Translanguaging: what is it beyond smoke and mirrors?

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Translanguaging

What is it besides smoke and mirrors?

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Since the launch of the term translanguaging in 1994, the multiple discursive practices that are grouped under this label have been explored in over 3000 papers, covering a variety of contexts, both within and outside education. While the term has clearly resonated with researchers and practitioners, here it is argued that it is unclear what it means exactly, because there are no diagnostic criteria specifying what it is. Extensive criticism has also been put forward in the academic literature, showing that central claims are untenable in the face of overwhelming counter-evidence from a range of fields, including studies on code-switching, bilingual education, bilingual first language acquisition, language contact and language processing. However, translanguaging can become a useful instrument for researchers and practitioners if the concept is narrowed down to what it was coined for, namely pedagogical practices that are beneficial for multilingual learners. In order for this to happen, clear diagnostic criteria need to be provided for the identification of translanguaging, and research evidence from neuroscientific, structural, psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic studies on multilingualism needs to be integrated into its conceptualization.

Keywords: translanguaging, code-switching, transfer, multilingual pedagogy, bilingual education

1. Introduction

Translanguaging has been around for around 15 years, if we take García (2009) as the starting point. Over those past years, translanguaging, which is defined as "multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage in order to make sense of their bilingual worlds" (García, 2009, p. 45), has turned out to be a very successful term, which has inspired a large group of researchers and teachers interested in educational, linguistic, psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic aspects of multi-

lingualism. Some have hailed as indicating a paradigm shift in English language teaching (Anderson, 2024), but it has also been claimed to be a new theory of language (Li, 2018), which could offer new and better interpretations of multilingual practices than those provided by other approaches. In particular since the publication of García and Li's (2014) monograph, the number of publications in which the concept is explored and the contexts in which it is studied have increased exponentially. According to Prilutskaya (2021), the term translanguaging was used in nearly 3000 publications in the context of ELT teaching between 2011 and 2021. This extraordinarily large number of publications does not even include papers covering translanguaging outside pedagogical contexts or papers written before the cut-off date (see Poza, 2017, for a summary of earlier work).

Despite its popularity, the exact meaning of the term remains elusive, as it has been used to describe a wide variety of practices, both inside and outside the classroom. In recent years, many of the assumptions and claims made in the translanguaging literature have been questioned and criticised, but surprisingly little of that critique has been taken up by researchers who have chosen to work with the concept rather than with more traditional concepts such as code-switching or multilingualism.

Here I will summarize the central claims that have been put forward in the literature, and the critique voiced by various opponents, and finish with a perspective on ways forward. First, we will turn our attention to what translanguaging is and which claims are associated with it.

2. What is translanguaging?

In its original conception, the term translanguaging refers to language alternation in the educational context of Wales, where Williams (2002) recommends the use of both languages (Welsh and English) in class as good practice to further deeper understanding of the subject matter on offer. Williams provides the following definition of *trawsieithu,* which was later translated as *translanguaging*:

> Translanguaging simply means (i) receiving information in one language and (ii) using or applying it in the other language. It is a skill that happens naturally in everyday life. (Williams, 2002, p. 2, as cited in Poza, 2017, p. 112)

According to Baker (2011, p. 289), reading or reading about a topic in one language and then writing about it or discussing it in another language is beneficial, because it encourages learners to 'digest' the content matter better. Thus, the first implementations of translanguaging in Wales were based on a clear separation of the two languages in bilingual schools, albeit allowing for crosslinguistic

transfer under the assumption that the two language systems are interdependent (Cummins, 2008). In addition, in its origin, translanguaging supported the constructs of additive bilingualism (where the second does not replace the first) and "teaching for productive contact between languages" (Cummins, 2021b, p. 268). This contrasts clearly with the positions taken by García et al. (2017, 2021).

Most readers familiar with second language (L2) learning and teaching, will be surprised to hear that it is even necessary to point out that using more than one language in the classroom can be beneficial for understanding the content matter of a class when the learners know more than one language. That activating the L1 in second language learning can be beneficial is indeed by no means a new idea, as this has been advocated for decades in the literature on bilingual education (e.g., Cummins, 1991) and researchers specialising in ELT or SLA (e.g., Cook, 2001). Therefore, the novelty of Williams' translanguaging approach needs to be understood against the backdrop of the longstanding monolingual tradition in L2 learning and teaching, which was based on the assumption that L2 learners needed to be immersed in the target language in the same way as first language (L1) learners. Under this approach, best known as the Direct Method, the Natural Method or the Berlitz Method, no translation was allowed in the classroom, except for some explanation of concepts in L1 (Howatt & Smith, 2014). Teachers did not need to be bilingual and in the classroom only the target language was used (Celce-Murcia, 1991). In a similar vein, in bilingual education, the emphasis was on developing bilingualism through two separate monolingual instructional routes (Lambert & Tucker, 1972), where switching was disallowed, and so was using the children's first language in teacher–pupil interactions. The principle underlying this approach later became known as *the two solitudes assumption* (Cummins, 2007), which according to Cummins (2019) prevails in most bilingual education and L2 immersion programs, and programs for minority languages.

Evidence from a range of disciplines makes it clear that a strict monolingual approach to L2 learning is problematic. Research into language processing in multilinguals, for example, reveals that the different languages of a multilingual are always active, albeit to different degrees. Indeed, there is extensive psycholinguistic evidence that it is not even *possible* to completely switch off one's first language while using the second. The language not being processed when the bilingual is in a particular speech mode remains residually active (Soares & Grosjean, 1984; Sanoudaki & Thierry, 2015). In addition, bilinguals can pro-actively inhibit the non-target language in experimental conditions, which provides evidence for the separability of language systems during language processing (Wu & Thierry, 2017). Thus, the key question is not *whether* the first language(s) of a learner should be activated in the classroom, but *how* pedagogies can be developed that build on the insight that both languages are active during language processing.

Before discussing these issues, we will first look at the different ways in which translanguaging has been operationalised.

The majority of the publications focus on educational contexts, where the concept has had most impact (García & Kleyn, 2016), which is not surprising given the fact that it was originally coined for education. To give but a few examples, the term (pedagogical) translanguaging has been used to describe the following practices:

–   Reading a text in one language and summarising it or discussing it orally in another language (Jones, 2017; Williams, 1994).
–   Free flow of languages in a session (Yasar & Dikilitas, 2022)
–   Drawing attention to cognate forms (Arteagoitia & Howard, 2015)
–   Vocabulary teaching (Busse et al., 2020)
–   Using resources from different languages in the same class so as to develop metalinguistic awareness (Cenoz & Gorter, 2022)
–   Wordplay (Nicolarakis & Mitchell, 2023; Li, 2022)
–   Use of glosses in L1 in the margins of an L2 text (Anderson, 2022)
–   Contrastive analysis of grammar points (Hopp et al., 2021), phonological awareness (Hopp et al., 2021) or derivational morphology and compounding (Leonet et al., 2020)
–   The use of computer games and multimodal cues (including gestures) to enhance understanding of mathematics (Tai & Li, 2021)
–   Translation and interpreting (Heugh et al., 2019)

To this long but not exhaustive list of operationalisations we might add publications in the field of *linguistic landscaping*, because translanguaging can be expanded to this field too (Gorter & Cenoz, 2015). This is no doubt the case, but it should be pointed out that the seed for the expansion of the meaning of the term translanguaging to spaces outside the classroom can already be found in Williams' comment that bilingual language use in the classroom reflects bilingual practices in everyday life of bilinguals. As far as I can see, the only common denominator in all the activities listed above is that more than one language is used in most of these. The diversity of the operationalisations has led to the critique that in the course of the years "the narrow sense of translanguaging was reconfigured into a terminological house with many rooms" (Jaspers, 2018, p. 2).

The fact that there are so many operationalisations of translanguaging illustrates, first of all, the popularity of the term, and the extent to which it has resonated with researchers and practitioners. However, this diversity may also be the result of the lack of clear diagnostic criteria which specify which practices count as translanguaging and which do not. The only classification which is offered is the one in strong and weak forms of translanguaging:

> "On the one hand, there is the strong version of translanguaging, a theory that poses that bilingual people do not speak languages but rather, use their repertoire of linguistic features selectively. On the other hand, there is a weak version of translanguaging, the one that supports national and state language boundaries and yet calls for softening these boundaries.   (García & Lin, 2017: 126)

The fact that translanguaging also appears to cover situations where boundaries between languages are recognised is somewhat surprising, to say the least, given the strong opposition against the relevance of such boundaries in most of the writings on translanguaging (Otheguy et al., 2015). It also means a widening of the concept to include almost all forms of bilingual education and second language teaching.

The expansion of the term is also reflected at a theoretical level, where attention shifts from a focus on language to multimodality, which is broadly described as the use of textual, aural, linguistic, spatial, and visual resources, or modes, to construct and interpret messages (Li, 2018, p. 21). In later work, researchers working on translanguaging begin to avoid the term "language" altogether. Instead, they use the term "resources" or "repertoires" (see also the discussion on central claims).

The developments ultimately led to Li's (2018) paper in which translanguaging is presented as a theory of language and translanguaging is seen as "transcending the traditional divides between linguistic and non-linguistic cognitive and semiotic systems." (Li 2018, p. 12). While it is difficult to see how the concept could expand beyond this stage, in a follow-up paper (Li, 2022) it is claimed translanguaging is also a method. In the paper, mention is made of a few approaches that would be appropriate for studying translanguaging (participant observation within the framework of ethnography, linguistic landscaping, walking methods), but why quantitative/experimental methods are not mentioned, and to what extent the proposed methodology itself is novel or leads to novel insights remains unclear.

To be fair, it is not unusual for concepts to change over time and cover an increasing number of phenomena. Cameron (1995) has called this process of semantic extension *discursive drift* and more recently, within the field of psychology, Haslam (2016) has coined the notion *concept creep*. In the field of linguistics and literacy, such semantic extensions have been noticed in the meanings of the concepts of *multicompetence* (Cook & Li, 2016) and *literacy* (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011), for example. A clear advantage of growing the semantic coverage of a concept is that it can then become relevant for researchers and practitioners from different backgrounds and with widely differing interests, which means it is likely to be cited more widely than when it only covers a small domain. A clear disadvantage is that the concept risks to gradually lose its meaning, a process often

called *semantic bleaching* (Aitchison & Lewis, 2003). This can finally lead to a situation where users can choose themselves what they think it to means, as described by Humpty Dumpty in Alice in Wonderland. In my view, this is indeed what happened to the concept of translanguaging.

For both theoretical and pedagogical purposes we need to ensure concepts are clearly defined, so that hypotheses can be derived from it, and decisions can be taken about their operationalisation. What exactly constitutes a *translanguaging lens* (Li, 2018) and how such a lens differs from the more transparent translanguaging perspective, remains unclear. Even less transparent is the term *translanguaging space*, which is described as follows: "Translanguaging space is a space for the act of translanguaging as well as a space created through translanguaging" (Li, 2011, p. 1223), or the metaphor of the *orchestra* as in "humans orchestrate the diverse range […] of material, biological, semiotic, and cognitive properties and capacities" (Li, 2022, p. 2). Such metaphors are no doubt beautiful, but what they mean remains vague.

3.   Central claims

The key claims of the translanguaging theorists differ slightly from one position paper to another, but on the basis of Otheguy et al. (2015, 2019), Li (2018); García and Otheguy (2020), and García et al. (2021), they can be broadly summarized as follows:

1. Translanguaging is using one's idiolect, that is one's linguistic repertoire, without regard for socially and politically defined language names and labels.
2. Bilingual people language with a unitary, not dual, repertoire from which they draw features that are useful for the communicative act in which they are engaged.
3. Languages are socially constructed realities but are not psychologically real.

These claims claims have been discussed at length in various contributions to MacSwan's (2022) edited volume and in separate papers by Cummins (2021a/b), Slembrouck (2022) and Jaspers (2018). It is not possible to repeat all the points raised by these authors, and will therefore only point to a number of key issues here, to begin with the issue of the idiolect. In the translanguaging papers, mention is sometimes made of the interactions between the individual and their environment, but the emphasis on idiolects over-emphasises the individual over the social. However, because we participate in multiple overlapping speech communities (MacSwan, 2022), speakers learn to adjust various characteristics of their speech to their interlocutors and vice versa, in a process that has been termed

speech convergence or accommodation (Giles & Smith, 1979). These processes are illustrated, for example in phonetic analyses of the talk show host Larry King and his guests, in which the researchers study the role of power relations in the kinds of accommodation that are displayed. Very similar processes operate in bilinguals (Sachdev & Giles, 2014). If speakers only had their own idiolects, such accommodation would not be possible. Rather, we have to assume that there is a considerable amount of overlap in knowledge between interlocuters with respect to the systems through which we communicate. Calling these shared systems languages or grammars is a convenient, but necessary idealization. While the translanguaging literature emphasises the uniqueness of the idiolects, it is important to realise that "as a social practice, an idiolect is useless without someone else to understand it" (Cook 2022, p. 61; see also Slembrouck, 2022 for further discussion).

The second claim, that bilinguals have a unitary repertoire of features (Otheguy et al., 2015, 2019) is also inconsistent with the research evidence from studies in a range of fields, including language processing, bilingual first language acquisition and code-switching (Auer, 2022; Genesee, 2022; MacSwan; 2022). To begin with, any theory of bilingual processing needs to account for the fact that bilinguals can not only inhibit words and task schemata from non-target languages, but can also switch freely between languages and mix languages within sentences when the situation allows it (Green & Abutalebi, 2013). The Unitary Model can explain the ability to use features from different languages within one conversation or utterance when the situation allows it, but it cannot explain how and why the same speakers can choose to limit themselves to only those features that belong to one language in other circumstances. The model proposed by MacSwan (2017, 2022), the Integrated Multilingual Model, by contrast, can deal with both these abilities, as it assumes (groups of) speakers share some grammatical categories, whilst others are discrete. Further support for the fact that language systems are partly shared and partly language-specific comes from studies into lexical processing and conceptualization in bilinguals. Extensive research into cognates (words such as *television* or *computer* which have a shared form and also a shared meaning in different languages) shows that these are processed differently from non-cognates (Dijkstra et al., 2015), because cognates are shared between the lexicons, whereas language-specific items are not. In a similar vein, the Modified Hierarchical Model (Pavlenko, 2009) assumes that some concepts are shared between languages (e.g., cars) but others (e.g., emotions) are not. Interestingly, more than forty years ago, Sridhar and Sridhar (1980) already realised that there is neither evidence for linguistic independence of the language systems in bilinguals, nor for a complete merger. Instead, they argue for an 'interactionist model of overlapping systems' (Sridhar & Sridhar, 1980, p. 10), which is very similar to MacSwan's model. While Otheguy et al. (2015, 2019) claim that their critics

advocate a dual competence model, in which both systems are completely separate, this is clearly incorrect. MacSwan does not hold such a view, and this has been made clear in various papers.

The fact that the claims made are not tenable has not gone unnoticed, and it has therefore become increasingly difficult to ignore the overwhelming counter evidence against the central claims. Indeed, Otheguy et al. (2015) note that bilinguals regularly suppress large portions of their repertoires when they are not translanguaging and García (2023) claims that

> …students must develop a stamina to be sociocognitively aware of when they must suppress certain features of their repertoire and when the must select some features to interact with different interlocutors.   (García, 2023: xix)

Clearly, the 'suppression of features' by individuals is only possible, if these features (and the differences between them) are psychologically real for them, which was hitherto denied. However, this creates a new problem, because it is unclear how the Unitary Model can account for the ability to select and suppress some features but not others.

Evidence that languages (or grammars) can indeed be separated and are psychologically real and not just socially constructed, as claimed in the translanguaging literature can also be obtained from the extensive literature on Bilingual First Language Acquisition (see Genesee, 2022, for a summary). Indeed, children who grow up with languages that have different word orders, such as German and English, tend to use language-specific word orders for two-word sentences in each language. While from an early age English utterances mostly follow the canonical V–O word order as in (1), German utterances generally follow the O–V word order as in (2), which were collected from a German–English bilingual two-year-old girl (Sinka & Schelletter, 1998).

(1) Read a book   (2;2)

(2) Junge Pipi machen   (2;3)
     Boy   wee make
     "The boy does a wee."

Admittedly, crosslinguistic transfer is widely attested too, which means that sometimes a child uses a structure or feature from one language in a stretch of speech of the other. This happened, for example, in the speech of the girl described above, who used *want* in the final position of an utterance on one occasion at the age of two, while the majority of her utterances followed the canonical English word order. However, this does not invalidate the Separate Development Hypothesis

(De Houwer, 1990; Genesee, 1989), which is widely supported by empirical evidence.

The intricate ways in which grammars can interact in bilingual development are analysed in the seminal publication of Gawlitzek-Maiwald and Tracy (1996, p. 920), who note that a bilingual can "pool her resources, combining what is available to her in both languages, in a lexical as well as in a structural sense." For this behaviour, Gawlitzek-Maiwald and Tracy (1996) coined the term *bilingual bootstrapping*: the child's stronger language provides grammatical structures which are not (yet) available in the weaker language. Thus, for example, a German–English bilingual child living in Germany, sometimes realises modal verbs, such as *kannst* "can-2ndSing" and auxiliaries, such as *habe* "have" in German, as in (3) and (4), while the main verb *move* or *climbed* is in English.

(3) Kannst   du   *move a bit*
     Can-2ndSing you move a bit
     "Can you move a bit?"   (2;4) Gawlitzek-Maiwald & Tracy, 1996, p. 913)

(4) Ich habe ge-*climb-ed*   *up*
     I   have PERF_PARTclimb-ed up
     "I climbed up."   (Hannah, 2;4. Gawlitzek-Maiwald & Tracy, 1996, p. 914)

Thus, at this stage the child "pulls resources" (Gawlitzek-Maiwald & Tracy, p. 920) from both languages. For the purposes of the current paper, it is particularly noteworthy that Gawlitzek-Maiwald and Tracy use the notion "resources", long before this term became fashionable in translanguaging literature.

A few years later, the same term surfaces in combination with the term "repertoires" in a paper by Myers-Scotton, who notes that "codeswitching makes optimal use of the resources in [bilinguals'] linguistic repertoires" (Myers-Scotton 2000, p. 1259). The similarity between the formulations found in the code-switching literature and those in the translanguaging papers is striking, and suggests that the claims put forward in the latter build on the code-switching literature.

4.   Translanguaging and code-switching

As Auer (2022, p. 22) has pointed out, the assumptions made by Otheguy et al. (2015) about code-switching are based on a "gross misrepresentation" of the research evidence on the ways in which bilinguals switch and mix languages. While in earlier work García (2009) comments favourably upon the pedagogical and sociolinguistic functions of code-switching, in more recent work, Otheguy et al. maintain that code-switching is an illegitimate term that should be avoided and replaced with translanguaging. Li (2018) distances himself from this attempt

to replace the term code-switching, but also claims translanguaging challenges the 'code view' of language, which sees language as "abstract verbal patterns, morphosyntax, or lexicogrammar, divorced from cognitive, affective, and bodily dynamics in real-time" (Li, 2018, p.17). The claim is that this view would be supported in the code-switching literature. Again, this is not an appropriate representation of the ways in which code-switching has been studied, as is demonstrated in analyses of the pragmatic and discourse functions of code-switching in the early work of Myers-Scotton (1993) on the social motivations for code-switching and the work of Auer (2013) on code-switching in conversation. Rather, these approaches explain how the participants make skilful use of the different language varieties they have at their disposal to get the intended meanings across to the listener in real time, building on or playing with the social norms for the use of these varieties in their context.

Clearly the attempt to replace the term code-switching has not been successful, but it is also questionable if such an endeavour is helpful. It is quite common for researchers to use different terms to describe particular phenomena. For Multiword Units (fixed expressions) well over 40 terms have been used (Wray & Perkins, 2000), but this has not stopped research in this field from developing rapidly, and becoming a key focus in second language acquisition and corpus linguistics. Similarly, in the field of language contact, a wide range of terms is used to refer to the interaction between languages, a short list of which is given below.

– Heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1981, as cited in Hirschkop, 2021)
– Polylanguaging and polylingual languaging (Jørgensen, 2008)
– Crossing (Rampton, 1995)
– Metrolingualism (Otsuji & Pennycook, 2011)
– Codemeshing (Canagarajah, 2013)
– Translingual practice (Canagarajah, 2013)
– Multilanguaging (Nguyen, 2012)
– Transference (Clyne, 1979)
– Transversion (Clyne, 2003)
– Alternation, backflagging, congruent lexicalisation, insertion (Muysken, 2000, 2013)

I do not see the diversity of terms as problematic, as long as researchers specify what they mean and which diagnostic criteria can be used to identify the phenomena they refer to in data sets.

One of the erroneous claims made in the translanguaging literature is that code-switching entails separation of languages, whereas translanguaging does not. As an example, Li (2018) presents a short excerpt with extraordinarily complex forms of mixing found among elderly multilingual Singaporeans, some of whom

use no less than seven language varieties in a single exchange.[1] Li cogently argues that individual words from this exchange cannot easily be attributed to one or the other language, and that this excerpt does not represent "classic code-switching" (Myers Scotton, 2002). However, it is clear this excerpt is so complex because there are many different processes at work. Different varieties of Chinese have been spoken in Singapore for several hundreds of years and they have interacted with different varieties of Malay and with (Singaporean) English more recently. The complexities of the interactions between the languages, which are revealed in contact-induced change and transfer at all levels of analysis, have been carefully documented (Ng, 2012; Platt, 1980; Zhiming, 2009). It is also important to know that this behaviour is typical of elderly Singaporeans only (Nah et al., 2021; Platt, 1980), which makes the reader wonder how the behaviour described here interacts with cognitive control. Thus, this example is interesting as an example of extreme forms of language contact that can arise in highly complex, multilingual contexts such as those in Singapore, but it is very different from the kinds of translanguaging found elsewhere. How the analyses presented in Li (2018) add to the available literature on language contact in Singapore, or help us understand translanguaging in other contexts remains unclear.[2]

Although the Singaporean context may be unique, it is evident that highly intimate forms of language contact exist elsewhere too. One of the earliest analyses come from a study by Clyne (1991) on Dutch–English and German–English bilinguals in Australia. Clyne's analyses show there are forms of mixing within one sentence where the grammars, the vocabulary and the phonetics of each language can hardly be disentangled.

(5)   Ik hebt een kop of thee, cup of tea or something
      I have a cup of tea, cup of tea or something.   (Clyne, 1991, p. 201)

(6)   I don't know what [vat] ze doen   (Clyne, 1991, p. 203)
      I don't know what they are doing.

Examples (5) and (6) are similar to those presented in Li (2018) in that it is hard to tell which language the words belong to. There are many Dutch–English cognates (Dutch *kop* "cup" and Dutch *wat* "what") and these act as trigger words, activating both language systems. I have on purpose chosen one of the earliest examples of

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1. The data come from Ng Bee Chin who interviewed 18 elderly Singaporeans in 2009 (unpublished conference paper).

2. While there is overwhelming evidence for the existence of transfer in second language acquisition and bilingualism (see Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008), García et al. (2021, p. 214) claim that "nothing is being *transferred*; everything is being *accessed*." They do not provide any evidence for these claims, and do not refer to the extensive literature on transfer either.

mixing between related languages, to show that evidence for the lack of separation between systems was in the public domain before the discussion about translanguaging took off, but similar examples abound in later publications (see van Dijk et al., 2024, for a summary of the literature on language processing in bilingual children).

Forms of code-switching where the grammars and vocabularies of both languages interact closely have been termed *congruent lexicalization* (Muysken, 2000), and the sociolinguistic and structural conditions under which this type of codemixing occurs have been described in great detail.[3] It is very surprising that the existence of forms of code-switching where the boundaries between the grammars and lexica of the contributing languages are blurred has gone largely unnoticed in the translanguaging literature, although this could have been interpreted this as evidence for the Unitary Model. However, as Auer (2022) and MacSwan and Rolstad (2024) point out, there are virtually no references to the code-switching literature in the translanguaging papers (except for some early references from the 1980s). Evidence from the extensive research into code-switching over the past 40 years, which is simply being ignored in the translanguaging literature, shows that the claims from Otheguy et al. (2015) and García et al. (2021) cannot be upheld.

It is also of interest to take a closer look at the examples of wordplay in Li (2018, p.12). These relate to the creation of blends between two morphemes, as illustrated in (7) and (8).

(7) *Departyment* = department + party, mocking government departments spending time and resources on parties

(8) *Chinsumer* = a mesh of 'Chinese consumer', referring to Chinese tourists buying large quantities of luxury goods overseas.

According to Li (2018: 23) these illustrate "multilinguals' creativity—their abilities to push and break boundaries between named language and between language varieties, and to flout norms of behaviour including linguistic behaviour…". While I have no doubt that this is what the examples illustrate, earlier studies on lexical blends and structural transgression in wordplay (e.g., Renner, 2015) reach similar conclusions. As is well known, wordplay can be based on the use of words from only one language, as in (9), where a comparative is attached to a multisyllable root, flouting the rules of English that trisyllabic or longer words cannot take

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3. For congruent lexicalization and other forms of very intimate mixing of systems Muysken (2000) uses the term code-mixing rather than code-switching, which involves alternation between systems.

the -er comparative, but need to form the comparative by periphrastic means (Graham, 1998).

(9)   *curiouser and curiouser*   (Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland)

The same effects can be achieved by using roots from different languages, as Knospe et al. (2016) have shown. They define wordplay as "building associative bridges between forms and meanings. These bridges can transcend hypostasized language boundaries and connect linguistic elements from different tongues." Examples of bilingual puns are given in (10), which is from Stefanowitsch (2002), and (11) from Knospe (2016).

(10)   cool-tour "Culture tour". Bilingual pun with English *cool* and German *Kultur* "culture". The transformation of *Kul* to *cool* is intended to convince young people that the cultural heritage of their regions hides "cool" things.

(Stefanowitsch, 2002, p. 69)

(11)   Friseur Cut:ja "Hairdresser Katja". Wordplay with German *Friseur* "hairdresser" and the proper name *Katja,* the hairdresser in Berlin. The name is cut into two halves: English *cut* and German *ja* "yes", which is intended to create a positive reaction from the viewer.   (Knospe, 2016, p. 209)

Both the monolingual and the bilingual puns follow a basic principle of humour, which is "the transcendence of all boundaries, an intermingling and muddling up with scant regard to the demands of morality and norms"[4] (Jauß, 1978, as cited in Horlacher, 2009, p. 12). Detailed semantic and cultural analyses of the ways in which the humorous puns in (10) and (11) transcend the boundaries between languages and cultures are given in Stefanowitsch (2002) and Knospe et al. (2016). Interestingly, none of these authors refer to the translanguaging literature in their work. Although it is entirely possible to interpret bilingual puns as a form of translanguaging, I do not see how a "translanguaging lens" would extend our understanding of bilingual puns over and above the insights offered by the literature on monolingual and bilingual wordplay. The existence of such bilingual puns also presents relevant counter evidence to the claim that (the boundaries between) languages are not psychologically real. Only speakers and listeners who know both languages can create and understand such puns. To do this, bilinguals need to be aware that morphemes belong to two different systems, and they also have to possess the skill to put these morphemes together in a novel, hybrid compound or multiword unit.

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4. Horlacher uses this description in his characterization of grotesque humour, but in my opinion the transgression of norms is typical for many forms of humour.

Finally, the fact that bilinguals can switch between their languages and monitor when to use which language with whom may well be "at the basis of the bilingual advantage" that bilinguals have been found to have in executive functions (Costa et al. 2009, p.144/5). Such language switching can only be done if we accept that languages exist as separable systems and that bilinguals can indeed separate them when the situation requires it. Denying this fact means ignoring the existence of a unique key skill that has a positive impact on bilinguals' cognitive functioning (see Alrwaita et al., 2023, for a summary of the effects of bilingualism on executive functioning).

5.   Pedagogical translanguaging

As pointed out in the introduction, translanguaging was originally a pedagogical concept. In this section I will therefore explore the aims of translanguaging, different translanguaging-based pedagogies, as well as the criticism of these approaches and the evidence for their effectiveness. A good starting point may be Baker's (2011, p.288) widely cited statement that "translanguaging is the process of making meaning, shaping experiences, gaining understanding and knowledge through the use of two languages." In later work, García and Otheguy (2020, p.27) refer to "leveraging the students' entire communicative repertoire", and to teachers co-designing pedagogy "according to the local context, the students, the community and their practices and desires" (García, 2023:xix). While I have no issue with these statements, I do not consider these to be novel, as they can already be found in the pedagogical principles associated with the famous philosopher of Education, John Dewey (1938), who notes that "systems of education based upon the necessary connection of education with experience" need to build on "the local community, physical, historical, economic, occupational etc., in order to use them as educational resources." (Dewey, 1938, p.14).

To most teachers, using all students' resources comes naturally. This became very clear when I had the opportunity to ask an Indian primary school teacher how he explained the concepts of evaporation and condensation to his students. I then learned how efficiently he made use of his familiarity with the children's home environments in explaining these chemical processes (see Treffers-Daller, 2024). This teacher had never heard of translanguaging, but knew what effective teaching was because of his knowledge of the subject matter, the students and their local context.

More details about the kinds of practices that can be characterised as translanguaging can be found in García, Johnson, Seltzer and Valdes's (2017) volume on the translanguaging classroom. On p.75 a list of activities is given which

specify how translanguaging can be practiced in the classroom. Among these we find looking up words in bilingual dictionaries, annotating texts with translations of vocabulary, and providing multilingual books. While these are no doubt helpful, most of these can be found in classrooms across the world. Indeed, it is common sense to allow students to use dictionaries or the internet to try and get to the meaning of a text. Thus, the translanguaging strategies advocated in the book are not as original as one might have hoped. García et al. (2017, p. 63) actually admit this when they write that many teachers when they hear about translanguaging "tell us that they have been doing it for years but haven't had a name for it."

A point that receives little attention in the translanguaging literature is how teachers can establish what exactly the students' resources consist of. The linguistic composition of many classrooms is very complex, in that there is often a great variety of home languages among students in one classroom. In a study on academic vocabulary, reading and academic achievement we carried out among international students in Higher Education in the UK, we had 23 different nationalities (and roughly 20 different languages) in a sample of 30 students (Vicary & Treffers-Daller, 2024). Clearly, using all of these in the classroom is impossible. Measuring students' ability in their home languages is even more difficult, given the paucity of valid language tests for bilinguals and the complexities involved in measuring bilingual ability (Gathercole, 2013a/b). Also, bilinguals often do not have translation equivalents for words in each language (Grosjean, 2008), and students may not be literate in their home language(s), both of which makes it difficult or even pointless to ask them to write L1 translation equivalents on the board, as suggested in some translanguaging resources (https://www.cuny-nysieb .org/translanguagingresources/). The language practices which are advocated in García et al. (2017) and García (2023) actually often resemble code-mixing in that it mainly consists of insertions of Spanish nouns, such as *acompañamiento* "accompaniment" or noun phrases *pedagogía a lo natural* "natural pedagogy" into English or the reverse, namely English NPs such as *the rows* in Spanish, as is illustrated in (12).

(12)   This *pedagogía a lo natural* involves a constant '*regar* the rows *del jardín*,' to water the language flowers, to grow the students' language practices [...] and an *acompañamiento* of the children [...]   (García, 2023, p. 9)

Furthermore, as Ticheloven et al. (2021) point out, the processes of implementing translanguaging have to be addressed more concretely. A similar point is made by Heugh et al. (2019), who would like to see more information about the ways in which L1s can be used *purposefully* in the classroom (see also MacSwan & Faltis, 2020) In many studies, translanguaging appears to consist of translating unknown items into students' first languages (e.g., Anderson, 2022), but concepts are not

necessarily easily translatable between languages (Pavlenko, 2009)), which means that providing glosses in the margins of a text or in oral form can be very difficult. There is also the question of how much time should be spent using the L1 because of the time–on–task principle (Carroll, 1963), which states that the more time you spend on a task, the better you are going to be at it. Expanding the time spent using the L1 necessarily means there is less time for L2 input, which may not be beneficial for L2 development (see also Hopp et al., 2021; Treffers-Daller, 2024 for further discussion). We also need clarification of the type of learner and educational levels for which translanguaging is most appropriate. According to Lewis et al. (2012), Williams considered translanguaging to be appropriate for children who have a "reasonably good grasp of both languages" (p. 644) but not for children who are still in the process of developing a second language. However, it all depends on what translanguaging actually means. Further details about what "teaching through a multilingual lens" means in the Canadian context can be found in Cummins (2019).

In recent years, the discussion about translanguaging has taken a different turn, in that translanguaging is situated as part of the decolonization agenda. The authors of the 2021 Manifesto see themselves as "racialized bilinguals", fighting "assumptions about language, bilingualism, and education that are based on raciolinguistic ideologies with roots in colonialism" (García et al. 2021, p. 203). Such ideologies would be rooted in so-called "abyssal thinking" (a term borrowed from de Sousa, 2007), which purportedly refers to a kind of hegemonic thinking, typical for Western societies, which draws lines between 'civil society' and other 'colonized knowledges' which are assumed to be on different sides of an abyss.[5]

While no one would want to deny the existence of racism in Western societies, bringing race into the academic discussion about translanguaging unnecessarily polarises the discussion, which should actually be focused on specifying ways to support monolingual and bilingual children in schools, and providing empirical evidence for the effectiveness of specific pedagogies. García et al. (2021) offer considerable critique on existing pedagogical practices, for example in that they consider efforts to teach minority language speaking children academic language to be flawed because they do not believe academic language and non-academic language can be separated, and because the distinction leads to stigmatizing "the language practices of racialized bilinguals as inferior and non-academic." (p. 210). However, there is extensive evidence that obtaining access to the formal registers that are part of academic language is important for bilinguals, as demonstrated in the work of Cummins (2021b) and Slembrouck (2022). The latter notes that

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5. Interestingly, García et al. (2021) do not refer to the extensive socio–political critique of multilingualism and multiculturalism as analysed in Kubota (2016).

the immigrant and refugees took pride in having obtained a B2 on the CEFR for Dutch, because this granted them access to Higher Education. Thus, obtaining these academic language skills did not lead to further stigmatization but opened new avenues for the future for these students.

This section on pedagogy would not be complete without mentioning *additive bilingualism*, for which García et al. (2017, p.183) offer their own definition, claiming that it is "the traditional view of bilingualism as adding one whole language to an existing whole language." Apart from the fact that it is not clear what the concept of a "whole language" refers to, this definition de-emphasizes an important point, namely that this form of bilingual education differs from *subtractive bilingualism* in that it does not aim to replace learners' first language(s) (Lewis et al., 2012). In the translanguaging literature, additive is also dismissed as representing monoglossic ideologies. This is very surprising, because the concept of additive bilingualism was developed as a sociopolitical construct precisely to challenge the wide-spread practice of suppression of minority languages (the students' home languages) in school (Cummins, 2021b). Due to space limitations, I cannot elaborate on the ways in which Cummins' work is misrepresented in the translanguaging literature, but refer the reader to Wong Filmore's introduction to Cummins (2021a) where extensive details about his theories and contributions to multilingual educational practice can be found.

In conclusion, we may ask why translanguaging has become so popular as a pedagogical tool, because there is little evidence that translanguaging is effective for promoting language and literacy skills in multilinguals, or for any other purpose, such as enhancing wellbeing of students or developing metalinguistic awareness. As shown in two recent systematic reviews (Prilutskaya, 2021; Huang & Chalmers, 2023), the available research is mainly qualitative and there are only very few carefully controlled experimental studies. In addition, according to Jaspers (2018), there is a serious question mark over the "transformative power" of translanguaging, in that it might help reduce social inequality, for example. Extensive discussion of these issues can be found in Jaspers (2018); MacSwan (2022) and Slembrouck (2022).

6.   Conclusion

The critical summary given here has shown that (a) the notion of translanguaging is currently too broad to be meaningful; (b) the theoretical claims regarding contact phenomena such as code-switching and transfer, or about bilingual education and additive bilingualism are insufficiently embedded in the extensive literature

on these topics, which has led to incorrect representations and incorrect attributions of positions held by key opponents; (c) there is overwhelming counter evidence against the Unitary Model of translanguaging; (d) the pedagogical principles proposed are hardly new; (e) there is very little supporting evidence that pedagogical translanguaging is more effective than other multilingual pedagogies, in particular from carefully controlled studies.

It is quite remarkable that translanguaging has become so popular despite all the issues mentioned above. A first reason why this has happened is that translanguaging has been consistently promoted in a long list of position papers which contained very little evidence for any of the claims made, but which were repeated (with slight modifications) across almost all available journals in the field of Second Language Acquisition, Bilingualism and ELT. This promotion has also happened on social media, such as Facebook. In other words, the notion of translanguaging has been very successfully marketed, in ways that are unprecedented in the field.

Second, the critique on translanguaging is largely being ignored in most of these papers, which creates the impression that there is a consensus on the views that are presented in these, which is clearly incorrect. It actually reflects a practice called *stacking the deck*, which involves rejecting, omitting or ignoring any evidence that supports an opposing argument (Leivada et al., 2023). This is particularly unhelpful as it prevents consensus building and leads to further polarization.

Third, key concepts such as resources, repertoires and features are never properly defined or operationalised, but kept intentionally vague. Thus, there are no diagnostic criteria against which researchers can check multilingual practices and decide whether or not these count as translanguaging. This makes it possible for readers of the position papers to attribute their own meaning to them. It also leaves them with the impression that they are exactly right for their research. Put differently, because of the vagueness of the terms, it is likely that many researchers and practitioners are victims of a variant of the so-called *Barnum effect* (Dickson & Kelly, 1985) according to which people are likely to claim that vague personality statements, such as "you have a tendency to be critical of yourself" apply to them. The Barnum effect is being used, for example, by fortune tellers and mind readers. Key to statements used in fortune telling is that they are sufficiently vague for users to be able to recognise themselves in it, because they apply to almost anyone. The same can apply to new scientific terms that are being proposed in the academic literature. Readers can more easily recognise these as relevant for their own research if they are formulated in sufficiently vague terms to allow them to continue their own practice under the guise of a new name. The notion of 'translanguaging space' is a typical example. This is described as follows: "Translanguaging space is a space for the act of translanguaging as well as a space

created through translanguaging" (Li, 2011, p. 1223), which invites a wide range of interpretations and operationalisations. In the absence of diagnostic criteria specifying what 'translanguaging space' is, any bilingual discursive practice can be seen to fall under this label.

Some researchers who used to work on code-switching have decided to abandon the term and replace it with the more fashionable and flexible term translanguaging. In many cases, this change meant simply replacing the terminology but it did not result in new analyses or novel findings. Those who chose to adopt the new term often do not provide detailed linguistic analyses of their data, as these are hardly ever offered by the translanguaging literature, whereas they are required in analyses of code-switching, which has been described and operationalised very precisely. However, as we have seen in this paper and in the papers of many other critics, the phenomena to which the terms code-switching and translanguaging refer are very similar. In addition, the loss of linguistic detail in the analyses in translanguaging papers is not helpful for the advancement of our understanding of the variability in the contact phenomena across the world.

So, what is next for translanguaging? My take on this is that if we want to continue using the term, claims that are not consistent with the research evidence need to be dropped. Instead, the research evidence from educational, psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic and structural perspectives on multilingualism needs to be integrated into the conceptualization of translanguaging. In addition, the concept needs to be narrowed down to what it was coined for, namely pedagogical practices that are beneficial for multilingual learners, and clearly operationalised so that claims can be further tested. Once the "extraneous conceptual baggage that risks undermining its overall credibility" (Cummins, 2021b) has been dropped, the term may well become fit for educational purposes, and for research into multilingual practices in and beyond education.

One of the issues that needs to be addressed is for which learning contexts and for which learners translanguaging is most beneficial. Recall that according to some observers (see Lewis et al., 2012) translanguaging may not be appropriate for children who are still in the process of developing a second language. There is a great need for further research into this matter. As pointed out in this paper, there are still very few carefully controlled studies into pedagogical translanguaging. A good example is the study by Antón et al. (2016), who do not use the term translanguaging because of its conceptual vagueness, but show that abandoning the two solitudes approach in language teaching and allowing for mixing in the input is not necessarily detrimental to learning outcomes. Clearly more evidence is needed into the effectiveness of translanguaging pedagogies, and it is to be hoped that future generations of researchers will rise to the challenge of providing the empirical evidence different stakeholders need.

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