Ways forward in the study of translanguaging

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In their highly interesting contributions, the many commentators on my keynote (Treffers-Daller, 2025) highlight a wide range of aspects of the concept of translanguaging, its theoretical underpinnings and the ways in which it can be operationalised in pedagogical research. I am most grateful to all the colleagues who have been willing to critically reflect on these issues, and have also highlighted points of (dis)agreement with my views. In this final word, I will begin with a discussion of the theoretical assumptions, before moving onto issues of pedagogy.

Kootstra and Poarch (2025, henceforth K&P) note that from a psycholinguistic perspective, it is possible to assume that bilinguals have a unitary linguistic repertoire as long as specific sounds, words and structures are tagged for membership of specific languages. The idea of language tags is a very attractive one, in my view. Such language tags would allow German–English bilinguals who are speaking in a monolingual mode to produce English utterances with a VO word order, and attach English inflections to English nouns and verbs only. In a bilingual mode, by contrast, if the situation allows it, they can combine words from English and German, and produce mixed utterances. It seems to me that common ground can indeed be found between the positions of K&P and Otheguy (2025), because the latter suggests that "no one has ever denied the psychological reality of linguistic features". However, the author also claims the linguistic units of an individual's mental grammar do not belong to any language. Currently, we do not know what linguistic units are referred to under the label "features" in the unitary model (UTT), and how bilinguals can inhibit features in their repertoire. Otheguy claims inhibition[1] happens "by whatever mechanism already does so among monolinguals". If inhibition of non-target language items, forms or sounds happens with language tags in bilinguals, this is different from the ways in which monolinguals process language, unless dialectal variants are tagged in similar ways as belonging to one or the other language variety. Nevertheless, an

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1. Otheguy uses the term "suppress" instead of "inhibit".

important point of contact between Otheguy and K&P is that the latter note that language membership representations are emergent properties of the linguistic system, and therefore these are socially constructed *as well as* psychologically real. A similar point is made by Auer, who notes that "socially constructed facts are deeply entrenched in our minds". That there are clear links between social and cognitive variables in bilingual processing is made very clear in the Adaptive Control Hypothesis (Green & Abutalebi, 2013), to which K&P refer. It is one of the first models to explicitly integrate linguistic, psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic information into one model, and it has been widely cited across research in different fields. It is such models, which build on evidence from a range of fields, that help to move a discussion forward because they allow researchers to derive specific hypotheses from it, and test these on empirical data.

Dixit and Anderson (2025, henceforth D&A) claim that "someone operating with a codeswitching mindset" assumes that "languages exist as different entities and are being mixed artificially or inappropriately." Unfortunately, D&A do not refer to any scholars who claim that languages are mixed artificially or inappropriately, and it would be hard to find any such scholars. It is clear that negative views of code-switching exist among the wider public. Such views have been labelled tacit or *ungrounded theories*, as they are based on tacit assumptions that have not been spelled out (MacSwan & Rolstad, 2024). An example of such ungrounded views are views of what constitutes "bad English" (e.g., stranded prepositions, as in *which town do you come from*?). By contrast, linguistic theories are based on *grounded theories*, which have been explicitly described, and formulated in terms of falsifiable hypotheses (MacSwan & Rolstad, 2024). D&A confuse those two types of theories or ideologies. They also claim translanguaging is a Southern practical theory. Paradoxically, this theory did not originate in the South, but in Wales. Uncritically assuming the worldwide applicability of any theory developed in the Western world is problematic and could even be seen as a novel form of colonialism. For theories that claim to adopt a decolonial perspective (García & Lin, 2017), this is extremely unfortunate. Ultimately what matters is not where a theory comes from, but whether its predictions are correct in the face of empirical evidence. Of course, this evidence needs to come from the South too. However, the fact that D&A also question the usefulness of deriving hypotheses from theories and operationalising concepts, makes it difficult to understand how this theory can be tested further. As Berthele (2025) points out, disposing of metalinguistic categories, as D&A do by refusing to label the languages in the excerpt from the school in Rajasthan, is not helpful if one does not offer any workable alternatives.

Tovar and Snape (2025, henceforth T&S) are keen to widen the concept of translanguaging even further, so that it also covers transpositioning and liquid-

ity of identity (Li & Lee, 2024). Unfortunately, neither the latter nor T&S explain what these concepts stand for, nor how they relate to other constructs in Linguistics or Psychology. In the literature on identity in bilinguals, the concept of hybrid identities has been around for a long time (West et al., 2017), but as far as I know, the translanguaging literature does not build on this.

As Berthele (2025) points out, toning down strong claims ("bilinguals do not speak languages but rather use their repertoire of linguistic features selectively"), as do García and Lin (2017, p.10) to weaker ones where boundaries between languages are recognised but required to be softened in teaching, leads to conceptually weak and epistemologically woolly and weak claims. Testing such claims empirically then becomes very difficult, as Berthele illustrates. I also agree with Berthele that inflation in terminology is unhelpful, and that the branding and marketing of new terms is the result of the ways in which research is funded: new terms are then interpreted as indicative of new ideas, and this may result in higher chances of getting funding. In the end, the only beneficiaries of the activities are the proponents of the new terms because they create a new market for themselves and the other members of the *echo chamber*, (Cummins, 2025), that is researchers with similar ideas who meet in small workshops or on social media, instead of exposing themselves to and taking into account any critique of their views. As journal editor and reviewer, I have had to point out to several authors who had submitted papers on translanguaging that they needed to refer to the critique of the construct. Instead of doing so, some preferred to withdraw their paper. Clearly, if the proponents of translanguaging can ignore the critique, why can't they? Researchers who are keen on breaking down boundaries should not fence themselves off to critique in an echo chamber. The use of esoteric language, such as "transcending languages" and metaphors, such as a "translanguaging lens", "translanguaging space", by members of what Berthele rightly calls the *translanguaging movement*, risks further alienating researchers.

Coming back to the issue of boundaries between languages, no one currently claims that language systems are completely separate in storage or processing, so it should be possible to find common ground in various theories. Indeed, Torregrossa et al. (2025) note that according to MacSwan's (2022) Integrated Multilingual Model multilinguals' mental grammars are partly shared and partly language-specific.[2] A similar point is made by Cummins (2025), who notes that the model of translanguaging he has proposed, the Crosslinguistic Translanguaging Theory (CTT) differs from the UTT in that in the CTT the boundaries between languages are fluid and porous (Cummins, 2021), while for the UTT there are no boundaries, and grammars are not psychologically real. Indeed, I

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2. It is therefore *not* a dual language model as Otheguy continues to claim.

concur with Cummins that theories that recognise the crucial role of transfer in multilinguals are much more plausible. In fact, many of the intervention studies in translanguaging are based on careful designs in which teaching for crosslinguistic transfer is an important basic principle.

As Parafita Couto et al. (2025) point out, evidence from non-Western societies has not so far sufficiently informed the discussion about models of language processing in multilinguals or code-switching. In these communities, speakers can be found to move seamlessly across language borders, and language mixing can be the norm rather than the exception. My own experience with Malay–English code-switching (Treffers-Daller et al., 2022) underscores this. Very intimate forms of mixing are found in the Malay–English data, code-switching is practised not only in informal contexts but also in work environments, and there is very little, if any, stigma attached to it. Interestingly, social media appear to be at the forefront of a move towards more innovative mixing practices. On social media, also a few word-internal switches were found, which is highly constrained in many speech communities, and has been the topic of extensive research (see MacSwan, 2022, for details).

Otheguy (2025) shows that there are also examples of word-internal switches (clitics) among Spanish–English bilinguals in his data set. This opens up the possibility that the rules observed in one community do not always hold elsewhere, challenging universal constraints. While the examples are truly interesting, they will need to be analysed in the context of the entire data set, revealing how widespread and frequent these are, as exemplified in variationist approaches to code-switching. The fact that there are some exceptions to widely observed constraints on word-internal switching does not mean that we should abandon the concept of code-switching being rule-governed behaviour.[3] Support for this comes from Lillo-Martin and Chen Pichler (2025), who point to the importance of accounting for differences between bilingual mixing phenomena from unimodal and bimodal bilinguals. They note that the mental language architecture found in bilinguals is "crucially still constrained by linguistic principles; it is not the case that 'anything goes'".

Yuan (2025) also asks how the integrated communication system proposed in the UTT operates exactly. It is unlikely that language users have "complete liberty

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3. Rules for code-switching are examples of what Searle (1969) calls constitutive rules, which create or define new forms of behaviour. The rules of football or chess, for example […] create the very possibility of playing such games, in that they specify how the pieces move on a chess board. Without such rules the game cannot be played. These are very different from regulatory rules, which regulate independently existing forms of behaviour (e.g., that one is not allowed to tap one's fingers on a chess board).

to randomly assemble linguistic and non-linguistic items" in communication. To illustrate the point made, he offers a fascinating and truly innovative example of multimodal code-switching, which involves attaching a Chinese collective marker to an emoji in an utterance with English and Chinese words. In addition, he offers compelling evidence to show that grammar is indeed psychologically real, and opens up new avenues for research into multimodal translanguaging.

My own view is that code-switching is indeed rule-bound behaviour, but that any rules for or constraints on for code-switching are likely to be of a probabilistic nature, as individual counterexamples can be found to any constraints that have been formulated in the past. It would certainly be of interest to consider word-internal switches, including switches of clitics (Otheguy, 2025) and collective markers (Yuan, 2025), in the light of Muysken's (2000) three-way typology of code-mixing, which is not mentioned by either Otheguy or Yuan). In Muysken's model, there is a form of code-switching (called *congruent lexicalisation*) which consists of filling a shared frame with content and function words from both languages.

As pointed out by Torregrossa et al. (2025), we need to make a distinction between arguments for or against the UTT and arguments of a pedagogical nature. Moving on to pedagogical translanguaging, Cenoz and Gorter (2025, henceforth C&G) provide excellent examples of translanguaging between Basque, Spanish and English in classrooms in the Basque country, but both C&G and Carroll (2025) take issue with my comments that using all students' resources comes naturally to many teachers. Of course, I am aware that there is resistance against the use of multilingual resources in the classroom in many contexts, which means teachers may be struggling to get translanguaging approaches accepted. In addition, in multilingual classrooms in the UK, where a wide range of different home languages are found, it would be difficult to require teachers to use all of these in the classroom, but as C&G point out, it should be possible to acknowledge and respect these. C&G are of course right that translanguaging needs to be planned and that the planning needs to be based on the students' repertoires. The issue I raised in my keynote is that deciding what the students' repertoires consist of is more difficult in many contexts than some proponents of translanguaging are ready to admit. In the Indian context, as part of the Multilila project (Tsimpli et al., 2020), we came across this issue when trying to collect information about the home languages of children. Some children used a name for their language (Bihari—the language spoken in Bihar) that did not correspond to any names known to us. As Auer (2025) points out, the sociolinguistics and the pragmatics of language naming are currently under-researched. The importance of having a "named language" is also key to the issue of linguistic human rights and the preservation of endangered languages, as Lane (2025) points out.

Nicoladis (2025) reminds us that before going into the how of pedagogical translanguaging, the goals should be articulated first. Is it to learn the school subject better, or to develop bilingualism or to recognise students' language identities? All these may be important goals, but achieving these might require different pedagogies aimed at each separately. How the success of any intervention study can be measured remains an area of disagreement. I concur with K&P's (2025) and Torregrossa et al.'s (2025) view that quantitative methods are needed in addition to qualitative and mixed methods to measure the success of any intervention. Carroll (2025), by contrast, contends that translanguaging does not fit into a "rigid quantitatively measurable framework", and the same point is made by D&A (2025). While I accept translanguaging is a difficult concept to pin down, anyone who exclusively accepts qualitative methods, will find it difficult to convince Ministries of Education of the importance of pedagogical translanguaging. It is more likely that a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods will convince different stakeholders in Education.

In several contributions, potential disadvantages of pedagogical translanguaging are mentioned too. Yuan (2025) suggests learners should be made aware when translanguaging is appropriate and when it is not, as in some speech communities, translanguaging is only appropriate in informal circumstances, and learners need to have access to more formal registers of the language, which are used so eloquently by proponents of translanguaging themselves. Lane (2025) adds to this the concern that if translanguaging equals a *laissez-faire* policy, there will be fewer opportunities for using minority languages, such as Sami in Sweden.

That reading a novel in English and discussing it in Spanish at university-level ESL classes in Puerto Rico is a novel concept for some teachers, as Carroll (2025) points out, is interesting, as the approach taken by these teachers corresponds exactly to the kinds of practices for which the concept of translanguaging was created. I see this as support for the view that going back to the roots of translanguaging instead of broadening it to some sort of *Theory of Everything* is a good idea.

In summary, although the discussion shows there are important differences in the ways in which translanguaging is conceptualised and in how it is used in pedagogy, I hope the readers of this issue of *Linguistic Approaches to Bilingualism* will feel there has been some benefit in discussing these, and in highlighting points of contact between different theories and approaches, some of which are just terminological in nature. To Backus (2025), there is no real difference between the many terms that have been introduced for language contact phenomena over the years, even though there is an important risk attached to replacing old terms with new ones, because it may lead to an erasure of the older literature. I couldn't agree more. Backus also reminds us that we are all actually fighting the same fight:

namely the monolingual habitus that is so common in our field. Let's all take heed!

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