

## Conference Cross-Talk:

# Tracing Across Repertoires/Resources

With the recent abundance of March conferences in the Pacific Northwest, it was possible to trace several threads of conversation across disciplines, specifically related to Second Language Writing (SLW). What follows is a brief mapping of the intellectual terrain at the conferences related to translingualism and translanguaging, both topics receiving a great deal of attention in 2017 at the convention for Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL), and the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC).

Translanguaging reconceptualizes language as a verb instead of a noun. It is a type of communicative action. A bilingual (or multilingual) person is not the sum of two (or more) distinct and internal monolingual people, but draws from a single holistic language repertoire depending on the situation and who she is interacting with. Several presenters at various conferences pointed to ways in which surface analysis of such interactions may look similar to previous approaches to identifying code-switching. However, it is a different conceptualization of the mind. Instead of two (or more) separate and distinct language codes in the mind that someone switches between, translanguaging is the act of drawing on strategic and appropriate aspects of their holistic language repertoire for a given situation.

For bilingual education, this could mean that instead of asking, “How would you say that in English/Spanish?” a teacher might ask, “Can you think of any other ways we could say that?” Wisconsin educators Laura Hamman, Emeline Beck, and Aubrey Hellenbrand showed that asking students such questions identified different and multiple ways of saying things “within” as well as “across” named (recognized) language varieties, which helps get at the situational nature of language and communication. Other learning project ideas included writings on identity that included certain aspects of students’ lives in languages that represented different parts of their lives within a single text or writing two different research report texts on a single topic for different audiences in different languages.

Translingualism focuses on how individuals draw on many semiotic resources - including, but not limited to language - depending on their purposes and situation. However, several speakers across conferences spoke of their perceived need to define and be precise about what translingualism is. At TESOL, Tony Silva and others even held a session to “interrogate” translingualism as a more aggressive attempt to define its meaning. At CCCC, Missy Watson from City University in New York took a more open stance in identifying the semiotic ambiguity that has led to several interpretations of translingualism, as well as different affordances of these various interpretations. At this same session, Suresh Canagarajah (author of the 2015 book *Translingual Practice* and 2017 AAAL keynote speaker) was actually in the audience and said he did not intend to use this word during his upcoming keynote at AAAL because of the pressure to limit it.

It seems that translingualism is undergoing some disciplinary push-back within SLW as I heard several comments from people critiquing it as an “anything goes” approach – or at least contrasting translanguaging to such an approach with the implication being that translingualism holds this position. While this is not actually what most writers on translingualism have proposed, it seems to be a discourse in circulation since Paul Kei Matsuda’s 2014 article “The Lure of Translingual Writing” in which he presented a view of uncritical celebration of this term. In contrast to this view, David Schwarzer at the TESOL conference pointed out that translingualism represents the practices people use when they’re trying to sell something – such as how New Jersey restaurant owners and other businesses in his research have made different kinds of information available in multicultural neighborhoods in order to better communicate with customers. Such decisions require a great deal of material investment, local/global sensitivity, reflexivity, and feedback from the community. During a CCCC presentation, an audience member also pointed out that translingualism has some political force, as well, for recognizing the reality of real world diversity of both identity and communication practices as it can be used to push against oppressive monolingual and monocultural ideological assumptions, still often present in the privileging of academic English to the exclusion of other semiotic resources.

During his plenary talk, Li Wei was careful to situate and trace the notion of “languaging” as separate from and historically preceding the rise of translingualism (which he never addresses directly) and demonstrated its traction especially among bilingual education scholars such as Ofelia García. For translingualism, presentation scholars referenced work from researchers such as Suresh Canagarajah, Bruce Horner, Min-Zhan Lu, Alastair Pennycook, John Trimbur, and Nancy Bou Ayash. With its focus on semiotic resources beyond language, many presenters are finding connections between translingualism with multimodality (extremely relevant considering the recent special edition TESOL Quarterly on this topic). At CCCC, many scholars are even moving further along this trajectory to talking about transmodality as the synthesis and synergy of communicative modes like visual, gestural, spatial, aural, and linguistic, instead of just considering multiple modes separately.

While both translanguaging and translingualism call for a reconceptualization of language teaching and research, translanguaging seems to be the term in vogue for the fields of TESOL and Applied Linguistics while translingualism is being operationalized more in Composition and Rhetoric. Since SLW is an inherently interdisciplinary endeavor and sits at this intersection, it is useful to follow both terms in use. Both have implications for teaching and research, and they both respond to the exigence of a non-monolingual world and the necessity of navigating it situationally.

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