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Sergei Gnitiev: Translanguaging: Multiplicity and uniqueness  
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## Translanguaging: Multiplicity and uniqueness

This article explores the growing significance of translanguaging as a vital tool for enhancing language proficiency, cognitive development, and content acquisition. It aims to present a comprehensive overview of the diverse interpretations of translanguaging practices across various disciplines and by different scholars. The primary objective of this paper is to provide a nuanced understanding of the intricate nature of translanguaging while analysing the multiple approaches employed in the realms of multilingualism, education, translation, and related fields. Moreover, translanguaging is examined in relation to other pertinent concepts, such as code-switching and bi-/multi-/plurilingualism, thus contributing to a deeper comprehension of its implications and broader theoretical frameworks. This article contributes to the scholarly discourse surrounding translanguaging and its multifaceted applications in diverse contexts by delving into these multifaceted perspectives and interdisciplinary connections.

Keywords: bilingual education, code-switching, translanguaging, translation

### 1. The multiple faces of translanguaging

Multilingual language use is often characterized by the term *translanguaging*, which describes the creative use of all the resources available to the speakers. The concepts of *translinguality*, *translingualism*, and *translanguaging* are becoming increasingly popular in applied linguistics and are often found to be used interchangeably in the literature. The latter term, ‘translanguaging,’ seems to be the most widely used in the literature and, as such, bears numerous definitions. Translanguaging is a useful concept applied in the areas of second language acquisition (e.g., Canagarajah, 2006; Baker, 2011), pedagogy (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021; Singleton & Flynn, 2021), language policy (e.g., Blackledge et al., 2013), linguistic landscape (e.g., Lee, 2014) and art (Lee, 2015).

Translanguaging has been defined in multiple ways and extended since 1994 when it was first used (Williams, 1994). This concept does not consider the norms that exist in the language as an immutable rule and takes into account deviations from the rules as a positive effect in the interaction of several languages, as a result of which a resource arises that gives fresh strength to the language (Horner, 2011).

According to García and Wei (2014), translanguaging is not about the interaction between two distinct languages or the synthesis of various language practices in a hybrid blend. Instead, translanguaging involves the emergence of

novel language practices that reveal the intricacy of language exchanges among individuals with diverse histories. It serves to unveil histories and understandings that were previously concealed within fixed language identities constrained by nation-states.

The term *translanguaging*, coined initially as “trawsieithu,” was first used in the Welsh context by Williams (1994). He suggested using alternative languages for more productive communication in his teaching practice. In translanguaging practice, multilinguals form and create their own unique and developing community, embodying new ideas in communication. According to Canagarajah (2013), bilinguals use the languages they use for their own purposes, changing norms and adapting language codes. The desire to convey information and to be understood by representatives of other cultures, makes carriers of different languages resort to the most diverse ways of communication, using borrowing, switching language codes, using international vocabulary and gestures, facial expressions, and sounds. It is an approach to developing language features (García & Sylvan, 2011).

García and Wei (2014) use the term translanguaging to refer to the flexible use of linguistic resources by bilinguals to understand the principles of proficiency in the languages they use, building their language practice in such a way that it corresponds to their communicative situations. Cenoz and Gorter (2020) explain “translanguaging” as a collective expression, including a broad spectrum of theories and practices. Nowadays, speakers are equipped with a range of language resources and expanding their linguistic repertoire, creating difficulty distinguishing whether the speaker is using one language or another.

While the majority of scholars acknowledge the importance of translanguaging in multilingual pedagogy, some researchers have expressed criticism towards translanguaging as an ideology or research paradigm in its entirety. This viewpoint is evident in two notable publications by Matsuda (2013), where the author highlights the lack of precise definitions and questions the suitability of the term “code-switching,” proposing the term “diglossia” as a more fitting alternative. Additionally, Matsuda suggests that “code-meshing” could be seen as a variant of “code-switching with attitude” (Matsuda, 2013).

Furthermore, it was proposed that translanguaging should not be used in classes unless necessary; “it might reinforce ethnocentric understandings of linguistics differences” (Matsuda, 2014, p.482). In his opinion, using examples of mixing code, developing intellectual curiosity, and being carried away by the search for relevant examples, translanguaging can turn into “linguistic tourism.”

Conteh (2018) offers a critical overview of translanguaging as pedagogy, arguing that the research on this phenomenon was based on interaction processes, not pedagogical potential.

Baker (2011) defines translanguaging as the dynamic process of creating meaning, shaping experiences, and acquiring understanding and knowledge by utilizing two languages. We consider the wide usage of the term “translanguaging”, which may also be referred as a pedagogical practice to enhance the language learning process, using the whole linguistic repertoire of the speaker (Gort, 2015). Translanguaging allows being free from separating languages to fit the sociolinguistic matters and build their language repertoire. It seeks to break the boundaries between linguistic, paralinguistic, and non-linguistic means of communication (Williams, 1994). The essential aspect of translanguaging reflects modern sociological realities and is directly related to “linguistic creativity” or speech-creating activities of bilinguals (García & Wei, 2014).

Pennycook (2010), for example, defines it as the use of language in new intercultural and contact conditions, which approaches the phenomena from language practices. Translingualism implies a transition from the vision of a language as a static and limited entity to a fluid and dynamic practice and relies on the practical activities of bilinguals. Translingualism can occur when learning a new language or using several languages simultaneously, refusing to communicate with the first, using the newly learned, returning to the first, and stopping the use of the newly learned. That is confirmed by Williams (2012), who mentioned the unplanned natural occurrences of translanguaging in schools.

Kubota (2016) believes that focusing on linguistic differences can lead away from the strategy of language negotiations, which is in line with the work of postcolonial writer Bhabha (1994). In her work, Kubota (2016) sets out a history of hybridity and fluidity in poststructuralist and postcolonial theory and reveals a criticism of these concepts. The author believes focusing on the power relations and inequalities in language differences is necessary.

Nevertheless, there are also contradictions regarding interlanguage interactions in research, policy, and practice. Blackledge et al. (2013) argue that concepts such as translanguaging challenge such concepts as “standard” and “target” language. Moreover, they highlight that translanguaging raises concerns about social justice in language education. It brings to light how linguistic resources are utilized within societies and how this utilization of resources perpetuates, negotiates, and challenges social disparities and inequalities.

According to Kellman (2019), translingualism, writing in a mandated language, and code-switching—employing a blend of languages within a single text—are powerful tools in the fight against rigid and uniform thinking. These practices resist monolithic ideologies and promote a more diverse and inclusive literary landscape. Some scholars go as far as to characterize the term by its inherent vagueness, uncertainty and fuzziness, fluidity, and flexibility of language structures (Conteh, 2018).

## **2. Translanguaging: differences and overlaps**

It is important to note the differences between translanguaging and such linguistic concepts as bilingualism and multilingualism. All of these concepts concern the knowledge of two or more languages, while translanguaging emphasizes the process of learning a second language, indicating the language practices of multilinguals as well, not only the process of acquisition. The translanguaging approach promotes equality among the languages, and since there are no languages preferred to each other, all varieties are equally valuable.

According to Canagarajah (2006), the term translanguaging allows us to consider communicative competence as unlimited by predefined meanings of individual languages, but also the ability to combine various language resources to build a new meaning. The term helps us go beyond the dichotomies of monolingualism/multilingualism or unilingualism/plurilingualism. These binaries create the impression that interlanguage relations and practice are important only for a specific group of people: those who consider themselves multilingual. We agree that translanguaging is fundamental to the acts of communication and relevant to multilinguals and monolinguals.

Translanguaging is essential in practicing the minority language, especially in the bilingual classroom. García (2016) proposed allowing the students to use their first language in the school. Such a perspective will allow students to introduce their ideas based on the language they feel confident in at that moment; note that students may work way more effectively while using the L1 instead of the proposed L2 in the school. Lewis et al. (2012) refer to code-switching as separating languages; translanguaging concentrates on learning both languages simultaneously with minimum or no separation.

Historically, translanguaging is firmly bonded, sometimes even mistaken, with code-switching. François Grosjean, in his interview with Ofelia García (2016), assures that translanguaging goes “beyond named languages and taking the internal view of the speaker’s language use”; at the same time, code-switching looks at the languages as different categories, which can be looked across. Code-switching is often addressed as the conscious or unconscious use of two or more languages. Such a perspective is not circulating in the classroom, as a language is considered to be divided sharply between L1 (official language) and L2 (foreign language in the classroom). In contrast, Cen Williams was the first to employ translanguaging as a teaching method. According to García (2009), translanguaging is a deliberate approach that utilizes the entire language repertoire of individuals to achieve enhanced outcomes in both comprehension and language production. Individuals can maximize their understanding and expression in a given language by drawing upon their full linguistic resources. This was advanced by Cenoz and Gorter (2013, 2021) and assisted in achieving the mutual understanding between multilingualism and language used or/and learnt in the classroom.

Lewis et al. (2012) classify code-switching according to two situations. The first is unplanned code-switching (response goes not in the language set in the class but in the mother tongue). The second is planned (conscious two-language usage; translanguaging to maximum clarify the income information). Camarca (2005) proposes that code-switching in the literature is used to imitate real multilingualism. Callahan (2004) assures that code-switching leaves space to gather information about grammatical and discursive patterns, which reflect the same used in face-to-face conversation.

On the other hand, code-switching is proposed as a “creative, pragmatic, and safe practice between the official language of the lesson and a language to which the classroom participants have greater access” (Cahyani et al., 2016, p. 2). The primary purpose of code-switching is to use different “code” depending on the situation, either formal or informal. Code-switching was originally linked to language separation while translanguaging hails the flexibility of language use. However, there is no clear boundary between any language, which creates the complexity of distinguishing them (Cenoz & Gorter, 2020). Nowadays, speakers are utilizing any language resource to achieve the desired outcomes of the conversation.

Both code-switching and translanguaging are reflected as an improvement in the bilingual qualities of the speaker. Cenoz and Gorter (2011) proposed the “*Focus on Multilingualism*” idea, which emphasizes exploring and recognizing a speaker's multilingual abilities. The concept highlights the existence of linguistic repertoire rather than the strict separation of linguistic competencies. It embraces a holistic perspective on language abilities. This approach advocates for recognizing and understanding the dynamic, fluid nature of multilingual individuals' language practices. It emphasizes the competence of individuals in managing diverse languages within their repertoire, acknowledging that proficiency levels may vary. The framework encourages a view of multilingualism that goes beyond isolated language competencies, instead focusing on individuals' communicative effectiveness and adaptability as they navigate diverse linguistic contexts. Contextualized within cultural and social factors, the “*Focus on Multilingualism*” framework challenges traditional notions of fixed language boundaries and supports a nuanced understanding of language use in multilingual settings (Cenoz & Gorter, 2011).

### **3. Translanguaging: a term connecting different fields**

#### **3.1 Translanguaging in multilingual literature**

The history of the study of translanguaging is also associated with the study of the work of bilingual writers who create their writings not in their native language, but at the same time retain linguistic identity, expanding and changing the style of creativity. The methods of describing the artistic images used by translingual authors differ from the means available to writers who create works in the language used from birth. As a result, the works will expand, combining several cultures' traditions and mixing elements of different ways of thinking, worldview and literary traditions. Expressing their thoughts and emotions, bilingual writers are representatives of the translanguaging concept in society. Examples include well-known international bilingual writers J. Conrad (Polish), J. Joyce, and S. Beckett (Irish), whose works are published in English. Further examples include the Swiss writer of Hungarian origin A. Christoph, who writes in French; the Romanian writer P. Celan, who writes in German; and Vladimir Nabokov, a Russian writer who created the novel "Lolita" in English. Many such authors are also winners of the Nobel prize: the Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka, a writer of Indian origin V. S. Naipaul, and Caribbean writer Derek Walcott.

It can be said that all professional writers who speak several languages demonstrate multilingual behavior, which is studied in order to understand how the mind or personality can change when using other languages. Studies prove that other languages allow writers to express their thoughts and feelings differently and develop a different personality because multilingual awareness gives authors who speak distinct languages double consciousness, so they use their own language in their own way (Kellman, 2019). As a result, the authors create a text in the first language focused on describing the culture of the second language or the text in the second language, reflecting the world of the first language.

Kellman (2019) also suggests that writers who write in a language other than their primary one are literature-translinguals. He believes this type of writer is an author who flaunts the freedom from the limitations of the culture in which they find themselves and are born by expressing themselves in multiple verbal forms.

Thus, a translingual writer is an author who can transform his language production into a new linguistic identity, and translingual literature is an essential aspect of intercultural communication.

#### **3.2 Translanguaging in translation**

An important form of translanguaging is translation. Many writers who have addressed this kind of creativity emphasize its complexity. When working with texts, it is necessary to establish links between two language systems, uniting them and relying on logical-formal relations and categories. In some cases, the translation is carried out qualitatively as the translation is not only a particular

type of interlingual activity, but also a unique intercultural phenomenon that performs decoding, understanding, processing, and transferring information by means of another language into another cultural field. The translator must understand the cultural-ethnic language correctly and make inter-variant translations, focusing on how the user uses various linguistic, semiotic, and conservative resources to more accurately convey the meaning.

Translanguaging is an approach to the use of language, bilingualism, and the education of bilinguals that considers the language practices of bilinguals not as two autonomous language systems as has traditionally been the case, but as one linguistic repertoire with features that have been societally constructed. Translanguaging changes the perception of languages for teachers and linguists. The main principle underlying translanguaging is that bilinguals are not two monolinguals in one person (Grosjean, 1989) but have “one linguistic system” that embodies and integrates features of societally conspired different languages, whose usage may conform to the societally constructed norms, but it may not (García & Wei, 2014). García and Wei (2014) suggest that translation into another language includes literacy, literary practice, and using images for communication. Translanguaging and translation are mutually exclusive practices; nonetheless, translation can be an ideal space for interlingual communication, as confirmed by Cenoz and Gorter (2021).

### **3.3 Translanguaging in literary art**

Translingualism is evident in compositions where artists incorporate fragments of the work in multiple languages, combining diverse musical forms, vocals, and cultural elements. These techniques serve to captivate attention and convey unique and supplementary meanings. Davies and Bentahila (2014) state that using two languages within a single artistic creation can symbolize the convergence or blending of two cultures and identities, while translation itself is viewed as a representation of mobility or intermingling. Such artistic expressions reflect the dynamic nature of language and culture, emphasizing the interconnectedness and fluidity of human experiences.

Examples: Anastasia Prikhodko’s “Mamo” (Eurovision 2009) and "Michelle" by the Beatles.

Translingualism can be applied in the design of products, services, or systems. People speak different languages in different parts of the world, which hindered communication in the past. If this dynamic changes, businesses, governments, and society can also modernize. Therefore, various projects in the fields of business and public research are focused on ways to overcome language barriers.

Lee (2015) associates translanguaging with aesthetic text. He believes that translanguaging functions in literary art are vital components that contribute to creating translanguaging imagination; translation into another language turns the text into a meta-commentary on linguistic and communicative problems. As

proof, he cites examples of how translanguaging works in two installations of the visual art of contemporary Chinese artist Xu Bing. The words written in square calligraphy visually change the language, and the resulting hybrid calligraphy offers us English words made with the orthographic structure of hieroglyphs. These words are incomprehensible to the Chinese viewer, as they are unrecognizable to them, but on closer examination, they are known by English spectators, even though it takes cognitive effort to decipher the letters encoded under the characters.

Thus, translanguaging is applied in a new form of calligraphy called “new English calligraphy.” It is the English language included in the visual scope of Chinese spelling, and at the same time, it is Chinese visuality with English phonetics. Here, translanguaging is applied in the form of visual diglossia, where the structure of the Chinese character and the structure of the English alphabet are modified and slide into each other, employing calligraphic strokes. Each word becomes an intermediate site, which arises due to the transformation of various script patterns.

### **3.4 Translanguaging in education**

Translanguaging is used in schools to teach bilingual children. Bilingual education is relatively widespread in educational institutions worldwide, but there is also the practice of monolingual programs for indigenous and immigrant population segments. The theory of translanguaging will help students develop language skills and integrate them in such a way as to develop an extended bilingual repertoire that will broaden their knowledge. Students can use various textbooks in their native language to check their understanding and be confident in the correctness of their homework. They may ask the teacher to explain the problem in their native language. Interacting in the learning process is crucial to expand the students' language, but it is not enough to listen and take forms or output new ones. Engaging and interacting socially and cognitively in the learning process in ways that produce meaning-making is equally crucial, while translanguaging is essential to mediate students' identities and complex cognitive activities (García & Wei, 2014).

Cenoz and Gorter (2013, 2021) contend against applying the traditional view on language teaching. They advocate for a focus on multilingualism, stressing the importance of ensuring that all languages collaborate and minimizing the boundaries between them. Besides, the concept of “pedagogical translanguaging” was introduced, which involves planned efforts by teachers inside the classroom, which is described as “planned by the teacher inside the classroom and can refer to the use of different languages for input and output or to other planned strategies based on the use of students' resources from the whole linguistic repertoire” (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017, p. 194). This perspective aligns closely with the original concept of translanguaging introduced by Williams (1994). Consequently, the

goal of pedagogical translanguaging is not exclusionary but aims to include as many languages as possible. Class planning should consider students' entire linguistic repertoire to enhance language learning and foster multilingualism.

Improved metalinguistic awareness has been linked to multilingualism. Moreover, a correlation exists with metacognition, a facet of the learning and thinking process. The objective of pedagogical translanguaging is to foster the cross-linguistic development of metacognition. Cultivating proficiency in multiple languages is anticipated to result in substantial advancements in language acquisition and, consequently, academic performance.

In linguistics, scholars adopt the translangual approach, which rejects the notion of a single language standard and views deviations from the norm not as drawbacks but as sources of creativity. Horner (2011) explains that the translangual approach revitalizes writing and language teaching by recognizing that language norms are inherently diverse, dynamic, and subject to negotiation. Instead of expecting writers to adhere to rigid and uniform standards, the translangual approach embraces differences as valuable resources. By shifting the perspective from seeing differences as problems to considering them as assets, the translangual approach encourages a more inclusive and flexible understanding of language usage, fostering a rich and vibrant linguistic landscape. If one relates to the English language, it is believed that various English language variants with special features should not be considered defective speech. Such options reflect the culture of users for whom English is non-native.

Additionally, Cummins (2007) critiques instructional methods that solely focus on one language in classrooms where multiple languages are spoken. Instead, he promotes the concept of translanguaging as a means to enhance language acquisition and academic success. Translanguaging involves utilizing and integrating different languages to facilitate communication and learning. Translanguaging is seen as a way to bridge the gap between home and school languages, promoting linguistic and cognitive development across multiple languages. Empirical research has started to explore the benefits of translanguaging in various educational contexts, shedding light on its potential to optimize language learning outcomes and improve educational equity. Chaika (2023) elaborates on the study of translanguaging and identifies challenges related to language dominance, teacher training and resources, and assessment in multilingual classrooms. The findings revealed that translanguaging practices improved comprehension, facilitated vocabulary development, fostered cultural connection, and promoted cognitive development in students. These findings align with the work of Canagarajah (2011) and Gorter and Cenoz (2015a), who identified advancing academic performance and contributing to a positive learning environment. However, further empirical studies are needed to provide robust evidence and extend our understanding of how translanguaging can

effectively support language acquisition and academic achievement in multilingual classrooms.

### **3.5 Translanguaging and linguistic landscape**

The concept of translanguaging is widely used in such a field as advertising. Using anglicisms in advertising contributes to the appearance of the “illusion of uniqueness,” significance, and uniqueness of a product or service. The unusual and unique qualities of Anglicism attracted the attention of consumers, for example, the German advertisement “Next, bitte” [Next, please] (©Next)

Translanguaging is often found in mixed signs on city streets (Lee, 2014; Pennycook, 2010). If a signboard includes units of several languages, Pennycook (2010) assumes it is impossible to decide whether the sign is monolingual or multilingual unambiguously. Furthermore, the author suggests that in describing such examples, it is not individual languages that should be analyzed, but language resources (Pennycook, 2010).

Another manifestation of translanguaging activity is the intentional creation of units with an undefined, mixed language status. An example would be the sign of the MasterOK located on the billboard of the tool store/repair shop.

Moreover, Gorter and Cenoz (2015a) extensively examined the linguistic landscape through the lens of translanguaging, as conceptualized in the framework of "Focus on Multilingualism" (Cenoz & Gorter, 2011). They advocated for including the entire linguistic repertoire of multilingual speakers, drawing attention to the concepts of "minimal" and "recognizing" competence. This approach underscores the existing linguistic imbalances within the mind, contributing to the adept navigation of interactions with public signs containing multiple languages (Gorter & Cenoz, 2015a).

The concept of translanguaging in relation to the linguistic landscape is multifaceted, surrounding both monolingual and multilingual dimensions. This involves a combination of diverse features on public signs, including symbols, fonts, and colors. Gorter and Cenoz (2015b) also highlighted the correlation between a neighborhood's characteristics and translanguaging development. Factors such as geographic, social, and linguistic borders play pivotal roles in shaping the dynamics of translanguaging in a given community. Their research underscores the intricate interplay between linguistic practices and the physical environment, shedding light on the nuanced ways in which individuals engage with and negotiate multilingual spaces.

Yet, the dynamic nature of signs presents a potential challenge when researching translanguaging within the context of the linguistic landscape. This is because signs, such as billboards, bus advertisements, and leaflets, can change anytime throughout the day (Gorter & Cenoz, 2017).

#### 4. Conclusion

Translanguaging is an increasingly popular approach to exploring the nature of language, which has blurred the traditional boundaries between the written language L1 and L2. Modern linguistic studies dedicated to this topic testify to its notable relevance in contemporary linguistics.

The considerable number of publications devoted to translanguaging in recent years shows that this term has attracted the special attention of scientists. Nevertheless, translanguaging is limited in existing language science, and understanding translanguaging requires its development among scholars and educators who need to clarify and expand the meaning of this term.

The popularity of the term translanguaging suggests that the global perspectives of softening the boundaries between languages continue to evolve in different educational contexts. In the future, work on translanguaging will be conducted in various directions. First, a consensus must be reached about using the term translanguaging. As the current paper explores, different authors use the term translanguaging for different realities.

It is also necessary to distinguish between translanguaging and bilingualism, plurilingualism and multilingualism, which concern the knowledge of two or more languages, while translanguaging emphasizes the process of learning a second language. More research is needed to ensure that translanguaging provides additional advantages in language training, whether it allows for a better understanding of the subject, and whether it is effective in learning a second language.

There are different points of view on translanguaging and code-switching. Many linguists are inclined to think that code-switching refers to the alternation of languages in a communicative episode and is governed by grammatical and interactive rules. There is a difference in the study of translanguaging and code-switching. García and Wei (2014) consider translanguaging to be different from code-switching, which is seen as changing two languages, while translanguaging is based on the speakers' organization of the comprehensive language repertoire. Hornberg and Link (2012) view code-switching as a search for "language interference and transfer" and contrast it with translanguaging, defined as the active involvement of multilingual speakers in their linguistic practices. When switching code, the concept of separation of languages is used, while in translanguaging, the main emphasis is on studying both languages simultaneously, not separating them.

Causes of translanguaging are different:

- personal linguistic and cultural preferences;
- the need for broader self-expression (the need for an extended lexical reserve, the need for self-affirmation);
- forced emigration for various reasons.

Translanguaging can be applied in various areas of science:

- in the creation of translanguaging literature;
- in advertising;
- in the author's translation;
- art and pop music;
- education.

It is necessary to consider students' multilingual experience and find ways of dealing with language fluidity and mixing practices, as well as the implementation of written pedagogy.

As an example, pedagogical translanguaging seeks to support the enhancement of less proficient languages by harnessing the full linguistic potential of the speaker. This approach aims to optimize the development of language(s) and enhance performance in academic subjects. It advocates the importance of recognizing prior or pre-existing knowledge of language (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021).

The literature on translation from the language is mainly theoretical. Additional empirical studies of practicing teachers based on translanguaging-based pedagogy can determine the extent to which translanguaging can be effectively used.

Considering translanguaging as an intricate multimodal practice emphasizes its complexity. Further empirical research is essential to comprehending how translanguaging operates across different domains.

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