Translanguaging, place and complexity

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Abstract

Prevalent approaches to classroom languaging and bilingual education interpret the practices of multilingual groups of people through a monolingual lens that obscures the fluid languaging and semiotic practices of contemporary communities who engage in dynamic semiotic and linguistic practices, rather than 'add' one language to another in the form of a double monolingualism. The paper examines the arguments for and constraints upon a translanguaging paradigm as a pedagogic strategy in classrooms and it considers how translanguaging practices have different consequences in Southern settings as contrasted with Euro- or North American contexts. The paper critically examines a spatiotemporal or scalar perspective on language-linked social inequalities and language evaluation processes in school as an account for why the fluid language practices characteristic of everyday interaction and of certain kinds of learning-helpful interaction in classrooms do not transfer to a rationale for translanguaging becoming the norm in schooling. The research finds that innovative and emerging translanguaging practices happen "under the covers" as it were, and make learning possible under constrained conditions. Researching classroom practices as a rhizometically assembled network of actors, materials, resources and practices, in their complexity and particularity, helps us to concretely identify possible points of attack to tackle persisting educational inequality.

Introduction

Excerpt 1: Oliver Twist Exam-lesson

Teacher (reading): Oliver was even less happy in the workhouse than he had been with Mrs Mann. He now had to work, which made him even hungrier.

Teacher (explaining): It means that before Oliver went to stay at the workhouse, he first stayed with Mrs Mann. And in Mrs Mann's house he didn't have to work, but now, since he is staying at the workhouse, in the workhouse Oliver has to work now. It makes him even more hungrier. *Imlambisa ngakumbi into yokusebenza* (translation: it makes him more hungry, this thing of working)

The teacher here in a school in Khayelitsha, Cape Town grapples to make sense for her Xhosa-speaking students of the complex past-tenses and comparative adjectivals in this reading passage of an English exam (which has indeed travelled far in space-time and across socio-cultural contexts to become a test item here) before giving them a Xhosa-language paraphrase of the key point they should remember in preparation for tackling the exam questions. When she does that she transgresses her principal's explicit instruction that 'they mustn't code-switch' in class, (i.e., teachers should not make use of familiar Xhosa language resources to clarify unfamiliar English language and content for students). She also transgresses the Department of Education's expectation that students will encounter specific test material as previously unseen content. In an interview, she tells us that during the week before the test day she explicitly coaches the students about the content of the upcoming exam and also at the state of the exam itself (as in Excerpt 1 above). Here, then, is one snapshot example of how state education delivery systems in many countries are presently challenged by the contrast between the semiotic repertoires that students from sometimes diverse backgrounds bring to class and

institutional insistence on monolingual instruction and standardised testing through the medium of a standard national or international language. It also starts to suggest for us that neither language nor testing in this location are quite the standard practices that an outsider might assume to be the case.

It is now a familiar theme that teachers in Europe, North America and Australia, as examples of Northern countries, increasingly encounter linguistically and socio-culturally diverse groups of students in their classrooms and lecture halls (Canagarajah, 2011; Jaspers, 2014; Creese and Blackledge, 2015; Leeman, 2015; Stroud and Prinsloo, 2015; García and Li Wei, 2017; Ollerhead et al, 2018). In one response to such diversity, *translanguaging* as an idea and an ideal has come to prominence over the last decade, in recognition of fluid languaging dynamics in everyday 'multilingual contexts' and also as a key part of a strategy in schools and universities that aims to acknowledge and tap the linguistic background resources of multilingual students so as to enhance their educational experience (García 2009; García and Li Wei, 2014; Creese and Blackledge (2010; 2015). Outside education, sociolinguists write about 'superdiversity' in European and North American cities, describing changing language dynamics in terms of 'multi-dimensional fluidity and excesses of language-ing (language behavior)' (Silverstein, 2014, 2). Translanguaging, in this view, invokes the idea of a diversified, less-scripted and more scattered form of languaging than prevailing notions of multilingualism and bilingualism have previously captured (Arnaut and Spotti, 2015, Silverstein, 2014; Blommaert and Backus, 2011; Blommaert and Rampton, 2011; Vertovec, 2007). In this article, we review the arguments for and constraints upon translanguaging as a pedagogic strategy in classrooms and we contrast Southern and Northern dynamics, in this regard. In discussion of data on classroom teaching in Khayelitsha, Cape Town, we apply a spatiotemporal scalar theoretical perspective from a sociolinguistics of globalisation (Blommaert, 2010) and consider what the limits of such a perspective are for understanding the tensions between translanguaging and monolingual standardisation practices in the classroom setting that we examine. We conclude by making a preliminary case for a more performative and dynamic perspective on these concerns than a scalar perspective would seem to allow.

Translanguaging and 'seeing like a state'

Proponents of translanguaging such as García (2009), García and Li Wei (2014) and Creese and Blackledge (2010; 2015) argue that prevalent approaches to classroom languaging and bilingual education continue to interpret the linguistic practices of local communities through a monolingual lens that obscures the fluid languaging of these communities whom García and colleagues see as engaging in dynamic linguistic practices rather than as adding one language to another in the form of a double monolingualism (Flores and Rosa 2015). Sociolinguists' studies of superdiversity and fluid languaging/translanguaging have most commonly focused on everyday, market, shopping, shop window or other informal trading settings, in European and North American settings (Creese and Blackledge, 2017; Blommaert, 2012; Blommaert, Collins and Slembrouk, 2005; Leeman and Modan, 2009). More regulated and institutionalised contexts in these same locations, where fluid languaging might be less prevalent, have received less attention, with the exception of educational contexts, where several researchers have gone to non-state rather than state school settings to study translanguaging in community-run religious schools, 'heritage schools' or in designated 'heritage classes' in schools and universities (Creese and Blackledge, 2010; Hornberger, 2005; Leeman, 2015; Owadally, 2011).

 In analysing classroom language in a school with a diversity of languages spoken by the students, Jaspers (2015: 110) argued that Belgium along with other Eurozone countries displayed, paradoxically, 'an unequivocal love for multilingualism' in response to the growing diversity in the national population, coupled with 'an equal affection for monolingualisms' in classrooms and local government. He explained this paradoxical orientation, drawing on a scalar

perspective, by suggesting that it 'spatializes linguistic diversity through locating multilingualism in the individual (as 'skills') or in international communication, while it zones off the national territory as monolingual'. In so doing, he suggested, nation-states can maintain that they function in a globalized world but are also still viable political entities with a clear identity, as indexed by the health of the national language. As Heller (2007) argued, the modernist project of the last two centuries amongst national-states in Europe and North America has been to create standard registers of previously vernacular languages.

Similarly, Silverstein (2014, 5) points out that when people ask: 'What language do you speak?', they mean 'what denotational code(s) – centrally, grammatically conforming words and expressions – for representing things and states-of-affairs in the world do you control?'. From this perspective, asking persons what language(s) they speak, involves what Silverstein describes as 'seeing like a state', assuming that they speak a standard national language reflecting their ethno-linguistic identity, and assuming that arriving immigrants will be oriented to a national standard language from their place of exit on arrival and will gradually orientate to the national standard of their new place of residence, whether by immediate immersion or through remedial bilingual educational programmes over generations. A 'standard language' in this statist view, as Silverstein describes it, is a 'voice from nowhere', occupying 'top-and-centre' as a register for denotation, from which perspective, variations and deviations can be identified as dialects or corruptions that are seen also as placed – from here or there, unlike the Standard. These tensions between heightened awareness of fluidity and diversity on the one hand, and standardisation and monolingual processes on the other are an important part of our focus in this study. We turn now to look more closely at how these tensions and dynamics are explained through attention to literature on sociolinguistic scales.

The spatial turn: spatiotemporal scales and structured normativity
Standardised language regimes in schooling set a monolingual register of a national or international language as the formal code for writing and testing in school. A spatiotemporal or scalar perspective on language-linked social inequalities and language-evaluation processes explains these inequalities and processes as happening in systemic though diversified ways that shape and contain the use and relative prestige of varying language resources in specific contexts (Blommaert, 2015; Arnaut and Spotti, 2015; Prinsloo, 2017). Scales theory in sociolinguistics follows Bourdieu (1991) in thinking about language (and other semiotic modalities) as embodying social capital in distinct ways within specific social economies, with language hierarchies that are socio-culturally shaped, spatially distributed and systemically structured. The scales model in a global sociolinguistics draws closely from World Systems Analysis, in social geography (Wallerstein, 1974) and takes the global economy as the highest scale in a cascade of scales, layered from higher- to lower-levels, which include the nation-state and smaller localities below that. A key premise in Blommaert's (2010) sociolinguistics of globalisation, following Silverstein's (2004) cue, is that language-in-use is always more than the denotational codes of lexicon, grammar and syntax and is always also connotational or indexical, i.e., it always points to socio-political and cultural interests which are identifiable in the ways that speakers and writers express themselves as recognisably certain kinds of people engaged in identifiable socially-situated actions and activities. Such repertoires, habits and expectations are both the effects of and also the shapers of social power (Blommaert, 2007). As Blommaert, Collins and Slembrouk (2005, 198) explain this scalar perspective, 'multilingualism is not what individuals have and don't have, but what the environment, as structured determinations and interactional emergence, enables and disables'. From a scalar perspective, linguistic repertoires are at work in specific social and spatial domains, they are layered and stratified and they operate at scale levels, such that some are effective globally (e.g., varieties of Standard English);

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some regionally (varieties of Swahili across East Africa) and some only locally (including languages restricted to small numbers of speakers in local communities as well as locally specific varieties of 'bigger' languages; as well as locally enregistered mixes of 'named languages'). The sociolinguistic scales model suggests that each context (local, regional, national, global) has its own 'orders of indexicality' which assign meanings, values and statuses to diverse codes. Lower level processes operate in specific spaces in shorter timespans, by way of 'events' or episodes in the daily languaging lives of individuals and places, whereas these in turn are shaped by the longer rhythms of particular social or institutional histories, the placed or situated dynamics of cultural and linguistic practices which are in turn shaped by, respond to and have effect on the almost timeless processes of the *longue durée,* the long-term cycles of human history. From this perspective, translanguaging practices and the inherent linguistic fluidity on which they are based, are lower-scale phenomena, happening in places in the shorter time-spans, or 'events' of daily languaging in the lives of individuals and local groups, while 'standard languages', 'bigger languages', 'named languages' and localised registers operate with the relative stability and inertia that characterise the longer rhythms of identifiable social groups, both larger and smaller ones. A spatio-temporal approach to sociolinguistic phenomena as scaled and hierarchical presents a problem for the advocates of a fluid languaging or translanguaging commitment to language in schools. The sociolinguistic scales model offers an explanation as to why a recognition of the fluid language practices characteristic of everyday interaction and of certain kinds of learning-helpful interaction in classrooms do not easily transfer to a rationale for translanguaging becoming the norm in schooling, if less fluid languaging practices are the ones that have currency beyond schooling, in workplaces and across various social institutions. Commitments to monolingual standard language use in schools, along with centralised testing, are all explicable from a scalar perspective as the workings of power, where power is understood to work hierarchically or from the top-down, and is sustained by the systemic effects of the modern world order as divided up between centres and peripheries. Thus, Blommaert et al (2005) identified students' attempts at writing in Standard English in a township school in Cape Town as featuring grammatical, spelling and other deviations and found the same features in teachers' writing, and took these findings as evidence of what they call 'peripheral normativity'. The school was seen to be located on the social periphery and the students along with their teachers were seen to be stuck there without access to higher scale linguistic resources (Standard English) that would enable their upward social mobility. These authors suggest that the production of 'local, deviant normativity' is a problem, because it remains 'insufficient' in terms of dominant norms and is at the same time a solution, because it allows for productive teaching practices in local schools. Canagarajah (2015), on the basis of his own study at a school in another Cape Town township, disagreed with Blommaert and colleagues' view that teachers and students were inevitably 'stuck' or 'locked' at 'one scale–level'. Instead, he found in the texts of the students a *recognition* of different norms, e.g. the possibility of hybrid writing on a school Facebook site, using a mix of English and Xhosa language resources, abbreviations and icons; but also an emerging sense in classwork of the genre requirements of school essay writing in Standard English, albeit from a very constrained starting point. With this debate in mind, as to whether there might be limits to the explanatory helpfulness of a strongly hierarchical and systemic model of scalar distribution of language and power, we set out the wider linguistic context for our own study. Following our discussion of school data, we consider how a scalar approach to translanguaging and monolingual standard language practices might require some review and modification and we suggest a more rhizomatic approach to these concerns than what a hierarchical scales model encourages.

Languages as migrants

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In an ironic reversal of European and North American dynamics, which suggest that migrants are people who cross into cultural and linguistic spaces that are seen as formerly homogenous, it is the dominant denotational codes (or languages) and not the people that are migrants in Khayelitsha, (and other Southern contexts), having crossed into these settings as legacies of colonialism and conquest. Migrating along with them have come the administrative apparatuses of Northern modernity, including the curricula, pedagogies, practices and materials of schooling. Children in Khayelitsha, along with others in ex-colonial settings, have to 'leave behind' the language/semiotic repertoire, 'ways of knowing' (Heath, 1983) and practices that they grew up with in their homes and local communities to learn at school through hegemonic standard languages, material and semiotic practices that earlier arrived as aliens in this setting and have since taken distinctive root. We can ask, then, how translanguaging practices might or might not be a different thing with different consequences in such settings as contrasted with Euro- or North American contexts, where the configuration of people, place, semiotic resources and social dynamics are so different from each other.

As Harries (2007), Errington (2008) and Mamdani (1996; 2012) have analysed it, colonial linguists of the 19th and 20th centuries ignored the variability and complexity of the language resources and social dynamics that they encountered when they chose to name distinct languages that identified distinct groups of African people. These linguists were influenced by and drew from 19th century European political and intellectual processes where regional/linguistic hegemonies were constructed around the notion of national languages, applying a 'Herderian' conception of a world of independent one-language-one-culture units (Pennycook, 2018; Scollon and Scollon, 2007). Apartheid ruling ideology in South Africa drew directly on these linguists' constructs of ethno-linguistic identities. Under apartheid ideology, Africans living in South Africa could enjoy political rights in their 'homelands' or 'Bantustans', each designated for an identified tribe or ethnic group with its own language, under the apartheid myth of 'separate but equal'. Post-apartheid governmentality has somewhat clumsily retained this earlier commitment to discrete languages and declared nine distinct 'African languages' to all be 'official languages' of equal status with each other and with the ex-colonial English language as well as with Afrikaans, the latter two having been the languages of administration in apartheid South Africa (Prinsloo, 2012; McKinney, 2016). These policy declarations of equality across eleven supposedly distinct denotational codes are not yet borne out in administrative practice, in government or in education, however. There, standard South African English remains the predominant code or national *lingua franca* for public communication, written documentation and teaching and testing in educational institutions, with disastrous consequences for the large majority of students who lack fluent access to this code and also lack teachers who are trained and skilled in helping them acquire it (Makoe and McKinney, 2014). While most speakers of the designated 'African languages' in South Africa are fluid languagers, able to work with the denotational and interactive codes of two, three or more of those designated languages, their fluid urban languaging resourcefulness does not help them when they are required to school in standard monolingual English with which they are not familiar (Probyn, 2005). The structuring of curricula and assessment practices in school runs directly counter to the linguistic facilities of both students and teachers and schooling is thus hard work and a challenge under these conditions, reflected in national test results, as was shown in the National Schools Effectiveness study (Taylor, 2011). Here, 20% of candidates were shown to do very well and 80% very badly indeed, with a very strong correlation between success and whether they were 'First Language English speakers' or not, and also whether they were taught by teachers who were fluent users of Standard English, or not.

Khayelitsha township in Cape Town, where our study is located, reflects the endurance of spatial segregation as a legacy of apartheid urban planning, in that the levels of poverty and

employment drastically reduce the mobility of residents, many of whom infrequently travel to the city and suburban centres where English language dominance prevails. The denotational code in Khayelitsha is predominantly an urban Xhosa variety, featuring the morphological and syntactical resources of Xhosa but frequently merged with words and phrases associated with other named languages (predominantly English and Afrikaans) that are used freely and strategically (see Dowling and Krause, 2018). The translingual competencies that characterize Khayelitshan languaging - the assembling and re-shaping of local as well as global language resources - however, neither give community members access to Standard English nor Standard Xhosa. When students test for all their subjects in Standard English exams, they undoubtedly do much worse in relation to others, for whom Standard English is not an obstacle (Probyn, 2009; Prinsloo, 2012).

The data discussed here are from a school-based ethnographic-style case study carried out over eight months by Lara-Stephanie Krause, the co-author of this article. She recorded language use in selected intermediate phase classrooms (Grade 4 to Grade 7) and carried out interviews and discussions with teachers, recorded with their permission, which focussed on their language ideas and values, their perceptions of their language use in class and also their comments on recorded extracts of classroom talk (see also Krause, 2014; Krause and Prinsloo, 2016; and Dowling and Krause, 2018).

The priming of struggling students

The lead quotation from our data at the beginning of this article shows a teacher in a Grade 5 English classroom helping her students to understand the comprehension text of an exam, from which they will have to answer exam questions in a moment. As we discuss below, when looking at further data around this exam-preparatory activity, the teacher has developed a response to centralised generic testing practices. After having received the exam a week before the test is due to be sat, she teaches her students the language and content of the exam, without actually telling them explicitly what to write. Here she describes her practice to the researcher:

Excerpt 2: Interview with Grade 5 teacher

> R = Researcher T = Teacher
> **R:** Mhm because sometimes I've heard you say that you've said: 'We've read this story four times, two or three times, before we writing the exam and you still don't understand.'
> **T:** Yes.
> **R:** So when did you do that reading?
> **T:** When the paper comes, when I receive the paper on Friday, then I make the copy of the story. We'll read the paper during the reading time.
> **R:** On a Monday?
> **T:** On the same day. Then we read it again on Monday.
> **R:** And again on Tuesday.
> **T:** And again on Tuesday, before we write it.
> **R:** And the department wants you to do that?
> **T:** No I chose to do it. No-one told me that I can do that. I just thought I must give them a chance to understand the story more, to see the words, to be able to understand. Because if you can come with the paper today, they are seeing the story for the first time, they will write nothing. They won't understand at all.

She is convinced that, if the students were simply confronted with the exam without such preparation, 'they will write nothing. They won't understand at all.' This account of this township school teacher hints at a rupture in the logic of the centralized assessment system. The designers of the assessment expect that the test will be administered uniformly across sites. However, we see that the exam activity is being re-shaped by the teacher in this township

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school. Asked what would happen if she did not do this language-coaching on the exam content, she says that 'they would have written something that is totally out of the question'.

How the re-shaping actually happens both before the exam as well as in the exam is illustrated firstly by our opening quote, where the comprehension story is explained translingually at the start of the exam, and secondly, by the following data piece that shows the teacher mediating one of the exam questions about that same comprehension story to the class, so that they can write their responses:

Excerpt 3: Exam question 1st exam

> T (reading): Explain what the effect was of Oliver's request for more food.
>
> T (explaining): *Kwaye kwabangela ntoni ukucela kokunye ukutya kukaOliver? Laa nto wayenzayo uOliver yokuhamba aye kwi-servant, aye ukucela more food, kwaye kwabangela ntoni?* [Translation: And it resulted in what, the requesting of Oliver for more food? That thing that Oliver did, of going to the servant to ask for more food, what did it result in?)]

In the written task, an unfamiliar English term, 'request', is embedded in a complex prepositional phrase 'of Oliver's request for more food' which in turn is embedded in a relative clause, along with the equally unfamiliar 'effect'. English prepositions – even in very simple sentences – are difficult for students to master because they do not have clear correspondences in Xhosa syntax (Nurse and Philippson, 2003, 31). They would likely have trouble making the connection between 'effect', 'of' and 'Oliver's request for more food' in trying to understand the written task. The word order carries signals that are not grasped by students who don't have fluid access to the denotational codes. 'Apostrophe s', as appears obvious to fluent readers of English, sometimes indicates a possessive and at other times represents a shortened form of the verb 'is'. Without a clear grasp of context and content, students would probably be at a loss to make sense of the question. Recognizing the difficulty of the task instruction, the teacher clarifies it for the students. She translates 'request' with 'ukucela', which can either be understood as the verb 'to request' or as a noun 'the requesting'. She uses it here as a noun with all the corresponding agreement markers of that noun class in Xhosa, where 'agreement, both anaphoric and grammatical, radiates out from the head noun across the noun phrase and into the verb' (Nurse, Philippson 2003, 31). One of these markers is 'ku-' that changes into 'kw-' when it meets with a vowel like in 'kwabangela', which translates as 'it (= the request) resulted in'. Because the 'kw-' marks a connection to that class of noun in Xhosa, it is now unambiguous for students that 'resulted in' (kwabangela) refers to 'request' (ukucela). 'Ukucela' then further agrees with 'okunye ukutya' (more food), clarified by the agreement marker 'kwa-', reduced to 'k-' when prefixed to 'okunye' (more; kokunye = for more). This agreement morphology now leaves no doubt that what is in focus here is 'the request for more food'.

Finally, in the possessive construction 'kukaOliver', the agreement marker 'ku-' reappears, linking 'kaOliver' (of Oliver) back to 'ukucela kokunye ukutya' (the request for more food), so that the students take away: 'Oliver's request for more food'. The teacher thus draws on syntactical affordances of Xhosa to explain the meaning or denotational code of English syntax. This example illustrates how the students' familiar languaging practices are differently organised than Standard English, which relies on context and syntactical signals to express object relations, whereas urban Xhosa languaging operates with a system of agreement markers (or: 'referential tracking devices' (Hapselmath2001:1130)), which, even without their understanding the full context, allows listeners to track referents throughout an utterance. Such local languaging particularities remain unconsidered in a one-size-fits-all centralized assessment system.

Another example comes from a different English exam observed three months after the Oliver Twist exam. The exam structure is similar, with a narrative extract followed by questions. The story is called 'I don't want advice' and tells the story of a girl unwilling to take advice. After

having answered questions about when and where the story takes place and who the main characters are, the children are then confronted with a more demanding multiple-choice exercise, which the teacher decides to help them with.

Excerpt 4: Exam question 2nd exam

Key: Exam question and multiple-choice answers in bold; teacher talk in normal print

1. T : Number 1 says: **Which of these words or phrases would not describe Jen?** Listen carefully, I know you like to make mistakes. Here they want the thing that is not Jen's characteristic, that does not explain Jen, that has nothing to do with Jen. You know how Jen is *mos, nê*?

2. L: Yes! (some students in chorus)

3. T: Here they want the opposite of Jen's character. **Which of these words or phrases would not describe Jen?** You are going to put an X inside the box next to the correct answer.

A) **Jen was a headstrong girl.** ☿

B) **She was open minded.** ☿

C) **She was stubborn.** ☿

D) **She is set in her ways.** ☿

4. T: You are going to write X inside the box next to one correct answer. Do you want me to read this question in Xhosa?

5. L: Yes! (some students in chorus)

6. T: Because I know it is a little bit confusing. *Apha bafuna into uJen angeyiyo. Uyiyeke le echaza ubunjalo bukaJen. Bafuna le angeyiyo uJen*. [Here they want the thing that Jen is not. Leave that which describes Jen's true self. They want that which she is not.]

The exam question in line 1 features the English conditional negative form 'would not', which will be unfamiliar to the majority of these students. It is, however, essential for students to understanding this tricky question, which does not ask for the attributes that *do* describe Jen but for the one that *does not.* The teacher does not translate the English question (line 1) but reformulates it (line 6). Xhosa words for 'words' and 'phrases' do not feature at all. She explains what 'they' (whoever set the exam) want (bafuna = they want). As in Excerpt 3., above, Xhosa resources allow for clear referential tracking: *angeyiyo* = a (that s/he) + *nge* (negative) + *yiyo* (it is that (referring to i*nto*) thing), making sure the students know that what is asked for here is the thing that she (Jen) is not. The teacher moves on, alerting the students to leave those answers that describe *ubunjalo bukaJen* (Jen's true self). Translanguaging allows the teacher to clarify opaque concepts from Standard English like 'true self' by using familiar local proxies (here: *ubunjalo*). This way she gives her students a chance at understanding what is being asked of them – a task that would have been unmanageable were she to stick exclusively to the prescribed language regime. The teacher does not give the students any additional hints here to help them decipher the multiple choice answers. Even though the vocabulary used here is very advanced ('stubborn', 'headstrong', 'set in her ways'), all three words/expressions feature in the actual story, which – just like the Oliver Twist story – was read and discussed several times in class before the actual exam date. The teacher therefore appears confident that the students can now work with these expressions, find them in the text and tick the correct box without additional mediation on her part. This shows how the teacher's translanguaging is differentiated and strategic as she uses it only where she deems it necessary, based on her understanding of the discrepancy between the language resources her students have access to and those they have to work with in the two exams illustrated here.

Apart from wanting to enable the students to understand what is asked of them in the exams, the teacher also describes some of the institutional dynamics around testing and grading that apply to township schools and further pressure her into developing mechanisms to make students cope with centralized assessment requirements:

Excerpt 5: Interview with Grade 5 teacher

> T: But then again, I become scared because the more students that fail, the department is after you. So you need to try by all means, you must be able to explain the case. Because when we do the class work, the student does good.
> R: Do you know what will happen if, let's say, the department would come after you, as you said?

> T: I don't know really, but I know that they need the students to pass. You must make sure that you don't get the high number of failures.

The arrival of the physical exam paper at the school induced a series of located re-shaping processes aimed at making it (barely) manageable for most students to pass and to not get their teachers into trouble. The completed scripts are sent off to the examining authorities, for them to find what has become a given: township students perform extremely poorly in centralized tests.

The interactions in this classroom data show evidence of translanguaging, but they cannot be understood without accounting for the pressure to appropriate standard languaging practices – here symbolized by the pressure to pass the exam. Such details of the context where translanguaging occurs are at least as important as the general observation that it does occur. While this is one of just many examples from classrooms around the world where translingual talk happens around monolingual text, the particularities are what is important. This school is one example of the conditions under which the *majority* of South African students learn, whereas translanguaging concerns in the North (and also in middleclass schooling environments in Cape Town) are often about anti-discriminatory concerns regarding a *minority* of students. The Constitution of the country guarantees access to quality education to all, in one of the 'official languages'. The dominance of standard English language writing and testing in this setting is not simply a consequence of the working out of scales that hover above such a site, therefore. It is at least as much a consequence of a lack of political will on the part of the ruling party, which supports the ideal of language parity at a policy level and supports anti-discriminatory practices to promote language equality but has not worked out how to do so in practice, yet. One reason for this is the continuous building of policies on separatist, static notions of language, without 'looking down' into local assemblages of diverse language resources. Such assemblages have to be understood as products of local translingual practices that teachers and students have for decades been adapting to cope with Standard English that 'migrated' into these settings as a vehicle for standardized education and assessment regimes. Scales theory in sociolinguistics tells us that this dynamic is inevitable, as it illustrates how local, low-scale translingual practices are 'outdone' by translocally standardized, higher-scale language norms. However, scales theory does not draw our attention to how such effects of scalar hierarchy are contested ones. What we see in the teacher's translanguaging activity is a kind of resistance, where the affordances of available linguistic knowledge on the part of both teacher and students are deployed in somewhat productive ways. Because of its systemic and relational orientation, scales theory in sociolinguistics is not well attuned to dealing with the constructed, political, variable and unpredictable nature of language and literacy practices in particular contexts, rather taking a 'long-distance' or 'bird's eye' view on such matters. The sociolinguistics scales model places its emphasis on social inequalities occurring in relations between sites and scales and its systemic emphasis can have the effect of naturalising boundaries between sites as well as between groups of people rather than seeing them as constructed, contested, or shifting (Canagarajah, 2015; Prinsloo, 2017). We have to look beyond the systems-logic of scales theory to find less top-down, determinist ways of making sense of our data.

Networks, assemblages and posthuman applied linguistics

A conceptualization of located educational dynamics as constituting a network of local as well as translocal actors and resources seems a helpful contribution to us. Ideas from Actor Network Theory (Latour, 2005; Law, 2009), posthuman applied linguistics (Pennycook, 2018) and Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of rhizome and assemblages, along with Literacy Studies' emphasis on situated practices (Street, 1984) offer resources for taking account of the specificity of local practices.

Rhizomes are roots, networks, linkages that travel and connect unpredictably (the term originates in biology).The metaphor emphasises principles of relationality, connectivity, unpredictability and heterogeneity in the study of language, culture and identity and contrasts this to the idea of a vertical structure, as in the image of a tree which is centralized, hierarchical and always binary, or top/down (the way scales are thought of as layered but intrinsically hierarchical phenomena with an ultimately layered order as their raison d'etre). The rhizome, in contrast, is a symbol of multiplicity that spreads multidirectionally and is not hierarchically determined. For example, in Tan's (2017: 472) rhizomatic discussion of 'heritage language, she quotes He (2010) as follows:

> Heritage language is not static but dynamic, constantly undergoing transformation by its learners and users, so that at the same time it serves as a resource for the transformation of learner identities, it is also transformed itself as a result of learners' and users' language ideologies and practices.

In this view, language practices are always 'nested' with other socio-cultural and material practices, some new and some old, forming a 'nexus of practice', a configuration of tools and actions with various conventions and histories associated with them which come together to form recognisable sequences of actions and to make available to actors to confirm (and revise) their recognisable social identities. The concept of 'assemblages' from the same literature is also a helpful construct for our study here. Broadly, an assemblage is an arrangement or layout (and less of a 'joining together') of heterogenous elements. An assemblage is the product of multiple determinations that are not predictable by a single logic. By classroom practices and language practices, then, we mean assemblages that lead to the construction of place-based activities that are both situated and translocal. Such assemblages involve ideas, knowledge (like the teacher's knowledge about learners' linguistic abilities but also about departmental expectations), practices (such as translingual mediation of monolingual text), materials (like the exam paper) and resources that make up an arrangement that is a multiplicity of heterogeneous elements rather than making up a unity or an essence. Some of these elements, for example the exam paper, are translocal in origin and some are local, like the teacher's translingual mediations. Such an approach allows us to attend to multiple scales with none of them treated as determinant. In such an approach, activities in the classroom are embedded through pedagogies as particular assemblages of embodied people, things and practices and produce embodied experiences. These socially constructed resources are taken hold of or refigured as placed resources and as assemblages in particular networks of association.

Implications and concluding remarks

The environment gets homogenized in a scalar view unless one recognises the provisional and socially constructed nature of scales of human activity. Law and Mol (2002) suggested that a scalar view encourages an approach to making sense of local phenomena by 'looking up' to identify its place in a larger interconnected system. They propose instead a counter-systemic perspective, where the researcher 'looks down' to study detail. By 'looking down', they suggest, we make an effort to understand local cultural processes, meanings and symbolic processes, in a way that is sensitive to variation and does not assume a functional connection to upper scales. Different and contending practices come into view that may not add up to a whole. Through this lens we can develop in our study a view of language, teaching and testing as situated practices.

We can conceptualize these as a rhizometically assembled network of actors, materials, resources and practices that, in all its complexity and particularity, helps us to concretely identify possible points of attack to tackle persisting educational inequality, such as:

□ questioning the usefulness of standardized curricula and assessment practices

□ making language policies more flexible by legitimizing established translingual pratices

□ promoting translingual resourcefulness as a valuable skill in – and ideally also as one of the stated aims of – education, so as to challenge the hegemony of standard language practices in society as a whole.

The scalar emphasis on educational and sociocultural stasis as features of peripheral settings distracts the researcher and educators from having to look closely at placed practices and from identifying strategies that could in fact help to undermine existing structures of inequality. We therefore argue instead for a less hierarchical and non-systemic approach to account for the complex interaction of people and things in this setting. Boundaries between social groups as well as languages can be more permeable than the hierarchical model would suggest. If they are not closed, they are also changeable. The 'Overton window', a term from political science refers to the acceptable range of thought on a particular theme or concern in a social setting at a given moment that can be shifted and can then change suddenly and dramatically, or more slowly (Lancaster 2016). The insistence on Standard Language instruction in early schooling is something that we think can be shifted over time in the South African context. The place to start this process, we suggest, is consolidating and developing the research on how teachers use the linguistic resources at their disposal to develop languaging practices in their classrooms that are responses to local realities and challenges. We can also work further to describe how students use their language resources in these and similar settings in sub-Saharan Africa, for example when they are allowed and encouraged to write translingually or to discuss topics in class without any restrictions placed upon their language use.

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