

Translanguaging: a “Practical Theory of Languages” to Support Minority Language Education

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Abstract

To address the communicative and educational needs of multilingual and complex social realities, the present work suggests adopting a translanguaging approach as a “practical theory of languages”. First, from a socio-linguistic point of view, a theory of languages characterised by soft boundaries enables us to portray the way real individuals convey meanings in their everyday life, interacting with each other, exploiting all the linguistic and semiotic resources available. Translanguaging goes beyond the concept of countability of languages focusing on the multilingual and multimodal repertoire of multiple language speakers. Secondly, from an educational perspective, by questioning the traditional assumption of languages as separate entities, the theory rejects the native/non-native label, typical of monolingual education systems, mainly concerned with the linguistic achievement purely conceived in terms of proficiency levels. Most importantly, a translanguaging approach in language education requires a critical gesture that aims to develop a high degree of cultural and linguistic awareness. It transforms the whole educational system creating a more inclusive space where, through interaction, students can act critically and creatively to break the traditional dichotomies between majority and minority languages.

Keywords

Translanguaging; Bilingualism; Heritage Languages; Minority Languages; Multilingual Education.

1. Introduction: Why Translanguaging?

The expression “translanguaging” was firstly used in the 1980s to refer to a particular pedagogical practice implemented in Wales by Cen Williams (1994, 2000). The languages being studied, English and Welsh, are very different from a typological point of view being the first a Germanic language and the second a Celtic language. Both are used at school in Wales with different streams depending on the relative use of each language as a language of instruction. The construct of translanguaging started to draw attention to the systematic alternation of input and output languages in bilingual education. A similar situation can be found in Spain, in the Basque country, with Spanish and Basque. Even though Welsh and Basque are recognised as languages of instruction from primary school, they still represent minority languages within their social contexts of use. Accordingly, all speakers become fluent in the majority languages, English and Spanish in this case, whereas the minority languages are mastered and used at different extents.

During the past decade, translanguaging has been the object of intense debate as a linguistic theory and as a pedagogical practice for multilingual and immigrant background learners. It was the influential work by Ophelia García (2009) that firstly extended the original Welsh construct of translanguaging to refer to the dynamic and heterogeneous linguistic practices of multilinguals. Besides, from a theoretical point of view, it started to denote the conception that legitimates the softer boundaries of languages endorsing bilingual educational practices based on the integration and leveraging of the entire repertoire of emergent bilinguals.

The pedagogical principles of translanguaging are in line with the Council of Europe’s construct of plurilingualism. Both embrace the same dynamic concept of bilingualism (Herdina and Jessner 2002), the softer and flexible boundaries across and within languages and the intersecting

nature of the linguistic repertoires of bilingual learners. Referring to the “unevenly developed, fluid, and constantly shifting competencies” in multiple languages, Cummins maintains that “because language users draw on the totality of their linguistic resources in both interpersonal and academic contexts, it follows that classroom instruction should encourage and promote this dynamic and integrated use of multiple registers and skills” (Cummins 2021: 295). Indeed, the plurilingualism framework provided a fundamental theoretical basis for a number of initiatives, developed by the Council of Europe, including the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR: Council of Europe 2001) and the *European Language Portfolio* (Little 2005).

The concept of languages as separate identities has been questioned by different scholars in recent years. Nonetheless, as Ortega (2019) points out, “languages are often identified and treated by speakers as labelled and separate at the conscious level” (31). It has been argued that even though there are considerable differences between the languages involved in the example provided, i.e. Basque and Spain, the two languages have influenced each other since they have been in contact for centuries. The direction of the influence is from the majority to the minority language, mastered by all speakers, and affects different linguistic levels: from phonology to syntax. Because of this influence, the boundaries between languages in one’s multilingual repertoire have been conceived as weaker and softer.

Translanguaging is the result of seeing the modern world as a super diverse environment (Blommaert 2016), due to diverse patterns of migration. Both online and offline communication is considered as people make use of all the linguistic and semiotic resources available in the different contexts to achieve the main and common goal of communicative functionality. To do so, they resort to different languages, codes, strategies and techniques and, most importantly, they blend and merge all these resources in a broader and unique linguistic system. Accordingly, expressions such as *code-switching* do not seem appropriate anymore to describe the linguistic and semiotic reality and practices typical of multilinguals. Specifically, “(it) exhausts the limits of their descriptive and explanatory adequacy in the face of such high complex blends” (Blommaert 2016: 247). Besides, adopting a translanguaging approach enables us to go beyond the concepts of cross-linguistic influence and transfer since such notions presuppose different subsystems that have been overcome by the propounded view. That is, the notion of code-switching is abandoned by some radical translanguaging scholars since, by definition, there are no codes left in this theory. For instance, Otheguy et al. (2015, 2019) maintain that code-switching is an illegitimate monoglossic construct because it assumes the existence of two separate linguistic systems. Similarly, García (2009) questions the notion of additive bilingualism as it entails the existence of two separate languages added together in bilinguals.

Interestingly, Sayer (2013) explains the importance of shifting from code-switching to translanguaging in pedagogical, social, and political terms. In his words, “translanguaging can help students figure out a particular vocabulary item or scientific concept, but it also allows students to participate in identity performances with their classmates that socialise them into the classroom, co-constructing them as component members of the group” (Sayer 2013: 70). Yet, what seems to portray an ideal learning environment is rejected. On the other hand, Canagarajah (2013) propounds the expression *codemesh* or translanguaging to substitute code-switching as both, writers and readers, negotiate meanings of texts. In particular, the author maintains that students incorporate words and expressions from the different languages they know. To support this thesis, he refers to examples of code meshing from academic writing demonstrating that it is an accepted practice even outside the classroom.

After introducing problematic concepts and definitions, the present article analyses the heterogeneous nature of minority language learners. Following Grosjean’s view (1985, 2006), these learners can be considered as peculiar bilinguals, with specific educational needs and linguistic strategies, due to their unique cognitive and linguistic profile. A translanguaging approach is suggested as an effective pedagogical practice and linguistic theory to be applied to all those educational contexts where the school language is different from the learners’ first language. In

particular, the main benefits advanced concern taking into account the variety of languages, social and cultural backgrounds and the different communicative needs of the learners involved.

To the well-known distinction between subtractive and additive bilingualism, the concept of dynamic bilingualism is added to refer to the multiple language interaction and various linguistic interrelationships occurring in multilingual learners at different scales. Most importantly, the effects of implementing a translanguaging approach to multilingual education systems are described to support heritage language education. Based on the flexible use of three or more languages as media of instruction, it highlights the benefits of teaching and preserving minority languages from a socio-cultural and linguistic point of view. The main goal is preserving and enhancing the linguistic and cultural heterogeneous background of minority and heritage language learners.

2. Defining Heritage and Minority Languages

In recent years, the term heritage language has been used broadly to refer to non-societal and non-majority languages spoken by groups often known as linguistic minorities. Those members of linguistic minorities who are concerned about the study, maintenance, and revitalization of their minority languages have been referred to as heritage language learners (Valdés 2005). Such minorities include populations who are either indigenous to a particular region of a present-day nation-state (e.g., Aborigines in Australia, speakers of Breton in France, Kurds in Turkey, Iran, and Iraq) or populations that have migrated to areas other than their regions or nations of origin (e.g., Mexicans in the United States, Turks in Germany, Moroccans in Spain, Pakistanis in England).

Thus, under the label minority languages or heritage languages a broad variety of languages with different features are included. On one hand, indigenous languages often endangered and in danger of disappearing (e.g. Scots Gaelic, Maori, Romani). On the other, also world languages commonly spoken in many other regions of the world (e.g. Spanish in the United States, Arabic in France). In terms of context of acquisition, these speakers may acquire and use two or more languages in order to meet their everyday communicative needs. In such settings, they have been referred to as circumstantial bilinguals/multilinguals (Valdés, Figueroa 1994). In contrast, élite or elective bilinguals/multilinguals learn an L2 in classroom settings and have few opportunities to use the language for genuine communication.

Needless to say, circumstantial bilingualism/multilingualism is generally characteristic of populations who occupy subaltern positions in particular settings, whether they are indigenous minorities in established nation-states (e.g., Bretons, Samis, Kurds) or other border crossers such as migrants, refugees, nomads, and exiles. The following observation by Fishman is very meaningful to understand the social implications as well as the perception that lay speakers have of language prestige:

Many Americans have long been of the opinion that bilingualism is a good thing if it was acquired via travel (preferably to Paris) or via formal education (preferably at Harvard) but it is a bad thing if it was acquired from one's immigrant parents or grandparents (Fishman 1966: 122-23).

2.1 Heritage Language Speakers as Peculiar Bilinguals

If earlier pedagogical programs had made reference to language education for “bilinguals” or “native speakers”, the establishment of heritage language and minority language education as a field has led to the emergence of a new label and category that needs to be clarified: i.e. “heritage language learner”. Indeed, there is no universal understanding of just what the terms “heritage language” and “heritage language learner” mean. Definitions differ on whether the primary focus is on the languages, their societal status, or individuals' linguistic proficiency. Researchers adapting the original Canadian usage by defining heritage languages as “languages other than the national

language(s)” (Duff, Li 2009) are generally more attuned to the socio-political status of a given language or to the collective rights and needs of the speakers of that language as a group.

It is in this research and policy context that there are also ongoing debates about whether terms such as "ancestral language," "minority language" or "community language" are equivalent or preferable to "heritage language". On the other hand, researchers focusing more specifically on educational policy and curricular design tend to give greater weight to linguistic proficiency and cultural connections in their discussions of who should be classified as a heritage language speaker: either all individuals with an ancestral or family tie to the language - even if they have extremely limited or no proficiency in the language - or just those who have some productive and/or receptive ability. Implicit in the construct of heritage language speaker is the notion that the individual's heritage language proficiency has been developed before her/his exposure to the national language, although this is not always technically the case. It is important to notice that while the emphasis is on the individual speaker, language status generally is also implicated in proficiency-based definitions.

Generally speaking, heritage language learners have been defined as individuals who “have familial or ancestral ties to a particular language and who exert their agency in determining whether or not they are heritage language learners of that heritage language and heritage culture” (Hornberger, Wang 2008: 27). This definition reminds us of the centrality of affective issues, particularly those surrounding identity, belonging, and connections to the heritage language and heritage culture. Indeed, according to Agnes He, identity is “the centrepiece rather than the background of heritage language development” (He 2006: 7). Definitions of heritage language learners such as the one by Hornberger and Wang (2008), more focused on affiliation and identity, are considered as broad definitions in contrast with so-called narrow definitions, which hinge on linguistic knowledge. Speaking to the latter type, Guadalupe Valdés (2001) notes: “Foreign language educators use the term to refer to a language of a student who is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speaks or at least understands the language, and who is to some degree bilingual in that language and in English” (Valdés 2001: 38).

The expansion of research on identity in language education contexts to include heritage language education reflects a recognition of the heterogeneity of learners' linguistic backgrounds and identities, as well as the types of investment that learners bring to language study. On the other hand, studies of heritage language education and learners have incorporated some of the theoretical perspectives and contributions from outside the field of heritage language pedagogy. As a result, it has been acknowledged that heritage language learners seek to (re)claim an ethno-national identity embodied in the heritage language, while also revealing that this ideology remains strong among students and teachers in many heritage language educational contexts.

3. The Benefits of Heritage Language Education

In contrast with earlier essentialist views that conceived identity as a static feature that people have, contemporary social constructivist accounts emphasize that the people's sense of themselves and of their relationship to the world is shifting and multiple (Leeman 2014). Arguably, identities are not fixed within the individual, instead, they are shaped and constrained by the macro and micro level socio-historical contexts, including societal ideologies, power relations, and institutional policies. Language learning is a particularly fruitful arena in which to study identity because they are instantiated in discourse, and learning a new language involves taking on new ways of being (Canagarajah 2004, Kanno & Norton 2003, Norton 1995, 2000). However, until recently, the study of language learning and identity only focused on second language learning. It is only in the past decade that scholars have begun to expand this line of inquiry to heritage language education.

It is important to consider that labels may have an impact on how referents are understood and experienced and, at the same time, they are one way in which identities are discursively

produced (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1995, Modan 2001). Because the choice of terms has implications both for how heritage language speakers are perceived by others and for how they perceive themselves, the association of the term heritage with the past has led some researchers to raise concerns that it positions non-English languages as historical relics. For instance, García's (2005) critique of the shift in U.S. educational policy from bilingual education to heritage language programs stresses the backwards-looking connotations of the terminological shift, claiming that "our multiple identities have been silenced, with one identity reduced to heritage" (García 2005: 605). Much heritage language education in the United States is at least implicitly linked to ethno-cultural identity and/or questions of educational equity. Building on this history while also drawing from critical pedagogy, some heritage language educators have sought to challenge the privileging of an imagined monolingual standard variety and the stigmatization of heritage speakers for their nonstandard or deficient varieties and practices by engaging students in analyses of the relationship of language to identity in discussions of language variation and multilingual practices (see Leeman 2014).

4. Translanguaging to Challenge the Monolingual Education System

Translanguaging has proven to be an effective pedagogical practice in all those educational contexts where the school language or the language of instruction is different from the learners' L1. Over the last years, it has been advocated as a language theory and a pedagogical practice that empowers both learners and teachers, transforms the power relations, and focuses the process of teaching and learning on making meaning, enhancing experience, and developing identities. More specifically, it deliberately breaks the artificial and ideological divides between indigenous versus immigrant, majority versus minority, and target versus mother tongue languages (García 2009, Creese & Blackledge 2015).

Hence, it can be argued that a valuable outcome of recent research on translanguaging is a rejection of the binary opposition between a native speaker and a non-native speaker. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that a heritage language speaker is also a constructed identity, one that is alternately contrasted to native speakers and non-native speakers. The risk here is to see heritage language speakers as a bounded category, mutually exclusive with, as well as inherently subordinated to, the primary categories of native and non-native. A translanguaging approach, applied to research on multilingualism and heritage languages allows us to challenge the monolingual bias conceiving languages purely in terms of level of attainment. Instead, it is advisable to switch the focus from the target language(s) to the multilingual learner as:

Someone who is aware of the existence of the political entities of named languages, has acquired some of their structural features, and has a translanguaging instinct that enables a resolution of the differences, discrepancies, inconsistencies, and ambiguities and manipulates them for strategic gains (Li 2018: 19).

5. The Soft Boundaries Between Languages

Differently from Second Language Acquisition (SLA), the main focus of studies in Third Language Acquisition (TLA) has been the multilingual learners' unique cognitive profile and linguistic repertoire (Bialystok & Barac 2012, Cenoz 2013, Jaensch 2009). It includes a wide variety of languages, with different levels of proficiency and registers mastered, acquired in different educational contexts, in multiple social realities affecting the prestige of those languages as well as the attitude towards them. In other words, the shift here is from an ideal monolingual learner to real users and learners of additional languages.

A translanguaging approach to multilingual education, including minority and heritage language speakers, overcomes the categorical dichotomies from the past between monolinguals and

bilinguals, propounding innovative linguistic and pedagogical approaches to multilingualism. First of all, referring to *trans-system* and *trans-space* means being focused on students' subjectivity, enabling them to engage multiple meaning-making systems through a fluid practice going beyond and between different language education systems, structures, and practices. Second, its *transformative* nature has been seen as a new configuration of language and education where old concepts and structures are surpassed to transform learners' subjectivities, identities, cognitive and social structures. Referring to the impact on the language and education analysis, a *transdisciplinary* approach provides lens through which a broader understanding of human sociality, human cognition, and human learning is possible (García & Li 2015).

Thus, translanguaging is used as an umbrella term including a wide variety of examples of both theories and practices of fluid use of languages, breaking the traditional conventions and the strict purist ideologies to get closer to the way people communicate in their everyday life. An interesting work by Li Wei (2018) discusses the main reasons why translanguaging meets the needs of a practical theory of language in applied linguistics. Specifically, he states that his main concern is not to identify and define different instances of translanguaging. Instead, he recognises the need for an innovative approach to multilingualism that suits the complex linguistic realities of the 21st century. Despite the acknowledgement of multilingualism as a social reality of having different languages coexisting in different parts of the world, what still remains problematic is the mixing of languages. Indeed, the author points out that one of the most important post-multilingualism challenges concerns the recognition of multiple and complex interweaving of languages and linguistic varieties, where boundaries between languages and other semiotic means are constantly reassessed and adjusted. Following this line, concepts such as indigenous, native, minority language are questioned.

What is worth recalling about Li Wei's own reconceptualization of translanguaging, as a linguistic practice and process, is the cognitive added value of the concept.

By adding the trans prefix to languaging, I not only wanted to have a term that better captures multilingual language users' fluid and dynamic practices [...] but also put forward two further arguments: 1 Multilinguals do not think unilingually in a politically named linguistic entity, even when they are in a monolingual mode and producing one namable language only for a specific stretch of speech or text. 2. Human beings think beyond language, and thinking requires the use of a variety of cognitive, semiotic, and modal resources of which language in its conventional sense of speech and writing is only one (Li 2018: 18).

Hence, the author defines the interrelation of language processing with other auditory and visual processes. Like any other cognitive process, it cannot be considered as independent. What is more, the language experience of multilingual learners and users are closely interconnected and mutually beneficial. That is, being language a multisensory and multimodal semiotic system interconnected with all the other cognitive systems, for the author, translanguaging means overcoming the separation between linguistic, non-linguistic, semiotic, and cognitive systems.

6. From Linguistic Competence to Multilingual Repertoire

One of the most interesting assumptions supported by translanguaging theories is the existence of a multilingual repertoire that differs considerably from the monolingual native speaker. That is, multilingual learners need to speak different languages for different functions. Therefore, having an idealised monolingual native speaker as a point of reference for each language mastered, in fact, is far from possible. Not only do multilingual learners acquire new linguistic and semiotic skills when dealing with additional languages but, most importantly, they reconstruct and adjust their repertoire to accommodate other languages. The features that the new language may have in common with the learners' linguistic background do not only refer to the grammatical aspects of the language but also to the emotional dimension affecting the learning process such as aptitude and motivation.

The construal of the multilingual repertoire constitutes an enlightening example of the previously discussed linguistic theory supporting the view of going beyond the counting and delimitations among languages. With the expression “*linguaging*” we refer to an approach to languages that is more focused on the individuals' contextualised social activities rather than as abstract systems. To say it in Pennycook's words, “to look at language as a practice is to view language as an activity rather than a structure, as something we do rather than a system we draw on, as a material part of social and cultural life rather than an abstract identity” (Pennycook 2010: 2).

Garcia and Li Wei (2015), propounding a translanguaging approach to multilingualism, overcome the ideal of languages as independent systems and the interdependence view assuming some degrees of mutual influence. Indeed, taking some concepts from the fields of sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics, their notion of translanguaging conceives the linguistic repertoire not as composed of systems or subsystems but as a unified identity with a set of linguistic features. The Dynamic Bilingual Model, related to their theories on translanguaging, “posits that there is but one linguistic system [...] with features that are integrated throughout” (Garcia & Li 2015: 15).

It is important to notice that, in this context, the term *system* has a particular meaning in that the focus is on using languages rather than conceiving them as static entities made of different sublevels. According to the authors, languages only exist as social constructions, they become simply specific patterns of selection of linguistic features in the repertoire. The latter is far from the communicative competence to reach in SLA. Although communicative competence is enriched with the social aspect of language, compared to the Chomskyan view of competence, its main limitation comes from looking at one language at the time rather than at multiple languages.

Instead, for multilingual speakers, it is fundamental to look at the sum of their multiple language capacity in a holistic perspective. Nonetheless, the term *competence*, according to some scholars (e.g. Hall 2019) is not preferred due to the idea of “homogeneity, permanence, and universality” that it carries (Hall 2019: 86). Indeed, the author suggests using the term *repertoire* to refer to “the totality of an individual's language knowledge defining it as conventionalised constellations of semiotic resources for taking action” (86). Interestingly, Cenoz and Gorter (2019) add the pre-modifier expression “multilingual and multimodal” to the term *repertoire* to highlight not only the heterogeneous background of multilingual learners and speakers but also the non-linguistic semiotic resources.

Research on TLA has shown that languages interact with each other, are multidirectional and that multilingual learners make use of similar strategies when producing written texts in multiple languages (Cenoz & Gorter 2011). Yet, this suggests the existence of the aforementioned soft boundaries between languages. This implies, from a pedagogical and theoretical point of view, to switch to the focus from a monolingual perspective to a multilingual one. In this way, when researching in the field of TLA, the commonalities shared by different languages must be taken into account to enhance learners' multilingual repertoire.

Besides, the expression multilingual repertoire, preferred to that of multilingual competence, focuses more on aspects that learners already possess rather than something that still needs to be achieved. It focuses on learners' knowledge in multiple languages and semiotic systems and its dynamic nature. Nonetheless, this does not imply that the idealised monolingual speaker needs to be replaced with an idealised multilingual learner of additional languages. Indeed, emerging multilinguals come to the process of TLA with a much more complex and diverse repertoire as well as very diverse goals to achieve. As the Douglas Fir Group (2016) maintains, “language learning is characterised by variability and change. It is a ceaseless moving target” (29).

7. Translanguaging and Minority Languages

Some of the advocates of the translanguaging approach that, as discussed, question the notions of code-switching, cross-linguistic influence and the existence of boundaries between languages call

for radical changes in pedagogical practices. Specifically, they maintain that a translanguaging approach is needed in heterogeneous and superdiverse contexts based on the assumption that monolingualism in education is an ideology that is related to nationalism and racism (Berthele 2020: 17). Following this line, translanguaging is particularly advisable for the aforementioned contexts of minority languages. Indeed, the fluid use of languages that breaks the strict separation of ideologies, typical of monolingual education, both outside and inside school contexts, is crucial for communities involving minority languages. Otheguy et al. (2015), for instance, argue that the reason why translanguaging can be beneficial for those communities is that “it helps to disrupt the socially constructed language hierarchies that are responsible for the suppression of the languages of many minoritised peoples” (283).

Nonetheless, for these contexts, it is important to consider the asymmetrical relations of power and inequalities since there is a risk of empowering the speakers of the majority languages rather than the other way round. Hence, as Cenoz and Gorter (2017) maintain, some spaces need to be allocated to the minority languages. For this purpose, they advance five principles to develop translanguaging practices in school contexts dealing with one or multiple minority languages:

1. Design functional breathing spaces for using the minority language;
2. Develop the need to use minority languages through translanguaging;
3. Use emergent multilinguals’ resources to reinforce all languages by developing metalinguistic awareness;
4. Enhance language awareness;
5. Link spontaneous translanguaging to pedagogical activities.

The theoretical and original framework of translanguaging, as both a theory and practice of language, aims at mobilising students’ multilingual and multimodal repertoire and is supported by a number of influential works. For example, one of the most recent and comprehensive examples of research on translanguaging practice comes from a study carried out in Italy by Carbonara and Scibetta (2020a, 2020b). The “AltRoparlante” project focused on the analysis of classroom interaction and students’ work in five different schools. It collected data based on the observation of teachers’ instruction, parents questionnaires and multiple interviews with teachers and students stressing the importance of the collaboration between the research and education fields.

After the initial implementing phase, teachers started to work in autonomy to explore the translanguaging instructional possibilities with their students with oral, written, and other subject content activities. With older students, the instructional practices were more explicitly focused on issues including language rights and social inequalities to develop a critical thinking of how power relations affect our society. Among the positive aspects emerged from the study, the authors mention the students’ metalinguistic awareness, academic engagement, and attitudes towards multilingualism as well as their home languages. In particular, they argued that: “Immigrant minority languages, usually confined to a minoritised position, began to be convinced by student as educational resources for learning and meaning-making” (Carbonara & Scibetta 2020b: 17).

Hence, the aforementioned practices allow teachers and students, both monolinguals and bilinguals, to rebuild their roles and identities. Teachers in these projects become aware that to teach the dominant language and engage all students in the school activities is to acknowledge and appreciate the language and cultural diversity of students, making them feel a precious resource, together with their diverse linguistic, cultural, and knowledge background. This means starting to bring their own experiences, as multilinguals, within the school practices. They all highlight the benefits of connecting students’ personal experiences, involving their home languages in the school’s practices to reinforce their levels of bilingualism and biliteracy, recognise and value their multicultural identities, and enhance their multilingual oral and written skills. According to Cummins (2021), “the construct of translanguaging (broadly defined) can be viewed as legitimate from the perspectives of empirical adequacy, logical coherence, and consequential validity” (273).

More specifically, the author argues that the fruitful collaboration between the teaching and research field has demonstrated the effectiveness of what will be called pedagogical translanguaging to “scaffold higher levels of academic performance, build critical language awareness, engage students’ actively with literacy in both their home and school languages, and affirm students’ identities” (273).

However, as Cenoz and Gorter (2019) notice, there is a significant difference concerning the way minority languages and identities can be preserved nowadays. If in the past language isolation and monolingual ideologies may have been useful for the preservation and revival of minority languages, today they no longer benefit minority language speakers the same way. Instead, they can even be seen as counterproductive. Translanguaging approaches must be adopted with careful consideration of the characteristic of the socio-linguistic contexts in which it is applied. Otherwise, the authors continue, it can even result in language loss. Thus, especially where language minorities are involved, adopting translanguage practices means recognising, first of all, the diverse language and meaning-making practices as well as the local histories of those communities who language and translanguage differently from the monoglossic realities.

8. Conclusion

To conclude, it can be argued that translanguaging offers a “practical theory of language”, to use Li Wei’s words, that considers the complexity and multifaced linguistic reality of our time. It enables the exploitation of multilingual, multisemiotic, multisensory, and multimodal resources available to multilingual speakers and learners. Besides, as discussed, it is a fundamental tool to overcome the traditional dichotomies from the past, typical of monolingual education systems, which considers languages as separate identities. Indeed, since the separation between languages and other cognitive domains cannot be considered as an existing psychological and social reality, the one-to-one relationship between languages and identities need to be questioned too.

Beyond the coexistence of different language practices, translanguaging can also be considered as an effective tool against ostracism and racism towards minority language groups. Indeed, by merging different representations, histories, and backgrounds, it has the potential to break the native speaker ideal of a standard language to achieve via schooling. In particular, the translanguage practice supports and includes those speakers of minority languages often stigmatized and excluded from the educational programs. It has the potential to develop more sophisticated discourse, deeper comprehension of multilingual texts, production of complex texts, evaluation and enhancement of prior linguistic and cultural knowledge and, most importantly, the inclusion of all learners' voices, as recognised and valued by teachers and educators first.

Thus, the crucial concern is to look at how students in multilingual classrooms deploy various aspects of their translingual repertoires to construct and index multifaceted identities, including locally meaningful identities of heritage languages. The broader and fluid linguistic repertoire, the type of resources needed, available, and exploited during the whole acquisition process need to be analysed and included. Finally, the learning strategies combined and used by multilingual learners for specific linguistic tasks need to be considered to thoroughly understand the peculiar nature of additional language acquisition contexts involving minority languages.

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