Racial Justice in Multilingual Education

The "Languaging Representations Chart": Teaching and Learning Translanguaging Theory

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Abstract

Translanguaging theory not only offers an alternative approach to language learning in schools, but an alternative way to reimagine language, language-users, and even the world. In what follows, and using the languaging representations chart (LRC), I illustrate how two approaches to language learning—translanguaging and codeswitching—each entail an imagined socio-political version of reality that, if centered, can help clarify the differences and theoretical premises promoted within each pedagogical world. While the LRC was designed to help fast-track the comprehension of terminological subtleties and differences, the ultimate goal is to move past the question: "How are the keywords and concepts defined differently from each perspective?" to "What does each perspective offer, create, promote, and how?"

Multiple supplemental resources are provided to readers: downloadable PDFs of the LRC, a read-along audio track of the article (read by author), and an explanatory video guide using the LRC (performed by author).

"[T]he lecturer who foregoes the marvels of professorial language and gives methodical and explicit presentations risks appearing as a primary school teacher who has strayed into higher education or as a non-conformist who will also find the institution turned against him, even though he has answered real needs and unacknowledged expectations." - Bourdieu, Passeron, and de Saint Martin. *Academic Discourse: Linguistic Misunderstanding and Professorial Power* (1965)

Introduction: The Languaging Representations Chart (LRC)

Translanguaging theory is notoriously difficult to understand. Not only does it offer a different approach to language learning in public schools, but an alternative way to imagine how language and languagers exist in society—a way to reimagine the world in a different way than what is offered by code-switching approaches. Here, I suggest that it is possible to focus on those differently imagined worlds to more easily grasp the seemingly never-ending terminological differences that make translanguaging theory feel so confusing. We can instead center how each pedagogical perspective offers, creates, and promotes a unique reality with certain kinds of language-users. To better illustrate, and using simplified imagery (see, Figure 1), I present code-switching pedagogies as creating and promoting a particular kind of worldview with a split bilingual subject who is said to "switch" between pre-made institutional categories (i.e. L1/L2, "home/school language," "English/Spanish," etc.). Translanguaging pedagogies, on the other hand, I present as creating and promoting a different kind of worldview with a different kind of language-user—one with a unified linguistic repertoire "unsplit" by the usual pre-made institutional categories (i.e. "L1/L2," "home/school language," "English/Spanish," etc.). In what follows, I illustrate how each approach entails an imagined socio-political version of reality that, if centered, can make the comprehension of all the keywords and concepts a far less daunting task.

In an interview with Nelson Flores (Mena, 2021), we spoke of his famous blog post "Let's not forget translanguaging is a political act" (Flores, 2014). During our conversation, I asked what, if anything, might be changed about the original blog post. Flores suggested an updated title: "Let's not forget that representations of language are political acts" (my emphasis). Such a title highlights how both translanguaging and code-switching approaches entail a political worldview that imagines language and language-users to exist in a specific way. In what follows, I offer the "Languaging Representations Chart" (LRC, downloadable PDFs provided) as a pedagogical tool to more effectively move beyond common terminological debates and confusions. While the chart's primary function is to more efficiently learn and separate the differing definitions of common keywords and concepts, it also presents each perspective as its own fully developed worldview. My goal is to move past the question: "How are the keywords and concepts defined differently in each perspective?" to "What does each perspective offer, create, promote, and how?"

In what follows, I first provide some background information on the development of the "Languaging Representations Chart" (LRC), focusing on why the chart was developed and where it will be most useful. Next, I address two common political, ideological stances educators and student-educators bring to the classroom that tend

to activate an oppositional relationship between code-switching and translanguaging perspectives. Each of these ideological stances become potential barriers to a deeper understanding of translanguaging theory. Then, using the LRC, I offer a "3-step exercise" that I use to help students practice deploying theoretical keywords and concepts. I end by exposing the limitations of the simplified imagery of the LRC, but also suggest how my general approach can be used to undermine perceived, theoretical "oppositions" (e.g. "theory" vs. "practice") that tend to re-articulate status-quo power relations.

Developing the "Languaging Representations Chart"

Before diving into pedagogical strategies, some notes on my training as a high-school teacher, as a scholar, and as a so-called "academic influencer," each contributing to my philosophical approach to teaching and the production of the languaging representations chart (LRC). My tenure as a high school teacher taught me much about pacing, about how much new information can be held and how fast. It also taught me to meet my students on their "home turf" (Mena, 2021; Mena and Ingebretson, forthcoming)—that is, start with the language students already know and plan from there. To be clear, I do not find myself doing anything special, other than considering myself first and foremost a high school teacher that somehow "strayed into higher education" (Bourdieu et al., 1965, p. 14). This means I invest much time in locating where misunderstandings happen. And, inspired by my high school teaching, I would never assume students would "eventually just get it"—such a pedagogical "strategy" would fail in high school in a most spectacular fashion. I suspect this approach fails in higher education as well (Bourdieu et al., 1965).

My earliest public presentations of translanguaging theory can be viewed on the YouTube channel: The Social Life of Language (w/ Dr. Mike Mena). It would be a couple years before having the opportunity to assign these videos (Mena, 2019, 2020) in my own courses, where I could better determine what was effective, and what was not. Luckily, I could immediately sense there was simply not enough time in a 15-minute video to "break through" the common beliefs and ideologies about language that folks arrive with. Indeed, those ideological walls have been hardening since students' first day of public school, when children are first institutionally classified based on linguistic abilities and/or competencies (i.e. "monolingual," "English speaker," "ESL," etc.). We might remember that each classification smuggles in hegemonic theories of "language" and "language-users," and that most students have experienced their world as some kind of categorized linguistic subject within hegemonic theories of language. Breaking through these ideological walls must be done strategically—it can take weeks, months, even years. And, this is why I created the languaging representations chart (Figure 1)—to help avoid some very common

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terminological misunderstandings and help speed up the process (ironically, through slowing down the overall pace of learning).
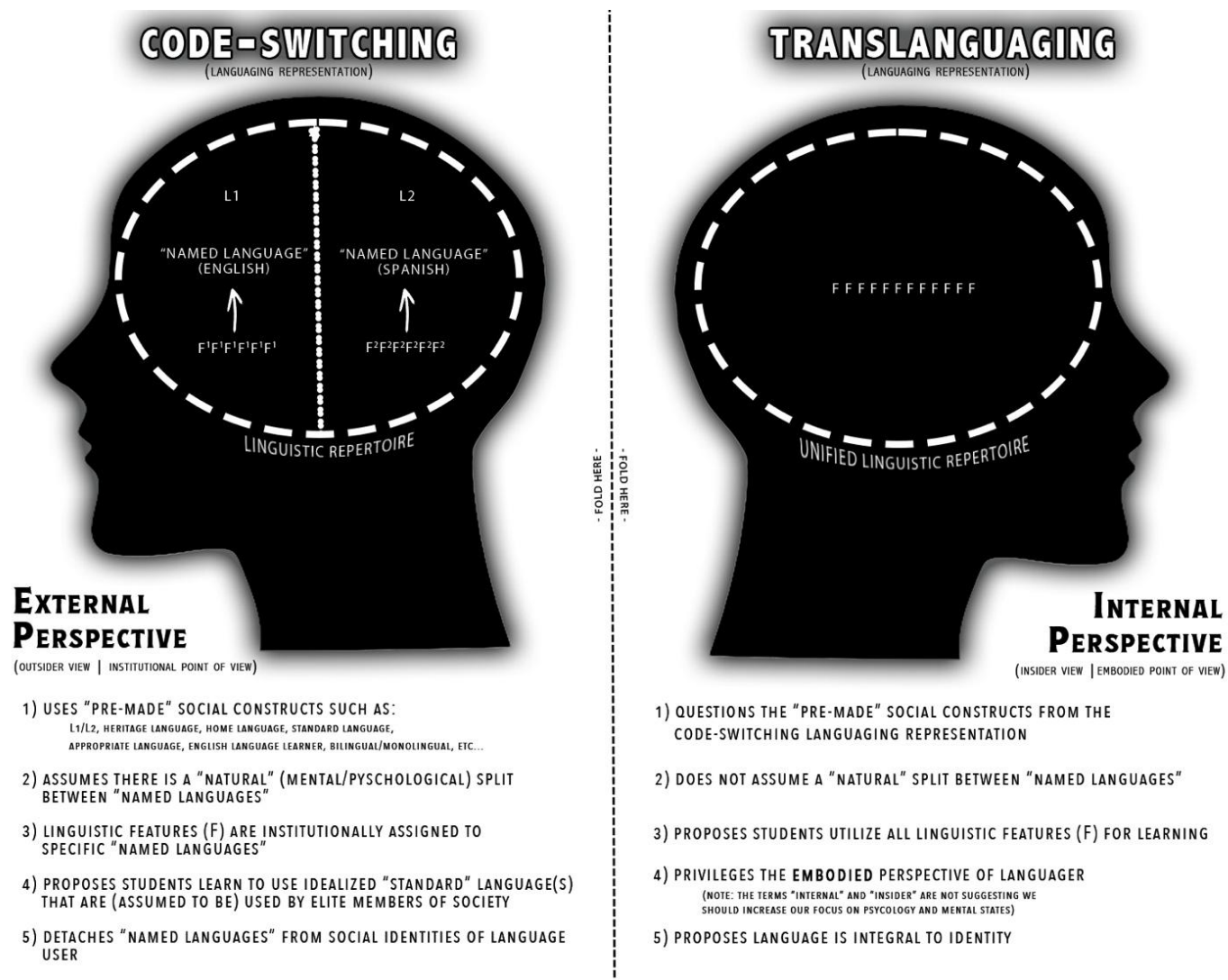

FIGURE 1: The "Languaging Representations Chart"

The primary inspiration for the LRC lay in the first semester I attempted to teach translanguaging theory to graduate students, most of whom were full-time bilingual educators who walked into class claiming to understand translanguaging as the practice of "freely switching between languages." In these kinds of statements, we see the notion of autonomous "languages" (like Spanish, English, etc.), forced into a statement describing translanguaging pedagogy, where autonomous "languages" do not exist in the same way. In doing so, these students recreated the figure of the *split bilingual subject* (who "switches") in a statement meant to be about translanguaging theory. In the illustration, we see two languaging representations, two perspectives, and/or two pedagogical approaches labeled "codeswitching" and "translanguaging." My students are explicitly told that each perspective uses a different set of keywords and concepts—even when they look like the same word!—because each perspective

sees different things as relevant. Each side offers, creates, and promotes its own version of the language-user and of reality.

The illustration instructions state to "print and fold" (downloadable PDF provided). This forces students to become hyper-conscious of separating perspectives and to use only one set of keywords and concepts at a time. In the opening lessons to translanguaging theory, I frame initial discussions to using the illustration with a perspectival mountain metaphor:

> Imagine standing on opposite sides of a mountain. When you are on one side, you notice it's really steep and perfect for skiing. When you go to the other side of the mountain, you see it's flatter, perfect for camping or building a log cabin. Both sides are different. Both encourage different possibilities even though it is the exact same mountain. Now, replace the mountain with a language-user, depending on whether you're viewing the language-user from [HOLD UP ILLUSTRATION] the code-switching perspective, or [FLIP] the translanguaging perspective, you will notice totally different things, a different worldview, a different reality. Neither side is better/worse, new/old, or progressive/outdated. Right now, we are just concentrating on what they can see and the different possibilities each side might have. We are just practicing using all these big words and concepts.

Those familiar with translanguaging theory may not take kindly to the idea that both perspectives are presented as politically neutral, as if translanguaging theory was not among the most politically subversive reimaginings of languaging and languagers (Seltzer et al, 2025). I agree, but at certain moments I am attempting to clear the conceptual terrain to strategically repopulate it back up with clarified keywords and concepts. Next, I suggest there are two powerful student attitudes in the classroom, and each require pedagogical strategies to overcome.

Two Common Student Ideological Stances

There are two ideological stances (at the graduate and undergraduate level) that have proven to be a consistent hurdle in my courses when trying to differentiate codeswitching and translanguaging pedagogies. Both stances—rooted in socialized language ideologies—set up a range of difficulties. Those stances being:

- Students wanted approaches to "work together."
- Or, students wanted approaches to "battle each other."

Note how each attitude positions the pedagogical approaches as perpetually interacting. Those wanting approaches to "work together" often searched for ways that keywords might overlap, which often resulted in the conflation of very basic

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concepts. For example, the term "language-user" has different definitions depending on the pedagogical approach because the concept "language" and how it is "used" means something different depending on which pedagogy is being referenced. I was most definitely one of these college students. I recognize now that I was always partially conflating terms (like "language-user") as a coping mechanism to help stay afloat while experiencing a sense of drowning in all the new keywords and concepts.

Yet, there was another, near opposite stance that was just as popular emanating from the more activist, politically-charged students. Often, these students wanted pedagogies to "battle each other," the intention being to "prove" translanguaging offers a "better" way forward. Which is great—love that!—but that is a different conversation. In my courses, political assertions deployed while first learning the keywords and concepts have never produced a recognizable pattern that I could strategically teach from—and, more often than not, confusion reigned if those commentaries deployed concepts in a way the larger class was not theoretically prepared for.

In my opinion, it is crucial that each student confidently own each keyword from the code-switching perspective, because, eventually, students must be efficient at transporting keywords and concepts from one perspective to the other, while also articulating how a concept might be deconstructed at a theoretical level. We might remember that language-teaching in an American public school means you are always, already invoking institutionally legible keywords and concepts from code-switching pedagogies (i.e. "L1/L2," "bilingual," or even the grouping of linguistic features known as "English"). Each concept smuggles in a wide range of linguistic ideological assumptions that, if addressed explicitly, tend to answer many of the first questions students have about translanguaging pedagogy long before getting to translanguaging theory itself.

Two Pedagogical Strategies

Because students often fixated on how both perspectives interacted—either working together or battling one another—I decided to politically neutralize both perspectives, as presenting them as totally different and separate worldviews that help create and promote different realities. Before accusations of translanguaging heresy arise, allow me to back track just a bit to suggest where I place the political in the larger structure of the course. In other words, there are two larger strategies working underneath that keep both approaches explicitly political.

Teaching Strategy One: When to Introduce the "Named Language"

I have a general understanding of how long my students (but, not necessarily yours) take *to understand* specific keywords and concepts. I also have a separate idea of how long it takes my students *to accept* alternate explanations of the world. Meaning, I

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make a general distinction between two kinds of learning: there is the *understanding* of the theoretical premises, and then there is the *acceptance* of those premises as a possible alternative, but legitimate worldview. The first time I taught this material, and against my better judgement, I tried the popular approach I saw on various syllabi. That technique being: "frontload" the syllabus with a wide theoretical overview, with the expectation that the class will work its way out of the theoretical weeds over the span of the semester—that is, they will "eventually just get it." Keep in mind, I consider myself a high school teacher first and foremost—meaning, I teach with empathy and meticulous planning. I immediately sensed my first syllabus gave too much unsupervised, self-teaching responsibility to students. Underneath this syllabus structure was an ideological stance, or an implied messaging about who was responsible for teaching in my course (Bourdieu et al., 1965). Something like:

> *I, the professor, am trusting you, the student, to read all this and eventually get yourself out of the theoretical weeds. I will help you, but you are primarily responsible for teaching yourself. Good luck!*

I could not imagine teaching high school students with this kind of philosophy—it would fail, spectacularly. I consider lessons "failures" when it feels like pulling teeth, when students constantly need me to reclarify something. To be clear, my frustration lay entirely in my own failure to create an effective teaching strategy—after all, in that space, I am the expert, and I should be an expert at teaching my expertise in a comprehensible way to non-experts. Looking back at how I frontloaded my first syllabus with dense translanguaging theory, I realize now I was not being empathetic to the pacing and l earning needs of my students. So, how did I adjust?

I take pacing seriously, giving time *to understand*, but also time *to accept* new knowledge. I spend almost two-thirds (Figure 2) of each semester concentrating on excavating the ideological assertions and the worldview held within the code-switching perspective, and *only* the code-switching perspective. And, one way to critique those ideological assumptions is through the
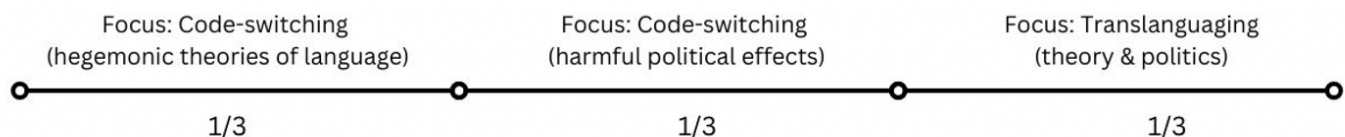
Typical 3-month Semester Structure

Focus: Code-switching (hegemonic theories of language)	Focus: Code-switching (harmful political effects)	Focus: Translanguaging (theory & politics)
1/3	1/3	1/3

FIGURE 2

concept known as the "named language" (Makoni & Pennycook, 2005), which posits that "languages" were given names (like "English" or "Spanish") as one way to help objectify and govern subordinated and racialized populations. However, when constructing my first translanguaging course syllabi, I generally saw Makoni and Pennycook's (2005) work frontloaded alongside all the other foundational, introductory texts to translanguaging theory—after all, it is a central text. Here, I suggest that the "named language" is exactly one of those concepts that takes time for students to *accept*. In my opinion, this reading should be given time to breathe, assigned separately, and long before the foundational translanguaging texts.

The proposition that languages are political inventions is generally *understood* by most students. They will say things like, "Just the way Columbus 'invented' America, colonial administrators 'invented' languages." However, not all students automatically *accept* the idea that named languages can be so powerful and so integral to the domination of marginalized groups. Some students need to be convinced a bit more before such a premise is accepted. Luckily, the concept of the "named language" also fits perfectly into the critiques of code-switching pedagogies, which uncritically use named languages. And, at this point of the semester, this is a good thing. This helps solidify the concept long before attempting to deconstruct it, or "disinvent" it (Makoni and Pennycook, 2005). And, perhaps most importantly, this is one less difficult-to-accept concept to tackle during your first translanguaging lectures.

To convince the students that need more time to accept the power of named languages, I assign readings that analyze how code-switching pedagogies are harmful while constantly reminding students that schools are using those named languages to inflict that exact harm. I suspect the reason my students want to learn how to differentiate translanguaging from code-switching is precisely because they have *accepted* the idea that there are devastating power relations dripping from these things called "named languages." There have been times where the excitement was palpable: the students wanted a new path forward. They wanted to know what worldview translanguaging theory "could offer" or "could create"—which is an entirely different ideological stance from wanting perspectives to either "work together" or "battle each other." And, best of all, students are only one step away from thinking of translanguaging as a decolonial project (Wei, 2022), as a way of unsettling our entire linguistic reality; as a way of dethroning the figure of the *split bilingual subject* that is created and promoted within code-switching pedagogies. But, what about all the other keywords and concepts? And, how would a student know if they are using terminology appropriately?

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Here, I direct your attention back to the LRC, specifically the five numbered assertions within the code-switching perspective. These are five "simple-looking" premises that I drop into discussions strategically (and repeatedly) over the first two-thirds of the semester. These might be described as "obvious" statements, yet so common as to be hidden in plain sight. Let us call these a set of theoretical premises, parameters, assumptions, or more simply: *the house rules* of the code-switching approach (more on this below). For example, the first house rule states that code-switching uses "pre-made" institutional categories. So, when analyzing something from the code-switching perspective, it is "correct" and "accurate" to say the following:

- "That bilingual child speaks two languages: the language named English and the language named Spanish. That child has a split linguistic repertoire and codeswitches between their L1 and L2."

Such a statement *holds true* when following all five parameters, all five premises, all five house rules of the code-switching perspective.

The goal is to know these first five code-switching house rules from memory—so I focus two-thirds of semester to learning just the code-switching side of the chart. But, why? Because when it is time to "flip" the chart, each one of those rules exists in a slightly modified, inverted, or sometimes opposite form. Meaning, once students have learned the parameters of the code-switching side, they indirectly learned all the parameters of the translanguaging side as well. After all, each translanguaging rule is written as an "inversion" or as a "qualification" of a code-switching rule. For example, the first numbered assertion on the translanguaging side appears to invert the first numbered assertion on the code-switching side, and so on. The simple language, ordering, and numbering of the house rules are intentional.

However, as the semester progresses into translanguaging theory, a new practical problem emerges that needs to be addressed: When speaking with a non-specialist (i.e. student, parent, administrator, counselor, etc.) how does one transport concepts from one pedagogical perspective to another without breaking the house rules? Or, phrased another way, even when teachers use translanguaging approaches in their classrooms, they will likely work at a school structured by code-switching terminology. How does one communicate about what they are doing when working "between" two perspectives? Here is where strategy two and my "3-step exercise" come in, which I turn to next.

Teaching Strategy Two: "Unstacked" Perspectives and Their "Family House Rules"

No matter how advanced the student was on their journey as emergent scholars, being able to transport concepts from one perspective/pedagogy to the other can be tricky. All teachers work in schools with specific language ideologies at play, mostly

aligning with the code-switching perspective where autonomous languages exist (i.e. "speaking English" or "having an L2" or "being a native speaker," etc.). This means part of the job likely includes being able to explain how language teaching happens in their classroom, and they will likely need to invoke code-switching terminology to explain stuff to administrators, parents and students. To address these exact kinds of scenarios, I developed a second strategy that I imagine will strike many as odd: I present both theories as running "parallel," as existing separately with all keywords and concepts being defined differently and not interacting at all.

This strategy was inspired by a very common critique of translanguaging theory: that the earliest formulations appeared to metaphorically layer translanguaging theory "on top of" code-switching pedagogies (Mena, 2025). As mentioned earlier, at the beginning of my learning of translanguaging theory, I actively searched for keywords and concepts that *almost meant the same thing*. This was an effect of my perceiving translanguaging "on top" and code-switching "underneath," which then led me to believe some keywords and concepts might "overlap" in meaning and definition. (Note my desire to have perspectives "work together.") It would take years before I realized that approaching these bodies of work as "stacked" perspectives (one on top, one underneath) created too much terminological confusion as too many keywords and concepts conflict at a theoretical level. Folks familiar with Ofelia García's work know she often uses explanatory metaphors and analogies—from bicycles, to four-wheelers, to flows and corrientes (García et al., 2017). Inspired by García's attentiveness to the metaphor, I "unstacked" the theories and put them on their side, running "parallel" to one another, as two ways to see the world, as two differently produced realities, as two perspectives looking at the same mountain (or, language learner). Once unstacked, it became easier for students to grasp what each perspective offers, creates, and promotes.

This approach would inspire the list of the five premises, assertions, and assumptions, each modified depending on which perspective is being utilized (code-switching or translanguaging). Indeed, it is far easier making these kinds of blunt assertions when dealing with one perspective at a time. And, to emphasize how different the terminology can be, I add another simple metaphor. I tell students that each perspective, each side of the chart, represents a *supportive family of concepts with five family house rules*—those five house rules being the five parameters listed on each side of illustration. These family members (the individual concepts) uncritically support each other, they "back each other up," they provide ideological and theoretical support for each other, and they could care less about what the other "family" (perspective) says about interpreting the world. Importantly, I explain how each family member (each concept) is "blindly supportive" of their other family members (other concepts) and that each family member depends on the next family member to exist. For example, when we say a child is "bilingual," that concept offers

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support to the existence of an "L2," which offers support to existence of an "L1," which offers support to the category "native speaker," which offers support to the concept "non-native speaker," and so on, until an entire epistemological worldview emerges that tends to create and promote a specific kind of linguistic reality with specific kinds of language-users. If done well, students will begin to sense how invoking a *single* version of a concept (family member) necessarily drags *many* other concepts (family members) along for the ride.

Finally, and most importantly, when a family member visits someone else's house, they must follow *their house rules*. In other words, when a concept is transported from one pedagogical perspective to the other, how any keyword or concept is used must be qualified, or explained in such a way that uses specific kinds of phrases and keywords to *hold true*—that is, not break the house rules. This is perhaps the most complex part. Up next, I walk through one modifiable 3-step exercise to practice using terminology while following the house rules.

The 3-step exercise: Producing Parallel Analyses in the Classroom

Transporting concepts across perspectives is theoretically difficult. However, it is far more difficult without a firm understanding of the ideological assumptions held within the code-switching perspective. In my courses, we walk through three steps of analysis, each level offering an opportunity to differentiate translanguaging and code-switching perspectives. First, I request a description using only code-switching terminology. Second, I request a description using only translanguaging terminology. And, third, I request a description that uses both perspectives, what happens in school settings, where the transport of terminology and concepts require qualifications to *hold true*.

At the beginning, to build confidence, having students work in groups might be more successful in producing "simple" and "obvious" observations. And, those deceptively "simple" observations are what I am trying to elicit from my students. For example, I may request students describe a bilingual child from an assigned reading in simple statements using as much terminology as possible from only the code-switching perspective. The following simple statements hold true because they stay within the parameters of all the house rules. Yet, notice how even these simple looking statements are theoretically nuanced, particularly with the deployment of the "named language" concept (Makoni and Pennycook 2005).

- "That bilingual child speaks two languages: the language named English and the language named Spanish. That child has a split linguistic repertoire and codeswitches between their L1 and L2."

At this point, I would affirm the student's description of the *split bilingual subject* as "correct" or "accurate" or "holding true" from within the code-switching perspective.

The more keywords and concepts students deploy, the better. The next step of analysis requires students to flip the LRC and describe the same child following the house rules of the translanguaging perspective. Immediately, the student feels aware that everything said—even when using the "same words"—likely means something totally different. It also becomes more difficult to accidently import and re-create the idea of the split bilingual subject! Luckily, the student only needs to follow the new house rules to remain "correct" in their new analysis.

- That child is a languager deploying linguistic features from his unified linguistic repertoire. This means a "code-switch" between an L1/L2 does not technically happen, because autonomous grammatical systems called "named languages" do not exist as pre-made categories we can use.

This description of the same child, but from the translanguaging perspective, *holds true*. While this level of analysis appears quite complex, in actuality, many students quickly note how the new analysis looks like an "inversion" or "qualification" or "meta-description" of the code-switching house rules. Giving students many opportunities to run through this exercise is key. These drills can be run as a whole class, in small-groups, or individually, from a written 5-minute "pop-quiz," to a more nuanced analysis done for homework.

The final step is the transporting of keywords across perspectives when speaking within institutional contexts structured by the ideological assumptions held within code-switching pedagogies. What is difficult about this last step is how the house rules must be referenced to make a statement that can hold true on both sides—which means student's metalinguistic awareness must be supercharged to say something like:

- That child is a languager who is institutionally categorized as "bilingual," but pulling from their unified linguistic repertoire. Within this languager's repertoire are institutional groupings of linguistic features that make up the concept named "English" and the concept named "Spanish." Those concepts are referred to as grammatically isolatable "named languages."

In this last statement, every concept was qualified to hold true from both perspectives and across all ten house rules. However, note how each of the sample statements were about an individual, a child. This same three-step analysis can be practiced with, for example, a piece of spoken or written text.

When eliciting descriptions about actual language in use, I tend to choose exercises that appear simple, but have wide potential. For example, in the following line, a teacher might first focus the exercise talking about the concepts named "English" and "Spanish."

- That party was lit, pero muy crowded.

However, there is more to discover. Some students might include the word "lit" as a code-switch to Black Language, AAVE or "youth slang." This can become a productive discussion on what constitutes a "code," and whether or not the grouping of linguistic features known as AAVE constitutes a "named language" within American education. Then, when flipping to the translanguaging perspective, suddenly the languaging of those pre-made concepts named "English," "Spanish," "AAVE," and "youth slang" feel far less theoretically problematic. Or, rather, translanguaging simply feels more capable of talking about different kinds of languaging. Additionally, the inclusion of "lit" serves as a reminder that translanguaging does not require the presence of more than one internationally recognized "named language."

Implications for Racial Justice: A Reality Beyond the Split

The Languaging Representations Chart (LRC) was created to help fast-track the learning of each family of concepts so that the politically subversive aspects of translanguaging theory are not only understood, but *accepted* as a legitimate path forward in American education. In my opinion, the most subversive, complex and interesting dimensions of translanguaging theory (Seltzer et al., 2025) are far easier to grasp when learners are not constantly attempting to reconcile older theoretical and political assertions within newer ones. Following this line of thought, we might be more careful, or perhaps entirely avoid, uncritically importing the *split bilingual subject* into research that attempts to reimagine the world through a translanguaging perspective. Without attempting to create a reality beyond the split—that is, transcend the figure of the split bilingual subject—I fear that much of the decolonial potential of translanguaging theory will be lost.

Using the "unstacking" method may also help educators overcome similar dichotomies that work to solidify racial hierarchies between approaches to knowledge production. For example, it has been my experience that many racialized educators are (rightfully) suspicious of "elite academic theories," and prefer reading about the "practical knowledge" and classroom methods used by "real-life" racialized teachers. Often, these two forms of knowledge are framed as perpetual enemies, as a simplified oppositional dichotomy: theory vs. practice or theorist vs. practitioner, with each positioned as "better" somehow, usually based on how data is collected, produced and analyzed (i.e. quantitative/qualitative, empirical/experiential, positivist/interpretivist, and so on.). But, ignoring the "real-life" *theoretical knowledges* emerging from our classrooms can only hinder racial justice in multilingual education, particularly when racialized, multilingual educators are positioned as "only" practitioners, but never quite theorists. Yet, what would happen if we unstacked the theorist/practitioner

approaches and ran them parallel to one another, with neither vision being "better," both being legitimate, both producing severe blind spots, both offering, creating and promoting a version of reality, and both making theoretical and political claims about what a classroom should look like. The goal, in this case, would be to deconstruct the perceived "separation" to show how both are co-constituted—meaning, pedagogical practice is required to create better theory, and vice versa.

And, finally, there is a dangerous limitation in the design of the LRC. Specifically, the chart only shows the "heads" of speakers, which will likely recreate the idea that language primarily exists as "linguistic features" that live in our heads, appearing separate from all the other ways we communicate. It is clear, then, a supplemental version of the LRC eventually needs to be created to include the languagers' entire body (not just the head), which would help emphasize how translanguaging also includes multimodal forms of languaging, including bodily expression as well as the cultural, emotional and spiritual dimensions of communication and community.

For teachers and students that want a bit more guidance, I encourage you to watch the 30-minute video explanation of the LRC (Mena 2025), as well as my previous YouTube videos on code-switching and translanguaging concepts (Mena 2019, 2020). With that said, the LRC should never be set in stone. It should be adapted and modified by instructors to best meet the needs of their students (who they know far better than I do). For those folks, I have provided a downloadable "blank" LRC that might be used to scaffold your own lessons (Figure 3). While the chart is effective at "unstacking" the worldview entailed in each perspective, it will be the instructor's job to emphasize how each perspective offers, creates and promotes its own political vision and worldview—after all, let's not forget that all representations of languaging are political.
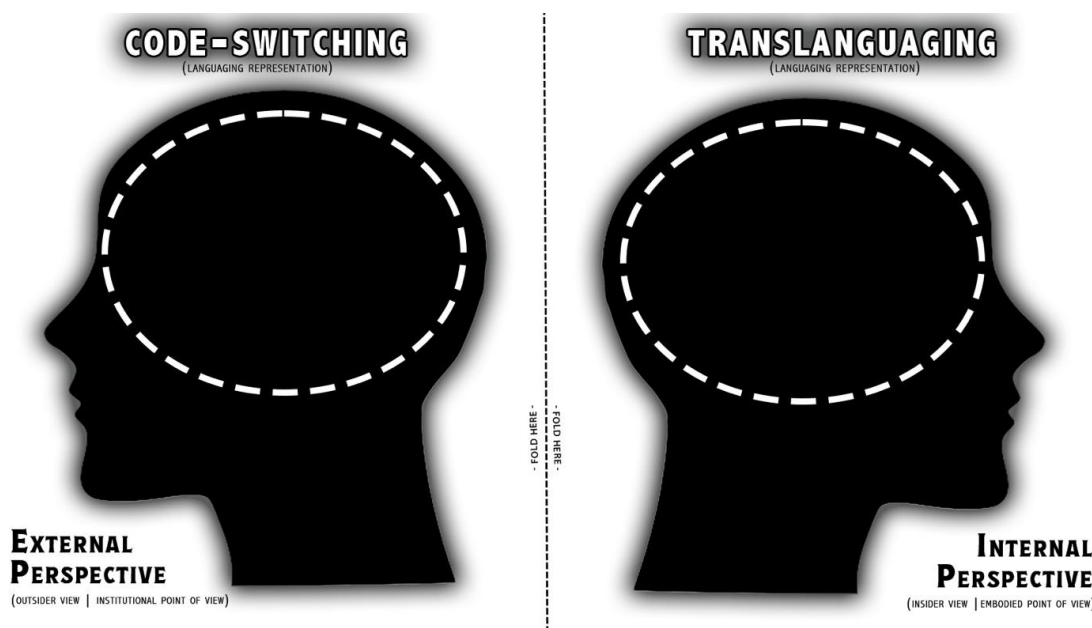

CODE-SWITCHING
(LANGUAGING REPRESENTATION)

TRANSLANGUAGING
(LANGUAGING REPRESENTATION)

- FOLD HERE -   - FOLD HERE -

EXTERNAL PERSPECTIVE
(OUTSIDER VIEW | INSTITUTIONAL POINT OF VIEW)

INTERNAL PERSPECTIVE
(INSIDER VIEW | EMBODIED POINT OF VIEW)

MENA: LANGUAGING REPRESENTATIONS CHART

FIGURE 3

References

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