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Chapter 3

Repositioning Language Education Theory

Achilleas Kostoulas

Abstract This chapter proposes an interdisciplinary, transformation-oriented perspective of theory for language education. This perspective departs from traditional definitions of theory as a corpus of technical knowledge about teaching and learning; rather, language education theory is conceptualized as a heuristic process of meaning-making, and as the emergent understandings of teachers' professional existence that result from it. Explicitly articulating such understandings is necessary for professional growth, and for challenging invisible processes that sustain structural inequalities in language education. The first part of the chapter describes a conceptual framework for scaffolding language education theory by relating it to the informing disciplines of applied linguistics, language education psychology, and pedagogy. The understandings that emerge from this synthesis are defined as being conservatively- or transformationally-oriented, and the argument is advanced that atomistic perspectives tend to be conservative in outlook. In the second part of the chapter, this argument is extended by suggesting that the emergent understandings are dynamic, and they may be "nudged" towards conservative or transformational directions by new input from the informing disciplines. This is exemplified with reference to examples from linguistics, psychology and pedagogy. The chapter concludes by problematizing the implications of this perspective for language education.

Keywords Language education; Applied Linguistics; Language education psychology; Education theory

1. Introduction

Since its inception, language teaching has tended to be firmly practical in its orientation and fiercely proud of its independence from theory. This is an outlook that is indexed, in staffroom discourse, in familiar dismissals such as "it is all very well in theory, but it doesn't work in practice". It is also attested in the discourse of the research community, such as the tactfully phrased observation that a survey of grammar teaching practices "does not reflect an impressive display of uptake from the research literature" (Diane Larsen-Freeman, p. 271). This sometimes uncritical dismissal of theory by the profession is perhaps justifiably grounded in frustration caused by the rapid turnover of ideas in educational and linguistics research, as well as the unquestioning confidence with which such ideas are promulgated (Edge, 2011). It also seems to connect with the intimidating pace at which the scope of research that purports

to inform best practice continues to expand (Medgyes, 2017), placing what is arguably an unreasonable burden on practicing teachers and teacher educators.

While acknowledging such concerns, the perspective taken in this chapter departs from the attitudes outlined above, and views them as unhelpful both to teachers as individuals and to the profession as a whole. At the individual level, atheoretical practice deprives teachers from the input and stimuli that might challenge established ways of doing things, and ultimately it hinders professional growth. At the collective level of the profession, an ideology that dismisses the potential of explicitly articulated theoretical beliefs renders language education vulnerable to the encroachment of invisible processes that could, if left unchallenged, undermine our shared values. With these risks in mind, this chapter constitutes an attempt to reposition language teaching theory in a way that addresses the defensible concerns mentioned above, and which affirms its role as an integral part of teaching praxis.

Before moving on to describe what such a repositioning might involve, two clarifications seem necessary. The first one regards the way in which the term "theory" is used in this chapter, as it is perhaps different from its usage in lay discourse. Rather than view theory as a set of research-driven facts about language, teachers, learners and education, I will take the word to term to mean a set of beliefs that bring coherence to what would otherwise be a random sequence of classroom events, as well as a heuristic through which such beliefs are generated. This loose definition encompasses collective and individual ways of making sense of the whats, hows and whys of our professional existence. Such beliefs are implicit in the practice of every language educator, including those who – like Medgyes (2017) – profess the irrelevance of research for day-to-day teaching practice, and they exist implicitly or explicitly in the ideological context where language education is embedded.

The second point that needs to be made concerns the aims of the repositioning project that is suggested in this chapter. At the core of this endeavor is a view of the language teacher as a professional who continuously evolves towards becoming more agentive and increasingly capable of affecting positive change in his or her professional context. This developmental trajectory has been outlined by Edge (2011) as consisting of five aspects. In its simplest form, it involves developing methodological competence through the thoughtful reproduction of good practice. A more elaborate aspect involves developing technical teaching competence, by acquiring insights from research in linguistics, psychology and pedagogy, and applying

these insights to practice. These two aspects, which correspond to the "craft" and "applied science" modes of teacher education respectively (Wallace, 1991; see also Skela, this volume), serve important purposes, but they seem to limit language teaching professionals to forms of practice that have been defined for them by others. It is in this sense that they seem unsuitable for sustaining teacher-driven innovation, and they can be defined as conservatively oriented.

The conservative orientation to language education can be contrasted to a transformational outlook, which corresponds to the final three aspects of professional development that Edge (2011) proposes. One of them is *theorizing*, or developing personal interpretations of one's professional experience as a language educator. This is complemented by *reflecting*, or "becoming intellectual" (p. 98), in ways that heighten the practicing teachers' sensitivity to the effects of ideology, politics, religion and race on their professional practice. This is a definition that overlaps with Said's description of public intellectuals in the Reith lectures, namely, as specialists who draw on their expertise to unsettle the status quo by "stirring up debate and, if possible, controversy" (Said, 1993, p. 4). Edge (2011) defines the final aspect of professional development as *acting*, or becoming pragmatic, in the sense of orienting oneself professionally towards activity that makes a difference. In doing so, he aligns with the axiomatic belief that language education is an applied field, one that is "concerned primarily and pragmatically with practical activities" connected to the teaching and learning of languages (Cumming, 2008, p. 286). These three aspects of professional development involve a way of relating to theoretical knowledge that goes beyond developing methodological and technical competences for language teaching, and enable greater autonomy and agency.

This chapter proposes a reconceptualization of language education theory that aims facilitate the processes of reflection, theorization, and action and thus foster a transformational outlook. To do this, in Section 2, I define language education theory as a process of synthesizing insights from three informing disciplines, namely applied linguistics, language education psychology and pedagogy, and as a coherent set of beliefs that emerges from this process. Throughout the section, the argument is made that relational and collectively-oriented perspectives can highlight connections between individual professional activity and professional structures, and they thus tend to have more transformational

potential compared to atomistic accounts. Following these observations, in Section 3 I discuss the dynamic nature of language education theory. This is done by examining how different theoretical developments in linguistics, psychology and pedagogy, "perturb" language education theory and nudge it towards more conservative or more transformational perspectives. The chapter concludes, in Section 4, with a discussion of possible implications of this perspective for language teacher education.

2. A Conceptual Framework for Language Education Theory

An obvious starting point in the endeavor to outline language education theory is to acknowledge the interdisciplinary nature of language education, and to map out the foundational disciplines that inform our professional practice. The inspiration to do so comes from Stern (1983), who proposed a general conceptual model for second language teaching. In Stern's model, teaching practice is informed, through the mediation of educational linguistics, by a number of theoretical foundations, namely the history of language teaching, linguistics, sociology (including sociolinguistics and anthropology), psychology and psycholinguistics, and educational theory. Stern's model represents a conceptual step forward from previous attempts to ground language education on either literary studies or on linguistics alone, but it is open to criticism on two accounts. First, it appears to privilege linguistic perspectives, even when interconnections with other disciplines are acknowledged. Secondly, it lends itself better to use in the "applied science" model of teacher preparation, that aims to develop empirically-informed technical and methodological competences. On the other hand, it is not easy to see how it might inform the processes of reflection, theorizing and acting (cf. Edge, 2011) and thus facilitate change. There appears therefore to be a need for a theoretical frame that is more balanced and transformation-oriented.

The model that forms the cornerstone of this chapter consists of three interpenetrating domains of knowledge, and conceptualizes language education theory as their area of overlap (Figure 3.1). The first of these areas is applied linguistics, from which language education derives tentative answers to questions including the nature of language and communication, what the formal features of the target language are, and how the complex interplay of relations among speakers is encoded in linguistic form. The second domain of knowledge that forms part of the model is language education psychology. This is the discipline on which we draw for theoretical tools that help us to better understand the cognitions, emotions and

actions of language learners and language teachers, as well as the ways in which these are enacted in diverse contexts. The final component of the model is pedagogical theory, which provides us with knowledge pertaining to the learning context, and raises our awareness of issues of cultural significance and political empowerment. In the next three subsections, I will take a closer look on each of these components.

[Insert Figure 3.1 approximately here]

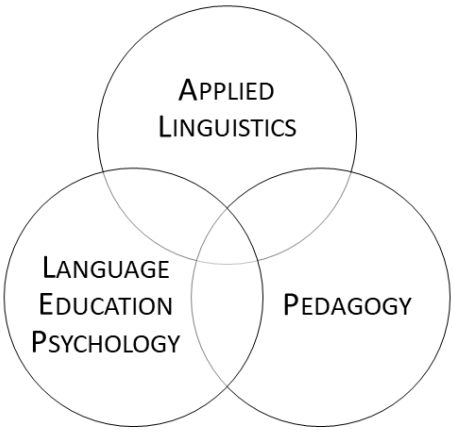

Fig. 3.1 Components of language education theory

2.1. Applied Linguistics

Although applied linguistics has been defined as the theoretical and empirical investigation of any real-world situation in which language plays a salient role (Brumfit, 1995), it has traditionally placed great emphasis on supporting language education. Ever since applied linguistics began to emerge as a coherent disciplinary field, the overlap between the interests of applied linguists and language teachers has been such that the two terms were sometimes used synonymously, and many language teacher education programs are often described as "applied linguistics" courses. This overlap has not been entirely unproblematic: For example, Skela (this volume) argues that a perspective of teacher that prioritizes applied linguistics is restrictive, and Phillipson (1999) cynically suggests that very term "applied linguistics" functions as a euphemism designed to disguise the imperialistic agenda of English language teaching. Nevertheless, the contributions made by applied linguistics research have had a great impact on advancing the professionalization of language education (Wallace, 1999).

A key reason why applied linguistics research has proved so influential in informing language education has been its very pragmatic orientation. For example, research into contrastive analysis (e.g., James, 1980) and error analysis (e.g., Corder, 1981) was motivated

by a desire to minimize learner error through effective syllabus design and teacher preparation. The same can be said about developmental approaches to second language acquisition, such as interlanguage theory (Selinker, 1972), the processability hypothesis (Pienneman, 1998), and more recent work, some of which informed by complexity theory (e.g., Larsen-Freeman, 2006; Spoelman & Verspoor, 2010; Verspoor, Lowie & van Dijk, 2008), which aspired to provide a blueprint of linguistic development with a view to supporting teaching and learning. More recent work in instructed second language acquisition has tended to be more limited in scope (e.g., Benati & Angelovska, 2015; Slabakova, 2013), which perhaps reflects a growing awareness that the complexities of language education preclude ambitious theoretical explanations, but it continues to reflect a commitment to engaging with the challenges of language teaching and learning.

Such theoretical contributions are mainly relevant to the aims of developing methodological competences, and are particularly valuable, provided teachers manage to translate them into practically applicable insights. However, from the perspective advanced in this chapter, such insights seem rather less effective in sustaining the theorizing, reflecting and acting processes that sustain transformation, and they are therefore peripheral to the model of language education that is put forward here.

On the other hand, when the attention of applied linguistics research shifts away from the individual learner and focuses on more collective phenomena, there is considerable potential for informing language education theory. For example, World Englishes scholarship (e.g., Kachru, 2006), which aims to describe the varieties of English that are emerging globally, could serve as a prompt for problematizing what varieties of English are most appropriate to teach in specific educational settings. Similarly, insights from sociolinguistics can trigger reflection on the reasons sustaining different attitudes towards the diverse varieties of English. Also, teachers might reflect on insights from critical applied linguistics (e.g., Fairclough, 2006; Pennycook, 2001, 2004), linguistic landscapes research (e.g., Blommeart, 2013) and ecolinguistics (e.g., Fill & Penz, 2017) in order to develop understandings of how their professional activity impacts local linguistic ecologies.

In other words, the argument that is put forward in this section is that, when it comes to drawing insights from applied linguistics, a repositioning of attention from atomistic accounts of language development to more social perspectives seems to hold considerable

potential for productive theorization. Given the nature of education as a social enterprise, this is perhaps not surprising.

2.2. Language Education Psychology

The second component of the framework is psychology of education, or more specifically, the subset of psychological research and theory that looks into language teaching and learning. Its relevance stems from the realization that language learning is a relational phenomenon, which brings together a dense web of psychological relations among the learner, the teacher, and the language to be learnt. Although this area of scholarship has been variously described as "language learning psychology", "psychology of language learning" or "psychology of language learning and teaching", I use the term "language education psychology" in this chapter, as it seems more useful for emphasizing the close interconnections between teaching and learning, as well as the broader (i.e., non-linguistic) developmental effects associated with learning a new language.

Research into language learning and teaching psychology has been especially productive in advancing our understanding of how learners relate to the target language and the process of learning. One of the earliest strands of such work investigated language learning aptitude (e.g., Carroll & Sapon, 1959), which was considered to be a predictor of success in language learning, and was used – controversially – to screen applicants for language courses. Another strand of investigation looked into language learning motivation, by examining the features that distinguished it from other aspects of motivation (e.g., Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Williams & Burden, 1997). Similarly, empirical research has demonstrated the existence of anxiety that is specific to linguistic performance (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; see also Gkonou, Daubney, & Dewaele, 2017). Another area of research that proved particularly generative is research into language learning strategies, which raised awareness of the behavioral, affective, and cognitive patterns that learners deploy when learning and using a second language (e.g., Oxford, 1990, 2016).

Research into psychological phenomena connected to teaching, as opposed to learning, developed at a somewhat slower pace (Mercer & Kostoulas, 2018). Such research has tended to apply to language teachers constructs that had been originally developed to investigate the experience of language learners. For instance, one salient line of research has built on Norton's (2000) seminal work to examine the identity development of language teachers

(e.g., Barkhuizen, 2016; De Costa & Norton, 2017; Varghese, Motha, Park, Reeves, & Trent, 2016). Other research has looked into language teacher cognitions, especially with regard to their self-efficacy beliefs (for an overview, see Wyatt, 2018). Another interesting line of scholarship, which extends into organizational psychology, has examined the psychological challenges associated with language teaching (e.g., King, 2016; see also Babić & Talbot, this volume). The relatively recent naissance of these strands of inquiry has meant that much empirical work in this field had tended be exploratory, involving case study designs or surveys with small numbers of participants, and thus necessitating caution in the use of findings. Moreover, the theoretical insights generated by research have yet to yield meaningful connections to practice (but see Gkonou & Mercer, 2017), and it has not always been possible to substantiate purported claims about the domain-specificity of psychological constructs to language education. However, it is to be expected that once the field reaches a level of maturity, it will usefully complement our existing understanding of the language learning process.

As is the case with applied linguistics, a useful distinction can be drawn between atomistic perspectives that focus on intrapersonal processes broadly related to language learning, and perspectives with a more visibly relational orientation, that is, research that foregrounds the interrelations among content, learners, and teachers in the context of language education. While both approaches can produce valuable insights, the former is limited in two important ways. Firstly, intrapersonal perspectives suggest both the permanence and the dominance of the individual characteristics associated with the process of learning and teaching a language, and in doing so they risk essentializing the people under study. It is important to remember that a “language learner” is a language learner only in the context of learning a language, and this is likely to be just one of multiple ways in which they perceive and define themselves; of course, the same applies to language teachers. This suggests that attempts to investigate psychological phenomena as trait-like characteristics, and relate them to researcher-assigned categories (e.g. “English teacher”) may be conceptually flawed, unless the phenomenological validity of these categories can be empirically established. By contrast, theoretical accounts that seek to understand how psychological aspects emerge in the teaching and learning context are likely to be more robust, and better suited to the needs of language education psychology.

The second potential problem associated with atomistic outlooks is they are potentially reductive. Most phenomena in language education are produced by the complex interactions among inter- and intrapersonal processes. An attempt to understand any such process in isolation, or even reduce it to static traits for the purposes of measurement, runs the risk of "destroy[ing] what it seeks to understand" (Cilliers, 1998, p. 2). Some examples of such links would be the ways in which collective ideology about language, learning, and education might entrain teaching and learning, or the ways in which the professional activity of individual teachers might reinforce or challenge structural elements of the educational context. It is in this sense, especially, that atomistic perspectives seem professionally unhelpful in fostering transformation.

To summarize, research into language education psychology has helpfully advanced our understanding of the interactions between learners, teachers, and linguistic content. An understanding of such interactions forms an inextricable component of language education theory, especially if it focusses on the contextualized activity of language teachers and.

2.3. Pedagogical Theory

The third component of the theoretical framework is pedagogy, and it refers to the influences on language education theory stemming from the educational ideologies and structures in which language teaching and learning is embedded. Such influences can be traced in multiple areas of language education, such as the design of learning activities (e.g., Ellis, 2018; Willis & Willis, 2007) and the structure of syllabuses (e.g., Woodward, 2001), in language testing research (e.g., Bachman, 1990; Weir, 2005) or in research about learner autonomy (e.g., Benson, 2013). Other examples of such connectivity are visible in projects that integrate language learning with other curricular areas (Nikula, Dafouz, Moore, & Smit, 2016; see also Tatzl, this volume), or proposals to use language learning to foster aims like multicultural awareness (e.g., Fay, Lytra, & Ntavaliagkou, 2010), intercultural comprehension (e.g., Byram, 2008; see also Mewald, this volume) or critical media awareness (Benesch, 2006). A full listing of the aspects of language education theory that have been germinated by insights from education theory would be not be feasible within the scope of this chapter; nor is it expedient given the chapter's purpose, which is to move relocate language education theory from the technical aspects of teaching and learning towards transformation-oriented aspects that are at least as important and probably less visible.

A common thread uniting many of these pedagogical recommendations is that mastery of languages, especially colonial ones and particularly English, is likely to ameliorate the living conditions of learners. This assumption is often held axiomatically, and not subjected to critical examination, although there is a small number of studies that have attempted to quantify such benefits in terms of GDP growth, poverty reduction, and increased democratization (for an extended discussion, see Erling & Seargeant, 2018). Such thinking has been the driving force behind the intensification of (English) language teaching globally, which has led to phenomena like the proliferation of English language programs at increasingly young ages (for examples of good practice and some theoretical discussion, see Bland, 2015), the encroachment of English in other curricular areas through Content and Language Integrated Learning and English Medium Instruction, the prevalence of monolingual teaching practices, and the advantages ascribed to teachers with a target language native-speaker background. Whether such educational policies and the ideology they index reduces or accentuates inequalities globally remains an open question (Brumfit, 2006; Canagarajah, 1999; Phillipson, 1992).

A related point concerns the provenance of the pedagogical suggestions listed above, and particularly the "learning group ideal" (Holliday, 1994, p. 54), of which the origins can be traced to the educational traditions of Anglophone countries. The learning group ideal indexes the belief that learning is most effective when it involves skill-based, discovery-oriented learning, and collaboration among students. It provides the theoretical underpinning of most current approaches and methods in language education, such as communicative language teaching, task-based learning and teaching, and more. The validity of the learning group ideal has come under sustained criticism, especially by academics working from a critical perspective, who have pointed out that is not always compatible with local educational traditions (e.g., Holliday, 1994, 2006), and that such forms of "scholastic hegemony" devalue local forms of knowledge (Kumaravadivelu, 2006a). However, it seems that it remains unchallenged, at least in its representation in the professional literature, if not in actual practice (Kostoulas, 2018).

In place of such monolithic ways of understanding pedagogy, a theory of language education is better served by a nuanced understanding of how pedagogical considerations can be brought to bear on the teaching and learning of languages. In such a perspective, the

economical imperatives that sustain the intensification of teaching are balanced with considerations of culture and heritage, whereas the (probably futile) quest for universally effective methods of teaching and learning is replaced by forms of pedagogy that are responsive to the diversity of local context. Such a pedagogical position, which is sometimes summarized as "postmethod pedagogy", typically postulates a set of general principles and values that are considered core to the mandate of language education, but suggests that the best way to enact such principles depends on the local context. For example, Kumaravadivelu (2006b) proposes ten macro-strategies, which are held to be universal, such as integrating language skills, promoting autonomy, and ensuring the social relevance of language teaching, and goes on to suggest that the specific micro-strategies that are used for their implementation should be guided by the teachers' observations, reflections, and analyses of their teaching contexts.

Such a theoretical position highlights the role of values and the ways in which these are reflected in language education. For example, it raises questions about how language education reflects educational policy, by influencing which aspects of social structure are reproduced and which ones are transformed. It can also prompt reflection regarding the roles of different languages in the social ecosystem. More pressingly, it can be also used as a starting point for problematizing how language education can help learners deal with cultural diffusion and increasingly complex demographic changes, tasks for which the educational models that served the nation state no longer appear adequate; or how language education can be optimized to foster prosocial behavior and sustainable peace (Birch, 2009).

In brief, pedagogy, the final component of the conceptual framework for language education, could encompass either a corpus of technical advice designed to increase the methodological sophistication of language teachers, or it could be used as an instrument to initiate and sustain problematization about the aims, methods, and effects of language teaching. In the latter case, which is closer to the position advocated in this chapter, it helps language teachers to reflect on the role of language education, especially as it concerns English, and on ways in which globalizing influences can be mitigated with the use of locally appropriate pedagogical responses.

2.4. An Interdisciplinary Perspective

To reiterate, the proposed framework for language education theory brings together theoretical insights and research findings from the domains of (applied) linguistics, (language education) psychology, and pedagogy. Some salient questions that are derived from each domain are summarized in Table 3.1. A theory for language education involves both the engagement with such questions and our current best attempt to answer them at a level of abstraction that is appropriate to our needs. In other words, this framework can be used to produce personally relevant understandings for individual teachers, as well as more abstract accounts that are more appropriate to professional communities. Although such answers might be implicit, their explicit articulation is likely to facilitate reflection, theorization, and – eventually – critical action that aims to transform language education.

Table 3.1 Overview of potential directions for language education theory

Informing discipline	*Contribution*
Applied linguistics	• What varieties of English are most appropriate to teach in different educational settings? • Why do we have different attitudes towards different varieties of English? • What are the effects on local linguistic ecologies when English language programs are implemented?
Language education psychology	• How do learners relate to the target language? • How do teachers relate to the target language? • How do teachers and learners relate to each other? • How do all of the above connect to learning the target language?
Pedagogical theory	• How can language education best support the values of the education system as a whole? • How can language education help learners deal with cultural diffusion and increasingly complex demographic changes? • How can we foster knowledge of non-violent forms of communication and action?

It should be noted that developing a coherent theory for language education involves more than merely aggregating the insights provided by the three informing disciplines. Rather, it necessitates a meaningful synthesis of linguistic, psychological, and educational perspectives. Although articulated in a context somewhat removed from language education, the following quote by the French philosopher Deleuze succinctly encapsulates what such an interdisciplinary perspective involves:

> The encounter between two disciplines doesn't take place where one begins to reflect on the other, but when one discipline realizes that it has to resolve, for itself and by its own means, a problem similar to the one confronted by the other. (Deleuze, 1986, p. 387)

In other words, the range of issues to which the informing disciplines have applied themselves does not provide us with a warrant for their indiscriminate inclusion in our theory, unless they can meaningfully complement each other. For example, the linguistic insights that can most usefully be incorporated in a theory of language education are those that help us to understand psychological and educational processes of language learning and teaching. Similarly, the aspects of psychology that interest us particularly are those that enrich our understanding of what hinders and what facilitates the learning and teaching of languages. Finally, from the corpus of knowledge that is education theory, the aspects that are most relevant to our needs are those that help us to understand how individuals and groups relate to language and how they use it in instructional settings and beyond them.

With this caveat in mind, in the next section I will look into the ways the framework can be used to help understand the conservative or transformational potential of developments in the informing disciplines.

3. Transforming Practice

In the previous section, a conceptual framework for language education theory was put forward, and the argument was made that theoretical awareness and active reflection can drive transformations in the ways that languages are taught and learnt. In this section, the argument is advanced further, by highlighting the dynamical nature of the conceptual framework, and illustrating how it can influence practice. I begin this discussion by describing how understandings of language education, viewed as dynamic conceptualizations, might occupy a range of positions in an imagined space ranging from conservative to transformational, and then I go on to describe how three theoretical "perturbations" might drive these understandings towards different directions in this continuum.

3.1. Conservative and Transformative Orientations

In the conceptual framework that was put forward in Section 2, language education theory was described as an interdisciplinary act of synthesizing linguistic, psychological, and pedagogical perspectives. The interaction of these perspectives produces theoretical accounts, which represent language teachers' attempts to make sense of their professional context. As Edge (2011, p. 80) reminds us, these "the important issue" with these formulations "is not one of complexity, or even originality", but rather "their importance lies in the individual (or group) attempt to take responsibility for putting into words the current

state of awareness and understanding with which one is operating". To further extend the point Edge made, the importance of these formulations also lies in their potential to raise awareness of mismatches between the current, potential, and desired states of affairs, and thus act as triggers for change.

In order to better understand the potential of language education theory to drive change, it may be helpful to conceptualize the emergent understandings that teachers articulate as existing in a metaphorical continuum, which spans a range of positions from conservative to transformative. Drawing on the vocabulary of complex systems theory, this continuum constitutes the "state space" (Kostoulas, 2018) within which the emergent understandings materialize. Positions at the conservative side of the continuum represent potential understandings that are likely to reinforce the current state of affairs, and – as was hinted in the previous section – these tend to be associated with an outlook that reproduces existing good practice, or focuses exclusively on technical competence. On the other hand, positions at the transformative side of the continuum are reserved for understandings that generate novel ways of teaching and learning, through processes of reflecting, theorizing and acting. Depending on our focus, the transformative potential of such understandings might be expressed as professional development, when viewed at the level of the individual teacher; when thinking of the small culture level, it might be experienced as structural reform of the professional context; and when thinking of the profession as a whole, it could take the form of paradigmatic shifts (for a discussion of scales in language education, see also Kostoulas & Stelma, 2016).

Up to this point, emergent understandings have been described in terms that suggested a static positioning within the continuum. While this was expedient for reasons of expository simplicity, it is important to remember that these understandings are constantly evolving, and are responsive to both classroom experience and novel theoretical input. To better illustrate this, I will now move on to discuss how three theoretical "perturbations" might "nudge" language education theory in either direction of the state space continuum.

3.2. Conservative and Transformative Influences

I have drawn the examples of developments that might generate theoretical reconfigurations from all three disciplines domains that contribute to language education theory, namely linguistics, psychology, and pedagogy, in order to highlight the vibrancy of breakthroughs that

are carried out in the feeder disciplines. These examples have also been purposefully selected to showcase both conservative and transformative impulses. I have chosen to focus my description the collective level of language education as a global phenomenon, in an attempt to resonate with the experiences of a wider readership, but readers may want to refer to Constantino (this volume) for an example of theorization leading to more personally relevant understandings.

L2 multicanonicity While much of language education serves the obvious purpose of facilitating communication across linguistic borders, Phillipson (1992) has also alerted us to the opaque ways in which the teaching of colonial languages preserves unequal distributions of power, both between the hegemonic west and the colonized, and between western-oriented local elites and the subaltern. This belief is hidden in plain sight in constructs like the standard language ideology, the axiomatic belief that language education should adopt as its linguistic model the variety used by the "social group with the highest degree of power, wealth and prestige" (Trudgill, 2002, p. 124). This has ensured that the linguistic markers that index social divisions remain in place even in the discourse of well-meaning attempts to provide "the least fortunate" with the linguistic resources that, it is hoped, will save them from "the least rewarding careers" (Quirk, 1990, p. 9). Set against the standard language ideology, there is a range of theoretical developments that have expanded our conceptualization of what might constitute an appropriate model for language education. For example, scholarship in the World Englishes tradition (e.g., Kachru, 2017) has argued convincingly for the local relevance of institutionalized varieties of English, such as Indian or Singaporean English. Similarly, English as a Lingua Franca research (e.g., Seidlhofer, 2011) and its recent pedagogical interpretations (Matsuda, 2017; Sifakis & Tsantila, 2018) have called for increased teacher sensitivity to the implications of their linguistic choices. In this sense, one might argue that breakthroughs connected to the conceptualization of language in language education are transformatively oriented.

Positive Psychology As discussed in Section 2.3, much of the psychological research carried out in language education has tended to grow organically out of issues directly relevant to the processes of learning (and, to a lesser extent, teaching). In recent years, this focus has shifted to include not only classroom-focused phenomena, but also psychological aspects of teachers and learners *qua* individuals, which are often examined through the lens of positive

psychology (e.g., Gabryś-Barker, & Gałajda, 2016; MacIntyre, Gregersen, & Mercer, 2016). Positive psychology has been imported to language education from mainstream psychology, where it was originally developed as a reaction to a perceived preoccupation with problem-based thinking (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Alongside a neoliberal priority of maximizing the wellbeing of individuals and capitalizing on personal strengths, positive psychologists called for a methodological re-orientation from phenomenological approaches to understanding, which were argued to be unscientific, to experimental and statistical techniques (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), commonly using constructs that are mainly relevant to Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic (WEIRD) populations (Rich, 2017) and Judeo-Christian ethics (Lazarus, 2003). In language education, scholarship that has been informed by positive psychology has tended to be more balanced in its methodological approaches, and it has to date avoided the embarrassments associated with overambitious statements, such as the discredited "positivity ratio" (Brown, Sokal, & Friedman, 2013; Fredrickson & Losada, 2005; 2013). However, the neoliberal thinking that underpins positive psychology, its western heritage, and its definitional enmity to critical engagement with negative experience are all in alignment with the ideologies that reinforce the *status quo* of the profession, and thus likely to produce conservative theoretical orientations.

Early foreign language learning The increasing flows of goods, ideas and populations that has been associated with globalization has been inextricably linked with the intensification of language teaching provision. In the case of English, in particular, there are increasing pressures for early foreign language learning, sometimes extending to pre-school education (for an overview, see Enever & Lindgren, 2017). Driving such developments is a nexus of ideological assumptions, including the belief that linguistic capital can be translated into economic value, the folk linguistic confidence that an early start in language education will always lead to better educational outcomes, and the sociolinguistically uninformed view that languages are politically neutral ("[English] has no ability to do things by itself, nor does it bear the responsibility for its state of being", Dendrinos, 2009, p. 181). In such cases, explicit engagement with theoretical propositions can have a transformational effect, as most of these assumptions have come under critical scrutiny from a variety of disciplines. For example, Pfenninger and Singleton (2017) provide a robust empirically-informed critique of

the linguistic benefits of early foreign language start, and Seargeant and Erling (2018) summarize research that casts doubts on the narratives that link economic success with English language education. Perhaps more importantly, however, questions are raised about the tensions between any potential benefits that early language learning might have for individuals, and the societal effects of widescale early foreign language programs, such as the disruption of local language ecologies, or the widening of achievement gaps between affluent and financially disadvantaged learners. Bruthieux, for example, notes that such programs often constitute waste of scarce public funds, and are usually of "outlandish irrelevance" to the majority of the disenfranchised that they purport to serve (2002, p. 292). Although critical commentary has failed to challenge the problematic aspects of early foreign language learning, an increased awareness of its effects can be argued to have transformational potential.

To summarize, in this section we looked into three examples of theoretical developments, which could potentially shift the theoretical understandings towards conservative or transformational directions. In some cases, such theoretical breakthroughs can drive innovation in the way language teachers think about their professional practice, as was the case with the linguistic scholarship that challenges the standard language ideology. In other cases, like the importation of positive psychology in language education theory, an uncritical adoption of such theoretical perspectives could lead to conservative impulses. And finally, empirical work and scholarship could act as a counterbalance to conservative trends, as was the case with the critical examination of Early Language Learning initiatives. In all cases, increasing theoretical awareness, which was described above as a developmental trajectory from relatively unreflective practice to reflection, theorization, and – eventually – informed action, seems necessary in order for teachers to develop from being passive agents to having more active control of their professional lives.

4. Repositioning Theory: Final Remarks

In this chapter, an argument was advanced for repositioning language education theory. Rather than viewing it as a corpus of technical knowledge about teaching and learning, on which teachers can draw in order to develop their methodological competence, language education theory can be usefully reconceptualized as an interdisciplinary frame of thinking about the values, assumptions, and implications associated with language, psychology, and

education. Such a frame, it was argued, acts as a heuristic, which enables the generation of emergent, situated, and contextually relevant understandings of professional practice. These understandings were described as dynamic entities, which occupy a position in a space ranging from conservative to transformational positionalities, and it was suggested that theoretical insights could move these understandings towards different directions within the space they occupy.

One question with which I have not engaged in this chapter, but which I would now like to offer for consideration, is how such a view of language education theory might be used to inform language teacher education. Unlike methodological competence, which can be taught through demonstration and exegesis, the processes of reflection, theorization, and action are more challenging to direct. Such processes, it could be argued, consist of acts of framing and interpreting input. However, if these acts are directed by teacher-educators, there is a risk of alienating the teachers that are being educated. Edge (2011) narrates the criticism from a participant in a teaching methodology course, who complained that that "All you have taught me is a lot of new words for talking about what I do anyway" (p. 24). And yet, acquiring new words and new concepts for the familiar, or developing what Giroux would have called a "discourse of educated hope" (2011, p. 11), is exactly the first aim of such a repositioning move. The next steps, of course, would be: to recognize the potential of such words and concepts for generating novel ways of understanding, other than those dictated by teacher education; to realize this potential by using such words, constructs, and understandings to develop original forms of professional action; and – ultimately – to assert responsibility for, and ownership of, our professional existence.

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