Book Review

Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education, by Ofelia García and Li Wei (2014). Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, U.K, 165 pages.

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For several years now, researchers in the fields of sociolinguistics and applied linguistics have been reading, attending presentations, talking about and, in many cases, working with translanguaging, a term that was first coined by Cen Williams in Welsh as 'trawsieithu' (1996) and more recently expanded as a theoretical and analytic concept in broader terms by Ofelia García (2009) and other scholars (Blackledge & Creese, 2010; Canagarajah, 2013; Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Li Wei, 2011, among many others) mainly from Anglophone countries with highly multilingual and multicultural contexts where bilingual education is a long pursued aim. The concept has resulted extremely prolific; since García's first theoretical proposals, many other scholars have adopted the translanguaging lens and an impressive amount of work has been developed around the concept, expanding it, reshaping it, applying it to new realms, and also questioning it and warning about the risks of its profusion of meaning and the excessive optimism of its transformative endeavors (Jaspers, 2017).

In this book, *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education*, García and Li Wei, two of the most well known authors and researchers on translanguaging, provide a key piece in the construction and development of the concept. In the few years since its publication, the book has become a reference title, extensively referenced[i] in subsequent work on the subject.

The authors expand their conceptualization of translanguaging building on concepts they had separately developed in previous works (e.g. García's distinction between subtractive, additive and dynamic bilingualism[ii] [2009] or Li Wei's 'translanguaging space'

[2011]), to encompass a complex and complete theory about translanguaging as social practice and as pedagogy.

The result is a highly comprehensive text that will be of interest for researchers in the fields of sociolinguistics and applied linguistics and to policy makers in language education; it will as well be a useful handbook for introducing translanguaging to emerging researchers and for teachers and trainee teachers engaged in promoting the recognition of linguistic diversity in schools and communities. The latter may find an especially valuable asset in the set of examples of translanguaging pedagogical practices described in the final sections, as a model for developing their own teaching practice.

The book bridges several elements. On one hand, it deals with translanguaging as social practice and its implications for our understanding of languages and language use (part one) and translanguaging in education (part two), analyzing both student and teacher-driven translanguaging and putting special emphasis on the development of translanguaging pedagogies –that is, framing translanguaging as a legitimate resource or asset that all children, teachers and trainee teachers should master.

It also bridges between the North American research on translanguaging, led by Ofelia García and her colleagues at (or formerly at) CUNY (Otheguy, Flores, et al.) and the British research on translanguaging (Li, Zhu, Creese, Blackledge, et al.). Both García and Li build on their extended research in bilingual educational settings (mostly in public schools in New York with a Latino population in García's case, and in complementary schools in the UK for students from Chinese family backgrounds in Li Wei's), and this is reflected in the diversity of data and examples on both social practices and classroom resources.

One valuable element to highlight is that the book is structured in a highly accessible and organized way. Every chapter is preceded by an abstract presenting the aspects that will be dealt with, and a set of keywords. Both the abstract and the keywords result in useful resources to frame the coming content, and also to link each part to the previous one and to 'the bigger picture', which is also stressed in the Introduction and Conclusion. In the same way, in the final pages (p. 163), after the Conclusion and References, the book includes a highly useful index of contents, including concepts and quoted authors (from *Additive bilingualism* to *Zentella, Ana Celia*).

All in all, the whole design results in a highly pedagogical orientation, a stance that is reinforced by the accessibility of the content, which is clearly explained, and the extent of examples, figures and images that make up a text that is not just for scholars, but for a more

general public, including educators and trainee teachers, interested in understanding the evolution and potential of bilingualism and bilingual education.

Description of each chapter

In the Introduction, the authors present the main questions of the book: "What is translanguaging? What does a translanguaging approach mean for language and bilingualism on one hand, and for education and bilingual education on the other?" (p. 1). In words of the authors, translanguaging "refers both to the complex language practices of plurilingual individuals and communities, as well as the pedagogical approaches that use those complex practices" (p. 20), and the book is subsequently divided in two parts that explore each of these realms. The first part, *Language and Translanguaging*, explains traditional views on language and bilingualism, to then describe how these conceptions are transformed through translanguaging. It contains two chapters: *Language, Languaging and Bilingualism*, and *The Translanguaging Turn and its Impact*. The second, much longer part, *Education and Translanguaging*, focuses on how translanguaging can transform traditional educational approaches and practices, especially regarding the education of bilingual students. It contains five chapters: *Language, Bilingualism and Education*; *Translanguaging and Education*; *Translanguaging to Learn*; *Translanguaging to Teach*, and *Translanguaging in Education: Principles, Implications and Challenges*.

The Introduction ends by describing what the authors define as three innovative aspects of the 'trans' approach that will be developed in the book:

1. The reference to a *trans-system* and *trans-spaces* to refer to "fluid practices that go *between* and *beyond* socially constructed language and educational systems, structures and practices to engage diverse students' multiple meaning-making systems and subjectivities" (p. 3, italics from the original text).

2. The *trans-formative nature* of the approach, which encompasses different levels including "subjectivities, but also cognitive and social structures" as traditional understandings of languages and educational practices are replaced by new configurations, which allow for the emergence of discourses and voices that have been traditionally ignored (p. 3). This focus on transformation relates translanguaging "to criticality, critical pedagogy, social justice and the linguistic human rights agenda" (p. 3). The alignment of translanguaging with an openly critical sociopolitical agenda and its pursuit for transformation is a predominant feature along the book.

3. -The third innovative aspect of the 'trans' approach that the book develops are the *trans-disciplinary* affordances provided by an integrated analysis of languaging and education, thus encompassing reflection and understanding of aspects of socialization, cognition, learning, social relations and social structures.

In chapter 1, *Language, Languaging and Bilingualism*, the authors describe the evolution of theories on language, from Saussure's structuralist definition of languages as arbitrary and autonomous systems of signs, and Chomsky's innatist perspective, to Bakhtin's dialogic claims that "language is inextricably bound to the context in which it exists and is incapable of neutrality because it emerges from the actions of speakers with certain perspective and ideological position" (p. 7).

Following the same epistemological path, the authors then reflect on the implications of moving from traditional understandings of language(s) as discrete system(s) to 'languaging' as a socially situated action, thus moving the focus of interest to the speaker's practices. The chapter then describes the subsequent evolution of our understanding of language use and language learning, from a traditional monolingual approach that conceived monolingualism as the norm, bi/multilingualism as the addition of parallel monolingualisms (Heller, 1999, 2007), and the fluent and hybrid uses of bilinguals around the globe as signs of deviant or deficient language knowledge and use, towards more dynamic understandings of the phenomena. García's well known distinction between subtractive, additive and dynamic bilingualism is recalled to embrace the idea that "the language practices of bilinguals are complex and interrelated; they do not emerge in a linear way or function separately since there is only one linguistic system (…) with features that are integrated (…) we see bilinguals selecting features from their linguistic repertoire depending on contextual, topical, and interactional factors" (pp. 14-15).

The authors claim that the term 'languaging' is not enough to account for the complexities of such dynamic and interrelated practices, and propose translanguaging as an explicit affirmation of both bilinguals' fluent languaging practices and of the aim to transcend and transform social boundaries and current orders of discourse to legitimate and promote these hybrid language uses.

After tracing this conceptual journey, Chapter 2, *The Translanguaging Turn and Its Impact* elaborates a more fine-grained description of the development of a translanguaging theory, from its initial emergence in Wales (Williams, 1996) as a specific educational practice of language integration and alternation in reading and production activities, to the extended theory that it is nowadays. Translanguaging has been widely developed and defined –the book

itself offers several different definitions–, to the extent that it might actually be difficult to clearly outline what is and is not translanguaging. The chapter is then an attempt to establish what the fundamental traits of a translanguaging theory are. For doing so, several key elements of translanguaging are brought to the front, including multimodalities –emphasizing the trans-semiotic nature of repertoires and practices–, linguistic creativity –as a product of speakers' free and original display of these semiotic repertoires–, and the generation of translanguaging spaces, defined by Li (2011) as spaces created by and for translanguaging practices, that encompass speakers' whole communicative and cultural repertoire in creative and transformative ways.

The final part of the chapter offers an interesting revision of several concepts that have emerged around the same time and share the same objective to acknowledge the complexity of language uses in an increasingly connected and globalized world: *crossing, transidiomatic practices, polylingualism, metrolingualism, multivocality, codemeshing and translingual practices, bilanguaging*, and the 'glish' terms such as *Spanglish* and *Singlish*. The authors argue that translanguaging is a more suitable paradigm to account for "the trans-systemic and trans-formative practices as a new language reality emerges" (p. 36), while also distinguishing it for its political and moral commitment to advance the social justice agenda. They finally point out that their understanding of translanguaging is deeply rooted in their own positionalities as transnational scholars whose own lives take place between and beyond linguistic, nationalist and cultural borders.

The aim of the second part, *Education and Translanguaging*, is to document the potential of translanguaging to overcome the many restrictions that educational policies and institutions often impose on the language uses of bilingual students, and break with language hierarchies that render minority languages invisible. The authors relate this to the potential creation of "a trans-space [a newly coined term clearly related to Li's translanguaging space] of change and an interdisciplinarity of knowledge and understandings" (p. 44).

Chapter 3, *Language, Bilingualism and Education*, reviews the traditional models of bilingual education as rendered in diverse typologies (Baker ,2011; Cenoz, 2009; García, 2009). The authors claim that, despite the increasing linguistic diversity in schools and the fact that bilingual students are the norm and not the exception, these models share subtractive or additive conceptions of bilingualism as parallel monolingualisms that reinforce schools' "monolingual 'academic standard' practices" (p. 47). These models do not comply with the highly interconnected and multilingual social contexts of the 21st century: "bilingual education cannot be simply subtractive or additive, for we have come to finally recognize that

there are no homogeneous groups using the same language practices" (p. 50). Despite the general tendency of bilingual pedagogical approaches to teach and keep languages separated, "insisting that each language be used in its own educational space and time period or with different teachers" (p. 52), students and teachers display diverse forms of resistance to these norms of language separation.

The chapter then provides examples of data to document how students and teachers 'translanguage' using complex language practices and building on complex resources for meaning-making. This final part describes several bilingual pedagogical strategies and teachers' efforts to promote integrated approaches and practices that encompass students' entire repertoire.

In chapter 4, *Translanguaging and Education*, the authors develop a theory of translanguaging in education, focusing on elements of creativity and criticality that would lead from bilingualism to translanguaging. It begins by describing García's expansion of William's original concept towards its current meaning as the "multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage in order to make meaning of their bilingual worlds" (p. 65). Several, complementary definitions are provided to situate translanguaging in education. Quoting García's previous work on the development of the term, the authors reaffirm that "translanguaging goes beyond code-switching and translation in education because it 'refers to the process by which bilingual students perform bilingually in the myriad multimodal ways of classrooms –reading, writing, taking notes, discussing, signing, etc.' (…) Translanguaging is not only a way to 'scaffold instruction, to make sense of learning and language; rather, translanguaging is part of the metadiscursive regime that students in the twenty-first century must perform'" (p. 65, quoting García 2011, p. 147)

Several aspects of these statements will be retrieved and developed in subsequent sections. Chapter 5, *Translanguaging to Learn*, concretely, focuses on students' use of translanguaging at schools, and on the affordances that translanguaging can bring to them, including identity creation, agency, and learning. In this chapter the authors expand on what has been described as pupil-directed translanguaging (Lewis, Jones & Baker, 2012) or natural translanguaging (Williams, 2012), providing examples from students of very diverse levels as they actively engage in translanguaging while carrying out school tasks, including the use of translanguaging for the development of literacy.

In line with a sociocultural perspective that states that knowledge is socially produced and acquired in interaction and collaboration, the authors conclude that promoting pupils' translanguaging would enhance knowledge acquisition as it enables students to develop

metacognitive aspects, interact in fluent and confident ways, manage tasks, mediate understandings and co-construct meaning, among other functions.

Chapter 6, *Translanguaging to Teach*, draws on observations of pupil-directed translanguaging as it emerges in the practices of participants to develop teacher-directed translanguaging, as a deliberate pedagogical practice, and once again documents several cases of teachers using and promoting translanguaging in different contexts. The core message of the chapter is that translanguaging as pedagogy has transformative potential. For describing this transformative stance, special attention is given to the development of a pedagogy for social justice, and of sociocritical literacies. An important part of the chapter focuses on non-formal educational programs, describing several cases that "give evidence of how it is especially in alternative educational spaces that translanguaging as pedagogy often fulfills its promise to truly open up spaces for meaning-making and social justice" (p. 117), describing these settings as "more amenable" to the development of translanguaging as critical pedagogy and of sociocritical literacies for social justice (p.90).

The final chapter, *Translanguaging in Education: Principles, Implications and Challenges*, is both a summary and an extension of the previous sections of the second part, focused on translanguaging in education. Through very detailed schemes, it presents a series of principles, goals and strategies for developing a pedagogy of translanguaging, defined as "a process by which students and teachers engage in complex discursive practices that include ALL the language practices of ALL the students in a class in order to develop new language practices and sustain old ones, communicate and appropriate knowledge, and give voice to new sociopolitical realities by interrogating linguistic inequality" (p.121, captions from the original text). For such an enterprise, the authors identify teacher education as a key stage to promote the acceptance of translanguaging as legitimate educational practice. The chapter then documents, in detail, a translanguaging project for educators. The project, based in García's institution, City University of New York (CUNY) and titled New York State Initiative on Emergent Bilinguals (NYSIEB), focused on the collaboration between CUNY scholars and the staff of 'failing' schools to incorporate translanguaging pedagogies.

The chapter's final part deals with what the authors identify as two of the major challenges for implementing translanguaging in education: first, the extended resistance of teachers to move from using translanguaging as a scaffolding practice towards its acceptance as a legitimate teaching resource and an asset that all children, teachers and trainee teachers should master; and second, the challenge of using translanguaging in assessment, as standardized assessment is extensively applied in only one, mainstream language, despite how

problematic this might be for emergent bilingual students with a limited command of the language of the assessment. Although the authors argue that "assessments using a translanguaging mode would enable students to show what they know using their entire linguistic repertoire", they acknowledge that such assessments have yet to be developed and would find strong resistance from policy makers and many teachers as "accepting translanguaging in assessment would require a change in epistemology that is beyond the limits of what most schools (and teachers) permit and value today" (pp. 134-135).

The book's very brief *Conclusion* section is somehow a more skeptical look at the presence of translanguaging in today's educational systems, still structured to a long extent by additive approaches to languages. Despite the general tone of the book being strongly optimistic on the benefits and opportunities of bringing translanguaging into the classrooms, it concludes with a not-so-positive tone regarding the social acceptance –especially by policy makers but also teachers– of translanguaging as a legitimate educational practice. Despite this, the book concludes, it is a battle worth fighting, as "translanguaging enables us to imagine new ways of being and languaging so that we can begin to act differently upon the world" (p. 138).

All in all, *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education* is a key work to understand a powerful, though also contested concept, as conceived by two of its major figures. The book encompasses the multiple implications –and potential transformations– of adopting a translanguaging lens: for our understanding of languages, for current models of bilingual education, and for educational research, policy and practice. It also affirms the concepts' social and political agenda advocating for the rights of linguistic minorities and a veritable bilingual education. This orientation to social justice, the authors claim, distinguishes translanguaging from other, similar terms, and brings it close to Freire's critical pedagogy (1968) and –we would add– to current claims for the adoption of a transformative activist stance (Vianna & Stetsenko, 2014) in research to contribute to educational transformation.

Especially interesting, in this sense, are those chapters that focus on translanguaging as a teachable asset, as they advance theory on translanguaging a step forward, from the already extensively explored field of translanguaging as social practice –and as student-directed transgressive strategies–, towards documenting teachers' efforts and structuring a coherent and comprehensive set of principles and strategies for other teachers and researchers to draw on and expand.

Finally, the book also opens up spaces for debate and questioning, including the contesting of the concept itself. As Jasper (2017) warns, the "profusion of meaning" of translanguaging, which can account for "all speakers' innate linguistic instinct, to bilinguals' spontaneous language use, to everyday cognitive processes, to a bilingual pedagogy, and to a theory of language and education [while also referring to] transformative, socially critical processes" (p. 3), can be problematic. The continuous redefinition and extension of the concept by translanguaging specialists, he warns, has reconfigured it into a "terminological house with many rooms", rendering the concept as elusive, ambiguous and running the risk of "discursive drift" (p. 3).

Especially straightforward is his questioning of the causality connection the authors establish between translanguaging and transformation, which goes from improving students' well-being and transforming their subjectivities and cognitive structures, to raising attainment levels and promoting educationally successful trajectories, to transforming unequal educational, ideological and social structures (p. 5). The extremely enthusiastic and ambitious effects of translanguaging claimed by García and Li, Jaspers argues, "trade on causality effects that cannot be taken for granted" (p. 3) and "generates inflated expectations about the effects of language learning" (p. 9) in isolation from many other factors that impact on educational trajectories and social inequalities. The author warns that translanguaging is likely to be less transformative and critical than is suggested and that, if it turns out that the predicted effects are not fulfilled, it might be harmful to the overall cause –shared by the author– of advocating for educational recognition of linguistic diversity, which might be discredited as naïve and non realistic (p. 6).

Finally, although the book offers an extensive account of the historical evolution of bilingualism and bilingual education and of relevant paradigms with the aim of delineating commonalities and specificities of a theory about translanguaging, some seminal contributions to our understanding of bilinguals' practices are missing. One example is the scarce reference to the work by John Gumperz, whose original notion of a single and integrated linguistic repertoire where all speakers' language resources "form a behavioural whole, regardless of grammatical distinctness, and must be considered constituent varieties of the same verbal repertoire" (1964, p. 140) is at the basis of translanguaging theoretical assumptions. Concomitant to this, another significant absence involves the extensive research on plurilingualism carried for over three decades by sociolinguists and socio-interactionists from a European, (especially) Francophone tradition (e.g. Lüdi, Py, Mondada, Nussbaum, Pekarek-Doehler), which clearly emerge from significantly different sociolinguistic and

sociopolitical contexts and differ in many aspects, but with which translanguaging shares Gumperz's contributions and other fundamental notions and principles.

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[i] According to Bookmetrics, the book has 419 citations until May 2018. Retrieved from: http://www.bookmetrix.com/detail/book/b9046d2e-7c82-4ee9-a2c7-83b548a01c16#citations

[ii] The authors use the term bilingualism to refer to the complex language practices of people whose repertoires integrate resources from diverse 'socially named' languages, very much in the way European scholarship refers to plurilingualism.

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