Transgressing native speaker privilege: The role of translanguaging

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In the last decade, scholars have questioned many of the conceptual dichotomies which second language acquisition/education scholarship has traditionally legitimized. Among the most prevalent dichotomy in the language education discourse is that of native/non-native speaker and L1/L2. Despite significant scholarly contributions that question these categories, the language education field continues to use these terms, reifying these distinctions in scholarship, and most significantly among educators.

Translanguaging, as we will show in this presentation, offers a way to think of languages and speakers not from social external categories given to us a priori, but taking into account the speaker’s internal semiotic repertoire. In shifting the lens from social external categories of "named" languages to the speakers’ semiotic repertoire, translanguaging theory disrupts ways of categorizing language and speakers so as to maintain national power hierarchies. Furthermore, instead of thinking of language acquisition and language education as simple additions of L2s to non-native powerless speakers of an L1, translanguaging theory gives agency to speakers and students, acknowledging them as capable of appropriating new language features into their unitary language system.

An alternative vision of language and speakers must then lead to different ways of educating "emerging bilingual/multilingual" students, those that the traditional literature calls "second language learners." Educators who take up translanguaging do not simply use an L1 to teach the L2 or L3, or go across languages, as it has been often understood. Educators who take up translanguaging go beyond categories of named languages. They do not see themselves teaching L2s to "others," to "non-natives," and for whom the L1 is a hindrance. Educators who take up translanguaging see themselves teaching students who always embody translanguaging, that is, a unitary language system into which they appropriate new features in order to expand it so that they could function in different social contexts appropriately. Thus, translanguaging theory is applicable to all types of education programs and students — traditional core language programs and bilingual/multilingual education of all sorts, as well as students who are at the beginning stages of the bilingual continuum, or are at more advanced stages.

The acknowledgement that speakers always embody translanguaging requires then different pedagogical practices. The second part of this presentation then focuses on translanguaging pedagogy. We identify the three strands of translanguaging pedagogy (stance, design and shifts) and show how translanguaging pedagogy is strategic and sense-making. We do this by discussing examples of teaching practice by different types of teachers. We end by showing how translanguaging works to promote social justice and disrupt the power hierarchies that are maintained by nations and their elites through educational institutions, policies and practices.

Keywords: