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Thinking about languages between fixity and fluidity: what can a translingual perspective teach us about language policies in the global South?

Pensando sobre as línguas entre a fixidez e a fluidez: o que uma perspectiva translíngue pode nos ensinar sobre políticas linguísticas no Sul global?

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ABSTRACT: Moving away from the tradition of treating multilingualism as a problem and language as an autonomous system, current theoretical approaches have shifted from monolingual principles toward translingual perspectives to investigate the relationship between language policy and ideology. In this text, I take on such a position to explore how multilinguals' attitudes toward their languages are shaped by ideologies that highlight both the fixity and fluidity of contemporary communicative practices. In order to do so, I analyze data taken from a larger study that problematized online translingual practices of individuals from post-colonial countries through the use of questionnaires and interviews. Drawing on the notions of translanguaging, languagised worlds and Bakhtin's concept of centripetal and centrifugal forces, I argue that in order to better account for the impact of language policies in multilinguals' lives, scholars should turn their attention to the implications of fixed and fluid notions of language for the negotiation of competing language ideologies.

KEYWORDS: translanguaging; fixity; fluidity; language policy.

RESUMO: Afastando-se de uma tradição que trata o multilinguismo como um problema e a língua como um sistema autônomo, abordagens teóricas atuais têm se deslocado de princípios monolíngues em direção a perspectivas translíngues como forma de investigar a relação entre política linguística e ideologia. Neste texto, assumo tal posição a fim de explorar como as atitudes de sujeitos multilíngues em relação às suas línguas são moldadas por ideologias que ressaltam tanto a fixidez quanto a fluidez das práticas comunicativas contemporâneas. Para isso, analiso dados de uma pesquisa que problematizou as práticas translíngues online de sujeitos de nações pós-coloniais através de entrevistas e questionários. Embasado nas noções de translinguagem, mundos linguagisados e nos conceitos bakhtinianos de forças centrípetas e centrífugas, defendo que para uma melhor compreensão dos impactos das políticas linguísticas nas vidas de sujeitos multilíngues, pesquisadores devem se voltar às implicações de noções fixas e fluidas de linguagem na negociação de diferentes ideologias linguísticas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: translinguagem; fixidez; fluidez; política linguística.

1 Introduction

Language Policy (LP) has been traditionally understood as a mechanism of language planning used to solve the linguistic problems of a community at both local and national levels. This perspective was put forward by (socio)linguists who focused their attention on finding solutions to the problems that emerge from language diversity in developing nations, especially in Africa and Asia (SPOLSKY, 2012). Scholars (SHOHAMY, 2006; GARCÍA, 2016; PENNYCOOK; MAKONI, 2020), however, claim that the very idea that multilingual societies are a problem is grounded in fixed conceptions of languages that disregard the social realities of their users. In line with this understanding, Spolsky (2004) proposes that LP be defined in relation to its three components: *language beliefs* – the ideologies about language that underlie each policy; *language practice* – referring to the ecology of language, that is, the communicative practices that actually take place in a given community; and *language management* – the efforts made to manage and control linguistic choices. This framework has been relevant not only as the foundation for the study of the ideological mechanisms of language policies, but also because it paved the way for the development of a critical agenda in multilingual research.

One of the perspectives most frequently debated in the emerging studies on language policy and multilingualism is that of *translanguaging*, a pedagogical and theoretical approach that leads us away from the notion of *language* as an autonomous and static system to a focus on the fluid and mobile semiotic resources individuals engage in during communication (BLACKLEDGE; CREESE, 2017). As García (2016) claims, translanguaging puts multilingualism at the center of language policy, and in so doing it opens up spaces for individuals' repertoires (their experiences, ideologies and actual language practices) to be acknowledged and valued. While questioning the social and political boundaries of languages and the discourses of purity that accompany them, scholars (BONFIGLIO, 2010; GREMLING, 2016; 2021) have also turned their attention to how such ideologies have real and material consequences for individuals. In that sense, it becomes particularly important to interrogate multilinguals' beliefs about their communicative practices by considering the effects of varying and contradicting language ideologies.

In order to incorporate these concerns, in this paper I draw on data that derive from a netnographic research project[1] that aimed to analyze online translingual practices of multilingual speakers. In this text, due to space limitations, the scope extends to only two research participants from two post-colonial countries, namely, Bangladesh and the Philippines. Through the analysis of interviews and questionnaires, I explore the impact of both monolingual and multilingual ideologies on the participants' attitudes toward language and investigate the extent to which taking into account individuals' metalinguistic awareness provides new lines of inquiry in contemporary communicative practices. Moreover, the notions of *translanguaging* (GARCÍA; LI, 2014; LI, 2018), *languagised worlds* (JASPERS; MADSEN, 2019), Bakhtin's concepts of *centripetal* and *centrifugal forces*, and language policy as practices embedded in social and ideological agendas (SHOHAMY, 2006) will offer the basis for the theoretical and analytical discussions that aim to unveil the fixed and fluid notions of languages on which multilinguals rely to make sense of their worlds.

[1] This study was approved by a Research Ethics Committee at the Federal University of Bahia, Brazil.

The article is structured as follows: I begin by defining the concepts of language policy and language ideology. Then, I turn to an examination of translanguaging perspective and shed light on how it intersects with language policies and ideologies. I also draw on the notions of *languagised worlds* and *centripetal* and *centrifugal forces* to investigate how fixity and fluidity are embedded in individuals' language practices. As far as methodology is concerned, I present the nature of the research, its participants, and I overview some of the LPs implemented in their countries. Then, I move to the analysis of excerpts extracted from interviews and questionnaires, and I end with remarks on the importance of conducting research that considers the tensions between fixed and fluid notions of language and identity in translanguaging inquiry.

By adopting a translingual perspective in discussing language policy, this text reflects upon the ideologies that underlie the discursive practices of multilinguals as a way to both discuss how languages are understood in different contexts and analyze how people's way of using linguistic resources are shaped by broader sociocultural values. Following from this, I argue that in order to better account for the impact of language policies in people's lives, scholars should consider the ways in which competing language ideologies are negotiated through translingual practices.

2 From policies to ideologies

To Maher (2013), language policy refers to the goals and interventions that aim to affect the ways languages are used, studied and interpreted. This perspective leads away from the notion that language policy and language planning are two different things, rather they are seen as interdependent processes that are related to both the establishment of linguistic goals and to the means through which they are realized. Maher (2013) also states that LPs are far from simply presenting solutions to linguistic problems. According to her, rarely have LPs focused solely on the manipulation of a given sociolinguistic situation, instead they are much more concerned with the manipulation of specific identities.

A point that illustrates this best has to do with the use of language tests as devices that affect language policies. Shohamy (2006) discusses how language tests have been used as gatekeeping tools in the context of migration. For her, when a language education system declares a specific language as priority, it consequently excludes/eliminates other languages in that space, thus preventing certain people from circulating. Moreover, language tests too often make it explicit that what it is essential for proficiency mastery is native-like competence, accent, and grammar. As a result, Shohamy (2006, p. 105) states that such criteria "[...] can at the same time become barriers for keeping unwanted groups, such as immigrants, from entering educational institutions and/or the workplace".

Shohamy's (2006) perspective also plays a role in the definition of LP that underlies this text. In her own words, linguistic policies are

> [...] used in manipulative, oppressive and imposing ways, especially in nation-states where language has become a tool for creating, imposing and perpetuating collective identities, homogenous and hegemonic ideologies, unified standards and categories of inclusion and exclusion. (SHOHAMY, 2006, p. 17)

Shohamy (2006), based on Schiffman (1996), discusses how language policies can be both overt and covert, meaning that, on the one hand, they can be explicit and formalized; on the other, they can be informal and implicit. This is in line with what Archanjo (2016) calls macro and micro level LPs. As she notes, in the first scenario, "[...] language policies deal with governmental actions, which are embedded in other public policies like, for instance, educational and cultural ones [...]" (ARCHANJO, 2016, p. 39); in the second, they operate "[...] with the decisions made by individuals in institutionalized social groups [...]" like, for example, the decisions teachers make on whether or not to adopt an English-only policy in a foreign language class. Such an orientation reminds us that LPs are embodied phenomena, to put it another way, it is a situated practice imbricated with complex ideologies and attitudes that play an important role in people's lives and language choices. That being said, "[...] wherever people are communicating, a language (sometimes more than one) is being elected [and] [t]his choice constitutes an act of language policy [...]" (ARCHANJO, 2016, p. 41).

With this in mind, it is notable that language policy and language ideology go hand in hand, for the object of LPs is not so much the language itself, but what people do with and think about languages. Hence, in this text, language ideology is understood as the system of ideas that articulate general notions about the languages with specific cultural, political and social frameworks. Furthermore, language ideologies "[...] include the vision of the linguistic configuration of a specific community, as well as the reasoning that first, produces that vision, and second, justifies its values [...]" (DEL VALLE; GABRIEL-STHEEMAN, 2001, p. 11).

In light of the above, it is possible to see that the aforementioned authors' orientations to language policies stress the importance of considering the tensions between language, ideology and identity. This is especially productive when analyzing the roles played by LPs in multilingual societies.

Given the heterogeneity of many postcolonial and multilingual countries, language policies have been a controversial issue. For Makoni et al. (2012), the misrepresentation of specific languages and ethnic groups in both local and national policies is a consequence of modern and European perspectives of language which show how the LPs of newly independent states, for instance, are a continuation of the colonial project. However, due to the increasing effects of globalization and worldwide migration, the linguistic landscape of those countries has become even more complex and diverse, calling for a change in the way LPs have been articulated. In this scenario, the imposition of European principles of language is now followed by the development of mother tongue-based language policies in education.

Shohamy (2006, p. 33) points out that through mother-tongue education:

> [...] the association of languages and national membership, patriotism and loyalty was reinforced in the educational context. Teaching the 'mother tongue' in schools reinforced the creation of myths about the need for 'national languages' to be taught to children that opposes early multilingualism and thus excludes immigrants and other groups from 'the nation'.

Pennycook and Makoni (2020, p. 55) complicate this issue further by stressing that "[...] [in] many southern contexts, Global North concepts of languages, mother tongues, or multilingualism, simply do not reflect the ways languages are used and understood [...]". To them:

> [w]hile much of this apparently well-meaning work has sought to develop language policies in favour of local languages (alongside other work and agencies promoting European languages), it has operated from several flawed premises. [...] [W]e argue that this understanding of language has been based firmly in northern epistemologies, promoting concepts of language choice and ethnicity that are alien to most southern contexts. By elevating languages over people, it has been unable to deal with the real issues of poverty, change, and discrimination faced by many language users in the Global South. (PENNYCOOK; MAKONI, 2020, p. 10)

What should be noted here, however, is that one is not denying the work that has been done in promoting mother tongue education, since it has been a vital tool in improving (among other things) learning and political participation of linguistic minority groups (UNESCO, 2012). Instead, what is at stake is the *how* and the *ideological foundations* on which such an education has been put forth. According to Khubchandani (2003, p. 249, emphasis in original) "[...] [t]he mother tongue cannot be the *only* language of education [...]". By calling for an alternate paradigm, the author stresses the importance of mother tongue education be reassessed on the basis of the particularities of plural societies, in which a child's first-hand experiences in native speech may not necessary show "[...] any resemblance to the formal 'school version' of his/her mother tongue [...]" (KHUBCHANDANI, 2003, p. 249).

This is akin to Banda's (2018) perspective, to whom, the so-called mother tongue-based multilingual education that has been taken up by countries like the Philippines, made it clear a monolingual orientation in language education policies. The author contends that although this model relies on the use of students' mother tongue and two or more other additional languages as languages of instruction, it is still based on the ideology of language separation and hierarchization, through which mother tongues are disregarded in favor of colonial and dominant local languages as students advance in their schooling process. For Banda (2018, p. 18), regardless of the language of education, "[...] the policy limits learners' access to the extended linguistic repertoires that would enable them achieve power, voice and agency [...]". So, he claims for an education policy that sees "[...] the learners' linguistic repertoires [mother tongues included] as material affordance in the promotion and pursuance of learning" (BANDA, 2018, p. 18).

Those authors argue, then, that in order to be responsive to the real language practices of southern people[2], scholars and policymakers must carefully consider the complex relationship between languages and, identities, considering that every decision about language practices is grounded in specific ideologies. Thus, one of the implications of such an orientation is the realization that we need alternative frameworks for the study of language and education. In this context, attention has been given to translanguaging, an issue I take up in the next section.

3 *Trans*-policies and *trans*-ideologies

Translanguaging theory and pedagogy focuses on how individuals draw on fluid and dynamic language practices as resources for communication and learning. It coincides with contemporary trends in socio-

[2] I rely on Pennycook and Makoni's (2020, p. 2) definition, for whom global South "[...] refers to the people, places, and ideas that have been left out of the grand narrative of modernity [...]".

linguistics and applied linguistics and reflects a shift from monolingual ideologies in the study of language and education (CENOZ; GORTER, 2020). To Dovchin, Pennycook and Sultana (2018), translanguaging is part of a *trans-* movement followed by different but related terms such as crossing (RAMPTON, 1995), polylanguaging (JØRGENSEN, 2010), metrolingualism (OTSUJI; PENNYCOOK, 2010), translingual practice (CANAGARAJAH, 2013; ROCHA, MACIEL, 2015) and so on. When it comes to research, as Li (2018) puts it:

> [...] [t]ranslanguaging is not merely a descriptive label for the kinds of Post-Multilingualism practices that one observes in the 21st century [...]. Translanguaging offers a practical theory of language that sees the latter as a multilingual, multisemiotic, multisensory, and multimodal resource that human beings use for thinking and for communicating thought.

In language education, García and Li (2014) and García, Johnson and Seltzer (2017) claim that translanguaging embraces all language resources of students and teachers in order to develop new communicative practices and subjectivities.

Translanguaging views language as a social practice, that is, as something that we do rather than something that we have (PENNYCOOK, 2010). In this sense, language is seen as an emergent phenomenon of social interaction and not a discrete system of a set of rules tied to specific nations as permeated by the vision of language in early studies of bilingualism. As far as education is concerned, translanguaging provides individuals with opportunities to employ their entire linguistic repertoire and not just one or another language as defined by nation-states (GARCÍA; LI, 2014). Thus, translanguaging approaches bi/multilinguals holistically, that is, "[...] a uniquely situated language user who functions bilingually, drawing on whatever language resources are appropriate, and is not the sum of two monolinguals [...]" (MACSWAN, 2017, p. 190).

As noted, translanguaging has made contributions not only to our conceptions of language and bilingual education, but also to that of language ideology and language policy. As a language ideology, translanguaging recognizes bi/multilingualism as the norm, resisting monoglossic perspectives that reinforce language separation. As García and Li (2014, p. 20) put it: "[...] the concept of translanguaging is based on radically different notions of language and bilingualism than those espoused in the 20th century, an epistemological change that is the product of acting and languaging in our highly technological globalized world [...]". In that sense, translanguaging shares much with post/decolonial theories for it challenges colonial epistemologies and enables the emergence of alternative language ideologies.

As for language policy, Dovchin (2019) claims that *trans-* approaches have the potential to lessen the reliance on language ideologies that endorse monolingual and purist perspectives in the area of language education planning and curriculum development at the cost of linguistic diversity. Consequently, translanguaging calls into question educational policies that ban or restrict the use of multiple languages by treating them as discrete elements that operate separately from one another while maintaining social stratifications in multilingual societies.

As stated by García (2016, p. 57), because of such a monoglossic view of LP that "[...] only recognizes national languages as autonomous and separate [...]", little is done for the development of "[...] a policy able to incorporate the linguistic competence of multilingual speakers and the ways in which these speakers use their full language repertoire [...]". By adopting a translanguaging lens through which to examine language policies, individuals would be encouraged to draw on their entire linguistic repertoire and be more

aware of how, when, where and with what speakers to use it. Thus, as García (2016, p. 58) argues: "[...] [a] translanguaging policy would go a long way in bringing down the barriers between foreign language education and bilingual education because it gives equal footing to all language practices and considers their complex interrelationship [...]". As already noted, by coming closer to the ways individuals communicate in real life, translanguaging can be a tool for liberating people and researchers from purist and monolingual ideologies.

Despite its increasing popularity, some authors have not shied away from raising the criticism of translanguaging. Macswan (2017) offers a critical assessment by suggesting an alternative point of view called *multilingual perspective on translanguaging* "[...] which acknowledges the existence of discrete languages and multilingualism [...], including language rights, mother tongues, and codeswitching [...]" (MACSWAN, 2017, p. 169). For Macswan, not only translanguaging scholars mistakenly claim that individual bilingual grammars are internally unitary and undifferentiated, but they also erroneously ascribe to codeswitching (a speech style in which bilinguals alternate languages) a dual competence perspective on bilingual mental grammar[3]. This author, then, proposes that codeswitching and multilingualism be seen as instances of translanguaging, for the research concerned with those issues are critically important areas of inquiry and can be used as an empirical defense of a positive view of bilinguals' language practices.

Another frequent line of criticism claims that translanguaging research and theorization is complicit with neo-liberal ideology. Kubota (2014, p. 12) charges that the "[...] privileged status and the politics of multi/plural turn are implicated in multiculturalism in a neoliberal era". In the same vein, Pavlenko's (2018) critiques that the scholarship on *trans-* perspectives "[...] is an effort to benefit from neoliberal interests of publishing and academic advancement [...]" (CANAGARAJAH, 2017, p. 2), leading scholars to strive "[...] to publish ever-more articles in an ever-increasing number of journals, while making an ever-greater 'impact on the field' [...]" (PAVLENKO, 2018, p. 143).

The last criticism of translanguaging that will be approached points to an apparent privileging of fluid communicative practices over fixed notions of languages, a focus that develops much more in the next section for it is of special importance in this text.

4 Between fixed and fluid translingual perspectives

As it has been pointed out, the recent upsurge of *trans-* approaches has been met with some skepticism. One of the reasons for this is their focus on fluidity that seems to overlook the ways people really communicate. This critique is based on the consideration that languages as fixed and lived entities play an important role in people's lives. Advocates (OTSUJI; PENNYCOOK, 2010; JASPERS; MADSEN, 2019; PENNYCOOK; OTSUJI, 2019) argue that although one cannot deny that translanguaging has made major contributions to the very idea of bilingual education and language, it is equally important to investigate the extent to which "[...] conceptions of language that have been developed over decades of sociolinguistic work onto the daily metalanguage of ordinary people". (PENNYCOOK; OTSUJI, 2019, p. 76)

Jaspers and Madsen (2019) put forward the concept of *languagised worlds* as an attempt to engage with people's understanding of their own languages. The authors suggest that the way people per-

[3] For more on this and related critiques, read Block (2018) and Auer (2019).

ceive their communicative practices may refer to both fixed and fluid notions of language and add that *languagised worlds* looks at

> [...] how speakers come to recognise established categories for language, how they reconcile them with their own practices and different purposes, and how they use these very categories, whether or not in line with their official conception, in their dealings with others [...]. (JASPERS; MADSEN, 2019, p. 20)

Pennycook and Otsuji (2019, p. 81-82) also offer an interesting take on *languagised worlds* when they point out that "[...] what is meant by language is neither as fixed as the old sociolinguistics might suggest nor as fluid as the new sociolinguistics proposes. This is a languagised world in which fixity and fluidity are both compatible and negotiable".

Such a body of research has been developed on the grounds that translanguaging theory lacks an appreciation of the relationship between what people believe about language and the way (socio)linguists approach it. It also represents a reaction against the notion that languages do not exist as real entities, a position taken up by Makoni and Pennycook (2007), Otheguy, García and Reid (2015) and others, to whom the idea of language is a European invention and a product of colonialism (GARCÍA; LI, 2014), and as such it forged the relationship between language, citizenship and identity and the ideology of languages as separate and enumerable categories.

It should be noted that even though criticism of translanguaging-based approaches states that it is also necessary to look into how languages as inventions are critical to understanding contemporary language practices (JASPERS; MADSEN, 2016), one should mention that translingual scholars did not disregard that these inventions have had real and material effects. Makoni and Pennycook (2007, p. 3) acknowledge that the inventions "[...] influence how languages have been understood, how language policies have been constructed, how education has been pursued [...] and how people have come to identify with particular labels [...]". Similarly, Otheguy, García and Reid (2015) note that when talking about languages as inventions, or as they call it, *named languages*, they are not denying their existence; they are restricting them to their proper domain of discourse instead. Moreover, the authors add that "[t]hese terms are appropriate and legitimate in discussions of social identity and sociolinguistic behavior because they are defined socially [...]" (OTHEGUY; GARCÍA; REID, 2015, p. 293).

The review above suggests that in order to understand language use, we need to find ways of rethinking language and multilingualism by incorporating not only researcher's point of view but also people's knowledge and perceptions that appear to rely on both fixity and fluidity. So, this attempt to account for the tensions between conflicting orientations to language and identity does not aim to elevate fixity to the detriment of fluidity and vice versa, but to examine how both notions intertwine and inform language policies and the different attitudes toward language. Such an orientation, to a great extent, elaborates on and expands Bakhtin's philosophical perspectives, to which I now turn.

García and Li (2014) state that the Bakhtinian concept of *heteroglossia* serves as an umbrella term for translanguaging theorization. The authors' consideration follows an increasing number of studies in sociolinguistics and applied linguistics that have returned to Bakhtin's philosophy as a perspective through which to investigate the ideological, political, and social implications of language practice (BLACKLEDGE; CREESE, 2014). Based on the term *raznorechie* (*heteroglossia*), Bakhtin (1981) examines how languages are

stratified not only into social dialects (characteristic group behavior, generic languages, professional jargons etc.), but also into languages permeated by socio-ideological positions. For Bailey (2012), however, what is worth observing about heteroglossia is its focus on social tensions inherent in language use which, in Bakhtin's terms, are defined as *centripetal* and *centrifugal forces*.

For Bakhtin (1981), every concrete utterance both characterizes social tensions and serves as a point where ideological forces are brought to bear. The primary tension in language use is represented by "[...] *the forces that serve to unify and centralize the verbal-ideological world*" (BAKHTIN, 1981, p. 270, emphasis in original). The *centripetal forces* of language accounts for "[...] the theoretical expression of the historical process of linguistic unification and centralization [...]" and are "[...] opposed to the realities of heteroglossia [...]". The second tension, on the other hand, represents "[...] the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification [...]" (BAKHTIN, 1981, p. 272). The *centrifugal forces* push toward various forms of linguistic practice, highlighting the creativity and diversity of language use.

Bakhtin (1981, p. 272), however, stresses that all language practices (or utterance in his terms) live between *centripetal* and *centrifugal* tensions, meaning that "[...] [t]he process of centralization and decentralization, of unification and disunification, intersect in the utterance [...]", and that "[e]very utterance participates in the 'unitary language' (in its centripetal forces and tendencies) and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces)". What Bakhtin teaches us is that individuals' language practices are always shaped and constituted by homogeneity, correctness, and standardization ideologies on one side, and heteroglossic ideologies on the other.

In this text, *centripetal* and *centrifugal forces* are evoked as both a theoretical and analytical tool to examine how individuals' translingual practices move between fixed and fluid notions of language and identity. In that sense, fixity and *centripetal forces* draw on the monolingual ideologies that permeate not only varying language policies but also peoples' attitudes toward language; while fluidity and *centrifugal forces* allow for translingual ideologies to take place in a superdiverse world (VERTOVEC, 2007). In sum, I argue that such concepts are appropriate for investigating the types of practices I am interested in for they offer ways to examine the interplay between fixity and fluidity in communicative practices.

5 Data, field site and research participants

The data analyzed here come from a larger study, carried out between 2018 and 2021, which aimed to investigate southern people's digital literacy practices on Facebook. The study mentioned is a netnographic research (KOZINETS, 2014), strictly speaking, a qualitative approach to social media data that seeks to understand the cultural experiences of social media users. As far as this text is concerned, I expand such a definition to include users' ideological experiences for they mediate their practices on Facebook alongside culture and politics. On that account, I echo Kozinets' (2020, p. 14) claim that netnography is "[...] a way of viewing data and thinking about how to understand the world [...]". The main type of data cover: Facebook posts analysis, interviews and questionnaires conducted with four multilingual speakers from four multilingual countries: Nigeria, Kenya, Bangladesh, and the Philippines. Due to space limitations, only data gathered from the interviews and questionnaires conducted with two of the research participants (from

Bangladesh and the Philippines) will be analyzed here. The excerpts chosen for analysis derive from D's and W's (all names are pseudonyms) responses to questions about their language practices. In addition, the data selected also represent the issues I am looking at in this paper.

D is a 34-year-old man from Bangladesh and, at the time of the research, he was doing his PhD in American Cultural Studies in the United States. In addition to English, D speaks Bengali and claims to understand Arabic and Hindi. The second participant is W, a 32-year-old man from the Philippines, speaker of Filipino and English who claims to understand some varieties of Chinese. As well as D, W is a language teacher and is used to posting about his experiences with teaching, his political views and daily routine. In order to understand D's and W's positioning toward language, one should turn their attention to the sociopolitical dynamics that shape the LPs in both Bangladesh and in the Philippines. The next paragraphs lay out some of these concerns.

According to Hamid and Rahman (2019, p. 398), the emergence of Bangladesh as a nation could be divided into two processes: "[...] first as a geographically distant part of the federation of Pakistan after the partition of India in 1947 (known as East Pakistan) and then from 1971 onwards when East Pakistan broke away from Pakistan as a separate nation [...]". As the authors point out, in both processes, linguistic nationalism played an important role, with Bengali being a key tool for national unity and language purity. By elevating Bengali to the highest status, the LPs in Bangladesh overlooked the existence of ethnic minorities and their languages. However, Hamid and Rahman (2019) observe that today's language policies in Bangladesh, curiously enough, display a growing interest in the inclusion of English language in the education system, targeting the development of proficiency in all levels.

Such a turn to English competence might be a consequence of the colonial politics of the language in Bangladesh (which was a former British colony), and represents a kind of symbolic power (BOURDIEU, 1977) that is closely related to one's social status. Moreover, Hamid and Rahman (2019) claim that the changes in language policy in general and English language policy in Bangladesh can be interpreted as a neoliberal narrative in a globalized world. Currently, while the LPs in Bangladesh have shifted toward an emphasis on English in the public and private sector, non-government organizations have promoted actions targeting mother-tongue education, with minority languages being acknowledged as mediums of instruction.

As for the Philippines, it is worth mentioning that the country is home to more than 180 languages (LEWIS *et al*., 2016) and that such a diverse linguistic background has led to different LPs, ranging from Filipino-only policy to bilingual education programs in Filipino-English, and more recently to mother tongue -based multilingual education programs. In this regard, Young and Igcalinos (2019) point out that language policies in the Philippines move between the marginalization of minority language communities because of the increasing power of Filipino and English and attempts to provide mother-tongue education. Therefore, the authors conclude that discussing language policy in the Philippines "[...] involves mediating multiple voices from different sectors of society and identifying ways in which these voices influence one another [...]" (YOUNG; IGCALINOS, 2019, p. 167), besides realizing that those voices "[...] are coloured through experience in a nation that has experienced repeated colonialisation that has obliged the population to use the languages of the colonisers – initially, Spanish and latterly, English" (YOUNG; IGCALINOS, 2019, p. 170).

As noted previously, although one should acknowledge the importance of providing mother-tongue education, it is necessary to bear in mind its consequences in a country that favors the exclusive use of two languages in public domains, such as schools. First, it should be pointed out that by focusing

on minority languages, people might be deprived of developing competence in the widely used languages, in this case, Filipino and English, resulting in unequal access to social and economic resources. Second, though mother-tongue based multilingual education might appear politically, ideologically and pedagogically inclusive, Tupas (2015, p. 115) believes that it should be "[..] mindful of the fact that multilingualism is essentially not characterized by the presence of many languages deemed of equal value or importance [...]". This, combined with the linguistic colonization that resulted in both the marginalization of vernacular languages and oppression of its speakers, might explain why teachers and students tend to devalue their own mother tongue vis-à-vis English and Filipino. And third, the lack of mother-tongue based materials and qualified teachers prevents minority communities from having a solid education in their languages. In short, although language policies in the Philippines have attempted to reflect its multifaceted and multilingual nation, major shifts in the bilingual Filipino-English education have not yet been accomplished due to problems in operationalization and socioeconomic constraints. The Philippines, in this scenario, have displayed the dilemmas of living between fixed and fluid notions of language and policy.

As shown, both participants (D and W) come from multilingual and post-colonial countries, and as such they might have experienced the effects of varying language policies and ideologies. In the next section, drawing on the concepts of translanguaging, *languagised world* and *centripetal* and *centrifugal forces*, I will look at how those experiences with LPs shape the participant's attitudes toward their linguistic practices.

6 Data analysis and discussion

6.1 When "being born in a language" matters

When Jaspers and Madsen (2019) proposed to analyze translingual practices in terms of *languagised worlds*, they had in mind the importance of considering how languages, speakers and places are dynamically interrelated. In this respect, individuals are not only likely to name, label and count languages by drawing on their past experiences, but also to display types of attitudes that may refer to both the objects *invented* by the linguistic sciences and more fluid practices. I shall now have a look at how this *languagised* practice might look like in the following excerpts collected in a questionnaire where W talks about his linguistic background:

> My mother tongue would have to be Min Nan Chinese, but I cannot read or write Min Nan Chinese since I was educated in Mandarin Chinese. I also cannot express myself fully in Min Nan Chinese since I have not much practice here in the Philippines. I can understand better than I speak.

In another quote, it is possible to see that his multilingual repertoire is used differently depending on a number of factors, being family relations one of them:

> We speak Filipino, English, Min Nan Chinese, and Mandarin Chinese. My father talks to me in Min Nan Chinese, Mandarin Chinese, English, and Filipino. My mother talks to me in Min Nan Chinese and Filipino. My sister talks to me in Filipino. Relatives from

> my father's side speak to me in Min Nan Chinese and Filipino, while relatives from my mother's side speak to me in Filipino and Bikol (another Philippine language).

W's experiences with various language resources raise some points that need to be highlighted for the discussion here. First, it was made clear that in multilingual interactions, one has not to adhere to a shared single language. In light of this, communication is taken to be involved by heterogeneous and changing norms. Canagarajah (2013) explains that in multilingual contexts the focus should be on the uses that are non-shared and on the negotiation strategies individuals rely on to make meaning. In this scenario, sharedness and homogeneity are the exception, while "[...] difference is the norm on which communicative success is built" (CANAGARAJAH, 2013, p. 17). Second, the possibility of not relying on a single norm and shared language also points to another important feature of translingual practice: the reaction against monolingual ideologies.

By elevating diversity and difference over shared norms of a single language, W's practices go beyond the equivalence of language, community, and place on which monolingual orientation is based (ZOLIN-VESZ, 2016). These ideologies have implications for identity as well once they define a person a native of one language. In so doing, monolingual ideologies root a person to a community and to a place. In addition, as Canagarajah (2013, p. 22) puts it: "[...] [i]ndividuals are fixed as belonging to this or that identity. [...] In terms of language, we have the ability to speak our 'native' language intuitively and enjoy authority in it".

However, the excerpts complicate this issue by showing that the sense of belonging to a specific language and place cannot be defined by the "privilege of birth". The linguistic clue *would have to be* points to the unstable relationship between W's attitude toward his language resources and his positioning as a native speaker of Min Nan Chinese since, as indicated, he does not possess the linguistic skills that would have made him a competent speaker of that language. In this regard, Canagarajah (2013) tells us that multilinguals' identification through languages is difficult because they develop simultaneous childhood multilingualism. The author claims that "[...] [l]anguage identity is relative to the communities and languages one considers salient in different contexts [...]" (CANAGARAJAH, 2013, p. 40). This is not, however, to reject the idea that a Min Nan Chinese identity could not be real for W, but it is to point out that self-ascription involves much more than just "being born in a language". This will be part of the discussion in the next paragraphs.

While reflecting upon his multilingual repertoire, W expresses his frustration with not knowing how to speak Min Nan Chinese. In the following quote from an online interview, the participant indicates that this feeling might be a consequence of educational policies in the Philippines that exclude individuals' home languages:

> I consider Min Nan Chinese as my mother tongue, but unfortunately I cannot read or write because there is no formal education that promotes the language. I think China does not have it as well since Mandarin is promoted as the national language – I might be wrong about this. Here in the Philippines, Chinese schools also only offer Mandarin Chinese as well. However, even if Mandarin Chinese is used during Chinese class, Min Nan Chinese is usually used to explain/deepen the lessons. I don't think Min Nan Chinese is valued in Philippine education because China does not value it as well. I think this has something to do with the politics of recognition or even politics of language use[4].

[4] It is important to mention that W went to a Chinese Filipino school which focused its attention to nurturing Filipinos aware of their Chinese heritage. However, since 1971, those schools have followed Filipino's educational system, which made Chinese Mandarin only a language course in the curriculum.

In this fragment, once again we see W's struggle to self-identify as a speaker of Min Nan Chinese. Although he claims the language as his, the fact that he is not able to speak or write in it leads to a sense of frustration (*but unfortunately*). All of this -the need to be represented by a language and the negative feeling of not being linguistically competent- highlights the material effects of the colonial invention of subjectivity as stated by Makoni and Pennycook (2007). Thus, the very status of Min Nan Chinese as a mother-tongue as well as the failure of not displaying a native-like proficiency not only represents the implications of such inventions in the material (and sensorial) domain of language effects but also underlies what W believes about language and identity.

On the other hand, Makoni and Pennycook (2007) claim that in order to rethink our understanding of language as a system and a definable entity, we need strategies of *disinvention*. The translingual strategy individuals employ to construct meaning in the classes might be an example of this practice, as indicated in: *However, even when Mandarin is encouraged during the classes, Min Nan Chinese is used to explain or deepen a subject.* By drawing on individuals' repertoires, this *resistance strategy* (CANAGARAJAH; DOVCHIN, 2019) challenges local LPs that impose a monolingual orientation in education by allowing multilinguals to celebrate their identity and linguistic resources right under the noses of dominant communities (in this case, the school or major educational policies). Therefore, although the Mandarin-only policy is imposed at the expense of individuals' home languages, reinforcing ideologies firmly based on monolingual principles, the real practices that take place in the classrooms transgress such ideologies and open up alternatives to a homogeneous language teaching. Yet, this tension between language policies calls for a more detailed exploration.

As noted at the beginning of this paper, Spolsky's (2004) language ideology framework addresses the complex relationship between beliefs, practices, and policies. As far as beliefs are concerned, we can see that educational LPs in the Philippines are still grounded in monolingual ideologies, that is, the idea that languages should be kept separated from one another (mother-tongues on one side and target languages on the other). When it comes to practice, however, we observe that people's actual use of communicative resources challenges whatever policies and beliefs are put forward in the classroom. Such a scenario is linked to Leffa's (2013) argument that LP goes beyond what linguists do for we act politically whenever we affect people's lives with our decisions concerning languages. So, this tension between macro and micro language policies lies at the heart of heteroglossic practices themselves since, in Bakhtin's terms, every utterance is part of a struggle between contradictory points of views and ideological forces.

Such a contradiction is expressed, on one hand, through W's investment in a particular static identity due to family issues as Min Nan Chinese is his parents' language as pointed out in one of the questionnaires (*Since I am born to a Chinese family in the Philippines, I was exposed to both Min Nan Chinese and Filipino first*). In this case, the idea of *a language* as an entity is evoked as a tool through which individuals can claim membership and orient themselves in terms of identity. On the other hand, the practices W engaged in school relied on the diverse resources he brought to class regardless of the imposed linguistic boundaries, and consequently expressed a more fluid orientation to language. Therefore, fixity and fluidity are intertwined in the *centripetal* and *centrifugal forces* of language, with the former characterizing the monolingual principles imposed on language use, and the latter the openness to translingual practices that embrace individuals' linguistic repertoires. I will elaborate on this tension a little further while I discuss data about the second participant.

6.2 What does it mean to "fight for language"?

While LPs in the Philippines have tentatively shed light on the importance of a multilingual education, in Bangladesh they have traditionally moved toward nationalist views of language and identity. As noted in previous sections, however, this has changed. LPs in Bangladesh have turned their attention to the spread of English by stressing its role in the economic development of the country. Such a movement between nationalist and neoliberal principles underlie D's positionings toward his language practices, as we shall see below when he comments, in an online interview, the sociolinguistic reality of Bangladesh:

> Ninety-eight percent of the people in Bangladesh speak Bengali as their mother tongue. It is a monolingual country. Our struggle for independence was based on linguistic nationalism or language based nationalism. [...] Ability to speak or use English shows that you are educated or from a privileged class. [...] [W]e fought for language. UNESCO declared 21st February as International Mother Language Day to honour our achievement and sacrifices. We are the only nation on earth who sacrificed lives for our mother tongue.

D made it clear that the monolingual ideology plays a role in Bengalis' perspective about language (*It is a monolingual country*). As mentioned earlier, such an attitude overlooks the presence of minority languages which can also be indicated in the following statement that shows the participant's attempt to answer the question of how many languages are spoken in the country: (*I cannot give you the exact number but it is about 10 to 15. They are from one language, Bengali*). On the other hand, D is aware of the power of nationalist discourse in the country (*Our struggle for independence was based on linguistic nationalism or language based nationalism*) and seems to recognize it as the foundation of Bengalis' *achievement* and *sacrifice* over their linguistic authenticity and autonomy. In this fragment, D takes us back to the language movement of 1952 in which students and intellectuals fought against the imposition of Urdu as the sole language of the then Dominion of Pakistan, ignoring the fact that in East Pakistan, Bengali speakers were the majority. Such an episode led to the Liberation War of 1971, an armed conflict between West Pakistan (now Pakistan) and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Fighting for language, in that sense, has a strong connection with national identity, with Bengali being the symbol of solidarity and unification.

In view of the above, it is worth recalling Makoni and Pennycook's (2007) perspective about the material effects of language invention when they say that:

> [w]hile it is useful to understand languages as inventions, it is also crucial to recognize that the effects of language inventions are very real. [...] [T]his is where we generally part company with those fighting for language rights and multilingualism, since the struggle is all too often conducted on a terrain on which the existence of languages as real entities is left unquestioned. While we may support some aspects of these struggles as political movements, we would argue that the battle also has to be an epistemological one, and that unless this issue is adequately addressed, the very real effects of language inventions will continue to be felt by different communities. (MAKONI; PENNYCOOK, 2007, p. 21)

So, for Bengalis, language and identity came at a price. It was not given but achieved through fight and loss. Because of that, LPs in Bangladesh still reflect this "one language one state" ideology that disre-

gards the linguistic situation of minor ethnic groups. According to Rahman et al. (2019, p. 3), ironically, "[...] [t]his policy was widely hailed politically although it was a similar act that once Pakistanis committed against Bengalis by trying to impose Urdu as the state language of Pakistan (East and West) [...]".

Another point that needs to be highlighted concerns the role that English language plays in the country. By stating that: *Ability to speak or use English shows that you are educated or from a privileged class*, D makes it evident that this language indexes status and knowledge. However, Rahman et al. (2019, p. 5) contend that "[...] [i]f access to English brings positive benefits to individuals, then English should be made equally accessible to all citizens". On the contrary, the authors point out that "[...] language access policy has created social inequity within the population since access to English is not equal in rural and urban areas [...]". Such an ideology seems to orient D's attitude toward English language to a great extent, as we can see in the following: "I feel so confident in speaking English as my English is better than many educated native speakers. My U.S. wife has certified me that I am better than most of the Americans in English."

What is interesting about D's comments on his proficiency in English is that such an analysis is indebted to the endorsement of a native speaker of the language, meaning, his American wife. According to Rahman et al. (2019), this ideology has its roots in the colonial past when Bangladesh was a former British colony. These authors claim that "[...] the Indian sub-continent still bears the legacy of British colonial norms and values" (RAHMAN et al., 2019, p. 2), and because of that speaking like or *better than many educated native speakers* assigns D a privileged position inside and (perhaps) outside Bangladesh.

Though D's metalinguistic comments have displayed more fixed ideas of language and identity, it was possible to see that the participant is also an advocate of fluidity and language diversity. When asked for his opinion on the use of multiple languages in daily interactions, D stated that:

> I do mix really when I teach in Bangladesh so that they can connect me, and think that I am one of them. I do not think [mixing languages is interrupting]. I think it clarifies many problems, adds diversities, connects audiences, and makes others curious. It also brings some entertainment in context. It is very helpful. Sometimes in teaching a target language a proper word is not coming, but a simple native word can define the situation. It is a clear advantage for both teachers and students to understand the situation or lesson.

In this fragment, D outlines some of the most widely known outcomes of a translingual stance (GARCÍA; JOHNSON; SELTZER, 2017). We can see that he expresses openness to language diversity in order to make students develop a stronger connection with the teaching process. Such an approach to language has been defined as *translingual sensibility*, that is, "[...] an understanding of language as a fluid and unbounded social practice [...]" (SELTZER, 2020, p. 9). According to Seltzer (2020, p. 9), *translingual sensibility* represents the receptiveness to the theoretical and epistemological foundations of translanguaging perspective, and in so doing, it "[...] highlights an actively transgressive element of students' language practices and positionalities that speaks directly against deficit language ideologies [...]".

We can infer that though D relies on more static notions of language and identity due to Bangladesh's colonial past and its nationalist-based language policies, he also shows an appreciation for translingual strategies to make sense of his world. As well as W's, D's attitudes not only move between forces that aim to both unify and decentralize language use, but also call into question research that has been conducted at the expense of speakers' local knowledge (CANAGARAJAH, 2005). In this regard, the reliance

on the objectivity of (socio)linguistic science tends to fail to notice what people actually think and do with languages. The participants' perspectives about their own linguistic identity help to make a point about this:

> I am multilingual because I do speak a number of languages. I like to use English and Filipino as these are the languages I am most comfortable with. I do not necessarily dislike speaking Mandarin and Min Nan Chinese, but there is some difficulty for me to speak both languages since I do not have a lot of practice. (W)

> I consider myself as Bilingual basically though I know another two languages, Arabic and Hindi. But I speak English and Bengali often. (D)

As we can see, both individuals have varying perspectives about what it means to be bi/multilingual. W considers himself multilingual because he speaks *a number of languages*, though he claims to feel more comfortable speaking two: English and Filipino. In turn, D says he is bilingual because he speaks English and Bengali *often*. In both cases, the participants did not make it clear whether knowing Mandarin, Min Nan Chinese, Arabic, or Hindi is included in their definition of bi/multilingual speakers, nor did they agree on the frequency it should take to be considered bi/multilingual (*a lot of practice/often*), suggesting that the representations they hold about themselves might not refer to the language-objects and labels (mono, bi, multi) invented by the linguistic sciences (PENNYCOOK; OTSUJI, 2019).

The data discussed here indicate the complexity of language policies as they interact with changing beliefs and practices, attesting that communication moves between fixed and fluid views of language. As discussed, the LPs in the Philippines and in Bangladesh are seen as means of reinforcing the ideological status of the countries as two independent nation-states, and as a way to both preserve aspects of national identity, and reveal individuals' sense of cultural, social, national, and ethnic affiliation. Consequently, the debate on educational and national language use vacillates between those perspectives.

With the aforementioned issues, this text argues for an alternative translingual orientation to multilingual interaction, one that does not celebrate fluidity over fixity as if fixed ascription of language and identity ceased to exist (PENNYCOOK; OTSUJI, 2019). Such a translingual perspective can be compared to Otsuji and Pennycook's (2010) studies on metrolingualism, since it can be conceived as a paradoxical practice where fixity and discreteness (as outcomes of the monolingual paradigm), and fluidity and hybridity (as features of contemporary language use) intersect and co-constitute each other. What is needed, indeed, quoting Jaspers and Madsen (2019), is the realization that language sciences should concern themselves with explaining the transformative potential of all language use, regardless of its fixed or fluid nature, without assuming that "[...] multiplicity and hybridity are necessarily good and that essence and authenticity are necessarily bad" (JASPERS; MADSEN, 2019, p. 19).

Finally, paramount to the study of LP under the rubric of translanguaging is the possibility of transforming the social and educational structures that still violate southern people's subjectivities and ideologies. In so doing, scholars will be able to situate multilingual education in broader sociopolitical frameworks as a way to investigate the extent to which languages are still unequally distributed across individuals and policies.

7 Concluding remarks

In the fields of sociolinguistics, applied linguistics and language education, there has been a critical rethinking of the monolingual paradigm and older conceptualizations of language, with notions like translanguaging proving to be relevant when it comes to examining the complexity of contemporary communicative practices. However, while such proposals have prompted some reflection, they have not gone without criticism. Underlying much of the critics' argument is a concern with focus: if multilinguals still rely on traditional ascriptions of language and identity to orient themselves in their practices, it is questionable to study language by only stressing fluidity and hybridity. In light of this, this text aimed to investigate how translanguaging perspective could benefit from considering the role played by both fixed and fluid notions of language in research and practice, while debating that what one can claim as fluid and fixed might not be related to the objects of linguistic sciences. Drawing on data from questionnaires and interviews conducted with multilingual speakers from post-colonial South-East Asian countries, I discussed how micro and macro language policies are intertwined with contradictory language ideologies and I shed light not only on how multilinguals' local knowledge is shaped by fixed and static notions of language in institutional and classroom settings but also on how their linguistic repertoires are mobilized strategically depending on the ecology of language practices. Therefore, while the research participants seem aware of the language policies promoted by their home countries, they also employ strategies that call into question monolingual ideologies. This indicates that when we engage with multilinguals' language ideologies, we are able to see that even though they live in a world in which language labels and enumerations are a common reality in everyday language talk, their understanding of what those language labels mean may be also fluid.

A central concern of this text was that in order to understand the dynamics of translingual practices, we need to learn that normativity and pressure toward uniformity are also part of language use. Bakhtin's notions of *centripetal* and *centrifugal forces* helped us to see that peoples' perceptions of language and identity are by no means only fixed nor only fluid, and that if we are to investigate language interactions drawing on translingual tenets, we need to be open to consider that practices that aim to homogenize language are also in play. All this suggests that we, as (socio)(applied)linguists, need to do a lot more careful work about the ideologies that underlie our academic work and everyday language practice. In this sense, this text not only showed how individuals' *languagised worlds* do play a role in the negotiation of policies but also called for more research on how policy and practice can affect each other so that language is viewed in heteroglossic terms, that is, in both fixed and fluid ways.

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