

## **Belonging and mobility: A translanguaging perspective**

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### **Abstract**

Belonging – a person's experience of identity in relation to affinity with a place, a space or a community – is challenged for people on the move. In my talk I explore the concept of belonging in contexts of mobility from a translanguaging perspective, drawing upon research in the UK and in Hong Kong. I first offer a personal view of the evolution of translanguaging as a theory of practice. With reference to two projects in the UK (*Translation & Translanguaging* and *Migration & Settlement*) I focus in particular on the notion of a translanguaging space, and how it can enable insights into belonging and its corollary, non-belonging. I then turn to my current work in Hong Kong, *Navigating Belonging*, a new project at the intersection of linguistic ethnography and creative practice. In collaboration with a partner support organisation, we are exploring experiences of belonging through narrative and participatory photography. I discuss data from the project's first phase, with participants who are forced migrants from South Asian countries in Hong Kong. How do they define, find and negotiate their belonging? A translanguaging perspective enables our scrutiny of established yet inadequate understandings of belonging which rest on ideas of cultural and linguistic homogeneity.

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## 1. Introduction

Let me take you back a few years, to 2019, and an extract from a political speech made in the UK. It appeared in *The Guardian* under the headline ‘Johnson pledges to make all immigrants learn English’:

I want everybody who comes here and makes their lives here to be, and to feel, British – that’s the most important thing – and to learn English. And too often there are parts of our country, parts of London and other cities as well, where English is not spoken by some people as their first language and that needs to be changed.

The speech was made by Boris Johnson in July 2019, shortly before he became the UK’s Prime Minister. It’s one of many that he and other senior politicians have made in the past quarter-century, where migrants’ English language has been highlighted as a supposed cause of societal problems. Johnson’s statement captures the sentiment which continues to inform and reflect much current policy relating to migrants, in the UK and elsewhere.

Speeches like this, and the associated media rhetoric, indicate the political landscape within which the figures of migrants must navigate their belonging and identity. Around the world we see the normalisation of far-right tendencies and the mainstreaming of right-wing populist movements and the ideologies that support them. Globalisation and mobility – notwithstanding the social lockdowns of Covid-19 – have prompted a counter-trend that has moved from policy rhetoric to actual policy and implementation.

In the UK, Johnson inherited an explicit policy which promised a ‘hostile environment’ for asylum seekers, one which destabilised a sense of belonging for newcomers and long-term residents alike, whatever their immigration status. In such a toxic climate, the voices of migrants – and forced migrants in particular – are rarely audible in the public sphere, where fear and anxiety abound alongside misinformation and the rejection of rationality.

Language is co-opted into such discourse and also into immigration policy itself, intertwined in debates about citizenship, naturalisation and right to remain, and even to

enter a country. A dominant monolingualist discourse in the UK sees the learning of the English language as a prerequisite for social cohesion, as well as its use as a gatekeeper for immigration. The failure of a migrant to learn and use usually one dominant language indexes - for politicians and sectors of the media - an unwillingness to integrate, a corresponding failure to pay the proper 'debt of hospitality' owed by migrants. There are parallels in the contexts with which you are familiar. This hegemonic, monolingualist discourse contrasts starkly with communicative practice on the ground, involving translingual and trans-semiotic practices that are well described and considered through the admittedly diffuse prism of translanguaging.

In my talk I argue that translanguaging offers a powerful lens through which to understand settlement and belonging for people who are or have been on the move. I advance the idea of a translanguaging space of belonging, and maintain that – as a concept – it might help to challenge more established and not to say cemented and deficit perspectives of belonging that are at play in public and political discourse.

I develop my argument with reference to three different projects exploring language, translanguaging, belonging and mobility. First I discuss the personal evolution of my understanding of translanguaging, and how I have moved from seeing it as a way of understanding flexible user-oriented multilingualism to more of a creative-political project. I then invoke the notion of a transformative translanguaging space: as Li Wei puts it, a space enabled *by* translanguaging *for* translanguaging. Using an example from a large project in the UK I contrast the notion of a dialogic, translanguaging space – one where opportunities are opened up – with normative monologic and monolingualising spaces, ones where opportunities are closed down.

I then turn to my main theme, belonging, and eventually to what a sociolinguistic account of belonging – one which utilizes the concept of emergent translanguaging space – might offer to policy on belonging in contexts of mobility. I refer to two projects exploring belonging and settlement through language and arts practice, one from the UK and one that is my current work in Hong Kong. In the first I present a view of belonging as emergent in interaction, in this case in a collaborative arts project and performance. In the second I describe the deliberate and explicit support the emergence of

translanguaging spaces of belonging through arts practice, and the affordances of such spaces.

Finally, I return to my main argument, that the notion of a translanguaging space, where belongings are fluid, negotiable in interaction, translocal and not necessarily even bound by the word, contests homogenizing political discourses of belonging.

## **2. Translanguaging: A concept worth fighting for**

Translanguaging is the sociolinguistic term now commonly used to describe and account for how people bring into interaction, according to their needs, their different histories, biographies and repertoires – verbal, visual, gestural and embodied – as they communicate with one another in linguistically and culturally diverse places.

At a conference on translanguaging, you don't need me to tell you that the concept is as multiply defined as it is popular. I regard it as a concept worth fighting for, aligned with a general orientation towards a 'trans-' disposition. In applied linguistics, this, say Hawkins and Mori,

signals the need to transcend the named and bounded categories that have historically shaped our thinking about the world and its inhabitants, the nature of knowledge, and communicative resources. Thus, from a 'trans-' perspective, we must consider movement across nations and cultures, spaces and places, modes and semiotic resources, and autonomous named languages.

(Hawkins & Mori 2018:1)

For me, the initial appeal of translanguaging lay in how it so well described the fluid multilingualism which was characteristic of the spaces where I was carrying out research a decade or more ago, mainly in and around the northern English city of Leeds. My work centered upon classes of English for Speakers of Other Languages, adult migrants in sometimes the very earliest stages of their settlement in the UK. In their day-to-day interaction students would deploy their communicative repertoire flexibly – in the memorable words of Otheguy et al. (2015:283) – 'without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named (and usually national and state) languages.' This contrasted sharply with much classroom practice that I observed. A monolingual norm was often at play, an authoritative voice of 'English

only in the classroom', against which the multilingual reality of students' lives sat in sharp contrast. There appeared to be a paradox: The goal was surely to develop multilingual competence in students. Yet curricula, materials and pedagogy appeared to be ignoring – and certainly avoiding the use of – students' extant multilingual resources by using a monolingual approach. Put another way - as our research began to ask - why would we want to teach people to become more multilingual, monolingually?

Asking such questions from within a translanguaging paradigm inevitably pulled me into debates that are by now quite well-worn. Does a bilingual speaker's translanguaging encompass a duality – as maintained by Jeff McSwan, or is the repertoire unitary – as proposed in their seminal book by Li Wei and Ofelia Garcia? Do languages have a reality in the brain and the mind or are they socially constructed and thus only socially real – the stance of Garcia in much of her work, and in the work of others such as Makoni & Pennycook? These are of course still important questions, and I remain agnostic on some of them. I'm certainly not about to reject or ignore research on code-switching, from Gumperz onwards, that notes the patterning and systematicity of alternations of languages, styles, registers and varieties across and within utterances. And from a political perspective the importance of named languages is not lost on me either, as it is not lost on anyone involved in language revitalization projects: the social and political reality of a minoritized language – be it Welsh, Irish, Cantonese, whatever – is as real as any psycholinguistic reality when it is central to an associated decolonization movement.

Attention on communication beyond language and across modes used in acts of meaning-making is far from novel in applied linguistics: *viz.* interactional sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, literacy studies and SFL-inspired multimodal discourse analysis, all of which encompass the para/non-linguistic within their scope. So even where language is the original referent, it is by no means always the only one. A trans-orientation towards language - languaging - however, with its spotlight on the speaker, encourages the range of study to extend to the many ways humans interconnect, and encourages a softening of the distinction not only between languages but between linguistics and everything else involved in communication.

### 3. Translanguaging space

Back in 2011 Li Wei introduced the idea of a translanguaging space, a kind of interactional space created both *by* and *for* translanguaging. Translanguaging spaces are spaces where a broad communicative repertoire can be deployed. They foster transformation in terms of ‘opportunities for innovation, entrepreneurship and creativity’ (Li, 2011: 1224): they operate in the service of the creation of new identities and values. Li Wei describes the creative potential of translanguaging spaces as lying in:

the ability to choose between following and flouting the rules and norms of behaviour, including the use of language, and to push and break boundaries between the old and the new, the conventional and the original, and the acceptable and the challenging.

(Li 2011: 1223)

This suggests something of a celebratory free-for-all, an emphasis on ‘a free and active subject who has amassed a repertoire of resources and who activates this repertoire according to his/her need, knowledge or whims, modifying or combining them where necessary’ (those are the words of Lüdi & Py in 2009). But the freedom and the ability to interact in an unconstrained way are not possibilities that are available to everyone all the time. It pays to remember that ours is a world characterised by sharp inequalities along every dimension imaginable, including in the control of space. The sociologist de Certeau and the cultural geographer David Harvey both distinguish between the spatial practices of powerful agents who manipulate space and those of users who are, however, not simply subjected to the domination of powerful agents but also appropriate and make over spaces for their own purposes. Thus, as T.K. Lee (2015: 3) views it, a translanguaging space is ‘a politicised space, a space for the encounter and negotiation of different forces’.

The politically contingent nature of interactional spaces suggests that as well as opening up (through translanguaging and to enable translanguaging), they can be closed down. There are instances when translanguaging is *not* enabled, where certain languages, varieties and registers are *not* allowed, when certain discursive practices are legitimised but others are not, and hence where creativity, audibility and resistance to social inequalities are restricted.

Let's look at an example. This comes from the team ethnography project *Translation and Translanguaging: Investigating Linguistic and Cultural Transformations in Superdiverse Wards in Four UK Cities* (2014–2018, and henceforth TLANG). The case studies in the four cities, including Leeds, where I worked on the project, focused in turn on the domains of business, heritage, sport and law.

In the second phase of TLANG - with a focus on heritage - we worked closely with Key Participant Monika, a young Slovak Roma woman in Leeds, who aspired to setting up cultural spaces for Roma people in the inner-city district of Harehills. We followed Monika as she attempted to bring her ideas into being. With the support of others, she tried to transform her available cultural capital into something that would preserve and consolidate heritage and would also earn her a living. She did this by starting to set up a socially beneficial business, for which she needed to write a business plan. As her plan moved through stages of transformation, she experienced her dreams and aspirations becoming tangible and at the same time constrained.

In our study of Monika's movement through the third sector funding system, we became interested in how communication is enabled, disabled or restricted across languages and crucially across registers and discourses, and within and between different spaces. Early in the process of developing her business plan, in the course of an interaction with a local authority advisor, Monika suggested a long list of activities that she might carry out:

a dance school; some office where I can support clients with my advocacy; do some parties; people will come to me and I can help them call job seekers; I will do like drop-ins; my job's gonna be get them some ESOL [i.e. English] classes; zumba classes; carnival; advising them; take them somewhere; support them to go to GP [i.e. doctor]; to be their hand.

(Baynham et al. 2016: 39; Bradley and Simpson 2019)

These ideas represented distinct aspects of her past, her present and her perceived future, and followed her own trajectory, a physical movement from Slovakia to the UK. The business plan would help her to make at least one of these ideas fundable. She faced immediate constraints: the plan not only had to be written in standard English and in a

specialised register, but it also had to be communicated and discussed in English. In our analysis, we saw though how Monika's linguistic and importantly her discourse resources were more than sufficient for successful navigation of the superdiverse streets of Harehills. They were not, however, the ones that she needed in the bureaucratic spaces of local government and third sector support offices, or in the emergent discursive spaces created by the interactions that take place there. She found herself outside of a discourse, without the trans-discursive resources to get within it.

Monika had the support of Sharon, an enterprise and small business advisor. In this transcribed extract from their meeting, Sharon tells Monika what she should do to turn her ideas into a business, and to make them viable within the narrow frame of third sector social enterprise funding. In the extract we can see how Monika is positioned in a particular way by Sharon, as someone who has to 'commodify' her ideas.

1	you'll need to find the wages so the point I'm gonna make to you is
2	I hear exactly what you're saying (.) but what I'm gonna (.)
3	the point I'm gonna make to you (.) is that advocacy service
4	what I'm I'm gonna help you to do is you're gonna tie it into the benefits (.)
5	package it in such a way that for example benefits agencies (.)
6	you're gonna say to them (.) I've got a package here
7	cause they're struggling and they want to get people off benefits
8	and you're gonna say to them (.) look at this amazing package
9	I've got here (.) if you refer people to me
10	I can get people off benefits by doing a, b, c, d, e
11	you see what I mean (.) or you package (.) or have a package here
12	because the GPs are struggling because people from
13	our communities and your communities they keep on going
14	for antidepressants they can't sleep (.) they this and that
15	so the GPs are spending a lot of money on GP visits if you go to the GP (.)
16	and say with the package you've got here you can cut down the amount of people
17	going to them if you refer people to me that's what I'm gonna help you
18	to think about that's what I'm gonna help you see

Davies and Harré (1999: 37) define positioning as a discursive process whereby 'people are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines'. In lines 3-4 Sharon positions herself as the person with knowledge to impart, and the person who is going to help Monika, in the storyline of Monika's business: *the point I'm gonna make to you / what I'm I'm gonna help you to do is*. The business idea itself is introduced in line 3: an advocacy service. Sharon explains from line 5 that she is going to help Monika *package it in such a way that for example*: the business idea will be packaged ready for sale. From here Sharon uses many directives (*you're gonna tie it into benefits*): she uses *you're gonna* to command Monika to behave in particular ways. She moves into the first person (6), speaking for Monika,



animating her imagined words in a hypothetical narrative (*you're gonna say to them / I've got a package here*). The package by now has become nominalised, an item, a more tangible something to sell. The supposed customers are organisations in whose interests it is to get people off state benefits, and hence save money (7). In (12) a development of the idea is offered relating to saving money by keeping people from going to the doctor and being prescribed antidepressants. Again (in 16-18) the narrative builds up to the first person: Sharon eventually uses direct speech (18), animating Monika's words as she sells the imagined advocacy package to the GP. In terms of topics and themes, we see the emphasis on the realities of third sector service provision detailed here in graphic terms. Money is made through cutting costs for others, and services are bought and sold.

Monika is a less powerful social actor than Sharon in this event: in Davies and Harré's terms (1999), if Sharon positions herself reflexively as the person who will help, then Monika is positioned by Sharon, interactively, as the person who needs to adapt to the local 'business' environment. Sharon is articulating the hegemonic underlying assumption of the third sector discourse: that nothing can happen without money. She is also encouraging Monika to align with the discourse into which she is being inducted. In the interaction we witness the emergence of a kind of *negative* translanguaging space, as the possibility for creativity (in terms of Monika's ambitions to provide multiple activities for the community) is closed down. Monika must follow the rules and both adopt and adapt to the discourse. For this she needs Sharon's support. Sharon engages in a kind of trans-discursive translanguaging, to help Monika in her efforts to get inside the constraining discourse which she needs to be within, if her ideas are ever to come to fruition and make her a living.

#### **4. Belonging and mobility**

From translanguaging space, I turn now to the question of belonging, which I conceptualize as relational and situated, embedded in lived power relations, social structures, and personal struggles; constantly felt, negotiated and contested, embedded in fluid processes of being and becoming.

The study of belonging has caught the academic imagination. It's a relevant issue for people who are on the move, for diasporic communities, and for times of change and uncertainty. Belonging has emerged as a major concern in recent years in public and political debate too, associated as it is with arguments about citizenship, social integration and immigration policy. For newcomers to a country, their belonging, their non-belonging, their no-longer-belonging and their not-yet-belonging are prominent as they navigate, successfully or unsuccessfully, political, public and employment systems, attempting to attain legitimacy as members of society.

The question of what it is to belong relates to more than political belonging in a new place, to finding a job and attending language classes. The study of belonging recognises it as translocal, complex, dynamic and intersectional, requiring a broad focus of attention. People also express, represent and enact their belongings interactionally, through multiple means, sometimes but not always including language. What is more, the salience of belonging is not restricted to new arrivals who might 'no longer' or 'not yet' belong – in an official sense – to a nation state. Belonging seems to resonate as a metaphor for everyone who finds themselves in a new situation.

I ask now what a sociolinguistic account of belonging – one which utilizes the concept of translanguaging space – might offer to our understanding of belonging in contexts of mobility. I'll talk about two projects exploring belonging and settlement through language and collaborative arts practice. The first - from the UK - enables me to present a view of belonging as emergent in interaction. The second - my current work in Hong Kong - elaborates on the idea of a translanguaging space of belonging. The arts is a domain where languaging might be present but is only sometimes paramount, so in both projects we're obliged to pay attention to multimodal, affective, embodied and spatial ways of understanding. In the practices we analyse, language – as Thurlow puts it – is 'decentred', as Thurlow has it: 'The point is,' he says, 'not to deny language but to provincialize it: to recognize its limits, to acknowledge its constructedness, and to open ourselves up to a world of communicating and knowing beyond – or beside/s – words'

## 5. Migration & Settlement: Trans-semiosis and belonging-in-interaction

For people who are or have been on the move, it can be difficult to express, perform and reflect upon one's belonging with referential language. *Where or how do you belong?* is a hard question for everyone, even when linguistic resources are shared and a response can be coherent. Arts practice, though, is a site of creative encounter, where participants can engage with belongings they already carry, and simultaneously make them anew. It offers 'a public site for the abstracted discussion of contentious issues' (Stupples & Teaiwa 2016: 11), for example the issue of what it is to belong.

I'll introduce the co-construction of a story of belonging, told in a participatory arts project linked to an English language course for new arrivals in the UK, again in the English city of Leeds. The project was *Migration & Settlement: Extending the Welcome*. It was undertaken in collaboration with a community arts organisation and a refugee support charity. In the research we asked: how do people who are attempting to settle in a new country – and those working with them – express and perform their translocal belongings through arts practice and language? My focus here is on how belongings emerge interactionally, and how they are shaped collaboratively in the process of developing a narrative-based creative performance.

*Migration & Settlement* ran in 2016 and 2017, co-directed by me and Jessica Bradley at Sheffield. The project took place in ten weekly workshops. As it progressed, so the focal activity became clear: the participants would develop a shadow puppet performance, using story and song, based on the narratives of three of them as they made their homes in Leeds. We recognised four overlapping phases of creative production, and we can follow those phases, through following the experience of Théo, one of the participants. *Conceptualisation*: Here we meet Théo, and examine interaction in an early interview with Ruth, a creative practitioner on the project. *Making*: The process of making the puppets and the set for a performance based on three stories of settlement. *Devising*: The process that ran alongside the making phase, the talk around the devising of the puppetry performance. *Performance*: The performance itself, and the means by which Théo's original narrative appears on stage.

Phase 1 Conceptualisation: The first two extracts are transcripts from an interview with Théo, creative practitioner Ruth, and researcher Jessica. This is not a research interview however. Ruth has been employed to create a performance that will be the artistic outcome of the project, and she needs to elicit narratives from participants that she can use for this purpose. Théo has been invited to tell his story of settlement and belonging in Leeds. His concern to do this is balanced with Ruth's, who needs part of the story for the subsequent performance. Control of the direction of the talk is thus contested, evident in the competition for the conversational floor.

We join the interaction as Théo responds to the question of how he felt when he first arrived in the UK from his home country, Guinea:

T: Théo; R: Ruth; J: Jessica

1.	T:	like this colour
2.	J:	ah:: ok like a red (.) a greyey red
3.	R:	clay
4.	J:	clay clay
5.	T:	I think the: now my country is the first
6.		country have most (.) bauxite in the world
7.	R:	oh ↑really
8.	T:	yes mm we used to er firstly was mm Australia
9.	J:	ok
10.	T:	and then Australia sent off and then
11.		make them country (.) rich (.) now it's my country (.)
12.		the second one
13.	R:	so what do they do with bauxite then
14.	T:	they do with a lot of things you see (4.0)
15.		((everyone looks at some information on a phone))
16.	R:	that's about mining it
17.	T:	yes like mining
18.	R:	so and er to use the minerals for
19.	T:	yes
20.	R:	I dunno ↑building ↑construction
21.	T:	nope no I think here what I (1.0) the first word
22.		when you was reading (1.0) ok
23.		it is a mixture of it was aluminium oxide
24.		aluminium ( ) clay ( )
25.	J:	oh so there's clay in it ok (.) quartz min- ok
26.	R:	lots of stuff in it then (.) I suppose
27.		you can like if you know how to (.) well
28.		obviously they would they can (.) separate
29.		all of the different metals (.) to do
30.		different things with it
31.	J:	mmm
32.	R:	the princ- principle ore of aluminium er:
33.		where does it um where's what is it again (3.0)
34.	J:	[that's so interesting
35.	R:	[wow (2.0) uses primary work yeah so it's
36.		just used for aluminium
37.	J:	ok
38.	R:	which is very obviously very needed very used isn't it (.)
39.		cool so that's what the country that your country (1.0)
40.		has this sort of orangey metal ground

Here, control of the floor shifts over the first few turns. In turns (1) to (4) Théo describes the colour of the ground in his home country, and Jessica and Ruth elaborate on his description. From (5) to (14) Théo holds the floor. In the first turn he shifts into narrative, explaining that Guinea has the world's largest bauxite reserves. At (13) Ruth asks *so what do they do with bauxite then*, to which Théo responds by taking his phone and googling 'bauxite' (14: *you see*). A collaborative floor develops, involving two exchanges, first between Ruth and Théo (16-24) and then Ruth and Jessica (25-40). Bauxite continues to be the topic, but now Ruth's commentary on bauxite and the content of the text on Théo's phone dominates. The commentary concludes at (38) with a pause and Ruth's summary (39-40).

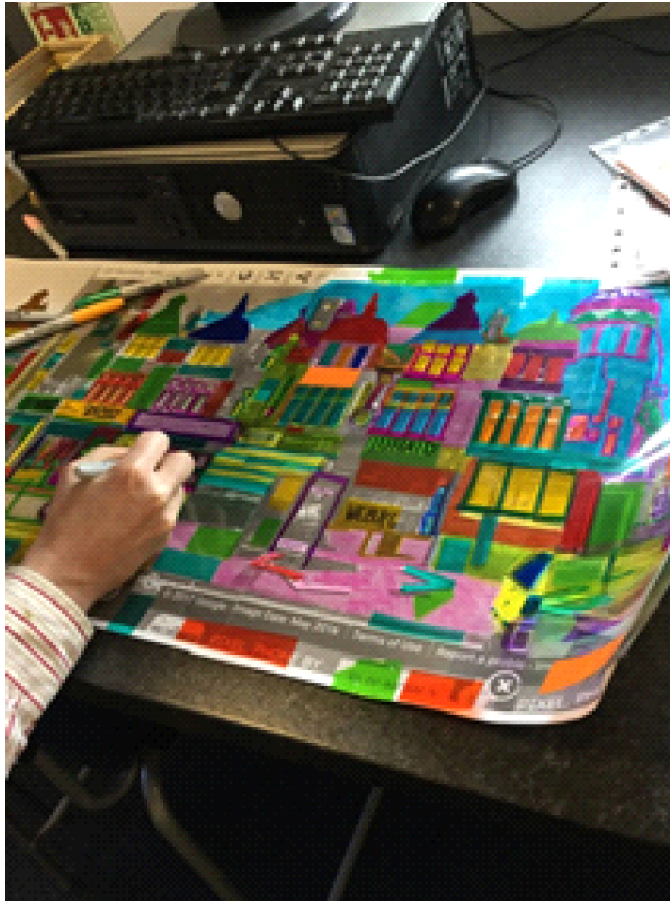
Théo continues his story, until this exchange, a few turns later:

83.	T:	I I left my [country
84.	R:	[can I get a pe- have you got a pen on you
85.		so it would be good to like make some [notes
86.	J:	[yeah
87.	R:	so we've got like we'd if we just talk and then
88.		we can talk about
89.	T:	ok
90.	R:	what we might record for your story

Ruth interrupts Théo by asking for a pen to make notes (84-85), *then we can talk about what we might record for your story* (87-90). This, though, is a story that is needed for the production. It is Ruth's task to gather the threads of stories and then weave them together for the performance, and the bauxite example of difference is one of these stories. Ruth is aware that she needs to identify stories quickly and while participants are together – and moreover those stories need to work within the final production. The qualities of bauxite are visually appealing, and reference to the mineral enables the representation of a contrast between Théo's previous life and his current one, using colour and material, in this case clay and metal oxide. The interaction is at the nexus of Théo's life trajectory and Ruth's professional and short-term concern, in the context of an arts project with its own imperatives.

**Phase 2 Making: Creating the shadow puppets:** In the making phase of the project, elements from three stories (including Théo's) which have been shared during the first phase are developed into a short shadow puppet play. The stories are resemiotised as

their key visual aspects are brought to the fore. Shadow puppets and backgrounds are created, and choices are made about music and lighting, for the elements of the story that will be the focus of the performance.



### *Making*

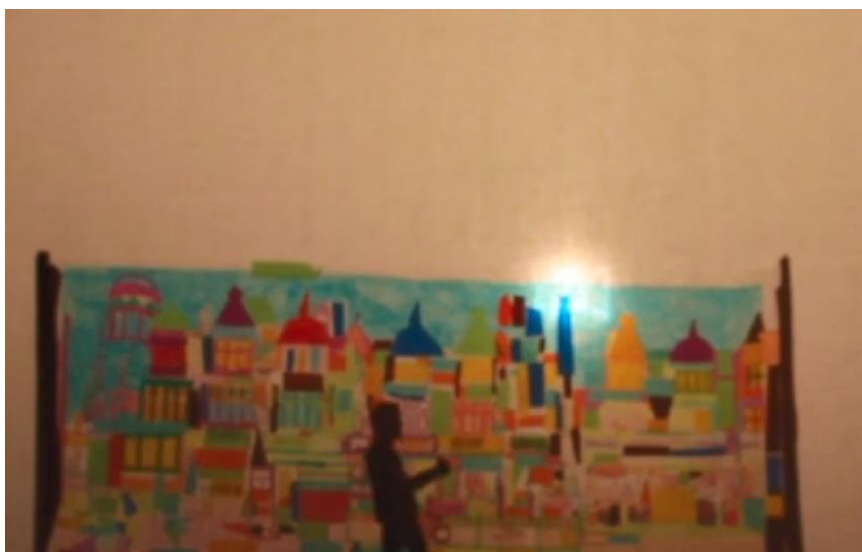
Phase 3 Devising: The devising process which runs alongside the physical making involves discussion of choices about the production in terms of the most appropriate mode of expression and media, and crucially the specific aspects of the stories to highlight, and how.

Phase 4 Performance: Théo's story becomes one of three in the eventual production. It is recorded and then edited, to be played as part of the performance. As Théo speaks for the recording, Ruth and Jessica continue to prompt him, helping him find the words and sometimes the longer utterances.

1. R: do you want to say about that  
2. T: ((whispers)) yeah ok (1.0) ((speaks aloud)) mm  
3. this the er the ground is different to mine in  
4. here because my country the ground is is er is  
5. like the ground the colour is like  
6. ((whispers)) what is this colour  
7. R: like er a  
8. T: ((whispers)) like this  
9. R: rusty (.) orange  
10. J: mm it's clay erm:  
11. R: cl- like a I would s- we would know w- what you  
12. meant by a clay [clay a red clay  
13. J: [clay a red clay  
14. R: (.) do you want to start that saying that the ground  
15. in my country is a red clay colour  
16. T: ok my ground er the ground of my country is the  
17. red cl- colour but here the co- is like (.) black  
18. a little bit black  
19. J: uhuh  
20. T: it's not really black  
21. J: uhuh  
22. T: the er the country have a most er bau- bauxite  
23. in this world is my country  
24. R: mhm  
25. T: he used to be mm Australia but now it's my country

### *Recording for performance*

At (1) they prompt him. At (14-15) Ruth provides Théo with all the words he needs to begin his story. Théo repeats this (16-17), continuing to describe the ground *here* as *a little bit black* (18) and *not really black* (20), all the while supported with affirming interjections by Jessica (19, 21). Then at (22-25) he makes his statement about bauxite. Ruth edited the recording, removing all talk apart from Théo's. The edited recording was included in the filming of the play during a public performance at the partner third sector organisation in Leeds. It can be viewed online – <https://vimeo.com/221776776>



### *The Production*

The last extract edited for the production comes at 4:33-4:52:

the ground of my country is the red cl- clay colour  
but here the co- is like (.) black  
a little bit black  
the country have a most er bau- bauxite in this world is my country  
he used to be mm Australia  
but now it's my country

*Théo's story in the production*

Following the editing it appears streamlined, as it homes in on the detail identified by Ruth in the earlier conceptualisation stage, the mineral bauxite. Théo has been a less powerful social actor than Ruth over the course of the process, due to her need to combine multiple and compatible stories into a visually-oriented public production.

Within the multimodal spatial activity of the production process my concern's been the story of emergent translocal belonging, of finding one's place in relation to the place one has left, and how it is expressed, re-presented and performed across modes and through time. I have uncovered the trace of the negotiation – which is usually masked – that enables the eventual performance. The four phases of the creative process that we identified and utilised as an organising principle, from conceptualisation to performance, have epistemological value too, reflecting as they do the sense of departure, arrival and eventually a tentative settlement. In the *Migration & Settlement* project Théo and his fellow participants made public their stories of movement through time and space, of belonging *there*, of transition and difference, and of belonging and not yet belonging *here*. In following Théo's story I asked questions of its ownership, and thus recognised that belonging is not simply expressed or performed, but is negotiated in interaction, contested and debated. I continue this point with my final example, from my current work in Hong Kong.

## **6. A translanguaging space of belonging: NavBe**

I'm bringing together the idea of translanguaging space and notions of belonging in interaction in narrative and arts practice with my final examples, from a project which supports the emergence of translanguaging spaces of belonging. The project is *Navigating Belonging*, and it aims to understand how people in South Asian



communities in Hong Kong define, find and negotiate their belonging. The project combines linguistic ethnography and creative practice, using sociolinguistics-informed narrative research, an approach called photovoice, and digital storytelling.

South Asians in Hong Kong experience discrimination, unequal access to education, employment, and public services, and barriers to participation in civic activities. The minoritisation faced by Hong Kong's South Asians has been brought into sharp relief too by the pandemic and by recent political upheaval.

There is a groundswell of academic interest in South Asians – and especially in South Asian youth – in Hong Kong, in areas allied to belonging, its construction and its navigation. Particular concerns have been their identity as Hong Kongers, the learning and use of Cantonese in relation to identity, the representation of South Asians in the media and online, language-based minoritisation in education policy, racial discrimination, in general terms, and South Asians' agency to challenge their marginalisation. The focus on young people and their education eclipses the idea that belonging in Hong Kong is an intersectional concern, and indeed one that can be examined through the study of arts practice as well as language.

Our project runs in three phases of fieldwork, comprising weekly workshops. Each phase is with a different group of participants. Our first phase was at the Centre for Refugees in Chungking Mansions, TST, and ended last month. The CFR is our main project partner, and they helped us recruit five clients, all women who are forced migrants in Hong Kong, from a range of South Asian countries.

For the first five weeks we ran Photovoice Workshops, led by my colleague the researcher and photographer Christine Vicera, and supported by me and others in the team. With Christine, our participants learned some principles of photography, and took photographs relating to their own belonging, in the workshops themselves, on photowalks in particular places in the area, and at home. In the workshops they described and talked about the photographs, and related them to their developing understanding of belonging, in structured but informal discussions with the project team. In the last three weeks of the phase, the participants worked with another

researcher, Michelle Pang, to develop Digital Stories based on the photographs and narratives from earlier. These are being prepared and will be displayed online on the project website.

As I've already suggested, *Where or how do you belong?* is a hard question for everyone, even when linguistic resources are shared. So how do the participants engage with their belongings through participatory photography? I'll illustrate this through an example. I've chosen an episode in our third workshop, where we did a Photowalk – trying out the techniques we'd been learning, on a walk around Kowloon Park. Participant Rosy (I'm using the pseudonym she chose herself) took a photo of a waterfall there, and talked about it when we got back to the Centre.

Here are my own fieldnotes from the workshop alongside Christine's post-workshop notes (Data 1 JS fieldnotes from Workshop 3; Data 2 Christine's post-workshop notes from Workshop 3)

Rosy took a photo of a waterfall in the park, and **tells us of being at the same place 28 years ago, when she accompanied her husband to HK on a business trip. She took a photo there at the very same place with her son who was 3 years old at the time.**

*Photowalk*

Teaching them the photolock on the phone + lighting

- As we were walking to Kowloon Park, we noticed how Sam Bhai opened up a new store. A and D stopped by to see the pani puri stall.
- Suggestion that we do our next photowalk at CKM
- A agreed saying that there are things at CKM reminds us of home
- Rosy says she'd rather not think about Sri Lanka, home is where she is now. Home was painful for her, the kidnapping, the torture

**R's photo of the waterfall and her story about her visiting Hong Kong with her son and husband in the 1980s**

And this is the actual photo that Rosy took on the Photowalk (Data 3 R's photo of a waterfall)

[Photo S1]

When we returned to the centre, we uploaded our photos so we could see them on the screen and talk about them. Here is an extract of what Rosy said (Data 4 Post-walk discussion with Rosy from Workshop 3, 09:00)

R: **and one is very important one this one this this waterfall**  
**I remember for 28 years back** (.) when I my son [was  
J: [really really  
R: yeah when my son elder son three years so we will come  
back to the Hong Kong to visit  
J: yeah  
R: **then that time same place I took the photo I have with me**  
**next time I will bring in show to you**

She goes on to say how she took this photo when she and her son had joined her husband on a business trip, a habitual occurrence.

J: tell us more about the first time you saw this pho- this waterfall  
R: waterfall really my son very loudly and he said mom I want take  
photo come come then yeah he's very young and small yeah three  
years old (.) that time  
J: was this when you first arrived in Hong Kong  
R: no no my son yeah 28 years back when my son was three years old  
so my husband take us visiting to Hong Kong  
J: so you visited  
[...]  
R: **visiting I went many times (xxx) yeah Singapore Malaysia Thailand**  
**India and China Hong Kong so er that time I carry with my son also**  
**because he's alone three years old so my husband always used to bring**  
**me and my son together when he was doing business**  
J: so he was working and you were with your son just to be tourists  
in Hong Kong  
R: yes because my son er order goods from China you know there so  
many material and er textile we have shop also in [home country]  
so that time my son want to purch-  
[...]  
R: so he's ask me to okay let's go together three of us then visit  
Hong Kong and go China and

Finally she tells us how she liked Hong Kong and decided that it would be the place to come to when she had to leave her home country.

J: and did you like it when you [visit it  
R: [yeah yeah really  
J: yeah  
R: **I I thought safe that's that's ri- that's the reason**  
**I came back to again**  
J: and that's why you came here  
R: yeah came  
J: you what you thought of [Hong Kong as a place to come  
R: [yeah yeah yeah  
J: when you left XXX

In the next workshop, Rosy brought the first photo she'd taken, on that much earlier visit, as I noted in my fieldnotes (Data 5 James' fieldnotes from Workshop 4)

Today's atmosphere in the workshop is very friendly, familiar. **Rosy brought in photos of her family in HK from 25 years ago**, when she came as a tourist/accompanying her husband on a business trip. She took photos of her little son, then aged three, in Kowloon Park. Last week, we took photos in precisely the same place, 25 years later. The photos she showed us were old, battered, water-damaged...

And here is that original photo (Data 6 R's original photo of a waterfall):

[Photo S2]

The photographs that our participants take are not just generative of narratives but are integral to their telling. I'm very much reminded of the stories I was told by my mother as a very small child, as we turned the pages of the family album. They were about the photographs we were looking at, and would not have been told without them.

The space of our workshops extends beyond the physical space where we do our work – into the spaces and places of the streets of Kowloon, and also back through time, to explore memories of belonging. The environment is multilingual and multimodal, and relates well to Li Wei's understanding of a translanguaging space, "a space for the act of translanguaging as well as a space created through translanguaging" (2011:1223). This is evident and indeed prominent in the storyboards that our participants are developing for their digital stories, drawing on the narratives and themes that they discussed in the first part of the project. Here is what three of them produced.

Laxmi makes effective use of colour, and foregrounds her religious identity as being inextricably intertwined with her sense of belonging (Data 7 D's storyboard):

[Photo L storyboard]

Uzi has engaged with her lack of political belonging, alongside notes about the inequities of being an asylum seeker in Hong Kong. She too makes interesting use of the visual (Data 8 U's storyboard):

[Photo U storyboard]

KK has used Panjabi, the language in which she is literate, to develop her story board (Data 9 K's storyboard):

[Photo K storyboard]

How our participants orient towards space and time in their narrative explorations of belonging is salient, as we can see with Rosy and the storyboards. The chronotope – literally space time – is the Bakhtinian concept that draws attention to the inseparability of space and time. It's used as a concept by sociolinguists for the empirical analysis of time-space framing found in real-time oral narratives. Migration narratives certainly foreground and problematize space in narrative, and we are reminded of de Certeau's claim that 'every story is a travel story – a spatial practice' (de Certeau 1988: 115). Our data are suffused with narratives of belonging and non-belonging in spaces and places and at different times. Our participants will talk about their earlier belongings, as Rosy did. Sometimes these emerge in tiny narrative moments, as small stories, to use Bamberg and Georgakopoulou's term. Here, in this short extract, A is talking about how she had chapati in Hong Kong, and the emotion it released (Data 14 Workshop 2 interview with A, 15:10):

A: then we came here in Hong Kong and first time I eat er chapati again at er [xxx's] home and she give us you know like like a <b>I just take a one er piece of roti and I am crying</b> [hh]
--

They also talk about the challenges of belonging in Hong Kong now, doubtless a problematic place in terms of its asylum policy. These narratives are personal but at certain moments the political interjects, intrudes. So here is A, describing how she wanted to join a gym at a community centre near her home: (Data 10 Workshop 1 interview with A, 09:30)

A: when you are starting to pull yourst- pull yourself er to what you want to do and **then you see oh my god I'm refugee I cannot because I don't have Hong Kong ID** (.) time step back (.) not forward

C: oh

A: because it's it is you don't lost that you are not refugee just your identity (.) you lost your your encouragement you're your thoughts

C: yeah

A: what being you so then then I feel so:: sad (.) I go I go ho::me and I think that oh:: I (.) because then li- I try to contact with my other friends who join the gym or other (.) so they said they apply with the passport copy or something like that **so my passport has expired so so I feel that no way there is no way** because m- because many years I also f- er searching for for erm study or some courses like I I I am interested but there is no [hh] so er:: **so that's why I'm no I'm just waiting I I still have hope I in the future I will do**

The political decisions at scales beyond the local restrict access to services only to those with the right documents, to those who are politically legitimate. A articulates how the lack of the correct documents – no ID card and an expired passport – relates in a clear and personal way to not being able to join the gym and beyond that to her sense of *just waiting*, albeit accompanied by a sense of hope. The interaction that is contingent and locally produced is heavily influenced by the large-scale global processes and inequalities of forced migration and asylum.

It's also fair to ask how and whether the participants felt their belonging was enhanced and represented in the ways they wanted, whether they experienced some kind of new agency, and what aspects of the project enabled it?" What indeed did the integration of narrative with participatory photography enable, in our translanguaging space of belonging? Christine writes in her fieldnotes from the third Digital Stories workshop:

At one point I asked each of them how their idea of belonging changed pre-workshop to post-workshop. Here's what I recall from our very brief conversations

**D: For her, there was a change. Instead of drowning in her homesickness, D realises she now has the agency to still celebrate the festivals she celebrated back home in Hong Kong.** This doesn't mean this is "any less fulfilling," and she mentioned how she now has a newfound sense of gratitude.

**U: Before the workshops, her sense of belonging was understood from an individual perspective. But after sharing her stories with everyone, she feels that there is a shift from "me" to "we."** She mentions that everyone she shares her story with is now included in her expanded definition of belonging.

## **7. Conclusion**

In my discussion of data from three projects concerned with migration, settlement, belonging and translanguaging, I problematised the notion of a translanguaging space, noting that interactional spaces can be closed down in contexts where for example a dominant monolingualist ideology pertains. I then showed how belongings - as well as being expressed, performed and felt, can be negotiated in interaction, contested and debated, in the context of an arts practice project. And finally I outlined the potential of a creative translanguaging space of belonging, emergent in work combining narrative and participatory photography.

In both of the creative practice projects our attention was on the multimodal. In our analysis in each case I refocused on language, while recognising that as a means of meaning-making it need not be considered central: It is provincialised, possibly even decolonised. So I would like to conclude where I began, and claim that this perspective stands in contrast to established and politicised understandings of the role of language for belonging. At the outset I quoted one of the many recent former Prime Ministers of the UK, as I asked how the belongings of people on the move might relate to wider political contexts and social structures.

Let's recall the situation in which our research participants – Théo and his classmates in the UK and our friends in Hong Kong – find themselves, as outsiders attempting to find a foothold in society. Their non-belonging - at best their not-yet-belonging - is implicit in the veiled demands for assimilation that characterise political debate, and policy itself, around social cohesion, immigration and citizenship, employment and employability, and mainstream education. Their daily lives are shaped by a struggle - most likely to be ultimately unsuccessful in the case of our Hong Kong participants - to be allowed to belong, in a meaningful political sense.

We can juxtapose this with our understanding of belonging as fluid, negotiable in interaction, translocal, and not bound by the word. Our analyses therefore contest homogenizing political discourses of belonging. Théo's narrative compares the red of the earth in his west African homeland with the darkness of the new northern European locality. Our Hong Kong participants explore and foreground their belongings in their

memories south Asia and in the here-and-now in east Asia through their participatory photography. In both cases the visual is introduced into the expression, performance and negotiation of belonging, and thus a window is opened on other ways of seeing belonging.

The contrast is with the monologic spaces of non-belonging, the sites of unsuccessful struggle which emerge at the nexus of geographical and socioeconomic mobility, spaces where creativity, audibility and resistance to social inequalities are restricted, spaces where multilingualism and translanguaging are viewed as a threat to community cohesion. The value of the notion of a translanguaging space of belonging therefore is as means of showing how debates on integration can be refocused towards a dynamic account of settlement and belonging, towards decentering the word and towards meaning-making beyond language. Thus we contribute to a more inclusive, holistic approach to understanding and addressing dislocation and relocation.



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