

BOOK REVIEW

Translation and Translanguaging, by Mike Baynham and Tong King Lee, Abington, Routledge, 2019, 199 pp., £23.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-138-06704-2

This co-authored book is introduced as a theoretical lens on applied translation practices in the deployment of a range of semiotic resources, namely translanguaging, defined early on as “a term to characterise bilingual and multilingual repertoires” (n.p.). It acknowledges its indebtedness to the TLANG (Investigating Linguistic and Cultural Transformations in Superdiverse Wards in Four UK Cities) project and as such is very much a book of a time which calls for clarification of the concept of translanguaging in applied linguistics (Wei, 2018).

Dialogical practice is key, not only to the epistemological position of the argument, but also to the form of what one of the authors describes as ‘our strange book’ (p. 1). The introduction is shaped as a dialogue between the two authors who discuss the development of their views on translanguaging, of the need they perceive to counterbalance non-normative labels attached to this concept in relation to its more established and prestigious counterpart, translation. There is an aspect of Socratic questioning in these initial stages as the two authors bounce ideas off each other in their search for a comfortable theoretical home and terminology. They inspect several concepts and terminological landscapes arising from translation studies for the way these can be adapted to a conceptualisation of translanguaging and to delineate it against other concepts. The picture which emerges from this dialogue is that translanguaging is a theoretically independent field from other linguistic constructs and that the authors do not shy from tackling difficult questions and from challenging perspectives. It also maps out the book as a learning journey which is itself free of a linear structure. There is a rich seam of metaphorical language in this opening section and this is the hallmark of the discourse adopted throughout the book which in itself can be viewed as a repertoire of creative language use.

The content may not be linear, but it is neatly organised into three sections subdivided into 3 chapters. The first three chapters include the Socratic dialogue and 2 theoretical chapters – one is devoted to the conceptualisation on translanguaging based on Jakobson’s typology of interlingual / translingual / intersemiotic translations, while the other explores translanguaging in relation to its disputed cognate, translation. These theoretical chapters are followed by an overarching section where each chapter maps out Jakobson’s typology as applied to translanguaging through a series of case studies. The final section of the book is devoted to an exploration of multimodal creativity and a concluding dialogue, unaffectedly subtitled: ‘what have we learnt?’ which again frames the book as a learning journey.

The two theoretical chapters unsurprisingly cover the cardinal constructs traditionally associated with translanguaging and proposed new conceptualisations. The contemporary context dictates the need to revisit formulations as “in a world marked and shaped by mobility and flows, it is no longer adequate sociolinguistically to think of language as the property of speech communities or communities of speakers” (p. 17). Expressions retained from the mining of linguistic and socio-cultural scholarship acknowledge the accretion of contributions

(Gumperz, Pennycook, Bhabha etc.) and speak, among others, of liminality ('contact zones', 'multilingualism from below'), of fluidity ('blending', 'polycentricity', 'deterritorialisation'), of variety in inspiration ('repertoires', 'vibrant assemblage', 'cannibalisation'), of personal relevance ('embodied'), of timeliness ('in the now', 'temporal suspension') and ultimately of transgression to existing ideologies ('infringing'), all of which acknowledge a meandering quality to the communicative process. Disambiguating translanguaging (TL) from code-switching (CS) is no easy task but is expressed in sets of dichotomies (focus, orientation, scope) through which translanguaging emerges as embodied multilingual multimodal practice. This is illustrated by the analysis of a multilingual dialogue from a marketplace showing how deeply entrenched in context translanguaging is. The conceptual pitching of translanguaging against translation comes with more assertive premises: "Unlike translation, which can describe both process and product, translanguaging is always process and never product" (p.34). The authors show that this notion of language on the move can however be captured, as illustrated by emerging and 'subversive' linguistic formations from Chinglish, which can manifest itself in artefacts such as in the ritual exchange of envelopes for the Chinese New Year. While this example helpfully illustrates the multimodal and spontaneous generation of new language forms and is acknowledged as a 'simulacrum of translation' (p. 51), the reader may wonder whether it does not belie the claim that translanguaging is never product, unless this is to be construed in terms of limited shelf-life. It is worth noting however that the authors recognise that there is an overlap between 'nonsubstantive translation' and translanguaging which seems to blur attempts at decisive definitions.

The theoretical sections of the book are followed in Part I by chapters which put analysis of empirical data to the fore and this is in my view where the book demonstrates best the scope of translanguaging as an analytical lens. Chapter 4, *Interlingual translanguaging*, provides, through the analysis of dialogues in community interpreting, insightful examples of how translanguaging is used by interpreters with considerable interpersonal skills to accommodate the needs and roles of the different parties they are liaising with in formal and informal contexts. The shifts and interplays between different languages, registers and lexicons illustrate convincingly how different strategies are employed to circumvent language hierarchies 'to get things done'. Chapter 5, *Intralingual and interdiscursive translanguaging*, revisits one of the scenarios of community interpreting used in Chapter 4 and team discussion of a business plan to examine more closely power shifts and cultural brokering. These examples demonstrate effectively how speakers draw interactionally on varieties in registers, discourses and institutional practices. Themed on intersemiotic translanguaging, Chapter 5 is dense in theoretical considerations, with added contributions arising from social semiotics and Actor Network Theory among others. The examples used to illustrate the interplay of intersemiotic modes are varied (e.g. visual signage, media representations, market footage, capoeira dance class) but I have sometimes found myself wishing augmented interpretations to those provided by the authors or wanting to know more about how the different theoretical approaches outlined could be applied to the examples provided.

Part II includes two chapters devoted to creative processes: cyberpoetics (Chapter 7) and text-based art (Chapter 8). The first of the two reignites the theme of resisted assimilation to

translation, with processes of reconfiguration and the breaking of rules in experimental translations of poetry from Chinese through algorithms and an example of a very complex process of Internet-sourced microcollage translation with kinetic elements of a Chinese poem. There are reflections there on creative processes akin to those found on discourses on modern art. The disruptive and avant garde theme is taken one step further in Chapter 8 which considers interesting examples of performative art, for instance one which proposes the resemiotisation of Chinese characters. While the emphasis of some of the previous chapters was very much in terms of communicative accommodation, it is interesting to note that in these sections the accompanying discourse from the authors shifts more markedly to that of transgression, with one of the pieces heralded as “a visual performance in noncommunication” (p. 165).

In the final chapter, ‘What we have learnt’, the authors revisit some of the definitions, blur boundaries, propose that you can have ‘translation-in-translanguaging’ and ‘translanguaging-in-translation’ and consider the role of playfulness in language use. This serves as an effective bookend to a text which, with its mix of theoretical considerations and applied practice from a range of languages, informs, probes and questions in multiple ways but does not impose certainties.

References

Wei, L. (2018). Translanguaging as a Practical Theory of Language. *Applied Linguistics*, 39(1), 9–30.

Christine Penman
Edinburgh Napier University
c.penman@napier.ac.uk