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This is the author's manuscript

Original Citation:

Availability:

This version is available <http://hdl.handle.net/2318/1894476> since 2023-03-02T10:53:01Z

Published version:

DOI:10.1080/14708477.2022.2084553

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To cite this article: Marco Santello (2022) Questioning translanguaging creativity through Michel de Certeau, Language and Intercultural Communication, 22:6, 681-693, DOI: 10.1080/14708477.2022.2084553

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2022.2084553>



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RESEARCH ARTICLE



Questioning translanguaging creativity through Michel de Certeau

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ABSTRACT

This article questions theoretically the conceptualisation of creativity put forth by the translanguaging paradigm, i.e. the speakers' ability to push and break language boundaries and flout behavioural norms. It does so by considering Michel de Certeau's view of everyday language use as creative by virtue of its being able to take advantage of a space of action. De Certeau's view emphasises the existence of constraints as a key aspect of creativity in everyday practices, which challenges the idea that multilingual creativity is necessarily to be seen as transcending boundaries and being disruptive.



Questo saggio vaglia da un punto di vista teorico la concettualizzazione di creatività portata avanti dal translanguaging, definita come l'abilità dei parlanti di spingere e rompere i confini tra le lingue e trasgredire norme comportamentali. Prende in considerazione la prospettiva di Michel de Certeau sull'uso della lingua nel quotidiano, che, secondo l'autore, è creativa in quanto capace di trarre vantaggio da uno spazio d'azione. De Certeau pone l'accento sull'esistenza di limiti come aspetto chiave della creatività nelle pratiche quotidiane, il che mette in discussione l'idea che la creatività multilingue sia necessariamente da vedere come travalicamento di confini e come dirompenza.

KEYWORDS

Translanguaging;
multilingualism; creativity;
Michel de Certeau;
multilingual theory

Introduction

Of all the current theories being proposed for the understanding of multilingualism, translanguaging theory is one that stands out for its emphasis on both theory and practice (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Garcia & Li, 2014). As a concept, it was initially developed in reference to educational settings (Williams 1994, 1996, cited in Baker, 2006, p. 297), but was subsequently extended to other areas of academic inquiry and social life, for example, transactions in city markets (Blackledge & Creese, 2017) and has enjoyed popularity for many reasons, including that it is an emic approach and that it is connected to popular movements such as decolonising. Being based on a view of the language user as an individual who is able to use in a fluid manner an ample range of resources for meaning-making beyond the limits of monolingualism, translanguaging, both intended as a research perspective and as language practice, is strongly associated with creativity, which in turn has been described as variously linked to criticality and transformative potential (Li, 2011, 2013, 2018). Baynham and Lee (2019) have even proposed to place creativity at the centre of what translanguaging entails.

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Recently Jaspers (2018) has started to scrutinise translanguaging by casting doubts on its claims of transformative potential and, more specifically, by criticising the notion of a connection between creativity and societal changes. In his view, the problem is that transformation needs to be clearly determined and that, by becoming increasingly accepted in multilingualism research, translanguaging could turn out to be a dominating force rather than a liberating one; it would be ‘the only rational, ideology-free option’ (Jaspers, 2018, p. 8) at the expense of non-hybrid linguistic practices. This strand of criticism is broadly in line with the point made recently that hybridity among speakers should not be connected necessarily to resistance to marginalisation (Catedral, 2021); in other words, multilingual language practices would not be *ipso facto* forms of resistance. Elsewhere it has also been argued that advocating heteroglossic practices such as translanguaging in schools would be linked to arguments that can acquire monological qualities (Jaspers, 2019). Cenoz and Gorter (2017) have even started to consider the possibility that it could pose a threat to regional minority languages, and MacSwan (2020) has described the deconstructivist aspects of translanguaging as deleterious to language-related rights. In a previous paper, he had opposed the erasure of the notion of identifiable languages and the ensuing implication that everyone is monolingual (MacSwan, 2017). In his view, this erasure should also be avoided since ‘individual multilingualism is psychologically real’ (p. 187). On the other hand, Otheguy et al. (2019) have expressly rejected such criticism, insisting that they cannot accept language-specific differentiation, arguing that ascribing differentiation to separate named languages is driven solely by social factors.

It is clear that the debate around these matters is open and that there is space for more theoretical exploration. Taking up the invitation to proceed with academic inquiry into translanguaging and creativity (Li, 2011), I contend that there are ways of looking at the creativity of multilingual practices in everyday life that raise the problematic issue of control over circumstances and doing in language exchanges, thereby questioning some of the tenets of creativity as theorised in studies that use a translanguaging framework. I do this by looking at creativity in translanguaging theory, concentrating particularly on studies that make theoretical points, and by showing how Michel de Certeau, a scholar who was strongly influenced by the ethnography of speaking, sees language and action within constraints. Through de Certeau not only can we increase our attention to everyday practices (Pennycook, 2010, p. 28), but also consider their tactical nature within society in relation to language use, which de Certeau describes as inhabiting what is given. De Certeau’s theory helps us to advance our understanding of constraints, in light of the fact that, although some scholars have argued that translanguaging allows for ‘the possibility of transformation/creativity as well as constraint’ (Turner & Lin, 2020, p. 8), in translanguaging theory these language practices are mostly described as disruptive and little has been said theoretically about constraints. Therefore, the key concern here is to move forward with the theoretical debate, allowing cross-fertilisation that helps to see if creativity can be further conceptualised through a scholar who has focused on the connections between language and creativity in a period when this move toward translanguaging was long to come. In doing so I follow and aim to develop the suggestion that translanguaging would ‘benefit from crossdisciplinary consideration [...]’ (Lewis et al., 2012, p. 649) and more generally that knowledge extension can arise from synthesising concepts and authors from different disciplinary areas (Rampton, 2006, p. 407). This paper will therefore address these two questions: what are the differences and the points in common between the notion of creativity in translanguaging theory and that of creativity in everyday language use as described by de Certeau? What does thinking about everyday language use in de Certeau’s terms add to our understanding of translanguaging creativity?

Translanguaging creativity theory

Translanguaging is a theory for the understanding of multilingualism that has tried to move away from the study of how different codes are used in conversation. The principal issue that scholars engaged in this strand of research raise is that what counts as a code would be historically and socially determined, and that language boundaries, i.e. distinguishing language A from language B

and language C, etc. in conversation, would be problematic. This problematisation of language identification is in line with the view that boundaries between codes are not neatly defined in the everyday life of a multilingual, so that insisting on tracing such distinctions when analysing their talk would risk doing something that does not explain in full what happens when they communicate (Blommaert, 2010; Blommaert & Rampton, 2011). Instead a multilingual could be understood as a fluid language user who has a rich repertoire from which s/he selects resources that might or might not be clearly or entirely ascribed to separate socio-historically determined codes (Creese & Blackledge, 2019). There are also other innovations that have been put forward, including an understanding of multilingualism beyond language, encompassing the use of signs (e.g. Harvey, 2020), proposing translanguaging as a way to look more generally at the ways in which meaning is created, to the point of seeing studies where languages other than English are not used at all (Li & Hua, 2020b). Examples of this expansive view of translanguaging could be the practices described by Blackledge and Creese in a city market where customers and sellers do not have much in common in terms of linguistic history, and inventiveness is described as being especially salient. Gesturing, in particular, emerges as a resource as it is combined with verbal resources so that they best serve commercial transactions (Blackledge & Creese, 2017). Translanguaging is therefore, in addition to a research perspective, also a practice in itself, which has been defined as ‘the dynamic meaning-making process whereby multilingual speakers go beyond conventional divides between named languages and between modalities to act, to know and to be (Garcia & Li, 2014)’ (Li & Hua, 2020b, p. 234).

Among the innovations translanguaging proposes as a research perspective, creativity is increasingly described as a particularly significant element (Baynham & Lee, 2019). Although the theorisation of creativity as related to translanguaging is at an early stage, it is clear that translanguaging has couched creativity as boundary transcendence and as disruptive practice. More specifically, creativity within translanguaging theory has been described as the speakers’ ‘abilities to push and break boundaries between named languages and between language varieties, and to flout norms of behaviour including linguistic behaviour’ (Li, 2018, p. 23). In a seminal article, Li Wei (2011) connects creativity also to criticality, stating that the former is about following and flouting rules and norms of behaviour while the latter is connected to the ability to use knowledge to question, inform views and express them in a reasoned way. According to this perspective, the two are connected, in that ‘one cannot push or break boundaries without being critical; and the best expression of one’s criticality is one’s creativity’ (Li, 2011, p. 1223). In the same work, there is also an invitation to continue studying these aspects, suggesting that neither creativity nor criticality have been fully considered in multilingualism research and there is a need for the field to interrogate itself on their relationship with the phenomena it explores. Indeed, looking at some studies (e.g. Blackledge & Creese, 2017; Creese & Blackledge, 2019), what others might consider a multilingual behaviour characterised by the ability to combine fragments, in translanguaging terms is characterised as a way in which boundaries are transcended.

Scholars who have engaged with translanguaging have contended that we can see many language practices which transcend boundaries (Li et al., 2020). Baynham and Lee (2019) have started to present certain multilingual practices which are not free from the influence of monolingualism, perhaps focusing on sites other than those where forms of mixing are more likely to be tolerated (Wee, 2019), but clearly transcending of boundaries is what characterises translanguaging in their work. And while it has been argued that translanguaging does not conflict with accepting one’s peripherality (Baynham & Hanušová, 2017), there is a sense in which these practices are seen as acts of transgressing power dynamics and dominant discourses. Others have also mentioned the existence of orderliness, but it is described as a backdrop to something disruptive, which is what is highlighted as creative (Callaghan et al., 2018). Otheguy et al. (2015) had even argued that in situations where monolingual normativity can be overcome and language users adopt a translanguaging mode, a speaker’s repertoire would become an unfettered instrument for expression. And thinking specifically about educational aspects, Jones suggests that ‘linguistic creativity is about how language is used by learners to solve actual communicative problems in the real world’

(2020, p. 541) concurring that creativity and criticality are inseparable in a translanguaging perspective. Therefore, there have been scholars who have started to consider that sometimes translanguaging does not come with wholesale boundary transcendence and disruption. Yet, these considerations are intended more as exceptions rather than challenges to the general theorisation of translanguaging creativity as boundary transcendence; in translanguaging theory those linguistic practices that are not described as transcending boundaries are also not brought to the fore as creative. While the whole picture remains blurred, one can almost trace an equation whereby keeping within constraints is related to normativised language behaviour and boundary transcendence is related to creativity. It is also worth noting that transcending boundaries might seem to imply that something clear has been transcended, while translanguaging starts from the assumption that boundaries between languages are not clear-cut to start with.

In more recent theorisations there is also a view whereby creativity in relation to translanguaging can be regarded as transformative. This is the case, for example, of Bradley et al. (2020) who emphasise that translanguaging is the result of a broader effort to move towards the transformation of what scholars mean by language and language practice, arguing that it ‘reflects the multiplicity, fluidity, mobility, locality and globality of the resources deployed by individuals for engaging in complex meaning-making processes’ (Bradley et al., 2020, pp. 28–29). Taking this further, in a recent commentary Li and Hua (2020a) have indicated that among the possible meanings of the prefix ‘trans’ one has to do with transformation in the sense that ‘new configurations of language and professional practices are generated, old understandings and structures are released, thus transforming not only subjectivities but also cognitive and social systems’ (Li & Hua, 2020a, p. 199). In this vein, Aden and Eschenauer (2020), conducting artistic workshops in schools in a disadvantaged suburb of Paris, conclude that there is ‘a significant and balanced correlation between the development of empathy (emotional, kinaesthetic and cognitive), the intensification of aesthetic experience and the strengthening of translanguaging skills’ (p. 144). Furthermore, Li and Hua (2020a) make again the point of keeping together criticality and creativity, but adding also another ‘c’ which stands for collaboration. This additional ‘c’ would involve people’s everyday language practices as well as the research perspective/action. Translanguaging is then also understood as a research perspective that tries to identify, explore and even participate in the creative practices that involve meaning-making and that are connected to some form of transformation.

Prompted also by Jones’ (2020) point about the need to look deeper from a theoretical standpoint at the relationship between translanguaging practices and creativity, I explain in the section on multilingual creativity, Michele de Certeau and translanguaging how the conceptualisation of creativity illustrated above is essentially challenged by what de Certeau describes as speaking as an everyday practice. But one can already explain the creative value of some of these practices in their being beyond what researchers expect. Researchers’ expectations are of pivotal importance, because ‘what counts as creative (and valued, etc) shifts across space, time, and participant roles’ (Swann & Deumert, 2018, p. 3) and the researchers are ultimately those who bring up the practices they deem creative.¹ Hymes, in his monograph on linguistic ethnography, narrative and inequality, already seems to acknowledge the presence of creativity in ordinary multilingual talk, when he suggests that:

[...] the burgeoning creativity of those in Africa and Asia and the Pacific, replanting English, cross-breeding English, their novel integration of resources, add colour and beauty to the world, to those who can see them as configurations of their own (cf. Kachru 1990). (Hymes, 1996, p. 209)

In fact, it could be argued that practices that can variously be described as creative are not uncommon in multilingualism research. It is beyond the scope of this article to review all the studies that show in one way or another creativity in everyday multilingual talk, but it is worth noting that already in Auer’s (1984) early work one can start to see practices that exceed clear-cut categorisations: these are instances of what he calls ‘non-prototypical’ language alternation that relate to the fact that speakers do not only comply with regularities but also go beyond them. In the

remainder of the paper, I discuss how everyday language use can be linked to creativity in a way that challenges translanguaging theory in these matters. To do so, I particularly take into account language use as theorised by Michel de Certeau in a range of works between the 1960s and the 1980s, primarily in *L'invention du quotidien* (Certeau, 1990). I highlight that de Certeau speaks about language use in terms of creativity while maintaining that it is not necessarily linked to the exercise of control, thus raising questions about what it means to be dealing with constraints and being disruptive.

Language use between strategies and tactics

In looking at social processes, de Certeau emphasises the relevance of production and consumption. He shows that the activities that are valued in society are usually those that have a function that can be ascertained and classified and that contribute to some form of production.² Similarly, he shows that individuals and groups are meant to be consumers of products and their actions are often inscribed in exchanges. In other words, according to him society is affected by functionalism, which means that often what counts is what serves a specific identifiable purpose.³ In this context, de Certeau stresses the centrality of what he calls 'strategies'. These are ways of doing that establish a dynamic whereby an individual or a group exerts control. Strategies have the role of controlling activities so that they are manageable and can serve their function well; to do so, people that use strategies must have an overview of what occurs and can put in place plans that can encompass and manage what is seen. Control of a place, for instance, can be exerted by strategies that describe it in detail so that parts that are not used can be identified and dealt with.

However, de Certeau finds it unacceptable to consider people who do not engage in strategies as passive consumers incapable of doing anything beyond what is imposed on them. Some activities, while based on elements that are not fully chosen, actively re-use what is given. Think of cooking, for example, an individual does not cook in a vacuum or completely evade what surrounds him or her. There are recipes, there is a specific place where cooking happens, there are ingredients that may or may not be available, but what the person who cooks does is to take part in a form of poiesis that happens contextually. These are not simply activities carried out by someone who wants to go against some kind of mainstream, but are everyday practices that are shared and particular at the same time. In other words, there are ways of doing that may form 'collective repertoires' (Certeau, 2006, p. 134, my translation) that have various origins and intertwine with individual activities in place.

To explain these kinds of everyday practice de Certeau employs the notion of 'tactic'. A tactic is radically different from a strategy. It is a way of doing that does not try to exert control, nor is it connected to planning and overseeing knowledge. It is the art of the weak⁴, who use gaps in the system to act unexpectedly. When someone acts tactically, they take advantage of the circumstances, using what they have to create an alteration. They can engage in activities such as cooking and walking that are in fact micro-activities where they can be creative. Indeed, for a scholar like Michel de Certeau who 'proposed as a primary postulate the creative activity of those in the practice of the ordinary' (Giard, 1998, p. XXXV) these tactics are key for the understanding of action in society.

Language is to be looked at in the context of the range of actions that individuals and groups perform. For de Certeau, focusing on language means looking at concrete ordinary practices which are in effect the locutory acts – or speech acts, according to an alternative nomenclature – that one sees when examining everyday language. These are embedded in dynamics that involve hierarchies among groups and ways of using language, but show inventiveness and the ability to adapt (Certeau, 2007, pp. 219–220). In *L'invention du quotidien*, drawing upon the work of J.L. Austin, de Certeau sheds light on the relevance of everyday language by emphasising its richness, logical complexity and its many connections accumulated over time. Not only is everyday language worth studying, but it is also less simple than one might think. When looking at idioms, for example, he

sees ‘a way to treat the language that has been received’ (Certeau, 1990, p. 43, my translation). In this sense, the kind of use de Certeau is interested in is not a production in itself (Pennycook, 2010) but more re-use, indeed a way to treat language. He also explains this concept by looking at proverbs: in proverbs, one can identify something beyond normative frames and a form of representation handled by users.⁵ Telling proverbs implies an involvement on the side of the speaker that is related to their being able to re-use them in a particular moment and in front of a specific interlocutor (Certeau, 1990, pp. 36–40).

It is evident that de Certeau points us toward two kinds of action. One that has an overseeing character that is able to exert control. The other that is not based on full control but that can be creative thanks to forms of re-use. In the realm of language use, think of the writing of a novel, where the author, albeit using pre-existing linguistic/cultural forms, oversees the entire work; and think instead of the aforementioned telling of proverbs, where the ways in which things are said do not depend on an overseeing grasp on the part of the language user. The distinction between strategies and tactics therefore is one that relates to control over circumstances and doing, rather than power over others or lack thereof. The tactical nature of everyday practices is related to the eventuality of being weak, which means not having necessarily an overseeing knowledge of contextual elements and yet being able to be creative. As Habermas (1986) would phrase it, it means to be able to engage in communicative action within the limits of the speakers’ lifeworld. Another way to put it is that language use in the everyday can be described as an artistic tactic which involves adaptation to changes (Certeau, 2007, p. 219). Speaking can be tactical in this sense; language is not simply given but includes the active involvement of the user, who does something while using language. Tactics are practices that involve moves that resemble those of a battle, while also being poetic and jubilatory: ‘[...] polymorphous manoeuvres and mobilities, jubilatory, poetic and military interventions’ (Certeau et al., 1980, p. 8).

The re-use that for de Certeau is the basis of everyday language use can also be described as inhabiting (Certeau, 1990, p. 51) and, in turn, inhabiting as a tactic (p. XLVIII). As for activities that have to do specifically with dwelling, one can consider the situation of a new migrant who finds a house in a new city. In this situation, the choice of where to live can be restricted as a consequence of the limited contractual power that migrants often have, at least at the beginning of their settlement in a new place. But the migrant can still do something creative. The limitations on a place to live in can be turned into something creative by superimposing one’s own ways of inhabiting onto what is given. The migrants might not be able to leave but they can use the place in ways that are not fully predictable. They inhabit it by using it and at the same time being in it. The locale becomes a small-scale ‘space of action, differentiation, experimentation and innovation’ (Certeau, 2007, p. 187, my translation).

Neither does using language imply a choice at all times.⁶ There is work done on codes, Eco (1975) would say. Something given, such as a language, can be inhabited; ways of using that do not fully belong to that language can be superimposed onto what is given. In this way, a language (or a place) can be turned into a space of action and allow the speaker to introduce creativity into something that was not chosen, while remaining in it. These are ways of using or rather re-using (Certeau, 1990, p. 52) which multiply as ways to identify through a place become problematised by people’s movement; and because of their lack of full control, in a way one can see speakers as renters rather than owners of their art (Certeau, 1990, p. 111). Speakers would then be seen as those who do not have a wholesale control over their ‘art’, as de Certeau puts it, and yet are able to use it.

As de Certeau stressed on more than one occasion, these kinds of tactical move have been growing in contemporary societies, in line with their detachment from traditional communities. Elements that are gathered and used in ordinary practices become the basis of individuals’ manipulations within language. These manipulations are in line with multilingual language use, which, albeit not explicitly acknowledged in de Certeau’s work, is clearly alluded to when he talks about language use as related to processes of detachment from traditional communities. He was not

assuming the exclusive presence of French when speaking about language in society, particularly if we think about the chunks of society he was looking at (often those at the margins) as well as his mentioning of migrants and movements in his metaphors and examples. In de Certeau's conception of everyday language use, then, there is a space of action – *un espace de jeu* (Certeau, 1990, p. 51) – where the speakers can superimpose their ways onto what they have within the place where they find themselves. This does not mean transcending the place itself: it means inhabiting it entirely by making it plural. It is more than dealing with restraints on grammatical and acceptability grounds (Gumperz, 1964); it is about how meaning-making relates to the everyday circumstances experienced by a language user, including those circumstances that are not chosen. As a result, the tactics that are linked to using language in everyday life are kinds of action where the actors need to seize the occasions that come up in order to be able to create something surprising.

Creativity for de Certeau intersects language precisely when one looks at it as an everyday practice. For him, it is in the everyday that one can see it as a tactical form of re-use. It is in the everyday that one can see the superimposition he is referring to and how it is involved in the use of limits to do something inventive. It is something beyond repetitiveness and yet strictly linked to re-use. These are 'unpredictable manipulations' (Certeau et al., 1980, p. 9) that are based on the ability to be creative within a given system. Something other than planned strategic action is connected to the ways in which orality comes into being and, in turn, 'the oral has a founding role in relation to the other' (Certeau & Giard, 1998, p. 251). It is indeed important to reiterate that, while this kind of creativity can be realised by an individual's language use, it is something that happens because of an encounter with difference, meaning with someone else who is, therefore, an 'other'. To a sociolinguist, this brings to mind that 'language usage – i.e. what is said on a particular occasion, how it is phrased, and how it is coordinated with non-verbal signs – cannot simply be a matter of free individual choice' (Gumperz & Hymes, 1972, p. VI). Drawing on scholars such as Sacks and Schegloff, de Certeau sees that there is a shared element that involves both what is used to communicate (the repertoire, we would say in contemporary linguistic terms) and how it is communicated, in that it implies the presence of another, an interlocutor who is there to be part of the exchange. To use Silverstein's (2003) vocabulary, we need to see the entailment that happens when communication occurs in microcontextual realtime.

Therefore, creativity for de Certeau comes about when what is given is re-used in a tactical way. It is about using a space of action, coming to terms with what the speaker did not choose, and rendering habitable unavoidable events (Certeau, 1990, pp. L–LI). It is within this space of action that creativity emerges; and its being able to introduce difference is predicated upon the acknowledgement that such a space of action is not boundless. As discussed above, instead of talking about mobility as if it were something available to everyone, de Certeau acknowledges that people do find themselves in places they did not choose and from where they cannot easily depart. This is evidently similar with a language. It is in this interplay between individuals finding themselves somewhere they did not necessarily choose (e.g. a language and a place) and their ability to inhabit it that de Certeau finds a way to describe what he finds remarkable. Speakers might be weak in the sense of not having full control over circumstances and doing, but they can nonetheless be creative by using fragments in the process of inhabiting. In this sense inhabiting and walking are two metaphors that explain re-use in a creative fashion, where the former places emphasis on constraints and the latter on mobility; they are two facets of the same tactical way of doing.

The existence of constraints emerges at the very root of de Certeau's view of how language use can be creative in everyday life. These constraints have to do with dealing with both linguistic and social elements that are not entirely chosen. It is in this tactical way of doing that one can find creativity, which for him is not incompatible with either re-use or the existence of a space of action which is not unlimited. As I explain below, this is in a dialectical relationship with recent theorisations of translanguaging creativity in everyday life.

Multilingual creativity, Michel de Certeau and translinguaging

The language practices subsumed under translinguaging are argued to be creative (Li, 2011, 2013, 2018). If we follow what de Certeau has established, we can see that his conceptualisation of tactical language use based on re-use has something in common with what translinguaging theory proposes. Rather than accepting resources passively, speakers can use them creatively; they make smart moves that are far from simple repetition. In translinguaging as well as in de Certeau's view of everyday language use, a speaker manages to avoid repetitiveness and conveys meaning in an unexpected manner.

What de Certeau also conveys is that this creativity does not come from an all-encompassing overarching view of resources or contexts. It is based on abilities and knowledge, but works as a practice that is fragmented, i.e. based on the use of fragments in a tactical rather than a strategic way. It happens because individuals who engage in enunciation find ways to use a space of action, which is effectively a gap for the superimposition of ways of speaking onto what is there. On the other hand, in translinguaging research there seems to be an emphasis on speakers who are fluid language users galvanised by their skilful command of resources. This is the case of multilingual children in the UK who were described as able to employ multiple linguistic resources creatively and critically choosing them from a varied repertoire (Li, 2013), or that of individuals in a self-directed learning environment who are described as crossing the boundaries of modalities, language scripts and writing systems, in addition to crossing assumed language margins (Li & Ho, 2018). But one might wonder if these do show everyday creative practices which denote forms of '*habiter*' (inhabiting) rather than '*sortir*' (exiting) (Certeau, 1990, pp. 51–52).

Translinguaging theory and de Certeau diverge precisely in their attention to constraints. In fact, little theorisation has been offered on constraints in translinguaging theory, where there seems to be a drive toward transcendence of limits; language boundaries are broken to the extent that they are no longer relevant or even language boundaries have little relevance for a multilingual speaker to start with. On the contrary, for de Certeau creativity is achieved within constraints, in a space of action that allows for the emergence of tactical ways of using language that do not expunge lack of control over circumstances and doing. Inhabiting what is given – rather than transcending it – is creative for de Certeau, while translinguaging puts the accent on the transcending of boundaries through language use. De Certeau allows us to appreciate something different; something which highlights the consideration of the tactical nature of ordinary practices. Creativity in everyday language can be seen outside disruptive dynamics and, instead, be illuminated as stemming from practices of the weak in the field of the strong, also beyond what is fostered or permitted in 'safe houses' (Garcia, 2004, pp. 168–170) or 'protected settings' (Otheguy et al., 2015, p. 295) or other forms of separated environment in which hybrid language practices are allowed free rein.

In multilingualism research there is much discussion around boundaries and 'whether and how poststructuralist interpretations of language adequately capture the ways in which multilinguals manage and navigate linguistic boundaries' (Jenks & Lee, 2020, p. 221). De Certeau has repeatedly emphasised that language use in everyday life is immersed in a social setting where individuals experience limits and have to navigate them; we see practices that do not acquire any big role in society, but are disseminated. In fact, one can say that multilingual language use in everyday life becomes creative precisely because it is bound by limits and, at the same time, can relate to these limits by adding elements that do not appear to fit within them. Boundaries themselves do not constitute a barrier to creativity. As one of the scholars who studied de Certeau's work extensively says, for him creative development grows at the margins (Di Cori, 2001, p. 315). For de Certeau being creative is somehow different from counter-normative behaviour, in that it encompasses the very inhabiting of what is given. In this sense, the language practices that fall under translinguaging would not necessarily be transformative – as in having a causal relationship with societal advancements (Jaspers, 2018) – but in everyday life would allow mobile subjects to use language creatively with elements not entirely chosen by them. Also Bradley et al. (2020), while highlighting

the potential of collaboration under a translanguaging framework as a way to create knowledge, caution against claiming transformation. After all, it is obvious that when we study multilinguals we do see speakers who, while not fitting the model of someone who adheres to an ideal monolingual strength, do not necessarily try to defy such a model. Exploring these practices could mean shedding light on their existence and their workings in multilingual realities – honouring voices from the margins, using Creese’s (2020) words – instead of automatically looking at them as disruptive. In light of these points, one may venture toward a way to look at multilingual practices that indeed acknowledges and even highlights the presence of constraints. There is an overemphasis on disrupting power dynamics in translanguaging theory, whereas not enough attention is paid on constraints as related to a state whereby a multilingual finds himself or herself not in full control of what is happening linguistically. This includes also linguistic practices that do not allow a speaker to gain any kind of strength or immediate social advancement, but that stem from a condition that lends itself to the active contribution of the speaker to get things done. As a speaker, one often makes meaning without trying to walk away from a condition that others may consider undesirable, while skilfully navigating one’s linguistic circumstances with the intent of communicating something, making do with what one has.

As Erickson (2004, p. 143) remarks when commenting on de Certeau’s work ‘[...] we must consider the situated character of talk; the social action as a site of affordance as well as constraint upon local social action’. This consideration can help us visualise these practices while keeping the magnitude of what they do under the spotlight. Through de Certeau we focus on practice not as a return to the individual (Pennycook, 2010, p. 28), but as a sociolinguistic matter, taking an additional step ‘away from the linguistic bias originally carried along in the discipline, and towards a sociolinguistics that attempts to understand society, not just language’ (Blommaert, 2013, p. 621). Gaining an enhanced awareness of constraints is not meant to limit or downplay the relevance of the creative endeavour that comes with multilingualism as an everyday practice, but to appreciate it for its own value. In this sense, it could be linked to asking whether and how a space of action contributes to the type of everyday creativity that translanguaging research is interested in. In other words, casting light on these practices includes asking questions about their potentially lacking influence on a larger social scale (cf. Prinsloo & Krause, 2019 for a similar point in educational settings). De Certeau did not arrive at the conclusion that individuals could use language disruptively to change their position in society, but showed that, in spite of the tremendous social constraints that individuals have to grapple with, a space of action is possible. The way in which de Certeau teaches us to look at these kinds of language practices is one that shows how the speakers can inhabit the weakness that is intrinsic in their not being in full control of circumstances and doing. What de Certeau proposes is therefore different from a ‘deliberate challenge’ (Deumert, 2018, p. 14), precisely because ‘everyday creativity and expressivity does not need to imply disruption or transgression’ (Deumert, 2018, p. 16). He points to a tactical way of going about everyday life through language, which involves precisely the inhabiting of what is given.

Conclusion

This paper explored differences and commonalities between the notion of creativity in translanguaging research and that of creativity in everyday language use as described by Michel de Certeau. Translanguaging was described as a way to look at language practices that tries to capture how multilinguals can be creative (Li, 2018), one of the key points that translanguaging research has put across in terms of theoretical innovation, so much so that it has been taken up by others (cf. Bradley et al., 2020). There are ways to think differently about creative language use as it intersects the everyday practices that translanguaging has been trying to describe. While creativity in translanguaging research is seen as transcending boundaries and disruptive, when one takes into account de Certeau’s conceptualisation a different side becomes apparent: language practices such as multilingual language use in everyday life can be creative by inhabiting what is given, which means operating

within constraints rather than beyond. Looking at multilingual language practices as creative in de Certeau's terms means first acknowledging that they can be seen as tactical, i.e. practices of the weak in the field of the strong that do not necessarily exert full control. De Certeau underscores what goes beyond that which is planned, repetitive and stable, in practices that take advantage of circumstances to create an alteration, but are not connected to a planning or overseeing knowledge. It also means acknowledging that these are dependent on a space of action and that they encompass forms of re-use. Inhabiting what is given for a multilingual can mean being in a position to do something unexpected, but it does not automatically imply engaging in an oppositional way with the unchosen. If we think about multilingual creativity as related to working through what is given to do something else, in some way the whole realisation of the lack of full control on the part of a speaker can imply an ability to behave linguistically in a proactive way. Emphasising the existence of such alternative practices could potentially underscore the value of multilingualism in itself and in relation to the social dynamics in which it is involved, also when the attainability of social transformation is not readily apparent.

This theoretical exploration of creativity and language use is new for translanguaging research. This paper allows for the cross-fertilisation that scholars have called for and, at the same time, points out some unexplored areas in translanguaging research, namely the consideration of the issues of control over circumstances and doing, the more general explicit acknowledgement of constraints and the potential non-disruptiveness that comes with creative multilingual practices. These points have implications, particularly for researchers interested in the intersection between creativity and the speaking of multilinguals in their everyday lives. Scholars could continue to examine what kind of constraints speakers find themselves facing and how they take advantage of their space of action to express their creativity through multilingualism in their everyday life. De Certeau helps us to consider multilingual practices as creative within a space of action, but it is indeed our job to identify the constraints that multilinguals operate within. This could lead to an explanation of what it means concretely to inhabit what is given, looking at the ways in which resources are used in interaction without necessarily connecting creative multilingual practices to disruptive transformation. Lastly, it might be fruitful to consider how other aspects can intersect with creativity when it is realised through everyday language use, possibly taking into account that resources are 'accumulated' (Hawkins & Mori, 2018, p. 2) over time, 'come with histories and values belonging to the places they inhabit' (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 154) and that there can be a specific undetermining element; the unforeseen, using de Certeau's words, that is connected to what language users do. In addition, if lack of control is to be understood, then it will be important to explore what it means when it comes to the daily activities people go about, whether people are to send something at the post office, communicate using a new phone from a lonely studio in a large city, have a family meal or even talk together with someone at a table going without a meal for that day.

Notes

1. The cogency of the problem of determining what counts as innovative and from which perspective has also been eloquently raised by Li Wei (2020).
2. One example of this is the rigid separation between work and free time, which situates behaviour and its value according to where the individual is. What matters is what is done in the workplace during working hours, and the rest has little significance.
3. This reminds us of the concept of procedural rationality proposed by Bauman (2017), which in turn reminds us of the currency that these points still hold.
4. De Certeau used the dichotomy weak/strong to convey the existence of differences between individuals and groups in terms of what they can do. In this paper, I continue using the pair weak/strong instead of alternative adjectives for the sake of consistency with de Certeau's terminology, which places emphasis to the category of the weak showing that weakness does not mean inability to act. Obviously, I do not intend it as a rigid macro-social category but as a contingent condition subject to change.
5. This understanding of telling proverbs is to be related to the tactical aspects of language use in everyday life, which are also relevant to translanguaging.

6. Consider for instance the role of social agencies in language transmission or the use of registers in conversation.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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