

# International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism

ISSN: 1367-0050 (Print) 1747-7522 (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rbeb20>

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To cite this article: Ofelia García & Ricardo Otheguy (2019): Plurilingualism and translanguaging: commonalities and divergences, *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, DOI: [10.1080/13670050.2019.1598932](https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2019.1598932)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2019.1598932>



Published online: 02 Apr 2019.



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# Plurilingualism and translanguaging: commonalities and divergences

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## ABSTRACT

The concepts of plurilingualism and translanguaging are explained and distinguished, showing how each has contributed to transformations in the study of bilingualism and multilingualism. The terms have introduced different epistemologies related to multilingual speakers. The two concepts have different socio-political grounding, a difference that has contributed to carving divergent paths in educational practice. Plurilingualism, whose educational benefits are discussed here, upholds the familiar conception of the dual lexico-grammatical system of bilinguals, a conception challenged by translanguaging. But alongside divergences, we point out the continua of practices enacted by educators informed by plurilingualism and translanguaging, both of whom have engaged with an education that benefits bilingual students.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 11 March 2019

Accepted 11 March 2019

## KEYWORDS

Bilingualism; language education; multilingualism; plurilingualism; translanguaging

## Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to draw the distinction between the concepts associated with the terms plurilingualism and translanguaging, and to explore how these concepts have transformed the study of bilingualism and multilingualism. We start by describing how multilingualism had been conceptualized before concepts such as plurilingualism and translanguaging introduced different epistemologies related to multilingual speakers. We describe how, in the past and continuing today, the traditional view of multilingualism has impacted the teaching of additional languages in second- and foreign- language programs, as well as in bilingual education. We then turn to the heart of the matter, the epistemological distinction between the ideas that plurilingualism and translanguaging bring forth, and the different understandings of how additional languages are learned and taught. In addition to reflecting on the epistemological differences and educational implications of the ways in which plurilingual and translanguaging practices and conceptions are understood, we discuss the different socio-political grounding from which these practices and ideas have emerged, and how this difference too has contributed to carving divergent paths in the teaching for multilingualism. Finally, and alongside divergences, we point out the continua of practices enacted by educators informed by what is labeled plurilingualism and translanguaging.

## Teaching for multilingualism in the past

Throughout history, most people in the world, in Europe and the Americas, in India, in Africa, and in the near and far East, have either spoken more than one named language or have languaged in ways that do not fit the definition of named languages. But because of power differentials built up during the processes of nation-building and colonial formation, monolingual white elites and their ways of

linguaging have been considered the norm (Flores and Rosa 2015; Makoni and Pennycook 2007; Mignolo 2000; Milroy 2001; Rosa and Flores 2017). This has led to a reductive situation where recognition is only accorded in a multilingual repertoire to the use of one, two, or three separate, standardized named language(s). When elite monolinguals develop as bilinguals, they most often do so in school, where they are taught what is labeled as a second language, to be used completely separately from what is called their first language or mother tongue. This elite bilingualism (Fishman 1977) is always understood as being composed of two different languages – an L1 and L2 / L3 – where at least one of which is a dominant European one. The most common colonial languages, English, French, Portuguese and Spanish, most frequently come to mind.

The study of bilingualism and multilingualism became an important field of study only in the middle of the twentieth century, with the publication of Uriel Weinreich's *Languages in Contact: Findings and Problems* ([1953] 1974) and Einar Haugen's *The Norwegian Language in America: A Study of Bilingual Behavior* (1953). These two important books consolidated the understanding of what we now know as the field of language contact, and advanced our understanding of multilingual behavior beyond simple 'language mixing.' Both scholars linked the description of structural linguistic phenomena to social criteria such as geography, indigeness, ethnicity, religion, race, sex, age and social class. Yet, it has been the concept of interference that has had the greatest impact. Weinreich ([1953] 1974, 1) defined interference as 'deviations from the norms of either language'. It implies, Weinreich says: 'the rearrangement of patterns that result from the introduction of foreign elements into the more highly structured domain of language' (1, our italics).

It has been the concept of interference that has most influenced the field of language education, leading scholars to insist on the complete separation of the two languages of the bilingual, so that no 'foreign elements' enter the 'structured domain of language.' In the field of Second Language Acquisition Studies (SLA) this has led to the concept of interlanguage fossilization (Selinker 1972; Selinker and Han 2001), which refers to the continued presence of features considered as belonging to a first language when speaking a second one. As a result, second- and foreign-language pedagogy became focused on correcting errors and eradicating interference. Students acquiring what is regarded as a foreign or a second language were expected to be two monolinguals in one, as Grosjean (1982) critically pointed out.

Schools have very often been effective institutions of social erasure and control, perhaps the most effective. To control those who language differently by limiting educational and social opportunities, a preferred tool has been the standardized named language. When schools have fostered bilingualism or multilingualism for their privileged citizenry, their work has been regimented by an additive ideology (Lambert 1974). Under it, schools are said to add an autonomous and whole second or third language (L2 or L3) to the students' first language (L1), itself perceived as autonomous and whole. This has been the ideology of foreign-language education programs since the early twentieth century, relying on what was seen as the 'direct method,' with students 'immersed' solely in the language being studied and allowed to only use that 'target' language (for more on this history, see, for example, Cummins 2007).

A bilingual or multilingual education that adds a second language might be seen as superior to a monolingual one, implemented through only one language (see, Baker 2001; Cummins 1979, 2007; Thomas and Collier 1997, among others). But viewing multilingualism only through the lens of additive bilingualism and insisting on pure languages free of interference, viewing multilingualism, that is, through a monoglossic lens often does more harm than good (Del Valle 2000; García 2009). For monolingual students, the expectation seems unrealistic, and many students, especially in the United States, stop studying an additional language after an initial try. For bilingual minoritized students, the prospect of linguaging as if they inhabited separate worlds is impossible. For these students, the effect of additive, monoglossic bilingual education programs is often to create, or add to already existing, linguistic insecurity.

The linguistic conception centered on named languages that represent different cultures and political states has had its most influence in foreign language education. In these classrooms students,

considered monolingual representatives of the nation-state, are taught an additional language, which is always seen as second to their first. Foreign language education programs reinforce the construction of named languages as spoken in specified, and foreign, nation-state(s), the idea being that the learning of this language will contribute to increased communication between people of different countries.

In some contexts, there has been a shift in the naming of such education programs, adopting the moniker of World Languages. In effect, this shift in naming acknowledges that the languages are not always foreign, and yet, these language education programs continue to reinforce the idea of separate entities spoken in different parts of the rest of the world. Although acknowledging that these languages could be spoken in the place where they are being taught, world language education places language outside of the speaker, out in the 'world.' The emphasis is not on developing a bilingual citizenry in the students' own locale, but in acknowledging these languages as of the world. World language education programs thus continue the tradition of foreign language education programs with but little or no conceptual or philosophical change.

Although developmental bilingual education programs have always existed for well-to-do students, these programs have also held the same language philosophy of Foreign / World Language programs (García 2009). Developmental bilingual education programs have had a strict language allocation policy. Students are never allowed to speak a different language from the one demarcated by the policy followed in school.

As studies of multilingualism emerged in the second half of the twentieth century, the world was undergoing an important socio-political change – the colonial structures of the European Empires started to be dismantled. The independence movements of Asian and African countries unleashed a sense of ethnic, racial and linguistic pride, as more minoritized groups clamored for greater political and economic rights (Fishman 1985). These were often accompanied by demands for a different type of education, one that respected and leveraged the cultural and linguistic practices of local communities (García and Lin 2017a). And in some contexts, language majorities, threatened by the increased power of the speakers of the 'other' languages started also clamoring for an education that would develop the bilingualism of their own children. The stage was set for the development of a new type of bilingual education – immersion programs.

In Québec in 1974, the Francophone numerical majority gained political control with the rise to power of the Québécois party. As a result, some powerful Anglophone parents demanded that the school system develop the bilingualism of their children. Immersion bilingual programs were organized, in which Anglophone children were first taught only in French. Labeled now not a foreign but a second language, French was used as medium of instruction throughout most of the day, no longer considered a subject of study for a single instructional period (Dicks and Genesee 2017). Despite this difference, immersion programs held on to the same language philosophy as did the Foreign / World Language programs. The language being taught had to be completely isolated from the language the children spoke. The process was completely reliant on the philosophy of additive bilingualism – French as a whole autonomous language was to be added to the children's whole separate English.

It is this Canadian immersion model that has spread today to the so-called English-medium instruction (EMI) programs that have proliferated all over the world, especially in Asia. These programs are fueled by the desire to teach English so as to facilitate access to the symbolic goods that English supposedly represents (Adamson and Feng 2009; Hu 2007). The quality of these programs, most often found in private educational institutions that require tuition payment by middle-class parents, vary considerably. Yet the language education philosophy that they espouse is the same as that of foreign language education programs – English is perceived as having a distinct linguistic reality and, as such, can be taught without any reference to the existing language repertoire of the child.

As the commodification of English gained ground around the world (Heller and McElhinny 2017), many countries that had started offering bilingual education programs to their populace as support

for national languages, added English to the curriculum. This is the case, for example, of Kazakhstan, where trilingual education in Kazakh, Russian and English is being promoted. This is also the case of the Basque Autonomous Region of Spain, where bilingual education programs in Spanish and Euskara have been transformed to trilingual programs in Spanish, Euskara and English (Cenoz 2009).

This vision of bilingualism as the addition of two autonomous languages was also continued after many colonies gained independence. The multilingualism in their midst was erased, as their schools and language educational programs more generally continued to be modeled after those of the imperial powers. This was the case, for example, of the many African and Asian nations that organized transitional models of bilingual education. Many multilingual African nations adopted a language education policy where one language, determined to be the indigenous one (often the most demographically or politically powerful one among many) was used in the first three to four years of instruction (Bunyi & Schroeder 2014). After that time, the colonial language, usually English or French, was used as medium of instruction. This was also the case of the United States, where transitional bilingual education programs, mostly in Spanish, flourished throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The idea in U.S. transitional bilingual education programs is that the minority child's 'mother tongue' is to be used until such time as the child acquires English (García 2009).

Not all language minoritized communities have been given access to even monoglossically-inspired additive bilingual education programs. Some have been given much less, others have been given more. Those given less include very threatened communities that have been simply ignored, erased, by the educational authorities, and who remain uneducated in monolingual (or even multilingual!) programs where instruction is conducted in languages they do not know. Many tribal groups in India fall in this category. Those given more include language minoritized communities whose colonial experiences have resulted in the endangerment of what is considered their language, who are often given access to immersion programs intending to revitalize it. This is the case, for example, of the Māoris in New Zealand, who have established language nests programs (Te Kōhanga Reo) in which very young children are totally immersed in Māori. This is also the case of bilingual education programs (Kura Kaupapa Māori) where elementary school students are immersed in Māori while instruction in English happens in a different building! (Hill 2014).

Language as taught and used in schools tends to have little to do with the language practices of people outside school, a generalization that holds true of general instruction, of foreign language teaching, and of all types of bilingual education programs. This is most evident in the failure of bilingual education programs in societies such as The Philippines where instruction in science and math takes place in the indigenous language (called the chosen indigenous language), which is the Tagalog spoken mostly around Manila, and in a non-indigenous language, English (Tupas and Martin 2017). A solution to the problem posed by this bilingual education policy has been the proliferation of multilingual education programs (MLE), where the indigenous local community's language is first used, until the transition is made to the national languages. MLE programs have also proliferated in India and other societies that are highly multilingual. However, the local community's languages are only used transitionally in the first few years of school. In many ways these MLE programs repeat, in a process that Irvine and Gal (2000) have called recursive iconization, the reification of another chosen indigenous language as whole and autonomous. Although emerging from the protection of minority rights through language, these programs (at least officially) most often erase the language practices of the highly multilingual community.

Language education scholars have often observed a discrepancy between a strict language education policy that separates languages according to day of the week or time of the day or even week, or according to subject or teacher, and the actual language practices of teachers and students in such programs (Brock-Utne 2006; García 2009; Lin and Martin 2005; Lin 2013; Martin 2005). Language allocation policies calling for strict language separation continue to prevail in schools, even as they are continuously violated and negotiated by educators and students (Menken and García 2010).

The conceptualization of bilingualism and multilingualism as simply the addition of different named languages has led to models of language education that have perpetuated the double

monolingual as the ideal bilingual. In doing so, language education programs have erased all traces of heteroglossia in language (Bailey 2007), upholding the standardized versions of named languages taught and valued in school, instead of valuing and recognizing the complex linguistic practices of multilingual speakers. But this traditional view of multilingualism has started to show fissures. Next we discuss how and why we are facing these ‘cracks’ in our conception of multilingualism and how it is viewed and used in school.

### **Fissures in the additive and monoglossic view of multilingualism**

As a result of the greater importance of multilingualism and language learning among Europeans, the Council of Europe coined the term plurilingualism. In parallel, and as a result of the greater understanding of multilingual practices among speakers, new conceptualizations have been advanced with names like polylinguaging, polylingual languaging (Jørgensen 2008), metrolingualism (Otsuji and Pennycook 2010; Pennycook and Otsuji 2015), translanguaging practices (Canagarajah 2013), and translanguaging (Blackledge and Creese 2010; García 2009; García and Li 2014; Otheguy, García, and Reid 2015, 2018; Li 2011, 2018). And to signal the complexity of the situation under study, others have simply used the concept of heteroglossia first introduced by Bakhtin (Blackledge and Creese 2014; Busch 2014). Because we focus in this paper on language learning, we take up the two terms that are most often used to describe new understandings of multilingual practices in language education programs – namely plurilingualism and translanguaging.

Both of these concepts disrupt the traditional understanding of multilingualism and the associated language education programs that we described above. However, and despite some overlaps, there is an epistemological difference between plurilingualism and translanguaging that leads to the formulation of different goals for, and approaches to, language education. We discuss each of the two concepts in turn, starting with plurilingualism.

### ***Plurilingualism***

Since its inception in the mid-twentieth century, the European Commission (EC), which is based in Brussels and whose primary interest is economic development, has promoted language education to improve mobility and integration within Europe. For its part, the Council of Europe, based in Strasbourg, has focused on the protection of human rights. As such, the Language Policy Unit of the Council of Europe considers the ways in which language protects or restricts human rights (Hélot and Cavalli 2017).

Both the EC and the Council of Europe have supported the position that all European citizens should learn two additional languages besides their first language. It was the Council of Europe that initially defined the difference between plurilingualism, as an individual characteristic of individuals, and multilingualism as a societal phenomenon. The European Union is multilingual as a supra-national body, but its citizens should be plurilingual. They define plurilingualism as:

- The intrinsic capacity of all speakers to use and learn, alone or through teaching, more than one language. The ability to use several languages to varying degrees and for distinct purposes is defined in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (1996, 168) as the ability ‘to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural action, where a person, viewed as a social agent, has proficiency, of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures.’ This ability is concretized in a repertoire of languages a speaker can use. The goal of teaching is to develop this competence (hence the expression: plurilingualism as a competence).
- An educational value that is the basis of linguistic tolerance: Speakers’ awareness of their plurilingualism may lead them to give equal value to each of the varieties they themselves and other speakers use, even if they do not have the same functions (private, professional or official

communication, language of affiliation, etc.). But this awareness should be assisted and structured by schools since it is in no sense automatic (hence the expression: plurilingualism as a value). (Council of Europe 2001, n.p. *our italics*.)

A plurilingual European citizen is thus said to have plurilingual competence in a 'repertoire of languages,' and holds values of plurilingual tolerance toward all languages and varieties. To prepare these plurilingual European citizens, a plurilingual and intercultural education should be fostered. This plurilingual and intercultural education should protect the right to learn additional languages, but also the right to speak a first language and the right to a quality education in the language of instruction (Hélot and Cavalli 2017).

The linking by the Council of Europe of plurilingual competence in 'a repertoire of languages' (and thus the right to learn additional languages) with plurilingual values of 'tolerance toward different languages and varieties of languages' (and thus the right of all to speak a first language and have a quality education in the language of instruction) has had a significant impact on language education. The Council of Europe's introduction of the concept of plurilingualism is connected to the work of scholars who have reconsidered the traditional idea that bilingualism and multilingualism are essentially additive, invoking instead Bakhtin's idea of heteroglossia (Bakhtin 1981; Busch 2014; Cenoz and Gorter 2015; Coste 2000; Blackledge and Creese 2014). In addition, the concept of plurilingualism has transformed traditional foreign language education, stressing that the goal should be partial competence in multiple languages, rather than full competence in two or three. Plurilingualism, it is argued, should be the focus of language education and the goal for all European citizens. Not only has the concept of plurilingualism influenced the teaching of additional languages for all European citizens, but it has also influenced instruction of the national language for the increasing number of black and brown refugees that enter the European Union.

Especially for European citizens, approaches to language education known as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) have been developed (Coyle 2007; Marsh 2002; Marsh, Coyle, and Hood 2010). These CLIL approaches consist of the teaching of language through content, starting as soon as possible, thus going beyond traditional core foreign language programs in which the language itself is the subject of instruction. Although similar in ideology to the immersion programs described above, the proliferation of these programs have impacted language education not only in the European Union, but also throughout the world. Traditional core programs of foreign language instruction are now often content-based, following principles of CLIL.

Other plurilingual education efforts aiming to promote a European citizenry involve the development of multilingual awareness projects. Some of these projects focus on developing plurilingual competence by contrasting, for example, Romance languages (Araújo e Sá and Melo-Pfeifer 2009). Some projects go beyond European languages and include migrant languages to make children conscious of the linguistic diversity in their communities (Melo-Pfeifer 2015; Perregaux 1995). One initiative along these lines funded by the European Commission in five countries is the Eulang project directed by Michel Candelier (see Candelier 2003). Hélot and Young (2006) report on a project they launched, the Didenheim project, in which young children were engaged with many languages, including those of the community in which they lived. These multilingual awareness projects correspond to the goals of the Council of Europe of 'education for plurilingualism,' including educating 'for linguistic tolerance, raise awareness of linguistic diversity and educate for democratic citizenship' (Council of Europe 2003, 16).

The emphasis on linguistic rights promoted by the Language Policy Task Force of the Council of Europe means that more attention is also being paid to the learner at the center of all plurilingual education initiatives, including CLIL and language awareness programs, but also in educational programs that target refugee students. In addition to acknowledging the languages used and taught in schools, emphasis is also placed on the linguistic and cultural resources found in the homes of students that can be leveraged to learn content and language simultaneously. That is, projects that take up the concept of plurilingualism acknowledge the importance of what is seen as the L1 to develop

proficiency in what are regarded as their L2 or L3 (see, for example, Grommes and Hu 2014). This in itself is an advancement over older conceptions of the education of bilingual students which required them, in a sense, to forget that they even spoke another language.

We have remarked on the extension of the benefits of plurilingualism efforts to black and brown immigrants. But there are still differences in how plurilingualism in education gets taken up depending on the identity of the students. For white European citizens, we have seen that plurilingualism acknowledges that it is impossible for individuals to be two (or three) monolinguals in one. It is thus accepted that language education programs do not need to aim at making students fully competent in a second or third language. Instead, as we have discussed, what is important is that one acquire competence to communicate to varying degrees. Differentiated language abilities are seen as required, as white European citizens cross borders to study, work, and live.

But raciolinguistic ideologies (Flores and Rosa 2015; Rosa and Flores 2017) operate even when practices follow a philosophy of plurilingualism. For example, the expectation for brown and black refugee youth in schools is not that they speak and use the national language 'to varying degrees,' but to what is considered a 'native' norm. Plurilingual refugee youth in European schools first have to demonstrate full proficiency in the dominant language of the nation in order to have access to universities. We see, then, that despite the advent of a plurilingual philosophy in a society that aims to be plurilingual, the goal of language education for white European citizens and brown and black refugees remains different and is embodied in persistently different approaches.

This difference of approach is worth some elaboration. Plurilingual education for white European citizens aims to develop a familiarity with societal multilingualism which does not expect these speakers to dissolve their identities (French, German, Italian, Spanish, etc.) as white European citizens of national states. Multilingualism is outside of their bodies, in the society. Inside, the goal is a plurilingual competence in a 'repertoire' that reflect 'pieces' of the languages. In this conception, their repertoire may be 'truncated' (Blommaert 2010), but it is nevertheless useful, and effective as a commodification of linguistic competence that enables them to travel, trade, buy, study, and cross national boundaries. Plurilingualism for these speakers is thus compatible with the supranational concept of the European Union (an EU with distinct national languages that work together), as well as with the national concept of European states (with a single national language). Plurilingual Europeans continue to be conceived of as 'native' speakers of a national language, although they may use different national languages as they see fit in their specific communicative situation. The national and linguistic identity of Europeans is not moved, even if their language repertoire expands to consist of what are considered bits of other national languages, creating speakers with broader horizons, and encompassing a more European persona. In this context, the interest in plurilingualism follows an economic imperative and might be complicit in what Flores (2013) notes is a neoliberal need for flexible workers and citizens.

In contrast, plurilingualism for brown and black refugees acts differently. A plurilingual education, in the limited cases where it exists, gives these students access to what is considered their 'first language' in order to integrate them linguistically to a 'new' and more valuable European national language. Their plurilingual education is kinder and more gentle than the monolingual educational practices of the past, where little was done to alleviate the entry into the educational system, and it facilitates the students' making meaning and sense of lessons and instruction. Often plurilingual education programs for refugee students consist of newcomer centers, where students are encouraged to use their first languages to make meaning. But the goal of these programs is to move these students toward what is considered full or native-like proficiency of the national language. The emphasis is on changing refugee students' national and linguistic identities, rather than affirming theirs, even when those are leveraged temporarily at the beginning of the educational career. In so doing, the goal of these programs is just as transitional as those of transitional bilingual education programs for language minoritized students in the United States, the difference being that European classrooms, more than their American counterparts, tend to be made up of students who speak many



different languages. This fact can easily transform these classrooms into monolingual ones where instruction is, for all intents and purposes, only in the national language. In fact, plurilingual programs for refugees are almost non-existent!

Plurilingualism has been a valuable construct, despite Flores (2013) cautionary note. Plurilingualism insists on giving all students recognition of, and access to, their language practices and identities, even if, for those who are minoritized, these are only temporary benefits. Plurilingualism in language education has represented a big step forward, freeing us from the concept of balanced bilingual competence, centering learning on the speaker's existing repertoire, and leveraging their first language in learning additional languages. But plurilingualism differs both epistemologically and in terms of societal goals from the other concept circulating in language education circles today – that of translanguaging.

### **Translanguaging**

If plurilingualism was coined by the Council of Europe to ensure the political and economic cohesion of the European Union, translanguaging was coined by a language minoritized community in Europe, the Welsh, using a Welsh word, *trawsieithu* (Williams 1994; translated into English by Baker 2001). Whereas plurilingualism was a language education policy that was proposed by a supranational body and adopted by national states, translanguaging emerged in what is considered the fringes of one of the most powerful English-speaking countries, the United Kingdom.

Mignolo (2000) has proposed that to transform society to be more inclusive of difference we must change what he calls the locus of enunciation. In its Welsh origins, translanguaging totally shifts the locus of enunciation – from a supra-national body to a small country context, from a powerful organization to an educator, Williams (1994), who was supported by a scholar who dedicated his career to the study of bilingualism and the Welsh linguistically minoritized community, Baker (2001). The locus of enunciation shifted through the coining of translanguaging because the term did not emerge from a position of power by those who believed in the value of multilingualism for national integration into a neoliberal economy. It started rather from a minoritized multilingual position that understood the effects that colonialism and nation-building had had on the community's identity, language, and economy, and who advocated for greater power as a Welsh national identity.

Because translanguaging developed in what Anzaldúa (1987) has called the borderlands, among bilingual minoritized communities, its epistemology is different from that of plurilingualism. The focus in plurilingualism is on turning monolingual speakers into multilinguals. As we have seen, the objective of plurilingual education projects was always language itself, ensuring that speakers develop a 'repertoire of languages.' But translanguaging focused on working with bilingual students to ensure that they were able to perform their bilingualism in ways that reflected who they were as bilingual beings. Strictly separating English and Welsh in classrooms in Wales did not reflect, Williams believed, the students' language practices or their acts as bilingual subjects. For the first time, language education scholars from language minoritized communities started claiming that the language-separation approach followed in language education programs that purported to lead to multilingualism did not help bilingual students, and actually worked against them.

Rather than focusing on simply the development of linguistic tolerance and a linguistic repertoire, the concept of translanguaging encourages theorizing that goes beyond language (García and Li 2014; Li 2011, 2018). That is, translanguaging goes beyond understanding language as simply what we have traditionally called the 'linguistic' – either named languages or what are seen to be their components – lexicon, morphology, phonology, syntax. Translanguaging, as we will see, incorporates an understanding of how different modes, including our bodies, our gestures, our lives etc., add to the semiotic meaning-making repertoire that is involved in the act of communication. Because language is often understood, especially in school, as only what is traditionally called 'the linguistic,' we first address how translanguaging goes beyond that dimension.

Translanguaging rests on the idea that the concept of the named language, and the related concepts of language purity and verbal hygiene were constructed to support ideologies of racial, class, and gender superiority (Cameron 1995). These ideas circulated as integral parts of undertakings aimed at nation-state building and their often associated ventures of colonial expansion (Makoni and Pennycook 2007; Mignolo 2000; Quijano 2007). By disrupting the hierarchies of named languages and the ideologies of language purity, translanguaging is said to be 'a political act' (Flores 2014). Translanguaging interrogates named languages, pointing to an answer that includes their being constructed by nation-states as a tool for the domination of language minoritized communities. The named language tool excludes these communities from social, political and economic opportunities by authorizing, legitimating, naturalizing and opening paths only to those who speak what is constructed as the common, autonomous and whole, national language.

Supplementing this social perspective, Otheguy, García, and Reid (2015) have defined translanguaging from a linguistic perspective as 'the deployment of a speaker's full linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named (and usually national and state) languages' (283). Rather than perceiving multilingual speakers as possessing the plurilingual 'repertoire of languages' supported by the Council of Europe, translanguaging sees multilinguals as possessing a unitary linguistic system that they build through social interactions of different types, and that is not compartmentalized into boundaries corresponding to those of the named languages (Otheguy, García, and Reid 2015, 2018).

Some scholars who have taken up translanguaging understand it only as fluid language practices. This is what García and Lin (2017b) have called a 'weak' version of translanguaging, rather than the 'strong' version that posits a single inventory of lexical and structural resources, a unitary linguistic system (Otheguy, García, and Reid 2015, 2018). Here we adhere to the position that, from a social perspective, multilinguals may be correctly said to use many different named languages; but we maintain that when speakers language they are deploying a unitary linguistic repertoire, that is, a single aggregation of lexical and structural resources. In contrast, MacSwan (2017) has argued that the repertoire of a bilingual person must also contain what he calls language specific internal differentiation, that is, that there must be two lexico-grammatical systems. In a response, Otheguy, García, and Reid (2018) have shown that the evidence for two linguistic systems is weak, and that bilinguals develop not only a unitary repertoire, but also a unitary linguistic system, a single lexicon and a single grammar.

In bilingual communities and in situations that are unmonitored by governmental, educational or other type of authorities, bilinguals simply have access to their full linguistic repertoire. But in monitored situations, especially in schools, bilinguals (and monolinguals too, to a lesser extent) are forced to select and deploy only those particular linguistic or multimodal features that correspond to dominant practices. Bilingual speakers have a more extensive repertoire of linguistic features than monolinguals. But since many of these features do not coincide with those of the monolingual speaker, they are rendered irrelevant in many interactions in instruction and assessment. Ofelia, for example, raised in the United States but born in Cuba, has a repertoire that in part consists of features that are said to be from English and Spanish. More than half of the features in her repertoire do not match those of her students, whose named language is said to be English. So when she teaches, Ofelia has much experience selecting only features that are said to be from English, and suppressing those that are said to be from Spanish. But she does not have to engage in this same exercise of selection at home.

The selection of linguistic features to communicate in what is called English is based on a socio-cultural understanding of which features are associated with which named language, but is not based on two distinct, internally differentiated phonological, lexical, and grammatical systems with boundaries corresponding to the two named languages, as MacSwan (2017) has argued. That is, Ofelia's bilingualism, despite its importance as a sociocultural concept in her daily life, has no correspondence in a dual linguistic competence. We have made this point by saying: 'The myriad linguistic features mastered by bilinguals (phonemes, words, constructions, rules, etc.) occupy a single, undifferentiated

cognitive terrain that is not fenced off into anything like the two areas suggested by the two socially named languages' (Otheguy, García, and Reid 2018, 3). Translanguaging acknowledges multilingualism as a product of socio-political categorization, centrally important for identity purposes, but rejects the psycholinguistic reality of two separate linguistic systems. This is an important difference with the epistemology of plurilingualism, which upholds both the sociocultural and psycholinguistic reality of named languages.

Under our interpretation, thinking in terms of translanguaging takes us not only beyond the named language but also beyond thinking simply in terms of dual sets of linguistic resources or linguistic systems. Translanguaging engages with the acts of deployment of features that are most appropriate to communicate a message to a listener.

As we have said, our understandings of translanguaging goes beyond the linguistic system itself to incorporate doing language, which means assembling, as Pennycook (2017) has said, the linguistic and multimodal practices that speakers have acquired through social interaction, as well as their embodied cognition. Since the speaker's lexical and structural resources constitute only a small part of this assemblage, translanguaging not only posits a single linguistic system, a single set of linguistic resources, but also goes well beyond it to encompass a communicative repertoire that is often seen as outside of what traditionally is defined as the 'linguistic.'

Bilingual students not only have a unitary system of lexical and structural signs, but also, as do all students, they have a system of multimodal signs that they use in conjunction with their linguistic features. Thus, the concept of translanguaging also pays attention to the multimodal ways in which students make meaning both with their bodies and outside of their bodies. Although in language education much attention has been given to the linguistic repertoire, translanguaging also looks at the entire range of multimodal resources that make up the speaker's full communicative repertoire – gestures, gazes, posture, visual cues, and even human-technology interactions. Translanguaging supports the idea that embodied social actions become part of the individual's meaning-making semiotic repertoire (Vogel, Ascenzi-Moreno, and García 2018). And it supports the claim that technology 'gets embodied in the human when he or she comes together with a machine in a temporary "assemblage"' (Dant 2004, 62). Here again is the idea of the 'assemblage' that Pennycook (2017) has developed, arguing that in translanguaging speakers bring together their entire linguistic ethnography, including their bodies, place, and things, a broad view of linguistics-informed discourse, their embodied and extended cognition, and multimodalities.

As does plurilingualism, a concept that is both sociolinguistic and socioeducational, translanguaging refers both to a conceptualization of the semiotic repertoire of bilinguals and to the pedagogical practices that leverage the fluid languaging of multilingual communities (Creese and Blackledge 2010; Flores and Schissel 2014; García 2009; García and Kleyn 2016; García and Wei 2014; García, Johnson, and Seltzer 2017; Gort and Sembiente 2015; Sayer 2013). Educators who enact a translanguaging pedagogy recognize that named languages are important socio-political categorizations; but they also understand that these named languages do not correspond to a psycholinguistic reality of dual linguistic systems. With this in mind, a translanguaging pedagogical design does not require bilingual students to hold their named languages as separate cognitive-linguistic entities. Educators, then, are free to encourage bilingual students to leverage their entire semiotic repertoire and to select from their full repertoire the hints that are most appropriate to communicate a message to listeners. In turn, by constructing a message or not, listeners contribute to the development of the students' repertoire and their meaning-making and learning. Educators who take up translanguaging also understand that to assess bilingual students they have to look beyond the socioculturally-dictated named language affiliation of the linguistic features deployed by the students. These teachers assess students' overall language abilities, that is, their ability to infer, to tell and write a narrative or argumentative text, to find text based-evidence, and to use the features of their unitary semiotic repertoire in all the myriad other ways required by school tasks.

This conception of language, communication, multimodality and, most centrally, this conception of the bilingual student's life puts students first, not language first. By putting bilingual children first, we have proposed that a translanguaging pedagogy:

gives students the affordances to expand what is truly psycholinguistically real, namely their lexical, structural, and other semiotic resources, engaging, to be sure, with the importance of named languages and boundaries for schools and societies, but keeping in mind that these are sociocultural constructions without cognitive linguistic reality (Otheguy, García, and Reid 2018, n.p.)

García, Johnson, and Seltzer (2017) identified four purposes of a translanguaging pedagogy. The first two purposes clearly also apply to a plurilingual pedagogy – supporting students as they engage with and comprehend complex content and texts, and providing opportunities for students to develop linguistic practices for academic contexts. But we argue that a translanguaging pedagogy also makes space for the two additional purposes identified by García, Johnson, and Seltzer (2017) – students' bilingualism and ways of knowing, and students' bilingual identities. That is, teachers who hold a translanguaging stance see language through the understanding of the unitary language repertoire that bilinguals have or are developing, even as they work toward developing the students' use of an additional named language. Thus, a translanguaging pedagogy supports active bilingual subjects that leverage translanguaging as they navigate the school context.

Although both a plurilingual pedagogy and a translanguaging pedagogy leverage the resources of the learners, a translanguaging pedagogy aims to firmly support the learners' subjectivities and ways of knowing as active bilingual subjects. By leveraging the learners' entire communicative repertoire, and not simply what is considered their L1, a translanguaging pedagogy gives linguistically minoritized speakers the power to make meaning. Adopting a translanguaging stance and designing translanguaging instruction de-naturalizes the standardized named languages of school. It de-naturalizes, that is, the named languages that have been codified by the nation-state to develop governable subjects (Foucault 1997). These are the named languages that continue to exclude those who have come out on the short end of the processes of nation-building, coloniality, and global capitalism, and who have been the victims of wars, violence, and racialization associated with these processes. Translanguaging pedagogical practices are deeply critical and political, as they make visible the meaning-making potential of all students.

Still, there can be no question that an important aspect of translanguaging pedagogical practices is to get students to gain access to the ways of using named languages that dominant groups and schools uphold, while raising students critical consciousness about the ways in which language dominance has been established. But a translanguaging pedagogy requires that teachers legitimate, naturalize, make visible and use bilingual students' translanguaging. Students are given experience using 'standardized' named languages while making them aware of the power that these have held. Following Bouaventura de Souza Santos' concept of 'abyssal thinking' (2007), it is important to make visible bilingual students' translanguaging which has been rendered invisible in schools. At the same time, it is important to help bilingual students understand that named languages are co-present in their lives in schools.

Projects of plurilingualism and projects of translanguaging often use pedagogical practices that seem similar on the surface, even though, underneath, they realize different epistemologies and have different goals. The next section focuses on those similarities and differences by describing the educational experiences of four students – Christine, born in Strasbourg, France and enrolled in university in Madrid, Spain; Mahmood, a 14 year-old refugee from Syria who arrived recently in Gåvle, Sweden; Danny, a five year-old born in New York City of Honduran background; and Alyssa, a 17 year-old Mexican American enrolled in university in a border town on the Mexico – United States border.

Although we describe four different cases, two in Europe and two in the USA, it is important for readers not to see these as different categories that are simply products of different national policies. It is true that educational policies are most often aligned with national ideologies about language,

race and identity. But engaged educators often disrupt national language education policies. Their ways of working with students are a lot more fluid than what these four cases suggest. These ways of working with students reflect the engagement and understandings of teachers, who are capable, the world over, of taking stances that go beyond the dictates of policy.

### **Plurilingualism and translanguaging in the classroom: a continuum**

As we described above, whereas plurilingualism leaves the concept of named language intact, translanguaging recognizes that named languages are important sociocultural constructs that learners desire, but does not accept their psycholinguistic reality. By viewing the bilingual speaker's linguistic performances as unitary rather than dual, translanguaging theory affords a view of the language of bilinguals as always and at every stage complete, responding to the affordances that have been provided, rather than partial or truncated, as some view plurilingualism. This has important consequences for pedagogy, for with translanguaging it is no longer a matter of scaffolding, that is, using an L1 to learn an L2 or an L3. The focus of translanguaging pedagogy is on expanding the abilities of the speakers to do language in order to critically transact with texts and with others. It thus focuses on building the agency of the learner to language in order to act and mean as a bilingual. It does not focus on exerting over students the power of named languages and the hierarchies they sustain. We start with what we think it is accurate to regard as the pull of a plurilingual ideology in education projects that engage Christine and Mahmood, and then focus on educational projects that respond more to a translanguaging philosophy for Danny and Alyssa.

#### ***Christine***

Christine, born in Strasbourg, France, and now enrolled in university in Madrid, Spain, is benefiting from ERASMUS, the exchange program established by the European Union for 'mobility of university students.' Christine speaks French as a first language, has taken Italian in a CLIL program while in secondary school in France, and is now studying through the medium of Spanish. Christine has also benefited from her secondary school's multilingual awareness program, a curriculum that emphasized the similarities among the Romance languages. Thus, Christine is familiar with the structural differences between French, Portuguese and Spanish, and has some understandings of the different histories of each country, and the cultural practices that each of them enacts.

At the university, Christine listens attentively to lectures in Spanish, helped by a classmate who shares her written notes. Most of the time, she tapes the lecture and listens to it again at home. When Christine does not understand, she asks the help of her French roommate, who has lived longer in Spain. She reads the assigned texts with some ease, although she sometimes misses some meaning. When this happens, she scans the text in Spanish and opens up Google translate. She is immediately provided with a translation in French.

In time, she develops good reading comprehension. As the months go by, she also acquires excellent listening skills, and very good speaking skills for social interaction. In class, however, she initially remains quiet, and the professor never forces her to participate actively during that time. For a final assignment, she is asked to write an essay, which she does with the help of her classmates and with Google translate. The professor never reads the essay for errors in Christine's Spanish, but for understandings of the content being taught.

#### ***Mahmood***

Mahmood, a 14 year-old refugee from Syria who arrived recently in Gävle, Sweden, speaks very little Swedish, but speaks Kurdish, the language of his home, and Arabic, the language of his school in Syria. Fortunately, in this town there are caring educators who, deeply influenced by a plurilingual ethos, have organized a Receiving Center for recently-arrived refugees. Mahmood has been in the

Receiving Center for two months. His classroom is made up of refugees from Syria, but also from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, Somalia and Iraq. In this classroom students speak what are named Arabic, Kurdish, Tigrinya, Tigre, Kurdish, Pashto, Persian, and Somali, among other named languages. The teacher does not speak any of these languages, although she does speak Swedish and English. Yet, the teacher has a stance of supporting plurilingualism and the right of each student to their first language, as well as to quality instruction in Swedish.

It is impossible in this linguistically heterogeneous context to establish a bilingual education program, but this teacher is deeply committed to allowing her newcomer students to use their L1 as they make sense of the lesson in Swedish. Sometimes, the teacher groups students who may have different first languages, but who also speak Arabic and even English, as a way to maximize their meaning-making resources. The teacher also relies heavily on translation technology to both understand what Mahmood wants to say, as well as to help him understand what it is he has to do. With some students, the translation technology used relies on oral language, since the teacher is not familiar with other scripts, but Mahmood is somewhat familiar with the Latin script since he lived for a time in a Kurdish-speaking community.

The overlaps between a plurilingual pedagogy and translanguaging pedagogy is made obvious by the fact that Mahmood's Swedish teacher often consults guides that emerged from translanguaging projects, especially the translanguaging guides that were developed for the CUNY-NYSIEB projects in New York State ([www.cuny-nysieb.org](http://www.cuny-nysieb.org)). The difference, however, is that Mahmood's teacher is developing Mahmood as a Swedish-speaker, even though she leverages his Kurdish and Arabic in doing so. Mahmood's L1 / L2 are simply recognized as a scaffold to develop Swedish. The Swedish teacher's plurilingual pedagogical approach is much more effective than putting him in a Swedish-only program from the beginning. And Mahmood is fortunate that his teachers believe in plurilingual pedagogies for refugee and immigrant children. This supportive educational approach is in concert with all the other support systems that Mahmood's family receives in Sweden – health care, employment, and housing and financial support in the beginning.

### **Danny**

Danny enters school in New York City as a five year old in kindergarten. His single mother was born in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, and does not speak English. However, Danny has an older brother and sister who do. Danny grows up hearing his mother speak Spanish. His older siblings are bilingual, so they engage in translanguaging at home. Danny's language at five does not fall neatly into one language category or another, for he has a language repertoire that is made up of language he has heard at home, on television, in the bodega, at church, and other places in the community. Danny relies on all the linguistic and multimodal semiotic signs he has acquired to interact with his mother and his siblings and to show his feelings and intentions. He cries; he gestures; he talks; he screams; sometimes he sings to himself or out loud. When he enters school, he is given a test in English, a test that immediately classifies him as an English language learner.

He is fortunate that his teacher, who has been thinking about translanguaging, understands the language of very young bilingual children, and does not consider his ways of using language incomplete or limited. Instead, she allows his entire repertoire to shine through, approaching him from a perspective of strength. Danny is assigned to a Dual Language bilingual program where the policy is that English is used one day, and Spanish the next day. However, Danny's teacher understands that he cannot (and should not at this young age) be forced to use only English or only Spanish during specific periods of time. She encourages his access to his full multimodal repertoire to select the most appropriate features to complete tasks, including what some might consider words from Spanish and words from English. She celebrates the fact that his language practices are more extensive and richer than those of monolingual children. She disregards the specific features that are said to be of the English language or the Spanish language that he uses to communicate and learn. Instead she focuses on questions such as: How does Danny use language to ask and

answer questions? To imagine? To tell a story? To say what he wants and how he feels? To say what is wrong? To solve a problem? To answer those questions she invites Danny not only to speak, but also to draw, sing, gesture, act. The translanguaging pedagogy on which she bases her teaching ensures that named languages are not used to exclude or to penalize students. Instead, Danny's teacher fosters his ability to make meaning, to be curious and imaginative, to learn how trains and rockets work, and how plants grow. To do all this, the names of the named languages are never invoked.

Of course, Danny's teacher understands that Danny will eventually have to acquire the sociocultural knowledge that prescribes which linguistic features are appropriate for which context and audience. But for now, she celebrates his ability to make meaning at all times. She focuses on what he knows how to do with language and urges him to extend those uses in story-telling, oral interactions, drawings, playing, inferring, etc. Danny's teacher is also not intimidated by Danny's test scores in English or in Spanish. She is able to differentiate between what he knows how to do, from what he knows in which language. She understands bilingual lives and experiences, and believes that the only way to develop an intellectually curious student is to do away with the power of named English (and named Spanish) to determine who is to be educated successfully.

Some of the pedagogical strategies Danny's teacher uses are the same as those of Mahmood's teacher. However, the goal for Danny's teacher is not for him to do language in the same way that a monolingual English speaker or a monolingual Spanish speaker would, but to become a competent translanguager, a bilingual being unapologetic for his language use. Of course, the approach used by Danny's teacher is supported by the school principal because she is teaching five-year-old students in kindergarten whose test scores still do not count to gauge the school's performance. But because Danny is encouraged as a learner and offered a rich and imaginative education, and not castigated for his different language use, she expects Danny will do well when he gets to fourth grade, the grade in which standardized testing begins.

### **Alyssa**

Like Christine, Alyssa is a university student. But she hasn't crossed any national borders; rather the border runs through her in her daily life. She is, as Zentella (2005) has called them, a *transfronteriza*, a young woman who lives her daily life on the U.S. side of the border but who crosses it almost daily to see relatives, shop, and attend cultural events. Her university, located near the U.S.-Mexico border, recognizes the bilingualism of their students – 95% Latinx, and most of Mexican background. But the university has struggled with how to provide instruction for their bilingual students, all of whom fall along very different points of the bilingual English – Spanish continuum. Some of the students are fourth-generation and beyond Mexican Americans. Others are recent immigrants. In the past, the curriculum was offered in English only, whereas at times they have had a bilingual offering, with some courses offered in English and some in Spanish. However, this bilingual arrangement has proven inefficient, for the students' linguistic practices go beyond the duality of the two named languages.

Alyssa is fortunate that her science teacher has been thinking about her bilingual students' translanguaging. She understands that her students' language goes beyond what others call English or Spanish. Alyssa's teacher has made a number of decisions. First, she decides that the language or language conventions students use will not have any effect on their grades. Second, she provides the science textbook in both English and Spanish, and leaves it up to the students to select the text they want to use. Third, she encourages oral interactions in which translanguaging is brought to the fore, and is convinced that this deepens discussions and allows everyone to participate. Fourth, she allows students to write using whatever features of their repertoire they feel comfortable with. Fifth, she engages with multimodalities in her science teaching. Thus, she shows films, bring in images and charts, encourages science experiments. She also urges students to give oral presentations using their entire communicative repertoire, including multimedia, so as to maximize communication and understanding of all bilingual students in the classroom. Alyssa's teacher focuses on

developing her ability to select the richest panoply of linguistic and multimodal signs that would communicate her understanding of science content.

Alyssa's teacher encourages and leverages the students' translanguaging to learn. However, she also provides the right types of affordances so that students learn to select features or modes that are most appropriate to show what they know. In addition, Alyssa's science teacher encourages critical reflection about the role that English and Spanish have had in the frontera.

Alyssa's teacher believes that what is most important for a young transfronteriza is to represent herself as bilingual for herself, not just for monolingual people on one side of the border or another. A translanguaging pedagogy in this science class enables Alyssa to, in the words of Du Bois ([1903] 1994), 'lift the veil' that has been put between minoritized and majority people, a veil that allows bilinguals to see and represent themselves as valid human beings only in relationship to Anglo monolinguals or Mexican monolinguals. In lifting the veil, it becomes possible also for monolinguals to truly see and hear bilinguals, enabling understandings that are not possible now. The teacher's translanguaging pedagogy enables the transformation of bilingual subjectivities. It does not act as a scaffold to simply cross over to the majority language and majority culture. In its transgression, the translanguaging pedagogy has the capacity to transform the institutional structures, and especially the modern western epistemologies that have rendered bilingual minoritized people voiceless and invisible. This teacher's translanguaging pedagogical practices 'cracks' the structure and reality of monolingual education. The teaching is not just in English nor just in Spanish. Alyssa does not just have to perform in English or just in Spanish; her translanguaging is validated to learn, be, act, imagine and create. True, it is just a 'crack,' and school structures often work against the transformative potential of translanguaging. But the potential for transformation is there, as new fissures and cracks enable the visibility of performances that are valid and important for bilingual students.

### Similarities or differences? Conclusion

Both plurilingual and translanguaging pedagogical practices in the education of language minoritized students remain controversial, for schools have a monolingual and monoglossic tradition that is hard to disrupt, even when the disrupting stance brings success to learners. At issue is the national identity that schools are supposed to develop in their students, and the Eurocentric system of knowledge, circulated through standardized named languages, that continues to impose what Quijano (2000) has called a coloniality of power.

All theories emerge from a place, an experience, a time, and a position, and in this case, plurilingualism and translanguaging have developed, as we have seen, from different loci of enunciation. But concepts do not remain static in a time and place, as educators and researchers take them up, as they travel, and as educators develop alternative practices. Thus, plurilingual and translanguaging pedagogical practices sometimes look the same, and sometimes they even have the same practical goals. For example, educators who say they use plurilingual pedagogical practices might insist on developing bilingual identities, and not solely use plurilingualism as a scaffold. And educators who claim to use translanguaging pedagogical practices sometimes use them only as a scaffold to the dominant language, not grasping its potential. In the United States, translanguaging pedagogies are often used in English-as-a-Second Language programs only as a scaffold. And although the potential for translanguaging is more likely to be found in bilingual education programs, this is also at times elusive. The potential is curtailed, for example, by the strict language allocation policies that have accompanied the growth of dual language education programs in the last decade in the USA, which come close to the neoliberal understanding of multilingualism espoused in the European Union.

It is important to keep the conceptual distinctions between plurilingualism and translanguaging at the forefront as we develop ways of enacting them in practice, even when pedagogies may turn out to look the same. Because the theoretical stance of translanguaging brings forth and affirms dynamic multilingual realities, it offers the potential to transform minoritized communities sense of self that



the concept of plurilingualism may not always do. The purpose of translanguaging could be transformative of socio-political and socio-educational structures that legitimize the language hierarchies that exclude minoritized bilingual students and the epistemological understandings that render them invisible. In its theoretical formulation, translanguaging disrupts the concept of named languages and the power hierarchies in which languages are positioned. But the issue for the future is whether school authorities will allow translanguaging to achieve its potential, or whether it will silence it as simply another kind of scaffold. To the degree that educators act on translanguaging with political intent, it will continue to crack some openings and to open opportunities for bilingual students. Otherwise, the present conceptual differences between plurilingualism and translanguaging will be erased.

## Acknowledgements

We want to express our sincere appreciation to the two anonymous reviewers whose insights have enriched this revised paper, and in particular to the anonymous reviewer who questioned and extended our thinking. Gracias.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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