Beyond the traditional scope of translanguaging☆
Comparing translanguaging practices in Belgian multilingual and monolingual classroom contexts

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the interactional behavior and the socio-pedagogical valorization of translanguaging practices of teachers and pupils in a multilingual and a monolingual classroom. By including the latter, we aim at expanding the scope of translanguaging research. Based on linguistic-ethnographic fieldwork, our analyses demonstrate differences in the nature of translanguaging practices: norm-breaking in the multilingual classroom versus turning back to the norm in the monolingual classroom. Translanguaging practices occur in the margin as well as in the centre of the classroom activity, with socio-emotional purposes in both classroom settings. Pedagogical goals, however, are only observed in the multilingual classroom.

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1. Introduction

Recent decades have been characterized by a sharp rise in the internationalization of many aspects of society. Changes in employment patterns, travel, communication, the mass media, immigration and an increasingly global economy have had a significant impact on the social, cultural and linguistic diversity of many Western European societies (Baker, 2011; Blommaert and Rampton, 2011). In these societies, globalization, along with migration flows and increasing diversity, has given rise to increasing multilingualism among the population. Language practices have long attracted scholars' attention but since the turn of the century the study of multilinguals' linguistic practices has been foregrounded as 'the new norm of applied linguistic and sociolinguistics' (May 2014: 1). In an attempt to describe the diverse linguistic repertoires of multilinguals, an explosion of concepts arose around the start of the 21st century: multilinguals are said to be involved in processes of 'flexible bilingualism' (Creese and Blackledge, 2010), 'polylingualism' (Jørgensen, 2008), 'metrolingualism' (Otsuji and Pennycook, 2010), 'code-meshing' (Canagarajah, 2011a) or 'translanguaging' (García, 2009a). Although each of these concepts has its own specificities and has led to valuable insights, 'translanguaging' seems to have outpaced the other terms in terms of research uptake.[1]

[1] On the 13th of April 2017, Web of science reported 125 articles on the topic of *translanguaging*, compare with 19 for *polylingualism*, 10 for *metrolingualism*, 5 for *flexible bilingualism* and 2 for *codemeshing*.

The concept of translanguaging was established in the 1980s by the Welsh educationalist Williams in order to designate 'the planned and systematic use of two languages for teaching and learning inside the same lesson' (Lewis et al., 2012: 643). Later on, the concept was popularized by Baker (2011) and García (2009a). The latter broadened the definition from its original conception as the pedagogical practice of using two languages in input and output for content instruction, to a description of the language practices of bilinguals, more specifically the way in which they move in a spontaneous and pragmatic way between their various languages (García, 2009a; Lewis et al., 2012; Williams, 1994). Translanguaging is 'rooted in the belief that bilinguals and multilinguals select features and co-construct or soft-assemble their language practices from a variety of relational contexts in ways that fit their communicative needs' (García, 2014: 95). Since the popularization, translanguaging has become widely used (see García and Lin, 2016; for an overview; Jaspers and Madsen, 2016; Otheguy et al., 2015).

The concept owes its popularity to García's broadening of the definition and particularly to her emphasis on its dynamic character (García, 2009b). According to García (2009b: 144), language practices are 'multiple and ever adjusting to the multilingual multimodal terrain of the communicative act'. In this view, the linguistic system or idiolect that speakers use in these practices consist of features, rather than of separate languages (García, 2011a; Jørgensen, 2008; Otheguy et al., 2015); that is to say, when people speak, they shuttle dynamically between these features (Canagarajah, 2011a). Although named languages may be important as social constructs, they are not appropriate as an analytical lens through which language practices can be studied (Creese and Blackledge, 2015). Researching translanguaging then refers to an analysis of speakers' linguistic repertoires or idiolects (Otheguy et al., 2015).

Scholars have frequently examined translanguaging in the context it was originally defined, namely education (cf. Williams, 1994): the concept has been applied in research in, for example dual bilingual education, transitional bilingual education and in complementary[2] schools (Creese and Blackledge, 2015; see García and Lin, 2016 for an overview). Translanguaging research has mostly been carried out in contexts where only two languages co-exist (cf. García, 2011b; Lasagabaster and García, 2014 in Spanish-English educational contexts). As a result, in almost every translanguaging study, the emphasis is on *bi*linguals (García and Hesson, 2015) and on a narrow interpretation of the idiolect. Nonetheless, various theoretical openings in relation to how these concepts can be understood in *multi*lingual communities were also formulated. Firstly, García and Wei (2014) clearly indicate that a translanguaging approach can be used in both monolingual and multilingual classrooms. Secondly, the idiolect – the cornerstone of translanguaging – is considered similar if not the same in multilinguals and monolinguals (cf. Otheguy et al., 2015: 294). Thirdly, translanguaging is commonly seen as applicable to multilinguals and monolinguals. However, research on translanguaging has not yet investigated speaker practices of intralinguistic variation.

The purpose of this article, therefore, is to analyze the interactional translanguaging practices of both multilinguals and monolinguals. Whereas both groups are typically studied in separate strands and serve as the subject of separate research designs and publications, this study seeks to question this division by exploring language practices in both multilingual and monolingual classrooms[3] from the theoretical perspective of translanguaging. By empirically studying the interactional behavior and the socio-pedagogical valorization of the linguistic repertoires of teachers and pupils in these classrooms, we hope to offer new insights on translanguaging as a concept (Lewis et al., 2012).

We carried out our research in the highly linguistically diverse educational context of Flanders and Brussels, Belgium. This linguistic diversity will be outlined in the next section (Section 2). In Section 3, we describe the Flemish language policy in education. Before turning to the methodology (Section 5), the aim of our research is further explained in Section 4. In Section 6, our results are presented from an interactional point of view and we end with a conclusion in Section 7.

2. Interlinguistic and intralinguistic variation in Flanders and Brussels

Belgium is a federal state divided into three regions (the Flemish, Walloon and Brussels Capital region) and three communities (the Flemish, French and German-speaking Communities).[4] These divisions mean that education in Brussels, Belgium's capital and an autonomous region, is governed by both the French and Dutch-speaking communities. However, due to the current political system and the way in which language-policy-in-education is organized, bilingual education does not exist in Brussels; schools are either monolingually Dutch or French. The schools we focus on in this paper – one located in Flanders and the other a Dutch-speaking school in Brussels – are both regulated by the Dutch-speaking Community. Consequently, the language of instruction (henceforth LOI) in both schools is Dutch, as stipulated by the Flemish Community.

As is the case in most other Western countries, Belgian society is characterized by increasing informalization, globalization, democratization and migration. Successive waves of economic migration over the 20th century (Van Avermaet, 2009) have contributed to increasing diversity of the population. Metropolises such as Brussels traditionally attracted the most newcomers and many specific migrant communities have established themselves in the city (Sierens, 2006; Van Praag et al., 2014). In the

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[2] Complementary schools, community language schools, heritage language schools or supplementary schools, "complement the education of the young people attending them in relation to statutory education" (Creese and Blackledge, 2010: 113).

[3] We will refer to the classrooms in our study as *monolingual* and *multilingual*. As we will demonstrate in the following sections, both classrooms are Dutch-medium classrooms, with interlinguistic variation in the first classroom ("the multilingual classroom"), and intralinguistic variation in the second ("the monolingual classroom"). We opt for the labels *multilingual* and *monolingual* because our emphasis is on the linguistic practices (not on the official, Dutch-medium and monolingual policy) in the classrooms.

[4] The Belgian regions decide on matters concerning the economy, spatial planning and the environment, whereas the communities are responsible for, amongst others, culture, education and language.