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Review of *Translanguaging and Epistemological Decentring in Higher Education and Research*

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Review of *Translanguaging and Epistemological Decentring in Higher Education and Research*. Edited by Heidi Bojsen, Petra Daryai-Hansen, Anne Holmen, and Karen Risager. Multilingual Matters 2023. 276 pp. ISBN 9781800410893 (Hardcover).

The anthology consists of an introduction plus eight chapters written by nineteen authors, who together speak at least twelve languages, including Hebrew, Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, German, French, Finnish, and Danish and are geographically positioned in seven different academic environments, located in Northern Europe, North Africa, North American and Southeast Asia. Such details matter, for they support the editors' ambition to demonstrate the "heuristic value of epistemological decentring" (quoted from back cover). A tenth chapter contains seven short student essays written by participants in the Language Profile program at the Danish university of Roskilde. These "testimonies" function as a reference point for several authors in the anthology, enabling them to read learner reflections on personal encounters with translanguaging in the light of research findings relating to epistemological and linguistic decentring. As a result, linkages can be found between different chapters in the anthology, which creates the impression of a joint "conversation" rather than individual scholars reporting eight pieces of independent research.

Central to the anthology is the editors' aim to establish a "nexus between translanguaging and epistemological decentring." To understand what such a connection involves, it seems prudent to begin with a clarification of the key notions of *Translanguaging* and *Decentring*. As explained in the introduction by Bojsen et al., *Translanguaging* describes a pedagogic approach to language learning that in its original meaning denotes a situation where learners may switch between the target language taught at school (e.g., English) and the native language used in children's homes (e.g., Welsh). In the context of Higher Education, the term is used in a broader sense, with experts from Foreign Language Education and Applied Linguistics arguing that foreign language learning can be enhanced when students are encouraged to draw on the variety of linguistic resources they have acquired as native speakers, their exposure to "Global English" in education and society, and encounters with other languages through the media, pop-culture or an upbringing in a bilingual environment (e.g., Kirilova, Holmen and Larsen, Darling and Dervin). Ideologically, proponents of translanguaging support a principle of multi- or plurilingualism, which in some contexts (notably English-speaking countries

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such as the United Kingdom and United States) involve a move away from the commonsensical notion that "English is enough." In contexts such as Continental Europe and Southeast Asia, translanguaging represents an attempt to support linguistic diversity, for instance by offering students' an opportunity to work in foreign languages other than English. One example is the Roskilde Language Profile, as pointed out by several contributors (e.g., Bojsen, Daryai-Hansen et al., Tranekjær).

The second trend foregrounded in the anthology is *decentring*. Referring to contemporary developments in anthropology, the editors define this as a debate "according to which traditional mind-sets are being deconstructed and revaluated in research and education" (Bojsen et al, 2023, p. 2). The editors refer to classic works by Fanon, Said, Spivak and Bhabha, which have inspired scholars, educators, and students to challenge "canons" of knowledge in disciplines such as Anthropology, English Literature, Sociology and Education. The theorists cited have been key influencers in effecting the change that today causes us to question epistemological hegemonies, pointing to problems of "white domination," "Eurocentricity," "English hegemony," and "Global North – Global South" asymmetries. Yet one important manifestation of "decentring" seems to be missing, which may be a consequence of contributors' interest in languages other than English. However, to do justice to the principle of "decentring," one should acknowledge the debate on "decolonising" that has gained momentum as part of the Black Lives Matter Movement. The idea of "decolonising" builds on the work of Paolo Freire and Walter Mignolo, prompting students to demand curricular changes in disciplines such as Geography, Anthropology and Sociology (e.g., Sultana 2019, Mogstad and Tse 2018). A second meaning of decentring relates to the debate on "British" versus indigenous Scottish, Welsh and Irish traditions, which has taken place at universities situated in the "Celtic fringe" for at least 200 years. An example is *Devolving English Literature*, published by Scottish literary theorist Robert Crawford in 1992, which in many ways anticipates decentring in the form proposed by Bojsen et al. Because he is white and writing in/about English, Crawford is easily dismissed if relying on binary constructs of "hegemonic English"/"other" languages, "Global North"/"Global South," "the West"/the rest etc. Yet a genuine pluralisation has to acknowledge dynamics of decentring within "core" states such as the United Kingdom, which implies that the process may be context-specific, with notions of "center" and "de-centred" best defined in relation to particular locations, times and people.

Establishing the "nexus" between translanguaging and epistemological decentring involves bringing together debates found in different disciplines. The editors propose that this be accomplished in Language Education through an engagement with knowledge hegemonies created through a focus on "English Only" in Higher Education, the construction of European "standards" of French or Spanish, or the marginalisation of non-western languages such as Arabic and Mandarin. With regard to the epistemological issue, starting from the "nexus" demands that attention be paid to role of language in producing dominant and dominated knowledges, which challenges us to consider why theories formulated in European languages are more likely to be adopted world-wide. Bourdieu and Wacquant asked a similar question in the essay "On the cunning of imperialist reason" (1999), arguing that our reliance on theories developed in the United States has implications for our interpretation of social reality. The anthology by Bojsen et al. can be read as an answer to Bourdieu's challenge, with contributors offering their versions of the form that translanguaging and epistemological decentring can assume within a specific linguistic, institutional, and disciplinary context.

Titled "The nexus of translanguaging and epistemological decentring in higher education and research," editors Heidi Bojsen, Petra Darya-Hansen, Anne Holmen and Karen Risager use the introduction to set the scene for a discussion of "centre" and "decentred," as manifest in contemporary research on language and education. The two central ideas of translanguaging and epistemological decentring are presented in a way that establishes a conceptual foundation for the chapters that follow. Central is the connection made between the "internationalization" of higher education and English domination, which is key to understanding the linguistic situation in a non-Anglophone setting such as Denmark. Many Danish students will thus accept their need to master English to access knowledge in the Humanities and Social Science, which tempts them to "stay intellectually comfortably" (p. 14), working in English and Danish instead of making the effort to

develop proficiency in languages such as German or French. In 2013 Roskilde University started the Language Profiles to address this problem, and the editors end their introduction by briefly presenting this initiative.

Heidi Bojsen's chapter on "Translanguaging, epistemological decentring and power" examines student experiences with the Language Profiles, based on a data set composed of student essays, transcriptions from seminars and evaluations. The author offers an initial conceptual clarification, arguing for English as a "component . . . producing particular epistemological centres" (p. 27). To "decentre," the author presents students to alternative "knowledges" in the form of theory on postcolonialism, race and gender, as well as texts from French-speaking contexts such as Mali and Senegal. In the subsequent analysis, examples of "translanguaging" and "decentring" are given, leading to the conclusion that the approach taken in the Language Profiles has enabled students to connect language learning to "lived experience," while encouraging them to consider linguistic hierarchies, power and privilege.

Marta Kirilova, Anne Holmen and Sanne Larsen use their chapter to present the "More languages for more students" initiative at Copenhagen University. Starting from the adoption of the Parallel Language Usage principle, the authors document the process of implementing a language strategy, offering perspectives from the university management, study boards, lecturers, and students. What emerges from the data is the complexity of the linguistic environment and practices, which are "grounded" in the sense that they reflect specific departmental and disciplinary contexts, as well as the balance between domestic and international students and staff. As a result, decentring emerges as an "evolving linguistic practice" (p. 67), involving disciplinary literacy in English and Danish, the right of internationals to rely on mediums other than Danish, and students' need for competences in European languages such as German and French.

"Glimpses into the language galaxy of international universities," by Deborah Darling and Fred Dervin, starts from the status of English as "hypercentral" (p. 75). According to the authors, this central role of English clashes with an institutional reality that is multilingual, constituted by the multiple native speeches used by international students. To explore such multilingualism, focus group interviews were carried out with eleven students who were asked about their everyday language usage. The findings show that English is omnipresent within the institution, with little opportunity for learners to rely on other mediums in formal contexts such as classroom teaching. The authors argue that this places international students at a disadvantage to the Finnish, who may occasionally ask questions in their native speech. Translanguaging is proposed as a strategy that may redress the imbalance by "decentring knowledge-building" and "[subverting] the language norms of the local constellation" (p. 94).

Petra Daryai-Hansen, Daniele Moore, Daniel Roy Pearce, and Mayo Oyama offer a comparative study which explores the "fostering of students' decentring and multiperspectivity" in Denmark and Japan. Using student essays, visual biographies and learning logs, the authors examine learners' reflections on language learning and teaching, "Othering" in language education, and possibilities for "multiperspectivity," which acknowledges that "speaking German in Denmark" and "speaking English in Japan" can be experienced very differently and is therefore best treated as situated linguistic practices. This motivates a critique of the traditional concern with grammatical correctness in language teaching, with the authors arguing that the "ideal language class" (p. 118) should start from participants' curiosity about a specific language and culture, which can be nourished when learners experience their ability to their linguistic resources, however scarce, to access and engage with other perspectives and knowledges.

The chapter by Ruth Adler, Annamaria Bellaza, Claire Kramsch, Chika Shibahara, and Lihua Zhang on "Teaching the conflicts in American foreign language education" offers a different form of multiperspectivity, inviting readers into the language classroom, so to speak. Central to the authors' account is the possibility of raising controversial topics in language education to enable students to engage in dialogue about US-Chinese relations (Chinese), the Israeli and Palestinian conflict (Hebrew), Hiroshima (Japanese) and immigration policy (Italian). Following a description of educational activities that show how conflicts may be dealt with in a US American class, the authors

reflect on implications in terms of decentring (emotional as well as epistemological) and translanguaging. The general message is that foreign language education should be used to develop students' ability to interact with native speakers in an empathetic way, enabling them to put themselves "into someone else's problem" (p. 143).

In the chapter "On Matroucity: Translanguaging and decentring plurilingual practices in Morocco," Bojsen and co-authors Joshua Sabih and Khalid Zekri present the idea that decentring practices found in literature provide a lens through which one may examine linguistic practices in Moroccan and Danish higher education. Central is the concept of Matrouzity, which is described as "a practice of alternating between two languages." The authors' argument is based on three data sets: Moroccan literature, interviews with university teachers in Morocco and essays produced for the Roskilde Language Profile program. Following an establishment of what forms Matrouzity can assume in literary works, the concept is applied to teacher and student observations, enabling the identification of codeswitching and codemeshing practices. The authors conclude that a focus on Matrouzity can bring out "the materiality of language" and open up the possibility for identity positions that acknowledge mobility and inconclusiveness (p. 169).

"Foreign language learning 'in the wild' and epistemological decentering" by Louise Tranekjær connects white settlers' acquisition of Spanish in Costa Rican tourist communities to experiences conveyed in essays by Roskilde Language Profile students. The author describes her approach as ethnomethodological, noting how an instrumentalist focus on labour market needs causes us to overlook the extent to which language learning is motivated by social needs, including a wish to participate in the community. This "learning in the wild" involves a process where white settlers move from an initial "othering" of the Costa Rican way of living to acceptance and imitation. Similar dynamics are found in the student essays where language learning is motivated by factors such as individual interest, mobility, and socio-cultural integration. Tranekjær concludes with a discussion of implications in terms of epistemological decentring, suggesting that "learning in the wild" should lead to an engagement with questions of privilege, race, colonialism, and power.

Karen Risager's "Strategies of decentring in translingual research" engages with representations of the world in language textbooks. The author questions researchers' tendency to focus on a single foreign language, arguing for the need to compare across languages and contexts. This leads to an identification of five strategies of decentring, which relate to the three levels of language, context, and discourse, respectively. Risager proceeds with a brief "translingual biography," in which she presents her own linguistic position and experiences as factors that influences her reading of the empirical material. This is followed by an analysis of textbooks from Brazil, Estonia, and Pakistan, which demonstrates how representations vary because of differences concerning the status of foreign language education, learning environment, dimensions of class and culture, as well as perceived learner needs. Risager concludes that such variety demands decentring, requesting that researchers accommodate "translingualism" by engaging with the diverse meanings and discourses found in language textbooks around the world.

The final chapter consists of seven "student testimonies," which are introduced briefly by the editors. The essays are organised into three thematic clusters, dedicated to learner motivation, exchange students' learning and the benefits of language learning. The reflections are personal and vary in length. The languages included are German and French, which are discussed in relation to linguistic repertoires involving students' native language (Danish) and English.

When read together, the ten pieces published in the anthology illustrate in a convincing way what principles of translanguaging and decentring may look like when applied to different types of linguistic practice. The editors' position as Danish academics working from "a peripheral position in the Global North" (p. 13) is important, since this highlights complexities that may be lost in research on linguistic diversity and knowledge hegemonies that refers to the situation in English-speaking countries alone. The result is variety, with authors presenting as examples of "translanguaging" policies of parallel language usage in Danish Higher Education, language learning as situated practice "in the wild," the multilingual environment emerging as a result of international students' reliance on

indigenous languages as well as English, and codeswitching as a pedagogic strategy enabling language teachers to include in their curriculum stories of conflict. In terms of decentring, the anthology contains several experiments where contributors attempt to represent multiple perspectives. An interesting example is the chapter by Adler et al. where decentring is manifest in the writing itself, which presents the idea of engaging with conflict from the perspectives of four languages and teachers. A different take is offered by Darya-Hansen et al, who demonstrate through an interesting cross-cultural study how the diverse experiences of Danish and Japanese learners can lead to a general discussion of "good" language education. Finally, Risager's account of "decentered" research is inspirational in the way that it demonstrates that there may be a need for scholars to look beyond the single language in which they have specialised, embracing the diverse "representations of the world" found in textbook material produced in different contexts and targeting different groups of learners.

While the editors' ambition to foreground the nexus of translanguaging and epistemological decentring comes out very strongly in some contributions, other chapters cause this reader to ask if the authors' insistence on a "decentred" approach might have caused them to construct alternative realities that are equally hegemonic in nature. This raises three concerns: First, one may ask if "decentring" can be reduced to constructing a new "truth" by teaching postcolonial theory in a language class? The US American critical educator Megan Boler (2004, pp. 130–131) foregrounds intellectual humility, stressing how "our perspectives and vision are partial and striving and must remain open to change." Yet some authors seem to evaluate learning based on students' references to theoretical concepts that the authors have presented in class (e.g., Bojsen, Tranekjær). A second issue is English, which some authors treat like the "elephant in the room." Darling and Dervin thus present English as a "hypercentral," hegemonic force that should be countered through the encouragement of multilingualism. By doing so, the authors seem to miss the key function of English as an access medium for international students, enabling them to study abroad. A final concern is the binary construction of positions of power/disadvantage in several chapters. Tranekjær, for instance, insists on comparing the privilege of white settlers in Costa Rica to Danish language students. Such parallels appear simplistic in the light of the editors' initial characterisation of Denmark as "peripheral" within the Global North. This suggests that privilege is multi-faceted, and that Danish students may occupy a privileged position in terms of geography and socio-cultural factors yet belong to the linguistic periphery in the sense that they are expected to acquire a foreign language to engage in international communication.

The anthology can be recommended to scholars and teachers working in the areas of Foreign Language Education, Applied Linguistics, and Intercultural Communication. The anthology may also be of interest to readers following debates on "decentring" and "decolonizing" in Higher Education, providing examples of how this can be realised in the language classroom.

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