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**We Teach Languages Episode 132: Language Ideologies and Translanguaging with Emma Trentman**

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**Announcer**:  [0:00] This is "We Teach Languages," a podcast about language teaching from the diverse perspectives of teachers.

**Stacey Johnson**:  [0:12] I'm Stacey Johnson. Today, on episode 132, I'm here with Emma Trentman, an associate professor of Arabic at the University of New Mexico. Hi, Emma. Thank you so much for being here today.

**Dr. Emma Trentman**:  [0:25] Thank you for having me. I love the podcast. I'm very excited.

**Stacey**:  [0:29] That is very kind of you. I'm just excited that the podcast connected us because I have been following you on Twitter for a little while now. Everything that you have contributed to one of the threads I've been involved in, I wanted to screencap it and add it to my lecture slides.

**Dr. Trentman**:  [0:48] [laughs] Thank you.

**Stacey**:  [0:50] I've enjoyed interacting with you so much. Thanks for everything you bring to our professional community. I gave you a very brief introduction, but would you mind telling us a little more about what you do, what your context is, who you teach?

**Dr. Trentman**:  [1:04] I teach primarily Arabic classes at the University of New Mexico. I also teach the language's capstone class, the language's majors. Then I'm an applied linguist. My research focuses on language and intercultural learning during study abroad, virtual exchange, and in the classroom, and again primarily focused on Arabic learners from the United States studying in these various contexts.

**Stacey**:  [1:30] That's wonderful. I'm interested in how did you come to the study of Arabic. Are you a native speaker?

**Dr. Trentman**:  [1:35] No, I'm not. I started studying Arabic in college when I was 18 and in my freshman year. I really liked it. I'm from a rural area. I'd always liked languages, but there wasn't a lot of opportunity to study them. In high school, I could choose French or Spanish, but not both.

[1:54] When I was in college, I wanted to study all the languages, [laughs] and I wanted to do something that I perceived as different. I chose Arabic partially because there was this author I liked called Sally Watson who wrote books, some of which took place in Palestine and some of which took place in Scotland.

[2:14] Because of that, obviously, there were lots of languages that I could have focused on, but I decided to choose Arabic and then I really liked it. I studied abroad in Egypt in the fall of my junior year, which is in 2001.

[2:28] That was when September 11th happened. That changed the landscape of Arabic teaching and learning in the United States. There's a big upswing in interest in learning Arabic, and at the same time, some very negative perceptions of Arabic speakers. I wanted to influence that, and in particular, I was a linguistics major already, so I was interested in linguistics.

[2:58] I shifted more eventually towards applied linguistics, because I really thought that the teaching of Arabic and study abroad in general could be improved, and I wanted all of these people who were now interested in learning Arabic to have a better experience than I did initially.

**Stacey**:  [3:15] That's fantastic. [laughs] I had that same experience, but going to college and wanting to study new languages took me into Spanish. I had done Latin in high school. Spanish turned out to be so hard ‑‑ it took so long for me to develop the competence I wanted in Spanish, and as an adult, I have found it very difficult.

[3:38] I still have that urge to do more languages and different languages, but I found it very difficult to find the time to be able to do that. Right before you and I started talking, I was on Duolingo practicing Scots‑Gaelic. [laughs]

**Dr. Trentman**:  [3:51] [laughs]

**Stacey**:  [3:51] [laughs] Because I just want to know all the languages and there's not enough time.

**Dr. Trentman**:  [3:57] Yeah. My problem is I just get so frustrated with the language ideologies embedded in Duolingo that I get partway through, and then I'm like, "Uh, this is just so annoying. You're this big company. Can't you think about your language ideologies that you're perpetuating?" Then I stop, which is not really doing anything for Duolingo. [laughs]

**Stacey**:  [4:15] I am able to completely block that sort of stuff out, because I am so single‑minded in my desire to know Scots‑Gaelic. I'm also doing Swedish, and I haven't found any other resources to do Swedish that I can fit into my day.

[4:31] Since I saw on Twitter where you mentioned language ideologies and the language apps in different situations, I've really been reevaluating how I'm interacting with that tool.

[4:46] Maybe you could take a minute to talk about what is language ideology, and how does it look in the classroom? I think that's something a lot of people would be interested in knowing more about.

**Dr. Trentman**:  [4:58] Definitely. Language ideologies are basically just beliefs or sets of beliefs about language, and so that can be, what is language? What is standard language? What language should be used? Things like that.

[5:12] Ideology can have a negative connotation, I think, in everyday life, but with language ideologies, the important thing is that we have to have them. We can't not have language ideologies.

[5:26] What I think is important, especially as language teachers, is that we're aware of our language ideologies and how what we do with language upholds, or reproduces, or potentially contests specific language ideologies. That's something we don't often think about enough in our language classrooms.

**Stacey**:  [5:48] I am going to park on something that you said. We can't not have a language ideology. You either know what they are or you don't, but you have to have them.

**Dr. Trentman**:  [5:59] You have to have them. It's like a perspective. If you're standing somewhere and you're looking at a scene, you have to be looking at it from a specific position. There's no neutral position. It's the same thing with language ideologies.

[6:14] Of course, we can change our language ideologies or we can try to uphold ones that are more in line with our values or not, but we can't not have language ideologies.

**Stacey**:  [6:25] Can you give me an example of what that might look like in a classroom, how language ideologies might affect classroom practice?

**Dr. Trentman**:  [6:33] Most of our language classrooms in the United States are very rooted in what is often referred to as monolingual language ideologies or nation state language ideologies. These come either rooted in European nationalism.

[6:51] Prior to the creation of nation states, we didn't have these strong language boundaries. Essentially, part of the creation of nationalism was developing a standard national language that was perceived as this distinct object. The political borders, the language borders, and the ethnic borders all mutually reinforced each other to create a nation.

[7:14] We see this in our language classrooms today. I don't think most of us think of ourselves [laughs] as upholding nationalism, but in the way that the languages are split apart by a language name. That's perceiving the language as a distinct object. We have Spanish. We have Arabic. We have English or French. These are all separate.

[7:34] Also in terms of what we imagine as the ideal model for language learners. Imagining that the native speaker of a standard variety of this language, their linguistic practices are the ideal model for learners. Another way we see this playing out in the language classroom is in this idea of a setting of monolingual immersion being the best way to learn a language.

[8:01] Because these language ideologies perceive languages as separate from each other, then there's not really interactions between them. If you want to learn a particular language, you should be immersed in that language. That excludes other types of linguistic language that you might have.

[8:20] Those are some ways in which these monolingual language ideologies are upheld in the classroom. We could think about contexts outside of the classroom. One of the reasons I got interested in this was through my work on study abroad.

[8:34] Whereas we imagine study abroad is that perfect monolingual immersion setting, and yet all of the research shows that it's a very multilingual setting. Yet because we have this ideology of immersion and going to this crossing national boundaries and being in this new nation with a new language and native speakers, then we imagine that way.

[8:58] I think that's actually a really problematic representation of study abroad that prevents students from, in some ways, actually learning in multilingual environments.

**Stacey**:  [9:10] What are some of the benefits to students of embracing a multilingual ideal instead of a monolingual ideal?

**Dr. Trentman**:  [9:18] There's several different types of multilingual language ideologies that have been proposed. There's plural lingualism and translanguaging. Some people will just refer to the multilingual term. Essentially, these language ideologies, they have their differences.

[9:37] What is important from perspective for thinking about language teaching is that these multilingual ideologies start with the individual and their linguistic repertoire as the unit of analysis.

[9:53] Instead of saying we have these separate things that are languages, they start with the individual. From the individual's perspective, they have a linguistic repertoire which is composed of all these various linguistic elements, which may or may not correspond with what we socially call languages.

[10:14] A lot of times, particularly in the translanguaging literature, they'll refer to named languages. This is emphasizing that these linguistic boundaries are socially constructed. If you start with the individual's perspective, then this has a lot of different implications.

[10:34] A lot of these multilingual perspectives have an element of social justice to them. They've come from wanting to recognize the abilities and the strengths of populations that are marginalized under monolingual language ideology.

[10:52] This would include settings of bilingual education, often, or of heritage students and sometimes of multilingual education or English‑medium education in countries where English isn't the dominant language.

[11:07] To give an example of that, what some of these researchers have argued, Ofelia García in particular, is that if you're testing a bilingual child's knowledge of educational content, such as math or science or social studies, like that and you don't give them access to their full linguistic repertoire, but you limit them just to the part of it that corresponds to a socially named language, you can't really test that child's knowledge of this content.

[11:39] They need to have access to their full linguistic repertoire, even if that repertoire doesn't fit neatly into the boundaries of a named language.

[11:50] In terms of language teaching, this is really important. You want to build upon the existing language repertoire in order to expand it in a particular direction of what we would call a socially named language.

[12:06] By, again, recognizing that these boundaries are fuzzy, it lets us ask more important questions. Some of it, we need to have new practices, but a lot of it can also be reframing our existing practices.

[12:24] An example I like to give people and the one that people usually feel most nervous about because they're so rooted in these monolingual language ideologies is the percent of the classroom that's in the target language, which is something that is actually quite difficult to measure because the language boundaries are fuzzy.

[12:41] If I say, " [Arabic] Coca‑Cola," is that Arabic, or because I said Coca‑Cola, is it English, even though that's what you say in Arabic? That's a really good example of what teachers will do, drawing from where the linguistic repertoire overlaps. Instead of choosing a drink that I know my students aren't going to know, I'm going to choose one that's from a shared linguistic repertoire.

[13:04] If we frame it as the teacher is drawing from the overlap between my linguistic repertoire and my students' linguistic repertoire with the goal of expanding the students' linguistic repertoire, that is, from my perspective, a much more interesting way to look at what our language is than what percentage of my utterance was in the target language.

[13:32] It can also give us really interesting perspectives on student work. For example, a lot of times in students, in their group work interactions, will complain that they're using too much English and not enough target language.

[13:47] Again, this takes us to this idea of linguistic boundaries and what percent is this and what percent is that. We're seeing them as separate. Often, what's happening in these interactions is that the students are doing the process‑oriented language in English.

[14:02] They're planning what they're going to do and what they're going to talk about. Then when they talk about what they're actually going to say, they'll do it in the target language. This allows them to then produce a more monolingual product when they present whatever the results of their activity are, a skit or a presentation or something like this.

[14:19] If instead of us saying "How much of the target language are they using, and how much English are they using," we look at why they're doing it and instead ask, "Are we using our full linguistic repertoires in ways that achieve the goal of expanding them in this particular direction in this class," that's a much more interesting question that could really help us in our teaching.

**Stacey**:  [14:44] What I really connect with on that is I'm looking for all of these different ways for my students to bring their whole authentic selves into the classrooms, their identities and their beliefs and their family life. I want them to bring all that into the classroom and share with me who they are and talk about their likes and dislikes, except for their full language.

[15:07] That's the only thing I want them to bring fully into the classroom. I want them to leave language ability at the door and sort of stop with all of that in my classroom. That's not really realistic. I like your approach to thinking about how are students using the language that they have to gain more than they have now, to move in a direction, to expand their knowledge.

**Dr. Trentman**:  [15:32] The other thing that is a really important point about this. At the beginning, I talked about how these multilingual perspectives and a translanguaging perspective in particular are rooted in the idea of recognizing that minoritized speakers or groups whose linguistic practices are not valued are in fact engaging in complex linguistic practices and know a wide variety of information.

[16:02] It's just a recognition problem. This really allows us to do this. For example, I was teaching an address form on writing an email in a pragmatically appropriate manner. I used an example from French, which has the tu and vous forms.

[16:17] Then my students, who have a wide variety of linguistic backgrounds were like, "We have the same thing in Spanish. We have the same thing in Pashto. We have the same thing in other languages."

[16:29] That insight, even though we were working on writing an email in Arabic, being able to draw from their full linguistic backgrounds was really helpful in having them understand this concept.

[16:40] This is also important to address explicitly with students and explicitly with teachers. Students also, for the most part, are primarily exposed to monolingual language ideologies because these are so prevalent in our society. To go back to what I started talking about originally...

[16:57] [laughter]

**Dr. Trentman**:  [16:57] in my classroom at least, I teach...It's very rare that someone would come into an Arabic classroom and not have studied another language besides English. My students are automatically coming in with lots of language knowledge.

[17:15] Many of them have grown up bilingual and learned other languages as well. If instead of assuming that they're starting at zero because this is a new, separate bounded language, we can draw on all of these strengths, this is really important.

[17:33] It can be especially important in a language like Arabic where we have to switch between multiple varieties, between the standard and a dialect. There's not really an option to just speak one variety and be able to engage in all settings.

[17:50] A lot of our students, especially these students whose language varieties are not recognized as legitimate, they already have these skills. They have these skills to switch between multiple varieties depending on the context.

[18:04] If we can say this is something that you know how to do and you're really good at, and now we're going to do the same thing in a new context, then it can connect that to the ideals of these multilingual language ideologies and their social justice groups. That's something that is exciting to see in our classroom and is really important for us to think about.

**Stacey**:  [18:26] What would language education look like if we didn't center it on the, as you said, socially named varieties of language that are connected to the nation‑state concept? What if there were a class...? I live in Nashville. My students engage with a Spanish‑speaking community. It's most likely to be the one here in Nashville.

[18:48] What would [inaudible] call that class? How would discovering our local language use be different from the class I teach now? To be honest, it would be extremely different. My students might end up with a similar level of competence at the end of it, but it would be a completely different context and completely different approach on my part. I might write that syllabus just to see.

[19:17] [laughter]

**Dr. Trentman**:  [19:17] I think that sounds exciting. That's something I also try to do in my language classes, is make these connections with speakers in our community. People don't think of Albuquerque as a place where people speak Arabic. They usually think of Spanish but, actually, there's quite a lot of Arabic speakers from all different places.

[19:39] Again, what this gets back to is imagining an ideology of where students will use language. All too often, we're imagining them going to study abroad, crossing that national boundary, going to a specific Spanish‑speaking or Arabic‑speaking country. We don't imagine them using it in their everyday lives here even though there are plenty of opportunities for that.

[20:09] In terms of what would we call it, that's a hard question because these language ideologies are sort of rooted. We can say named languages, but we're still naming the languages as separate things.

**Stacey**:  [20:22] I don't even know how to describe the language I teach without using the colonial nomenclature. I don't even know how to decolonize the name of my course.

**Dr. Trentman**:  [20:32] I don't either. That's a really interesting question. It's from the flip perspective. Sometimes, we do want to name these languages, because we teach major world languages. They're unlikely to be contested.

[20:48] Smaller languages or minoritized languages, sometimes it's important to name those languages to say that they're real. There are people who speak them. They deserve to be recognized. They might not be able to get away from naming our language classes with these specific named languages, although perhaps we will. Someone else would be able to imagine a better way of doing it.

[21:14] What we can do is always remind ourselves that these boundaries are socially constructed. They're fuzzy. They're representative of our societal power structures.

[21:27] If we can always remind ourselves of that, and remind our students of it and help them to see that, and realizing that the reason that the way I speak English is considered standard is because the power has traditionally been with people like me who are by a middle class, then we can recognize...

[21:53] Again, this goes back to what we've talked about in the beginning of recognizing our language ideologies. We can recognize that this is just a perspective. Then it's not one that we necessarily need to uphold. In that case, we should resist it. That's true for all of our language ideologies.

[22:12] We can call it Arabic, but we can make sure that we're including all speakers of Arabic as examples in our classroom, not just the ones that we perceive as educated and native speakers in standard varieties. That is perhaps the first step in resisting the monolingual language ideologies in our languages education.

**Stacey**:  [22:37] All right. That was amazing. When you were talking about different kinds of multilingual approaches, one of the examples that you gave was translanguaging. I would like to know more about translanguaging. What is it, and how is it useful in language classrooms?

**Dr. Trentman**:  [22:57] Translanguaging is one of these multilingual perspectives. Essentially, as I've talked about earlier, it's very much rooted in recognizing the value of linguistic practices of speakers who are traditionally minoritized under monolingual language ideologies who don't fit into that very standard boundary of language, and race and ethnicity, and nation.

[23:26] It primarily grew out of bilingual education with Ofelia Garcia and her students. Then also in the UK, Li Wei has done a lot of work on this in what they call community language schools which we, in the US, tend to refer to it as heritage language schools.

[23:45] From this perspective, we started with the linguistic repertoire of the individual speaker and look at how they draw from the linguistic resources in this repertoire to communicate in a particular situation.

[23:59] One thing that's very important in this perspective is that we can't abstract the language use from the context. It's always contextualized. If we look at particular contexts, we can see that the linguistic resources that speakers draw from may not correspond to these socially named languages that we talk about.

[24:25] What makes this different from code‑switching is the perspective more than the practice.

**Stacey**:  [24:32] I was going to ask about that. Code‑switching is when a student who might have more than one variety of the same language that they speak or might speak multiple languages will go back and forth between the varieties or between the languages in conversation with someone who also has access to the same variety, the same languages, right?

**Dr. Trentman**:  [24:54] Yeah.

**Stacey**:  [24:53] How does it differ from translanguages?

**Dr. Trentman**:  [24:57] The practice in that instance is the same. What's different is the perspective, the ideology it's rooted in. From a code‑switching perspective, they're still separate codes. The student is going back and forth between these two bounding codes, which I view as separate.

[25:14] Translanguaging would say that the student is a whole person with a whole linguistic repertoire that they are drawing from their linguistic repertoire to overlap with a linguistic repertoire of the person that they're talking to.

[25:34] Part of the reasons why I think this distinction is really important is that when you have the code‑switching, it's still normalizing those two codes. That's not addressing why those particular linguistic elements got to be part of named languages, whereas what the student is using isn't named or is named as a hybrid.

[25:56] It emphasizes that the student is a whole person with a complete linguistic repertoire. They're drawing in this context. They're not always falling in between these two named languages.

[26:07] I would say, in many instances, the practice is similar. It's just that the perspective of code‑switching comes from these more monolingual language ideologies, whereas perspective of translanguaging comes from our multilingual ones.

**Stacey**:  [26:26] I really appreciate that so much because it makes the boundaries of language defined at the individual level instead of at the level of social power. It's wonderful. [laughs]

**Dr. Trentman**:  [26:40] That's exactly it. That's why it does have a very strong social justice orientation. Translanguaging perspectives are often trying to resist the societal power and recognize the individual language practices that are quite complex and effective in particular contexts.

**Stacey**:  [27:04] It's fantastic. What else do you think that we should know about your work or about what you advocate in classrooms?

**Dr. Trentman**:  [27:15] I advocate for a translanguaging perspective in classrooms. As I mentioned, in many ways, this can just be a reframe of our existing practices. Instead of asking what percent of what language are we using, you're keeping them very separate, asking the question of how are we drawing from our linguistic repertoires to expand them.

[27:38] Another example I like to give is...This is anyone who teaches novice‑level learner. Even the higher or advanced ones will recognize this. A student will start a sentence in Arabic, and then say a word in English, and then continue.

[27:54] If we have this monolingual perspective that, "Oh, they used a word in English," that's either they failed, or they feel ashamed because they studied that so many times, they don't remember it. That which they cut off the conversation if they stop there.

[28:11] Whereas if we normalize, you just keep talking because you're in a multilingual setting where everyone also knows that word, then you're actually doing a lot more to expand your linguistic repertoire than stopping because you can't remember where you've got it. Because you're in a multilingual setting, likely, someone else is going to be able to supply you with that word.

[28:32] That's a common practice in language classrooms. When you reframe it like this, we can recognize new skills. We can also get away from a lot of the shame associated with language learning, which monolingual language ideologies uphold because you're set to achieve this standard that isn't possible.

[28:57] There's a lot of shame associated with falling short or would not having the right language, or the standard language, or things like this. A lot of that shame comes into our classrooms before we even started teaching.

[29:11] This is another benefit of multilingual language ideologies. It can allow us to recognize that a lot of that shame has to do with power structures and social structures. That would help effectively using language to communicate.

**Stacey**:  [29:26] That's fantastic. I've learned so much in our conversation. I'm excited to share it with everyone.

**Dr. Trentman**:  [29:36] I love talking about this stuff.

**Stacey**:  [29:38] Thanks for sharing with me today. I'm going to use the term "full linguistic repertoire" a lot more often after this conversation.

[29:45] [laughter]

**Dr. Trentman**:  [29:45] Yes, that's what we want, too. People can always contact me with questions.

**Stacey**:  [29:51] Great. I will make sure to put your contact information into the show notes so that if anyone clicks through, they'll be able to send you an email or reach out to you on Twitter and follow up on this.

**Dr. Trentman**:  [30:03] I also have a blog where I write about these topics. I describe what I do in my classroom and talk about language ideologies and this type of thing. You could put that on the show notes, too. It's emmatrentman.com/blog.

**Stacey**:  [30:19] I will definitely do that. Thank you so much.

**Dr. Trentman**:  [30:21] Thank you.

[30:21] [background music]

**Stacey**:  [30:22] If you have questions or comments related to today's episode, we would love to hear from you. You can reach out to us multiple ways. All of them are available at our website, weteachlang.com/contact. You can also find us on Facebook and Twitter @weteachlang.

[30:45] We would like to say a very special thank you to the PEARLL Foreign Language Resource Center for partnering with us to provide transcripts and other professional development resources related to the episodes. You can learn more about PEARLL by going to pearll.nflc.umd.edu. Thanks so much for listening. Bye‑bye. 

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