

## **Translanguaging, belonging and language education**

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I explore a translanguaging perspective on language and mobility. From this perspective I engage with the concept of belonging – a person’s experience of identity in relation to affinity with a place, space or community – and how this is challenged for people on the move. I first offer a personal view of the evolution of translanguaging as a theory of practice. I focus in particular on the idea of translanguaging space, and how this can enable insights into belonging and non-belonging. I then turn to my research in Hong Kong, Navigating Belonging, an ongoing project at the intersection of linguistic ethnography and creative practice. Findings suggest that a translanguaging perspective enables productive scrutiny of established thinking on belonging which rests upon ideas of cultural and linguistic homogeneity. Finally, I consider how an understanding of translanguaging derived from research outside the classroom might complement conceptions of translanguaging that are current in language pedagogy.

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## 1. Introduction

Good morning. Thank you for inviting me to give the opening plenary talk. I'm James Simpson. I'm a professor in the Division of Humanities here at UST, and I also direct our MA in International Language Education.

To start, I want to show you examples of political and policy discourse from three people.

The first person is a well-known former president of the USA. These extracts come from speeches he made in February and March this year.

"We have languages coming into our country. We don't have one instructor in our entire nation that can speak that language ... These are languages – it's the craziest thing – they have languages that nobody in this country has ever heard of. It's a very horrible thing."

Donald Trump, Washington, February 2024

"[Migrants are entering the country speaking] truly foreign languages. Nobody speaks them."

Donald Trump, Texas, February 2024

"[New York classrooms are overwhelmed with] pupils from foreign countries, from countries where they don't even know what the language is. ... We have nobody that even teaches it. These are languages that nobody ever heard of."

Donald Trump, Virginia, March 2024

The second is the UK's former Prime Minister, Boris Johnson. The extract is from a political speech in 2019. It appeared 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.”

Boris Johnson, 2019

Thirdly, writing in the *Hong Kong Free Press*, Mandy Cheuk of Hong Kong Unison – a charity which advocates for Hong Kong’s ethnic minority residents – suggests that:

“Without Chinese linguistic ability, hopes of upward mobility in this officially bilingual territory are only flimsy ... The argument that learning Chinese is unnecessary for Ethnic Minorities seeking success and a stable future only avoids the problems they are almost certain to encounter further down the road. It sets Ethnic Minorities up for failure.”

Mandy Cheuk, 2020

Donald Trump has weaponised immigration from Mexico and Latin America in his presidential campaigns from Build the Wall onwards. Now he has seized on languages as the dangerous thing that migrants are bringing with them over the southern border, coopting language in his demonisation of migrants.

Boris Johnson was talking shortly before he became the UK’s last Prime Minister but one. His speech is one of many that senior politicians have made in the past quarter-century, where migrants’ English language has been highlighted as a supposed cause of societal problems.

The Unison spokesperson in Hong Kong was doing something different. Hong Kong, as we know, has a complicated trilingual language policy which aims to enable residents to write English and Chinese, and to speak English, Cantonese and Putonghua. The dominant language in Hong Kong is Cantonese and around 88% of Hong Kong’s residents claim it as their first language. A lack of competence in Cantonese for Hong Kong’s non-Chinese residents is – for people like Mandy Cheuk – a rights-based issue, held up as a barrier to participation in the labour market and to social progression.

In their own ways, these speeches indicate the political landscape within which the figures of language minoritised people must navigate their belonging and identity. Whether they are virulently anti-immigration like Trump, absurdly nationalistic and exceptionalist, like Johnson, or strongly oriented towards social justice, like Mandy Cheuk, the speakers are invoking language as part of a grand narrative of non-belonging. It seems that only certain languages are allowed, if people wish to belong.

What I want to do is point – at the outset – to the damaging, exclusionary and othering nature of monolingualist discourse, underpinned as it is by a homogenising ideology. One does not have to reach far for other instances of aggressive monolingualist rhetoric in the public sphere, where language is coopted for the demonisation of minoritised groups, whose language itself is used against them as a proxy for other things – principally race and ethnicity. Language is brought into discourse and also into actual policy about citizenship, naturalisation, political belonging and right to remain, and even to enter a country. A dominant monolingualist discourse in the US mutually supports a nativist ‘one-nation-one-language’ ideology. In the UK, the learning of the English language is seen as a prerequisite for social cohesion, as well as its use as a tool of immigration policy. In Hong Kong, Cantonese is presented as the gatekeeper for decent jobs for “EM”s or Ethnic Minorities - Hong Kong’s language-minoritised non-Chinese residents.

In all cases the failure of someone positioned as an outsider 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 and minorities. A hegemonic, monolingualist discourse – whether it’s couched in aggressively anti-immigration or in emancipatory terms – contrasts starkly with communicative practice on the ground. This – in the linguistically and culturally diverse spaces of the contemporary world – involves translingual and trans-semiotic practices that are well described and considered through the admittedly diffuse prism of translanguaging.

This conference is about dissolving dualities. In my talk, I argue that translanguaging can be thought of as a theory of practice, and hence presents a challenge to the binary

inherent in this conference's themes. It offers a useful perspective from which to understand communication in linguistically diverse places and spaces. I develop my argument with reference to research exploring language, translinguaging, belonging and mobility. First, I discuss the personal evolution of my conception of translinguaging, from seeing it as a way of understanding flexible multilingualism, to being more of a creative-political project. I then invoke the notion of a transformative translinguaging space, which is, as Li Wei puts it, a space enabled *by* translinguaging *for* translinguaging.

Then I talk about my own research as I turn to the question of belonging, and to what an account of belonging which utilizes the concept of emergent translinguaging space might offer to our thinking about communication in culturally diverse multilingual spaces, including classrooms. I'll maintain that the notion of a translinguaging space, where belongings are fluid, negotiable in interaction and translocal, helpfully contests homogenizing discourses of language and belonging.

## **2. Translinguaging: Capturing the public imagination**

At a conference with a focus on translinguaging, you probably don't need me to tell you that the concept is as multiply defined as it is popular. Here's my favoured definition: Translinguaging is the sociolinguistic term now commonly used to describe 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.

I regard translinguaging as a concept worth fighting for, aligned with a general orientation towards a 'trans-' disposition. In applied linguistics, this, say Maggie Hawkins and Junko 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 appeal of translanguaging first lay in how the concept resonated with my own observations from my research in language education in the north of England. What I noticed was the fluid multilingualism which appeared to be characteristic of the spaces where I was carrying out my work, mainly in and around the northern English city of Leeds. My research centered upon classes of English for Speakers of Other Languages, ESOL, adult migrants in sometimes the very earliest stages of their settlement in the UK. In their day-to-day interaction outside class, students appeared to deploy their communicative repertoires flexibly – in the memorable words of Otheguy and colleagues:

without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named (and usually national and state) languages.

(Otheguy et al 2015:283)

This contrasted sharply with much teaching practice that I was observing. A monolingual norm was often at play, an authoritative voice of ‘English only’, against which the multilingual reality of students’ lives sat in sharp contrast. There appeared to be a paradox: The pedagogic goal was surely to develop multilingual competence in students. Yet curricula, materials and practice itself appeared to be ignoring, avoiding, and failing to capitalize upon, students’ extant multilingual resources. My question became - as our research began to ask - why would we want to teach people to become more multilingual, monolingually?

My involvement in a large project called *Translation and Translanguaging* inevitably pulled me into debates that are by now quite well-worn. Does a bilingual speaker’s translanguaging encompass a duality, or is the repertoire unitary? Do languages have a reality in the brain and the mind or are they socially constructed and thus only socially real? These are of course important questions – though I’m agnostic on some of them: like many linguists, I manage to hold competing ideologies about language, which I deploy flexibly and fluidly according to the contingencies of the situation.

So, as a critical applied linguist, I can remark on – and celebrate – the notion of a repertoire of semiotic resources that a user appears to draw upon *ad hoc*, to make meaning – to get things done – in a communicative context, perhaps with disregard for, and as a challenge to, the norms of linguistic behaviour – the rules for communication – in a particular space.

As a sociolinguist though 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. Translanguaging from a linguistic perspective is not a chaotic free for all.

And as an advocate for linguistic human rights, 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, Catalan, Uyghur, whatever – is as real as any psycholinguistic reality when it is central to an associated decolonization movement.

So what use, specifically, is translanguaging? Why has it caught the public imagination? Why is it such an appealing concept for educators? It's not as if attention on communication beyond language and across modes used in acts of meaning-making is novel in applied linguistics: interactional sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, literacy studies, SFL-inspired multimodal discourse analysis: all of these 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, for applied linguists. What does translanguaging offer that other linguistics-informed accounts of communication in multilingual spaces do not?

Well, first a trans-orientation towards language - *linguaging* - with its spotlight on the speaker and the process, encourages the range of study to extend to the many ways humans interconnect. Translanguaging, as a theory of practice - a theory grounded in practice - encourages a softening of the distinction not only between languages but between and across varieties, registers, discourses, and between and across linguistics and everything else involved in communication – the other communicative modes –

ways of gesturing, dressing, moving through space. All of these can be incorporated into an account of translanguaging.

Second, translanguaging aligns with a stance which allows criticality about language use into the equation - and I'll quote our next keynote speaker here - this being the:

“ability ... appropriately, systematically and insightfully to inform considered views of cultural, social, political and linguistic phenomena [and] to question and problematize received wisdom”

(Garcia and Li 2014: 67)

Third, translanguaging has creative potential. As Li Wei says:

“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)

That is to say ‘this is fine – you’ll be listened to here - it’s OK to be imaginative and relaxed about your language use in this space – and perhaps in other spaces too, where you might have thought your translanguaged voice was not a legitimate one.’ The transformative possibilities of translanguaging are perhaps why it has caught the eye of educators – it gives a warrant to multilingual people, to students and their teachers, to free themselves of the shackles of normative rule-bound hegemonic monolingualism - at least in some domains of practice.

### **3. Translanguaging space**

Let me introduce further, and talk critically about, the idea of a translanguaging space. This, as Li Wei put it when he introduced the concept, refers to 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.

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. Michel de Certeau and 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 those 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 – *by* and *for* translanguaging), they can be closed down. There are occasions when translanguaging is *not* enabled, spaces where certain languages, varieties and registers are *not* allowed, times and places when certain discursive practices are legitimised but others are not, and hence where creativity, audibility and resistance to social inequalities are restricted. I used to see this sign, and ones like it, all the time on the walls of adult ESOL and literacy classrooms in the UK. Usually, the rationale for displaying it was well-meaning: the equality argument (no-one will feel left out or excluded if only one common language is allowed) coupled with a strong belief in the tradition of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) that instruction works best when carried out exclusively in the target language.

#### **4. Opening up translanguaging space: an example from a Hong Kong school**

Some educational spaces are translanguaging spaces though. I'll offer an example from an EMI school in Hong Kong. EMI schools in Hong Kong are interesting places. In classroom interaction, and at the scale of practice, we typically don't observe an unfettered free-for-all, an unconstrained deployment and performance by all participants of the full range of their semiotic resources. Teachers' and students' repertoires are deployed according to their understanding of what aspects of the repertoire they share, but also according to the norms of interaction in particular settings within a school. Such norms can be understood as a language policy interpreted and enacted locally. There are other spaces in schools, outside classrooms, where the norms and policies, the interactional orders, operate differently than in a classroom during a lesson, to a useful and I would argue a necessary effect.

Here are two extracts of interaction in an EMI school in Hong Kong. The data were recorded and transcribed by Jennifer Li Ge, an MPhil student at HKUST who's carrying out a school-based linguistic ethnography.

The first extract is of classroom interaction. The class is a Chinese class, and Cantonese is being taught. The students are Form 5 students from a range of language backgrounds, and none of their dominant home languages is Cantonese. The class is the top NC Chinese language class in Form 5: NC - rather tellingly - stands for 'non-Chinese' students. The activity is a dictation.

The interaction in class is not monolingual: the dictation activity involves translation, and both students and teacher use English as well as Cantonese here, two of Hong Kong's official languages. But it is controlled by the teacher leading the activity, and – more abstractly – by the norms and constraints of interaction in learning spaces like this.

After class, in the school yard, things are quite different. In the second extract Jennifer's Key Participant is talking to his friends the day after the lesson in which the first extract was recorded.

Here the talk is obviously bilingual, but not in the same way as it was in the classroom. In this case the language in addition to English is Panjabi, one of Hong Kong's other - or othered - languages. The setting is a space in school, the school yard, where social interaction is allowed for a fixed time-bound period, during the break. The participants are members of a friendship group, who – significantly – share linguistic resources associated with an expert language that is not one of the official languages of Hong Kong. The ends, that is, the purpose of the interaction, are learning-focused – they are discussing the dictation – but they also seem to be about relationship building, and about performing and understanding shared and individual identities.

The two school spaces contrast. The first is classroom space where focused teacher-controlled attention can be devoted to practicing the relevant aspects of the content in question. And a teacher might argue that such control is important, that the local language policy of the classroom, whereby only certain types of interaction and language use are allowed at any particular time by any particular participant, enables the content to be covered and the teaching to be done. This may well be the case. But - and jumping scales - we should not deny that interactional spaces in schools and universities too are politicised spaces, spaces for the enactment of policies of various kinds, the policies of central government and more local and localised school-based and classroom-based policy regimes. The students in this EMI school in Hong Kong are learning Chinese. Why so? This might seem self-evident, but a generation ago, children in the same classroom in the same school would have been learning French. This tells us something surely about the language policies that are the visible mark of the dominant ideologies (linguistic and otherwise) that operate in today's Hong Kong.

In the second, freer and less constrained space, a translanguaging space, the interpersonal function of talk threads through the discourse. Here perhaps is where identities are created, performed and developed, where relationships are built and negotiated, where opportunities for innovation, entrepreneurship and creativity lie, where much of the important business of doing and being a pupil in an EMI school in Hong Kong actually happens.

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

In the next part of my talk, I bring together the idea of translanguaging space with that of belonging, as I discuss an ongoing project that supports the emergence of a translanguaging space of belonging. The project is *Navigating Belonging: Exploring Settlement for South Asians in Hong Kong through Narratives and Participatory Photography*. I lead it, and it's funded by a grant from Hong Kong's Research Grants Council General Research Fund.

The study of belonging, like translanguaging, has caught the academic imagination, and in my view for good reason. It's a relevant issue for migrants and others who are on the move, including the academic sojourners who many of you work with, and 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 migrants, for newcomers, for minoritised people, 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.

My project 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 - as we saw in the previous example. 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 own project ran in three phases of fieldwork, comprising weekly workshops. Each phase was with a different group of participants. Our first phase was at the Centre for Refugees in Chungking Mansions, TST, in the middle of last year. The participants in this phase were five women who are forced migrants in Hong Kong, from a range of South Asian countries.

For the first five weeks of activity we ran Photovoice Workshops, led by my colleague the researcher and photographer Christine Vicera. With Christine, our participants learned some principles of photography, and took photographs relating to their own belonging, in the workshops themselves, on photowalks in 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. Then the participants worked with another researcher, Michelle Pang, to develop Digital Stories based on the photographs and narratives from earlier. These are to be displayed online on the project website.

The question of *where or how do you belong?* is a hard one for everyone to answer, even when linguistic resources are shared. So how do our participants engage with their sense of belonging through participatory photography? I'll illustrate this through an example. I've chosen an episode from our third workshop, where we did a Photowalk – trying out the techniques we'd been learning, on a walk around Kowloon Park. Participant Rosy 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.**

Here are Christines notes of the same event:

*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)

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, which was, it seems, 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 along 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):

Migration narratives 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.

The photographs that our participants take are not just generative of narratives but are integral to their telling. I'm reminded of the familiar practice from childhood, of

storytelling while turning the pages of the family photo album. The stories 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 digital stories that our participants developed, drawing on the narratives and themes that they discussed in the first part of the workshop phase. 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 DS):

Uzi has engaged with her lack of political belonging, alongside notes about the inequities of being an asylum seeker in Hong Kong (Data 8 U’s DS):

KK has used Panjabi, the language in which she is literate, to develop her digital story (Data 9 K’s DS):

It’s fair to ask how and whether the participants felt their belonging was enhanced and represented in the ways they wanted on the project, whether they experienced some kind of new agency, and what aspects of the project enabled that. What indeed did the integration of narrative with participatory photography allow, 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.

## **6. Conclusion**

In conclusion I ask: what scope is there for imagining the language classroom as a translanguaging space of belonging? I've taken you – with necessary brevity – through some of my thinking about monolingualism, translanguaging and translanguaging space, multilingual interaction in schools, and narrative and visual expressions of belonging among south Asian asylum seekers in Hong Kong. So how to bring this back to the spaces that we're interested in today, those devoted to language education? As I was preparing my talk I returned to the title of this event, and rested again on the notion of binaries and dualities. If we can consider a language classroom as a potential translanguaging space of belonging, how does such a space rub up against, and potentially challenge, the dominant monolingual imperatives of contemporary higher education, both in Hong Kong and elsewhere? The relevant duality to dissolve here is marked by a classroom wall: between classroom practice and the multilingual realities of our students' lives. What we're set to challenge are those 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. The value of considering the language classroom as a translanguaging space of belonging, therefore, is its potential for showing how debates on interaction in culturally diverse spaces can be refocused.

A more general point is that a move towards translanguaging can take account of linguistic diversity in education – drawing upon it as a resource - rather than denying it. While remaining cautious about its transformative potential, I maintain that a translanguaging approach to language education can push towards potentially decentering the word and towards attention on meaning-making beyond language. Thus it can contribute to a more inclusive, holistic approach to understanding and addressing what it means to belong.

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