Translanguaging as a political act with Roma: carving a path between pluralism and collectivism for transformation

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Abstract

Translanguaging claims to advance social justice as a transformative pedagogy. This paper analyses a tension which developed over the life span of a European research project which aimed to improve the educational experience for Eastern European Roma pupils through teachers' employment of a translanguaging pedagogy. Roma are ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous, but as a minority group face continued racism, whilst Roma pupils face educational exclusion. The voices of Roma parents, pupils and activists and academics alerted us to potential threats in utilising translanguaging as a political act for transformation in education. They revealed a central tension between recognition of linguistic pluralism for emancipation at school level (with possibilities for policy level changes at local or national levels) and unifying endeavours for collective action towards equality and human rights at a (trans)national level. To understand this tension we reframed it in light of the postmodernist positioning of translanguaging, and critiques of the de-politicizing tendencies of

postmodernism. In proposing a way forward for research and pedagogy, we carve a path between pluralism and collectivism by placing translanguaging pedagogy and associated research into Nancy Fraser's integrative model of recognition and redistribution for transformation.

Keywords: *translanguaging, Roma, Romani, pluralism/plurality, collectivism/ collective action, transformation.*

In this paper we aim to untangle a seemingly irreconcilable tension which arose during a research project on translanguaging as a transformative pedagogic practice for Roma pupils and families. The research was a 3 year Erasmus+ funded project involving academics, schools, teachers, Roma pupils and parents in England, Finland, France, and Romania. The aim was to improve education for Eastern European Roma pupils through teachers' employment of a translanguaging pedagogy. According to García (a prolific author on translanguaging) writing with Johnson and Seltzer (2107) a translanguaging pedagogy aims to support engagement with and comprehension of content and texts; provide opportunities to develop linguistic practices for academic contexts; make space for bilinguals' ways of knowing; and support socioemotional development and identities. Together these aims 'advance the primary purpose of translanguaging – social justice' (Ibid, p.ix). More recently García (2019) has described her work as re-politicizing language.

However, in our attempts to improve educational practices for Roma pupils, we were alerted to potential threats in utilising translanguaging as a political act for social justice in the emergence of a central tension between recognition of linguistic plurality in Romani dialects and group unification of Roma via language standardisation or homogenisation for collective political mobilisation.

As researchers convinced by the transformative *potential* of translanguaging, we wanted to find ways to understand and address this tension and hence overcome such threats. As Apple (2004, p. 14) argues

'without an analysis of the tensions, differential relations of power, and contradictions within it, we are left with increasingly elegant new theoretical formulations, but with a less than elegant understanding of the social power on which they operate … for a consistent tactical analysis …. of what is necessary to change it'.

Hence, our aim here is a 'tactical analysis' of translanguaging in a political frame. It is not a critique of translanguaging as a linguistic theory; rather it is a troubling of the possible ramifications of utilising translanguaging as a pedagogic approach in a neoliberal world where 'difference' has been commodified. It is a critical reflection of understandings developed before, during and after a research study, in order to propose ways for a translanguaging pedagogy with multilingual pupils, including Roma, to be transformative beyond a localised school context. As such, the paper adds to a number of other recent concerns over the transformative potential of translanguaging (for example: Block, 2018; Charalambous et al, 2016; Jaspers, 2018), building on earlier critiques of the depoliticising effects of postmodernity. The problems identified in the project suggest we as academics and teachers pause for a moment to critically consider how practices such as translanguaging which are founded on recognition of diverse and plural linguistic experiences can collide with the political aim of recognition as unification and in so doing, prevent the very transformation such practices claim to offer. As in Block's (2018) critique of translanguaging, we draw upon Nancy Fraser's (1997) original integrative analysis of recognition and redistribution in order to understand the identified tension. However, in a step beyond such critiques, we offer proposals for how recognition of language diversity in plural approaches

such as translanguaging, can result in political action to actualise its potential transformative aims. We believe this especially useful as an addition to conversations about Roma education given that amongst Roma activists and scholars themselves there are conflicting views as to ways forward in addressing social and educational inequalities.

Roma and Education

Roma are ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous, living across the globe, including in almost all European countries (Claveria & Alonso, 2003). Claveria and Alonso (2003) document systematic persecution of Roma dating back to the turn of the fifteenth century, including slavery and decrees outlawing or restricting Roma in many European countries. By the nineteenth century Roma were positioned 'scientifically' as racially inferior, and in Germany were declared to be inherently and habitually criminal, resulting in the death of between 250,000 and 300,000 Roma during the Porrajmos Romani (Roma Holocaust). This history is important not only in terms of recognising patterns and forms of racism against Roma remaining across Europe today and the impact of these on the poverty experienced by many Roma (Claveria & Alonso, 2003; Kostadinova, 2011), but also the consequent need for continued resistance and transformative action. Such action is made complex by the fact that although Roma are citizens of the state in which they reside, because of their dispersal across nation states they can also be considered to belong to a 'stateless nation' (McGarry, 2011). Attempts at the European level to construct a unified Roma identity as transnational, however, have revealed significant dilemmas. For example, in constructing a transnational identity, there exists the danger of reinforcing ideas of Roma as not full citizens of the nation in which they reside, relieving the nation state of their obligations of protection (McGarry, 2011).

Today, as well as continuing to face racism, intolerance, and discrimination, Roma face social and educational exclusion as a result of poverty, racism and monoglossic language policies (Gatti, Karacsony, Anan, Ferre & De Paz Nieves, 2016). An example is the compulsory initial assessments children face when enrolling in primary education in both the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic. These tests are given in Czech or Slovak and do not account for the lack of early years provision for Roma, nor the Romani language used in the home. As the World Bank report states: 'This often leads Roma children to be streamed early to the so-called 0th grades (preparatory grades within primary school) and to special education' (Gatti et al, 2016, p. 67). In England where the state undertakes monitoring of educational outcomes (https://www.gov.uk/ government/statistics), Roma, currently collapsed into the category Roma/Gypsy, are consistently at the bottom of the national achievement tables, and by a large margin. In 2015, at the start of this project, only 30% of Gypsy/Roma children achieved level 4 or above (the Government's national target) at age 11 in reading, writing and mathematics tests in comparison to the national average of 80%. By the time they are 16 and sitting their GCSEs (the major qualifications at age 16), the percentage falls to 10% achieving A* to C grades. They are also by far the most excluded (permanent and fixed period) in mainstream schools: in 2015/16, according to official Government statistics, 31% of Gypsy/Roma boys were excluded, in comparison to a figure of 14.54% of Black Caribbean boys, the next most excluded group, and 7.47% of white boys. It is also worth commenting on the lack of trained Roma teachers across Europe, which is surely linked to the aforementioned disparity of educational outcomes. The current project employed translanguaging in an effort to begin to address these huge inequities at a school level. And this was done very much in the spirit of Alison Phipps' (2019: 7) decolonising multilingualism which requires as she put it, doing it "as an attempt at a way of doing it", where you don't get it right first time and where:

> "It's going to be messy, it's going to be like all creative human endeavour, it's going to need some awkward practice, uneasy rehearsals, the development together of new scripts which we trace out from having made it up as we went along the journey with others. And it is not about knowing lots, but about particularities and granularities of experience."

The following section details the reasoning underlying this approach to translanguaging.

A brief history in the path towards translanguaging

The research team have many years of experience both in teaching multilingual pupils and teaching about multilingualism and multilingual pedagogies in initial teacher education courses and beyond in England, France and Finland. As academics, we have witnessed sweeping changes in funding arrangements in the UK particularly, which have coincided with gradual changes in advised practices for bi/multilingual pupils. In England, where there are often many home languages in one classroom, one could find opportunities within initial teacher education courses and in-service education training to learn about for example: Tove Skutnabb-Kangas' (1984) research on the benefits of bilingual pedagogies and broader socio-political ideas focusing on linguistic humans rights (1994; 2000); Jim Cummins' (1979) distinction between BICS and CALP and his later ideas on transformative bilingual pedagogies (2000); Josie Levine's (1990) suggestions for including bilingualism in mainstream curricula; Eve Gregory's research on the centrality of families and communities in the processes of many pupils becoming *and* remaining bilingual (2001); Maggie Gravelle's (2000) ideas for promoting home languages through stories in what was then termed 'the literacy hour; and Pauline Gibbons' (1993) excellent ideas for developing an interactive classroom (including ideas for 'home language use').

During the second half of the 20th Century, research showed conclusively that the benefits of 'bilingual maintenance programmes' or 'dual' or 'multilingual language' classroom approaches, as some of the examples above demonstrated, far outweighed practices that advocated solely privileging the school's language. It was not unusual therefore (although it cannot be claimed to be common practice) for teachers to incorporate some of the home languages of children in their class into lessons through for example: bilingual stories and talking pens (Mantralingua), teacher or parent translated key words and phrases, bilingual dictionaries, and in-class grouping arrangements. Many further examples were published (for example Kenner, 2000; Conteh et al, 2007; Sneddon, 2009) and promoted by national organisations such as NALDIC. Such opportunities have gradually faded, however, as requirements to understand multilingual pedagogies within the teaching/teacher standards have disappeared (Smith, 2013) and the funding allied to pupils with EAL has almost entirely evaporated.

Although the histories of funding and pedagogies are not the same in France and Finland, early work during the present project revealed that home language use in multilingual classrooms in France (with the exception of a few outstanding examples) and Finland is not at all common practice in the majority of schools. To the research team, therefore, translanguaging appeared to offer a way of reinvigorating and updating home language use for learning in schools in European contexts such as the UK, France and Finland. Here, learning together in one classroom with one teacher are children from many language backgrounds, who have entered the classroom at many stages of their educational lives, with different levels of prior educational experiences ranging from none at all to multiple layers of experiences in classrooms of other countries on the way, and with varied prior experiences of the language of their current location. Even if bilingual, the teacher is not going to know all of the children's languages as in models most often adopted in bilingual education programs in the US (Collier

and Thomas, 2017). Similarly, the mother-tongue based multilingual education approach which has been successful in parts of the post-colonial Global South, are not practicably feasible in the multilingual classroom contexts of Northern Europe, particularly in the current political climate.

Translanguaging as a theory of *language in use*, proposes that people who live and learn in more than one language have a linguistic repertoire, rather than separate linguistic codes, from which they are able to strategically select and 'soft assemble' features according to context to make meaning and communicate effectively. A translanguaging pedagogy enables pupils to leverage their entire linguistic repertoire in the pursuit of learning, making their language audible in cognitive terms as Phipps (2019) puts it. According to García, Johnson and Seltzer (2107, p.xii), this, in effect, means classroom teachers must recognise multilingual pupils' *general linguistic performance* in undertaking academic tasks employing their repertoire to "express complex thoughts effectively, explain things, persuade, argue, compare and contrast, recount events, tell jokes" and so forth where the pupils' focus is on employing their semiotic repertoire for learning in general. Further, teachers must distinguish this from pupils' *language-specific performance*, which is "use of features corresponding to what society considers a specific language or variety"; in other words employing their semiotic repertoire for learning 'languages' per se. We conceive 'translanguaging-to-learn' through a sociocultural lens and have presented a conceptual model integrating Vygotsky's concepts of inner and private speech to 'translanguaging-to-learn' practices through an adaptation of translanguaging theory to Guerrero's (2005) schema of inner speech externalisation (Smith & Robertson, 2020).

Our approach was to *adapt* a model of translanguaging, with origins in the Welsh bilingual classroom (Lewis et al 2012), to suit the multilingual classroom contexts of Northern Europe (as well as the bilingual context of Romania), much as García

and colleagues have done for the multilingual classrooms of New York (García, Johnson and Seltzer, 2017) and to do so specifically for Roma pupils in a European context of multilingual classrooms and monolingual teaching practices and a deleteriously changing landscape. This landscape is not just about funding changes, it is a political shift towards assimilation. We therefore understand translanguaging as a political act founded on understandings of linguicism, which recognises 'ideologies and structures that are used to legitimate, effectuate and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources between groups which are defined on the basis of language.' (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1988, p. 13). The ways in which linguicism interacts with racism and nationalism is also of concern here, sometimes referred to as ethnolinguistic racism (Block, 2018). The historical path towards an adapted translanguaging pedagogical approach had a significant effect on all practices undertaken during the research project to which we now turn in order to contextualise our subsequent arguments.

The Research Project

The research project known as ROMtels (https://research.ncl.ac.uk/romtels/), began in England in a large Federation Primary school situated across 3 sites in the north east of England with a linguistically diverse multilingual pupil population. There were approximately 27 different languages spoken by children at the time of the study. The school had 95% of pupils for whom English is an additional language, and have witnessed an increase in the number of families arriving from Eastern Europe, only some of whom self-identified as Roma. It is not unexpected that Roma may choose not to self-identify as Roma on school admissions paperwork given the prejudice and social and educational segregation many families are likely to have experienced prior to coming to the UK. The project sought to identify the specific language(s) or variety(ies) shared by pupils in order to enable opportunities for effective translanguaging-to-learn through general linguistic and language-specific performances *between* pupils wherever

this is possible. In this sense, rather than expectations of a linguistically homogenous class with a monolingual approach to learning, plurality of both general linguistic and language specific performances within and in the (re)creation of repertoires during learning is recognised, accepted, valued and nurtured. In light of this understanding and of prior research revealing the extent and diversity of Romani dialects, we began conversations with the Roma families in the participating schools in the project by asking them to *name* their languages; information, we explained, which was invaluable to help us help their children in class. We did so with the support of Zaneta Karchnakova, employed by the school to support home school liaison. Zaneta is of Roma heritage with Czech as a first language, and she is widely trusted by the local Roma community. She acted as our translator and co-researcher without whom none of this would have been possible. The families named their language(s) as Roma or Gypsy or Zigan. Employing the database of Romani dialects from the Romani Project at Manchester University (https://romani.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/rms/) which includes audio recordings, to match parents' languages to the names ascribed in the database, proved a key moment in changing relations between the research team and the families. The families told us they found it fascinating that anyone had afforded such an interest in their languages, whilst the process revealed much to the families about the differences between their dialects. This 'naming' process was repeated in one primary and one secondary school in Sète, France, one primary school in Järvenpää, Finland (to a far lesser degree) and to one large pro-Roma primary school run by the charity People-to-People, Romania in a village called Tinca. The table below shows the evidence we collected in relation to the names as recorded in the database.

		Roma families' country of origin		
		Slovak Republic	**Czech Republic**	**Romania**
Roma families' present home	**Newcastle, England**	1. East Slovak Romani 2. Czech Vlax	Understood East Slovak Romani	Ursari
	Sète, France			Ursari and some Kalderash
	Tinca, Romania			Korturare
	Järvenpää, Finland			Ursari

We termed this a 'languages for dignity' approach, described in detail in a guidance document for schools (https://research.ncl.ac.uk/romtels/resources/guidancehandbooks/). The families had different experiences with their languages, so whilst some families spoke mostly Romani at home and not much Slovak or Romanian, for others the opposite was true. Some children only knew a handful of Romani words learnt from their peers rather than their parents, whilst others spoke a real mixture of both Romani and Slovak or Romanian. Most of the children were not confident in English and several were not willing to participate verbally in English in whole class interactions.

At the same time as we were working with parents, we asked teachers in Newcastle to dream about lessons by developing enquiries based on the curriculum (history, science and PSHE) for year 2 and year 5 children (aged 6-7 and 9-10). The series of enquiries would be undertaken in small groups where at least 2 pupils shared the same Romani dialect, within a virtual reality-like 360 degrees enclosed space. The children would lead the learning adopting a particular role (such as fire investigators). Wells (2003) argued that enquiry is not a method or even a set of procedures; rather it is about creating a culture in which the activities created matter equally to the pupils and teacher, where both are simultaneously learners and experts, and where making mistakes is both normal

and useful. In this culture, pupils both ask and answer questions of each other and the teacher, and pupils have responsibility for pursuing lines of enquiry.

Each enquiry in this project was made up of two parts: firstly, there were videos and pictures on each wall of the enquiry space, where they would meet characters from the enquiry, one of which would guide them through the enquiry (such as the fire chief, or the archaeologist). Secondly, there was a digital table on which the children would undertake specific tasks directed by the characters such as a Venn diagram sorting activity to place materials as either useful as building materials or as dangerous (in the Great Fire enquiry). The table also contained multimodal recording tools for children to record their ideas and evidence in written form (e.g. notepad and postcards using only their fingers as a pen), or drawings, or verbally by pressing the recorder button. This is the approach of using the affordances of technology to multimodal representations in a translanguaging-to-learn process advocated by Velasco and García (2104). Finally, there were supportive tools such as an interactive timeline and a multilingual speaking dictionary which the children could add to over time by writing and recording words and concepts they struggled with or which they feel would help others. The format of the dictionary meant they can in effect record this in a translanguaged form, similar to attempts at forming multilingual concept glossaries (Madiba, 2014). The children were encouraged to talk to each other and make recordings in the enquiry space in any language or combination of languages they found best in solving the puzzles and collect evidence.

Once we had envisaged the technicalities of the enquiry space, we shared our vision with the parents and following the principles articulated by González et al (2005) in acknowledging parents' 'funds of knowledge', we asked for their support in enabling their children to 'translanguage-to-learn', by translating the characters' scripts which had been written in English by the teachers. To start, two Slovak parents who shared an East Slovak Romani dialect, and a Romanian

grandmother and grandfather (of the same family) and their daughter-in-law who spoke Ursari, stepped forward to co-construct the enquiries. Our instructions were simply to; "say it as you would at home so your children would understand it, using whichever languages you like in whatever combination"; in effect a translanguaged form of their Romani and Slovak or Romanian. The parents did not simply translate. They took each unit of meaning and decided how to capture this in a combination of their Romani and Slovak or Romanian, or in the creation of something new, to make it the most accessible for the children. Unlike most traditional bilingual pedagogies, therefore, parents were not tasked with producing one or more translations of named languages. Although Zaneta is literate in English and hence was tasked with writing, we found some of the Slovak parents wanted to capture their thinking by writing in Slovak and the Romanian daughter–in-law chose to write in Romanian, Secondly, we asked the parents to record the characters' script so the children heard the characters speak to them in English and in a translanguaged version of their Romani and Slovak or Romanian. So, for example, we have the voice of a Grandfather pretending to be an insect! As we video recorded all of the lessons within the room, we asked the parents back to help us translate the children's participation back into English. This took many hours of focussed work, the results of which when shared with teachers more widely across the two schools had a marked effect in shifting their perceptions of the Roma communities' capital in Yosso's (2005) extended sense particularly in terms of the teachers' perception of the parents' aspirational, linguistic and familial capital.

In effect, together we created a translanguaging enquiry space, "a space for the act of translanguaging as well as a space created through translanguaging" (Li Wei 2011: 1222). In other words, we created a space wherein the children were as free and as enabled as possible to leverage all of their repertoire in the service of solving the puzzles and in so doing learn about an historical period/event, or

scientific facts, or become prepared for transition to secondary school. The process was then repeated in France, Finland and Romania in ways suitable to the curriculum and practices in each context. So, in Romania for example, the school began to invite parents into the school to work as classroom assistants in the early year's classes, so that the children could talk to them in Romani whilst working with the Romanian class texts. This was despite the appalling living conditions of the Roma in Tinca, who live on the outskirts of the village, where the tarmac literally ends, in self-made houses, many of which are without water or electricity. The school also began to incorporate the Romani alphabet being developed in Romania (as below). In France, where the Romanian Roma families lived in squats on a trading estate on the outskirts of the town, again with no running water, the project developed a relationship with the local museum which hosts several pieces of art. Working together, teachers, parents and pupils responded to the art, writing captions displayed in the museum which were a translanguaged form of Ursari and Romanian (see https://research.ncl.ac.uk/romtels/ for more information, videos and photographs).

Whilst the project proved immensely successful within the immediate context of the schools and communities described, effecting enhanced educational experiences for the Roma families, improved achievement and attendance at school, as well as home/school relationships, several incidents occurred over the life span of the project which taught us to reflect more critically on this success. These critical understandings inform our subsequent analysis, so we begin here by reporting on two of the incidents in order to illustrate the emergence of the central tension between pluralism and collectivism: terms we will now clarify.

An emerging tension in the creation of a translanguaging pedagogy

The effect of the ROMtels project was to transform teachers' understanding of Roma parents' interest in their children's education, indeed in schooling per se,

and their linguistic dexterity and expertise and hence potential in supporting their children's education. This was true for those teachers close to the project and others who were affected by presentations of it, including the non-Roma teachers in Romania we worked with during a conference in Romania towards the end of the project. Concomitantly, parents' navigational capital of schooling (Yosso, 2005) developed and relationships between parents and the schools also transformed, realised materially in increased home school interactions in Newcastle, Sete and Tinca. Express recognition of linguistic plurality in the production of resources to support learning therefore, played a pivotal role in processes of co-production to empower parents in developing capital which unsettles unequal hierarchies thereby transforming home school relations. Analysis of the pupils' participation, video excerpts of which are available on the project website (https://research.ncl.ac.uk/romtels/resources/video/) provide empirical evidence of Roma children translanguaging-to-learn through for example, cumulative and exploratory talk, peer–peer scaffolding and translation. It is also worth noting improvements in pupils' recorded achievement over this period in in schools Newcastle and Romania.

As intimated, later in the project, the team spent two days working with teachers in Romania to 'present' our research (hyphenated to acknowledge intrinsic relations between presentation and the research process itself). The Romanian partners who organised the 2 days decided to include a presentation by a Romanian academic and Roma activist, Professor Ionel Cordovan. Professor Cordovan is part of a team in Romania using the 'polylectal' Roma alphabet created by the French linguist Marcel Courthiade (Marushiakova & Popov, 2017) to develop a standardised version of Romani for all Roma in Romania (and latterly across the globe). This alphabet is used in Romanian schools and universities involved in teacher education, in teaching Romani as part of the Romanian curriculum. This echoes work by Kyuchukov (2013, 2015) who fought

tirelessly over two decades for the right of Roma children in early years and primary schools to learn Romani. He based this argument on research which tested Roma children's knowledge of grammar in both Romani and the countries' official languages (Bulgarian and Slovak). He found that the children struggled with some grammatical forms in both of their languages arguing therefore that "it is crucial that Roma children begin to learn their language in a systematic way as early as possible." (Kyuchukov, 2013: xii). These examples appear to contradict what Matras (2015, p. 307) refers to as a paradigm shift in European language planning policy when the Council of Europe changed its policy from recommendations that Romani should be standardised across Europe 'in order to avoid a purely 'national' standardisation which would risk cutting ties with other Roma communities throughout Europe', to recommendations for codification to reflect and support linguistic pluralism.

Professor Cordovan's intervention alerted us to arguments against an overt focus on linguistic differences between Roma communities. This was more fully articulated much later in the project when one of the authors was involved in a Round Table discussion organised by a University in England that focused on recent research with Roma children, families and schools in England and in Italy. Two discussants involved in the Round Table were of Roma heritage, who had recently completed their PhD studies and who self-identified as Roma activists. The project researcher was describing the process of language and dialect identification and the complexities surrounding language naming practices which surprised the Roma activists. "But it is all actually the same language", they suggested "not lots of different ones". They insisted that work on dialects has the effect of fractioning Roma. They argued for a strong collective and a Pan-Roma identity, in order to better protect *all* Roma communities from stigmatisation and exclusion. Their primary concern was to develop mass solidarity to actively change social and material conditions for Roma. So, although Professor

Cordovan did not overtly talk about the link between standardisation and Roma activism, nor did he critique the plural approach of the research study, these Roma students and activists specifically linked express acknowledgment of linguistic pluralism, as a factor in the research process and pedagogical approach, to a fractioning of Roma unity; an act which was effectively counterproductive to Roma activism.

Here then are the two divergent views we faced: recognition and celebration of linguistic/dialect diversity and plurality versus unification via language standardisation or suspension of dialect acknowledgment. On the one hand, plurality of dialect (and orthography variants) is recognised as a reality and viewed as beneficial to cultural and public life (including institutionally in European language planning policy) (Matras, 2015), and, as we experienced, to processes in transformational research, and to pupils' learning. On the other hand, language standardisation is advocated as a means of unifying and mobilising Roma as a key element 'to legitimise demands for Romani political representation and for protection from discrimination and exclusion.' (Matras 2015, p. 299). Linguistic coherence is viewed as central to 'revising traditional images of 'Gypsies' as a lifestyle or a social grouping and replacing them with an acknowledgement that the Romani population constitutes an ethnic minority' (Matras, 2015, p. 297). As noted by McGarry (2011), representation structures based on a shared ethnic identity, which would in this case include a common language, 'enhances ethnic collective action on a large scale insofar as they provide organizational infrastructures, leaders and network links' (Olzak, 2004, p. 671).

This tension can be recast as a fundamental question: to what extent does pluralism (in our case in terms of a recognition (and expert use) of Romani dialect plurality) fracture attempts to propose a shared identity on which collective

claims to social justice and human rights can be fought, even when and if recognition of pluralism transforms unequal relations at a local level including schools? This is a critical question for translanguaging as a pedagogy which, as we have seen, views linguistic plurality and complexity as the norm, and translanguaging-to-learn as transformative and liberating in 'attempting to wipe out the hierarchy of languaging practices that deem some more valuable than others' (García and Leiva, 2014, p. 200). In translanguaging pedagogy, the use of one's linguistic repertoire is viewed as a legitimate practice and a right. The trouble is, what if this right for individuals and groups within institutions such as schools, lies in conflict with unifying endeavours for collective action towards equality and human rights at a national and, for Roma, transnational level? As teachers and researchers who have faced many such tensions before, we were cognisant that "the language of difference (disadvantage, diversity) works to construct a position of inferiority even when that may not have been the initial intent" (Ladson-Billings, 1999: 219), and hence translanguaging for Roma must be interrogated within a political frame.

Reframing the incidents: the depoliticizing tendencies of postmodernism and translanguaging as a political act

Translanguaging has been both overtly situated within and, through the concepts it draws on, consistent with (as in the discussion below) a postmodernist stance, both in terms of its description of the condition of linguistic plurality as a lived reality and in its analysis of such plurality as a theory of language in use. For example, García and Woodley (2015, p. 138) explain how postmodern scholarship has described fluid identities affected by linguistic repertoires and spaces, concepts drawn upon within translanguaging theory. In earlier work, García (2009, p. 397, note 14) speaks about fluid language codes framed within social practices as fitting with 'the theoretical posturing of postmodernism'. García and Li Wei (2014, p. 9) refer to an analysis of language as a process of

languaging (the premise on which translanguaging rests), as due to the rise of post-structuralism in the post-modern era. Li Wei (2018, p. 9) rests his reasoning for developing translanguaging as a practical theory of language in part on dismissals of translanguaging as 'part of the sloganization of the post-modern, possibly also post-truth era.' Most recently García (2019) has described herself as adopting a critical post-structuralist stance.

Recognition of plurality is central to postmodernism in its 'abandonment of universality … motivated by the idea that any suggested or realized unity or universality inevitably brings about exclusion, injustice, repression and violence.' (Biesta, 1995, p. 163). This is essentially the critique offered by Matras (2005, p. 41) in response to calls to standardise Romani:

> 'if we examine the historical circumstances in which Standard languages emerge, we find that they generally satisfy a quest for power – by imposing one single variety of the language on all users in the public spheres such as education, public services, and broadcasting; a quest for control – by rewarding those who adhere to the Standard, and imposing sanctions on those who don't, usually via tests within the education system and the qualifications that it awards'.

In terms of translanguaging however, one might reason an association with poststructural sociolinguistics means arguments *against* the notion of plurality. Blommaert (2012, p.3), for example, claims multi-frames such as multi/plurilingualism maintain the illusion of separate singular language codes, whereas an epistemological rupturing of such approaches by concepts such as translanguaging leads to an understanding of language as appearing by degree:

> "in the shape of approximations of something we always imagined as stable, 'complete' and constant. The overall patterns of activity can never be clearly pre-dicted on the basis of what we know about 'languages' or established genres,

registers, and so on—it is fundamentally creative, and it always produces something entirely new"

The instability, fluidity and creativity of language within post-structural sociolinguistic notions of (trans)languaging *is* plural however, in the sense meant here, in that it abandons any universal truth of a language as "defined and identified in singular terms" (Blommaert 2012, p.2). Even if one was to disagree with this counterclaim, as a minimum we can say such constructions against plurality are not political arguments towards linguistic coherence for collective action.

As already stated, however, translanguaging is not just involved in theorising language in terms of plurality or complexity, it is also a pedagogy which is viewed as a vehicle for social justice for multilingual pupils. Squeezing space for the voices of the marginalized to be recognised, valued and hence expressed in schools is one thing, and is part of what was achieved within the project. To actively seek for these voices to be purposively used in traditionally monolingual classrooms as a semiotic tool for learning and for this practice to be normalised as a right, and for this to have a transformative political effect, however, is quite another, squeezing past postmodernism towards something far less particularistic. In rejecting metanarratives, 'postmodernists maintain that it is impossible to aspire to any unified representation of the world, a world where there are multiple connections and differentiations united by some broader, less particularistic over-view' (Beyer & Liston, 1992, p. 374). This is the point at which even Biesta (1995, p. 165), who is sometimes described as aligned to resistance postmodernism, acknowledges Marxists' and other critical theorists' lambasting of 'the political impotency' of postmodernism as a political project given the 'depoliticizing tendencies within it'. As Rikowski and McLaren (2002, p. 6) argue, 'the infinite play of 'difference' based on social context, perspective,

infinite interpretation and variegated relations to the Other – we are left with *little or nothing in common* upon which to build a politics of resistance to capital.' This is essentially the real world concerns put forth by the Roma activists, and as Beyer and Liston (1992, p. 372) note when these arise and 'are motivated by a general concern for social justice, equality, or liberation, postmodernism seems to deny the authenticity of such nonparticularistic moral claims.' What we are left with is a 'cacophony of voices that disallow political and social action that is morally compelling' (Beyer and Liston, 1992, p. 380).

The postmodern project has also been critiqued for obfuscating and acting as a veil for neoliberal education policies of the radical right (Hill et al, 2002). We can see this play out in the literature on translanguaging in two main ways. Firstly, Otheguy, García and Reid (2015) have expressed frustration that in translanguaging's amplified global interest and increasing polysemy (which one may argue is itself a consequence of a postmodernist stance), existential critiques of languages as real entities (such as Makoni and Pennycook, 2007) have been lost. They argue that translanguaging therefore must be viewed in terms of the free use of one's idiolect, or the ordered lexical and grammatical features that a person actually speaks '*without regard for socially and politically defined language labels or boundaries*' (Ibid, 2015, p. 297, our italics). The problem is that, even if one were to concur with this ontological position, there *is* an acute need to *have regard for* socially and politically defined language labels, given the real, and as García and Lin (2017a) themselves acknowledge, *material* consequences of the hierarchically structured status differential between named languages. Ignoring this political contextual reality will not bring about its demise, just as being colour-blind will not bring an end to racism. Whilst freedom to draw on one's entire linguistic repertoire is argued as advantageous to pupils, and to groups of pupils and parents within schools, one must be alert to possible, and some would argue likely given the current global domination of some

languages, alternative adverse effects. For example, questions have been raised about the effects of translanguaging on the continued existence of minority languages either as named entities *or* as features within the social realm to become available for individuals' repertoires. Cenoz and Gorter (2017, p. 908) argue that in contexts where majority languages are introduced into environments where learning is undertaken in minority languages, as opposed to most translanguaging research where minority languages are introduced into contexts where learning is mostly undertaken in the majority language, as is the case in our study, there is a concern the majority language will eventually overtake, due to an 'imbalance of status and power between languages.' García and Lin (2017b, p. 126) insist that minoritized languages cannot be maintained 'as if they were autonomous museum pieces; instead it can only help sustain and develop them in functional interrelationship within the communicative context in which they are used by bilingual speakers. However, this ignores the very real neoliberal impact upon global communicative contexts within which bilingual speakers interact, including in schools. As Rasool (1998, p. 96) noted, postmodernism's stance on language choice and its associated liberating potential, must be 'balanced against the fact that ..... the new globalizing processes [are] not free and unbounded'. In response to such critiques, García and colleagues advocate a space for both the learning of named languages, and a separate space for nurturing translanguaging which does not compete with the majority language, which would not, in our opinion, overcome the objections raised above, as the local context is placed within the wider and pervasive global capitalist context.

Secondly, and relatedly, in exploring the relationship between neoliberalism and plurilingualism, Flores (2013, p. 503) reminds us of the construction of the neoliberal subject as an enterprising self who is 'an autonomous, flexible, and innovative subject who is able to adapt to the rapidly changing contexts of our sociohistorical period'. He does so in order to caution against how the

commodification of plurilingualism, and here we would add translanguaging, 'may unwittingly be used as a tool of neoliberal governance that reinforces rather than challenges current relations of power.' Interestingly, Jaspers (2018, p. 2) has recently suggested that because of the disparate meanings now associated with translanguaging as a neologism, one needs to question the extent to which translanguaging 'answers to an entrepreneurial academic climate that looks benign on words that sell.' The benefits to bilingualism in forming flexible, dynamic individuals, is partly framed in the translanguaging literature around ability to compete in a technologically advanced global market where bilingualism is viewed as 'an increasingly important *commodity* in the world's social, political and economic development.' (García, 2009, p. 98, our italics). Whilst this may be true in some cases, it takes the need for competition as a given thereby naturalising the market, whilst situating dynamic bilingualism as a competitive edge within this market. This is a critique shared by Jaspers (2018, p. 5) who argues that 'transformation from a translanguaging point of view then at most resides in achieving a different composition of the unequal 'slots' in the existing social hierarchy, in making sure that new winners replace, or join, old winners'. Of course, bilingualism, however dynamic, is not a panacea for global material inequities; not all bilingualisms are equal given the geopolitics of the world's languages, and not all bilinguals are in a position to claim their prize. Here we are reminded of a study of Turkish speaking pupils of Bulgarian backgrounds in a primary school in Greek Cyprus (Charalambous, Charalambous, & Zembylas, 2016, in Jaspers, 2018). The study found that because of the political struggles between nation states, pupils did not want to be identified as Turkish, which they felt would result from 'speaking Turkish' in class. One can imagine similar scenarios in many other contexts around the world. As Apple (2004, p. 18) argues, 'neo-liberal policies involving market 'solutions' may actually serve to reproduce—not subvert—traditional hierarchies of class and race' and in this case in relation also to language hierarchies. In other words,

situating translanguaging for dynamic bilingualism as a commodity reifies the marketization of education, which may therefore act to legitimise and reinforce the very hierarchies it professes to transform.

So, to return to our original dilemma rephrased, we would need to ask how we can oppose the depoliticizing tendencies of postmodernism's rejection of social reality and non-particularistic unification, which can result in a reinforcement of neoliberal policies, in order to enable translanguaging pedagogy as a political act which acknowledges and promotes linguistic pluralism at a school and national policy level, to *transform* educational inequities. In other words, we need to find ways of advancing linguistic pluralism at the local or national policy level for community emancipation in relation to education, that is keenly aware of the ways in which such pluralism can be hijacked politically to decollectivize and disempower. Simultaneously, in the building of collectives for communal action, we must stay alert to how hierarchies can operate to exclude and marginalise at the local level. Crucially, we must also ask what is meant by transformation in relation to social justice within and beyond the school gates. Our proposed solution therefore begins with an acceptance of the premise that 'the local can illuminate the more general, and that the global can heighten our sensitivity to the more particular.' (Beyer and Liston, 1992, p. 375).

Paving a way forward: translanguaging as transformative within a justice of recognition *and* redistribution

At this point, we draw on Nancy Fraser's attempt to integrate cultural and economic injustices in terms of political mobilization primarily because she recognises the very tension we were forced to address in terms of translanguaging for Roma: abolition or at least suspension of a recognition of difference for collective struggle, versus pluralism in the acknowledgment of cultural specificities as she phrases it, for group identity. For Fraser, race, alongside

gender, is viewed as a bivalent collectivity, as injustices which arise from oppression or subordination are traceable to both the political-economic structure and the cultural-valuation structure. As such, race equality requires both redistributive justice and a justice of recognition in order to avoid 'a vicious circle of cultural and economic subordination.' (Fraser, 1997, p. 21). Redistributive justice, which refers to 'a concern with how material resources are produced, distributed, acquired, and used in society' (Block 2018, p. 4), requires solidarity in collective action, whereas a justice of recognition, which is concerned with 'reigning social patterns of interpretation and evaluation' (Fraser, 1997, p. 18), requires recognition of differences. Fraser (1997, p. 21) exemplifies this in terms of race, useful here in considering ethnolinguistic racism, by positing that 'anti-racists, … must pursue political-economic remedies that would undermine 'racial' differentiation, while also pursuing cultural-valuational remedies that valorize the specificity of despised collectivities.' In order to remedy this apparently intractable dilemma, Fraser distinguishes between two types of 'remedies': those which are affirmative, aimed at correcting inequitable outcomes without disturbing the underlying framework that generates and sustains them; and those which are transformative, aimed at correcting inequitable outcomes by restructuring the underlying generative framework. Both affirmative and transformative remedies are concerned with redistribution and recognition. In affirmative action group differentials are supported, whereas transformative actions are said to blur, in the case of redistribution, and destabilise, in the case of recognition, group differentials: 'by destabilising existing group identities and differentiations, [transformative] remedies would not only raise the self-esteem of members of currently disrespected groups; they would change *everyone's* sense of self (Fraser, 1997, p. 24, original italics). In raising the important outcome of some affirmative redistribution policies in engendering assumptions of deficit which can in turn lead to assumptions of unearned privileges, thereby fostering injustices of recognition, Fraser demonstrates the integrative nature of

this model. This has proved useful in understanding the vicious cycle of disadvantage faced by the Roma as a bivalent collectivity (Kostadinova, 2011), and to problems in assuming the transformative potential of translanguaging (Block, 2018). Block (2018) concludes that translanguaging as currently envisaged by scholars is at best concerned with affirmative actions towards recognition, and he is less convinced that translanguaging theory in action in education 'would somehow filter upward into the ideological realm, and to the roots of discrimination that it aims to combat and /or eliminate' as transformative.

We draw on Fraser's model to imagine how translanguaging *could* appear as transformative within a justice of recognition, where pluralism is acknowledged and differences are destabilised, *and* within redistributive justice, where differences are abolished in collective action. We acknowledge the speculative nature of this, but we do so in order to attempt to both problematize and solve our identified tension. We then add to this by articulating how deconstruction in recognition must be informed by understandings of redistributive justice in global terms, and how metanarratives concerning theories of redistribution, must be aware of negative cultural valuations at the local level in order for translanguaging to be transformative in the sense articulated by Fraser.

Imagine an ideal scenario where solidarity in collective action has resulted in a deep restructuring of relations of production on a global scale. In this case naming languages is less important as the power differential between languages (and nation states) will have collapsed, hence designation of terms such as minority or majority when applied to languages would lose meaningful relative signification. In this scenario translanguaging can flourish in everyday life and within schools as both an aid to the process of learning and as a desired outcome. Imagine also at the other end of Fraser's spectrum, there has been a revaluation of the language hierarchy alongside a cultural shift in destabilising notions of race. Dialects and

what were once deemed lower status/minority languages are now legitimated and valued as tools for learning. Furthermore, national languages and monolingualism is no longer privileged, and translanguaging is viewed as an educational right. In both scenarios, citizenship would be disentangled from languaging performances and Roma would be free to draw on their entire repertoire without fear of being stigmatised as not full citizens of any nation state enabling Romani dialects to flourish.

As Fraser (1997, p. 15) repeatedly signalled however, paths to attaining these are intertwined: 'even the most material economic institutions have a constitutive, irreducible cultural dimension …. [and] even the most discursive cultural practices have a constitutive, irreducible political-economic dimension'. Hence in order to conceive the true potential of translanguaging in the fight for social justice in schools let alone at other levels of society, we need to show how this integration works in terms of translanguaging.

The ideal state of recognition proposed above requires a journey towards destabilisation of the differential status of languages in hierarchical relation. In turn, this requires a deconstruction of race revealing unearned privileges and unconscious biases as in a critical race theory approach, especially in relation to notions of language purity and racist notions of intelligence (Gillborn, 2016). It also requires an awareness and untangling of assumed relations and elisions between race, language and nationalism in understanding ethnolinguistic racism and racist nativism (Smith, 2016). Notwithstanding the huge task this poses for schools and larger society, it would remain unachievable without cognisance of the neoliberal world (including its grip on education) in which such activities would be undertaken on the way to achieving this ideal state. In this neoliberal world, as we have argued, not all translanguaging activities act to liberate and may even do damage. Deafness to non-particularistic real world moral claims

requiring collective action resulting from postmodern assumptions, can further open the door to linguistic plurality being framed as choice in a neoliberal sense, thereby acting to reproduce inequities it claims to transform. Without a keen awareness of how this reproduction works, one can imagine translanguaging as an accepted and even encouraged pedagogy presented as socially just: let the children chose which languages to use, with whom and for whichever activities. Unplanned and under-monitored, translanguaging becomes an unfettered freedom which could cost pupil development including in the majority languages which, *at this stage of the journey*, remain prized possessions in a free market; i.e. in this scenario it would be liberating only in the short term and at a local level[1]. An interesting example of such a consequence is reported in Marushiakova and Popov (2017, p. 54) in relation to the proposition by an NGO in Bulgaria in 1990 for the creation of autonomous Roma schools which would teach entirely through the medium of Roma. It was rejected by local Roma partly because they felt that it would make Roma integration more difficult because the pupils would not be able to compete against their peers from mainstream schools, with Bulgarian as the language of instruction, in finding subsequent employment. As Skutnabb-Kangas (2000, p.665) has warned us in elaborating on linguistic human rights "purely human rights oriented approaches are naïve if they disregard power relations - and many of them do. Some of them are themselves well on their way to rather becoming part of the oppressive system, rather than a solution." In this model of choice, pupils' lack of development would then be assumed to relate to individual/familial deficit and the required deconstruction for recognition would be at best harder, at worst impossible. Translanguaging would effectively be utilised to act against transformational recognition.

Of course, the journey towards an ideal state of recognition is also vulnerable to changes in governments and hence their policies. Kyuchukov (2013) describes this very scenario when a change in Government in Bulgaria in the 1990s meant

that the policy of Romani as a mother tongue in schools was forbidden given the new Government's views on the status of Romani.

Correspondingly, the journey towards redistributive justice requires, 'a fundamental and wholesale change on how the economy is organized.' Block (2018, p. 18). Alongside economic changes, what could be achieved within schooling would require translanguaging research and pedagogy both: to use translanguaging as a tool in critical analysis of social justice in decoupling liberalisation from the market, including in understanding how the language hierarchy operates to maintain economic injustices[2]; and translanguaging pedagogy as a planned, purposeful, and constantly evaluated approach to teaching and learning, to demonstrate in practice at this micro-level how the language hierarchy *can* be disrupted. Indeed an example of how this can work occurred during the project in France where the team worked with Roma pupils and parents from Romania. One of the pupils asked a member of the team from Romania why Roma pupils in Romania had to learn Romanian, whereas Romanian non-Roma did not have to learn the Romani languages of Romanian. We would need to learn how this would work in scenarios beyond that described here in multilingual classrooms in parts of Europe.

At the local level this sort of disruption requires changes to policies and teaching practices which understand social divisions in language use from axes of class *and* race (and nationalism). Research into translanguaging must acknowledge these specificities in collective action towards the abolition of these specificities. On the ground enactment of policy changes towards redistributive justice requires recognition of longstanding negative cultural valuations relating to intersections of language, race, coloniality and nationalism alongside class, as Kostadinova (2011) demonstrated in relation to Roma. Without continued teacher education, therefore, to deconstruct race, nationalism and the language hierarchy in the ways

mentioned above, the potential for translanguaging to contribute towards economic redistributive justice is at best, severely lessened.

Final thoughts

What we are effectively arguing for in research on translanguaging as a pedagogy is that which Block (2018) refers to as a bivalent approach to inequality to examine intersections of ethnolinguistic racism and class, which is similar to that which Leonardo refers to a critical raceclass theory of education. Leonardo exhorts us to bring analysis of race into closer dialogue with analysis of class, as it is through attention to the 'coordinated but awkward dance between race and class' (Leonardo 2012, pp. 429-430) that the lived experience of power and discrimination can be better understood. This turns to what Flores and Chaparro (2018) refer to as a materialist anti-racist approach. Without such an approach, tensions such as those found in our research will continue to resurface, inhibiting transformation. For Roma who face unrelenting racial discrimination leading to social and educational exclusion, alongside, and in ways which interact with, extreme levels of poverty in parts of Europe, a materialist anti-racist approach to pedagogical choice and research is crucial. However, for translanguaging to work as an inclusive pedagogical practice towards transformation (acknowledging that pedagogies are only ever a part of transformation), it must understand the integrative nature of redistribution and recognition. Most particularly it must be ever vigilant to the ways in which pluralism can be hijacked to work against collectivism, and collective action towards redistribution can occlude the need for a recognition of plurality during the journey towards transformation.

Notes

1. We are not suggesting this is what is being recommended by proponents of translanguaging pedagogy; indeed García, Johnson and Seltzer (2017) set out in precise detail how to enable the most effective translanguaging pedagogy. What we are arguing

is for cognisance of the vulnerability of such approaches to being appropriated into a fabricated education marketplace under neoliberal terms.

2. Although proponents of translanguaging have argued that key features are creativity and *criticality* in 'using evidence to question problematize and express views' (García and Li Wei, 2014, p. 24), there is a distinct lack of a clear political position on what ought to be problematized; a sort of political vacuum. Although an extended notion of criticality from Li Wei (2011, p. 1223) refers to problematization of 'received wisdom', and García and Kano (2014) say translanguaging involves interrogating linguistic inequality, neither are overtly framed within a critique of capital for redistributive justice.

Acknowledgments

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