generated creative forms of strategic negotiation and new communicative practices. Our intuitions also led to gradual structural changes, even subtly resisting the modernist ideologies imposed on us during colonization. The more critically reflective teachers and students engaged in transforming communicative norms. Local journals, even academic ones, used Sri Lankan English for articles; codeswitching was becoming more acceptable in professional contexts; those who adopted pidginized versions (called "non-standard Sri Lankan English" by the privileged) occupied important social and professional positions and felt comfortable with the vernacular in formal contexts; and the English-speaking and English-educated didn't enjoy the predictable privileges that used to come with their language proficiency, as earlier instituted in the colonial times. It must be confessed that local scholars are comfortable with their language practices and ideologies that they don't feel motivated to engage in epistemic decolonization as a conscious mission (as defined in the West). They have other life pressures from the poverty, injustice, and underdevelopment in

everyday life to care for that they didn't find time to discourse on (academic) epistemological resistance. Decolonization was embodied and embedded in local intersectional struggles involving caste, region, religion, gender, and land, and not undertaken in relation to academic discourses in the Global North.

I soon had to deal with these policy/practice tensions and develop a reflective awareness when I started working as a university instructor of English in my hometown. Like almost all local English teachers in our schools and universities, I had done all my education in the Tamil-medium, with English as a separate subject. At that time, we were largely professionalized through our teaching practice and didn't have separate pedagogical training. I had never traveled outside the country or was exposed to other pedagogies or English varieties. Like almost everyone else, my pedagogy consisted of something resembling grammar translation method, with codeswitching into English and Tamil, and using Sri Lankan English for classroom interactions, though the texts donated to us by the Asia Foundation (a wing of the US Information Agency) featured American or British English. Things came to a head when the Asia Foundation brought three American applied linguists to our rural university for professional development workshops during my second year on the job. After completing their planned training, the experts asked some of us to demonstrate our teaching in a mock class set up for this purpose. I did what we always do: I used considerable Tamil to explain grammatical points; used Sri Lankan English for my interactions with students; and analyzed the narratives (designed to illustrate grammar points) to understand the context and develop a critical perspective on the values and ideologies informing them (see Canagarajah 1993 for more on the texts and their values). The students were fully engaged and I succeeded in accomplishing what I intended. However, I was surprised to find that the American experts were not impressed with my teaching. I seemed to have confused them. They wanted to know what my teaching method was (i.e., how it related to the then-fashionable task based or communicative language teaching), what my target language was in this lesson (i.e., if I intended to teach Sri Lankan English or Tamil), and what my pedagogical objectives were (i.e., as I seemed to be moralizing rather than teaching English grammar). I felt humiliated by their questions as I wasn't aware that our typical teaching methods were inferior, and I didn't know why codeswitching or Sri Lankan English were not acceptable in the classroom.

4 Theorizing local communicative practices

That humiliating experience started in me a search to critically reflect on our intuitive local practices in communication and language teaching. I have since

read many scholars who have analyzed the different orientations to language between our region and the Global North (such as Annamalai 2001 and Pollock 2009). I briefly present here the theorization of Lachman Khubchandani in his book *Revisualizing Boundaries: A Plurilingual Ethos* (1997). It explains the rationale for our local language practices. I will also demonstrate how this orientation differs from the epistemological traditions and paradigms in the Global North.

Khubchandani theorizes language around the notion of *āvāsa*, “which means ‘household’, in a wider sense ‘habitat’” and which “represents the study of mutual relations between organisms and their environments” (p. 79). In other words, language is part of our habitat. Language and other semiotic repertoires are treated as integrated with land and the diverse social and environmental beings that are part of it. This orientation calls for an embodied orientation to communication, and an appreciation of how language and material life are entangled. It is for this reason that we don’t isolate the texts or words in our performance, but respond to the whole situated activity in our appreciation of கூத்து or ancient சங்கம் poetry.

This ecological orientation is influenced by the nondualist philosophies that are indigenous to our region (labeled *advaita* in Hinduism). That is, what are considered separate and hierarchical in the West (such as mind/body, human/nonhuman, spiritual/material, and text/context, with the first term in each pair treated as primary or superior) are seen as integrated. This distinguishes our orientation from structuralist linguistics in the West which treated language as enjoying its own autonomous system, disconnected from social or material conditions. The latter domains are typically treated as secondary to language, merely providing the context or setting, but not integrated with grammar. The structuralist notion of grammar was later given a mental locus by Chomsky’s theorization. His cognitivism promotes other modernist tropes such as the transcendental status of the mind, the capacity to speak as innate, and language endowing the mind with a blue print to represent, regulate, and remake the world.

My heritage understanding of language as part of our habitat has other implications. It means that our material life cannot be disconnected from our languages. Our language embodies our collective histories, experiences, and environmental resources. This orientation accounts for the linguistic sovereignty of local communities which each claim a right to speak their own language. But the notion of habitat also develops a rationale for tolerance and sharing of diverse languages. Since it is the land that is the frame of reference for communication and identity, all languages and semiotic repertoires in a given place are treated as belonging to that ecosystem. Communities develop a tolerant disposition towards the languages in their environment. Khubchandani gives examples from many minority communities in the region which have preserved their languages in migrant contexts for centuries (including his own Sindhi) because they cherished

the embodiment of their identities and communities in their new habitations. Host communities also treated these languages as making up the local environmental ecology, by virtue of their shared history. Compare with this orientation the Herderian triad which informs language ownership in the Global North. Modernist orientations have treated language, community, and place as isomorphic. That is, a language exclusively represents a community, and both belong exclusively to that place. This orientation territorializes languages and identities. Note, therefore, a distinction between both epistemologies on their orientation to land. I draw from the space/place distinction in human geography (Massey 2005) to distinguish indigenous orientations which treat land as *space* that is expansive, primordial, and agentive, and different from the European modernist orientation which treats land as *place* which is territorialized through human control.

Modernist discourses have also adopted a biological orientation to languages. Notions such as native speaker, speech community, and language ownership essentialize languages as part of one's genetic makeup either explicitly or implicitly. Furthermore, notions such as *language family* and *language trees* treat languages themselves as sharing a common genealogy. In treating languages as evolving from a common ancestry, they also adopt a Darwinian orientation, treating more developed forms of language as superior and earlier languages as unfit for survival. However, treating land as the frame of orientation for the ecological life of language motivates Khubchandani to appreciate the co-existence between languages in environmental ecologies. He argues, "Many Indian languages belonging to different families show parallel trends of development ... [They] exhibit many phonological, grammatical and lexical similarities and are greatly susceptible to borrowing from the languages of contact" (p. 80). Rather than competing with each other for the survival of the fittest, these languages influence and complement each other. He thus appreciates the co-evalness of diverse semiotic systems. Languages also go beyond their family trees and genetic make up to resemble each other. A good example of this process are Tamil and Sinhala, the main languages in Sri Lanka. Though the former is classified as Indo-European and the latter Dravidian in heritage, thus feeding many racist ideologies by colonial scholars which led to post-independence conflicts between both language groups, sober minded linguists point out that these languages share many structural similarities from their history of inhabiting the same geographical space for centuries (Coperahewa 2007).

For this reason, Khubchandani offers for the region a different language map that doesn't depend on language families or trees. He adopts a spatial metaphor *kshetras* to show diverse languages co-existing in the ecological environment, and developing shared and distinguishing features as they move further geographically in their habitation: "These zones can be visualized as a rainbow; here

different dimensions interflow symbiotically into one another, responsive to differences of density as in an osmosis” (p. 84). To further illustrate how languages work together in a shared space, he cites many hybrid languages that have evolved there over time, to the point that one cannot say which labeled language they claim as native to them. To explain the rationale for these mixed languages, Khubchandani says, “The edifice of linguistic plurality in the Indian subcontinent is traditionally based upon the complementary use of more than one language and more than one writing system for the same language in one ‘space’” (p. 96). While some of these languages were instantaneous mixings for temporary functions in contact situations, others developed their own labels after being enregistered over time with their own functions and values. In fact, some of these languages developed enregisterment for literate genres. The best known in my community is the மணிபிரவளம் (*manipravala*), which is an appropriation of the learned language Sanskrit by the regional vernacular Tamil for discoursing on Hindu religious and philosophical discourses. Less known is ஆர்வி (*arwi*), a mix of Arabic and Tamil for discoursing on Islamic religious discourse among Tamil-speaking Muslims in Sri Lanka.

Note here that such hybrid practices defy the “creole exceptionalism” (Degraff 2005) that is prevalent in modernist linguistics. From this biased perspective, instantaneously mixed and functional languages are treated as pidgins and creoles that are deficient and not enjoying the status of full-fledged languages. The fluidity of languages and identities was disorienting to our colonial administrators. In fact, local scholars have documented how differences in speech and appearance were used to construct rigid language labels and ethnic identities, and imposed by colonial administrators for purposes of efficient governance, serving objectives such as census, demography, and taxation (see Mohan 1992). However, colonial administrators were also exasperated that local people would give different identifications of their “native” languages in census because this concept was alien to them. The British, therefore, concluded that the natives were instinctive liars!

If communication in my community involves such unpredictable and spontaneous mixing, a troubling question for mainstream linguistics is how people can communicate with each other. The structure of grammar and the norms of labeled languages provided predictability and control for communication in modernist linguistics. Local communities couldn’t (and didn’t) depend on predefined grammars and norms for meaning making. Rather they focused on strategies and practices to co-construct grammars and indexicality. In fact, the focus on strategies rather than norms (or forms) is a huge difference in the local communicative practice from the epistemologies in Global North. Khubchandani highlights the dispositions that enable local people to adopt strategies for such diversity and

unpredictability. He explains the meaning making process as follows: “Individuals in such societies acquire more synergy (i.e., putting forth one’s own efforts) and serendipity (i.e., accepting the other on his/her own terms, being open to unexpectedness), as they develop positive attitudes to variations in speech (to the extent of even appropriating deviations as the norm in the lingua franca), in the process of ‘coming out’ from their own language codes to a neutral ground” (p. 94). *Synergy* is a willingness to collaborate with others and their diverse repertoires. *Serendipity* is the ability to accept unpredictable outcomes and go along with them. Khubchandani goes on to use a stunning paradox when he says that such processes lead the local people toward “appropriating deviations as the norm in the lingua franca.” That is, idiosyncratic and nongrammatical forms become normalized to serve as the shared code between strangers. This orientation to communication might explain why I didn’t focus on grammatical norms in my teaching practice narrated earlier. In retrospect, what I seem to have done in my model lesson was developing the dispositions of students—i.e., an awareness of language and cultural differences and ways to negotiate them, together with a critical orientation to values and ideologies. While teaching a normative grammar is inadequate for a multilingual and diverse world where grammars are unpredictable, dispositions to negotiate this diversity can help students engage in meaning making and co-construct indexicality.

5 Border thinking in the Global North

That decolonizing linguistics is a risky process was already evident to me from the publishing experience of Khubchandani. In an effort to delink knowledge, Khubchandani uses many new metaphors for linguistic processes (such as osmosis, synergy, serendipity, symbiotic, and rainbow—see the quotations above). He also adopts Sanskrit words such as *āvāsa* and *kshetra*. He does make a concession to mainstream linguistics in the title of the book by using the label “plurilingualism”—a label he doesn’t develop much in his book. It is possible that the title was suggested by the multinational publisher Sage for marketing purposes. The challenge for Khubchandani’s delinking practice is that his Sanskrit terms might be treated as esoteric and English metaphors treated as poetic by scholars in mainstream linguistics. The question is whether these new terms will gain uptake by a wider group of readers and go through social and ideological processes of enregisterment to index an alternative linguistics. In my conversations with scholars in the Global North, I find that many don’t know Khubchandani, and a few think of his publications as philosophical rather than linguistic. Such responses point that the uptake of his work has been problematic outside

South Asia. In fact, the book itself was published by Sage in its New Delhi house and not in its London or New York branches, presumably because Sage considered the book as relevant only to readers in India.

How do we practice border thinking and translation for effective enregisterment and transformation of mainstream linguistics? That has been the major concern for me during my studies and teaching after I migrated to USA. I have taken gradual steps by trying out diverse metaphors and constructs with an eye for the needs of uptake, indexicality, and enregisterment. I always kept in mind that epistemic resistance is not an individual activity, but a social and historical activity that involves diverse agents and institutions. Though I had discoursed on indigenous communicative practices with local metaphors earlier in Sri Lanka, I later chose terms that might resonate with other progressive scholars beyond my community during my teaching and scholarship in USA. In the beginning, I worked with paradigms that had received some enregisterment as resistant constructs to expand them for my purposes. There are many paradigms in critical theory that have been useful for me. In the interest of space, I discuss only two contrastive examples below.

In the beginning, I found value in World Systems Theory (WST), initiated by Latin American economists (Cardoso and Faletto 1979; Prebisch 1962) and developed by Marxist theorists such as Gunder Frank (1966) and Wallerstein (1976), which had considerable uptake in progressive circles in the Global South. I adopted the center/periphery framework to articulate geopolitical differences in language and literacy. My *Geopolitics of Academic Writing* (2002a) is an example of this work where I question the dominance of European and Anglicist norms in academic writing and publishing. In this book, I demonstrate the differences in writing and knowledge construction as practiced in my local academic community, and critique how the publishing industry both sustains and enforces material inequalities via language and literacy and naturalizes modernist European epistemologies around the world. In other publications, I articulated the implications for policy work on how we can reconfigure teaching, literacy, and language planning in terms of “local knowledge” (see Canagarajah 2005). Adopting the metaphor of a periphery that will always be unruly and resistant because of its off-center status, I articulated the limitations of established communicative and pedagogical practices of the center. I translated the value of multilingual communication and embodied/holistic teaching as practiced in the South. In some ways, I turned the tables on the center by celebrating the practices of the periphery. Much of this work also involved developing solidarity with scholars from marginalized and minoritized academic communities in the North and South (as one can see from edited works in Canagarajah 2002b, 2005).

However, I soon found that the enregisterment of the center/periphery metaphor was complicated. While scholars from multilingual backgrounds in the

Global South found this line of scholarship resonating with their experiences and thinking (see review by Sadeghi 2007), Global North scholars considered this work off putting. A TESOL expert damned my critical response to her state-of-the-art essay on writing scholarship by simply citing the Marxist metaphors informing my contribution. She responded that the Marxist discourse informing my article was reductive, old fashioned, and off putting (see Raimes 1993). Reviewers of my publications often commented that the center/periphery distinction sounded too binary and hierarchical for even progressive scholars who were interested in seeing social domains as fluid and layered in terms of the dominant postmodern discourses popular at that time (see Campbell 2003). Other decolonizing scholars have encountered a similar response to the center/periphery framing. Mignolo (2000: 313–338) comments on how he has received criticism for employing the center/periphery paradigm in Global North academic circles, but notes that fellow scholars in the Global South find this framing resonating well with their experience.

Furthermore, I found that the WST discourse was treated as functioning at the macro level of language practices and not relevant to the microlevel processes of communicative interactions. Another TESOL expert commented after one of my conference presentations, “Good politics; bad pedagogy.” The implication was that my approach was not informed by linguistics but politics, and that it didn’t translate well to pedagogical application or the concerns of pragmatic practitioners. In fact, metaphors from Marxist and WST discourses were enregistered in linguistic circles as identifying progressive theories in social sciences and irrelevant to practitioners in language and literacy. WST’s structuralist roots were considered operating at a macro social level, and not relevant for micro social or everyday communicative concerns. It was also identified as a paradigm for deconstructing the status quo, but having little to say about how to reconstruct practices and relationships. In other words, it was a tool for critique, not alternatives. It thus encouraged a separation of policies/ideologies from texts/interactions, and didn’t relate well to embodied and intersectional activism.

I adopted the metaphor “translingualism” next, with the possibility of overcoming some of the above limitations. In addition to having the possibility of indexing the communicative practices from my locality, it was a construct that was receiving enregisterment within circles of language and literature as native to these disciplinary fields. If Marxism or WST were treated as imports from social sciences, translingualism has its origins in educational linguistics. The term “*trawsieithu*” coined by doctoral student Cen Williams in Wales in the context of bilingual studies was later translated by Colin Baker (2001) into English as “translanguaging.” Lydia Liu (1995) had used “translingual practice” in translation studies to discuss how meanings exceeded or operated beyond the structures of labeled languages of

Chinese and English. This construct enabled me to articulate the practices of multilinguals from the Global South on how they drew strategically from diverse semiotic resources to resist the control of meanings according to the norms and practices imposed on them by the privileged. It resonated with the communicative practices of Indian novelist Raja Rao, Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, the African American sociolinguist Geneva Smitherman, and Chicana feminist scholar Gloria Anzaldúa who had all crafted a written language that meshed their own vernaculars with English to develop a resistant communicative practice. It is possible to see translingual practices as accommodating the types of instantaneous pidgins and well established hybrid languages such as மணிபிரவளம் and ஆர்வி from my own heritage. It also facilitated the possibility of representing an orientation to communication beyond monolingual and territorialized communication in diverse communities in the Global South from precolonial times (as I review in chapter 3 of my 2013 book *Translingual Practice*). In fact, de Souza Santos (2016) alludes to Lydia Liu's book on translingual practice approvingly (see p. 214) and defines his own term "intercultural translation" relatedly as "a living process of complex interactions among heterogeneous artifacts, both linguistic and nonlinguistic, combined with exchanges that far exceed logocentric or discourse-centric frameworks" (p. 214).

However, no construct or label is free of indexical polysemy. Even translingualism has been interpreted and applied in ways that relate to different scholars' positionalities. Therefore, I had to engage in border thinking between my heritage and dominant paradigms to translate translingualism for the interests of the communities that mattered to me. To begin with, I treated translingualism as a form of *practice* rather than a *product*. This perspective was so important that I emphasized this in the very title of my book, *Translingual Practice* (Canagarajah 2013). That is, this form of communication is not another grammatical system with its own universal norms or homogeneous use by all speakers. Its grammatical and representational outcomes would vary according to the interests and contexts of the interlocutors. It is therefore a form of resistant practice—i.e., how interlocutors engage with the semiotic resources and the established meanings of each context to renegotiate them for more inclusive and ethical outcomes. This is analogous to how Homi Bhabha (1999) defines hybridity as not a product but a resistant strategy. He argues: "For me, hybridization is really about how you negotiate between texts or cultures or practices in a situation of power imbalances in order to be able to see the way in which strategies of appropriation, revision, and iteration can produce possibilities for those who are less advantaged to be able to grasp in a moment of emergency, in the very process of the exchange or the negotiation, the advantage. [...] For me, hybridization is a discursive, enunciatory, cultural, subjective process having to do with the struggle around authority, authorization, deauthorization, and the revision of authority. It's a social process. It's not about persons of diverse

cultural tastes and fashions” (1999: 39). Bhabha is perceptive in anticipating that the construct could be appropriated as an essentialized “product” by both critics and fans.

As I continued to engage with empirical work in studying communicative practices in diverse transnational contexts and drew from my heritage, I expanded the meaning of translanguaging. While the term had been largely treated as addressing the place of verbal resources beyond their labeled/separated languages (as indexed by the prefix “trans”), I emphasized that the prefix could also index other meanings such as: beyond verbal resources to being entangled with diverse semiotic repertoires; beyond texts to being entangled with diverse social networks and material ecologies; and beyond context-bound appropriateness and stratification to transformation of contexts and structures. Translanguaging, for me, included treating communicative practice as involving a distributed practice between diverse semiotic repertoires in relation to relevant social networks and material ecologies as interlocutors negotiated meanings and indexicalities to favor inclusive and ethical interests (see Canagarajah 2018a, 2018b). Note, however, that the notion of “negotiation” implies that there is something to negotiate with or against. These are regimes, institutions, structures, norms, and ideologies that impose limiting, partisan, and exclusionary interests. Therefore, translanguaging as a practice involves constant repositioning in relation to the changing configurations of power to achieve ethical, inclusive, and just interests. In this manner, I defined *translingual practice* to index the orientations from my South Asian linguistics as articulated by Khubchandani and embodied in my community practice as narrated earlier.

6 Divergent uptakes in the Global North

I move to now review the uptake of the translingual construct in mainstream linguistics and literacy circles in the Global North. As it is to be expected, translanguaging is being taken up in different ways in relation to divergent scholarly interests. Many critical applied linguists have theorized translanguaging’s resistant value against modernist and monolingual ideologies and aligned it with movements for superdiversity, mobility, and urban communication (Blommaert 2013; Creese and Blackledge 2010). Some scholars like Native American scholar Ellen Cushman (2016) and African American scholar Keith Gilyard (2016) acknowledge its decolonizing potential, though they suggest further areas of application for developing its politics. However, other uptakes are unfavorable and require closer analysis. I list four broad strands of uptake that complicate the resistant politics of this orientation.

6.1 Academic uptake: translingualism as the new canon, or a slogan with cachet, for academic promotion

Some scholars see translingualism as the new orthodoxy in academic circles in the Global North. From this status, it is sometimes exploited by scholars for their personal promotion and by universities for marketing their programs. Jobs are beginning to be advertised for specialization in translingualism. Publishers are beginning to commission more books and journals on this subject. In these ways, translingualism serves the neoliberal impulse of the academy to be entrepreneurial and devise theories and labels to brand scholarship as novel. Labeling this the “multi/pluri bandwagon,” Kubota (2016) observes: “its knowledge is becoming another canon—a canon which is integrated into a neoliberal capitalist academic culture of incessant knowledge production and competition for economic and symbolic capital” (p. 475).

6.2 Market uptake: translingualism as a marketable resource or practice in the professions and economy

Beyond academia, translingualism is appropriated by the market to further profit making interests in economy and industries. The key strategy of neoliberal profit making, *flexibilization*, would certainly benefit from language ideologies that favor repertoire building rather than static and territorialized language proficiencies. Such linguistic flexibilization would help mobile professionals to travel to different locations on short term gigs and interact with multinational people for production or business purposes. Kubota (2013) has articulated from her research in East Asian industrial contexts that multinational companies favor functional proficiencies in mixed languages (resembling “truncated multilingualism”—Blommaert 2010) rather than advanced proficiencies or normative grammars. Such proficiencies would suit the rapid deployment of workers and professionals to favor changing markets and products. Furthermore, a market that favors new inventions and more efficient production practices would benefit from creative communication. Nelson Flores observes that proficiencies in multiple languages may fit “the desire for flexible workers and lifelong learners to perform service-oriented and technological jobs as part of a post-Fordist political economy” (2013: 500).

6.3 Philosophical uptake

As both forms of uptake above are exploitative and superficial, they have led to the appropriation of translingualism that reduces its critical edge. The

following are two ideological effects of the academic and market uses of translingualism:

- A. Translingualism as a remix of existing languages and/or a continuation of dominant language ideologies.

For some scholars, translingualism is treated as continuing the traditional orientations to language, perhaps with a more fluid and extensive mix of language resources. Translingualism is thus treated as part of the earlier scholarship on codeswitching or code mixing, simply dressed up as a new theory or paradigm for attention. Pavlenko states: “The very terms *translanguaging*, *polylinguaging*, *crossing*, and *truncated repertoires* are anchored in the idea of languages as codes, whose idealized norms and wholes we truncate and whose boundaries we may or may not cross” (2018: 160). Kubota identifies the orientation as situated within earlier scholarly paradigms such as postcolonialism and multiculturalism, and their celebration of hybridity as an essentialized product. She observes: “the conceptual features of the multi/plural turn overlap with neoliberalism and neoliberal multiculturalism, which uncritically support diversity, plurality, flexibility, individualism, and cosmopolitanism, while perpetuating color-blindness and racism” (2016: 474). Unfortunately, such writing would serve as meta-pragmatic texts to reify the meaning of translingualism away from the embodied practices that inform it in the Global South.

- B. Translingualism as an essentializing and universalizing construct.

The mainstreaming of translingualism also results in the construct being interpreted as another universalizing and essentializing discourse that is not friendly to diversification. Keith Gilyard is concerned about “the flattening of language differences, the notion of language as an abstraction, the danger of translingualism becoming an alienating theory for some scholars of color, and deeper study of powerfully translanguaging students” (2016: 284). Gilyard observes that translingualism treats everyone’s linguistic challenges and discriminations as similar in processes and outcomes, without studying the specificity of the discrimination in relation to the positioning of various groups in the social hierarchy. Gilyard’s critique is justified because of the practical consequences of doing and reading research primarily in English in the Global North. Scholars here don’t have access to the research and practices in other languages in other parts of the world. For example, scholars are not informed about practices such as மணிபிரவளம் or ஆர்வி that are well known in South Asia, and scholarship relating to them for centuries. As most scholars in the North undertake critical research on European languages, there is the further perception among scholars here that translingualism only relates to privileged language groups. Note, however, that this

justifiable critique by scholars in the North would function as metapragmatic cues that further solidify the enregisterment of translingualism as an essentializing or privileged discourse.

6.4 Progressive uptake: translingualism as textual or identity politics at local level, and disconnected from more important material and structural changes

Critical applied linguists see translingualism as not going far enough to have transformative potential. They associate translingualism with partial concerns in social justice struggles and, therefore, ineffective as a politics of resistance. David Block (2018) has critiqued translingualism as focused solely on identity politics, as in popular activist discourses in the Global North, and not addressing material inequalities. Block borrows from Nancy Fraser's critique of identity politics to argue that without material changes, such as redistribution of resources, identity politics is ineffective. From this perspective, translingualism will be interpreted as a "feel good" politics to assuage minoritized communities. It is an ideology of cheap affirmation of marginalized languages and identities without institutional changes and material implications. Along with this critique of what we might label "resistance-lite," other scholars observe that efforts towards translingual justice in classrooms, texts, and social media are ineffective without changes at the institutional, policy, or structural level. Heng Hartse and Kubota (2014) argue that efforts to pluralize academic publishing by making spaces for alternate styles and registers are bound to fail because editorial guidelines and publishing policies favor language normativity and privileged registers. Kubota goes further to treat such interest in classrooms and texts as "moving further away from real-world problems" (2016: 461). Therefore Kubota demands from such paradigms "increased attention to places where real problems exist" (2016: 462). It appears that changes at localized spaces in texts, classrooms, and identities are treated as misdirected or unreal.

7 Explaining the uptake in Global North

How do we interpret these processes of uptake in the Global North? The diverse processes of appropriation behind the way the academy and the market work would not spare any resistant epistemology. These are the forces that all decolonizing activities have to contend with.

To begin with the academy, the ways disciplinary paradigms work have built into them processes of centralization. These processes involve appropriating resistant theories which gain ascendancy as part of science's quest for truth, objectivity, and progress. Liberal social constructionist theorizations on the formation of academic paradigms treat such cycles of resistance/change/centralization as the universal process of knowledge construction. Kuhn's (1962) "structures of scientific revolutions" articulates how established paradigms collapse when arguments against them mount and a scholarly consensus develops on their inadequacy. Thereafter, the resistant orientations become established as the dominant paradigm for the scientific community to conduct its inquiry. However, orthodoxy involves understandable reduction in criticality and complexity for any resistant thinking. It is arguable whether translingualism has deposed the dominant monolingual paradigm in the Global North and become the new orthodoxy. The fact that racist, nationalist, and xenophobic discourses are still powerful, giving more life to restrictive language ideologies, suggests that many monolithic language ideologies are still powerful. However, decolonial scholars have to be wary of translingualism becoming the new orthodoxy or celebrated as a "theory," and always treat translingualism as a resistant practice that changes its positioning in relation to the assemblages of power in every context.

Secondly, market forces cannot be sidestepped whether in academia or outside. No theory or practice, however resistant, can be treated as free of the market in the current neoliberal dispensation. In fact, the promotion of resistant and indigenous thinking is not completely in the hands of decolonial scholars. There is very little they can do to prevent the market's efforts to appropriate any intellectual, cultural, or material product for its profit making purposes. In fact, no one stands free of market, dominant ideologies, and structural arrangements. We can discuss how these structures should be consciously resisted for progressive purposes, but we cannot operate free of them. Even scholars in Global South should not consider themselves and their discourses standing outside dominant market and geopolitical structures. Though some progressive scholars in Global North adopt the tone of criticizing other scholars as complicit with market forces and themselves and their theories more ideologically pure, they misunderstand the power of the market to appropriate everything. Even criticism of other progressive theories and claims of one's own theories as "more woke" play many useful functions for the market and the status quo. Dominant groups might exploit internal debate to call progressive movements as hypocritical and argue for business as usual. Schmenk (2018) observes how even the labels used to critique dominant academic labels will themselves become the new brands for marketization.

We have to be also wary of the appropriations and distortions involved in any "traveling theory." Edward Said (1983) has analyzed how theories of certain times

and places go through changes when they are taken up in other places and times. Orientalism was itself an example of this, with great pertinence to the fate of epistemologies from the Global South. Given these appropriating processes, it is not surprising that translanguaging is taken up differently in the Global North and enregistered with divergent values from what it indexes in the South. Even well-meaning progressive scholars in the North might interpret translanguaging according to dominant northern social philosophies that are alien to the principles informing the practice in the South. So, separations such as identity politics and material redistribution, local and structural, and classrooms and policies, with the latter treated as more determinative of the former and more significant for social transformation, is a western philosophical bias. We might recall the tiring debates on base and superstructure in traditional Marxism, for example, which influence the binaries and hierarchies mentioned in the current scholarly debates on translanguaging. For the South, where epistemologies of nonduality are significant, these domains are interconnected, with social transformation gaining trajectories that are embodied and nonlinear. As we noted earlier, even spirituality, art, narrative, and culture play active roles in political transformation for indigenous communities. From this perspective, treating certain domains as not part of the “real-world” is also alien to the South. The “real” accommodates many affective, imaginative, cultural, and spiritual experiences that are all equally significant for social and political life on the South. Furthermore, in some circles in the North, critique is given more importance than gradual, protracted, and imaginative initiations of change. Social transformation is largely addressed in policy or institutional and macrosocial levels. However, decolonial scholars like Walsh, Mignolo, and Santos recommend relinking as accommodating affective, spiritual, identity, life style, pedagogical, and community level changes, without any of them treated as simplistic or irrelevant.

8 La Lucha Continua

How do we proceed then in maintaining the decolonizing edge of translanguaging in the context of such divergent uptake and indexicality? That a construct is enregistered in different ways in its travels to other communities and its appropriations by the market and academia is not the exception but the rule. What is more important is to *engage* with them on an ongoing basis to maintain the critical edge of southern epistemologies. While Global South scholars may themselves travel to other institutions and communities, such as academia in the North, it is important to be conscious of our locus of enunciation in our land and heritage to generate resistant thinking and practices.

So what should we do about translingualism? Should we abandon it as a label because it is now tainted by appropriation and manipulation? It is the diversifying and resistant communicative *practices* that are important, not the labels that describe them. However, using semiotic resources to discourse about our resistant practices of the Global South is unavoidable. Though many of these creative and resistant practices are intuitive and embodied, and will continue to thrive at that realm, we need to discourse about them to develop shared global struggles in solidarity with others. Furthermore, in order to make structural and policy changes, we must engage with dominant epistemologies. We cannot avoid engaging with theories and practices in the North to generate pluriversal epistemologies, literacies, and pedagogies. All this will involve the construction of resistant semiotic resources and their enregisterment.

It is possible that we might have to construct “new critical nouns” (de Souza Santos 2016) to undertake this decolonizing work. In fact, some scholars don’t like the term translingual (see Gilyard 2016) because the prefix indexes meanings of *transcending* diversity or inequality and leaning towards universality. I have seen some Northern scholars treating the prefix as a synonym for “transcendental,” which goes counter to the embodiment I articulated as important for epistemologies from my Tamil heritage. One can of course imagine adopting labels from southern languages to undertake this decolonizing work in linguistics. For example, *āvāsa* from Khubchandani (1997), *ubuntu translanguaging* from Makalela (2017), *kene/dami* tradition of the Kashinawa in Brazil (de Souza 2002), and the *tlaquilolitzli* in Mexico (Baca 2009) are meaningful other possibilities. These labels will continue to have significance and currency for those local communities, and it is important to preserve the local knowledge relating to these constructs in the spirit of pluriversality and fostering a rich range of practices and discourses. However, adopting one of these terms for translocal conversations will not solve the problem of divergent uptakes and indexicalities. No label can remain free of marketization, appropriation, and centralization. In fact, *āvāsa* or *ubuntu* might only become a more exotic, “authentic,” and effective brand for marketization. They might become the next new shiny object for commodification.

Therefore, I articulate a practice of enregistering resistant meanings for any well motivated label we might adopt for decolonial communicative practices. Whatever the label, such practices of enregisterment need strategic engagement. There is a role for social agents to engage in resistant enregisterment rather than treating uptake as totally impersonal or lying in the hands of the privileged social groups and institutions. Agha observes: “A register grows in social domain when more and more people align their self-images with the social personae represented in such images. The stereotypic social range of the register may change during the social process of its demographic expansion when those exposed to it seek to

formulate additional, partly independent, or even counter-valued image of what its usage entails” (2005: 56). There is thus space for our qualified agency in enregisterment.

I provide an example of such ongoing and strategic enregisterment from the resistant strategies of the diversity workers (mostly British university administrators in charge of diversity issues) whom Sara Ahmed (2012) interviewed for her book *On Being Included*. Ahmed and the workers are focused on the enregisterment of the word “diversity.” They are aware of the ways in which “diversity” is currently used to index nonthreatening ways to engage in efforts towards inclusivity. In fact, many institutions are said to prefer this word as a safe alternative to others such as “equality” or “access” which tend to index critical action or an agonistic footing. We realize here how a term that had positive implications for social justice in some circles gets appropriated for affirming the status quo over time. However, Ahmed goes on to show how progressive workers use “diversity” strategically for institutional transformation. In fact, “strategy” is the term Ahmed uses to interpret the efforts towards enregisterment these workers undertake (2012: 72). One strategy is to use the term “diversity” to start a conversation, as the audience is more receptive to it. But as the conversation progresses, the workers use this word in proximity to other words such as “equality” or “access” to develop edgier indexicalities for “diversity.” Sociolinguists might say that these workers are constructing a strategic “co-text” to recontextualize the enregisterment of “diversity.” From this point of view, whether “diversity” is a good word or a bad word, a “woke” word or neoliberal cliché, is not the question the workers are worried about. They focus on how the word can be strategically redeployed for transformation, enregistering resistant meanings.

Ahmed sums up her findings on the strategies of these diversity workers as follows, using her own metaphors for this process of enregisterment:

Even if diversity workers cannot determine the contexts in which diversity circulates, they can aim to give it the right context when and where it does come up. We might think of this process as a politics of reattachment: practitioners aim to reattach diversity to the meanings it may lose on or in its travels. If the success of diversity is partly that it becomes detached from histories of struggle over inequality, then the success of diversity work might require reattaching the word to those same histories. (80)

We might consider “reattachment” as the term Ahmed uses for enregisterment through strategic co-texts. And note below how she uses words such as “pointer,” “point,” and “refer to” to address sociolinguists’ perspectives on indexicality. How the new *word* constructs a new *world* (or new communities and realities) Ahmed goes on to explain as part of enregisterment:

If diversity is a pointer, then it is a way of directing or being directed. You have to learn as well as follow its point. A community can take shape through the circulation of diversity. Diversity does not refer us to something (a shared object that exists outside of speech) or even necessarily create something that can be shared. But in being spoken, and repeated in different contexts, a world takes shape around diversity. To speak the language of diversity is to participate in the creation of a world. (81)

Similarly, the challenge for decolonial linguists is to constantly engage with our labels and metaphors to enregister resistant meanings and values. This is not an option, but a necessity. Dominant institutions and groups are already engaged in appropriating “new critical nouns” and enregistering conservative meanings to their own advantage. It is because this effort is ongoing and unrelenting that I borrow the maxim among southern activist circles, translated as “the struggle continues,” as the title for this final section.

There is still a lot of work left for translingual scholars in attaching our terms with more diverse social groups, contexts, and practices to develop their critical enregisterment. In fact, articles such as this might help in the critical enregisterment by reattaching translingualism to its locus in the Global South. Other scholars are also currently engaged in attaching the label to critical interests. See how translingualism is getting attached to raciolinguistics by some scholars (García et al. 2021; Milu 2021). We should expand the pluriversal possibilities of the term by articulating practices and experiences from more diverse contexts, communities, and communication. Such enregisterment can help resist the appropriation of the paradigm by the academy. In fact, the mission is not to limit the meaning of translingualism to index an essence, product, or totality. It is to develop diverse meanings for diverse communities—all with resistant possibilities in their own contexts. Stories and studies of more expansive contexts and communities in the Global South will provide a pluriversal co-text for a more edgy enregisterment of translingualism.

I outline some areas for research if translingualism is to further its decolonizing politics:

- Because academic research is concentrated in privileged universities and journals in the Global North, an overwhelming number of translingual studies too have been conducted in this context. More spaces have to be provided to represent translingual practices and studies from the Global South.
- Because of this geographical bias, the repertoires addressed have also been limited. As the privileged academic contexts are in English-dominant countries, most translingual studies focus on how English is negotiated by other language groups. The privileged status of English as a lingua franca also explains its overrepresentation in studies. Other European languages have also received some attention. But how do minoritized languages interact in

vernacular communicative practices? How do Sri Lankans negotiate Sinhala, Tamil, Malay, and creoles in their interaction? They might demonstrate different negotiation strategies, given the different statuses these languages enjoy in local community life.

- Studies have also adopted a binary orientation to studying English in relation to a local language. However, language practices in multilingual communities in the Global South are rarely binary. They involve multiple vernaculars and multiple other colonizing languages. My Tamil community has had to negotiate local languages such as Sinhala and Malay, in addition to the influences of previous colonizing languages such as Sanskrit, Portuguese, Dutch, and English. As we can infer, negotiation involves multiple colonial languages with uneven markets. One of my doctoral advisees is studying how the Circassian community in Russia has to negotiate the global lingua franca English, the regional lingua franca Russian, and diaspora languages such as Bosnian and Turkish that community members speak. The politics of this negotiation will be different from the binary “English versus L1” studies.
- We have to also expand the communicative activities beyond the educated, urban, and technologically advanced contexts studied hitherto. A majority of the studies have been on educational contexts, whether secondary schools or higher education contexts. Secondarily, there are also studies from urban contexts in market places, restaurants, linguistic landscapes, and social media. Such studies might distort translingual practices as belonging to the urban educated. The rich translingual traditions in the Global South belonging to rural and underprivileged communities don’t find representation. The communicative activities and repertoires will be different for these communities, as will be their politics. Consider Huamei Han’s (2017) studies on “grassroots multilingualism” among migrant small traders from Africa in their inter-racial family, community, and work interactions in China. Other communicative activities important to nonurban and less educated groups, such as domestic, community, labor, and environmental interactions will involve different practices. Consider Cathy Kell’s (2017) examples of the less literate—i.e., a South African township woman complaining about her faulty house construction in isiXhosa narrative on an exercise book to her community and civic organizations, and a New Zealand migrant worker from Samoa reporting an accident in his construction site up the chain of command on its readymade templates.
- To understand such subaltern translingual practices, we also need more archival research on communicative traditions before colonization and modernity. Though these practices are still alive in many communities, including mine, they have also gone through hybridization after colonization.

To really understand their rationale and epistemological foundations, we need archival studies. Understandably, this is a difficult undertaking as records of such practices were destroyed during European colonization. Liz Kimball's (2021) archival study of 18th century Philadelphia brings out translingual practices in the political, religious, and educational discourses of Germans, Quakers, and African Americans, and everyday interactions in Welsh, Swedish, Lenape, German, and Ladino, before English became dominant. Though set in post-independence US, the book suggests both the challenges and possibilities in doing archival research in precolonial contexts in the Global South. It is ironic that sometimes decolonization is theorized in universities in the Global North with a thin archive on how indigenous epistemologies and literacies worked.

- Such expansion of the corpus of studies, especially in less privileged contexts in the Global South, will lead to redefining many of the dominant constructs in linguistics. In many translingual studies so far, scholars have been under pressure to prove the effectiveness of such practices in terms of the constructs valued in the Global North. Consider the notion of “competence.” This construct has traditionally been defined in cognitive, individualistic, and logocentric terms, consistent with modernist ideologies. Rather than proving the efficacy of translingual practices in terms of the “competence” demonstrated by individual students or users, a decolonizing approach will lead to demonstrating how meanings are produced in collective, distributed, ethical, and embodied practices, consistent with indigenous theories of nonduality. This shift will call for different constructs to discuss people's communicative success. Or consider how translingual studies focus on “meaning” largely in terms of a demonstrable product. This obsession with literal or representational meanings is understandable, as policy makers and teachers in Global North fear that diversity leads to disharmony and unintelligibility. However, we have to decolonize this meaning of “meaning.” Minoritized communities negotiate diverse spaces of breakdown in meaning, refusal to mean, strategic ambiguity, a dizzying array of proliferation of meanings, silence, and incommunicability. All these are productive sites of meaning making, and shouldn't be confused with failure or confusion. We might call these the performative and embodied dimensions of non-representational communication, which are not always anxiety producing as they are in the Global North.
- Decolonizing translingualism will also lead to exploring more sites of intersectional activism. For example, how caste identities complicate class, language, and national identities in South Asia is a unique experience to the region that will generate a different politics and sociolinguistics. Similarly, disabled identities have not been adequately addressed in translingual

- studies. Consider how “competence” is ableist. Also its logocentrism pathologizes many people who communicate through diverse embodied practices. While the autistic are widely considered as asocial and arhetorical, Melanie Yergeau (2017) argues that her embodied forms of neurodivergent communication don’t count as communication for linguists. Similarly, a growing group of Deaf scholars are engaging with translanguaging to demonstrate a wider corpus of semiotic resources in their repertoire and expanded strategies of communication (see Snoddon and Weber 2021). Such intersectional activism will also involve transdisciplinary orientations in translanguaging research. For example, there is much that translanguaging can learn from disability studies (see Canagarajah 2022).
- Such expansion of studies in more vulnerable contexts and communities will involve further questioning of some of the foundational assumptions in linguistics to facilitate a more radical epistemological critique. Consider how the field has prioritized ableism in the form of cognitive, individual, instrumental, and logocentric communicative capabilities. The Global South brings a keen sensitivity to vulnerability as part of its oppressed history, and perceives vulnerability as communicatively resourceful. How do we theorize competence, meanings, and learning in terms of vulnerability? This exploration will take the field in directions away from control, instrumentality, and imposition to relationality, ethics, and co-existence valued by indigenous communities. Such work is just beginning (see Canagarajah 2022).

Ironically, the indexicality of “translanguaging” as other decolonizing labels is caught up in the same process of struggles for meaning that the theorization of translanguaging attempts to articulate. The bottom line for the translanguaging orientation is that meanings shouldn’t be considered as irrevocably fixed by language ideologies, grammatical structures, or “native speaker” communities. If resisting such colonizing practices is the politics of translanguaging, the very word “translanguaging” is not free of such struggles for meaning and relevance.

Acknowledgments: I thank the reviewers and editors for useful suggestions.

Research funding: None declared.

Author contributions: The author has accepted responsibility for the entire content of this manuscript and approved its submission.

Competing interests: Author states no conflict of interest.

Informed consent: Not applicable. No empirical data used.

Ethical approval: Not applicable. No empirical data used.

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