

# Not a First Language but one Repertoire: Translanguaging as a Decolonizing Project

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## Abstract

Translanguaging has opened up spaces to recognize the dynamic multilingualism of students in classrooms taught in dominant languages, and problematized concepts such as ‘additive bilingualism’. This article aims to further explore two issues that remain little understood. First, translanguaging is often seen as simply the acknowledgement or use of multilingual students’ ‘first language’. This article clarifies that this is a misunderstanding, for the trans- in translanguaging connotes the transcendence of named languages, the going *beyond* named languages as have been socially constructed. Second, in going beyond named languages, translanguaging is also intended as a decolonizing project, revealing how bilinguals inhabit a world with different knowledge bases and linguistic/cultural practices. We use two bilingual students, in London and New York City respectively, to show how they are viewed and listened to by their teachers as bilinguals with two ‘incomplete’ linguistic systems because each element in their language/semiotic repertoire is seen as a separate entity. We then weave all the elements together to provide a fuller picture of these students. In doing so, we reject raciolinguistic ideologies that have enregistered them as deficient and instead regard them through a translanguaging lens. The article emphasizes the importance of understanding translanguaging as a unitary repertoire, as well as its decolonial potential in education as teachers abandon the focus on named standardized languages and engage fully with their students’ full repertoire of features and meanings.

## Keywords

translanguaging, bilingual learner, repertoire, decolonizing, academic language

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## Introduction

Since we published *Translanguaging, Bilingualism and Education* (García and Li, 2014), the work on translanguaging, especially in education, has burgeoned. A Google Scholar search in March 2022 found some 23,000 research publications that refer to the term ‘translanguaging’.

The concept of translanguaging – a term first coined in the Welsh context (Lewis et al., 2012) – opened spaces to recognize the dynamic multilingualism of students in classrooms taught in dominant languages. It also problematized the concept of additive bilingualism espoused in most bilingual education classrooms. But as the work has spread and has been used in educational contexts of various kinds, two related issues remain little understood. First, for those teaching monolingually in the dominant language, translanguaging is often seen as simply the acknowledgement or use of multilingual students’ ‘first languages’. For bilingual educators, translanguaging is often interpreted simply as enabling students to go across the two languages of instruction. This article clarifies that this is a misunderstanding, for the trans- in translanguaging connotes the transcendence of named languages, the going *beyond* named languages as have been socially constructed (Li, 2018; Otheguy et al., 2015). Second, in going beyond named languages, translanguaging is also intended as a decolonizing project, that is, a way to undo the process through which the knowledge base and linguistic/cultural practices of colonized people was obliterated. In so doing, translanguaging opens spaces for social and cognitive justice in the education of these students (García et al., 2021; Li, 2022).

To contextualize our two arguments – that translanguaging is not simply about using the student’s ‘first language(s)’, and that it is a decolonizing project – we introduce the readers to two bilingual students in the two cities where we live. One is a Shanghaiese/Mandarin-speaking adolescent who was born in London. The second one is a Garifuna/Spanish-speaking 10-year-old who recently arrived in New York City. We use these two cases to show how these students are viewed and listened to by their teachers as bilinguals with two ‘incomplete’ linguistic systems because each element in their language/semiotic repertoire is seen as a separate entity. We then weave all the elements together to provide a fuller picture of these students. To do so, we reject raciolinguistic ideologies that have enregistered them as deficient and instead regard them through a translanguaging lens (García et al., 2021). We end by taking one step further and making visible the problem with considering these students simply as bilinguals or multilinguals, and why doing so is *important, but not sufficient*. This critical essay is not intended to report any empirical project as such. The two cases we describe below are exemplars of the large number of minoritized and racialized bilingual learners whom we have studied over many years in the UK and the US, through sociolinguistic ethnographies (see acknowledgements).

### *Meet Two Bilingual Students: Song and Julia*

Song’s family moved to London a year before Song was born. His family spoke mostly Shanghaiese at home, although both parents had been schooled in Mandarin and lived in Guangzhou, a Cantonese-speaking city, and therefore could operate in both these varieties of Chinese too. The family settled in a neighbourhood in London where they knew other Chinese families and had the comfort of the Chinese market, a Chinese

social club, and even a weekend Chinese complementary school where the children were predominantly of Cantonese-speaking families. Song grew up speaking mostly Shanghaiese with his parents, but English was also used in the family. He had the good fortune that his parents sent him to a Chinese school on weekends, where he learned basic Chinese literacy. There he became interested in Chinese calligraphy, and has continued to develop this talent as an accomplished young artist, as he incorporates it into the modern art he produces.

Song attends the local secondary school, where there is a significant number of students of Chinese descent but speaking different varieties of Chinese, as well as those of immigrant backgrounds from Poland, India and Pakistan. Although Song considers English to be his native language, the teachers have evaluated his English as inappropriate, so he languishes in English language classes that he thinks are boring. And yet, Song is an avid reader of science fiction literature, which generates his visions of space that he fills with Chinese calligraphy in his art. To ease his burden in English, and because the art teacher noticed his use of Chinese calligraphy, the school recommends that he take a Chinese class. But the class is in Putonghua, the standardized variety in mainland China. Song's everyday languaging practices are distant from those coded as Putonghua. In March 2020, his school goes 'remote' because of COVID-19.

Julia is a 10-year-old Garifuna/Spanish-speaking bilingual who recently arrived in New York City from Honduras to reunite with her mother, who has now remarried and has had another child. Growing up with her grandmother in a Garifuna black community in Honduras, Julia spoke mostly Garifuna with her grandmother, although she used Spanish in the community. She excelled in school where instruction was in Spanish. She learned to 'declaim' poetry in Spanish, knew some of the classic Spanish poetry by heart, and won many national school competitions on poetry declamation. She also loved traditional Garifuna Punta music, was an accomplished musician, and wrote her own lyrics in Spanish, using Garifuna language, music and legends, which she loved.

Julia crossed the Mexico–US border after President Biden was elected. In her journey, she was first accompanied by a family of neighbours, and then separated from them. In her 'declaiming' voice which she had practised in English, she told the US border agents: 'I came alone, and I don't know anyone here. My mother lives in the Bronx and her cell phone number is xxx-xxx-xxxx.' (Julia's case is also described in García, forthcoming.)

Julia's mother registered her in the local elementary school, where the English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher described her as another 'problem' – a black poor student deficient in English. Two months afterwards, in March 2020, the school closed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and Julia lived through the unrest after the murder of George Floyd. She witnessed her mother's activism in Black Lives Matter protests, fuelled by her mother's interest in the #MeToo movement because of prior sexual abuse. Eventually, and through her mother's insistence, Julia was transferred to a Spanish/English 'dual language' bilingual classroom where her life and language practices were also not understood.

### *Viewing and Listening with Raciolinguistic Ideologies*

Race and language have been mutually constituted and produced through processes of colonization (Mignolo, 2000; Mignolo and Walsh, 2018). The colonization of the Indigenous populations of the Americas by white settlers/conquerors, mostly from England and Spain,

as well as the many autochthonous people of Asia and Africa by Europeans, is well known. Less understood, however, is the internal colonization that took place by members of dominant social, economic, racial/ethnic, linguistic, or political groups within a territory. Regardless of whether the colonization was external or internal, European or not, the racial/ethnic/linguistic hierarchies established by dominant groups to exert power over others continue today in a process that Peruvian sociologist Quijano (2000) calls 'coloniality'. The coloniality of language, with named language categories associated with racial/ethnic groups with different power, then produces the naturalization of dominance. Those with institutional power, whom Rosa and Flores (2015) call 'the white listening subjects', then listen to others through raciolinguistic ideologies, rendering racialized bilinguals as deficient regardless of the language being produced. This process then produces subjectivities of inferiority and deficiency in racialized bilingual students.

Shedding raciolinguistic ideologies to view Song and Julia holistically clearly reveals how the named language and biological race that they have been assigned has little to do with how they perform their language and their racial/ethnic identities. For school personnel in London, Song's language is 'Chinese'. Confused by the different terminology used to classify the languages of the Chinese people as one language simply based on the ideographic Chinese writing (Li and Zhu, 2021), school administrators do not understand the complexity of Song's language practices. They assume that Song's Chinese is Mandarin, because that was the Chinese variety that the school taught as a foreign language alongside French, German and Spanish. When his English teacher learns about translanguaging, she starts asking him to use Chinese (Mandarin), even though Song is hardly capable of this since British schools have simply not valued it or taught it, and his Chinese is primarily Shanghaiese from his parents. Even though Song feels more British than Chinese, he continues to be seen and categorized simply as 'Chinese'.

In New York City, the school personnel in Julia's school suffer from the same linguistic confusion. When the mother registers Julia in school, she talks to the Spanish-speaking secretary and identifies Julia's language as Spanish. Ignored is the fact that her languaging also differs from the Spanish found in NYC schools. Her mother feels that to identify Julia's language as Garifuna serves no purpose, since no one will know what this is, or will have any interest in it. Julia also doesn't fit the 'Brown' racial category that is assumed for 'Hispanics' in the US, for she identifies as Black. And this mismatch between the assumed bilingualism, biculturalism and racialization process and Julia's identity continues in the 'dual language' bilingual Spanish/English classroom in which Julia ultimately enrolls.

Both Song and Julia are forced into language, racial/ethnic and gender categories that do not reflect their complexities. In isolating these categories as one named language or another, one racial/ethnic classification or another, and one gender or another, the complexity of how they lead their lives is simply ignored. This means that they always fall outside of the school's understandings for inclusion. Only a Mandarin Chinese class is available for Song in his school in London. Only a Spanish/English bilingual education programme is available in New York City for Julia. In both cases, the minoritized language is 'curricularized' (Valdés, 2018) in ways that do not fit the students' complex multilingual practices. Their race/ethnicity is also biologized in ways that do not allow them more complex ethno/racial and ethno/national identifications.

A first step in all efforts to support students like Song and Julia is precisely to recognize their multilingualism, their named languages. It is important for educators to

understand that Song's language practices include Mandarin, but also Shanghainese, Cantonese and, of course, English. It is useful for educators to learn about Garifuna in relationship to Spanish. This would go a long way towards resisting the monolingual ethos of British and American schools. But taking the step towards acknowledging the named languages with which racialized students identify is *simply not enough*, for this leaves intact the monoglossic ideologies about language that nation-states and their schools support. To support the growing number of racialized bilingual students like Song and Julia, more must occur than simply acknowledging multiple named languages. It is imperative that we focus on the bilingual students' *unitary repertoire*, *their translinguaging*. Multilingual awareness is important, but it must be *critical*. It is essential to acknowledge how these named languages are important for identity and social purposes, but it is also important to understand how reifying them as separate entities will always leave out bilingual students whose lives are led in the *entremundos*/borderlands (Anzaldúa, 1987) that are neither one world nor the other. We consider below how Song's and Julia's teachers have started to understand how important it is to acknowledge the bilingualism of their multilingual students, and yet how they continue to understand bilingualism and multilingualism from *external* sociopolitical language perspectives, not starting from the *internal* perspective of the bilingual students themselves.

### *Misunderstandings of Translinguaging in Teaching*

Song's and Julia's teachers are now more aware than ever about the multilingualism of their students. Song's English teacher wants to ensure that she acknowledges her students' multilingual capacities as a resource. Julia's teacher in her dual language bilingual classroom also wants to make sure that Julia develops both her Spanish and English. Both teachers have heard about translinguaging in professional development opportunities. They have read a few articles, consulted some websites, and even heard us speak. But they interpret translinguaging through the conceptual lenses about bilingualism and multilingualism that they have been taught in their teacher education curriculum.

Both Song's and Julia's teachers have had the good fortune of studying for graduate degrees in applied linguistics and bilingual education respectively. Both learn about 'second language' acquisition and to value the students' 'first or native language'. They are taught about language contact, 'transfer' and 'interference', and to identify examples of loans and calques in the students' use of language. They read articles about bilinguals' 'code-switching' and learn about the 'grammatical constraints' that prevent this from being a haphazard phenomenon. They learn to value 'additive bilingualism' as the addition of a second language to the students' first, and to fight against 'subtractive bilingualism'. They learn that the addition of a linguistic entity needs to be protected and separated from the other linguistic entity that bilingual students possess. The understanding of multilingualism that they construct through their readings and discussions is one of double monolingualism, of a double monoglossia emanating from two named languages as entities (García, 2009). As they learn about translinguaging, they also interpret translinguaging through this double monolingual/monoglossic ideology that is present in much multilingualism scholarship. This leads them to classroom practices that do not in any way match the spirit of translinguaging work.

Song's English teacher is now keen to value Song's 'first language'. One day, she asks him to translate something into Chinese, something he is just not used to doing. Song gets

out two words and hears some of the other Chinese students in the class laugh at what they view as Shanghainese, even though it is Song's representation of Mandarin. Another day she encourages him to consult a website written in Chinese, although he is embarrassed that he cannot do this successfully. Up to then, Song had hidden his bilingualism, but now, under the teacher's limited understanding of translanguaging, he is being forced to use a language that, in isolation, is not quite his, about which he feels uneasy. During his 10 years of British schooling, his 'Chinese' had never entered his formal learning, so he mistrusts this new openness. Before, he had been made to feel deficient in English, in a language seen as his 'second', even 'foreign', but now he is being made to also feel inadequate in what is supposed to be his 'first language'. This limited understanding of translanguaging compounds Song's subjectivity of being inferior, foreign, not British, a non-native speaker of English, and now also of 'Chinese'.

In Julia's dual language bilingual classroom, the teacher, a bilingual Latina, strictly separates English and Spanish. Following the dual language 'model', half of the students in this class entered school in kindergarten as monolingual English speakers, and the other half spoke Spanish and were classified as English language learners. Now that they are in the fourth grade, the students' languaging falls along all points of the bilingual continuum. Their language performances are now a lot more fluid, but the language allocation policy is still the same, with English strictly used one day, and Spanish the next day. On Spanish language days, English speakers do not understand the complexities of lessons in science and social studies. On English language days, newcomers like Julia are sidelined. However, Julia has noticed that English speakers during Spanish days are allowed some flexibility in their language use. For example, they often speak English when discussing a reading. However, if the teacher notices Spanish-speaking students using Spanish during the English day, they are severely admonished not to do so.

After learning about translanguaging, the teacher decides to relax a bit her strict language allocation policy. However, only English and Spanish continue to exist in this classroom, despite 'English-speaking' students being speakers of Arabic, Mandarin, Shanghainese, Russian and Vietnamese, and 'Spanish-speaking' students being speakers of Garifuna, Chinese, Mixteco and other Indigenous languages. Julia's teacher understood translanguaging to simply mean allowing students to use their 'first language' to make meaning, even if instruction was taking place in the other language. But the problem is that English is not the first language of many English speakers, and Spanish is not the first language of many Spanish speakers.

Such bilingualism/multilingualism in classrooms has been constructed with the same logic that has been used in monolingual classrooms. And many bilingual/multilingual studies continue to use concepts that in the face of the complexity of the bilingual lives of minoritized students do not add to understandings. To transform language education to disrupt what the colonial theorist Mignolo (2000) calls 'the colonial matrix of power', we have to unsettle the academic concepts about language and bilingualism that have been constructed. To leverage translanguaging in education, much more is needed than simply validating the students' 'first language'.

### *Deconstructions of Bilingualism/Multilingualism*

The scholarship on bilingualism has grown exponentially especially since the studies in the mid-20th century of Weinreich (1953/74) and Haugen (1956), of sociology of

language/sociolinguistics of Fishman (1968), and of bilingual education of Wallace Lambert et al. (1972). These scholars were trailblazers in the study of how bilinguals use language and how schools could develop or destroy bilingualism. But as the interest of scholars in bilingualism and bilingual education grew, its study focused on logic derived from monolingualism and from monoglossic conceptions of language (García, 2009). Thus, as we have said, the study of language contact produced concepts that have plagued the profession, such as first/second language, transfer, interference, code-switching and incomplete acquisition, produced simply by comparing minoritized bilingual language use with that of monolinguals who inhabit contexts presumed monolingual and educated in one language. As Skutnabb-Kangas (1981) said long ago, bilingualism is a lot more complex than simply having a first language and a second language. The idea of a first language depends on which criteria one is using. There are criteria based on order of acquisition, on self-identification, on identification by others, on presumed proficiency, on presumed language use, on presumed comfort in using language. All these criteria might result in Song's and Julia's first language as being Shanghainese, Garifuna, English, Mandarin, Spanish, and often in not being able to decide on a single one. Thus, the concept of 'first language' or a 'native language' is not useful to understand bilingualism. And the concept of 'second language' risks reducing bilingual students to second-class language users and citizens.

Searching for a better term than 'first language', many scholars are using 'home language'. But this idea can also reify one language at home, when the practices of bilingual students at home are a lot more complex. Even when using the term 'home language' to refer to complex practices, it runs the danger of being used in hierarchical relation to the more valued 'school language' (Seltzer, 2019). During the COVID-19 pandemic, remote teaching forced the school language, English, into British and US bilingual homes, pushing out more flexible translanguaging practices.

Another traditional sociolinguistic concept that has proven harmful is that of diglossia. Joshua A. Fishman (1967) posited that the stable bilingualism of a linguistic group was dependent on the functional compartmentalization of one language from the other, either by territory or by personality. But this arrangement, as many critical sociolinguists have said (Martín-Rojo, 2017), only normalizes the power arrangements that have kept some groups in power and others dominated. This diglossic arrangement, sometimes promoted as the 'complementary distribution principle', has been responsible for language allocation policies that divide languages, students, teachers, time and space in many bilingual classrooms.

In schools, the concept of a standardized and normed language has morphed in the last 20 years to one of 'academic language', as standards are established in the dominant language of school. But despite attempts by scholars to describe this academic language, many critical sociolinguists have argued that it is nothing more than an ideology that centres the practices of white dominant speakers as 'academic', refusing to see the creative and critical (Li, 2011), as well as academic, ways in which minoritized and racialized bilinguals use language (Flores, 2020; García and Solorza, 2020). Can the dynamic translanguaging practices of bilingual language users ever be described as 'academic'?

The decolonial scholar Boaventura de Souza Santos (2007, 2014) has called for perceiving reality beyond the abyssal line, that is, the line that was established during colonization processes to ensure that power remains in the lips, hands and bodies of those

whose linguistic and racial/ethnic profiles were established as dominant. For teachers to act against raciolinguistic ideologies, they would need to see the lives and performances of minoritized bilingual student *beyond the abyssal line*. Teaching with the logic from the other side of the line would be the only way for us to see the creative, critical and academic performances of students in classroom (Li, 2011). Translanguaging as a decolonial project attempts to erase the abyssal line (for more on this, see the language education manifesto in García et al., 2021), as language educators engage in an ecology of knowledges (Santos, 2007) that has the potential to transform the present conditions in which students like Song and Julia are educated.

### *Decolonizing Language Education: Translanguaging as a Decolonial Project*

Suppose that Song and Julia were viewed not from an external sociopolitical perspective of named languages, racial classification and nationality, but from their internal lives, from their own identities, use of language, and ability to be creative and critical. What would teachers see?

As the world came to a halt because of COVID-19, both Song's and Julia's teachers witnessed up close illnesses and deaths, as well as experienced the school/work closure. They gained *knowledge* about the virus and the vaccines: what the virus was, how the virus and the vaccines were related, and how the vaccines could predict the outcome of the pandemic. But to decide on their own vaccination, they needed more than knowledge. They needed to gain *understanding*, make sense of it all from their own context and through their own affective and sociocultural meanings. This distinction between *knowledge* and *understanding* then figured prominently for them as schools reopened for in-person instruction. They returned to teaching with the understanding that they could not just impart knowledge about language as if it were the same for everyone. Instead, they needed to keep an eye in the *particularities* of each student, in how they engaged *affectively and through their own sociocultural contexts* with learning and language (for more on the distinction between *knowledge* and *understanding*, see Camp-Yeakey on Edmund Gordon, 2000).

Song's teacher then understood that she could not simply mould Song into a Chinese national or a British national, but would have to act on what García et al. (2017) called a *translanguaging juntos stance*. The *juntos* stance refers to a perspective that views their practices, racial/ethnic identities juntos/together. Song's teacher started viewing teaching as co-learning (Li, 2014), for the process of teaching and learning are juntos. She realized that there would be a lot to learn from viewing Song from his own positioning, and not from that of the British state and its schools. Slowly, Song's teacher started to see what he was capable of as he emerged as a valid learner. She started to understand how Chinese calligraphy was not an isolated element in Song's life, but its existence in Song's own universe, light years away from the cultural context in which it emerged. As a result, she now does not put Song on the spot to demonstrate his Chineseness (Li, 2021). Instead, she starts seeing him as another British student who assembles pieces of his life, culture and language in a creative whole (Pennycook, 2017). She allows Song to demonstrate his understandings not always in English, not even at times in Chinese, but in the complex ways in which these understandings emerge, sometimes in more traditional school modes – writing, for example – but other times through modes of his choosing: painting, drawing, making collages, photographing. The learning is now



in Song's own hands, body, affect and life, in his own particularity. His teacher merely allows Song's translanguaging corriente/current to flow as it meanders through the imaginative cracks and solid walls of the classroom. Song's teacher has understood that she must act with *translanguaging shifts*, as she follows the imagination, creativity, criticality and complex lives and ways of languaging of the multilingual students in her classroom.

Julia's teacher realizes that even though her dual language classroom has been designed for two types of learners – English language learners and Spanish language learners – none of the students in her class fit into these two categories. Not only do the supposedly English learners and Spanish learners speak other languages, but none of them are simply learners of another language. They are all developing multiple ways of languaging, for those classified as 'English fluent speakers' are continuing to develop ways of using 'English', and those classified as 'Spanish speakers' are also extending their ways of using 'Spanish'. For example, Julia adds to her repertoire not only features of what is said to be 'English', but also features of what is said to be another 'Spanish variety', as when she learns that some of her Mexican Spanish-speaking classmates constantly say 'órale', and sometimes 'órale güey'. Julia is enlarging her repertoire not by adding another separate language entity, but by adding and integrating new features – an 'órale', which used by her classmates with the accompanying gestures connotes what back in Honduras would have been 'okey' or 'ta bien'. These new features, 'pearls in a single string' (Otheguy, personal communication) forming a unitary repertoire of linguistic/semiotic features, become part of Julia's repertoire, used by a bilingual Julia, and no longer simply marked as belonging to a named language or national territory. Instead, they are features that are available to Julia as she languages with her unitary repertoire in the complex world in which she now lives.

Julia's and Song's teachers also realize that they have to design instruction so as to support their multilingual students' translanguaging. But these *translanguaging spaces* (Li, 2011, 2018) are to be instructionally purposeful, while working within the language education policy that the school imposes. Sánchez et al. (2017) identify the use of translanguaging for three purposes: to scaffold instruction, to understand what students really know and can do, and to transform subjectivities of inferiority. In some classrooms, there are students like Julia who are newcomers to the country. During English instructional time, Julia's teacher ensures that she has appropriate instructional material in Spanish, as well as culturally appropriate books that introduce Garifuna culture and history to supplement Julia's understandings. Sánchez et al. (2017) refer to this use of translanguaging for scaffolding as *translanguaging rings*, ways of expanding the students' Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978) so that they can understand with assistance. Song's Chinese teacher, who teaches in Mandarin only, opens a *translanguaging documentation* space. For example, she encourages Song to use all of his languaging to explain a history event, thus better understanding what Song knows and can do. Both Song's and Julia's teachers decide that it is important for them, and for their entire multilingual class, to transform their understandings of standardized language and its role in excluding many knowledges. To do that, they engage the entire classrooms in putting together an end-of-year multimedia project/performance. Song exhibits a gigantic scenery to which all students contribute, although it features Song's beautiful Chinese calligraphy. All students use their many ways of languaging to act out and communicate

with the multilingual audience. Julia teaches all her classmates to dance to Punta music, and the music performance includes Julia and others singing lyrics composed collaboratively – lyrics that express their many ways of languaging. The project is part of creating a *translanguaging transformative* space to ensure that all students' languaging and lives are included in school and to transform the ways they have viewed their own home languaging as deficient.

Two other aspects of the teachers' translanguaging design are important: the difference between process and product, as well as the importance of assessment. Song's and Julia's teachers have started to understand that translanguaging is always available and multilingual students must be allowed to leverage it during the *process* of learning, as they want, in order to make sense. However, the teachers distinguish between process and product, encouraging students to produce certain *products* in one language or another when that is the teachers' specific goal. In assessment, Song's and Julia's teachers ensure that the formative assessments in their classrooms always leverage the students' entire linguistic/semiotic repertoire to truly assess what students know and can do. Inevitably the teachers have been asked to give their students standardized assessments produced at the national or state levels. But Song's and Julia's teachers have become advocates of their students' translanguaging, able to clearly articulate how a single numeric score in one named language does not in any way reflect the bilingual and multilingual students' complex understandings. The reading of symbols is not the same for everyone and reading them in only one way create differences that materially matter. The reading of a test score as singular and universal for all students is what creates differences, and the ensuing educational success for the dominant and failure for the subjugated. Changing the assessment regimes to better reflect bilingual learners' translanguaging capacities is a top priority in decolonizing education in the 21st century.

## Conclusion

This article has emphasized the importance of understanding translanguaging as a unitary repertoire, as well as its decolonial potential in education as teachers abandon the focus on named standardized languages and engage fully with their students' full repertoire of features and meanings. With this understanding, teachers can use their agency and autonomy to develop effective and inclusive pedagogical practices for the classroom. We repeat that such practices must not start with classifying the bilingual learners' languages into first or home versus additional or school. Translanguaging is not about adding more named languages into the classroom practice, but is fundamentally reconstitutive and transformative of the power relations between the named languages in society.

For translanguaging to fulfil its transformative potential, bilingual and multilingual students must be accorded the same privilege as dominant monolingual students. They must be trusted in their ability to language, and to do it in ways that is theirs, and not that of others. They must be understood as themselves, according to their own particularities and knowledge systems. Language, race and gender cannot continue to erect walls that create differences and end up mattering in education. Opening up translanguaging spaces where bilingual learners can use their linguistic and semiotic repertoire freely and flexibly and question and challenge the standard and named language ideologies is the practical way forward. The creativity and criticality of bilingual students (Li, 2011) must be allowed to flow as they construct their own understandings with their own

linguaging. Only then will all of us have an opportunity to benefit from an ecology of knowledges that thinks beyond the abyssal line and reveals the potential of translanguaging in education.

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