

English has Always Been Present: Transnational Youths Illustrating Language Dynamics in Zacatecas, Mexico
English has always been present: Jóvenes transnacionales que ejemplifican dinámicas lingüísticas en Zacatecas, México

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at describing the impact of transnationalism on the reconfiguration of linguistic repertoires of transnational people and how this is manifested in their discursive practices, their residing communities, and the geographical places they connect. Narratives from three participants are analyzed from the perspective of translanguaging theory (Wei, 2011, 2018b), which allows to capture moments of language creativity and criticality that are then linked to the transnational dimension of the participants, exemplifying how these elements interact with each other. Through participants' flexible languaging and metalinguistic commentaries manifested in various domains of their daily lives, their creativity and criticality emerge as natural and significant features of their routine and bilingualism.

Keywords: 1. transnationalism, 2. translanguaging, 3. transnational youths, 4. Zacatecas, 5. Mexico.

RESUMEN

Este artículo busca describir el impacto del transnacionalismo en la reconfiguración de los repertorios lingüísticos de las personas transnacionales y cómo este fenómeno se manifiesta en sus prácticas discursivas, las de sus comunidades de residencia y de los lugares geográficos que conectan. Se analizan tres narrativas, desde la perspectiva de la teoría de translanguaging (Wei, 2011, 2018b), la cual permite capturar momentos de creatividad y relevancia lingüística, que a su vez se conectan con la dimensión transnacional de los participantes para ejemplificar la manera en que todos los elementos interactúan entre sí. A través del discurso flexible de los participantes, así como de sus comentarios metalingüísticos, que se manifiestan en varias dimensiones de su cotidianidad, podemos reconocer su creatividad y sentido crítico como características naturales y significativas de su cotidianidad y bilingüismo.

Palabras clave: 1. transnacionalismo, 2. translanguaging, 3. jóvenes transnacionales, 4. Zacatecas, 5. México.

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INTRODUCTION

The first two decades of the 21st century have been characterized by the rapid reconfiguration of the world across domains. International migration has increasingly been at the center of current debates as the phenomenon is often portrayed as one of the main triggers of the diversification and change of societies around the world. In this context, contemporary takes on transnational mobility break from the traditional assimilationist approach embracing notions of multiculturalism, multilingualism, and the mobility dynamic of people who are not firmly planted in or attached to a single place (Itzigsohn & Saucedo, 2002; Robertson, 2013).

This paradigm shift in contemporary migration studies aligns with the latest research approaches in the field of linguistics (De Fina, 2016; Wei, 2018a; Otheguy, García, & Reid, 2018). It emphasizes the increasing dynamism of language practices that incorporate various languages and varieties as a result of migrants “taking their heritage languages to new locales and developing repertoires that were not traditionally part of their community” (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 2). The linguistic contact and diversity that people experience because of their mobility increase the variety of communication resources available for them as part of their linguistic repertoire.

Busch (2015) points out that part of this repertoire is also found in the unavailable resources, the life experiences, and spaces which are part of people’s biographies and trajectories, which determines the configuration of their linguistic repertoires. Therefore, beyond the notion of a linguistic repertoire as a “toolbox” containing languages, codes, grammar, or social conventions that people use depending on the situation, linguistic repertoires reveal “the synchronic coexistence of different social spaces in which [people] participate as speakers” (Busch, 2015, p. 356). Moreover, people’s mobility implies that the languages, varieties, or dialects in contact and the repertoires they build in the context of their transnational journeys move along with them and are active assets of their interactions and participation in the communities they belong to across borders. Therefore, this paper aims at describing the impact of transnationalism in the reconfiguration of people’s linguistic repertoires. This description allows us to gain insights into the discursive practices of transnationals, their communities of origin, and the geographical places they connect.

Language and Transnationalism

Even though language contact is a significant dimension in the journeys of migrants, little is known about the complex discursive practices of transnationals and the configuration of their linguistic repertoires. The relationship between people and language is often also obscured by ideologies of power, prestige, or race that frequently interact, resulting in the emergence or perpetuation of prescriptive constructs of language and identity (Makoni & Pennycook, 20067; Samy Alim, Rickford, & Ball, 2016; Silverstein, 2015). For instance, the widespread belief that one state equals one language as in Japan= Japanese or England= English (García, 2009) or the emergence of *Hispanophobia* against Spanish speakers in the United States (Zentella, 1997).

These ideologies frequently lead to expectations of how people must use language to be considered part of a territory or group with a defined identity and shared values. This becomes problematic for the transnational migrant who is suspended continuously between multiple frameworks of reference that include at least two languages and two cultures (Skerrett, 2015). The synergies that develop with these dynamic trajectories lead to the emergence of fluid identities, which imply people revealing “different identity positions” (Migge, 2016, p. 7) depending on particular contexts that influence each other resulting in new identity components. This situation challenges traditional, monolingual, and monocultural ideologies, under which the identities displayed by transnationals seem rather illogical or decontextualized (Migge, 2016).

Over the last four decades research on transnationalism highlighted assimilation and acculturation to the ‘host’ society as the ultimate goal of adaptation for migrants. Including, in most cases, the acquisition of a new language that is spoken by the majority in the ‘host’ country—for instance, Mexican migrants learning English in the United States—. However, contemporary research has drawn attention to the significance of migrants’ heritage language or mother tongue² in many of the activities they perform. For example, when participating in religious ceremonies, transnational organizations’ events, and other forms of social interactions where they use the languages, dialects, or varieties shared by members of the community abroad (Escala Rabadán & Rivera-Salgado, 2018; Ghorashi, 2004). The role of migrants’ heritage languages becomes even more relevant once we consider the complex linguistic dynamics and landscapes that people navigate daily, particularly within the transnational context. From online interactions with family members and friends in the country of residence or origin to carrying out daily chores, listening to the news, or finding out information, most transnationals live their lives using different languages or varieties as new communication resources integrate into their repertoires. Therefore, these resources are employed for different purposes, and people attach particular meanings to these dynamic languaging practices. This resonates with contemporary notions of transnationalism highlighting how “immigrants redefine, but do not break ties to their country of origin” (Itzigsohn & Saucedo, 2002, p. 766) or to other places and people across linguistic, cultural, or ideological borders (Duff, 2015). This demonstrates that beyond the ‘acquisition’ of a new language or the ‘preservation’ of their ‘heritage language,’ migrants exercise their bilingualism or become bilinguals³—to various degrees— as they navigate their daily lives drawing on the multiple elements and resources that make up their complex linguistic repertoires.

As we learn more about transnational communities and their practices, we see that stronger attention is paid to myriad symbolic elements that characterize the culture of migration. For instance, the engagement of transnationals in activities placed on different geographical locations provides an account of their networks and belongings. In this context, language performance

²The language, varieties, or dialects people grow up with in the sense of having a degree of ‘expertise’ or a ‘negotiated’ affiliation (see Rampton, 1990).

³The terms bilingual/bilingualism are used here in adherence to Grosjean’s (2010) definition of bilinguals as “those who use two or more languages (or dialects) in their everyday lives” (p.4).

becomes central to their actual participation in activities involving cultural dissemination and to explore the meaning they attach to these particular discursive practices. As we saw above, the transmission of cultural elements through the organization of and participation in given events and interactions happening within transnational fields (Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2006) implies the use and contact of migrants' heritage language(s), other language(s) or communicative resources.

This is also observed in the case of migrants who carry out seasonal visits to their hometowns, where language becomes a symbolic element characteristic of their mobile trajectories and an indicator of the prevailing culture of migration. An example of this comes from Moctezuma Longoria (2011), who explains it in his description of the actions and practices that migrants perform in many communities in Zacatecas, Mexico, during seasonal visits to their hometowns, particularly during Easter or Christmas holidays. Among elements such as the organization of religious celebrations and the display of economic wealth and migrants' acquired possessions, language features in the use of anglicisms attesting to the journeys of transnationals and their offspring. Even though examples like this provide evidence of the significant role that language plays for transnationals and their culture, further research and analysis are needed to understand the dynamics at the core of the interaction of language practices and transnationalism. It is the intention of this paper to contribute extending this discussion by presenting the perspectives that bilingual-transnational youths have on the languaging practices and the phenomenon of migration.

Translanguaging

Over the last decade, within the field of bilingual education and applied linguistics, translanguaging has become widely known. The emergence of the term translanguaging is framed within the contemporary 'translingual move' in linguistics (Canagarajah, 2013; Pennycook, 2008), concerned with language use in terms of practices and processes that go beyond named languages and structures. Translanguaging has been proposed as a practical theory aiming at capturing the processes and discursive practices of bilinguals who use multiple language varieties or dialects to navigate their everyday lives (Wei, 2018b).

The lens of translanguaging has proven to be particularly useful in investigating how transnational families communicate (García, 2012; Hua & Wei, 2016). Commonly, these families' multidimensionality propels the use of language(s) and communicative resources in complex ways. It reflects people's cultural backgrounds, identities, community networks across borders, and other aspects emerging from their transnational profiles. In fact, García (2012) has described how daily interactions between members of transnational families across all generations are conducted through using at least two languages to talk to each other and with external actors, listen to the radio or TV, and in general to negotiate language(s) use in their everyday tasks and encounters. According to García (2012) translanguaging accounts for "flexible use of [transnationals'] linguistic resources to make meaning of their lives and complex worlds" (p. 1).

It is often believed that translanguaging is a synonym or a competing term for code-switching,⁴ but it is not. Code-switching is rather a feature of translanguaging, which “posits that bilinguals have *one linguistic repertoire* from which they select features *strategically* to communicate effectively” (García, 2012, p. 1). We shall now turn to further explaining how the lens of translanguaging can illuminate significant aspects of transnationals’ practices and identity construction.

Recent studies have used the lens of translanguaging to shed light on the creativity and criticality of the discursive practices of transnational youths (Wei & Hua, 2013). Understanding the discursive practices of transnational youth can provide us with insights into the construction of their identity and how they view the world, which can become highly significant when investigating migration phenomena. For instance, the dynamics at the core of the culture of migration have been suggested in a previous paper exploring the link between socio-cultural remittances —language included— and identity (Núñez Asomoza, 2019). The investigation of discursive practices and translanguaging has been effectively done through the notion of moment analysis.

According to Li Wei (2011), moment analysis captures significant instances where something linguistically creative or salient has happened. The findings obtained by conducting this type of analysis provide concrete and contextualized evidence of translanguaging events, where people display the complex synergies and dynamics of the way they communicate. Groundbreaking research conducted by Li Wei and Zhu Hua (2013) with transnational youths in London illustrates how translanguaging practices challenge linguistic norms to position themselves “flexibly” (p. 532) while they emphasize the fluidity of their identities, which simultaneously evoke the dynamism of their trajectories. This research highlights how through acts of translanguaging social spaces and identities are negotiated, a key aspect to understanding transnational mobility and its complexity.

Furthermore, translanguaging has also been found to be an empowering practice in schools. Scholars such as Mazak and Herbas-Donoso (2015) researched language practices in Puerto Rico. They found that the translanguaging practices of both university students and teachers “break the monopoly of English” in academic contexts, while for students, it validated their bilingualism as a “socio-political act” (p. 712). This becomes highly relevant in a context where transnational mobility comes with tensions around language hegemony that continuously challenge people’s ideologies, belongings, expectations, and identities. Taken together, these findings demonstrate the significant links between transnationalism and translanguaging. In studying transnationals’ discursive practices, we acknowledge the complexity of their trajectories and how these are

⁴Code-switching is perhaps one of the most noticeable features of the discourse of bilinguals, and it often comes to mind as a characteristic of the speech of transnational families. However, according to García and Wei (2014), it is understood as “going back and forth from one language belonging to one grammatical system to another” (p. 12). It is a term that highlights the structural notion of languages in their morphology.

projected into their languaging to give us an insight into their world views. Therefore, allowing for the reassessment of the global dynamics of mobility and their impact on people's lives and everyday practices.

Transnational Youths

As international mobility increases, researchers have used multiple terms to capture distinct dimensions of the phenomenon and describe those who experience these various facets. Many of these terms are particularly used when referring to youths and/or students, for instance: transborder students (Kleyn, 2017), transfronterizo students (De la Piedra & Araujo, 2012; Relaño Pastor, 2007; Zentella, 2009), or returnees (Avilés & Mora Pablo, 2014; Jensen, Mejía Arauz, & Aguilar Zepeda, 2017). Each of these terms corresponds to youths or people with clearly defined profiles characterized for being located specifically 'in the border region' where Mexico and the United States meet or for signaling a particular migration flow and a process of 'relocation.'

In addition to the previous, Duff (2015) points out that other terms used to describe people and youths engaging in transnationalism have emerged with rather negative connotations, as in: "*satellite children, parachute children, astronaut families, anchor babies [...] undocumented children or unaccompanied minors*" (p. 66), among others. However, the term transnational youth has become increasingly used in literature in recent years, and it offers a different perspective on migrants' profiles, as it highlights the complexity of contemporary mobility patterns in addition to "virtual and psychological connectedness" (Duff, 2015, p. 57). Precisely, the complexity expressed and described by the participants in the study underpinning this paper led me to adopt the term transnational youth.

Skerrett (2015) defines transnational youths as "young people who maintain significant ties to two or more nation states" (p. 365). Their engagement in transnationalism entails practices and processes' reconfiguration at personal and social levels. Therefore, as a result of living suspended between two or multiple locations, these youths develop unique profiles that include particular language and communication skills, literacy frameworks, community networks, experiences, and attachments. There are approximately 258 million migrants in the world (UNESCO, 2017), which means that there is a constantly increasing number of transnational migrants. Skerrett (2015) notes that the limited research available on transnational youths in school systems worldwide makes it still difficult to know the exact number of transnational youths. According to the quantifications provided by studies conducted in schools in different countries, estimations vary from hundreds to millions of transnational youths (Skerrett, 2015). Thus, creating a need to continue searching for information that can provide us with accounts of how transnational youths live and navigate their worlds.

Being a country with a long tradition of migration, Mexico has become a fruitful context to investigate transnational youths that traditionally move between the United States and Mexico but could have links to other places and spaces—as some of the participants in this study—. Research conducted in the last two decades has provided a broad picture of the situation around transnational

youths in Mexico. More importantly, it has set the grounds to continue the work in the area of education and language practices (Despaigne, 2018; Despaigne & Jacobo, 2016; Hamann & Zúñiga, 2011; Kleyn, 2017; Panait & Zúñiga, 2016; Tacelosky, 2018a, 2018b; Zúñiga & Hamann, 2009). The seminal work of Hamann, Zúñiga, and Sánchez García (2008) has drawn attention to a large number of transnational youths enrolled in basic education in the Mexican states of Nuevo León, Zacatecas, Puebla, and Jalisco, all of which have a high migration incidence. Based on 54,000 surveys conducted and census data, Zúñiga and Hamann (2013) explain that there could be around “69,500 students with U.S. school backgrounds” (p. 3) across the surveyed states. According to their data, “almost a third of Zacatecas schools (32%) [...] had a significant transnational presence” (Zúñiga & Hamann, 2009, p. 339).

There are approximately 2.1 million U.S. residents of Zacatecan-descent living in the United States (Delgado Wise, Márquez Covarrubias, & Rodríguez Ramírez, 2004) result of the long migration tradition in the state. Calculations based on research looking at basic education schools (García Zamora, Ambríz Nava, & Herrera Castro, 2015; Moctezuma Longoria, 2015; Zúñiga & Hamann, 2019) have found an average of 8,000 transnational children in schools across the state of Zacatecas for the academic years of 2005-2006, 2012-2013 and 2013-2014. This coincides with the estimations by Zúñiga and Hamann (2009) seen above. While these are approximate numbers from academic reports, they provide an overview of the magnitude of the phenomenon, comprising not only young cohorts, but expanding as they grow older and continue their academic and transnational journeys in the future. Moreover, this body of work also provides insights into the effects of transnationalism in Zacatecas in terms of family dynamics (e.g., parent-children separation), the culture of migration, and tensions revolving around transnational youths’ socialization and language use.

The literature mentioned in this section sheds light on the complex and unique trajectories of transnational children and teenagers, as they all have different profiles characterized by intricate mobility patterns, places of birth, and periods of permanence in the United States and Mexico. Additionally, further research that has documented the experiences of transnational youths in Mexico provides evidence of the complexities faced by these youths as they navigate life across borders and more specifically across education systems (Despaigne & Suárez, 2019; Peralta Ruiz & Valdéz Gardea, 2012; Vargas Valle, 2012). Current studies have shown the importance of language in socialization and school experiences. In these practices, there is a constant struggle as a result of adhering not only to the society’s monolingual and monocultural expectations but to the school system in the United States and Mexico (Avilés & Mora Pablo, 2014; Borjian, Muñoz de Cote, van Dijk, & Houde, 2016; Hamann & Zúñiga, 2011).

Mexico-U.S. Migration and Language Tensions

The linguistic and cultural differences between Mexico and the United States have been a major and constant source of tensions. Their effects are deeply rooted. In fact, at an internal level, these tensions have had a significant influence on the construction of immigration or education policies.

Also, they have affected some people's perceptions leading to a widespread rejection of Spanish in the United States and English in Mexico. In the case of the United States, language has been closely related to immigration policy and the criminalization of Spanish speakers, especially for Mexican and Latin-American descendants in general (Macgregor-Mendoza, 1998). This systematic hostility towards Spanish speakers in the United States can be explained by looking at the symbolic value of language "as the bedrock of national identity" (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014, p. 215) and as the ultimate proof of assimilation. Moreover, this perspective has led to the emergence of the English-only movement, which advocates for legislation that would make English the official language of the United States. Consequently, it perpetuates a narrative of white supremacy that favors monolingualism and monoculturalism (Hartman, 2003).

In Mexico, on the other hand, English has gained major significance as a desired asset given the long commercial relationship with the United States. Despaigne (2010) explains how English has acquired a commercial value manifested in entertainment, marketing, word loans, shopping, education, and certifications such as the TOEFL exam. According to Despaigne's (2010) research, the perceptions of English in Mexico point at its 'aspirational character,' as it is considered a commodity mainly accessed by elite groups. Moreover, Despaigne (2010) also highlights the symbolic value of English for millions of Mexican (transnational) migrants, who might regard it as a language associated with "abandonment, loneliness, exploitation, discrimination and hard work" (p. 67).

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection and Participants

The findings presented in this article are drawn from a larger qualitative study on the translanguaging practices of 23 transnational youths between the ages of 19-32 in Zacatecas, Mexico. The study included university-enrolled students and young professionals working in public institutions, all of them with a history of migration between Mexico and the United States and/or other countries. Based on the transnational profiles identified by Hamann et al. (2008), the characteristics of the participants in this study considered their place of birth, age, average time living in Mexico or the United States/another country,⁵ and the type and frequency of cross-border mobility (returned, seasonal, occasional, or highly active).

The data collection process was carried out between May-June 2017 and January 2019 using semi-structured interviews and writing compositions conceived as traslanguaging spaces (Wei, 2011). Both instruments promoted the flexible use of language and communication resources to capture those *moments* of creativity and criticality that triggered the analysis and provided insights

⁵1) Born in Mexico with 1-4 years living in the United States before moving to Mexico, 2) Constant movement between Mexico-U.S., 3) Born in the United States, and 4) Born in Mexico with more than 5 years living in the United States before moving to Mexico.

into participants' perspectives and meanings. This flexibility meant that the researcher and participants were free to use English or Spanish in addition to their varieties and other languages as they wanted.⁶ This approach allowed to capture instances of natural language use — translanguaging natural occurrences (TNOs)— while it allowed participants to provide descriptions, reflections, and explanations —metalinguistic commentaries (MLCs)— of the processes inherent to their languaging practices.

Each data strand corresponding to the TNOs and MLCs was coded and analyzed with the support of the software *Transana* (Woods & Fassnacht, 2017) and through the application of the *translanguaging* theoretical framework for the interpretation of the data. Pseudonyms were used to identify all the participants and to protect their identities. Participation in the study was voluntary, and signed consent was obtained from each participant. A portion of the findings is presented in the article. They correspond to the metalinguistic commentaries revolving around the theme identified as 'migration and transnationalism.' In the next section, I introduce interview and composition extracts from three students: Paco, Adriana, and Regina, who discussed the languaging and migration dynamics in their towns.

Participants' Biographies and Transnational Profiles

Paco (22), Adriana (22), and Regina (27) are all transnational students located in the state of Zacatecas at the time of the research. They reported going to school in Mexico as they grew up and were enrolled or graduated from the B.A. in Foreign Languages where they speak Spanish, English, and an additional language (Italian, French, or German).⁷ Paco and Regina also reported being English teachers. The participants' transnational profile was determined based on the average time they have spent living in Mexico, the United States, or abroad. In addition to the type and frequency of the cross-border mobility, they reported in the research instruments. Paco's parents migrated to the United States at different stages, and he reported visiting them occasionally. During these visits, Paco spends some time studying English or working in the United States.

Regarding Adriana's family, they have been engaged in transnational migration for generations, in fact, many members of her family—including her and her younger sister— have become U.S.

⁶The interview transcripts and participants' compositions were not edited for grammar or spelling. Since the study looks at natural-occurring discourse, the non-standard forms are not regarded as mistakes, nor were the aim of the study to focus on the analysis of language variation or style. Many extracts in the complete study include instances of 'Spanglish,' varieties of Spanish, English, and German. Additionally, the participants referred to their closeness to African American English and other languages and varieties. Flexible languaging was captured in the transcription of the interviews and compositions as they were naturally produced by participants.

⁷These participants made frequent references to the use of Spanglish in school, and they also detailed their flexible use of their linguistic repertoire to learn Italian and to interact with various speakers during their time abroad.

citizens or residents. This migratory status allows Adriana to work in the United States for short periods during the holidays while visiting family members who live there. Upon completing her degree in Foreign Languages, Adriana wants to study for a master's degree abroad. The last participant presented here is Regina, who at the time of the research was studying for a master's degree in central Mexico. Regina also described her family's engagement in transnational migration, and she was the only one of these three participants born in the United States. In the sections below, I show how they perceive transnationalism manifestations in connection with the languaging practices emerging in their landscape and in their accounts of life in their hometowns.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section has been divided into four parts: *English and the 'paisas,'* "English has always been present," *The dynamics of language in the town,* and *The migrant atmosphere.* Each section presents an aspect of the languaging and migration practices perceived and described by the participants. Additionally, they feature an interview extract or writing composition corresponding to the participants. Following the framework of translanguaging, the analysis focused on capturing relevant moments where the participants used or noted instances of linguistic creativity or significance, as well as those moments where participants critically analyzed the discursive practices located in the landscape or within the context of their own experience of transnationalism and as translanguagers.

English and the 'Paisas'

During the interview, Paco introduced himself by providing some biographical details and general yet very significant information about his hometown:

<p><i>Ah OK, este ... pues soy un joven estudiante de 22 años, tengo procedencia de un municipio del estado de Zacatecas donde el inglés es un idioma pues prácticamente nulo. Uhm, claro que cuando llegan los paisas —como decimos acá en México— pues si tenemos un poquito de acercamiento, pero no tan arraigado (Paco, comunicación personal, 22 de enero del 2019).</i></p>	<p>Uh OK, well ... I'm a young 22-year-old student, I come from a municipality in the state of Zacatecas, where English is practically not spoken. Uhm, but obviously when the 'paisas' —as we call them here in Mexico— are around, we do have a bit of contact, but [English] is not rooted (Paco, personal communication, January 22, 2019).</p>
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Although in the beginning, Paco describes his hometown as being a place where English is "nulo" (nonexistent), he clarifies the situation and explains that English can be heard around when "los paisas" visit the town. "Los paisas" —short form of the word *paisanos*— is an expression used to refer to people who share the same place of birth but live outside of there (compatriots). Frequently, the term is used by people and institutions to refer to Mexican migrants living in the United States as a marker of identity linked to the place of birth that entails a sense of closeness or

fraternity. In this case, Paco acknowledges that link by talking about *los paisanos* coming back to his hometown. Anzaldúa (2012) recognized such ascription as generated within the context of border life. She explains that ‘being Mexican’ or referring to Mexicans is not meant as a “national identity, but a racial one” (p. 84). Similarly, the forms *paisa*, *paisano*, *paisas*, or *paisanos* have become common, and they are particularly meaningful in the discourse around Mexican migrants in the United States and seasonal returnees. The term has been employed to brand and publicize government or other institutional programs aimed at assisting Mexicans living abroad and returning to their communities of origin during holiday seasons. Two of the most well-known examples of this are *Programa Paisano* and *¡Bienvenido a casa Paisano!*

Paco’s use of the expression “*claro que*” (meaning obviously) implies a level of familiarity with the practice of seasonal migrant visits to the town. It is of general understanding in Zacatecas that migrants visit their hometowns, particularly over the Christmas and Easter seasons. During these times of the year, there is a notable presence of ‘big pickup trucks’⁸ also called ‘*trocas*’ or ‘*trocotas*’ traveling in convoys carrying families of *paisanos*, gifts (representing socio-cultural remittances), and suitcases. The seasonal trips made by migrants from the United States to Zacatecas and other places in Mexico have been described in research (CNDH, 2017; Hirai, 2014; Moctezuma Longoria, 2011), and they have also been covered in journalistic texts (Cobián Lafont, 2018; Revista Proceso, 2016).

In his description of the town, Paco is careful to emphasize that English is “not rooted.” However, we both ‘obviously’ understand that English is in the air when migrants come to visit, as it is not only spoken by the *paisas* but is also impregnated and visible in the goods traveling along with them. Considering the broad context, Paco’s narrative acquires a significant value when we observe his description of the role that language plays in this context. In essence, he is describing the dynamics of the language practices in his hometown, a place where Spanish and English coexist at the margins of people’s transnational mobility. His description provides an insight into the tensions between English not being “rooted,” but at the same time being accepted within the social context framing the ritual of migrants returning for seasonal visits. In contrast to Paco’s description, we now turn to a different perception of language, as Adriana describes her town’s dynamics.

“English Has Always Been Present”

Another description of the manifestation of transnationalism in Zacatecas comes from Adriana. Being exposed to the migration phenomenon for generations within her family, she also witnessed the effects of migration in Zacatecas and her hometown, as she explains below:

⁸Light-cargo vehicles popular among migrants for family transportation. The cargo area at the rear is commonly loaded with luggage and gifts during visits to migrants’ hometowns in Mexico.

[...] I grew up in Mexico in a town called Jerez from the state of Zacatecas; Spanish is my first language; however, English has always been present in my life. I live in a state where half of the population (or even more) lives at the United States, it is rare to find someone who does not have relatives somewhere across the border. I have half of my family over there [...] (Adriana, written composition, June 2, 2017).

This fragment provides a contextualization of the social and linguistic environment that surrounds her. In contrast to Paco's perception of English being "*nulo*" (nonexistent) except during seasonal migrant visits, Adriana does not neglect the role of English in her town. She qualifies it as "always present." Like Paco, Adriana attributes the presence of English to the migrant phenomenon in the region, which she seems to be well aware of and informed. She confidently provides an explanation that has a quantitative tone: "I live in a state where half the population (or even more) live at the United States" (Adriana, personal communication, June 2, 2017). There is a reinforcement of her words as well, especially when talking about how frequent it is to encounter people who "have relatives somewhere across the border." And finally, she brings the broad social context to the personal level by confirming, "I have half of my family over there." Adriana's statement not only denotes that she has experienced the transnational phenomenon firsthand, but it aligns with her former personal calculations.

Adriana's apparent 'informal' estimate on the percentage of migrants from Zacatecas living in the United States finds justification in her experience within the place she comes from and inside her family dynamics. Adriana's confidence to talk about her perception of the migration phenomenon is remarkable, and it becomes highly significant considering that formal census discussions suggest that "there are more Zacatecas living in the United States than in Zacatecas" (Delgado Wise et al., 2004, p. 165; García Zamora et al., 2015, p. 4). Therefore, Adriana demonstrates to be perceptive and well-informed of the mobile characteristics of her community. Finally, in framing her language background within the phenomenon of migration, Adriana implies the existence of a context in which her community and individual contact with Spanish and English are not only common but part of the town's routine.

During the interview with Adriana, she provided further descriptions and reflections of her hometown and the migrant phenomenon. She expressed this by saying: "I feel like there's a lot of impact of ... how do you say? Like, Chicano society in Jerez" (Adriana, personal communication, June 2, 2017). In acknowledging the great influence of what she calls "Chicano society" in her hometown, Adriana paints an image of a place and context where migrants and locals coexist in a perfect example of what has been described in anthropological and sociological research as transnational social fields (Fouron & Glick Schiller, 2002; Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2006). Additionally, referring to the notion of 'Chicano' implies that Adriana is to some degree knowledgeable of the nuances inherent to Mexican communities and/or migrants in the southwest of the United States (Anzaldúa, 2012; Chávez, 1984), which is home to the majority of Zacatecan *paisas* across the border. Beyond this broad description, we now move on to Adriana's concrete examples of language use in the town and her perceptions of them.

The Dynamics of Language in the Town

Adriana's observations about her hometown and the influence of migration were also captured in the following description of a particular episode she experienced, where elements such as place, language, and the sense of transnationalism converge:

[...] like, for example, once I noticed something really strange. Like, there was this place called ... Uhm ... I think it was a sports bar called 'Doggería,' and I was, like ... OK ... That's, uhm: 'dog' from English and the other is, how do you say? A suffix?! from Spanish. and I was thinking: "It makes sense!" Of course! But you have to know English and Spanish. And that's why like ... everyone knows that there are a lot of people from the outside that they don't mind. They know that people will understand, or at least the majority of people will understand. And of course, we take a lot of words from them, and they take a lot of words from us, like: 'parkeadero,' 'troca.' We invent, and just, like, we do that a lot (Adriana, personal communication, June 2, 2017).

Adriana's commentary on how she "noticed" a relevant situation in her town reflects a moment of linguistic awareness, where she tries to make sense of what is happening. Regarding translanguaging theory, we can understand this episode as a significant *moment* where Adriana critically engages with the creative element she came across. First, her linguistic repertoire allows her to perceive an element that stands out to her, such as the word "Doggería," which she critically analyzes by breaking it down into linguistic particles according to what she has learned in her formal language education in university. This approach shows her awareness of the morphological components in her linguistic repertoire, which is confirmed by how she answers her question "how do you say? A suffix?!" (Adriana, personal communication, June 2, 2017) to label the ending of the word "Doggería." She concludes after the internal analysis that the word "makes sense," although she notes: "But you have to know English and Spanish" (Adriana, personal communication, June 2, 2017). Adriana understands that being able to notice a creative element such as the fusion of two linguistic elements from different languages requires a particular background and skill.

However, given the context in which she found the word, she explains how things work in Jerez: "everyone knows that there are a lot of people from the outside that they don't mind. They know that people will understand" (Adriana, personal communication, June 2, 2017). On the one hand, Adriana refers to people in Jerez by stating their familiarity with "people from the outside" (Adriana, personal communication, June 2, 2017) referring to the migrants living in the United States. Therefore, having these 'creative words' is not regarded as a problem by people in Jerez, or in her words: "they don't mind." On the other hand, Adriana portrays the owners of businesses like the *Doggería* (possible migrants in the United States, returnees, or their families) as being aware that "people will understand, or at least the majority" (Adriana, personal communication, June 2, 2017) because the community comprises transnational migrants, their kinship, and other inhabitants who might be familiar with the migration phenomenon and the use of English. Finally, Adriana's comment reinforces the sense of linguistic creativity between the community and

individuals by explaining that word exchanges are frequent. Also, they manifest in linguistic fusions such as the words ‘*parkeadero*’ and ‘*troca*.’⁹

These words are examples of Chicano Spanish, which Anzaldúa (2012) describes as “words borrowed from English [that become] Tex-Mex argot, created by adding a Spanish sound at the beginning or end of an English word” (p. 79). Because of proximity with the United States and the influence of migrants in certain regions of Mexico, these words are commonly used in the central-north and north regions of Mexico as well as in the south and southwestern regions of the United States. They also represent examples of what is normally referred to by some people in these regions as ‘Spanglish.’ Regarding these examples, Adriana explains: “We invent, and just, like we do that a lot” (Adriana, personal communication, June 2, 2017). Her words explicitly state the level of creativeness (“we invent”) and the usage frequency (“a lot”) that she perceives in the discursive practices of her community, which is strengthened by the fact that she positions herself as part of the phenomenon by her saying ‘we’ twice.

The Migrant Atmosphere

The last example that remarkably illustrates the transnational character of Zacatecas came from Regina. Just like Adriana, she is also from Jerez. Regina’s life has been marked by significant events related to internal migration. For example, transnationalism, learning multiple languages, institutional identity issues, and family unveiled truths that have shaped her perceptions through incredibly deep reflections about her life journey.

In the following extract, she talked about her observations of the migrant phenomenon in the region:

Ay, bueno, pues de Jerez... @@@ Bueno, yo crecí en Jerez. Viví ahí pues desde que me trajeron mis papás a México hasta los 17 que me vine a vivir a Zacatecas para estudiar la universidad ... Yo creo que yo, durante todos esos años nunca fui tan consciente del ambiente migrante [...] Pero bueno, ya después que lo redescubrí [a Jerez] empecé a notar eso, que incluso por ejemplo en la familia de mi novio, eh, los dos hermanos mayores viven en Estados Unidos. No tienen papeles, eh, sus hijos son nacidos allá, sus esposas son de aquí también de México ... mmm... O sea, incluso en la familia de mis papás claro que está el fenómeno migrante. La mayoría de sus hermanos están allá, pero no había mucho contacto con ellos [...] Hoy día ¿cómo veo yo a Jerez? ... ¡pues sí, es

Uh, well, Jerez ... @@@ Well, I grew up in Jerez. I lived there since my parents brought me to Mexico and until I was 17 and came to Zacatecas to go to college ... I think that I, over all those years I was never aware of the migrant atmosphere [...] But, well, when I rediscovered it [Jerez] I started to notice it, even for example my boyfriend’s family, uh, the two oldest brothers live in the United States. They don’t have papers, uh, their children were born there, their wives are also from México ... uhm ... I mean, even in my parents’ family the migrant phenomenon is obviously there. The majority of their siblings are over there, but we didn’t have much contact with them [...] How do I see Jerez today? ... well, yes, it is totally a migrant town! [...] Even Zacatecas [the city], I feel

⁹ *Parkeadero* means a place where people park their cars, and *troca* means a large vehicle that could be a ‘pickup,’ ‘van,’ or ‘campervan.’

totalmente como un pueblo migrante! [...] Incluso Zacatecas [la ciudad], también siento que tiene algo, algo de esto ... Sí, o sea, eh, todos mis amigos, sí, todos mis amigos tienen familiares en Estados Unidos. ¡Mi dentista! Tiene a su bebé ahorita allá porque están arreglando los papeles y ¡no sé qué! Entonces estoy muy en contacto con, pero yo siento que nunca lo experimenté muy para mí y que no me identifico tan fácilmente con todas esas experiencias porque...no sé... por la educación que tuvimos, creo que era como bastante conservadora, local-nacional ¡no sé cómo llamarle! (Regina, comunicación personal, 19 de diciembre del 2018).

like it has something, something like that ... Yeah, I mean, uh, all of my friends have family in the United States. My dentist! Her baby is over there because they are getting her papers in order, and I don't know what! So, I'm in contact with it, but I don't feel like I ever experienced it too closely and I don't identify so easily with all those experiences because I don't know... because of how we were brought up, I think our education was quite conservative, local-national I don't know how to call it! (Regina, personal communication, December 19, 2018).

When asked to share her impressions about Jerez, Regina provided an account of events that explained the relationship that she has had with Jerez over the years. Regina is the youngest of three siblings and the only one in her nuclear family born in the United States and brought to Mexico soon after. Although she lived in Jerez for around 17 years and was the daughter of a migrant family, she initially recognized that she “was never aware of the migrant atmosphere” (Regina, personal communication, December 19, 2018) around her.

Throughout fragments of the interview and similarly to other participants in the study, she recalled memories of her siblings speaking English and having access to books and movies brought from the United States, something that seemed normal and natural to her household dynamics. However, as she grew up and started relating with other people, she began to make sense of the migrant synergies of Jerez and Zacatecas. Regina's description of her boyfriend's family is just another example of the culture of migration, which characterizes the region. It illuminates the issue of undocumented migration, family networks, and traditions linked to both sides of the Mexico-U.S. border.

Regina's contact with other people's migration stories became meaningful as she was able to look at her family through the mirror of those around her. She realized the significance of migration in her family to the extent that she now has a concept for it, as she acknowledged later in the interview: “*yo nunca estuve familiarizada con el transnacional, así de voy-vengo. Y eso que mis primos yo creo que también se identificarían, así como transnationals. Entonces es muy extraño porque siempre estuvo presente en mi vida, pero no muy cerca*” (I was never familiarized with the transnational in the sense of going back and forth. Even though my cousins, I think they would identify as transnationals. So, it's weird because it was always present in my life but not closely) (Regina, personal communication, December 19, 2018). Regina's sense of ‘unawareness’ about the migration phenomenon comes out as consistent given the repetition she makes of this sense of ‘blurriness’ at different points of her quote in this section and throughout the entire interview.

The second half of Regina's account is placed in the present, as she answers her question: "*Hoy día ¿cómo veo yo a Jerez?*" (How do I see Jerez today?) (Regina, personal communication, December 19, 2018) with a confident expression: "[...] *¡totalmente como un pueblo migrante!*" ([...] it is totally a migrant town!) (Regina, personal communication, December 19, 2018). Her vision and perception of the migrant phenomenon extend to the city of Zacatecas, and similarly to Adriana, she personalizes the experience by saying, "[...] *todos mis amigos tienen familiares en Estados Unidos*" ([...] all of my friends have family in the United States) (Regina, personal communication, December 19, 2018). Moreover, she added that even her dentist and her family are deeply involved in the transnational phenomenon. In sharing these rather intimate experiences, she confirms the migrant atmosphere of the region, which coincides with the narratives of the other two participants presented in this article. However, Regina once again positions herself as a distant partaker in the phenomenon attributing this attitude to the type of education given to her and her siblings, which she qualifies as "quite conservative, local-national" (Regina, personal communication, December 19, 2018). In this particular description of Jerez and Zacatecas, it is interesting to note that Regina does not make any references to language outside her household, as Paco or Adriana did.

Regina's narrative is centered on the migration dynamics and how it has impacted her and the people around her without mentioning language as a significant aspect of the region's transnationalism or character. The only clue of the language dynamics in this case, emerges in Regina's quote about her cousins. The translanguaging moment where she keeps the conversation flow by switching from Spanish into English: "*con el transnational,*" "*como transnationals,*" (Regina, personal communication, December 19, 2018) and back to Spanish is perhaps the only indication she gives us of the interaction of English and Spanish in her community. This translanguaging moment is, indeed, highly significant because it materializes the impact of the transnationalism that Regina describes in detail throughout her narrative. This quote indicates how transnationalism and translanguaging are woven into discourse through casual conversation. Regina's metalinguistic commentaries not only incorporate code-switching, but they also provide an insight into how she navigates the world. The flexibility that she shows through this quote demonstrates her familiarity with these languaging practices.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this paper, I have highlighted the importance of exploring the discursive practices of transnationals, as our understanding of them comes with a reflection of wider processes related to migration, specifically how they could illuminate the embeddedness of the culture of migration. Language use and its manifestations in the everyday practices and places that transnationals and non-mobile actors navigate provide concrete evidence of the meanings, values, and synergies happening at a micro-level that are also strongly influenced by global phenomena. As in the case of the participants' hometowns, these everyday practices go unnoticed due to the casualty and frequency of occurrence in locations where transnationalism is deeply rooted. Therefore,

frequently and in given contexts, these practices remain invisible or become stigmatized when they finally come to light, usually at the margins of established ideologies and expectations.

The narratives of the three participants provided evidence of the complex discursive practices emerging from these youths' engagement in transnational migration. Through the lens of translanguaging and moment analysis, the narratives unveiled rich insights into the relationship between transnationalism and the construction of participants' linguistic repertoires and that of their communities and hometowns in Zacatecas. Participants' flexible languaging, their metalinguistic commentaries and how all this is manifested in various domains of their everyday lives allow us to acknowledge their creativity and criticality as natural features of their routine and significant characteristics of their bilingualism. Not only do participants describe the features they 'notice,' but they reflect on what they mean and how they make sense for them as translanguagers with complex linguistic repertoires. "English has always been present" is the common thread in these stories, accounting for the impact of transnationalism in the places, spaces, and links that these youths bring together as part of their unique migration journeys and networks. Moreover, the unique ways in which languaging takes place affirm the existence and relevance of the interaction between language use and world perception.

The narratives analyzed are significant examples of the interaction between transnationalism and languaging. They showed the dynamics of language and migration practices specific to the state of Zacatecas, which had been widely detected in previous research but not yet described. Understanding how transnational youths perceive and exercise translanguaging practices in everyday activities and places allows us to reflect on transnationalism's influence beyond the economy and related quantitative aspects. The language manifestations, the meanings, and the relevance that transnationals attach to these practices open the scope to explore people's and communities' notions of migration and identity.

Moreover, the data presented set the basis for further research while describing the discursive practices of transnational youths to improve the services and public policies in places with deeply rooted transnational migration, biculturality, and bilingualism. This becomes particularly relevant for the state of Zacatecas (and other regions in Mexico), known for its historical participation in migrant mobility to the United States and its strong transnational associations networks. However, the relevance of these descriptions also has implications for broader contexts, as discursive practices can be in myriad contexts, age groups, and domains around the globe. In seeing the familiarity and embeddedness that translanguaging has in places with a migration history, we can begin to acknowledge their prevalence to normalize their presence and contribution to the understanding of the multilingual global landscape of the 21st century.

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