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## Introduction to the special issue: On the transgressive nature of translanguaging pedagogies

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### ABSTRACT

**EN** As translanguaging gains traction in language education, its political and ideological implications are becoming central considerations to researchers and practitioners. In this introductory article to the special issue, “Translingual and Multilingual Pedagogies” for the *EuroAmerican Journal of Applied Linguistics and Languages*, we provide a conceptual point of departure on the notion of translanguaging by revisiting Li Wei’s (2011) threefold description of its prefix *trans-* (i.e., transcending, transformative, transdisciplinary), which we expand by adding a new definitional element, transgressive, to reflect our understanding of translanguaging as politically charged and disruptive by virtue. We then move on to provide an overview of the articles and book reviews included in this special issue.

**Key words:** TRANSLANGUAGING, TRANSGRESSIVE PEDAGOGIES, MULTILINGUALISM

**ES** A medida que el translingüismo gana terreno en la enseñanza de idiomas, sus implicaciones políticas e ideológicas son cada vez más importantes. En este artículo introductorio del número especial “Pedagogías translingüales y multilingües” de la revista *EuroAmerican Journal of Applied Linguistics and Languages*, proporcionamos un punto de partida conceptual sobre la noción de translingüismo al visitar la descripción tripartita de Li Wei (2011) del prefijo *tras-* o *trans-* (trascendente, transformativo, transdisciplinario), que expandimos agregando un cuarto elemento de definición (transgresivo) para reflejar nuestra comprensión del translingüismo como concepto con carga política. Luego, proporcionamos una descripción general de los artículos y reseñas de libros que se incluyen en esta edición especial.

**Palabras clave:** TRANSLANGUAGING/TRANSLINGUAR, PEDAGOGÍAS TRANSGRESIVAS, MULTILINGÜISMO

**IT** Mentre il *translanguaging* trova terreno fertile nell’insegnamento delle lingue, le sue implicazioni politiche e ideologiche stanno diventando sempre più centrali. In questo articolo introduttivo al numero speciale “Pedagogie del translinguismo e multilingue” della rivista *EuroAmerican Journal of Applied Linguistics and Languages*, forniamo un punto di partenza concettuale sulla nozione di translinguismo rivisitando la triplice descrizione di Li Wei (2011) del prefisso *trans-* (cioè, trascendente, trasformativo, transdisciplinare), che espandiamo aggiungendo un quarto elemento descrittivo, trasgressivo, per sottolineare la concezione di *translanguaging* come connotato politicamente e dirompente per natura. Forniamo quindi una panoramica degli articoli e delle recensioni dei libri inclusi in questo numero speciale.

**Parole chiave:** TRANSLANGUAGING, PEDAGOGIE TRANSGRESSIVE, MULTILINGUISMO

### 1. Translanguaging as transcending, transformative, transdisciplinary, and transgressive

Theories and practices in language education are gradually shifting to incorporate a more organic and fluid understanding of bi-/multilingual practices and a more ecological perspective of those language users who engage in them (e.g., Cenoz & Genesee, 1998; García, 2009; May, 2013). On the premise that language does not operate in a vacuum, traditional approaches that conceptualize language, speaker, and context as independent are giving way to more dynamic perspectives: a turn that encourages us to think of

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the classroom as a space linked to the students who inhabit it, their social and linguistic practices, and their life trajectories, as they interplay with institutional and social-historical elements at a number of levels. Undoubtedly, at the core of these developments, the notion of *translanguaging* has taken off to capture the imagination of researchers and practitioners alike across multiple subfields in language education. Often seen in competition with other terms such as *metrolingualism* and *translingual practice*, and not without great deal of pushback, it is safe to say that translanguaging has become one of the few terms for the field of applied linguistics to call its own (Li Wei, 2017). As the notion of translanguaging has become more widespread, gradually more attention has been devoted to the nature, the implications, and the possibilities of multilingual practices in different educational contexts, including (but by no means limited to) complementary schools in the UK, bilingual education in the US, and multilingual institutions in South Africa, with examples ranging from World Englishes to CLIL (see e.g. Blackledge & Creese, 2014; García & Li Wei, 2014; Paulsrud, Rosén, Straszer & Wedin, 2017).

A starting definition of translanguaging is the “multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage in order to make sense of their bilingual worlds” (García, 2009, p. 45). Elaborations on translanguaging rely on two key components: the notions of *flexibility* and *repertoires*. However, stances on translanguaging may vary: some of them are grounded on the idea of deploying elements from two (or more) languages or navigating two (or more) different languages (e.g., Canagarajah, 2007; Creese & Blackledge, 2010), while other perspectives emphasize a more emergent, post-structuralist perspective as multilinguals go beyond common patterns of monolingual language practice (e.g., Li Wei & Zhu Hua, 2013; Otheguy, García & Reid, 2015). Regardless, they coincide in their emphasis on fluidity and flexibility regarding traditional (socio)linguistic boundaries: boundaries among named languages, boundaries among language modes, and boundaries among social and cognitive spaces where certain practices are considered proper.

Similarly, central definitions of translanguaging draw on the notion of linguistic repertoire, a basic sociolinguistic concept referring to the “the totality of linguistic resources (i.e., including both invariant forms and variables) available to members of particular communities” (Gumperz & Hymes, 1972, p. 20) and including “the totality of distinct language varieties, dialects and styles employed in a community” or by a speaker (Cook-Gumperz, 1986, p. 7). Linguistic repertoires encompass “every bit of language we accumulate” in our lives (Blommaert & Backus, 2013, p. 28). Importantly, it is not adherence to normativity that dictates the importance and meaningfulness of these “bits of language” to the speaker, but the relevance they have to the individual’s life. This simple definition of repertoire is, therefore, one that builds on what speakers can do with their resources, treating these resources as continuously evolving and describing the speaker’s skills in relation to contextual specificities/requirements.

Departing from a perspective that subsumes flexibility (in multilingual practices) and the rich, heterogeneous repertoires of multilingual speakers, translanguaging thinking brings in what multilinguals do when they engage in multilingual practice. To provide an overarching working definition of translanguaging to guide this special issue, we turn to (and extend) Li Wei’s (2011) threefold take on the meanings of the prefix *trans-* to emphasize three levels of flexible multilingual practices. Li Wei’s take on translanguaging (as ours) derives from the notion of languaging, meaning “the process of using language to gain knowledge, to make sense, to articulate one’s thought and to communicate about using language” (Li Wei, 2011, p. 1223). By means of this process, “language serves as a vehicle through which thinking is articulated and transformed into an artifactual form” (Swain, 2006, p. 97). Li Wei describes translanguaging as “going between different linguistic structures and systems, including different modalities (speaking, writing, signing, listening, reading, remembering) and going beyond them”, thereby granting multilingual practice “its own transformative power” (p. 1223).

Among Li Wei’s (2011) three-way division of different levels of *trans-*, the first emphasis is on it as *transcending*: moving beyond notions of single systems, structures, and spaces, as well as beyond the idea that multilingual individuals simply alternate between different systems. Instead, translanguaging asks us to consider the entire range of a multilingual individual’s linguistic performance, across modalities and settings. The second level at which the prefix *trans-* operates is in relation to *transdisciplinarity*, because a translanguaging approach holistically connects cognition, social relations, and social structures. Finally, Li Wei connects the prefix *trans-* to the *transformative* nature of translanguaging, as it brings together various dimensions of the individual’s social, linguistic and cognitive skills, attitudes and beliefs into a constellation of (inter)personal elements that, when taken together, shape the configuration of the individual’s social world into what Li Wei calls *translanguaging space*: a space both for the act of translanguaging and which is created through translanguaging.

To those three levels from which the prefix *trans-* draws its meaning, we add a layer at which translanguaging is a form of *transgression*. The idea of translanguaging as transgression highlights the potential that translanguaging has to remove language-related hierarchies (e.g. García, 2009) and for bi-/multilingual individuals to engage in situated practices that challenge traditional normativity of language use. Translanguaging can allow speakers to access new positionalities and embrace empowered subjectivities in contexts that are characteristically governed by prescriptivist and/or suppressive views and actions. As García and Leiva (2014, p. 200) put it, translanguaging “attempt[s] to wipe out the hierarchy of languaging practices that deem some more valuable than others”. We refer to transgression to underscore similar functions but also as an attempt to distinguish them from the transformative nature introduced by Li Wei (2011), which is more geared towards translanguaging space.

To be clear, this transgressive character is contextual, as traversing perceived boundaries between the named languages conforming the individual’s repertoire is often perceived as disruptive in specific contexts only. For instance, when people from higher socio-economic backgrounds engage in similar practices, they are commonly congratulated for trying, often portraying their practices as remarkable, but not transgressive. Conversely, when minoritized speakers and/or individuals from low socio-economic backgrounds engage in these practices, they hold additional disruptive value. This is one way that translanguaging moves beyond transformation to transgression: when enabled in a top-down manner (e.g., by the teacher in the classroom setting) translanguaging holds transformative potential; when initiated from the bottom up (e.g., by a student), it can be a form of resistance. Because of this transgressive potential, translanguaging can lead to a reconfiguring of educational spaces through repositioning, empowerment, and transformative action.

Our extension of the *trans-* prefix in translanguaging to place emphasis on transgression reflects our belief that traditional language education models replicate and reify the monolingual bias in the classroom (see Prada & Turnbull, this special issue for a detailed discussion of this issue). A translanguaging approach instead enables pedagogical strategies which operationalize a diversifying, anti-racist philosophy, first, by generating translanguaging spaces through the participants’ repertoires, second, by opening opportunities for students to articulate their histories and trajectories, as well as explore their shared and non-shared experiences, and third, by fortifying a positive attitude towards being and becoming multilingual and to engaging multilingually. Due to the long-standing ideologies guiding current patterns underpinning the language teaching and learning landscape, radical innovations are necessary to make changes possible. As Sriskandarajah, Tidball, Wals, Blackmore, and Bawden (2010) argued, these radical innovations in education happen in niches “where dedicated actors nurture alignment and development on multiple dimensions to create ‘configurations that work’ . . . Niche-innovations may break through more widely if external landscape developments create pressures on the regime that lead to cracks, tensions and windows of opportunity” (2010, p. 495). We find that the edge of translanguaging pedagogy (and the philosophy underpinning it) has an ability to puncture the systemic normativity, leading to that window of opportunity for renewal in education as a whole, starting by the niche that is language education.

But our interest in disturbing the bedrock of top-down activities that bolster the status quo in language education is not new. We build on a tradition that is critical of treating languages as treasured objects that must not be altered, ignoring the realities of language change. We connect with Bourdieu’s (1991) critique of structural linguists and their treatment of languages “like an end in itself” (p. 31) and how this approach strengthens purist views on what the ideal version of a language is. At the opposite end of this line of argument stand scholars such as Reagan (2004) who claim that there is no such a thing as English or Spanish as these are mere social-historical constructions bound to change over time. Connectedly, Makoni and Pennycook (2009) emphasized that it is important to understand the interrelationships among factors, such as metadiscursive regimes, language inventions, colonial history, and strategies of disinvention and reconstruction.

These general considerations raise a series of interrelated questions in which we as translanguaging scholars are particularly interested. For example, what is the nature of the above-mentioned boundaries between named languages? How have they come to be, and how can we rethink them to create more inclusive, accessible, and universally-available sociolinguistic spaces? What are the opportunities and possibilities of translanguaging thinking to mainstream education? As these questions show, thinking about translanguaging and its implications is not merely an educational effort. Translanguaging captures the sociolinguistic and cognitive dynamics of multilingual speakers allowing to reconceptualize them from the bottom-up. This perspective guides new ways thinking about the standardized patterns typical of an

imagined, idealized, monolingual speaker. In doing so, references to this imagined, idealized speaker lose their grip in the dissemination of regulatory and centralizing narratives. From this perspective, standards may be described in socio-historical and political terms, as a mold to be imposed on speakers, and a tool to separate the wheat from the chaff, so to speak. Importantly, as others have pointed out (e.g., Flores & Rosa, 2015) these standards have traditionally been used to covertly subordinate individuals from minority(ized) backgrounds, an issue that deserves attention in language classrooms.

## 2. This special issue

It is common for teachers working in multilingual contexts to become excited about the idea of translanguaging. However, it is often the case that teachers are not sure how to translate theories and philosophies into hands-on practices. In the spirit of the *EuroAmerican Journal of Applied Linguistics and Languages*, our goal in this issue is to illuminate this grey area. We have sought to develop a special issue that provides both a panoramic overview of translanguaging as well as its materializations. The discussion above on different dimensions on the *trans-* prefix in translanguaging has highlighted the multidimensionality of the concept. This multidimensionality is clear in this special issue's six original pieces. Together, they offer a rich perspective, combining data-driven discussions with critical ones, to highlight the transdisciplinary, transcending, transformative, and transgressive functions of translanguaging. The articles cover multiple socio-political and educational contexts, focusing on both content and language classrooms, from African American English within the US K-12 system to Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in sciences school class in Switzerland, and they address different educational levels from elementary schools to university education. By doing so, they offer insight into the feasibility and applicability of translanguaging in different contexts. While translanguaging is not a one-fits-all approach to language education, the articles in this issue show its great potential across seemingly unrelated settings.

The articles are organized according to the following logic: the issue begins with a conceptually-oriented article (Prada & Turnbull), which will help readers who might be less familiar with translanguaging become familiar with how translanguaging connects with and facilitates current shifts in language teaching and learning. The order of the next five articles reflects their position on a continuum from institution-level and institution-affecting perspectives (Duarte & Günther-van der Meij; Musanti & Cavazos) to a discussion of a multilingual pedagogical approach to language teaching (Panzarella & Sinibaldi) to articles attending to micro-level translanguaging classroom practices (Durán & Henderson; Bieri). In what follows, each article is introduced in more detail. While all of the articles address translanguaging as transcending language boundaries, we will pay special attention to how each contributes to an enhanced understanding of the transformative and transgressive potential of translanguaging.

The first article, "The Role of Translanguaging in the Multilingual Turn: Driving Philosophical and Conceptual Renewal in Language Education," by Josh Prada and Blake Turnbull, provides a frame for the special issue by offering a thorough overview of the central developments that have paved the way for the shifting emphases from monolingual assumptions to the emergence of multilingual turn in education. The authors make a threefold call for transformatory action: 1) arguing for the need to adopt translanguaging-based pedagogy in the teaching of what have traditionally been referred to as foreign and second languages; 2) pinpointing core areas that need to be addressed when translating theorizations of classroom translanguaging into praxis, and 3) arguing how these have the potential to facilitate multilingual turn and open up spaces that can leverage students' learning in language classrooms.

The article, "Holistic Model for Multilingualism in Education," by Joana Duarte and Mirjam Günther-van der Meij, reports on an ongoing multilingual education project in the north of the Netherlands in school contexts with both migrant and minority pupils. The project involves design-based interventions in which teachers and researchers together develop multilingual activities. Among the pedagogical activities illustrated in the article are using cognates and translanguaging to support learning and language awareness. From a translanguaging-as-transgression perspective, it worth noting how such activities can give voice to migrant background children, contribute to their sense of ownership and raise language awareness of all students involved.

Both institutional and teacher perspectives are addressed by Sandra Musanti and Alyssa Cavazos in their article, "Siento que Siempre Tengo que Regresar al Inglés: Embracing a Translanguaging Stance in a Hispanic-Serving Institution," in which they reflect on the effects of their decisions to adopt a translanguaging stance and to engage in language-transcending practices in their undergraduate university courses in a

bilingual and bicultural region in the United States. Their discussion of tensions and struggles involved remind us of challenges that transforming language practices can trigger, yet there are also obvious transgressive aspects through problematization of language and monoglossic views of multilingualism by teachers and their students alike. The authors also showcase translanguaging as a transgressive act to challenge monoglossic norms through their own bilingual academic writing.

Also set at the university level, but this time in Europe and with foreign language teaching in focus, Gioia Panzarella and Caterina Sinibaldi's article, "Translation in the Language Classroom: Multilingualism, Diversity, Collaboration," addresses classrooms where students are studying Italian as part of their degree in a British university. The authors argue that transforming foreign language teaching by adopting a translanguaging perspective to translation as a collaborative and translingual practice can be used to foster multilingual competence and intercultural awareness. They also address transgressive aspects of translanguaging by referring to its potential to shake conventional orientations to language by stimulating critical reflection of forms and functions of both the source and target language and by providing opportunities for problematizing boundaries between languages.

Moving on to classroom-practice oriented studies, the fifth article by Leah Durán and Kathryn Henderson, "Pockets of Hope: Cases of Linguistic Flexibility in the Classroom," focuses on pedagogical practices of two elementary classroom teachers in Texas with predominantly Latinx, Spanish-English bilingual students. These teachers have chosen to transform the taken-for-granted classroom practices and linguistic norms by crossing both linguistic and dialectal borders and engaging in motivated shifts between academic and everyday language as an integral part of their teaching. The study shows the transgressive power of translanguaging pedagogy that challenges traditional language normativities in order to create more equitable classroom spaces. In these spaces, teachers and students value and take advantage of language diversity, and they engage with language in ways that help to prevent marginalization of emerging bilinguals and their language practices.

The sixth and final article by Aline Bieri, "Translanguaging Practices in CLIL and Non-CLIL Biology Lessons in Switzerland," shifts the focus to content teaching in both CLIL and regular biology lessons in the Swiss upper secondary school context, where apart from the standard German and English, Swiss German is also used. Through classroom data analysis and teacher interviews, Bieri found that in both explicitly bilingual (CLIL) contexts as well as those framed as teaching in L1, translanguaging occurs and has both content learning and interaction-oriented functions in both contexts. From a transgression viewpoint, the study shows how a translanguaging approach can reveal teachers' way of drawing on source languages such as a Latin and Greek to support the negotiation of meaning of technical terms in biology in both CLIL and non-CLIL classrooms, and that this challenges monolingual views by showing the presence and important learning supportive functions of translanguaging.

Taken together, the articles in this issue provide an important contribution to the field, showing how multilingual and translanguaging pedagogies can help change educational realities by introducing new ways of working and thinking. These, in turn, can increase participants' potential to use their linguistic repertoires in the full and can foster multilingualism, language awareness, and a renewed sense of what it means to know a language. Importantly, the articles also illustrate concretely what it means to adopt a translanguaging stance in education, and they make evident the transgressive potential of translanguaging to challenge monoglossic ideologies and normative assumptions that bolster subordinating practices.

In addition to the above-mentioned original articles, the special issue also provides reviews of four current publications in the field of translanguaging and multilingual pedagogies. First, Laura Gasca Jiménez provides a critical *reseña* in Spanish of Ofelia García, Susana Ibarra-Johnson, and Kate Seltzer's *The Translanguaging Classroom: Leveraging Student Bilingualism for Learning* (2017). Then, Paola Guerrero authors a *reseña* of *Translanguaging in Higher Education. Beyond Monolingual Ideologies* (2017), edited by Catherine M. Mazak y Kevin S. Carroll. In Italian, Andrea Scibetta provides a *recensione* of *La Visione Eteroglossica del Bilinguismo: Spagnolo Lingua d'Origine e Italstudio. Modelli e Prospettive tra gli Stati Uniti e l'Italia* (2016), by Elena Firpo and Laura Sanfelici. Finally, la *recensione* di Valentina Carbonara reflects on Gerardo Mazzaferro's edited volume, *Translanguaging as Everyday Practice* (2018).

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