

TRANSLANGUAGING FROM ELSEWHERE: EXPLORING A DECOLONIAL APPROACH

TRANSLINGUAGEM A PARTIR DE LUGARES OUTROS: EXPLORANDO UMA ABORDAGEM
DECOLONIAL

TRANSLINGUAJE DESDE OTROS LUGARES: EXPLORANDO UN ENFOQUE DECOLONIAL

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ABSTRACT: This essay presents an analysis of translanguaging as a transformative theoretical approach. Whilst acknowledging the broad range of approaches within the field, we argue that more engagement with perspectives from the Global South/s is needed in order to harness translanguaging's full disruptive potential. Drawing on Medina (2016)'s concept of *speaking from elsewhere*, we contend that translanguaging can foster a collective movement towards embracing perspectives beyond the confines modern/colonial logic. Thus, translanguaging emerges as a powerful tool for challenging coloniality, and promoting engagement with a plurality of non-hegemonic perspectives and language practices.

KEYWORDS: Translanguaging. Decoloniality. Southern Epistemologies. Language Ideologies. Social Justice.

RESUMO: Este ensaio apresenta uma análise da translanguagem como uma abordagem teórica transformadora. Embora reconheçamos a ampla gama de abordagens dentro do campo, argumentamos a favor da existência de mais engajamento com Epistemologias do Sul para aproveitar todo o potencial disruptivo da translanguagem. Com base no conceito de Medina (2016) de falar de um outro lugar, argumentamos que a translanguagem pode promover um movimento coletivo em direção à adoção de perspectivas além dos limites da lógica moderna/colonial. Assim, a translanguagem emerge como uma ferramenta poderosa para desafiar a colonialidade e promover o engajamento com uma pluralidade de perspectivas e práticas linguísticas não hegemônicas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Translanguagem. Decolonialidade. Epistemologias do Sul. Ideologias Linguísticas. Justiça Social.

RESUMEN: Este ensayo presenta un análisis del translenguaje como un enfoque teórico transformador. Si bien reconocemos la amplia gama de perspectivas dentro de este campo, abogamos por un mayor compromiso con las perspectivas del Sur Global para aprovechar todo el potencial disruptivo del translenguaje. Basándonos en el concepto de Medina (2016) de hablar desde otro lugar,

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sostenemos que translenguaje promueve un movimiento colectivo hacia la adopción de perspectivas más allá de los límites de la lógica moderna/colonial. Por lo tanto, el translenguaje puede surgir como una herramienta poderosa para desafiar la colonialidad y promover el compromiso con una pluralidad de perspectivas y prácticas lingüísticas no hegemónicas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Translingüismo. Decolonialidad. Epistemologías del Sur. Ideologías Lingüísticas. Justicia Social.

1 INTRODUCTION

This article presents an analysis of translanguaging as both a transformative theoretical reconceptualization of language and a decolonial movement. By drawing on a broad range of scholarship, including some recently developed work (Rocha, 2023; Rocha and Megale, 2023; Abreu and Rocha, 2024; Rocha and Maciel, 2024; Rocha, forthcoming, among others), we seek to expand the notion of translanguaging beyond the notion of movement across named language categories. First, this paper provides an overview of translanguaging as a theoretical concept. It then makes the case for why greater engagement with perspectives on translanguaging from the Global South/s is essential for translanguaging to reach its full transformative potential. To do this, we highlight the synergies between translanguaging and decoloniality and between translanguaging and Medina (2006)'s concept of *speaking from elsewhere*, in order to stress the importance of engaging with a multiplicity of Global South/s perspectives to challenge monolithic and monological views within translanguaging.

2 TRANSLANGUAGING: AN OVERVIEW

Over the past three decades, translanguaging has emerged as a flourishing field of study that seeks to reconceptualize language to “better capture the sociolinguistic realities of everyday life” (García and Li Wei 2014, p.29). As a theoretical concept, translanguaging has its roots in bi- and multi-lingual education (Masak, 2017). The term was coined in Wales in the 1990s by Cen Williams who used the term ‘trawysieithu’, later translated to English as ‘translanguaging’ by Baker (2001), to describe the pedagogical practice of alternating between reading and writing in English and Welsh to enhance proficiency in both languages (Williams, 1994, 1996). Despite the perceived cognitive and socio-cultural benefits (see Baker, 2001), however, this approach failed to challenge harmful monolingual and monoglossic ideologies (García, 2009), and the hegemony of English on the ethnolinguistic identities of Welsh children (Sato and García, 2023).

Also working within the field of bi- and multi-lingual education, García and Li Wei (2014) took translanguaging further by framing it as an explicit challenge to the oppressive impact of named language categories on minoritized peoples’ lives. For the authors, translanguaging encompasses “the enaction of language practices that use different features that had previously moved independently constrained by different histories, but now are experienced against each other in speakers’ interactions as one *new whole*” (García and Li Wei, 2014, p. 21). This reformulation has paved the way for more complex understandings of everyday language practices, ones that highlight their fluid, dialogic and embodied nature. The conceptual shift from ‘language’, most commonly understood as a noun or something we use or possess, to ‘linguaging’, a verb or action, presents a fundamental reckoning with how we conceive of the relationship between our bodies, languages and environments.

Drawing on the work of the Chilean biologists Maturana and Varela, García and Li Wei (2014, p. 8) describe languaging as “the simultaneous process of continuous becoming of ourselves and of our language practices, as we interact and make meaning in the world”. Languaging is a dynamic and active practice, an enaction of our worlds, histories, experiences, and relationships with others. The prefix *trans-*, as Pennycook (2016, p. 204) asserts, describes moving “between and beyond (linguistic) systems and structures, transforming current structures and practices, and employing transdisciplinary perspectives on society and cognition”. In addition to challenging the concept of bounded, autonomous language categories and the overemphasis on verbal resources in communication, the prefix *trans-* invites us to consider the influence of spatiotemporal contexts on processes of meaning-making. It urges us to recognize the role of semiotic resources in generating new meanings and practices and thus transform existing social structures (Canagarajah, 2017). Translanguaging therefore signals a shift beyond the linguistic to encompass multimodal and multisensory assemblages of communicative practices (Pennycook, 2017).

That being said, the recent ‘translanguaging turn’ (García and Li Wei, 2014) has welcomed a plethora of interpretations and approaches which has meant that translanguaging can refer to many different, and sometimes contradictory, things (Masak, 2017). Indeed, translanguaging has emerged alongside a wide range of similar concepts, such as translanguaging, polylingualism, transidiomatic practice, metrolingualism, amongst others (García and Li Wei, 2014). This rich array of conceptualizations has been celebrated as a positive contribution to translanguaging as a (socio)political theory and practice (Li Wei, 2021) but has also raised concerns about the divergent ways translanguaging has been defined and illustrated within scholarship and the challenges of having such a broad spectrum approach to translanguaging theory and practice (Poza, 2017).

We, the authors, believe that the vast range of themes, concerns and theoretical discussions within translanguaging research across the globe highlight translanguaging as a concept in constant evolution. A wealth of scholarship already proposes translanguaging as a decolonial framework for language education policy and practice. For instance, Rocha et al. (2023) present a compilation of studies that draw upon translanguaging lenses to approach literacy practices, and language policies in the field of D/deaf education. In addition, studies carried out by Nogueira (2019), Dorta (2024) and Abreu and Rocha (2024), amongst others, contribute to the breadth of work showcasing the ability of translanguaging to develop transformative teaching materials and to promote liberating educational practices. In this sense, a central facet of translanguaging, both as theory and practice, is its ability to consistently interrogate dominant power.

The next section presents the case for a strategic commitment to a more expansive, decolonial approach to translanguaging to fulfill its potential to challenge dominant epistemologies and illuminate non-hegemonic perspectives from the Global South/s (Rocha, 2019; Rocha, forthcoming).

3 TRANSLANGUAGING AND DECOLONIALITY

If translanguaging is to be considered a truly transformative theory and practice, it cannot be reductively linked to static norms or categorizations. We therefore believe in focusing on approaches to translanguaging which take as their starting point a critical exploration of its decolonial potential. The complexities and dynamism of these approaches can nurture the continual evolution of translanguaging, keeping it alive and effervescent, and allowing for its growth and reinvention within the Global South.

Decoloniality can be understood as a strategic upheaval of the colonial matrix of power (Quijano, 2000, 2007) with the aim of legitimizing minoritized people’s ways of knowing and being. This matrix is a system that regulates and organizes social and economic life worldwide according to a Eurocentric point of view. The matrix encompasses various forms of power – onto-epistemological, geographical, and political – which sustain colonial logic and influence to this day. In Mignolo’s words:

The colonial matrix of power (the CMP) is a complex structure of management and control composed of domains, levels and flows. Like the unconscious in Sigmund Freud or surplus value in Karl Marx, the CMP is a theoretical concept that helps make visible what is invisible to the naked (or rather the non-theoretical) eye. Unlike Freud’s unconscious or Marx’s surplus value, though, the CMP is a concept created in the Third World, in the South American Andes. That is, it is not a concept created in Europe or in the US academy. The concept was born out of theoretical-political struggles in South America, at the intersection between the academic and the public spheres. Driven by local critics of development, the CMP bears the impulse of liberation theology and emerged out of the limits of dependency theory in the seventies. These, of course, were also the years of the struggle for decolonization in Asia and Africa. (Mignolo, 2015, p. 2).

Decolonial approaches seek to fight the colonial matrix of power, thereby challenging the modern/colonial logic that delegitimizes non-hegemonic forms of existence. A decolonial project must therefore include proposals to decolonize knowledge and decenter Eurocentric epistemologies. After all, given the diverse array of existences and world sensibilities, “[...] the decolonial task consists of undraping the positivity of political theory and political economy and showing that the positivity of both is mounted on the negative consequences of their implementation” (Mignolo, 2015, p. 3). With García and Alvis (2019), we thus reiterate the importance of employing translanguaging approaches to connect with decolonial theories, in order to harness their power to challenge dominant discourses, policies and practices.

In this sense, decoloniality presents a challenge to a complex system of power that has been defined from within the Global South. In order to be truly effective, a decolonial approach to translanguaging must not only engage with, but center Global South perspectives.

4 TRANSLANGUAGING FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH/S

The concepts of Global North and Global South do not simply refer to geographical locations (Pennycook and Makoni, 2020). Instead, these terms are deeply connected to positionalities that represent proximity or distance to hegemonic standpoints. As Kramsch et al. (2024) emphasize, the terms Global North and Global South refer to the contrasting mindsets of people who either understand the world from a Western modernist neoliberal perspective, or who understand that the world is constituted of unequal relations of power as a result of capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy.

In terms of what translanguaging from a Global South perspective may look like, collectivity is a key concern. Takaki (2020) asserts that a dialogue between translanguaging and decoloniality involves exercising a kind of self-critique that is interested in building a *juntos-stance*. This stance is concerned with challenging individualism to build collective ways of living and building knowledge. Similarly, García (2020) uses the term ‘co-labor’ to emphasize the importance of a strong, pluralist and collective mindset to prompt social change. Collective translanguaging practices can be considered a co-labored space of Southern resistance and epistemic disobedience. In our view, translanguaging spaces, collectively built in the name of decolonial resistance, are nurtured by an attitude, or an energy that cannot be silenced or domesticated. It is thus crucial to understand translanguaging spaces as polyphonic, so that they can continue to be nurtured by diverse Southern voices. This is an ongoing process. Engagement with Global South perspectives, as Makoni and Severo (2022), drawing on Gordon (2021), stress, is continuing, iterative project defined by its incompleteness, in order to keep pushing towards new possibilities: “The study of Southern epistemology is an open-ended and never-ending project because, [t]here is always something to learn from different ways of learning, knowing, expressing, and living’ (Gordon, 2021, p. 1)” (Makoni; Severo, 2022, p. 81).

Makalela and Silva (2023) have assembled a broad range of studies on translanguaging and language policy from the Global South/s, which demonstrates the variety of ideas and concerns within translanguaging research. By compiling discordant positions on translanguaging, these authors reinforce the idea of togetherness. This exchange of perspectives reflects a commitment to both *coming together* and transgressively *going beyond* when it comes to radical transformations in language educational practices and policies. From this perspective, translanguaging scholarship can be seen as a remarkable ensemble of principles, practices, voices, and knowledge, contributing to a robust research agenda in Applied Linguistics and similar fields. Indeed, as Makalela and Silva (2023) point out, the decolonial potential of Global South translanguaging chimes with an integrative, organic, and cosmic view of how we perceive our very existence. Makalela’s proposition of the *ubuntu translanguaging* (Makalela, 2016, 2018, 2022), for example, presents a powerful theoretical resource for engaging with the interconnectedness of all beings, encapsulated in the assertion: “I am because we are; we are, because I am” (Makalela, 2016, p. 191). For Makalela (2016, p. 191), a translanguaging model based on ubuntu principles “reflects on a dialectic disruption of linguistic boundaries and the simultaneous recreation of new ones” and it therefore “shows a confluent, fluid and porous existence of language entities”.

The link between translanguaging and language policies, discussed by Makalela and Silva (2023), Rocha et al (2023) and Ribeiro (2023), serves as a crucial reminder of translanguaging as a political stance (Li Wei, 2021). This is defined as:

[...] as a theory of human cognition and communication, translanguaging postulates that named languages are political constructs and historico-ideological products of the nation-state boundaries and have no neuropsychological correspondence and that human beings have a natural instinct to go beyond narrowly defined linguistic resources in meaning- and sense-making, as well as an ability, acquired through socialization and social participation, to manipulate the symbolic values of the named languages such as identity positioning [...]. (Li Wei, 2021, p. 2).

Deliberately signaling the political dimension of translanguaging is an invaluable contribution to the development of a decolonial translanguaging framework from the Global South/s. The intersection between translanguaging theory and language educational policy could possibly amplify translanguaging as a movement, particularly at a time when radically transformative language policies are urgently needed (Rajagopalan, 2020). It is thus important to reiterate translanguaging as both political and transformative, through its intersections with decoloniality (García and Alvis, 2019) and encourage “more and more voices from the South [...] [to] join the chorus” (Rajagopalan, 2020, p. xii).

Severo, Abdelhay and Makoni (2020) highlight areas warranting further investigation within the Global South/s, advocating for a closer examination of the relationship between translanguaging studies and sociopolitical contexts of protest, for example. According to the scholars, “Translanguaging as an analytic concept can be used to engage with three interrelated issues in sociopolitical contexts of protest: the monoglot ideology of language, agency, and social justice” (Severo, Abdelhay and Makoni, 2020, p. 106). This assertion encapsulates the struggle against modernity-coloniality by promoting opportunities for people to speak from non-hegemonic positionalities. The result is a more critical and creative engagement with Southern epistemologies, perspectives and voices.

Within the Brazilian context, for example, translanguaging literature is growing fast, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Lucena (2021) is not alone in showing, however, that in the field of (in)disciplinary Applied Linguistics the number of studies on the role of translanguaging in challenging dominant understandings of bilingualism and language use is still limited. To provide an idea of the rich translanguaging agenda in Brazil, it's worth highlighting the range of fields in which studies have been developed. These include: teacher education (e.g. Cavalcanti, 2013); language education (e.g. Rocha and Maciel, 2015; Lucena, 2018; Rocha, 2019; Welp ; García, 2020); d/Deaf education (e.g. Nogueira, 2019; Rocha *et al.*, 2023); amongst others (e.g. Abreu; Rocha; Maciel, 2021; Santo, 2021; Liberali; Swanwick, 2020). In addition, many scholars have approached translanguaging as a framework to analyze complex linguistic and pedagogical practices involving different named languages within Brazilian educational and political contexts (Makalela; Silva, 2023; Santo, 2021; Welp; Maciel, 2024; Barros and Zolin-Vesz, 2024, amongst others).

Severo, Abdelhay and Makoni (2020), however, criticize the limited way Brazilian scholars tend to discuss translanguaging, noting that the discourse predominantly focuses on its application in the field of English teaching. They suggest that Global South perspectives on translanguaging could illuminate the rich diversity of language interactions, not only within Brazilian contexts, but also across the Global North. They argue: “If scholarship in the Global North is linked and subordinated to the academic agenda of the Global South when viewed through the way translanguaging is understood in the Global South, then some of the theoretical and practical problems which the Global North has been faced with can be addressed”. (Severo; Abdelhay; Makoni, 2020, p. 104).

Despite the advances in Brazilian translanguaging scholarship over the past decade (Zolin-Veiz, 2014; Leroy and Pires Santos, 2017; Leroy, 2021, among others), the field needs more stimulation in order to move beyond the realm of English teaching. Rocha (2019), for example, asks what translanguaging would look like in contexts not officially recognized as bi- or multilingual, such as Brazilian high schools.

Translanguaging within the Brazilian academic context effectively illustrates the importance of ‘going beyond’, as proposed by García (2020). We must therefore keep engaging Global South/s perspectives and challenge discussions that still look at translanguaging through a modernist and structuralist lens. Drawing on Anzaldúa (1987), García (2020, p. xxi) describes the energy produced when linguistically and culturally minoritised people “perform life entre mundos/in the borderlands”. For García (2020, p. xxi), it is this very energy, “produced by performing entre mundos translanguaging”, that can make cracks in the “solid muros” responsible for perpetuating social divisions. Translanguaging is a transgressive theoretical approach which can produce political, onto-epistemological, ethical, and aesthetic cracks. These cracks could be powerful catalysts for change (Walsh, 2018). In this sense, translanguaging can challenge the coloniality of language, as well as challenging the very *centrality* of language in our lives. However daunting this may seem, it is important to remember that radical transformation calls for courageous leaps of faith into the unknown, the unimaginable. A radically transformative, decolonial translanguaging agenda would then benefit from an unwavering commitment to keep going further, and beyond.

5 TRANSLANGUAGING FROM ELSEWHERE

It is important to recognize that no singular conceptualization or theory can fully capture the complexities of social life. Therefore, despite divergent approaches within a particular field of knowledge, what truly matters is the capacity for a particular concept to inspire and to enable *speaking from elsewhere* (Medina, 2006). According to Medina (2006), *speaking from elsewhere* is about embracing plurality as a radical act, by assuming other positionalities and speaking from diverse perspectives. He uses the phrase “[the] polyphony of language games” (Medina, 2006, p. 176) to describe the importance of the nurturing of a “multiplicity of voices and standpoints”. Meanings which cannot be recognized and expressed from one discursive standpoint could, in this way, be recognized and expressed from a different perspective, that is to say, from *elsewhere* (Medina, 2016, p. 176), from outside the confines of modern/colonial logic.

Speaking from elsewhere challenges the silence and marginalization perpetuated by dominant language practices, or language ‘games’, as Medina terms it. The author argues that oppressive language structures strip marginalized people of their resources to make meaning, leading to forms of exclusion that often go unnoticed. As Medina (2016, p. 176) says: “We cannot understand how silences are produced and how they can be overcome if we don’t critically question what it means to be a participant and to have a voice or to be deprived of it in a language game”. *Speaking from elsewhere* creates possibilities to fight back.

The concept of *speaking from elsewhere* chimes with translanguaging’s commitment to transformative action (García, 2020) and with the notion of *starting from the other end* (García, 2020; Cresse, 2020). That is to say, that the decolonial potential of translanguaging can be harnessed through engaging unexplored points of view. We believe that embracing these new positionalities requires a genuine interest in ‘co-laboring’, as García (2020) suggests, which would allow us to collaboratively re-imagine and “re-perform our experiences and understandings” (García, 2020, p. xvii). In this way, we strongly believe in the decolonial and emancipatory potential of translanguaging to confront epistemic violence, especially in the complex and heterogeneous contexts of the Global South/s. It is the transformative decolonial potential of translanguaging, with its inherent contradictions and incompleteness, that stands out as one of its most distinct and compelling features.

6 CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

Many scholars, such as Safatle (2020), consider affect and emotion as a core components in establishing regimes of domination and epistemic marginalization. Whereas decolonial theory can be a useful tool for understanding and addressing our experiences of onto-epistemic violence (Walsh, 2023), affect and emotion are also important resources for strategies of resistance. Emotions such as fear, hope, frustration, and expectation have been used and (re)produced as psychological tools and commodities to exert control over our bodies and actions. Translanguaging, in this sense, can be a disruptive force which opens up new possibilities of thinking about language, affect and emotion from *elsewhere*. To this effect, Eliane Brum’s reflections, are particularly poignant.

Brum (2021) describes being translingual as both a choice and a way of life, involving the crossing of worlds and imagined borderlands. This movement is never finished, and there is no pre-determined destination. Named language categories have no role in this process, because our existence transcends language. For Brum (2021), language and body are one unified whole. She describes how we are all in “a translingual trance” (Brum, 2021, p. 330). From her perspective, being translingual means being more complete and enriched *because* we exist in a state of incompleteness.

Brum’s ideas expand and challenge our understanding of translanguaging by illuminating the potentiality of ubuntu translanguaging. She writes:

“A impossibilidade de converter a complexidade da vida em palavras, assim como a impossibilidade de converter corpo em palavras, me acompanha desde sempre. Vida e corpo escapam das palavras. – ou palavras não dão conta de abarcar vida e corpo. Essa é a condição permanente de quem conta, seja pela escrita, seja pela oralidade” (Brum, 2021, p. 330¹).

¹ Translated into English by the authors, Brum’s words go as follows: *The impossibility of converting the complexity of life into words, as well as the impossibility of*

Translanguaging is an essential concept because it enables *speaking from elsewhere*, so that we may cross worlds, and cross them together, so closely that it becomes possible to envisage other cartographies of the world (Krenak, 2022) *from* and *of elsewhere*. This is possibly one of the most precious and challenging *trans-potentialities* of all: to embrace plurality so fully that advocating for singular narratives becomes undesirable (Krenak, 2022).

As with any other theoretical framework, translanguaging presents but one prism through which to understand language practices. Far from a silver bullet, it should be seen as an invitation to consider perspectives and practices *from elsewhere*. In this way translanguaging can inspire us to disinvent, to recreate, and to collectively breathe on our way toward peaceful interconnectedness.

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converting the body into words, has accompanied me ever since. Life and body escape words. – or words are not capable of encompassing life and body. This is the permanent condition of those who tell, whether in writing or orally.

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