Foreword: The Transformative Possibilities of Translanguaging

Every so often we encounter a word that puts a name to a phenomenon that we have always experienced but have never known how to describe. Translanguaging has been one of those terms for me. It is a term that has helped me to make sense of the language practices of my childhood with English and Spanish coexisting in my home without any clearly demarcated boundaries between them. It has also helped me make sense of my experience as a high school ESL teacher who was forced to grapple with the tensions between the deficit discourses I relied on to make sense of the language practices of my bilingual Latinx students and their seamless ability to transcend the linguistic borders of English and Spanish on a daily basis. In short, it has provided me with tools for challenging the dominant language ideologies that pathologize the language practices of my community. For me, translanguaging has never simply been about theory – it has been about my life, my family, my students and my community.

I was first introduced to the term translanguaging when I took a doctoral seminar with Ofelia García in 2008. In this seminar, she shared chapter proofs from *Bilingual Education in the 21st Century: A Global Perspective*, which would be published the following year. Reading these chapter proofs provided me with the first glimpse into what it would look like to reimagine conceptualizations of language in ways that start from the perspective of racialized bi/multilingual communities and the implications of this for how we think about language education as part of broader efforts at social transformation. In treating the perspective of racialized bi/multilingual communities as the norm, rather than the exception, the book pushed me to question a code-centric view of language that seeks to objectively document the linguistic features of purported switches between multiple named languages and instead to embrace a person-centric view of language that did not start from the perspective of named languages but rather from the meaning-making of racialized bilingual communities. This shift in perspective empowered me to develop a counternarrative to dominant conceptualizations of bilingualism that not only shaped my professional trajectory but also helped me to embrace my own bilingualism which, until that point, I often refused to acknowledge as

being ‘truly’ bilingual. I came to realize that I, my students, my family and community, were, in fact, truly bilingual regardless of what dominant conceptualizations of bilingualism suggested.

While the term resonated deeply with me, I could not predict how much the term would resonate with others after the publication of the book. Over the past decade it has gone from being a term used primarily to describe bilingual education policy and practice in the United States to a term used in applied linguistic studies of bi/multilingual both inside and outside of classrooms around the world. While there are many great opportunities that come with such a development, there are also dangers of the term being taken up as a buzzword in ways that remove it from the perspectives of the racialized bi/multilingual communities that were its original locus of enunciation in *Bilingual Education in the 21st Century*. Indeed, as I have seen the term being taken up over the past several years, I worry that this is precisely what is happening. The more I have heard the term used at academic conferences, the more disconnected it has seemed from this locus of enunciation. At first, I assumed that I had become so acclimated to the term that it no longer felt revolutionary to me in the ways that it did before. But the more I have heard, the more I have realized that it has, in fact, begun to be used in ways that were disconnected from this locus of enunciation. *Transformative Translanguaging Espacios* brings translanguaging back to its roots and offers a path forward for those of us committed to embracing translanguaging not simply as an academic concept but rather as a political commitment.

For one, I have noticed a growing trend of translanguaging being treated as an empirical question. The questions that emerge from this mindset are what counts as translanguaging (and implicitly what does not count as translanguaging) as well as attempts to objectively determine the linguistic features that constitute translanguaging. This ironically, reinscribes the code-centric view of language that translanguaging originally rejected. In contrast, *Transformative Translanguaging Espacios* treats translanguaging as a political stance that centers the perspectives and needs of Latinxs and other racialized bi/multilingual communities. This can be seen in the ways in which the various chapters in this volume both work to challenge existing social hierarchies through a focus on political and economic issues such as gentrification and immigration and center the voices and perspectives of Latinx students and families through the incorporation of cultural and linguistic knowledge such as corridos and cuentos. The overall message of the volume is clear: centering the cultural and linguistic practices of Latinx children through the incorporation of translanguaging pedagogy must occur in conjunction with the transformation of the broader society that has deficitized the language practices of these communities to begin with.

Secondly, I have noticed a growing trend of translanguaging being treated as temporary scaffolding to dominant language practices. The questions that

emerge from this mindset are attempts to determine ‘best practices’ for supporting bilingual Latinx and other racialized bi/multilingual students in mastering ‘academic language’ in English and sometimes their home language. This ironically, re-inscribes the deficit discourses that translanguaging originally rejected. *Transformative Translanguaging Espacios* is not interested in ‘best practices.’ Instead, it is interested in theorizing the relationship between linguistic transformation and broader social transformation and the role of education in facilitating both forms of transformation. From this perspective, the question is not whether translanguaging pedagogy is effective at increasing test scores or developing ‘balanced’ bilingualism, but the affordances of translanguaging pedagogy as a tool for a broader decolonial project that challenges dominant language ideologies and the broader structural processes that produce and reify these language ideologies.

Thirdly, I have seen translanguaging increasingly used simply as a substitute for code-centric views of language often associated with theories of code-switching. This serves to frame translanguaging as the language practices of the Other – as something exotic in comparison to the monolingual white middle-class norm. *Transformative Translanguaging Espacios* rejects this exoticization by framing the cultural and linguistic practices of bilingual Latinx children as the norm. By doing so, it points to the ways in which translanguaging offers a new framework for understanding the language practices of *all* people. Everybody, whether they are positioned as monolingual, bilingual or multilingual, has to negotiate the sociohistorical construction of languages, dialects and registers, and often to do this in ways that deviate from the arbitrary linguistic boundaries produced by these sociohistorical constructions. The translanguaging perspective offered here provides a point of entry for critically interrogating why the linguistic border crossing of Latinx and other racialized bilingual communities are positioned as deviant while white middle-class communities who engage in similar linguistic border crossing continue to be perceived as the unmarked norm.

In short, racialized bi/multilingual communities were the initial locus of enunciation from which contemporary theorization of translanguaging has emerged. *Transformative Translanguaging Espacios* uses the case of Latinxs in US schools as a point of entry for reconnecting translanguaging to this locus of enunciation. Through its unapologetic centering of the lives and experiences of Latinx bilingual children, through its insistence on the inherent worth of their cultural and linguistic practices and through its commitment to envisioning classroom spaces that normalize and extend their cultural and linguistic practices, this volume points to the transformative possibilities of translanguaging. Each of the chapters in this volume shows the other worlds that already exist if we know where to look for them and offers guidance on how to amplify these worlds in ways that lead to social transformation.

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