Translanguaging as Transformation: The Collaborative Construction of New Linguistic Realities

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Translanguaging, in Li Wei's words, has 'captured people's imagination' (2017: 9). While the number of academic articles and books about translanguaging has grown exponentially since the early 2000s, the title of this edited volume includes two further key terms – *collaboration* and *transformation* – which encapsulate the specific contribution we offer the field. The authors of the twelve chapters describe how collaboration and transformation are integral to their endeavours across different geographical locations and spaces of engagement. The aim of this collection, therefore, is not solely to describe diverse practices of translanguaging, or places and ways in which translanguaging might be enabled, but also to critically examine how people work together to catalyse change. Such change relates to how people and their communicative resources are positioned in different localities, and equally importantly, how people with different backgrounds, different frames of knowledge and different needs come together, communicate and work together. Such *intra-action* (Barad, 2007) – the co-constitution of entangled agencies from within encounters between people, the material world and discourses – offers the possibility of including different viewpoints for imagining alternative linguistic realities, and thus new methodologies for understanding and constructing worlds *for* and *through* language. Li conceptualises translanguaging as a practical theory of language, in that it involves an ongoing and emergent '*process of knowledge construction* that goes beyond language(s)' (2017: 15). In contributing to this practical theory, our volume presents translanguaging as being both an ontological and an epistemological project: an endeavour concerned not only with the meaning of language and communicative practices, but also with how such meanings are generated.

The three parts of the book articulate diverse voices speaking of and from different experiences and traditions in the study of language and linguistic diversity; the authors also use words other than translanguaging to refer (in similar albeit nuanced ways) to the communicative practices which they examine. These include *translangageance* (Aden & Eschenauer), *transmodalities* (Hawkins), *bilingualism* (Ballena, Masats & Unamuno), *multilingualism* (Andrews *et al.*, Simpson), *plurilingualism* (Llompart-Esbert & Nussbaum), *pluriliteracies* (Vallejo Rubinstein) and *voice* (Harvey). Indeed, compared with some of these terms, translanguaging is a relatively new concept that can be used for describing practices that are not themselves inherently novel. It is also one that has been assumed differently in the local contexts and scholarly traditions represented in the book. García (this volume), for example, makes explicit reference to aspects such as race, social class and sexuality in her understanding of how translanguaging works, while these aspects are less explicit in at least some contributions to the volume. Translanguaging has emerged as part of a broader, critical process in which the meaning of 'language', understandings of 'language practices', and ideas about how knowledge of these phenomena is generated have themselves been objects of transformation. The

traditional understanding of 'language(s)' as monolithic construct(s) existing independently of communicative use has been rejected in fields including interactional sociolinguistics, linguistic ethnography and critical applied linguistics in favour of conceptualisations of *languaging* (Becker, 1995) as practical social action that draws on an expansive repertoire of (not only linguistic) semiotic resources (Gumperz, 1964; Lüdi & Py, 2009, Blommaert & Backus, 2011; Rymes, 2014). Like the authors in this volume, many researchers now consider the concept of translanguaging beyond language(s) and encompass within their focus the multimodal nature of communication (Blackledge & Creese, 2017; Bradley & Moore, 2018; Kusters *et al.*, 2017; Zhu Hua *et al.*, 2017). Translanguaging thus reflects the multiplicity, fluidity, mobility, locality and globality of the resources deployed by individuals for engaging in complex meaning-making processes. It provides 'a way of capturing the expanded complex practices of speakers who could not avoid having had languages inscribed in their body' (García & Li, 2014: 18).

We do not dwell on whether the notions and terminology employed by authors in this volume are more or less appropriate for referring to the communicative contexts and encounters that they study (see, for example, Jaspers & Madsen, 2016; MacSwan, 2017; and Pennycook, 2016 for critical discussions in this area). Rather, we regard all the contributions as being important in generating emergent understandings of language and other semiotic practices in contexts of diversity. This is what García is referring to, in the foreword to this volume, when she claims that 'there is no need to enter into a discussion of the "linguistic" within this approach'. By extension, as García describes, the chapters illuminate the relationships, processes and outcomes of collaborative endeavour (which blurs the boundaries between role), therefore broadening the translanguaging scope to encompass these practices.

The paradigm opened up by translanguaging (and similar co-existing notions) for the study of communication in contexts of diversity has allowed for a plethora of hidden and perhaps stigmatised ways of communication, often engaged in by members of linguistic minority groups, to be brought to the forefront of theory. In the words of feminist economic geographers Gibson-Graham, research and action have made the everyday practices of diverse individuals '"real", more credible, more viable as objects of policy and activism, more present as everyday realities that touch our lives and dynamically shape our futures' (Gibson-Graham, 2008: 618). This 'performative ontological project' involves seeing knowledge as always in a process of being and becoming, and scholars as privileged actors in this process of (re)inscribing meanings onto the world. Yet the *re*performance of reality, Gibson-Graham claim, requires 'new' academic subjects with an orientation towards a 'new' ethical practice. Thus, while much research has confirmed the dominance of certain communicative spaces and practices and the oppression of others, ethical practice would invite researchers to open spaces of freedom and possibility, by de-exoticising supposedly omnipresent forms of power in a way that new realities may be imagined and constructed. A performative ontological project is therefore intrinsic to collaborative, co-produced and action research agendas. It is also closely related to a transformative

activist stance, described by Stetsenko as a way of researching 'that transcends the separation between theory and practice while embracing human agency grounded in political imagination and commitment to social transformation' (Stetsenko, 2015: 102).

The possibility of re-imagining and re-constructing linguistic realities – as a performative ontological project – is where translanguaging research, we argue, holds most promise. In their extended definition of translanguaging, García and Li (2014) encourage scholars to engage in research that is trans-system, trans-space, trans-disciplinary and *transformative*, in seeking to go between and beyond socially constructed spaces, systems and practices of knowledge production in enacting novel ways of engaging with language, cognition, social relations, education, and social structures. From an epistemological perspective, translanguaging thus also offers new means of understanding knowledge production and of engaging as researchers with communities and their members in novel and mutually beneficial ways. With the aim of contributing to the epistemological as well as methodological turn that a translanguaging approach could potentially afford research into language and linguistic diversity, our volume showcases studies that embed long-term community partnerships in their processes, with a strong social justice orientation. Indeed, by referring to *new* in the title of the volume we are not only alluding to the fluidity and mobility of the social meanings attached to language uses. Perhaps even more importantly we are hinting at the possibility of modifying subjectivities through the types of action-oriented collaborations presented in the chapters.

The 'Translation and Translanguaging' Project

The inspiration for this book was the collective involvement of the editors and a number of the contributors in the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded project 'Translation and Translanguaging: Investigating Linguistic and Cultural Transformations in Superdiverse Wards in Four UK Cities' (henceforth TLANG[1]). The three linking chapters are written by scholars involved in the TLANG project as co-investigators, Mike Baynham, Adrian Blackledge, Zhu Hua and Li Wei, and the projects' principal investigator, Angela Creese, has contributed an afterword. TLANG was a four-year project (2014-2018) in which collaboration between academic researchers, non-academic partners and community stakeholders was fundamental. Also central to the project was the concept of understanding, in this case understanding how people communicate across diverse languages and cultures in superdiverse cities (Vertovec, 2007). Translanguaging for the TLANG project was initially conceived as a means by which people make use of the communicative resources available to them in and across multiple inner-city and online spaces and places. These locations included food markets, libraries, advocacy charities, enterprise meetings and sports clubs, as well as the home. Founded upon a linguistic ethnographic approach, the research extended to encompass the multimodal, the embodied and what Baynham and colleagues describe as the 'trans-discursive' (Baynham *et al.*, 2015). Considering this mosaic of everyday spaces of everyday practice enabled new understandings of how people communicate to get things done: how they build their lives. In this way, translanguaging, as

configured in the TLANG project and within the chapters in this volume, is hopeful practice. The 'trans-' approaches embodied across the TLANG project illustrate a postmodern orientation towards research which accepts and foregrounds an understanding of the 'complexities of the ethnic and linguistic mingling which takes place in social spaces worldwide' (Holliday & Macdonald, 2019: 10), spaces that are always emergent. The TLANG project therefore served as a catalyst for creative approaches to doing research and to understanding everyday communication in social life. At a methodological level it opened up a space for further development of lines of thinking and lines of doing. It formed, in this sense, a point of departure – and not least for this book.

Underpinning Themes

We now return to the foundational themes for our volume – *collaboration* and *transformation* – setting out some of the different ways in which these concepts frame the contributions.

Collaboration

How does our volume as a whole understand the concept of collaboration? The contributions are organised into three parts, focusing in turn on collaborative *relationships*, *processes* and *outcomes*. All three parts offer perspectives on collaboration, or on how diverse people, with different ways of knowing and doing, take action together. Or as Creese puts it in her afterword, the volume explores 'ways to open up the research process so that other voices can be heard in research accounts'. Part I focuses on the relationships that are built for and through research, Part II foregrounds the processes of joint engagement, and Part III centres on the outcomes of such shared work. As is the case with translanguaging, the contributors also use other terms to refer to their collaborative efforts, including *participatory research* (Llompart-Esbert & Nussbaum), *interthinking* (Andrews *et al.*), *co-labor* (Ballena, Masats & Unamuno), *boundary crossing* (Moore & Tavares), *bricolage* (Bradley & Atkinson), *coproduction* (Pöyhönen *et al.*), *transauthorship* and *transcreation* (Harvey). The volume addresses the gap in accounts of what collaboration might mean in research, or the challenge of 'developing a language to talk about the different traditions that constitute the field' (Facer & Pahl, 2017: 4). Through their different contributions, all authors show how this 'language' for talking about collaboration is necessarily locally contingent and multi-voiced.

Part I of the volume, *Collaborative Relationships*, focuses on the broad range of contexts in which research is built and takes place. There is a risk in laying these upon the page. Often relational processes go unwritten, with research write-ups focusing on results, analysis and outputs. Here we showcase some of the messiness involved in the performative ontological project of translanguaging – the long-term relationships required, the commitments to being uncomfortable and to allowing different stories and understandings to come to the fore. The contributors do not seek to offer a guidebook to developing collaborative relationships for research. Instead they foreground the multiple

ways in which this development can take place, from deliberate collaborations to emergent co-productions.

Part II, *Collaborative Processes,* emphasises the negotiated and unfolding nature of collaborative work. The four chapters all focus on creative arts, and on collaborations between university researchers and creative practitioners, demonstrating how flexible and emergent epistemologies work in practice. The chapters show how collaborative processes challenge the ownership of knowledges in terms of whose voices are heard and whose voices are therefore considered worth hearing. Moreover, these glimpses of the lived realities of doing research *with* people embody opportunities for creative ethnographic practice.

The chapters in Part III, *Collaborative Outcomes*, demonstrate that the products of collaborative processes are inextricable from these processes and from the relationships established. The outcomes here perform the 'trans-', allowing insights into the potential transformative possibilities, and also to the potential restrictions. The reflections offered within the chapters build on the question of 'whose voices?' to ask 'whose *transformation?*'

In this way, the volume speaks to questions about the valuing of collaborative research, both inside and outside the academy, an issue raised by Facer and Pahl (2017). These authors state that in much research of this kind, there is a tendency to focus on the complexities of setting up a 'partnership' – and that work is needed to explore how research in this trans-space can be judged. We do not offer a taxonomy or a structured framework here. We do however seek to show glimpses, albeit partial ones, of the often invisible sides of research and make a link between the performative ontological project and the messiness inherent in the approaches taken by the chapter authors.

Transformation

In terms of how the contributions conceptualise transformation, the chapters across the volume typically focus on one of two types of change – either on practical manifestations of changes in people's practices in local settings, or on changes in subjectivities as a result of the relationships developed by participants in collaborative engagements. Jaspers (2018) presents a critique of translanguaging scholarship, problematising its transformative claims. Although his main focus is on research which describes the transformative potential of translanguaging pedagogies in schools, his words remind us to act with caution in upholding transformation as a causal effect of translanguaging, or even as its purpose. Indeed, one contribution to this volume (King & Bigelow) explicitly questions the chances of long-term transformations of communicative practices and pedagogies that are partially determined by fluctuating socio-political environments. In fact, all chapter authors present rigorous accounts not only of the changes their work hoped to bring about, but also of its limitations, and the challenges they encountered. One of our intentions as editors was to critically engage with notions of transformation and its (im)possibilities, paying attention to different aspects of research practice and allowing for further questions to emerge in the place of claims to exacting findings. By foregrounding

collaboration across all of the contributions, the work also helps address questions such as 'who gets to decide what transformation is?', and 'how might transformation be experienced, in different localities?' We see transformation as a subjective experience, and the chapters help illuminate some of those subjectivities.

Outline

We now turn to the structure of the book and some brief notes on the content of the different contributions. Each of its three parts contains four main chapters, and is introduced by a short comment chapter.

In his comment chapter framing Part I, *Collaborative Relationships*, Baynham notes that the relationships that are imagined and enacted by those engaged in researching translanguaging are of many kinds: relationships of solidarity (based on the transgression of linguistic and communicative boundaries) and of challenge (subverting prevailing normativities), as well as research relationships with participants. These have the aim of amplifying voice, enabling their 'speaking back to ideologies and norms of monolingualism and separate bilingualism in a way that might be politically effective' (Baynham, this volume). This 'freedom-orientation' of translanguaging is clearly evident in the main chapters, which highlight the centrality of relationships and dialogue within research contexts. Hawkins' chapter details the complexities of engaging youth from across the world in a film-sharing project, where she elaborates the potential of transmodal transnational interaction for generating critical cosmopolitanism with her participants. Translanguaging possibilities in adult migrant language education in the UK are the focus of Simpson's chapter: this is a domain of educational practice where normative understandings of monolingualism dominate, and where the concept of translanguaging is often at odds with established understandings of language use and language pedagogy. A different kind of tension is found in the context of a collaborative photography project with unaccompanied minors who are residents at an asylum seeker reception centre in the rural west of Finland, in the chapter by Pöyhönen and colleagues. Here a light is shone on how the sustained engagement of ethnography enables the establishment of relationships between the different actors involved in the project. Part I ends with a study of *co-labor* in the context of plurilingual education in Wichi-speaking communities in Argentina, by Ballena *et al*. These colleagues understand co-labor as working together with indigenous communities, and from symmetrical positions of power.

Authors of chapters in Part II, *Collaborative Processes*, relate their work to the experience of carrying out collaborative research. The dialogic nature of the chapters emphasises, in the most positive way, how – as Blackledge notes in his framing comment chapter – once dialogism is recognised as a mode of representation, the authority of the single voice is questioned. Creative practice that is collaborative, as Blackledge explains using the example of poetry, enables the productive expansion and elaboration of interpretations of social life. Part II begins with Aden and Eschenauer's work in language education. They describe an enactive language pedagogy which they

develop within a framework of what they term *translangageance*, focusing on the process of emergence of a 'common language'. Andrews and colleagues in the next chapter reflect on their use of arts-based methods in a large multi-site trans-national cross-disciplinary collaborative project. They regard their practice as transformative and consider this from the perspectives of the new materialism and from *interthinking*, which they gloss as collaborative problem-solving in teams across communicative modes. The chapter that follows also considers collaborative practice in the arts, this time at the intersection of research, practice and engagement. Here, Bradley and Atkinson explain how they use *bricolage* as a conceptual framework for their transdisciplinary pedagogical approach to the study of the linguistic and semiotic landscape (and its limitations), reflecting on the transformational affordances of translanguaging, in work with young people in Leeds, UK. In the last chapter in Part II, a poet (Tavares) and an academic (Moore), describe their experience of creating co-produced research, also in Leeds, with a Youth Spoken Word poetry organisation. In so doing, they illuminate the processes involved in co-reading, co-interpreting and co-writing ethnography.

The *Collaborative Outcomes* of relationships and processes are the focus of chapters in Part III. The authors of the framing comment, Zhu Hua and Li Wei, caution that the outcomes described in these chapters cannot be divorced from process. Rather, one should consider outcomes themselves as 'a collaborative, creative and critical process, underpinned by strong commitment to social justice and equality' (Zhu & Li, this volume). Harvey, in the first chapter of Part III, discusses the Bakhtinian concept of *voice*, the foundation of her work with a theatre company in the north of England in the co-production of performance art. She develops the concept in relation to this work, describing voice as the material vehicle for processes of trans-ing: translanguaging, transcreation, and transauthorship. In the chapter that follows, by King and Bigelow, we return to migrant language education contexts, but this time in Minnesota, US. The work they discuss, on translanguaging pedagogies, takes place with adolescents who are refugees and are in the process of becoming literate as well as being language learners. Plurilingual learning in a High School in Barcelona is examined in the next chapter by Llompart-Esbert and Nussbaum: they demonstrate how the adolescent students who participate in their collaborative research are highly competent in using their linguistic and communicative repertoires for learning. The final chapter of the section, by Vallejo Rubenstein, also describes research in Barcelona. This time though the focus is on translanguaging as transformative pedagogy, in work that 'bridges' across educational contexts: an after-school literacy program in a multicultural, multilingual primary school, and a teacher education project where educational resources incorporating a translanguaging approach are developed for – and with – the participants in the after-school literacy program.

Looking forward

The authors of the framing link chapters, together with García and Creese in their foreword and afterword, already highlight many of the main ideas from the book to be taken forward in future

translanguaging scholarship. In this final section we will briefly refer to some of the concrete findings or main conclusions that weave across chapters. Firstly, the volume offers important methodological insights for researchers and research institutions: it illuminates the affordances of collaborative research for generating 'newness' as it is perceived in each local context by different individuals. As highlighted by Facer and Pahl (2017), critical work is still needed in terms of how this research and its 'impact' is valued both inside and outside the academy. The volume offers clear methodological advances in terms of interdisciplinary research with creative practitioners, as pointed out by Creese in her afterword. Some of the chapters are co-authored with artists (Andrews *et al.*, Bradley & Atkinson, Moore & Tavares), and these and well as others (Aden & Eschenauer, Harvey; Pöyhönen *et al.*) report on the development of creative inquiry methodologies for answering language-related research questions. In Applied Linguistics there is increasing interest in creativity and the arts (broadly understood) as method for researching language and as communicative practice (see the AILA Research Network on Creative Inquiry in Applied Linguistics, formed in 2018; Bradley & Harvey, forthcoming), and this volume offers methodological advances for this emerging field. García and Creese in their forward and afterword argue that further interrogation of the relationship between criticality and creativity in translanguaging research and practice emerges from the volume as a necessary future direction for this type of work. While not addressing creative inquiry specifically, other chapters offer insightful examples of how translanguaging research may bridge spaces (for example, a non-formal educational context and a university teacher education course in Vallejo Rubinstein's study) and roles (for example, the dual role of teacher and researcher taken on by Llompart-Esbert in her study with Nussbaum), and others are co-written by academics and educational activists (for example, Ballena *et al.*), all advancing our understandings of what collaborative research means.

As a number of the chapters focus on formal or non-formal educational contexts, the volume also offers significant findings in terms of translanguaging pedagogies. One important conclusion in this regard is the recognition that letting 'other' languages into teaching/learning spaces does not necessarily mean that educators and learners need to use 'all languages and all times'. Indeed, in her own work in the field of Education, García speaks of translanguaging as 'part of the discursive regimes that students in the 21st century must perform, part of the linguistic repertoire that includes, at times, the ability to function in the standardized academic languages required in schools' (García & Sylvan, 2011: 389). The recognition that standard languaging practices in 'one language at a time' are also part of translanguaging emerges in the chapter by Ballena *et al.*, who support spaces for learning Wichi, spaces for learning Spanish as well as bilingual spaces. It is evident too in the chapters by Llompart-Esbert and Nussbaum and by Hawkins, in which learners' full communicative repertoires are included in learning processes which progress towards and culminate in project products (digital stories, digital posters) that use one language only, alongside other semiotic modes. Explicit recognition of translanguaging as a continuum of language practices could help reduce the sort of

tensions reported on in the chapter by Simpson in terms of pervasive monolingual ideologies in educational settings. A further important finding in terms of translanguaging pedagogies is clearly represented by Vallejo Rubinstein's chapter, in which educational resources were developed 'ground up' from the practices plurilingual students. Translanguaging pedagogies are necessarily responsive to local realities, and thus may look different from one context to another.

Finally, the chapters point to tensions in terms of the need for 'fixity', for example in placing translanguaging in durable policies. In their chapter, King and Bigelow speak precisely of the experimental nature of many of the policies and practices supporting translanguaging. Simpson discusses the complexities of engaging with policy actors, and sees most promise in collaborative grass-roots initiatives. Similarly, Ballena *et al* conclude that enduring educational transformations 'can only occur through […] sustained, reflective and collective actions', rather than through particular policies or action plans. These findings align with our understandings of transformation and newness, discussed in earlier sections of this introductory chapter, as being intricately tied to collaborative endeavour and individual subjectivities.

Notes
[1]See: www.tlang.org.uk

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