Defining Translinguality

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KEYWORDS

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> *[Translinguality] is an occasion for labor, the labor of revision that is always what we, in concert with our students, take up, and take responsibility for (whether or not we acknowledge that responsibility) in our thinking, teaching/learning, writing.*
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> —Lu and Horner, "Translingual Work," 216.

In this essay, we address conflicting views of *translinguality* in the fields of composition and of language and literacy education more broadly. Our aim is not to identify the correct meaning for *translinguality*, nor do we expect to be able to resolve all dispute about the meaning of the term—a task that from our perspective is not merely futile but misguided in its approach to language and language users. Rather, we intend to use the mixed history and mixed usage of *translinguality* as well as some of the terms and practices with which it is often linked—e.g., *plurilingualism*, *translanguaging*, *code-meshing*, *second language writing*, *bilingualism*, *multilingualism*—to tease out differences in the positions that might be taken on language and languages, language users, contexts of use, and the relations of all these to one another, and to better understand how writing takes place within and beyond norms of monolingualism (see Lu and Horner, "Translingual Literacy").

We argue for *translinguality* as a way to interrogate and unveil terms of language ontology, language user agency, and the kinds of social relations advanced: matters of ideology about language and language practice. While this project is theoretical in its concern with conceptualizations of all these, we take theory to be "a process in society," as Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff put it, the aim and point of which is "social intervention" (2, 3). Hence, our project is directed not at cataloguing the various positions to be taken on language, language users, contexts of use, and the relations of these to one another, or even in adjudicating among these, but, instead, at advancing a particular position on these and articulating what distinguishes that position from others. At the very least, it is hoped that the articulation of our position will help to account for some of the confusions and conflicts besetting recent discussions on translinguality.

We begin by describing the current state of scholarly discourse on translinguality in composition studies, locating that discourse in the larger context of both changing sociocultural and sociopolitical conditions and the scholarship from a range of disciplinary perspectives addressing language difference in response to those changing conditions. We then distinguish among these responses in terms of the ontological status accorded languages and, consequently, the ways that difference in language is understood; the kind of agency ascribed to language users in relation to languages; and the implications of particular configurations of these for social relations and, more specifically, social justice. We use these distinctions to articulate our own perspective on translinguality, one that has grown to focus on the concrete labor of language use as a means of advancing social relations to language other than those treating language(s) and even language practices as commodities, and to make more salient how translinguality addresses social justice concerns. Commodity relations occlude the role of concrete labor in (re)producing language, rendering language not as itself the ongoing outcome of labor but, instead and at most, a set of available tools or resources for achieving so-called transparent or effective communication. In contrast, a translingual orientation, at least as we define it, can bring back into recognition the role of that concrete labor in sustaining and revising language, and hence can redefine the social relations between and among language users and language. By recognizing the role of language users' concrete labor in sustaining and revising language, a translingual orientation acknowledges opacity and friction as normal components of social interactions rather than as problems to be eradicated or condemned. Based on that perspective, we offer a critique of alternative formulations of language difference generally and translinguality in particular and call on composition teacher-scholars to rethink language difference in light of that critique.

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Translinguality in Context: The (Re) Emergence of Language Difference

The term *translinguality* came to prominence in composition studies with the 2011 publication of "Language Difference in Writing: Toward a Translingual Approach" (Horner et al., 2011, hereafter "LDIW"). But the emergence of that term can best be understood as one point in a trajectory of growing interest in and concern about how composition teachers and scholars might better understand and respond to language difference in writing. LDIW itself references CCCC's 1974 position statement *Students' Right to Their Own Language*, and the original bibliography accompanying LDIW presents a long list of scholarly works that the authors describe as "helpful in [their] thinking about translingual work" (309), at least some (though not all) of which can be identified with composition scholarship. So, despite the LDIW authors' admission that they are still "at the beginning stages of [their] learning

efforts in this project" (310)—a position marked by the denotation of their project in the title as merely working "*Toward* a Translingual Approach" (emphasis added) —LDIW can be seen not so much as initiating but, instead, articulating, forwarding, and attempting to give a particular direction to an ongoing move toward what the authors term "a translingual approach" to language difference.

Different Terms, Same Meaning?

In that ongoing move, scholars who now explicitly advance a translingual perspective have previously invoked other available terms to name what they would argue for (see Trimbur, "Translingualism"). For example, prior to Suresh Canagarajah's publication of his book *Translingual Practice* and his edited collection *Literacy as Translingual Practice*, Canagarajah has argued for a "codemeshing," a "plurilingual," and a "world Englishes" approach to writing ("World Englishes"; "Place"; "Translanguaging"); Juan Guerra and Keith Gilyard have (separately) called for a "transcultural literacy" approach (Guerra, "Cultivating"; Gilyard, "Cross-Talk"); Lu and Horner, two of LDIW's co-authors, have argued for a "multilingual" approach to resist monolingualism ("Resisting"); Horner, Donahue, and NeCamp have argued for taking a "*translingual* norm" to work "toward a *multilingual* composition scholarship" (emphasis added); and in 2002, LDIW co-authors Horner and Trimbur argued for "an actively *multilingual* language policy" to supplant the tacit policy of unidirectional English-only monolingualism they identified with US composition ("English Only" 597). Thus, over the course of a few decades, a variety of terms have been put forth by composition scholars to name the preferred alternative to monolingualism (see Canagarajah, "World Englishes" 273-74), inevitably causing some degree of confusion, and to a great extent adding to the conflation of other approaches more firmly associated with these other terms with a "translingual" approach.

Different Meanings for the Same Terms: Translinguality, Plurilinguality, Code-meshing, Translanguaging

Confusion about the meaning of *translinguality* and alternative terms is furthered by different uses of each of these terms by both composition scholars and scholars in related fields. So, for example, Lachman Khubchandani writes of a plurilingual "ethos" that has long governed language practice in the Indian subcontinent ("Plurilingual," *Revisualizing*), whereas the Council of Europe advocates inculcating plurilinguality as a new kind of communicative competence needed now:

- To equip all Europeans for the challenges of intensified international mobility and closer co-operation not only in education, culture and science but also in trade and industry.
- To promote mutual understanding and tolerance, respect for identities and cultural diversity through more effective international communication.
- To maintain and further develop the richness and diversity of European cultural life through greater mutual knowledge of national and regional languages, including those less widely taught.

- To meet the needs of a multilingual and multicultural Europe by appreciably developing the ability of Europeans to communicate with each other across linguistic and cultural boundaries, which requires a sustained, lifelong effort to be encouraged, put on an organised footing and financed at all levels of education by the competent bodies. (3)

Both comparative literature scholar Steven Kellman and the MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages advocate what they call translinguality, but the former treats it as a kind of special "sensibility" characterizing writers of literature who compose in what is viewed as more than one language or in a language other than their perceived "primary" language (Kellman and Stavans 13), whereas the latter addresses translinguality as a competence to be inculcated in students to prepare them for an increasingly globalized world. Hence what the MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages identifies as a translingual competence appears to mean something close to the "plurilinguality" advocated by the Council of Europe (cf. Molina).[1]

Jeroen Gevers treats translinguality as necessarily involving, and coterminous with, code-meshing, whereas LDIW co-author Min-Zhan Lu rejects the metaphor of "codes" ("Metaphors"), and she and Horner reject defining translinguality in terms of code-meshing, instead defining a translingual approach as "one that recognizes difference *as* the norm, to be found not only in utterances that dominant ideology has marked as different but also in utterances that dominant definitions of language, language relations, and language users would identify as 'standard'" ("Translingual Writing" 586; see also 600; Vance). Paul Kei Matsuda has observed that, adding to the confusion, "[M]any applied linguists use the term 'code-mixing' interchangeably with code-switching, which is more or less the same idea as code-meshing," but that, alas, as he acknowledges, the heretofore idiosyncratic use of *code-switching* by Wheeler and Swords (a.k.a. "codeswitching") to refer to maintaining separate spheres for designated codes rather than mixing and meshing them "is also beginning to make its way back to applied linguistics" ("It's the Wild" 134). Adding further to the confusion, code-switching is regularly conflated with translanguaging (see Li Wei, "Translanguaging and Code-Switching"; Otheguy et al. 282; cf. Canagarajah, "Codemeshing"). To address this confusion, Juan Guerra has proposed the more felicitous term "code segregation" as an alternative to what *code-switching* has come to mean, albeit as of this writing his proposed term has yet to gain traction (*Language* 27).

A further conflict appears in the terms claimed for moving beyond the purely linguistic in conceptualizing communicative practices. For example, while Li Wei defines translanguaging as an approach that treats "language as a multilingual, multisemiotic, multisensory, and multimodal resource for sense- and meaning-making" ("Translanguaging as a Practical" 22), Canagarajah states that it is *codemeshing*, "*[u]nlike translanguaging*," that accommodates the possibility of mixing communicative modes and diverse symbol systems (other than language)" ("Codemeshing" 403, emphasis added).

The broader scholarly context adds further grist for confusion. For example, there remains a longstanding tradition in comparative and world literatures of treating the term *translingual* as signalling little more than writing that involves movement from one language to another (see for example Kellman; Liu).[2] In David Gramling's provocative analysis of *The Invention of Monolingualism*,

for instance, *translinguality* is invoked to infer simply writing that entails translation from one named language to another. And Ryuko Kubota, in her attempt to unveil what she sees as a troubling "multi-plural turn" in applied linguistics, unfortunately lumps translingualism with translanguaging, plurilingualism, code-meshing, and metrolingualism, ignoring the multiple and conflicting ways each of these terms has been defined (see Moore and Gajo; Li Wei, "Translanguaging as a Practical" 9-10).[3]

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This history of the use of different terms for what may be the same perspective, and of ascribing different, even contradictory meanings and perspectives to the same term, gives a somewhat different inflection to Lu and Horner's admonition that "translingual" is "at most, and at its best, an occasion for labor" ("Translingual Work" 216). We take the need for such labor not as a reason to dismiss the potential of the term: we do not imagine that the matter will someday be settled, nor do we believe that disputes about its meaning signal a limitation in the term itself. Instead, we take the differences in the meanings being attributed to *translinguality* as evidence of the growing struggle accompanying an emerging epistemological break, in composition studies and elsewhere, regarding languages, users, contexts of use, and the relations of all these to one another.[4]

Because, in our view, *translinguality* signals that break, it is to be expected that, rather than grasping its significance in terms of such a break, *translinguality* is instead commandeered to signal the equivalent of other, more familiar, understandings of these—e.g., conventional models of multilingualism, or mixed language use (code switching and/or meshing), use of what are commonly viewed and treated as "nonstandard" forms of a particular language (e.g., world Englishes, AAL) or mixtures of these with what is expected will be recognized as "standard"—and that it is conflated with competing terms that have recently emerged to make sense of language difference—*plurilingualism*, *translanguaging*, *metrolingualism*, *cosmopolitan literacy*, *transcultural literacy* (cf. Otheguy et al., 282, for a similar discussion about uptakes of *translanguaging*).[5]

This brings us to the larger context prompting the emergence of *translinguality* and these other terms: the increasingly undeniable linguistic heterogeneity and fluctuating character of language practices worldwide, brought on by changes in global communication technologies and migration patterns, with the *locus classicus* being Steven Vertovec's (2007) notion of the emergence of "superdiversity."[6] It is in light of the perception of these changing conditions that what had once seemed like adequate conceptual frameworks for understanding language, languages, language users, contexts of use, and the relations of these to one another have come under challenge. For example, in 1997, Constant Leung and his colleagues, writing about the urban English context, argued that while "TESOL practice in the schooling sector in England has implicitly assumed that ESL students are linguistic and social outsiders and that there is a neat one-to-one correspondence between ethnicity and language . . . . *demographic and social changes in the past 30 years have rendered such assumptions inadequate and misleading*, particularly in multiethnic urban areas," leading them to call on teachers to "question the pedagogical relevance of the notion of *native speaker*" (543,

emphasis added). In 2006, Suresh Canagarajah, pointing to "intensified globalization of English in postmodern society," argued that "if earlier arguments haven't radically changed the status of English varieties in literacy and education, recent social and communicative developments should" ("Place" 588), with the implication that world Englishes can now take their rightful place in composition teaching, and that "Outer" and "Expanding" Circle users of English have a significant role to play in shaping the constitution of "English." Horner, writing in 2010, argued that those working in the "Anglo-American sphere" in composition needed to engage in cross-language relations in part as a response to "changes in the language backgrounds of the students in our classes, or at least changes in our perceptions of our students' languages" following from changes in patterns of immigration to the US, in admissions to US college and universities, the growing permeability between ESL and non-ESL students, as well as the globalization of English ("Introduction" 3, 4, 5). Xiaoye You, in his 2016 book advocating "cosmopolitan English" and "transliteracy," describes the emergence of "new conceptualizations of language and literacy" in applied linguistics, literacy studies, and writing studies as a response to "[t]he proliferation of symbols and meanings due to colonization, migration, trade, and communication technologies" that he claims "is a defining feature of our times" (ix). And writing in 2018, Li Wei argues that what he terms the "Post-Multilingualism" era "raises fundamental questions about what language is for ordinary men and women in their everyday social interactions," given the fact that, as he sees it,

> 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. ("Translanguaging as a Practical Theory" 14-15, emphasis added; cf. Creese, Blackledge, and Takhi 191)

As such works also make clear, the dominant, prevailing language ideology in contradistinction to which they are positing alternatives remains monolingualism.[7] That ideology posits languages as stable, internally uniform, and discrete from one another. Each language is identified with a particular nationality and/or race/ethnicity as a defining attribute of that nationality and/or race/ethnicity (think "French" or "Chinese" as denoting not merely a nationality but also, at least ostensibly, its inhabitants' sole, stable, internally uniform language/culture/ethnicity), and language users are expected to have a single such language as their birthright as its "native speakers." Their ostensible command of that language (as monolith), achieved naturally through advance to adulthood, is posited as the target for others to aim for, however unlikely these others may be to reach that target. A shared language is deemed essential to communication, treated as the unproblematic transfer of meaning among its speakers—an assumption that renders diversity, let alone superdiversity, suspect. Opacity, by contrast, is deemed as evidence of a failure to use the language properly, or to grasp it fully. Language

difference is thus the exception to the norm, acceptable only as the expression of creative genius by those so authorized—e.g., Writers of Literature (see Lu, "Professing").

In challenging notions of the native speaker, the status of world Englishes, and (therefore) notions of target languages, language acquisition, and standard languages, composition scholars are aligned with and learning from past as well as current scholarship in related and intersecting fields of language study. For example, back in 1975, Einar Haugen suggested that the concept of a language, while in some ways a "useful fiction," "can now be replaced by more sophisticated models" (335).[8] In 1985, Thomas Paikeday pronounced the native speaker "dead." In a 2000 review of an edited collection on standard English, Nikolas Coupland concluded that "there are good reasons to move on from ontological perspectives that reify, describe and account for S[tandard]E[nglish] as a 'natural' or 'necessary' sociolinguistic reality" (632), in alignment with arguments made earlier by Rosina Lippi-Green and later by James Milroy. In 1997, Alan Firth and Johannes Wagner called for a break from what they termed the "individualistic and mechanistic" view of discourse and communication they saw as then dominating second language acquisition (SLA) studies, arguing that such a perspective "fails to account in a satisfactory way for interactional and sociolinguistic dimensions of language" (285). Rejecting the legitimacy of dominant SLA conceptions of a "target language," "interlanguage," and "learner," and the distinction between "native" and "nonnative" speakers, they called for "a significantly enhanced awareness of the contextual and interactional dimensions of language use," among other changes (286). Peter Mühlhäusler, in his 1996 book *Linguistic Ecology*, proposed an ecological model that abandoned the "givenness" of languages and the boundaries between them and the distinction between linguistic and non-linguistic means of communication. As Jean-Louis Calvet observes, this effectively calls into question "the whole contemporary linguistic approach," which is effectively "blown out of the water" (13).

These (and other) studies suggest that the growing interest among scholars of composition and literacy studies in challenges to prevailing notions of language and language difference is, if anything, late, its own history of shifting understandings of these constituting the equivalent of tidal debris marking, and produced by, earlier shifts and forces emanating elsewhere. But it is more likely the case that, as in other related fields, acknowledgement of the inadequacy of such concepts is commonly followed quickly by ignoring the implications of what is acknowledged, as Otheguy, García, and Reid rightly complain (283, 286). Hence complaints that the insights of translingual theory regarding, say, the ontological status of language are not "new" to other fields are beside the point: however well established these insights may be in these other fields, those fields honor them primarily "in the breach," allowing them to remain largely unaddressed, unconfronted, ignored.

Conditions, Catalysts, and Conflicting Responses: Ideological Struggle

A degree of confusion in response to any epistemological break seems unavoidable. We take at least some of this confusion as a manifestation that scholars are mistaking the conditions of more apparent linguistic "superdiversity," brought on by changes to global migration patterns and

communication technologies, as themselves representing a new norm to replace monolingualism, rather than as merely the precipitating catalyst for questioning prevailing orthodox views of languages, language users, contexts of use, and the relations of these to one another. So, because practices of code switching/meshing and translanguaging appear to challenge the discrete character of languages, they are themselves sometimes taken as preferable to refraining from such code-switching/meshing (see, for example, Young, "Keep"). However, as Gramling, Makoni and Pennycook, and others have observed, such a move can reinforce monolingualist ideology by pluralizing it, leading to a multilingualism that, while seeming to bespeak tolerance, maintains the boundaries between languages from among which writers are now permitted to draw more broadly (as "resources" or "repertoires") and reinforcing insistence on transparency in communication (of goods, services, and most of all, capital—see Gramling 37 and *passim*; Blackledge et al. 192-93; Blommaert, "Complexity" 613; discussion below). In such uptakes, the monolingualist ideal of clear and untroubled communication remains, and code-switching/meshing and translanguaging become no more than a means of achieving that ideal, reinforcing the reification of language practices into readily identifiable and discrete "codes" available for mixing or meshing (see Lu, "Metaphors"; Vance).

Alternatively, the tenets of a translingual perspective on languages, language users, contexts of use, and the relations of these to one another might well be posed even absent any ostensible changes in communicative practice toward more recognizably "mixed" or "meshed" forms."[9] That they have not been posed previously is not in itself evidence that communicative practice has changed in specific ways, any more than a change in scientific thinking signals a change in natural phenomena. Instead, the alternative may represent simply, if crucially, a change in our understanding of language practice (cf. Gasset 242). Hence, just as the "new literacy studies" developed not as a response to a change to literacy practices—a reaction to some new set of phenomena—but, instead, as a change in how literacy was to be understood (e.g., as an ideological social practice) (see Street, "New" 28), the development of a different perspective on language and language difference is a signal not of a change in language practices to be heralded as an improvement on or repudiation of previous practices. Instead, it is a change in how language(s), language users, contexts of use, and the relations of these to one another are understood: a change in how we think language difference. Thus, the translingual slogan that language difference is the norm is not an indication of changes to language practices from, say, homogeneity to heterogeneity in uses of "named languages." Rather, difference in language is itself conceptualized differently, as an inevitable feature of all utterances, whether deemed "standard" or not, conventional or deviant.

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The concept of ideology is useful in this regard. We can take language ideologies as representing a constellation of beliefs about languages and their relations to language users and contexts of use. But all language ideologies are by definition at some remove from actual language practices while nonetheless influencing those practices, most obviously but not solely at the level of policy (see Kramsch, "Privilege" 23). So, for example, there is a longstanding belief in the U.S. that English is and always has been the official and only language of those perceived as its citizens despite strong evidence to the contrary (see Crawford, *Hold*; Kloss; Trimbur, "Linguistic"), and there is a longstanding belief that specific demographic populations are characterized by their use of a single, stable language variety, again despite strong evidence to the contrary (see, for example, Riggs, Royster). That remove of ideology from actuality provides grist for challenging particular language ideologies for their failure to adequately represent the realities of language practice. Indeed, as we argue above, that failure is part of what has led to efforts to formulate alternative conceptions of languages and their relations to one another and to language users and contexts of use.

However, it is also possible, far easier, and therefore far more tempting to accommodate those practices that contradict a prevailing language ideology to that ideology. In such a strategy of accommodation, those practices are either treated as mere exceptions to or deviations (creative or mistaken) from the rule, effectively reinforcing it, or they are adapted to the ideology. In the case of the language ideology of monolingualism, we can see the former strategy in the distinctions between performance and competence and notions of an interlanguage (Firth and Wagner), or the treatment of these practices as evidence of "creativity" in the "breaking beyond" standards by those deemed Artists. We can see the latter strategy in reifications of seemingly deviant practices as constituting additional sets of language standards, each appropriate to a designated social sphere (see Fairclough).

But a more damaging, because unintended, response is to imagine one is pursuing a break with that ideology while its governing assumptions continue their reign in the proposed alternative model. The difficulty here is real: how to think a phenomenon differently than the available terms and conceptual frameworks seem to allow. We can see efforts to give novel inflections to conventional terms like "multilingualism" in the examples cited above as one strategy by which to meet that challenge. Another is to invent neologisms (or steal to give new meaning to terms from other fields): the invention or uptake of terms such as *plurilingualism*, *translanguaging*, and *translinguality* can be understood as attempting this strategy. However, as already suggested, even these efforts can lead to mistaking a difference in packaging for a difference in substance: old wine in new bottles. At least some of the excitement generated by the emergence of these neologisms can be attributed to just such a false sense of difference, given the ultimate comfort yielded by the domestication of the ostensibly unfamiliar thereby achieved. In those cases, the break attempted through the introduction of the neologism is effectively repaired by redefining the break in terms that accommodate it to the dominant ideology.

We have then conditions precipitating an epistemological break, various kinds of responses to those conditions, and significant confusion. In light of the confused status of terminology, we sort through this not by terminological categories—translinguality vs., say, translanguaging or code meshing or plurilingualism—but by considering what might constitute an epistemological break

from the language ideology of monolingualism. We argue for translinguality not in opposition to these other categories—futile given the diverse meanings currently ascribed to each and all—but, rather, in terms of language ontology, language user agency, and the kinds of social relations advanced: matters of ideology about language and language practice. A translingual approach, we argue, can and should be defined in a way that constitutes a break with dominant monolingualist language ideology in the ontological status it accords language(s); the agency attributed to language users; and the social relations to advances. We argue further that while translingual theory, as we define it, responds to many of the same phenomena as do arguments for translanguaging and plurilingualism, and aligns with many of their claims, it can be distinguished from these arguments by its insistent focus on labor as its point of address in defining language difference. Its foundation in a labor theory of language leads to a quite different, though not competing, set of social justice concerns in relation to language difference than those articulated by advocates of translanguaging and plurilingualism. It defines language difference in terms of labor that is not typically recognized as labor, and hence a definition not readily recognizable as having anything to do with either language difference or social justice. Against an insistence on achieving understanding, it argues for opacity as a constant, necessary element of social interaction—what Edouard Glissant refers to as the "right to opacity" (*Poetics* 190).[10] With that insistence on opacity comes recognition of the inevitability as well as constant necessity of labor in engaging such opacity. Given its applicability to all language use and users, a translingual theory is thereby less likely to be relegated to the cultural margins. For it takes as its point of departure not particular language practices already marked by the language ideology of monolingualism as "different" but, instead, all language as labor confronting and producing difference.

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This focus on labor has prompted concern that translingual theory may risk "flattening" all language difference, thereby neglecting significant differences in the status accorded some kinds of language difference and those populations identified with them—even, ironically, differences in the labor demands imposed on those with lower status by those enjoying more privileged status: who is required to explain themselves to whom, how, according to and judged by whom. Such concerns emanate from and focus on the language differences that monolingualism has already disposed us to recognize as such: the sense in which we each and all speak and write a variety of language by definition at some distance from, and therefore different than, the putative "standard." Importantly, as Gilyard, Otheguy et al., and others

have rightly pointed out, such differences do not enjoy the same status nor, hence, have the same kinds of consequences for specific groups of speakers (Gilyard, "Rhetoric" 286; Otheguy et al.). Those kinds of language difference are consequent upon monolingualist reifications and commodifications of language that produce a sense of specific varieties of language (including idiolects and dialects as well as the "standard" language): languages and language varieties understood as entities that, as Gilyard puts it, people "have" (or don't, "Rhetoric" 287) but that are accorded different levels of status (including negative status) on the basis of the status of those individuals and groups to which they are said to "belong."[11] The resulting differences in labor are differences in commodity relations—here, differences in the exchange value ascribed various reifications of languages/language varieties. Such reifications of languages and varieties are ascribed particular exchange values depending on their putative communicative power, an ascription that occludes the labor entailed in making meaning from any and all utterances.

We can see these reifications operating in the argument Otheguy et al. make for translanguaging. Otheguy et al. distinguish between idiolects and what they call "named languages" by deeming the latter but not the former social constructs rather than properly linguistic categories, however useful in other ways. These "named languages" are defined as "not true linguistic entities because their boundaries are established on non-linguistic grounds. Rather, they are groupings of idiolects of people with shared social, political or ethnic identities" (Otheguy et al. 291). The authors acknowledge that "there are, to be sure, large areas of overlap between the idiolects of people who communicate with each other," including people from the same region or nation sharing "some sort of linguistically mediated cultural or historical identity" (290). But the authors maintain a sharp divide between such groupings and idiolects per se.

The sharp divide that Otheguy et al. attempt to maintain between idiolects and "named languages" is meant to highlight, first, the circular illogic of presuming a linguistic category—e.g., "English"—prior to analyzing features of language practice categorized thus to define that category. More forcefully, it is intended to honor the unity among the language resources that bilinguals/multilinguals are said to possess, rather than seeing them as a mixture that might be identified from an "outside" perspective as belonging to and combining separate categories (e.g., Spanish vs. English). As Otheguy et al. state, "seen from the point of view of the speaker, that is, from the insider's perspective, . . . the question of which words [in a bilingual's vocabulary] belong to English and which ones belong to Spanish (and which ones to both) cannot be asked coherently. . . . they all belong to the same idiolect" (291). The insistence on this unity is the basis for their argument that bilinguals should be allowed to draw on as full a range of their idiolectal resources as monolinguals are, through "translanguaging," rather than being restricted to using only some of their resources on the basis of artificial social boundaries on language use (e.g., using only words designated as English) (295). Translanguaging, they argue, refers to the act of deploying all of a speaker's lexical and structural resources *freely. . . . without regard for socially and politically defined language labels or boundaries*" (297, emphasis in original), a freedom they wish all to have access to.

But in invoking idiolects, Otheguy et al. reintroduce the reification of language that they are otherwise at pains to undermine in their treatment of named languages and the accompanying

demand for transparency in communication, as opposed to recognizing the normality of opacity in communication.[12] The notion of language as stable "resource," described as what individuals possess ("all the words together ['Spanish' and 'English'] [that] belong to Ofelia and Ricardo and their children, that is, to their idiolects" [291]), while being rejected in terms of nation states, is accepted in terms of the individual as a means of achieving such communicative transparency. We can see this in their argument regarding anxieties over the preservation of minoritized languages. They reject the aim of "preserv[ing] a pure, well-bounded and essential collection of lexical and structural features," but then argue for the "affirmation and preservation" of "a cultural-linguistic complex of multiple idiolects and translanguaging practices that the community finds valuable." As they state, "It is toward the affirmation and preservation of these complexes, and not of named essentialist objects, that [language] maintenance and revitalization efforts are properly directed" (299). Thus, while rejecting the reification of named languages (e.g., Euskara, Maori, Hawaiian, English, Spanish, French, etc.), their argument deflects that reification onto complexes of idiolects and the "community" of the speakers of those idiolects, a deflection that simply redirects questions about what constitutes the essence of the "named" language into questions about whose idiolects will count as the "community's" (and who is authorized to say).

In contrast, the labor perspective on language difference for which we argue breaks from such reifications and commodifications of language (and language difference), and thereby from the commodity relations underlying the rightly decried linguicism. Rather than asking what words or other linguistic features to allow or not, or to categorize in a particular way, to achieve transparency in communication, it focuses on the labor involved in (re)producing specific languages; it asks what difference any particular utterance—by definition phenomenologically different from others in spatiotemporal location and, therefore, in sociopolitical significance—might make, and by means of what kinds of labor. Rather than posing that question in terms of rhetorical effect by restricting the differences possible to those made to the situation addressed—as conventional rhetorical considerations would—it asks what difference an utterance might make to the language deployed: whether and how it might reinforce and thereby contribute to the sedimentation of, challenge, or pose new meanings to specific lexico-grammatical and other cultural practices, and how the labor of utterance inevitably transforms those practices (including the transformation represented by their further sedimentation), and what processes and conditions might contribute to any one of these consequences. Hence, as Horner observes, rather than calling for a break from ordinary practice, a translingual orientation calls "for a different understanding of what language practice entails," its critical political edge arising "less from the language rights such an orientation demands and more from its recognition of the agency of language 'users' operating in all language use" (Horner, "Reflecting" 108).

By insisting on the inevitability of the spatiotemporal, and hence sociopolitical, difference of all utterances for the contexts of use and the language used, it restores to recognition the contribution made by the concrete labor of speakers, writers, listeners, and readers to the reproduction of "conventional" language practices, sought after by many student and other writers, and hence their status vis-à-vis those practices. For rather than restricting recognition of "production" and

"creativity" only to those utterances that are lexicogrammatically deviant from what is deemed merely commonplace and conventional, it recognizes the inherent productivity operating in language "reproduction," the creativity operating in the "recreative." From a translingual perspective, language, as Blommaert puts it

> is *fundamentally* creative, and it *always* produces something entirely new within the bandwidth of the sociolinguistic or socio-semiotic economies in which participants dwell. Note that, thus, creativity can not be seen anymore the way we saw it until now: as special. It is simply the default mode of production of what we call, by lack as yet of better words, 'language'—hence 'languaging'. ("Complexity" 614, emphasis added)[13]

Ontology

The questionable ontological status of language is, for us, most succinctly put by Calvet's formulation "Practices > Languages," signaling that languages are the ever-emerging outcome of practices rather than entities that practices merely express.[14] As he explains, "[I]t is practices that constitute languages. . . [L]anguages exist only in and through their speakers, and they are reinvented, renewed and transformed in every interaction, each time that we speak" (6, 7). This means that, at least in terms of the conventional, monolingualist conception of languages, "*languages do not exist*; the notion of a *language* is an abstraction that rests on the regularity of a certain number of facts, of features, in the products of speakers and in their *practices*" (241).

This is close to Otheguy et al.'s deconstruction of "named" languages (286ff.). But, Calvet continues, "Coexisting with these practices there are *representations*—what people think about languages and the way they are spoken—representations that act on practices and are one of the factors of change. They produce in particular *security/insecurity* and this leads speakers to types of *behaviour* that transform practices" (241, emphases in original). Hence, as Calvet explains, "*the invention of a language* and consequently the *way it is named* constitute an intervention in and modify the ecolinguistic niche" (248, emphases in original).

This is how it is possible that, while languages do not exist in the same way that, say, the universe exists, beliefs about language exist and affect practice, and, hence, affect language, idiolects included. In short, the divide Otheguy et al. wish to maintain between idiolects and named languages is, by Calvet's account, regularly breached. And, while it is true, as Gilyard complains, that "when I am around a group of people who speak a language foreign to me, it amounts to nothing to counsel myself that language is really an abstraction and that those speakers don't really have that language that I don't comprehend" (287), his complaint, pertinent to Otheguy et al.'s argument, does not contradict Calvet's notion of language as an abstraction that Gilyard is critiquing. Instead, it speaks to the power of representations (as language practices themselves) to affect subsequent practice, including, for us most powerfully, the representation/belief that the opacity in communication Gilyard complains of is abnormal rather than the inevitable, constant norm and component of all communicative acts.[15]

We can see that representation/belief in the Council of Europe's argument for plurilinguality. At least as the Council defines it, plurilinguality seems to be aimed at eliminating, or at least

ameliorating, the hypothetical situation Gilyard describes of not understanding the language. For the plurilingualized individual would have some partial understanding of at least some of what was being said, depending on the individual's specific competence in that language, and, hence, it would be *less foreign* to that person. Opacity would thus be reduced, if not eliminated. By effectively rendering languages as mere codes available for various decoding and recoding, such an approach, in line with monolingualism, has as its aim the erasure of difference through occluding the labor of translation (cf. Flores; Gramling).

Those responses to the language ideology of monolingualism that herald mixing of languages, or codes, or that herald the legitimacy of what are deemed non-standard languages/codes would, conversely, seem to reinforce the ontological status of the languages or codes posited. As Otheguy et al. themselves warn, "[N]o matter how broadly and positively conceived, the notion of code switching still constitutes a theoretical endorsement of the idea that what the bilingual manipulates, however masterfully, are two separate linguistic systems" (282; cf. Blommaert, "Complexity" 613). So, for example, while Vershawn Ashanti Young maintains that all language "codes" are always already "meshed," hence not separable as "codes," he also argues strongly that such meshing be allowed to take place. Code-meshing, then, appears at once to be unavoidable, on the one hand, and yet, on the other hand, also a choice, or what should be permitted, in contradistinction to, say, code segregation.

At least some arguments for translanguaging appear to suffer from a similar confusion. For example, Li Wei argues that translanguaging refers to a process of language production rather than to any specific forms that result, and hence would appear to constitute at best an orientation to communicative practice that is intended to "challenge boundaries . . . between named languages, boundaries between the so-called linguistic, paralinguistic, and non-linguistic means of communication, and boundaries between language and other human cognitive capacities" ("Translanguaging and Code-Switching"). But the practices identified as exemplifying such challenges—communications that "cross" what viewers/listeners/readers are predisposed to recognize as distinct—appear to be dependent on, and a reaction to, the boundaries they "challenge," and thereby, perversely if inadvertently, risk reinforcing those boundaries. However valuable such challenges may be as tactics, they do not challenge the distinctions themselves, only arguments for the segregation of what is accepted by the language ideology of monolingualism as ontologically distinct: here, one language vs. another, what is and isn't linguistic, etc. It is telling, in this regard, that, as we argue below, such arguments have as their primary focus language users and uses already marked by the language ideology of monolingualism as different—bilinguals mixing or translanguaging.[16]

Agency

Agency in language use is commonly located in acts that break, intentionally, with perceived norms, in close relation to notions of creativity defined in terms of novelty or "artful" performance: utterances that are "*distinctive* from ongoing interaction, in which the communication itself is highlighted and subject to evaluation by an audience," even the "routine use of creative forms" (Swann and Maybin 491, emphasis added)—what is deemed (art)work, not labor. Insofar as perceived norms

are identified with the hegemonic, breaks from perceived norms are seen as manifesting criticality, whereas reproduction of such norms is identified with lack of criticality. This excludes from consideration the (possibility of the) exercise of agency in the (re)production of forms not deemed creative, not distinguishable from "ongoing interaction." And even that agency that is recognized, as Lu and Horner have argued, is typically recognized only in "mainstream" students: those who are deemed to already be in command of the routine, hence whose breaks from routine forms are ascribed an intentionality not ascribed to comparable breaks by students deemed nonmainstream: those labeled basic writers, L2 writers, nontraditional students (Lu and Horner, "Translingual Writing" 583; see also Alvarez). Conversely, Lu and Horner observe, "mainstream writers' seeming iterations of standardized forms and meanings are perceived as evidence of . . . their conformity to 'common sense' or orthodoxy, while the seeming iterations of standardized forms and meanings by 'nonmainstream' writers are perceived as evidence of either their mastery of the privileged language or their betrayal of their home or first languages" (583)—a perverse exercise of agency, if that.

Arguments for code-switching/meshing and translanguaging seem likewise concerned with those utterances that in some way deviate from what are recognized as language norms, specifically utterances that deploy a mix of languages, particularly in ways that deviate even from conventional practices of code-switching (as linguists have traditionally defined that term). First, as Otheguy et al. acknowledge, the notion of code switching is understood as "the expressive *transgression* by bilingual speakers of their own separate languages, endow[ing] these speakers with agency and often find[ing] in the very act of switching *elements of linguistic mastery and virtuosity*" (282, emphasis added). Likewise, Li Wei argues for translanguaging as evidence of creativity and criticality, stating that

> 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. . . . 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. (15)

Li Wei makes it clear in his article that he is primarily concerned with the language practices of "multilingual language users," and he offers translanguaging as a "practical theory of language [that] offers better interpretations" of those practices (11). Especially for those of us used to dominant invocations and assumptions of a generic but decidedly white male heterosexual middle-class US English monolingual as the (unstated) norm (see Matsuda, "Myth"; Ohmann 145, 148-49), this concern is both necessary and long overdue. But necessary as it is, this goal by definition excludes those language practices that observers are disposed to deem unmixed, uncreative, uncritical—that is to say, the overwhelming majority of language practices. These, then, are relegated to the uninteresting and uncreative. It is against these that translanguaging is posed as the alternative.[17]

What stands in the way of recognizing the agency of more typical, conventional, and (therefore?) uninteresting and (or because) presumably uncreative, uncritical utterances is an atemporal

conception of language, a conception that maintains its residence even in those arguments, like Li Wei's, attempting to redefine language in terms, and as an outcome, of practices. It is that atemporal conception of language that renders particular features visible as distinctive, creative, different, new by positing a stable, internally uniform, discrete, atemporal norm against which those features are set. Such a conception of language, while recognizing the element of criticality in the recognizably unconventional, fails to recognize the element of criticality operating in production of the conventional, thereby denying the agency operating in efforts to reproduce the conventional (Horner, "Reflecting" 108-09). The inextricability of reflection from action through the word that Freire insists upon (128) is thus rendered extricable, exceptional rather than normal, rare and the province of the few rather than a constant (however repressed), for all.

Paradoxically, that conception renders the norm of monolingualism and the monolingual speaker (see above) effectively unassailable, invulnerable: hegemony rather than merely hegemonic, its status not—unlike the "hegemonic"—in continual need of repair and sustenance (see Williams, *Marxism* 112-13). In the case of Li Wei's argument for translanguaging, the non-multilinguals (or at least those deemed thus) and their practices of reiterating linguistic forms that appear to be readily identifiable with a particular named language in "regular" ways are dismissed from consideration altogether, thereby allowing the status of such practices as "regular" and as internally uniform, stable, and discrete from other languages to go unchallenged—e.g., what is deemed to be "SE" as, indeed, constituting standard English. Conversely, by recognizing the temporally different character of all utterances, including reiterations of the seemingly conventional, we can challenge the very stability and internal uniformity of the conventional. For, as Blommaert reminds us regarding language identity work, "[i]t is the habituated, low-key, routine, and ritual of identity work that shows us—amazingly—how complicated and dynamic the demands are on such work in *any* instance, even if the work is performed just 'in the pursuit of sameness'" ("Complexity" 620).

To take up such work, the questions Li Wei asks about the examples of translanguaging utterances—"the sociopolitical context in which these expressions occur, the history of [the language variety named], the subjectivities of the people who created and use these expressions, as well as the ideologies, including linguistic ideologies, that these expressions challenge"—would then return as relevant to all expressions, as would questions about the ideologies reinforced by the expressions under consideration.[18] But to do so would be to acknowledge the labor necessary to maintaining as well as revising and challenging all ideologies and languages, hegemonic and counterhegemonic.

Social Relations

It is manifestly the case that the "movement" toward an epistemological break in how languages, their users, and their contexts of use are to be understood has been driven not only, and even not primarily, by changes in language practices that previously dominant conceptions of language are inadequate to explain. Rather, it has been driven at least as much, if not more, by the urgent need to defend and stand with communities who have historically and presently been the target of racial, ethnic, and class prejudice and discrimination: in the US, most prominently, African Americans,

Native Americans, Latinx/e people, residents of Appalachia and the rural South, the poor, and people perceived to be recent immigrants from the "global South." Insofar as language, tied by the ideology of monolingualism to race, class, ethnicity, region, and nationality, has been used as a proxy target for discrimination against people identified with these communities, many teachers and scholars of language, including written language, have directed their efforts at defending the legitimacy of the language practices of those targeted: e.g., African American Language, Native American languages, translanguaging, code-mixing and meshing. Against the demand to "Speak English, This is America!" they have insisted on the right and value of knowing, speaking, and writing a variety of languages in a variety of ways.

In these arguments, language difference is defined in two ways: 1) the use of what are already demarcated as distinct languages—e.g., Spanish, Navajo, French, Chinese, Arabic—in settings where these are not the dominant demarcated language—e.g., in the U.S.—and 2) the use of any language or languages, dominant or not, in unconventional ways—e.g., mixing of languages, or using a language variety—e.g. AAL—deemed inferior to or of less value than the "standard" (because of its association with groups with lower social status). We focus on the latter insofar as these appear to challenge the stability and internal uniformity, and discrete character of demarcated languages, such as English. So, for example, Li Wei defends the "New Chinglish" by observing that

> 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. ("Translanguaging as" 14)

Against such ridiculing, Li Wei argues for the critical and creative character of Chinglish.

Ofelia García and Camela Leiva go further, arguing that translanguaging serves social justice. First, they argue that "for US Latinos, translanguaging offers the alternative of performing a dynamic bilingualism that releases them from the constraints of both an 'Anglophone' ideology that demands English monolingualism for US citizens and a 'Hispanophone' ideology that blames US Latinos for speaking 'Spanglish' . . . or for their 'incomplete acquisition' of their 'heritage language'" ("Theorizing" 200). But they distinguish translanguaging from other "fluid" language practices—e.g., what has been called polylingualism, transidiomatic practices, metrolingualism, code-meshing—by its "transformative" character. For García and Leiva, translanguaging "could be a mechanism for social justice, especially when teaching students from language minoritized communities" through its efforts "to wipe out the hierarchy of languaging practices that deem some more valuable than others" (200). The gist is to level the status of languaging practices by recognizing the value in those previously held in low esteem. As Otheguy et al. likewise claim, "Translanguaging evens the playing field, giving bilingual students the same opportunity that monolinguals have always had, the opportunity to learn and grow while enjoying the intellectual and emotional benefits of all one's linguistic resources" (305).

In these arguments, translanguaging is treated as both a technique for achieving and evidence of the achievement of social transformation. So, for example, García[19] states that, for her,

> Translanguaging refers to social practices and actions that *enact* a political process of social and subjectivity transformations, which *in turn produces translanguaging*. Besides challenging the view of languages as autonomous and pure, translanguaging *as a product of border thinking*, of subaltern knowledge conceived from a bilingual in-between position, changes the locus of enunciation and resists the asymmetries of power that "bilingual codes" often create. (García and Leiva 204, emphasis added)

While there is a lot to take in from this passage, we take the authors to be posing translanguaging as the deployment of a specific kind of formal expression that is simultaneously the means and purpose of social transformation. That postulation hinges on the idea of "enactment" as performative: translanguaging as both the expression of accomplishment and means of accomplishing a particular condition. We can see this same invocation in García's discussion of the use of the music video "*Si Se Puede*" in her co-author Camila Leiva's teaching of a high school class intended for immigrant newcomers to the US. Referencing the video's "translanguaging where English is performed alongside Spanish, both in sound and image [to relate] one important message: *Unidos todos con esta canción* / *Si se puede* [United with this song, / Yes, we can]," García argues that

> *It is the translanguaging that creates a unity* that is difficult to express, neither immigrant nor native and yet both; neither Spanish or English, and yet both in autopoietic organization. The music video is neither in English nor in Spanish, but in "both" that is "neither" because it is a new discourse, a product of coloniality, a transculturación languaging. Because the students and Camilla *are constituted in the translanguaging of the video*, they are involved in a continuous becoming that is of neither one kind nor another, but that constitutes the liberating action of an autopoietic "*Si se puede*." As they follow the translanguaging the students are confronted with alternative *representations that release knowledge and voices* that have been silenced by the discourse about illegal aliens in English that dominates the beginning of the video. (208, emphasis added)

It would be wrong to argue with the sentiments of this proclaimed unity, or with the inclusive and transformative effects of Leiva's use of both Spanish and English in the classroom discussion of the video, as when Leiva "wants to create through translanguaging a discourse that goes beyond autonomous languages that represent sole national or transnational identities" (211). Translanguaging, García argues, "opens up possibilities of participation, while generating the fluid subjectivities that US Latinos need to succeed in US society. Translanguaging gives back the voice that had been taken away by ideologies of monoglot standards . . . , whether of English or Spanish" (211).

In this passage, we see García making a moral argument about language rights: here, not the right to speak a given "named" language (Spanish or English) but, instead, the right to translanguage, i.e. produce utterances not readily identifiable with any single such language. This is a crucial argument we would support. From a labor perspective, however, there remain limitations to this view of translanguaging. Agency is attributed not to the speakers (or listeners) but, rather, to the technique of translanguaging—the deployment of a specific kind of forms, in this case the co-presence of both Spanish and English (in the music video and in the class discussion).[20] And the transmission of that technique itself then becomes the aim, rather than constituting no more than a means of making

student participation in education possible. Of course, under the current educational and political regime, to grant the right to translanguage is a legitimate means of making student participation in education possible, and hence is necessary. But that is not the same, we argue, as assigning a liberating effect to the technique of translanguaging *per se*.

This is all the more crucial insofar as language teachers, including writing teachers, may well find the attribution of agency to a language technique especially tempting to make, as it suggests that teachers can empower students by gifting them with, or "allowing" them to use, such techniques. Through translanguaging, teachers may believe they can "give voice" or "give back the voice" to students or "enable their voices to emerge."[21] But while it seems clear that insisting on "English only" in the classroom described would be wrong in all sorts of ways, it also seems clear that the translanguaging that is described cannot by itself accomplish what is claimed for it; that accomplishment, rather, belongs to the students in their work with the teacher.

For, despite the claims for the accomplishment of social transformation through translanguaging (a transformation that makes possible translanguaging), the identification of the means of that transformation with the production of a specific set of formal linguistic features effectively abstracts the production practices identified as "translanguaging" from their spatiotemporal location, rendering those practices as able, in themselves, to produce specific effects. Translanguaging is thus commodified, occluding the labor of speaking and listening, reading and writing. The video, and moving across and between Spanishes and Englishes, by themselves are ascribed the power to produce transformation—an instance of commodity fetishism. In this way, the technique of translanguaging may appear to "level the playing field," but the field, and the rules of the game being played, remain unchallenged. Everyone may now participate in that game of vocalization, but the commodity relations obtaining between the participants and the languages they vocalize remain unchallenged. Labor and the dependence of language on that labor become invisible.

"In assessing the effects of languaging, we need to distinguish between (abstractions of) language practices per se and the material social conditions of those practices. But to recuperate all these possibilities would require attention to the labor of writing and, more specifically, rewriting and revision of the meanings made, through the labor of writers and readers, listeners and speakers."

Missing from this account are the range of possible meanings in response to the video, and to the mixing of Spanish and English, that may be produced through the specific concrete labor of instances of the speaking, listening, reading, and writing practices of specific speakers, listeners, readers, and writers. (Imagine, for example, the different responses to the video by English or Spanish or, for that matter, Chinese monolinguals, or those Spanish/English bilinguals committed to the language ideology of monolingualism). And missing from this account is the possibility of mixing of Spanish and English in efforts to produce, not a Latinx pan-ethnicity of the kind García sees Leiva and her students constructing (211), but quite different ethnic formations and politics (cf. Blackledge et al.).

In assessing the effects of languaging, we need to distinguish between (abstractions of) language practices per se and the material social conditions of those practices.[22] But to recuperate all these possibilities would require attention to the labor of writing and, more specifically, rewriting and revision of the meanings made, through the labor of writers and readers, listeners and speakers. The meaning would not, then, be said to inhere in the video or translanguaging per se, but in the work to which the video and languaging practices are put.

We can see García attempting to relocate translanguaging as social practice in some such conditions, as when she asserts, "It is not enough to claim that languaging consists of social practices and actions; it is important to question and change these when they reproduce inequalities. By appealing to the concept of *translanguaging*, I go beyond simple languaging as a social practice to emphasize that a *new* discourse is being produced by a new *trans-subject*" (203). But this then takes us from translanguaging altogether: one might well challenge language practices that "reproduce inequalities" while remaining well within the confines of what listeners or readers are disposed to recognize as only English (or Spanish, etc.). The emphasis on the novelty of the discourse and subject here signals not so much a material accomplishment but, rather, an imagined removal (or escape, or break) from material social history.

We belabor this point to highlight what we see as a distinguishing feature of translingual theory: in contrast to those approaches emphasizing specific linguistic features, such as translanguaging and code-meshing—translingual theory emphasizes the social relations *of the language users to language,* with language itself the ongoing product of, and dependent on, their concrete and embodied labor. Raymond Williams has observed that "the most important thing a worker ever produces is himself [sic], himself in the fact of that kind of labour" (*Problems* 35). If we accept that languaging is work (albeit of a kind we are disposed not to recognize as work, or as "productive"), then language users perennially produce a sense of themselves in the fact of that work. Monolingualist ideology represents language users as mere "users" of something given to them, with the responsibility of then having to use it "correctly" or "properly" or "appropriately." Language work, in this representation, thus becomes a matter of following orders, and language workers are those who follow such orders (or defy them). Those who engage in translanguaging (or code-meshing) might well still see themselves in this way, but enjoying the newly given "freedom" of choosing from an expanded range of options and combinations: not just English, or Spanish, or both, but a mixture, as they please, as well as the diversity of "resources" within "named languages" and other forms of expression. This freedom of choice, however, that the enlightened teacher may give students maintains their position as no more than consumers—savvier and more fortunate consumers, no doubt, but consumers nonetheless (of music videos, languages, identities, brands, modes). The agency exercised, in other words, is the agency of selection from predetermined options given or assigned to them.

By contrast, the translingual perspective we advance insists on shifting the sense of language use from consumption to production—even when the acts of production appear merely to exactly "reproduce" conventional forms. There is far less emphasis, or concern, with doing what is recognizably "new" (a hallmark demand of neoliberalism). Indeed, newness per se is from this perspective an irrelevant criterion—hence translingualism's insistence on the inevitable newness,

phenomenologically, of every utterance, whatever forms are (re)iterated. Instead, there is an insistence on the role played by the concrete labor of every instance of writing and speaking, reading and listening in sustaining and revising any and all language, whether seemingly conventional or not, the social relations advanced through such usages, and the responsibility for contributing to such relations through ways of writing and speaking, reading and listening. The fact that much of that labor is likely to be directed toward maintaining those social relations currently obtaining does not make it any less productive, nor does it obviate the value of recognizing the role of language work in sustaining and, potentially, changing such relations, which are themselves basic productive forces (Williams, *Problems* 35). Language sedimentation is itself a never ending process. Utterances directed at maintaining existing social relations nonetheless change those social relations by rendering them reinforced and now obtaining in a different moment in time. The social relations "maintained" are thus different insofar as, through the labor of utterances, they have become further reinforced, like a path worn further by the steps of those following it.

The notion that language is work is not a new concept (see, for example, Rossi-Landi) but, rather, "basic Marxist theory" (Hickerson 695). Nonetheless, it is not a concept that has informed much of the recent attempts to rethink languages and their relation to users and contexts of use. Instead, thanks to the language ideology of monolingualism, language is imagined as a kind of property one either inherits or attempts to acquire, that one possesses (or not) and to which one does or does not have rights, including rights of use. In light of the venom directed at the languages of minoritized populations (as a means of directing venom at the populations themselves), language educators have reacted by defending those languages and language practices, whether in terms of language rights (e.g., the right to speak Spanish or Chinese or Navajo in the U.S.) or the value of novel uses made of these, e.g., translanguaging and code-meshing. As a consequence, those forms that we are predisposed by monolingualism to recognize as instances of creativity or resistance to monolingualist policy (because seemingly "new" or at odds with monolingualist policy) have garnered the most attention. This has led scholars like Matsuda to complain of a linguistic tourism that focuses on seemingly (from a monolingualist standpoint) exotic forms of writing ("Lure" 482-83). More damagingly, it has contributed to the commodification of language, denying the role played by language users' concrete labor in maintaining and revising language. It has thereby contributed to the marginalization of the implications of the epistemological break we face regarding language, which now appears to be a phenomenon restricted to the language and language practices of minoritized populations, and therefore something that most of us—and particularly the dominant—can safely ignore.

Alternatively, by pulling out from beneath them the ontological rug on which monolingualist conceptions of language have stood, a translingual approach to language difference can force a change in social relations by its acknowledgement of labor. We can justify language and writing classes not as a means of either giving students the (premade) tools they need, or giving them voice (or their "freedom"—as gift by definition spurious), or producing a social utopia confined to the classroom. Instead, we can see such classes as occasions for taking up more deliberately that work on language that students are already inevitably and necessarily engaged in.

Claire Kramsch has observed of learners of a second/foreign language that

> few of them are aware of the role they play as non-native speakers/actors in the life or death of a language, its development, its usage, its semiotic potential. . . . Learning a foreign language, with all the decentration, conflict, and discoveries this brings, is one of the more favorable academic means by which to restore to learners the discursive agency that they think they lack. ("Contrepoint" 322, our translation).[23]

Thanks to monolingualism, almost all writers and speakers, "native" as well as not, believe they lack that same "discursive agency" that they in fact have ("la puissance d'agir discursive dont ils pensent manquer"). A translingual approach, then, would not attempt to gift them with such agency. Instead, it would use the classroom setting (official and unofficial) as an occasion for that agency to be acknowledged and exercised more consciously and deliberately, in the interest of rethinking, and potentially revising, social relations through such work—the work of language representation, as itself a language practice affecting subsequent language practice. Much of that work might well result in language forms that appear monolingual and conventional—there is, after all, a use to common practice, so long as it is recognized as no more than that, and hence always a work in progress. But it would be translingual in design. Students might well "learn English," say, or written English, not as a given for their utterances to be measured against, but, in line with Kramsch, as a project to which both their learning and their utterances contribute.

This changes the social relations in the classroom, admittedly in ways more laborious and less appealing than offering students liberation. There are no predetermined or final results to expect the course to lead to, nor any gifts to distribute or exchange. And the discursive agency students exercise also comes with greater responsibility than following orders (i.e., responsibility for the social relations language practices contribute to maintaining or revising), surely less immediately appealing than mere license under the guise of freedom, or than being told what they need to do to get through another day. But this is simply a way to acknowledge what is already happening, and cannot stop from happening, in the work of writing and speaking, reading and listening, despite teachers' and students' worst/best efforts. In bringing into visibility what monolingualist ideology denies, translingual ideology forces a reconsideration of the kind of languaging all of us do, might, and should participate in, and why, with no recourse to "standards" to tell us what we have to do (Alvarez et al.) .

Defining translinguality in terms of an epistemological break with monolingualist notions of the ontology of language, the agency of users, and the social relations of language practice whereby languages preexists users, users are mere consumers of languages, and commodity consumer social relations prevail is not how translinguality is commonly understood, since it breaks with what monolingualist ideology has led us to understand breaks with monolingualist ideology to be: being "free" to use "different" languages and having the freedom to use them "differently" (as if it were possible to do otherwise). Understandably, then, translinguality is all too often conflated with little more than more tolerant versions of monolingualism that allow for, even celebrate, what monolingualism itself leads us to recognize as different, exotic, new. And, particularly under current circumstances, there is an urgency to arguments for tolerance of people and their languages and language practices that have been identified not only as different but "other," "dangerous," even "criminal." It is difficult to do more

than react to growing, and increasingly officially sanctioned, expressions and actions of in-tolerance, racial and ethnic prejudice, discrimination, hatred, misogyny, and violence.

But it would be a mistake to be only reactive. Proactively, we need to reject the legitimacy of the very terms of the arguments made in defense of such intolerance. In the case of language prejudice and discrimination, we need to redefine all language as the continuing outcome of our collective ongoing labor, dependent on that labor for its continued viability. There is no "there" in language to defend, only a work in perpetual progress. To invocations to "speak English," we can ask "What English, made how, and why, toward what ends, when?" (Alvarez; Horner, "Teaching"; Horner and Tetreault; Lu and Horner, "Translingual Literacy"). And these are questions that, quite rightly, we can pursue with our students as well. It is work that is necessary, that we're all already doing, that requires everyone's participation, and that therefore we can and should take up more deliberately.

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NOTES

[1] Further complications arise from differences between francophone and anglophone research traditions on plurilinguality (see Moore and Gajo).

[2] This is not to dismiss such work, which especially in Liu brings out the problematics of translation that such movement precipitates and entails.

[3] For a close analysis and critique of Kubota's argument, see Blommaert's "Superdiversity."

[4] For comparable arguments, see, for example, the special issue of *Applied Linguistics* devoted to the emergence of "trans" perspectives in language theories and practices (Hawkins and Mori), Blommaert and Rampton's account of recent paradigm shifts ("Language and Superdiversity" 3ff.), and Canagarajah's argument that translinguality constitutes a "paradigm shift" from monolingualist orientations (*Translingual Practice* 6).

[5] For other accounts of the growing number of terms emerging to make sense of language difference, see Canagarajah, "Translanguaging"; Li Wei, "Translanguaging as a Practical," Gevers; Lu, "Metaphors."

[6] A term that has been highly contested (see Flores and Lewis).

[7] For a fuller analysis of facets of monolingualism as language ideology and its politics, see Yildiz; Watson and Shapiro.

[8] And far earlier (1957), Jose Y Ortega Gasset proclaimed,

> what [linguistics] calls "language" really has no existence, it is a utopian and artificial image constructed by linguistics itself. In effect, language is never a "fact" for the simple reason that it is never an "accomplished fact" but is always making and unmaking itself, or, to put it in other terms, it is a permanent creation and a ceaseless destruction. Hence precisely the splendid intellectual achievement represented by linguistics as it is constituted today obliges it (*noblesse oblige*) to attain a second and more precise and forceful approximation in its knowledge of the reality, "language." And this it can do only if it studies language not as an accomplished fact, as a thing made and finished, but as in the process of being made. (242)

[9] Of course, the degree to which current communicative practices are somehow more mixed (linguistically and/or otherwise) than previously is questionable. On this, see, for example, Blommaert, "Complexity" 618; Trimbur and Press, "When"; Canagarajah, "Translanguaging" 3-4; and Yildiz.

[10] Glissant explains, "I thus am able to conceive of the opacity of the other for me, without reproach for my opacity for him. To feel in solidarity with him or to build with him or to like what he does, it is not necessary for me to grasp him" (*Poetics* 193).

[11] This is in addition to the common ascription of language differences to specific social groups in light of their social status regardless of any actual linguistic features of their utterances.

[12] The same may be said of increasingly common invocations of language users' "repertoires," understood as resources they "have" that users can choose to deploy in various ways that do not alter the constitution of those resources—invocations rehearsing the kind of cloisonné model of language critiqued by Bernabé et al., but here ascribed to individuals.

[13] Blommaert is not invoking the term *translingual* here (a term he treats as suspect), but we see his representation of language as in accord with the labor perspective on language we are advancing.

[14] Calvet 6. See also Pennycook, *Language as a Local Practice.*

[15] On the necessity of recognizing the norm of opacity to communicative acts, see Bernabé et al. 113, and Glissant, "For Opacity."

[16] Though Otheguy et al. see all speakers, including those deemed monolingual as well as those deemed bilingual, engaging in translanguaging, their concern is with the latter insofar as, in terms of their framework, the latter are prevented from engaging as freely in translanguaging as monolinguals are (297).

[17] Blackledge et al. and Otheguy et al. do acknowledge the "mixing" of registers, etc. "within" a single named language as also constituting translanguaging, or "flexible bilingualism" (Blackledge et al. 192-93; Otheguy et al. 297). There is also, of course, dismissal of language practices as subnormal by the dominant, e.g., by those groups deemed subnormal, such as the language practices of African Americans and of those identified as white but residents of the US Appalachians.

[18] Cf. Blackledge et al.'s argument that "the questions we need to ask are not limited to which languages are in use in an interaction and why. We also need to attend to the ways in which linguistic resources are deployed in our societies and how this deployment of linguistic resources reproduces, negotiates, and contests social difference and social inequality" (193).

[19] While both García and Leiva are identified as the co-authors of the article, the article presents the speaker as "I," and that speaker describes Leiva's teaching using the third person ("Camila," "she," "her"; hence we alternate between representing the article's authorship as plural and representing the presentation of the article's argument as García's. We apologize for any confusion.

[20] Hence Canagarajah's caution against the romanticizing of tranlanguaging ("Translanguaging" 4-5).

[21] For an early but useful critique of the limitations of this posture in critical and feminist pedagogy, see Gore, "What We Can Do for You!"

[22] See Canagarajah's caution about scholarship treating multilingual communication as "more diverse, dynamic, and democratic than 'monolingual' competence," and his call to "adopt a critical attitude towards the reources/limitations and prospects/challenges of translanguaging" ("Translanguaging" 3).

[23] "Peu d'apprenants ont conscience du rôle qu'ils jouent en tant que locateurs/acteurs non-natifs sur la vie ou la mort d'une langue, son développement, son usage, son potentiel sémiotique. . . . L'apprentissage d'une langue étrangère, avec tout ce qu'elle apporte de décentration, de conflit et de découvertes, est une des matières scolaires les plus propices a . . . redonner aux apprenants la puissance d'agir discursive dont ils pensent manquer." Thanks to Christiane Donahue for assistance in translating this passage.

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