



Association of Mexican American Educators Journal

A peer-reviewed, open access journal

Volume 15 Issue 3

2021

AMAE Special Issue

Centering Translanguaging in Critical Teacher Education:
*Cultivando Nuevos Conocimientos de Translenguaje en la
Educación de Futuros Docentes*

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<http://amaejournal.utsa.edu>

ISSN: 2377-9187

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24974/amae.15.3.457>

(Re)Orienting Translanguaging in Bilingual Education

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As a US born Latino who grew up in a bilingual household in Philadelphia, I learned from an early age about the subjective nature of language borders. For example, when I was in first grade, my teacher asked us about our favorite TV show. My answer to her was “la novela,” in reference to my mother’s soap opera that I enjoyed watching with her on my days off from school. Fitting the typical demographic of the US teaching force, she was a monolingual white woman who didn’t understand me. I remember being surprised by this. While I was old enough to understand that my parents sometimes used Spanish—a language that my teachers and many of my peers did not understand—I hadn’t realized that “la novela” was, in fact, not considered English to many people since I used it all the time with my siblings and cousins who all identified as English speakers. Until that moment, “la novela” had always functioned as an unmarked English word to me with the term “soap opera” not entering my linguistic repertoire until later as the preferred term when engaged with monolingual English speakers.

Many years later when I was a graduate student in New York City, I had the opportunity to meet a former member of the Young Lords, a 1970s radical Puerto Rican organization with bases throughout the Puerto Rican diaspora that had inspired my own political commitments. We were waiting for the elevator together and I said something about “el elevador” taking a long time. She quickly corrected me insisting that “el elevador” was Spanglish and that the correct term was “el ascensor,” a term I had never heard used by any Spanish speakers in my life up to that point. This was one of many of my experiences of language policing in progressive circles that led me to the realization that the language policing of US Latinxs spans the political spectrum from the far-right, who often want to impose draconian English-Only policies to the far-left who often subscribe to purist language ideologies in the name of language maintenance. It was also one of the experiences that reminded me that it was not only monolingual white people who engaged in this language policing but also bilingual Latinxs.

These experiences are part of what inspired me to develop a research agenda that brings attention to the arbitrary nature of linguistic borders and the harm that these linguistic borders perpetuate against US Latinx students, teachers and communities. My point of entry into this work has been through the concept of translanguaging. I had the great fortune of reading the page proofs of what would eventually become *Bilingual Education in the 21st Century: A Global Perspective* as a graduate student working under Ofelia García's supervision. I remember how validated I felt as a US Latinx who was constantly made to feel as if neither my English or Spanish were good enough as I read through the book. I feel even more validated when I come across other Latinxs like Navarro Martell who share similar experiences in her critical autoethnographic work as part of this special issue. Many of us have been able to build community around this concept in ways that were not just individually transformative but also provided us with tools to promote institutional transformation.

At the same time, I worry that as the term has been taken up it has often been in ways that are divorced from the important political and epistemological components of Ofelia's original conceptualization of the term. Salmerón, Batista-Morales and Valenzuela remind us of these political dimensions of translanguaging, by pointing to the ways this connects to the longstanding politics of caring and authentic *cariño* Latinx communities have used to combat subtractive schooling that has sought to violently strip us of our cultural and linguistic practices. Nuñez & García-Mateus further examine this resistance to subtractive policies that have shaped the experiences of US Latinxs by examining the ways Latina mothers work to sustain translanguaging family and cultural practices in defiance of monoglossic language ideologies that frame these language practices as deficient and in need of remediation. These articles are an important reminder that the inspiration for translanguaging as originally conceptualized in *Bilingual Education in the 21st Century* was political struggles of Latinx and other minoritized bilingual communities in the US and in the world. Indeed, the origin story that Ofelia has told about what originally inspired her to conceptualize translanguaging in the ways that she did in her book was the disconnect that she observed between the strict separation of languages that was, and often continues to be, considered "best practice" in bilingual education and the strategic use of both English and Spanish that many bilingual teachers engaged in to enhance student learning and affirm their bilingualism. The legacy of resistance that inspired her conceptualization can be seen in the retratos described by Muñoz-Muñoz where Latinx bilingual

teachers use their knowledge of translanguaging theory and pedagogy to continue to create counterideological stances in their schools.

In the spirit of continuing to push the conversation further, I want to revisit one of the key conceptual moves that Ofelia has made in her insistence that any theory of language committed to social justice must take bilingualism as the norm and use this as a point of entry for reconceptualizing the nature of all language practices. Her argument, which she has continued to develop in collaboration with many others including me since 2009, is not simply that bilingualism is good but rather that bilingualism should be positioned as the norm of human communication. Doing so reorients language away from the assumption that homogenous codes are the normative form of human communication toward the recognition that language is inherently heterogenous—that is, the recognition that all of us are constantly crossing socio-historically produced linguistic borders. From this perspective, the relevant question to ask is not what linguistic practices count as translanguaging and what linguistic practices do not count as translanguaging. Instead, the relevant question to ask is what forms of linguistic heterogeneity become marked as translanguaging and what forms of linguistic heterogeneity remain unmarked.

The first step in reorienting language toward the embrace of its inherent heterogeneity is unapologetically engaging in marked forms of translanguaging in spaces where these language practices have typically been marginalized such as in academia. By engaging in the strategic use of language practices that have historically been associated with both English and Spanish, the articles in this special issue are doing the important foundational work of normalizing these language practices by taking the stance that they are not just legitimate in homes and communities but also in schools and academia. This is most powerfully articulated through the *Trenzando Poetry* where the authors are strategically using their entire linguistic repertoire to speak back to their racial and linguistic oppression. Ostorga illustrates the power of bringing these marked forms of translanguaging into bilingual teacher education, where Latinx teachers whose Spanish language practices are typically perceived as deficient because of the legacy of oppression that has shaped their development can begin to heal from this trauma by having their entire linguistic repertoire positioned as integral to their development as bilingual teachers. This, in turn, allows them to tap into the broader history of resistance that has characterized the experiences of US Latinxs that they can bring into their classrooms in their work with their students in order to continue to resist in the present.

The second step in reorienting language is to use the normalizing of marked forms of translanguaging as a point of entry for reconceptualizing language outside of a monoglossic lens. Eller and Nieto in their discussion of idiolect offer one point of entry into doing this. By refusing to take named languages as the point of entry for conceptualizing language, these authors align themselves within broader efforts to shift the epistemology of language away from the universalizing of idealized monolingual whiteness toward the recognition of the arbitrary nature of linguistic border construction that both affirm marked forms of translanguaging while deconstructing the very idea of monolingualism as part of broader efforts to dismantle white supremacy. This epistemological move helps us to imagine a new more inclusive vision of humanity that frames all of us as having idiosyncratic idiolects that are inherently heterogeneous as opposed to presupposing that some people engage in objectively more homogenous and pure codes than others. From this perspective, this commentary, which many readers may perceive as engaged in standard academic English, can also be understood to be engaged in translanguaging through my strategic use of my idiolect in ways that accommodate my audience, task, and goals. Indeed, all language practices can be understood as translanguaging with marked forms of translanguaging recognized as such because of the social status of the speakers and the political status of the named languages that are present within the language practices of their communities.

To give you a sense of how adopting such an orientation might play out within the context of bilingual education, let me describe a recent interaction that I had with bilingual teachers in Philadelphia. We had spent several sessions together learning about translanguaging and working to normalize the simultaneous use of linguistic features that have historically been associated with English and Spanish. The teachers felt affirmed by the concept of translanguaging and were grateful to have a word to describe and affirm the types of language practices that they have regularly engaged in both in their classrooms and the broader community. Despite this, one of the teachers lamented the fact that her students did not speak Spanish in a way that she perceived was proper. One example that she focused on was the use of the term “rufo” to refer to “roof,” which she condemned as Spanglish. I explained to her that “rufo” was a natural consequence of language contact and was no different than the fact that English speakers now use terms like “taco” and “hacienda.” We critically interrogated why it was that certain products of language contact (such as “rufo”) were perceived to be deficient whereas other

products of language contact (such as “taco” and “hacienda”) were not. Was I able to convince this teacher that “rufo” was legitimate? Probably not. Was I able to model for her how she might engage in discussions of language variation in ways that do not reify a monolingual white perspective? Yes. And my hope is that continuing to push these conversations will continue to chip away at the colonial logics that shape contemporary approaches to bilingual education continuing in the legacy of our ancestors who have always resisted these ideologies. I see this special issue as part of this continuing legacy and am grateful to all of the work that these scholars and educators for their tireless efforts.