Translanguaging as a Practical Theory of Language

*LI WEI

UCL Centre for Applied Linguistics, UCL Institute of Education, University College London
*E-mail: li.wei@ucl.ac.uk

This article seeks to develop Translanguaging as a theory of language and discuss the theoretical motivations behind and the added values of the concept. I contextualize Translanguaging in the linguistic realities of the 21st century, especially the fluid and dynamic practices that transcend the boundaries between named languages, language varieties, and language and other semiotic systems. I highlight the contributions Translanguaging as a theoretical concept can make to the debates over the Language and Thought and the Modularity of Mind hypotheses. One particular aspect of multilingual language users' social interaction that I want to emphasize is its multimodal and multisensory nature. I elaborate on two related concepts: Translanguaging Space and Translanguaging Instinct, to underscore the necessity to bridge the artificial and ideological divides between the so-called sociocultural and the cognitive approaches to Translanguaging practices. In doing so, I respond to some of the criticisms and confusions about the notion of Translanguaging.

1. INTRODUCTION

The term Translanguaging seems to have captured people's imagination. It has been applied to pedagogy, everyday social interaction, cross-modal and multi-modal communication, linguistic landscape, visual arts, music, and transgender discourse. The growing body of work gives the impression that any practice that is slightly non-conventional could be described in terms of Translanguaging. There is considerable confusion as to whether Translanguaging could be an all-encompassing term for diverse multilingual and multimodal practices, replacing terms such as code-switching, code-mixing, code-meshing, and crossing. It also seems to be in competition with other terms, for example polylanguaging, polylingual languaging, multilanguaging, heteroglossia, hybrid language practices, translingual practice, flexible bilingualism, and metrolingualism, for academic discourse space. Dissents exist that question the need for the term, and indeed the other terms as well, dismissing it as merely a populist neologism and part of the sloganization of the post-modern, possibly also post-truth, era. The central objective of this article is therefore to explicate the theoretical motivations for having

the term Translanguaging and its added value, respond to some of the questions raised by researchers who are either sympathetic or critical of the term, and clarify some of the confusion that has been caused by the proliferation of its usage. I will do so by framing Translanguaging as a practical theory of language. It is important to say that the perspective presented in this article is largely a personal one, though of course a product of collaborative work with many others.

The article is structured as follows: I begin by outlining the kind of practical theory of language that I believe applied linguistics needs, and the kinds of linguistic practice that I am interested in investigating through a Translanguaging lens. I then discuss in detail the key theoretical arguments that underpin the notion of Translanguaging. In particular, I highlight the two fundamental issues in the study of language and linguistics with which Translanguaging aims to engage—language and thought and the modularity of mind. I will also discuss the relationship between Translanguaging and multimodality. I go on to discuss two related notions: Translanguaging Space and Translanguaging Instinct, which have important implications for policy and practice. I conclude by highlighting the added values of Translanguaging.

2. APPLIED LINGUISTICS IN NEED OF A PRACTICAL THEORY OF LANGUAGE

Applied linguistics has borrowed many different concepts and methods from other disciplines including, but way beyond, linguistics. Yet we own very few theoretical concepts and analytical methods of our own, and the disciplines from which we have borrowed concepts and methods pay relatively little attention to what we as applied linguists have done in return. 'Applied' is often taken as synonymous with atheoretical, therefore of lower scientific value. Many applied linguists would not mind that because our primary interest is in policy and practice concerning language and how to solve real-world problems in which language is a central issue (Brumfit 1995). On the other hand, many applied linguists would like to think that what we do is, or should be, 'theoretical': we are offering new thinking and new ways of looking at everyday linguistic practices in society, not just practical solutions.

In her 2015 reflection on applied linguistics as a field of enquiry, Kramsch made a timely call for an 'applied linguistic theory of language practice'. Kramsch's (2015) ideas are informed by Bourdieu's (1977) practice theory where the notion of 'habitus' is central to capture the dialectic between social structure and human agency and how social beings, with their diverse motives and their diverse intentions, make and transform the world. I would like to suggest that Translanguaging is a good candidate for a theory of language practice. But due to my own cultural upbringing, my ideas of a theory of the practice come from a rather different source, and I shall call it a Practical Theory. It is essentially based on Mao's reading of Confucius as well as

western, including Marxist, philosophies, advocating the so-called dialectical-materialist approach to knowledge acquisition that knowledge is wrought through practice. Mao (1937) emphasized the dependence of theory on practice, that is, theory is based on practice and in turn serves practice. The process of theorization, or knowledge construction, involves a perpetual cycle of practice-theory-practice. The crucial first step in knowledge construction is descriptive adequacy. Note that it is not accuracy: no one description of an actual practice is necessarily more accurate than another because description is the observer–analyst's subjective understanding and interpretation of the practice or phenomenon that they are observing. Questions are formulated on the basis of the description and, crucially, as part of the observer–analyst's interpretation process. Interpretation is experiential and understanding is dialogic. The questions are therefore ideologically and experientially sensitive. A practical theory goes for holistic descriptions to the observer's best ability and descriptions of all that has been observed, not just selective segments of the data. Whilst descriptive adequacy is a matter of degree, richness and depth, therefore, rather than elegance (cf. Chomsky 1965 on 'descriptive adequacy' but from a formal rules and elegance perspective) are the key measures. The main objective of a practical theory is not to offer predictions or solutions but interpretations that can be used to observe, interpret, and understand other practices and phenomena. The theory should provide a principled choice between competing interpretations that inform and enhance future practice, and the principles are related to the consequentialities of alternative interpretations. An important assessment of the value of a practical theory is the extent to which it can ask new and different questions on both the practice under investigation and other existing theories about the practice. It is also useful to recognize that practices can be of very diverse natures; for instance, the academic practices of knowledge production which include the purposes of the research articulated in specific socio-historical settings, language practices by the language users being studied, and professional practices such as language teaching. I am primarily concerned with everyday language practices of multilingual language users, and I want to show, in this article, that Translanguaging as a practical theory of language offers better interpretations of the kinds of language practice that I am interested in and the kinds of theoretical questions it can raise in relation to some of the most central issues in linguistic science.

3. THE PRACTICE

Let me first explain the kinds of language practice that I am particularly concerned with. The first set of examples comes from a corpus of what I have called New Chinglish (Li 2016a) which includes ordinary English utterances being re-appropriated with entirely different meanings for communication between Chinese users of English as well as creations of words and expressions

that adhere broadly to the morphological rules of English but with Chinese twists and meanings.

(1)

- *Niubility* 牛逼 = *niubi*, originally a taboo word, now meaning awesome ability that is worth showing off or boasting about + ability.
- *Geilivable* 给力 = *geili*, to give force, regional dialectal expression meaning 'supportive' or 'cool' + able.
- *Chinsumer* 在外疯狂购物的中国人 = a mesh of 'Chinese consumer', usually referring to Chinese tourists buying large quantities of luxury goods overseas.
- *Smilence* 笑而不语 = smile + silence, referring to the stereotypical Chinese reaction of smiling without saying anything.
- *Propoorty* 房地产 = describing the mounting costs property owners, especially the young, in China have to incur.
- *Don'train* 动车 = *dong*, v. move; advanced high-speed trains are called *dong che* in Chinese. Don'train, which sounds similar to the Chinese term, refers to both the high costs that prevent ordinary workers in China to be able to take the high-speed trains and the government-imposed speed restrictions after a number of accidents on the railway.
- *Circusee* 围观 = circle/circus + see, referring to a common phenomenon where crowds gather around an accident or around elderly people's dancing and singing in public places. It also makes use of the habit of adding a vowel after a final consonant that some Chinese speakers of English have.
- *Z-turn* 折腾 = Chinese netizens' translation of a warning by the former Chinese president Hu Jintao, 不折腾 (*bu zheteng*, NEG. + verb), 'Don't make trouble or cause turmoil', manipulating the sound (Z-turn and zhe teng 折腾), the letter shape, and the semantics.
- *Shitizen* 屁民 = shit + citizen, reflecting how ordinary citizens in China feel about their status in society.
- *Democrazy* 痴心妄想 = democracy + crazy; mocking the so-called democratic systems of the west and in some parts of Asia where certain legislations such as the ownership of firearms can be protected due to political lobbying and, in the case of Taiwan, parliamentarians get into physical fights over disagreements. The occurrence of the word was prominent after the news of Trump's victory in the US presidential election broke.
- *Gunvernment* 枪杆子政权 = gun + government; after Mao's saying 'Government comes out of the barrel of the gun'.
- *Freedamn* 中国特色自由 = freedom + damn, mocking the idea of 'freedom with Chinese characteristics'.
- *Harmany* 中国特色和谐 = The Chinese Communist Party's discourse on 'harmony' has been turned by the bilingual netizens into harm + many, as many people felt that the social policies imposed on them brought harm rather than cohesion.
- *Departyment* 政府部门 = department + party, mocking government departments spending time and resources on parties.

- *How are you* = back word-to-word literal translation from Chinese 怎么是你 (how + BE + you), meaning Why you?!
- *How old are you* = back word-to-word literal translation from Chinese 怎么老是你 (how + old + BE + you)., meaning Why always you?!
- *You can you up, no can no BB*, meaning 'If you have the ability then you do it. If you don't have the ability, then say nothing.', which is a translation of 你行你上啊, 不行别逼逼。
- *You ask me, me ask who*?, meaning 'Don't look at me. I have no idea.', from a word-to-word translation of 你问我, 我问谁?
- *We two who and who?*, meaning 'We are the best buddies.', from 咱俩谁跟谁?
- *I will give you some colour to see see*, meaning 'I will teach you a lesson', a literal translation of 我要给你点颜色瞧瞧！

These examples look English, but a monolingual English speaker may find it difficult to understand precisely their meanings and connotations. Existing terms such as code-mixing and code-switching that assume the existence of different languages as structural and cognitive entities and focus on structural configurations of the form seem unable to fully capture the creative and critical dimensions of these expressions. A fuller description and interpretation must involve an understanding of the sociopolitical context in which these expressions occur, the history of Chinglish, the subjectivities of the people who created and use these expressions, as well as the ideologies, including linguistic ideologies, that these expressions challenge.

The second example is provided by Ng Bee Chin of the Nanyang Technological University in Singapore who recorded an exchange between Jamie, a Chinese Singaporean in his 50s, and an old family friend, Seetoh, who had just lost her husband.

(2)

Seetoh: *Aiyoh* (discourse particle), we are all <ka ki nang> (自己人 = own people, meaning 'friends'), **bian khe khi** (免客气 = don't mention it). <u>Ren lai jiu hao</u> (人来就好 = good of you to come), why bring so many 'barang barang' ('things'). **Paiseh** (歹勢 = I'm embarrassed). 'Nei chan hai yau sum' (你真有心 = you are so considerate).

Jamie: *Don't say until like that.* Now, you make me malu ('shame') only. You look after my daughter for so many years, **mei you gong lao ye you ku lao** (没有功劳也有苦劳 = you have done hard work even if you don't want a prize). I feel so bad that I could not come earlier. 'Mm hou yi si' (不好意思 = I'm embarrassed). I was so shocked to hear about Seetoh, **tsou lang ham ham** (做人 ham ham—meaning life is unpredictable), <u>jie ai shun bian</u>. (节哀顺变 = hope you will restrain your grief and go along with the changes)

Seetoh: <u>ta lin zou de shi hou hai zai gua nian</u> (他临走的时候还在挂念 = He was thinking of Natalie before he passed away) Natalie (Jamie's daughter). Of all your children, he 'saying' ('love') her the most.

Bold: Hokkien
In square brackets < >: Teochew
<u>Underlined</u>: Mandarin
In double quotation marks: Malay
In single quotation marks: Cantonese
Italics: Singlish
Standard font: English

This is typical of the everyday speech of ethnic Chinese Singaporeans. Whilst I have tried to mark what I can identify in terms of namable languages and varieties, there seems to be little point in asking what languages or varieties they are speaking or counting how many languages are being spoken here. A classic code-switching approach would assume switching back and forward to a single language default, and it would be the wrong assumption to make about this community of multilinguals. If we treat each nameable language or language variety as a discrete entity, some, such as Teochow and Hokkien, are disappearing fast in Singaporean Chinese communities as the younger generations increasingly shift towards English–Mandarin bilingualism instead of the traditional multilingualism in regional varieties of Chinese. But many words and expressions, particularly those that have not been standardized with written Chinese characters, are being preserved and used in the highly fluid and dynamic speech of Singaporean speakers as in the example here. Conservationist discourses surrounding endangered languages do not typically pay any attention to this kind of speech, are ambivalent towards language mixing, and tend to argue instead that the integrity of individual languages should be protected.

I have many other examples of dynamic and creative linguistic practices that involve flexible use of named languages and language varieties as well as other semiotic resources. My main concern here is not whether these and other examples are instances of (different kinds of) Translanguaging, but more generally that the-more-the-better approaches to multilingualism seem increasingly over-simplistic and inadequate for the complex linguistic realities of the 21st century. Whilst there has been significant progress in many parts of the world where multilingualism, in the sense of having different languages co-existing alongside each other, is beginning to be acceptable, what remains hugely problematic is the mixing of languages. The myth of a pure form of a language is so deep-rooted that there are many people who, while accepting the existence of different languages, cannot accept the 'contamination' of their language by others. This is one of the reasons for Chinglish to have been the object of ridicule for generations, even though the creative process it represents is an important and integral part of language evolution. The practices in the Singapore example above are in fact under threat from English–Mandarin bilingualism there and the compartmentalization of languages, or what has been called the 'complementary distribution' principle. We are facing serious Post-Multilingualism challenges (Li 2016a) where simply having many

different languages is no longer sufficient either for the individual or for society as a whole, but multiple ownerships and more complex interweaving of languages and language varieties, and where boundaries between languages, between languages and other communicative means, and the relationship between language and the nation-state are being constantly reassessed, broken, or adjusted by speakers on the ground. Concepts such as native, foreign, indigenous, minority languages are also constantly being reassessed and challenged. What is more, communication in the 21st century requires much more involvement with what has traditionally been viewed as non-linguistic means and urges us to overcome the 'lingua bias' of communication. The Post-Multilingualism era raises fundamental questions about what language is for ordinary men and women in their everyday social interactions—questions to which I believe Translanguaging can provide some useful answers.

4. WHY TRANSLANGUAGING?

It must be said that the term Translanguaging was not originally intended as a theoretical concept, but a descriptive label for a specific language practice. It was Baker's (2001) English translation of Williams' (Williams 1994) Welsh term *trawsieithu*, to describe pedagogical practices that Williams observed in Welsh revitalization programmes where the teacher would try and teach in Welsh and the pupils would respond largely in English. Sometimes the language choice would be reversed when the pupils would read something in Welsh and the teacher would offer explanations in English. Such practices were by no means unique to the Welsh context. But instead of viewing them negatively as tended to be the case in classrooms involving bilingual learners, Williams suggested that they helped to maximize the learner's, and the teacher's, linguistic resources in the process of problem-solving and knowledge construction. Over the years, Translanguaging has proven to be an effective pedagogical practice in a variety of educational contexts where the school language or the language-of-instruction is different from the languages of the learners. By deliberately breaking the artificial and ideological divides between indigenous versus immigrant, majority versus minority, and target versus mother tongue languages, Translanguaging empowers both the learner and the teacher, transforms the power relations, and focuses the process of teaching and learning on making meaning, enhancing experience, and developing identity (García 2009; Creese and Blackledge 2015). What I like about William's and Baker's idea of Translanguaging is that it is not conceived as an object or a linguistic structural phenomenon to describe and analyse but a practice and a process—a practice that involves dynamic and functionally integrated use of different languages and language varieties, but more importantly *a process of knowledge construction* that goes beyond language(s). It takes us beyond the linguistics of systems and speakers to a linguistics of participation (Rampton, p.c.).

For me, the Translanguaging pedagogy also helps to re-examine an age-old question of the role of L1 in second, foreign, and additional language teaching and learning. Despite the theoretical appraisal in recent years of the importance of L1 in learning additional languages, the target-language-only or one-language-at-a-time monolingual ideologies still dominate much of practice and policy, not least in assessing learning outcomes. The actual purpose of learning new languages—to become bilingual and multilingual, rather than to replace the learner's L1 to become another monolingual—often gets forgotten or neglected, and the bilingual, rather than monolingual, speaker is rarely used as the model for teaching and learning.

As explained in my 2011 article (Li 2011a), whilst I was aware of Williams' and Baker's work on Translanguaging as a pedagogical practice, my initial idea of Translanguaging came from a different source, namely, the notion of *Languaging*. In a short commentary on Newmeyer's (1991) essay on the origins of language, Becker (1991) borrowed the term Languaging from the Chilean biologist and neuroscientist Humberto Maturana and his co-author Francesco Varela (Maturana and Varela 1980) and invited us to think that 'there is no such thing as Language, only continual languaging, an activity of human beings in the world' (p. 34). He reiterated Ortega y Gasset's (1957) argument that language should not be regarded 'as an accomplished fact, as a thing made and finished, but as in the process of being made' (p. 242). This argument has been followed up by other researchers in at least two ways.

Swain (2006), for example, used the term to describe the cognitive process of negotiating and producing meaningful, comprehensible output as part of language learning as a 'means to mediate cognition', that is to understand and to problem-solve (p. 97) and 'a process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language' (p. 97). She gave specific examples of advanced second language learners' cognitive and affective engagements through languaging, whereby 'language serves as a vehicle through which thinking is articulated and transformed into an artifactual form' (Swain 2006: 97). She also mentioned Hall's work on languaging in psychotherapy (Hall 1999) where 'talking-it-through' meant 'coming-to-know-while-speaking' (Swain and Lapkin 2002). I particularly like the connections Swain and the others made between languaging and thinking, cognizing and consciousness. But I wanted to ask the question: How is the thinking process affected by simultaneous use of multiple languages of the kinds in the examples above?—a very common practice amongst multilinguals whether all the named and nameable languages get verbalized or written. I also wanted to extend the discussion beyond advanced second language learners to include different types of multilingual language users and to find a term that would capture their 'talking-it-through' in multiple languages however incomplete or truncated their knowledge of the individual languages may be. It is the entirety of the learner's linguistic repertoire that I am concerned with, rather than knowledge of specific structures of specific languages separately. Perhaps it is closer to Lado's (1979) idea of language as 'full linguistic performance' (p. 3), to

which Swain contrasted her conceptualization of Languaging, although Lado did not deal with multiple languages either.

Another line of enquiry has been pursued from the perspectives of distributed cognition and what has become known as 'ecological psychology', where languaging refers to 'an assemblage of diverse material, biological, semiotic and cognitive properties and capacities which languaging agents orchestrate in real-time and across a diversity of timescales' (Thibault 2017: 82). Following Love (Love 1990, 2004), scholars such as Stephen Cowley, Paul Thibault, and Sune Steffensen set out to challenge what they call 'the code view' of language that sought to identify abstract verbal patterns, morphosyntax, or lexicogrammar, divorced from cognitive, affective, and bodily dynamics in real-time and specify the rules for mapping forms to meanings and meanings to forms. They regard language thus identified and specified as a second-order construct, the product of first-order activity, languaging (Thibault 2011, 2017; Steffensen 2009, 2011; Cowley 2017), and argue that 'human languaging activity is radically heterogeneous and involves the interaction of processes on many different time-scales, including neural, bodily, situational, social, and cultural processes and events' (Thibault 2017: 76). They urge linguists, psychologists, and others working on human communication to 'grant languaging a primacy over what is languaged' (Cowley 2017: 13, following Love 2016).

I find this particular way of conceptualizing languaging appealing for three key reasons:

1 Fundamentally, it invites us to rethink language not as an organism-centred entity with corresponding formalism, phonemes, words, sentences, etc., but as 'a multi-scalar organization of processes that enables the bodily and the situated to interact with situation-transcending cultural-historical dynamics and practices' (Thibault 2017: 78).
2 It sees the divides between the linguistic, the paralinguistic, and the extralinguistic dimensions of human communication as nonsensical and emphasizes what the researchers call the orchestration of the neural-bodily-worldly skills of languaging. In particular, it highlights the importance of feeling, experience, history, memory, subjectivity, and culture. Although they do not talk about ideology and power, it is entirely conceivable that these too play important roles in languaging.
3 On language learning, it advocates a radically different view that the novice does not 'acquire' language, but rather 'they adapt their bodies and brains to the languaging activity that surrounds them', and in doing so, 'they participate in cultural worlds and learn that they can get things done with others in accordance with the culturally promoted norms and values' (Thibault 2017: 76). This linguistics-of-participation approach resonates with the language socialization's and complex dynamic system's perspectives on language acquisition and learning (The Five Graces Group *et al.*, 2009; Duranti *et al.* 2011). For me, language learning is a process of embodied participation and resemiotization (see also McDermott and

Roth 1978; McDermott *et al.* 1978; Dore and McDermott 1982; and Gallagher and Zahavi 2012).

By adding the *Trans* prefix to *Languaging*, I not only wanted to have a term that better captures multilingual language users' fluid and dynamic practices such as those in the New Chinglish and Singaporean speech examples above but also to put forward two further arguments:

1 Multilinguals do not think unilingually in a politically named linguistic entity, even when they are in a 'monolingual mode' and producing one namable language only for a specific stretch of speech or text.
2 Human beings think beyond language, and thinking requires the use of a variety of cognitive, semiotic, and modal resources of which language in its conventional sense of speech and writing is only one.

These are about two of the fundamental theoretical questions in contemporary linguistics: Language and Thought and Modularity of Mind.

With regard to the first point, there seems to be a confusion between the hypothesis that thinking takes place in a Language of Thought (Fodor 1975)— in other words, thought possesses a language-like or compositional structure— and that we think in the named language we speak. The latter seems more intuitive and commonsensical and has indeed attracted a great deal of attention by researchers who, through elaborate experiments, have tried to provide evidence that, for instance, Japanese or Greek speakers process motion events, shape, and colour differently from English or Russian speakers. This line of argument is not all that different from earlier observations that speakers of English, Semitic, Oriental, Romance, and Russian languages had rather different rhetorical patterns (Kaplan 1966), though being much more speculative of the relationship between the language used in the expressions and the thought processes that lie behind them, as well as allowing the possibility of change from one way of thinking to another as a result of language learning. However, it remains a controversial topic, not least because it cannot address the question of how bilingual and multilingual language users think without referencing notions of the L1, 'native' or 'dominant' language.

For me, one of the most important, and challenging, issues in bilingualism and multilingualism research is to understand what is going on when bilingual and multilingual language users are engaged in what Grosjean calls 'the bilingual mode' (Grosjean 2001) and what Green and I have called 'an open control state' (Green and Li 2014) where they constantly switch between named languages. It is hard to imagine that they shift their frame of mind so frequently in one conversational episode let alone one utterance. With utterances such as the ones in the Singaporean example above, a question such as: 'Which language is the speaker thinking in?' simply does not make sense. We do not think in a specific, named language separately. The language we individually produce is an idiolect, our own unique, personal language. No two idiolects are likely to be the same, and no single individual's idiolect is likely to be the same

over time. As Otheguy *et al.* (2015) argue, a bilingual person's idiolect would consist of lexical and grammatical features from different socially and politically defined languages, just as a so-called monolingual's idiolect would consist of lexical and grammatical features from regionally, social class-wise, and stylistically differentiated varieties of the same named language. If we followed the argument that we think in the language we speak, then we think in our own idiolect, not a named language. But the language-of-thought must be independent of these idiolects, and that is the point of Fodor's theory. We do not think in Arabic, Chinese, English, Russian, or Spanish; we think beyond the artificial boundaries of named languages in the language-of-thought.

We must also not forget that the names and labels that we use to talk about languages, for example English, German, Danish, and Norwegian, or Burmese, Chinese, Thai, and Lao, are names and labels assigned by linguists to sets of structures that they have identified. Often these names and labels are also cultural–political concepts associated with the one-nation/race-one-language ideology. From a historical perspective, human languages evolved from fairly simple combinations of sounds, gestures, icons, symbols, etc., and gradually diversified and diffused due to climate change and population movement. Speech communities were formed by sharing a common set of communicative practices and beliefs. But incorporating elements of communicative patterns from other communities has always been an important part of the selection and competition, that is survival, process (Mufwene 2008). The naming of languages is a relatively recent phenomenon. The invention of the nation-state also triggered the invention of the notion of monolingualism (Makoni and Pennycook 2007; Gramling 2016). Translanguaging is using one's idiolect, that is one's linguistic repertoire, without regard for socially and politically defined language names and labels. From the Translanguaging perspective then, we think beyond the boundaries of named languages and language varieties including the geography-, social class-, age-, or gender-based varieties.

This is not to say that the speakers are not aware of the existence of the idealized boundaries between languages and between language varieties. As part of the language socialization process, we become very much aware of the association between race, nation, and community on the one hand, and a named language on the other and of the discrepancies between the boundaries in linguistic structural terms versus those in sociocultural and ideological terms. A multilingual is someone who is aware of the existence of the political entities of named languages (Li 2016a), has acquired some of their structural features, and has a Translanguaging Instinct (see further below) that enables a resolution of the differences, discrepancies, inconsistencies, and ambiguities, if and when they need to be resolved, and manipulate them for strategic gains.

As to the second argument regarding thinking beyond language, it concerns the ways in which the Modularity of Mind hypothesis has been interpreted and operationalized in research. According to Fodor (1983), the human mind consists of a series of innate neural structures, or modules, which are

encapsulated with distinctive information and for distinct functions, and language is but one module. This has somehow been understood to mean that the language and other human cognitive processes are anatomically and/or functionally distinct; therefore in research design, the so-called linguistic and non-linguistic cognitive processes would be assessed separately. Thierry (2016: 523–4), a leading neuroscientist in the field of bilingualism, has the following to say:

> I would go as far as saying that making a distinction between language and the rest of the mind is meaningless. Making such a distinction implies that language and mind are two ensembles that can be delimited, as if one could draw a line between the two, or indeed trace a line around language within the mind. This is misleading both from an anatomical and functional viewpoint. First, there is no such thing as a language-specific brain region. . . . It has been widely shown that the areas of the cerebral cortex, inner brain ganglia, and the cerebellum involved in language processing are also activated by numerous nonverbal auditory and visual processes. . . . Second, there is no such thing as a cognitive operation impermeable to or wholly independent of language processing and *vice versa*'.

In other words, language processing cannot be wholly *in*dependent of auditory and visual processes, just as cognitive processes such as number processing and colour categorization cannot be wholly independent of language. There is increasing evidence that the language experience and cognitive capacity of learners and users, multilingual or not, are closely interconnected and mutually beneficial (on bilinguals, Bialystok and Poarch 2014; Litcofsky *et al.* 2016). Language, then, is a multisensory and multimodal semiotic system interconnected with other *identifiable* but *inseparable* cognitive systems. Translanguaging for me means transcending the traditional divides between linguistic and non-linguistic cognitive and semiotic systems.

It is also inconceivable from existing research evidence that the human mind can be divided into different languages. Some earlier experimental data did show that processing later acquired language might involve certain neural networks that are not central to first language processing. But that tells us more about the process of language learning than about the representation of different languages in the human mind. Likewise, the findings that certain brain areas may be involved in processing the lexical tones and logographic writing systems that some of the world's languages have point to the closer connections between language and other cognitive systems as much as to the differences between languages. Earlier attempts to identify the 'switch' in the brain for code-switching have long been discredited. In any case, technological advances have allowed some scientists to raise questions about the very existence of the Broca's area that has long been assumed to be responsible for language (Ullman 2006; Tsapkini *et al.* 2008). But the idea that everything has to have an essence, be localized or localizable, be pinned down to an

organ, an organism or a gene still haunts the human condition (see Gallagher and Zahavi 2012).

4.1 Translanguaging and multimodality

The discussion of the interconnections between language and other cognitive systems in the human mind brings forth the issue of multimodality. Human communication has always been multimodal; people use textual, aural, linguistic, spatial, and visual resources, or modes, to construct and interpret messages. In specific communities, a primary mode may be especially featured; for instance, in the Deaf community, sign language may feature more prominently than other modes of communication, though bimodal bilingualism in both oral and sign languages can also be common. A considerable amount of work on Translanguaging practices in Deaf communities is emerging where Translanguaging is used to describe the meaning- and sense-making processes in cross- and multi-modal communication (Kusters in press).

In a thematic issue of the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, 'Language as a multimodal phenomenon', Vigliocco *et al.* (2014) asked the intriguing question: What if the study of language had started from signed language rather than spoken language? They pointed out that our understanding of the cognitive and neural underpinnings of language has traditionally been firmly based on spoken Indo-European languages and on language studied as speech or text. Yet language, or more precisely languaging, is and has always been multimodal. In face-to-face interaction, speech signals are invariably accompanied by visual information on the face and in manual gestures, and sign languages deploy multiple channels (hands, face, and body) in utterance construction. The contributors to the special issue also point out that the narrow focus on spoken Indo-European languages has entrenched the assumption that language is comprised wholly by an arbitrary system of symbols and rules. They argue that iconicity, that is resemblance between aspects of communicative form and meaning, is the norm. They discuss in detail the implications of shifting the current dominant approaches and assumptions to encompass multimodal expression in both signed and spoken languages for language learning, processing, and evolution. More recent work by Kita *et al.* (2017) shows how gesture not simply accompanies speech but influences thinking and speaking.

Perhaps a better known perspective on multimodality is the social semiotics of multimodality, especially Gunther Kress' work. Coming from a literacy and writing studies context, Kress defines mode as 'a socially and culturally shaped resource for making meaning. Image, writing, layout, speech, moving images are examples of different modes' (Kress 2010: 79). These modes are 'shaped by both the intrinsic characteristics and potentialities of the medium and by the requirements, histories and values of societies and their cultures' (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 34). A medium, on the other hand, is the substance in which meaning is realized and through which it becomes available to others.

For instance, the electronic medium is often used to create digital modes with the interlacing of image, writing, layout, speech, and video. Multimodality is the aggregate or ensemble of modal resources required to create a single artefact, say a film or a website. The ways in which the modes are assembled contribute to how multimodality affects different rhetorical situations, or opportunities for increasing an audience's reception of an idea or concept. Take a textbook or a web page, for example; everything from the placement of images to the organization of the content creates meaning. Increasingly in the digital age, we see a shift from isolated text being relied upon as the primary source of communication, to the image being utilized more frequently. One consequence of this is that the speaker/writer and audience/reader relationship evolves as well. Multiliteracy, the ability to comprehend and analyse different modes in communication—not only to read text, but also to read other modes such as sound and image, and more importantly to understand how the different modes are put together to create meaning—is a crucial component for the social semiotic perspective on multimodality.

Williams' and Baker's original discussion of Translanguaging as a pedagogical practice did include modalities of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. As it has been developed as a theoretical concept, Translanguaging embraces the multimodal social semiotic view that linguistic signs are part of a wider repertoire of modal resources that sign makers have at their disposal and that carry particular socio-historical and political associations. It foregrounds the different ways language users employ, create, and interpret different kinds of signs to communicate across contexts and participants and perform their different subjectivities. In particular, Translanguaging highlights the ways in which language users make use of the tensions and conflicts among different signs, because of the socio-historical associations the signs carry with them, in a cycle of resemiotization. As Scollon and Scollon (2004) have pointed out, certain actions transform a whole cycle of actions during which each action is also transformed. This transformation cycle is often referred to as resemiotization (Iedema 2003), where actions are re-semiotized, that is they are redesigned, from one semiotic mode to another, with new meanings emerging all the time. Translanguaging is a transformative, resemiotization process, whereby language users display the best of their creativity and criticality as illustrated in the New Chinglish and Singaporean speech examples above, which conventional code-based approaches cannot address.

To sum up the discussion so far, Translanguaging reconceptualizes language as a multilingual, multisemiotic, multisensory, and multimodal resource for sense- and meaning-making, and the multilingual as someone who is aware of the existence of the political entities of named languages and has an ability to make use the structural features of some of them that they have acquired. It has the capacity to enable us to explore the human mind as a holistic multicompetence (Cook 1992; Cook and Li 2016), and rethink some of the bigger, theoretical issues in linguistics generally.

5. TRANSLANGUAGING SPACE AND TRANSLANGUAGING INSTINCT

There are two related concepts—Translanguaging Space and Translanguaging Instinct—to which I shall now turn.

5.1 Translanguaging Space

In Li (Li 2011a), I talked about a *Translanguaging Space*, a space that is created by and for Translanguaging practices, and a space where language users break down the ideologically laden dichotomies between the macro and the micro, the societal and the individual, and the social and the psychological through interaction. A Translanguaging Space allows language users to integrate social spaces (and thus 'linguistic codes') that have been formerly separated through different practices in different places. As has already been said, Translanguaging is not simply going *between* different linguistic structures, cognitive and semiotic systems and modalities, but going *beyond* them. The act of Translanguaging creates a social space for the language user by bringing together different dimensions of their personal history, experience, and environment; their attitude, belief, and ideology; their cognitive and physical capacity, into one coordinated and meaningful performance (Li 2011a: 1223), and this Translanguaging Space has its own transformative power because it is forever evolving and combines and generates new identities, values and practices. Translanguaging underscores multilinguals' creativity—their abilities to push and break boundaries between named language and between language varieties, and to flout norms of behaviour including linguistic behaviour, and criticality—the ability to use evidence to question, problematize, and articulate views (Li 2011a,b; Li and Zhu 2013). From a Translanguaging lens, multilingualism by the very nature of the phenomenon is a rich source of creativity and criticality, as it entails tension, conflict, competition, difference, and change in a number of spheres, ranging from ideologies, policies, and practices to historical and current contents. Enhanced contacts between people of diverse backgrounds and traditions provide new opportunities for innovation and creativity. As discussed earlier, multilingual language users are aware of the existence of the political entities of named languages, have acquired some of their structural features, and have an ability to use them. They are capable of responding to the historical and present conditions critically. They consciously construct and constantly modify their sociocultural identities and values through social practices such as Translanguaging.

Translanguaging goes beyond hybridity theory that recognizes the complexity of people's everyday spaces and multiple resources to make sense of the world. A Translanguaging Space has much to do with the vision of Thirdspace articulated by Soja (1996) as a space of extraordinary openness, a place of critical exchange where the geographical imagination can be expanded to encompass a multiplicity of perspectives that have heretofore been considered by

the epistemological referees to be incompatible and uncombinable. Soja critiques binaries and proposes that it is possible to generate new knowledge and discourses in a Thirdspace. To frame his Thirdspace, Soja uses the Argentinean Jorge Luis Borges' short story, 'El Aleph', of which Borges (1945) says it is 'where all places are—seen from every angle, each standing clear, without any confusion or blending', that is 'the sum total of the spatial universe' (p. 189, English edition). A Translanguaging Space acts as a Thirdspace which does not merely encompass a mixture or hybridity of first and second languages; instead it invigorates languaging with new possibilities from 'a site of creativity and power', as bell hooks (1990: 152) says. Going *beyond* language refers to transforming the present, to intervening by reinscribing our human, historical commonality in the act of Translanguaging.

The notion of Translanguaging Space has implications for policy and practice. For example, in García and Li (2014), we argued that education can be a Translanguaging Space where teachers and students can go *between* and *beyond* socially constructed language and educational systems, structures and practices to engage diverse multiple meaning-making systems and subjectivities, to generate new configurations of language and education practices, and to challenge and transform old understandings and structures. In so doing, orders of discourse shift and the voices of Others come to the forefront, relating Translanguaging to criticality, critical pedagogy, social justice, and the linguistic human rights agenda.

5.2 The Translanguaging Instinct

Translanguaging emphasizes the interconnectedness between traditionally and conventionally understood languages and other human communication systems. As said above, human beings' knowledge of language cannot be separated from their knowledge of human relations and human social interaction which includes the history, the context of usage, and the emotional and symbolic values of specific socially constructed languages. Following Pinker's (1994) *Language Instinct* metaphor to describe human beings' innate capacity for acquiring languages, some psychologists, anthropologists, and linguists have argued for an 'Interactional Instinct', a biologically based drive for infants and children to attach, bond, and affiliate with conspecifics in an attempt to become like them (Lee *et al.* 2009; Joaquin and Schumann 2013). This natural drive provides neural structures that entrain children acquiring their languages to the faces, voices, and body movements of caregivers. It also determines the relative success of older adolescents and adults in learning additional languages later in life due to the variability of individual aptitude and motivation as well as environmental conditions. I have extended this idea in what I call a Translanguaging Instinct (Li 2016b) to emphasize the salience of mediated interaction in everyday life in the 21st century, the multisensory and multimodal process of language learning and language use. In particular, the Translanguaging Instinct drives humans to go beyond narrowly defined

linguistic cues and transcend culturally defined language boundaries to achieve effective communication. Contrary to the elegance of the principle of economy in linguistic theories such as the Minimalist Program, a Principle of Abundance is in operation in human communication in real-life social contexts. Multiple cues are present simultaneously in producing a message; human beings have a natural drive to draw on as many different sensory, modal, cognitive, and semiotic resources as they are available to them to interpret the meaning intentions whilst assessing the relative relevance and significance of the different cues when cues complement and compensate each other. But human beings read multiple cues in a coordinated manner rather than singularly. In the meantime, the Translanguaging Instinct highlights the gaps between meaning, what is connected to forms of the language and other signs, and message, what is actually inferred by hearers and readers, and leaves open spaces for all the other cognitive and semiotic systems that interact with linguistic semiosis to come into play.

The idea of the Translanguaging Instinct has implications for language learning. Whilst the natural drive to combine all available cognitive, semiotic, sensory, and modal resources in language learning and language use is innate, one relies on different resources differentially across one's lifespan and life course, as not all resources are equally available at all times. In first language acquisition, infants naturally draw meaning from a combination of sound, image, and action, and the sound–meaning mapping in word learning crucially involves image and action. The resources needed for literacy acquisition are called upon later. In bilingual first language acquisition where cross-linguistic equivalents are learned, the child additionally learns to associate the target word with a specific context or addressee as well as contexts and addressees where either language is acceptable, giving rise to the possibility of code-switching. In second language acquisition in adolescence and adulthood, some resources become less available, for example resources required for tonal discrimination, while others can be enhanced by experience and become more salient in language learning and use, for example resources required for analysing and comparing syntactic structures and pragmatic functions of specific expressions. As people become more involved in complex communicative tasks and demanding environments, the natural tendency to combine multiple resources drives them to look for more cues and exploit different resources. They will also learn to use different resources for different purposes, resulting in functional differentiation of different linguistic resources (e.g. accent, writing) and between linguistic and other cognitive and semiotic resources. Crucially, the innate capacity to exploit multiple resources will not be diminished over time; in fact it is enhanced with experience. Critical analytic skills are developed in terms of understanding the relationship between the parts (specific sets of skills, such as counting; drawing; singing) and the whole (multi-competence (Cook 1992; Cook and Li 2016) and the capacity for coordination between the skills subsets) to functionally differentiate the different resources required for different tasks.

One consequence of the Translanguaging perspective on bilingualism and multilingualism research is making the comparison between L1 and L2 acquisition purely in terms of attainment insignificant. Instead, questions should be asked as to what resources are needed, available, and being exploited for specific learning task throughout the lifespan and life course? Why are some resources not available at certain times? What do language users do when some resources become difficult to access? How do language users combine the available resources differentially for specific tasks? In seeking answers to these questions, the multisensory, multimodal, and multilingual nature of human learning and interaction is at the centre of the Translanguaging Instinct idea.

6. CONCLUSION: ADDED VALUES OF TRANSLANGUAGING

I have sought in this article to explain the theoretical motivations for the concept of Translanguaging. I have emphasized that Translanguaging is not merely a descriptive label for the kinds of Post-Multilingualism practices that one observes in the 21st century, as illustrated in the examples at the beginning of the article, although descriptive adequacy is crucial in theory building. I have argued that Translanguaging offers a practical theory of language that sees the latter as a multilingual, multisemiotic, multisensory, and multimodal resource that human beings use for thinking and for communicating thought. The Translanguaging perspective challenges the received and uncritical view in some quarters of the applied and socio-linguistics communities that bilingualism and multilingualism are about the protection of individual languages and, since language and sociocultural identity are postulated to be intrinsically linked, maintaining one's language means maintaining one's identity. If the divide between languages and between language and other cognitive systems has no psychological reality, shouldn't the sociocultural conventionalization of different languages and the one-to-one relationship between language and identity be reconsidered and reconceptualized too? We know for a fact that the labelling of languages is largely arbitrary and can be politically and ideologically charged, and there is often a close relationship between the identity of a language and the nation-state. But in everyday social interaction, language users move dynamically between the so-called languages, language varieties, styles, registers, and writing systems, to fulfil a variety of strategic and communicative functions. The alternation between languages, spoken, written, or signed; between language varieties; and between speech, writing, and signing, is a very common feature of human social interaction. It constructs an identity for the speaker that is different from a La identity or a Lb identity. Moreover, language users use semiotic resources, gesture, facial expression, etc., in conjunction with language to communicate with each other. From a Translanguaging perspective, asking simply which language is being used becomes an uninteresting and insignificant question.

Ultimately, Translanguaging aims to present a new transdisciplinary research perspective that goes beyond the artificial divides between linguistics, psychology, sociology, etc, and as such it requires analytic methods that move the focus away from treating languages as discrete and complete systems to how language users orchestrate their diverse and multiple meaning- and sense-making resources in their everyday social life.

For me, Translanguaging has never intended to replace code-switching or any other term, although it challenges the code view of language. It does not deny the existence of named languages, but stresses that languages are historically, politically, and ideologically defined entities. It defines the multilingual as someone who is aware of the existence of the political entities of named languages and has an ability to make use of the structural features of some of them that they have acquired. It is a research perspective that challenges conventional approaches to multilingualism. Fundamentally, Translanguaging is a Practical Theory of Language, therefore an applied linguistics theory, that comes out of practical concerns of understanding the creative and dynamic practices human beings engage in with multiple named languages and multiple semiotic and cognitive resources. It has the capacity to enable us to explore the human mind as a holistic multi-competence (Cook 1992; Cook and Li 2016). But in addition to the analysis of multilingual practices, the concept of Translanguaging also enables us to ask some bigger questions about some of the core concerns of linguistic theories, such as language evolution, language and thought, and how we understand the Modularity of Mind hypothesis, and to demonstrate that Applied Linguistics can make a significant contribution to these issues. The added values of the concept are highlighted in the *Trans* prefix to *languaging* by referring to:

- the fluid practices that go beyond, i.e., *transcend*, socially constructed language systems and structures to engage diverse multiple meaning-making systems and subjectivities;
- the *transformative* capacity of the Translanguaging process not only for language systems but also for individuals' cognition and social structures; and
- the *transdisciplinary* consequences of re-conceptualizing language, language learning, and language use, and working across the divides between linguistics, psychology, sociology, and education.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

that helped to improve the presentation enormously. Ng Bee Chin of Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, and the creators of Kongish Daily (https://www.facebook.com/KongishDaily/), especially Alfred Tsang and Nick Wong, supplied the author with wonderful examples. The author is grateful to all of them.

REFERENCES

Baker, C. 2001. *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 3rd edn. Multilingual Matters.

Becker, A. L. 1991. 'Language and languaging,' *Language and Communication* 11: 33–5.

Bialystok, E. and **G. Poarch**. 2014. 'Language experience changes language and cognitive ability,' *Zeitschrift Fur Erziehungswissenschaft: ZfE* 17: 433–46.

Borges, J. L. 1945. *El Aleph (The Aleph)*. Editorial Losada. Translated into English by N. T. di Giovanni . 1978. Dutton.

Bourdieu, P. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge University Press.

Brumfit, C. 1995. 'Teacher professionalism and research' in G. Cook and B. Seidlhofer (eds): *Principle and Practice in Applied Linguistics*. Oxford University Press, pp. 27–41.

Chomsky, N. 1965. *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*. MIT Press.

Cook, V. 1992. 'Evidence for multicompetence,' *Language Learning* 42: 557–91.

Cook, V. and **W. Li** (eds). 2016. *The Cambridge Handbook of Linguistic Multi-Competence*. Cambridge University Press.

Cowley, S. J. 2017. 'Changing the idea of language: Nigel Love's perspective,' *Language Sciences* 61: 43–55.

Creese, A. and **A. Blackledge**. 2015. 'Translanguaging and identity in educational settings,' *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 35: 20–35.

Dore, J. and **R. P. McDermott**. 1982. 'Linguistic indeterminacy and social context in utterance interpretation,' *Language* 58: 374–98.

Duranti, A., **E. Ochs**, and **B. Schieffelin** (eds). 2011. *The Handbook of Language Socialization*. Wiley.

Fodor, J. 1975. *The Language of Though*. Harvard University Press.

Fodor, J. 1983. *Modularity of Mind: An Essay on Faculty Psychology*. MIT Press.

Gallagher, S. and **D. Zahavi**. 2012. *The Phenomenological Mind*, 2nd edn. Routledge.

García, O. 2009. *Bilingual Education in the 21st Century: A Global Perspective*. Wiley.

García, O. and **W. Li**. 2014. *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Gramling, D. 2016. *The Invention of Monolingualism*. Bloomsbury.

Green, D. and **W. Li**. 2014. 'A control process model of code-switching,' *Language, Cognition and Neuroscience* 29: 499–511.

Grosjean, F. 2001. 'The bilingual's language modes' in J. Nicole (ed.): *One Mind, Two Languages: Bilingual Language Processing*. Blackwell, pp. 1–22.

Hall, L. M. 1999. *Languaging: The Linguistics of Psychotherapy*. Empowerment Technologies.

hooks, b. 1990. *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. South End Press.

Iedema, R. 2003. 'Multimodality, resemiotization: Extending the analysis of discourse as multi-semiotic practice,' *Visual Communication* 2: 29–57.

Joaquin, A. D. L. and **J. H. Schumann**. 2013. *Exploring Interactional Instinct*. Oxford University Press

Kaplan, R. B. 1966. 'Cultural thought patterns in inter-cultural education,' *Language Learning* 16: 1–20.

Kita, S., **M. W. Alibali**, and **M. Chu**. 2017. 'How do gestures influence thinking and speaking? The gesture-for-conceptualization hypothesis,' *Psychological Review* 124: 245–66.

Kramsch, C. 2015. 'Applied linguistics: A theory of the practice,' *Applied Linguistics* 36: 454–65.

Kress, G. 2010. *Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication*. Routledge.

Kress, G. R. and **T. van Leeuwen**. 1996. *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*. Psychology Press.

Kusters, A. in press. 'Deaf and hearing signers' multimodal and translingual practices,' A special issue of *Applied Linguistics Review*.

Lado, R. 1979. 'Thinking and ''languaging'': A psycholinguistic model of performance and learning,' *Sophia Linguistica* 12: 3–24.

Lee, N., **L. Mikesell**, **A. D. L. Joaquin**, **A. W. Mates**, and **J. H. Schumann**. 2009. *The*

Thierry, G. 2016. 'Questions of multi-competence' in V. Cook and W. Li (eds): *The Cambridge Handbook of Multi-Competence*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 521–32.

Tsapkini, K., **A. B. Vivas**, and **L. C. Triarhou**. 2008. '''Does Broca's area exist?'': Christofredo Jakob's 1906 response to Pierre Marie's holistic stance,' *Brain and Language* 105: 211–19.

Ullman, M. T. 2006. 'Is Broca's area part of a basal ganglia thalamocortical circuit?,' *Cortex* 42: 480–5

Vigliocco, G., **P. Perniss**, and **D. Vinson**. 2014. 'Language as a multimodal phenomenon: Implications for language learning, processing and evolution,' *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B* 369: 20130292.

Williams, C. 1994. 'Arfarniad o Ddulliau Dysgu ac Addysgu yng Nghyd-destun Addysg Uwchradd Ddwyieithog, [An evaluation of teaching and learning methods in the context of bilingual secondary education],' Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Wales, Bangor.