Bilingual teachers' performances of power and conflict

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Betsy Rymes, Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor and Mariana Souto-Manning

This paper describes and analyzes the use of Augusto Boal’s Theater of the Oppressed (TO) as a form of academic and social support used in a recruitment and retention program for bilingual teachers in the Southeastern United States. We use critical discourse analysis to understand how TO works to disrupt monologic relationships and reestablish dialogue between teachers and others in their professional lives. Focused on power dynamics and communication between a bilingual paraprofessional and an adversarial parent, our analysis examines actors’ changing stances as they role-play different possible approaches to the conflict. Findings suggest awareness of both the language tools that structure individual relationships and the larger forces shaping what different individuals can and cannot say provides teacher-participants with options for approaching interactional conflict in new ways – to take up confident, expansive roles and to project new futures for themselves and others.

Keywords:

Introduction

Since the early 1970s there has been increased attention to bilingual education in the United States, specifically programs aiming to educate students in English as well as an immigrant language (often Spanish, the largest immigrant language in the U.S.). Whether from an assimilationist ideology viewing bilingual education as a speedy route to replacing immigrant students’ heritage language(s) with English or from a pluralist standpoint valuing immigrants’ first language rights and resources and bilingual potential, many school districts in the U.S. have sought to recruit bilingual adults, specifically those fluent in Spanish, to serve the linguistic and cultural needs of Latino children and their families.

These recruitment efforts have met with little success. Although in 2000 Latinos were the largest minority group under the age of 18 (16%), there were relatively few Latino teachers in K-12 classrooms (4%) and fewer still who were fluent in Spanish and English and able to communicate easily with Spanish-speaking parents and community members (Souto-Manning, 2005). These statistics support the ever-present need to recruit increased numbers of bilingual adults into the teaching profession who can serve culturally and linguistically diverse student populations. However, given that nearly 30% of new teachers leave within the first two years of teaching (Udelhofen & Larson, 2003), and that in diverse school districts ‘the exodus is even greater’ (Halford, 1998), more attention must be given to the support and retention of bilingual adults in and beyond teacher education programs.
Recruited for their linguistic and/or cultural skills, bilingual teachers are more likely than monolingual teachers to work with communities that are racially, linguistically, and socioeconomically marginalized (Genzuk & Baca, 1998). Likewise, because of their own racial and linguistic markedness, bilingual teachers are more likely themselves to encounter a collision between their own experiences of oppression and recognition of their potentially oppressive status as teachers working within the monolingual structures of the U.S. school system (Macedo, Dendrinos, & Gounari, 2003). Bilingual, Latino teachers working with us in teacher preparation programs have described frustrations related to their own experiences of linguistic or racial discrimination (e.g. from administrators, parents or colleagues) or related to observations of discriminatory practices against others (e.g. limiting Latino parental information, ignoring a cluster of Latino students in a classroom).

This paper describes and analyzes the use of Augusto Boal’s *Theater of the Oppressed* (TO) as a form of academic and social support used in a recruitment and retention program for bilingual teachers in Georgia. We use critical discourse analysis to understand how TO approaches work to disrupt monologic relationships and reestablish dialogue for increased behavioral and attitudinal options at the moment of discrimination (Schutzman, 1994, p. 145).

**TELL program description and Theater of the Oppressed as focus group method**

The TELL (Teachers for English Language Learners) program is an initiative funded by the U.S. Department of Education to recruit 55 bilingual adults to enter the teaching profession and support them through the credentialing process. Support includes $5000 toward tuition expenses, academic and professional workshops and consultations, career placement, and classroom observations as well as social support in the form of holiday parties and other informal group gatherings. In exchange for these various forms of support, TELL scholars are expected to complete a teaching credential within the five year period of the program (2003-2008), teach in a high need (a U.S. Department of Education term used to designate schools eligible for grant funding) K-12 school in the Southeastern state of Georgia for three years following receipt of their credential, and attend semi-annual focus group meetings during the duration of their coursework and first year of teaching. At the time of this study, Spring 2005, the program had recruited 35 bilingual adults, five of whom had received their credential. 34 of these 35 TELL scholars had Spanish as a first, second or additional language and 30 of 35 were female.

Our aim in this study is to analyze the discourse that took place in performance-based focus group meetings to begin to answer questions about best practices for the recruitment and support of minority and nontraditional, bilingual pre- and in-service teachers. Initially, the required 90 minute focus group interviews were designed as part of our program evaluation to determine how well the program was meeting the financial, academic and social support needs of the TELL scholars. After analysis of transcripts from these early meetings in 2003/4 (Cahnmann, Rymes, & Souto-Manning, 2005), we were concerned that focus group meetings – while providing sufficient information for our grant reports on scholars’ progress in the program – did not provide the kind of sociopolitical support we felt these bilingual adults needed to develop critical language awareness. The TELL program was not designed merely to place 55 bilingual teachers in Georgia’s schools, but also to nurture a cohort of bilingual teachers and leaders prepared to combat widespread deficit orientations that discriminate against bilingual populations. To foster discursive awareness and reflexive practices necessary to promote the maintenance and development of bilingual/bicultural identity, we changed the format of our bi-annual focus group meetings from around-the-table group interviews to workshops using techniques from Augusto Boal’s *Theater of the Oppressed*.
methods. For readers who may not be familiar with Theater of the Oppressed (TO), we begin with a brief explanation, followed by a description of how we adapted TO methods for use in the TELL program.

Our analysis draws from 10 audio and video recorded enactments of TO focus group meetings lasting approximately one to two hours each. The first meetings took place in October 2004 with three to six participants with subsequent meetings taking place every six months until our last meeting prior to writing this paper in October 2007. This paper focuses on the discourse analysis of one of our earliest meetings when six scholars met with two TELL program coordinators and co-authors of this paper.

**Background: Theater of the Oppressed**

Much like Freire’s (1970) critique of the banking model of education, Boal (1979) was critical of theater’s tradition of constructing silent, passive audiences through unidirectional performances from stage to audience. Struggling against the Brazilian dictatorship in the sixties, Boal conceived of a new form of interactive theater, replacing the spectator with a spect-actor, one who is not merely a passive member of an estranged audience but an interactive participant in a collective performance aimed at recognizing, analyzing, and overcoming social oppression (Burgoyne et al. 2005).

Forum Theater is one among many of Boal’s TO methods ‘for exploring oppression on both analytic and sensory levels and for resolving oppressive conditions’ (Placier, Cockrell, Cockrell, & Simmons, 2005). In our practice with Forum Theater, we asked each TELL scholar to think about their own experiences with oppression, defining oppression as ‘power-over’ compared to ‘power-from-within’ and ‘power-with’ in light of the (mis)perceptions that oppression does not exist in developed countries such as the U.S. (Starhawk, 1987, p. 9).

**Prompt:** We would like for you to think about a time when you experienced oppression or conflict with ‘power over’* you without a clear resolution.

* Power-over shapes every institution in our society. This power is wielded in the workplace, in the schools, in the courts, in the doctor’s office. It may rule with weapons that are physical or by controlling the resources we need to live: money, food, medical care; or by controlling more subtle resources: information, approval, love….Power over is linked to domination and control; power-from-within is linked to the mysteries that awaken our deepest abilities and potential. Power-with is social power, the influence we wield among equals (Starhawk, 1987, p. 9).

In small groups, TELL scholars shared their experiences with power and disempowerment and selected one story from which to improvise a skit in three scenes representing one—protagonist (usually the TELL scholar) and his or her recurring oppressive situation with an antagonist. In only one case, a group of TELL scholars presented an oppressive situation that was not their own but one experienced by K-12 bilingual students. The various protagonists in the 10 cases we have analyzed include the TELL scholar as paraprofessional (teacher’s assistant), novice or uncertified classroom teacher, or university student in teacher education classes. The antagonists were even more varied including supervising teachers, colleagues, students, parents, professors and administrators. In this paper, we focus on the case of ‘Zoe’ (all names are pseudonyms) and her oppressive situation as a paraprofessional with an antagonistic parent.

**Discourse analytic methodology as a means to reflect on the Boalian process**

As Boal himself recommends, we want to move from confronting individual acts of oppression, in the particular, to recognizing more general, interactional characteristics and social forces that
give rise to discrete situations of oppression. On the individual level, we want to forecast positive futures for bilingual educators by rehearsing embodied, discursive practices to reconfigure oppressive interactions with colleagues, parents, administrators and others. Additionally, we want to develop awareness of how these acts are embedded within larger configurations of power and powerlessness that have a history predating individual interactions – a history that these interactions have the potential to lead in a new direction.

To work toward these twin goals of understanding oppression both in individual interactions and at a sociohistorical level, our research demands methods that afford a focus on language in use as well as the investigation of how each instance of language in use is also embedded in a sociohistorical context. We have used discourse analytic methodology – in particular the indexing of stance – to analyze individual interactions (cf. Ochs, 1996); we employed critical discourse analytic understandings of orders of discourse to analyze the relationship of our interactional work to institutional power and discrimination (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Foucault, 1978). Through an awareness of discourse at the interactional and sociohistorical level, our analysis displays how each reenactment of oppression as performed in the context of bilingual professional development is potentially a ‘rehearsal for the revolution’ (Boal, 1974 [1979], p. 122) – a practice session that develops new forms of agency for future confrontations.

Here we analyze precisely how, in one instance of Forum Theater, participants moved from monologue to dialogue by gradually orchestrating changes in stance and by expanding the relevant knowledge domain. That is, we analyze how, through gradually changing performances of an oppressive situation, Zoe, a bilingual paraprofessional working toward her teaching credential, rehearsed changes in stance and expanded what counted as knowledge relevant to her situation as well as others in the group. Finally, we look at how institutional inequities were perceived to have affected this interaction – and how embodied and discursive awareness of these entrenched inequities may afford reshaping of future interactions.

**Stance**

As we viewed and re-viewed the 10 interactions that took place during our TO focus group meetings, we began to see regularities in how conflict was enacted. Conflict often began as an articulation of two diametrically opposed (monologic) positions: the *Protagonist* was right, the *Antagonist* was wrong (e.g. Zoe, the Paraprofessional was right, the Parent was wrong). We began to look closely at each performed case of antagonism by analyzing speakers’ language. How was language being used to both establish and perpetuate this diametric opposition? Useful in this regard is the analysis of *stance*, that is, a speaker’s display of a position relative to the truth and/or emotional content of a situation (Ochs, 1996). Speakers are always drawing on language in particular ways to express relative certainty or uncertainty (epistemic stance) and relative emotionality or lack or emotion (affective stance). The statements ‘I truuuuuly adoooore you!’ and ‘you are liked by me’ represent a wide range of affective stance displays – from heightened affect, to minimal affect expressed in the passive voice. While affective stance centers on emotion, epistemic stance centers on knowledge state. A statement like ‘God is Dead,’ for example, uses the eternal present tense to express certainty regarding the non-existence of God; ‘Sometimes I kinda wonder if God exists,’ on the other hand, uses hedges (sometimes, kinda) and a conditional ‘if’ clause to express doubt and uncertainty. In general, it is difficult to enter into dialogue with an individual who expresses a strong epistemic stance, whereas a mitigated epistemic stance (as marked in the God example by hedges, and conditional statements) more often invites dialogue and alternative perspectives. Because we are concerned with bringing our bilingual teachers into dialogue with forms of monologic power, epistemic stance is particularly important to our analysis.
Initial displays of epistemic stance: ‘No he didn’t,’ ‘Yes he did’

In our analysis we focus on how epistemic stance changed over the course of multiple reenactments of the same scene of oppression. One spect-actor was encouraged to play the role of the Protagonist and another spect-actor played the role of the Antagonist, beginning in diametrically opposed positions. Each protagonist was initially portrayed as one who possessed an absolute truth, disregarded by the antagonist.

In the focal example here, Zoe, a special education paraprofessional, described just such a conflict. The scene was a kindergarten classroom in a school located in a suburban town on the outskirts of a large Southern city. This town of approximately 10,000 people has been rapidly diversifying over the last 10 years from a predominately white, 1950’s-style small town atmosphere, to a suburb in which many newly arrived Latino families have chosen to make their homes. Zoe worked in the one elementary school in town as a paraprofessional as she pursued her teaching credential. As a Puerto Rican woman who speaks English and Spanish fluently, she described her necessity in the school, serving increasing numbers of Latinos. She had been hired, however, not specifically to support the bilingual needs at the school, but to work as a special education aide in a kindergarten classroom, assisting special education inclusion students.

In the October focus group Zoe re-enacted a conflict she’d had with a parent over what a student had or had not said. Derrick was a student with cerebral palsy participating, with the help of Zoe, in a mainstream kindergarten class. Neither he nor his mother was Latino or Spanish-speaking. In their interactions, Zoe’s bilingualism was not framed as an asset. Rather, Zoe’s accent in English became a liability. While describing this recurrent conflict, Zoe emphasized her perceptions that this mother could not get beyond this Spanish accent to listen to her professional counsel, a point to which we’ll return after the examples have been presented.

Three spect-actors reenacted the scene below, playing the young boy, ‘Derrick,’ Derrick’s ‘Mom,’ and ‘Zoe’ the paraprofessional. We use quotes here to indicate roles played, e.g. ‘Derrick,’ the ‘Mom’ and ‘Zoe’ the teacher vs. the actual participating teachers playing these roles in the focus group. Derrick was in the process of learning how to go to the bathroom by himself, and as part of this process, Zoe (the participating teacher) explained, he needed to be able to articulate when he was finished, to say ‘I’m done.’ However, in the scene presented, Derrick’s mother and Zoe were embroiled in an escalating conflict as to whether or not he had verbally indicated, ‘I’m done.’ In constructing this conflict, both ‘Zoe’ (played by herself) and Derrick’s ‘Mom’ (as played by Catherine, another bilingual teacher), displayed highly certain epistemic stances as marked in bold in the excerpt below (Derrick was played by an author, the facilitator and a co-author of this paper):\(^1\)

**IS HE DONE #1**

Zoe (Paraprofessional): Derrick, are you finished?

Author (Derrick): Mm.

Catherine (Mom): He says he’s done.

Zoe (Paraprofessional): What does that mean (?) I mean (?) when he says that.

He says he’s done. He said he’s=

Catherine (Mom): No he didn’t.

Zoe (Paraprofessional): =done. Can’t you see he said he’s done.

Catherine (Mom): [No he didn’t say I’m done.

Zoe (Paraprofessional): Yes he did. Can’t you understand?

[He said I’m done.

Zoe (Paraprofessional): [No. He did not say I’m done. He just said Mmm.

This exchange (‘No he didn’t,’ ‘Yes he did’) represents clear conflict. Both participants were absolutely certain of their own version of the truth, and these versions were diametrically opposed.
There was a back-and-forth, but no dialogue. From Derrick’s mother’s perspective (played by Catherine), ‘He says he’s done.’ From Zoe’s perspective he mumbled, ‘Mmm’ but did not say the words, ‘I’m done.’ We characterize this dynamic then, by naming two mutually-supporting processes:

1. Enacting two diametrically opposed monologic stances; and
2. Limiting what counts as knowledge.

First, each speaker monologically privileged her own perspective, as displayed by their relatively certain epistemic stances and marked by present tense and unmitigated factual statements (‘Yes he did,’ ‘No he didn’t’). Second, both speakers viewed the situation within one and only one limited knowledge domain. That is, no additional information was offered up to expand how either party was thinking about the situation or to change the direction of the discussion. This was a zero sum game, in which one and only one person could be ‘right’ and each person was certain she was the one.

Modifications in stance through Boalian reenactments

In the next step of the Forum Theater process, a new spect-actor entered the scene as a protagonist – in this case replacing Zoe as the paraprofessional – and acted out an alternative response to the conflict. In the example below, Catherine replaced Zoe and Juan took up the role of ‘Derrick’s Mom.’ In this performance, Catherine modified the paraprofessional’s epistemic stance dramatically, while Juan, as the mother, maintained absolute monologic certainty:

**IS HE DONE #2: Conflict avoidance**

Catherine (Paraprofessional): Well, okay well we’ll wait until you’re done. You let me know when you’re done.

Juan (Mom): [He’s done. (.) He’s done. Can’t you [see that he’s done?]

Catherine (Paraprofessional): [Oh no I didn’t- Well no I didn’t realize. Do you think he’s done? Do you think that means that he’s done?]

Juan (Mom): Yeah he’s done.

Catherine (Paraprofessional): Are you sure?

Juan (Mom): He’s done.

Catherine (Paraprofessional): Oh okay well good then we’ll get up.

In this re-enactment, Catherine dramatically modified Zoe’s epistemic stance display, but did not change the knowledge domain under consideration. Rather than making bold present tense statements of what Derrick had said, she downplayed her own perceptions (‘I didn’t realize’) and questioned how the mother knew Derrick was done – positioning the mother as the source of knowledge about Derrick (‘Do you think he’s done?’). She potentially expanded the knowledge domain by questioning how the mother knows Derrick is done (‘Do you think that means he’s done?’). However, because the mother did not provide additional information about the cues she was reading from Derrick, the knowledge domain remained limited.

While Catherine deferred to the mother and her knowledge, the mother used this deference as a platform to further assert her monologically certain stance, not to open up dialogue. Even Catherine’s question ‘Are you sure?’ which could be seen as undermining the mother’s authority, functions to give the mother a chance to reaffirm her stance. Yes! She is sure. ‘He’s done.’ By changing the paraprofessional’s stance, Catherine may have avoided conflict, but did not promote dialogue. Now the processes enacted were as follows:
(1) Enacting only ONE monologic stance by mitigating the paraprofessional’s stance; and
(2) Limiting what counts as knowledge.

Ultimately, this scene silenced the paraprofessional’s perspective. Part of the Forum Theater process involves asking the spect-actors if the reenactment presented seemed ‘real’ or satisfying as an option. While the goal is not necessarily to come up with one ‘best performance’ or best embodied and discursive response, the Forum Theater process lends itself to varieties of performative options and surrounding discussion. As Spry (1994) suggested, ‘the actual solutions proposed by the interveners are not as important as what is triggered in the way of ideas, discussion, and debate’ (p. 183).

In this next enactment, Maria stepped in to replace Catherine as the paraprofessional. Like Catherine, she attempted to mitigate the paraprofessional’s epistemic stance, with similar results. The mother constructed her uncertainty as deference and this reinforced the mother’s monologic position:

IS HE DONE #3: Conflict avoidance, again.
Maria (Paraprofessional): Are you finished?
Catherine (Mom): He says he’s done. He said he’s done.
Maria (Paraprofessional): Well-
Catherine (Mom): Take care of my son.
Maria (Paraprofessional): Do you think that’s what he said? I didn’t-
Catherine (Mom): I’m sure. Didn’t you hear him?
Author (Derrick): Mmmm.
Catherine (Mom): = he said he’s done. He said he’s done.
Maria (Paraprofessional): Well, maybe since- maybe we can hear him again?
Catherine (Mom): =he’s done. Look lady you need to get him up off the seat
Catherine (Mom): Don’t make him si-
Author (Derrick): I’m done.
Maria (Paraprofessional): Are you finished? Are you finished?
Catherine (Mom): =he’s done. Look lady you need to get him up off the seat
Zoe (Spect-actor): She’s too soft!

In this version of the scene, Maria, like Catherine before her, displayed a weakened epistemic stance, and this never provided a pathway for new knowledge to enter into the dialogue, repeating the two processes seen in Scene 2:

(1) Enacting only ONE monologic stance by mitigating the paraprofessional’s; and
(2) Limiting what counts as knowledge.

Maria mitigated her epistemic stance considerably, asking questions or using explicit hedges for nearly all her utterances (‘Do you think that’s what he said,’ ‘Well, maybe since – maybe we can hear him again?’). Again, the mother (now played by Catherine) took this as an opening to further assert her position. And, the paraprofessional’s uncertainty did not open up the knowledge domain and provoke dialogue. Instead, the Mother was even more certain, explicitly stating how sure she was of her knowledge – questioning what the paraprofessional perceived (‘I’m sure. Didn’t you hear him?’).

Again, the result was unsatisfying for the group. Zoe was again compelled, as a spect-actor, to conclude that Maria, as the paraprofessional, was ‘too soft.’ Maria’s hedging and mitigating of her own certainty came out simply as ‘being soft’ – giving too much, letting the mother dictate her position, and dismissing the paraprofessional’s knowledge.
In scenes 2 and 3, Catherine and Maria both mitigated their epistemic stance, but without opening up the knowledge domain. Only one monologic stance was fully articulated (that of the mother) and the knowledge domain remained limited to what the mother counted as knowledge. Neither Catherine nor Maria were able to coax the mother into taking up a new position relative to the paraprofessional’s knowledge about Derrick. The result was the unsatisfied sense of being ‘too soft,’ having mitigated the paraprofessional’s knowledge in order to avoid conflict. However, for Zoe, who perceived this mother to be an oppressive, racist force in her professional life, these options were unacceptable.

In the next scene, Zoe came back to play herself. Here, based on the options she had seen enacted by the group, she tried to mitigate knowledge claims, but in a very different way – not her own claims but the mother’s:

**IS HE DONE #4: Puncturing the Mother’s knowledge claims**

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<th>Zoe (Paraprofessional):</th>
<th>Your mommy’s here. Okay? (.) Derrick. Are you finished?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Author (Derrick):</td>
<td>Mmm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine (Mom):</td>
<td>He’s done. He says he’s done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoe (Paraprofessional):</td>
<td>Does that mean he’s done?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author (Derrick):</td>
<td>Yes that- that means he’s done. Yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine (Mom):</td>
<td>[Are you sure?]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoe (Paraprofessional):</td>
<td>[Mmm]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author (Derrick):</td>
<td>I’m positive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine (Mom):</td>
<td>How do you know?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoe (Paraprofessional):</td>
<td>Because he’s finished.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author (Derrick):</td>
<td>Oh that’s the- that’s the way he says that he’s finished.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine (Mom):</td>
<td>[EXACTLY.]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author (stepping out of Derrick character):</td>
<td>[Stop. Stop.] Stop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoe (Paraprofessional):</td>
<td>You take Derrick’s place (laughter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoe (Paraprofessional):</td>
<td>I was trying to be nice!</td>
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Here, Zoe re-played herself. Now, like Catherine and Maria in the previous two scenes, she mitigated her epistemic stance. However, rather than questioning her own knowledge and backing down before the mother, as Maria and Catherine did when they played the paraprofessional, Zoe more directly questioned the mother’s knowledge. In this way, she slightly modified the first of the two processes seen in scenes 2 and 3:

1. Enacting only one monologic stance by mitigating not the paraprofessional’s, but the mother’s claims; and
2. Limiting what counts as knowledge.

Rather than hedging her own claims, she questioned the mother after each of her bald statements: When the mother said Derrick is done, Zoe questioned, ‘Does that mean he’s done?’ When the mother claimed that yes, that means he is done, Zoe again cast doubt on the parent’s knowledge, questioning, ‘Are you sure?’ And again, when the mother said she is ‘positive,’ Zoe asked, ‘How do you know?’ Zoe’s own version of ‘The Paraprofessional’ was one that refused ‘niceness’ as a strategy, requiring the paraprofessional to back down from her own claims with ‘maybe’ and ‘well’ the way that Catherine’s and Maria’s characterizations did.

To the end, Zoe (playing herself) questioned the mother’s knowledge claims. Even when she seemed to be accepting the mother at face value (‘Oh, that’s the way he says he’s finished’), her tone was challenging. She sounded like a parent who, having asked multiple times for a child to clean his room, surveys the meager results and says, sarcastically, ‘Oh, **that’s** the way you
straighten up?’ So, even as Zoe was trying to probe the mother, she was not backing down from her own truth claims in the process. When the scene drew to a close, Zoe laughed and said, ‘I was trying to be nice!’ But she simply could not ‘be nice’ in the way Catherine and Maria displayed ‘nice,’ by completely changing her stance toward the events. She could not give up what she knew to be true to avoid conflict with a parent she perceived as racist and undermining her authority.

Zoe decided in her performance that she could not be someone she was not. And, taking a stance that she didn’t support would be doing just that. Stance is, arguably, a primary building block for identity in interaction (Ochs, 1996). The amount of certainty or emotion human beings display compounds in every exchange, building a picture of, for example, someone who is ‘strong and silent’ (through displays of certainty and lack of affect) or ‘ditzy’ (through displays of mitigated certainty and heightened affect) or ‘trustworthy’ (through displays of certainty, and moderate affect). Moreover, human beings are socialized into these compilations of stance (identities) over a lifetime of interactions in communities, families, and institutions with distinctive language habits. Taking up a different kind of stance, because it is so closely tied to identity, then, would be paramount to being someone different. As Goffman (1959) stated:

To the degree that the individual maintains a show before others that he himself does not believe, he can come to experience a special kind of alienation from self and a special kind of wariness of others … the dramaturgic elements of the human situation (pp. 236–237).

Is there any alternative for bilingual teachers in the face of interactional conflict with perceived antagonists who may represent the monolingual social world? This is precisely the project of Boalian Theater of the Oppressed as a professional development tool for bilingual educators – to extend the range of who individuals can ‘be’ in oppressive situations, by acquiring the skills of an actor and changing one’s performance of self in ways that feel ‘real’ and agentive. By viewing different options, spect-actors recognize multiple patterns of language in use, and explore new versions of situations and selves. This is exemplified most distinctly in the next scene, when the author steps in to play a different version of the paraprofessional:

IS HE DONE #5: Different knowledge domains

Author (Paraprofessional): Oh are you finished?
Zoe (Derrick): Mmm.
Catherine (Mom): Oh he’s done. Go ahead and get him up. He’s done.
Author (Paraprofessional): You know that is so interesting. I- when he makes that movement he has- what I’m trying to (...) teach him now is to articulate that he’s done (...) to say ‘I’m done’ because it’s [very important]-
Catherine: [Yeah but he said he’s done. He said he’s done.
Author: =He said it physically I bet that’s how you’ve read [him]- you are his mother and you know him right?=
Catherine: Yeah.
Author: =He is done.
Catherine: Exactly. I know my son. The boy’s done.

Here, Author changed how the paraprofessional displayed epistemic stance, but without relinquishing her own knowledge completely. In the process, she illustrated a possibility of avoiding monologic and knowledge-limiting processes, working toward dialogue and new forms of shared knowledge. In this way, Author dramatically modified the two processes seen in the previous scenes:

(1) Simultaneously validating two opposed sets of claims; and
(2) Opening up what counts as knowledge.
Rather than completely backing down from the Paraprofessional’s truth claims, the Paraprofessional (as played by Author) maintained them (“He said it physically”). However, she simultaneously validated the mother’s truth claims (“I bet that’s how you’ve read…”). She could do the seemingly impossible – acknowledge the validity of each player’s truth claims – by opening up the knowledge domain. Rather than Knowledge being a zero sum – a negative plus a positive, in which one person must be wrong for the other to be right, the Paraprofessional here asserted that the Mother has ‘interesting’ and relevant knowledge. Granted, only a certain social demographic sees conflict like this as possibly ‘interesting.’ Arguably, ‘this is so interesting,’ is the kind of statement that only a professional firmly entrenched in a bourgeois, educated class habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) can utter. However, our interpretation is not as deterministic as Bourdieu’s. This interaction also represents the possibility that voicing an inquiry-oriented stance can be empowering. By using ‘This is so interesting,’ the Paraprofessional simultaneously asserted that she has professional knowledge and perceptions, and that she has responsibilities to ensure that Derrick learn to articulate in a manner that more people can understand (“What I’m trying to teach him now is to articulate that he’s done’). In this scenario, both the Paraprofessional and the Mother could be right, and each of them could have expertise.

This new way of approaching the situation involved, again, enacting a very different stance toward what is true and who knows it, and what kind of knowledge gets brought into the situation. The author’s portrayal of the Paraprofessional is not necessarily the ‘solution’ to the problem, however. The Mother might, even in light of this different stance, continue to stubbornly insist the Paraprofessional is wrong in every way. In fact, when the scene was drawing to a close, Author asked the group whether her version of the Paraprofessional seemed like a realistic solution. As if in response, Catherine jumped back into the stubborn ‘Mother’ character and asserted her point of view. She refused to acknowledge the expertise of the Paraprofessional. She was unwavering in her assertion that Derrick already knew how to say he is ‘done.’

IS HE DONE #5, cont’d: Is it real?

Author (herself): Okay. Is this real what I’m saying is to pull the expertise (.) in and say you know what? You are right, Mother, he is done and you know it. What I’m trying to teach him is how to say it=

Catherine (Mom): But he said it.

Author (Paraprofessional): =to let everybody understand that.

Catherine (Mom): Can you not see it that my son said he’s done.

Zoe (Derrick): Mm. Mmmm.

Was this performance real – e.g. if performed in real time between the real Zoe and Mother, might the outcome have been any more or less empowering and/or authentic for the bilingual paraprofessional? It certainly was real for the author to make attempts to claim expertise while simultaneously acknowledging the mother’s expertise. But Catherine’s continued enactment of the mother character suggests that, while the paraprofessional as protagonist may appear more empowered by voicing this new stance, and by opening the knowledge domain, the antagonist mother may never change.

So far then, changes to this scenario have revolved around modifying epistemic stances facing what Zoe perceived as the consistently oppressive voice of an untrusting parent. None of the spectators, including the group facilitator, had performed ‘Zoe’ in a way that would stop the mother from insisting on her point of view or her racist perceptions of the paraprofessional. However, the collections of scenes began to make the entire group more familiar both with this specific
conflict as well as more generally with shared feelings of inadequacy and disempowerment when bilingual teachers’ claims to knowledge and expertise are shaken by antagonist-others such as parents, colleagues, administrators and professors. No performance of ‘Zoe’ was portrayed as more legitimate or successful than another – the value of these exercises lies in the experience of performing multiple courses of action from multiple possible selves during moments of confrontation with those who may be perceived as having power over the bilingual educator.

Orders of discourse: WHO can back down? WHO gets to expand the knowledge domain?

While no one solution is necessarily more legitimate than another, being aware of multiple possibilities – as well as who has access to certain options and who does not – is an important component of Boalian Theater work as well as critical discourse analysis and its impact on the professional development of new, multicultural educators. Therefore, in the next level of our analysis, we probe more deeply into Who makes which modifications? By analyzing which participants enacted which roles we became more aware of how roles can be limited by participants’ backgrounds and previous experiences. In particular, our role analysis indicates the following distinct approaches to the problematic scenario:

(1) Catherine (U.S. origin) and Maria (Anglo-Latino origin), participating novice teachers, who are bilingual, but do not speak with pronounced Spanish accents, ‘solved’ the scenario by backing down from their truth claims.

(2) Zoe, a paraprofessional, and the actual protagonist, who speaks with a strong Puerto Rican accent and looks non-white, found it difficult to back down from her own claims, and changed only by mitigating the antagonist’s stance.

(3) Author, a director of the program and university professor, who is bilingual, but non-Latino and white, validated both the protagonist’s and the antagonist’s claims by expanding the knowledge domain.

Significantly in Zoe’s case the person who confidently validated multiple forms of knowledge was a professor, and the participants who constructed the solution as some form of backing down were novice elementary school teachers. The person who can only re-do the scenario as a form of resistant undermining of the antagonist’s perspective is the paraprofessional who experienced the original conflict. Larger domains of discourse that inform this theater process are necessary to understand exactly why, even in theatrical performance, certain roles are more available to some more than others. A link can be made between the macrostructure of social institutions or what Marx and Engels (1848/1998) termed ‘the ideas of the ruling class’ and the microsociological phenomena of face-to-face interaction. Indeed, this is precisely the connection Boal intended to make in structuring Theater of the Oppressed – a means for those experiencing oppression to consciously perform options in the context of a spect-acting troupe. By understanding who is more socially accustomed to certain roles – and through this awareness – changing these tendencies – the hope is that spect-acting participants (in this case novice, bilingual teachers) will be able to reconstruct and challenge societally conditioned oppressive situations.

Discussion

Boal referred to habitual, socialized sets of expectations for behavior as our ‘cops-in-the-head’ and used this metaphor to explain why people from different life roles perceive themselves as more or less able to change their physical and discursive behaviors. In this case, ‘the cops’ gave the green light to the white college professor to probe multiple perspectives, but the warning
light to the Puerto Rican paraprofessional to be defensive or better yet deferential when confront-
ing the mistrust of a white, middle-class mother. Foucault (1978) called these sets of socially
reinforced expectations orders of discourse. This phrase has been taken up in current social
theory as a way of understanding how power configurations both permeate and are sustained
through daily interactions – and through networks of social practices (Chouliaraki & Fairclough,
1999; Fairclough, 2003).

By bringing the metaphor of cops in the head to the linguistic understanding of stance and
language socialization, and the theoretical notion of orders of discourse to bear on our data, we
can understand how, while we can engage participants in the choices they have as to what they
can say and do differently in the future, without rehearsing awareness of new ways of speaking,
and the origins of teachers’ own interactional habits, their options may still be perceived as neces-
sarily limited. Because different ways of life come with different ways of speaking (orders of
discourse), certain kinds of knowledge claims are more accessible to some people than to others.

When viewed through an expanded lens, one that affords a recognition of the networks of
social and linguistic practices that are in play in Zoe’s conflict with a parent, we can also see
why it was the author who expanded the knowledge domain in the final scene, who performed
‘Zoe’ as a character who could draw on her professional status and associated expertise. As a
white professor, as someone experienced in theater and Boal’s work, and as director of evalua-
tion for the TELL program, she was in an institutionally privileged position. This position comes
with habitual ways of speaking and formulating knowledge claims. She has been accustomed to
expanding the knowledge domain, to encouraging people to think in new directions (e.g. ‘this is
so interesting’), and to challenging the status quo. And, in some understandings of the job, this
was a legitimate role for her as a professor. Zoe, as a paraprofessional, and Maria and Catherine,
as novice teachers, were not used to viewing themselves as in a position to foment dialogue, but
in a position to either agree unwillingly (‘trying to be nice’) or to attack by undermining the
mother’s claims.

Thus, the aim of our work has been to engage in practiced rehearsals with a collective group
of bilingual teachers to share alternative physical and linguistic responses in oppressive circum-
stances. In analysis of our work from October 2004 to October 2007 we have already seen that
with practice, TELL scholars are more likely to provide alternatives that realize dialogue and
multiple forms of knowledge and to act ‘as if’ they had the power to exert their authority and
expertise. For example, in a TO focus group meeting in April 2005, when an uncertified, Latina
teacher explored the oppressive conditions of working for an administrator who repeatedly
claimed not to understand her accent, Maria and Catherine, spect-actors in the group who had
participated in the October 2004 group with Zoe, explained the interaction from the perspective
of empathy rather than exclusive anger. We believe empathy with different perspectives, espe-
cially antagonistic ones, is only possible when those experiencing oppression understand it
as situated within multiple stances and within different layers of power and privilege. Thus,
empathy is possible and empowering when one recognizes one’s experiences of oppression as
interactionally situated within specific socio-cultural contexts.

Together, Maria and Catherine (below) encouraged the group to reflect on the disadvantage
of the more privileged, antagonistic administrator – the disadvantage of not being ‘lucky’ enough
to grow up speaking more than one language and hearing more than one kind of accent:

The Lucky Ones
Maria: I honestly think that people who have lived here and been raised here all of their
      lives do not have- (.)
Catherine: an ear-
Maria: that it is not that easy for them as it is for us to take a- an accent any accent and
      figure it out. We’re used to hearing it and they are not-
Catherine: Yeah they haven’t been exposed.
Maria: They have not been exposed and are not as lucky as we are.

Maria and Catherine, clearly, were beginning to talk about language habits as not necessarily something an individual has control over (cf. Bourdieu, 1977). There are forces larger than the individual that shape what kinds of language experiences all actors bring to the presentation of self in everyday life (Goffman, 1959). As these habits become institutionalized, some people experience more difference than others.

But it is these institutionalized habits of language use that initially limited what Zoe saw herself as able to do in the moment of interactional conflict. She was fighting even more dangerous perceptions that are particular to her identity as a bilingual Puerto Rican who speaks English fluently, but with an accent. As the group debriefed, she quoted a favorite movie line: ‘I may speak with an accent – but that doesn’t mean I think with an accent’ (original emphasis underlined). As these examples suggest, Zoe felt she was positioned not only by the conflict fomented by Derrick’s mother, but also by institutional roles, language habits associated with those roles and by her accented English and her Puerto Rican identity. We hope to encourage the TELL teachers eventually not to deny that they ‘think with an accent’ – but illustrate that we all have accents (and most of us think with them!) (Lippi-Green, 1997). Unfortunately, some accents are more valued than others.

Conclusion and implications

While orders of discourse are relatively stable, they do change. We are suggesting that an awareness of the language tools that structure our individual relationships as well as an awareness of the larger forces shaping what different individuals can and can not say can help educators, especially educators who are themselves minorities or who work on behalf of minority communities, rehearse performances of self that validate their knowledge stances and identities as advocates for linguistic and cultural pluralism. We also see performance-based work of this nature as helpful in expanding what Boal (1995) referred to as the ‘Rainbow’ of beliefs and motivations held by every protagonist and antagonist, encouraging those experiencing oppression to role-play themselves as well as the varying perspectives of their perceived oppressors. While empathizing with a potentially racist mother may not at first seem empowering to a bilingual paraprofessional of color, we believe empathizing and role playing the fears and frustrations held by a parent of a disabled child enabled spect-actors to contextualize the parent’s antagonistic behavior as stemming also from her own experiences of feeling silenced and discriminated against in the public school system. Playing and replaying potential outcomes of this interactional moment between parent and teacher allowed teacher-spect-actors to empathize with the multiple ‘hues’ from which any given interlocutor may communicate. Our hope has been that through performative professional development participating bilingual teachers will have gained voice and interactional tools to ultimately move into more powerful perceptions of self and more critical, socio-historical understandings of others.

By disrupting habitual orders of discourse, Boalian Theater can potentially give our participants the option to approach conflict in new ways – to take up confident, expansive roles and to project new futures for themselves and others. But, many of these participants may not re-do these scenes in new ways. Zoe never performed the scene as her peers or professional workshop leader had suggested. What she and her colleagues did experience was shared performance of a real, lived struggle to assert oneself and the collective wisdom for how to interact with ever-present antagonists that appear, in their rainbow of desires (Boal, 1995), in bilingual teachers’ lives. Boal’s Theater of the Oppressed does not buy into the Hollywood portrait of the single-handed
bilingual revolutionary like Jaime Escalante in the movie *Stand and Deliver* (Musca & Menéndez, 1988). Such portraits of solo teacher performances are acts of fiction whereas Boalian work pursues transformation of the day-to-day lived realities of the individual within the social processes of the group.

From this place of group strength, these novice minority teachers developed meta-awareness of the roles they took up, seeing the humor in these roles, and options for acting differently, should they so choose. Performative teacher development enabled participants to consciously see how roles are produced by a system that often does not distribute goods fairly, and that judges superficially, and that there are no easy solutions to inequality. Ambiguity, conflict, and dissent become familiar. This ability to talk through conflict and dissent, according to Michael Apple (2004), is the first step toward confronting dominant and potentially oppressive ideologies, to understanding how each person is potentially complicit in the reproduction of these ideologies, and to acting in new ways that do not reproduce unfair and unequal systems.

Because the teachers involved in the TELL program were all minorities and/or non-traditional students, their perspectives are doubly in danger of being silenced within the strong hierarchical and routinized culture present in public schools in the United States. While this approach does not change accent-based or race-based discriminatory behaviors of antagonist-others, we believe the power of these critical performance-based strategies lies in their potential to transform spect-actors’ understandings of their own socially constructed discourses and collectively rehearse change from within. In other words, this work does not necessarily intend to change others’ oppressive behaviors but, rather, works to expand spect-actors’ consciousness and rehearsal of discursive options and their concomitant outcomes.

In post-focus group surveys and follow up interviews we often learn participating spect-actors value these collective rehearsals for sharing moments of struggle too often experienced in isolation from others. One participant described the performance process as relief:

> I didn’t know about drama, and I don’t usually feel comfortable being in the spotlight. I’m kind of shy. But I liked it afterwards. I felt relieved. You know, sometimes you have built up emotions, and then, with encouragement of a teacher-support group, you can just let it out one layer after another. And suddenly you feel like a different person! (Participant interview, January 27, 2007)

This practical and analytical approach has proven effective for our group and, no doubt, will be increasingly relevant in more professional development contexts, as teachers in the schools become as diverse as the students they are teaching. Boalian Theater of the Oppressed affords recognition that these teachers have recurring situations day after day that potentially silence their perspectives on events.

A critical discourse analysis of the talk involved raises an awareness of the interactional and societal forces that condition certain habitual forms of conflict and paths to resolving that conflict. This critical discourse study illuminates possibilities for how Theater of the Oppressed can be used as an intervention in the preparation of minority and non-traditional pre-service teachers and support during the first years of practice. Teacher educators can use critical discourse awareness to analyze how conflict is perceived and explore ways to preserve the dignity, equality, and knowledge domains of the protagonists as well as the antagonists involved.

**Endnote**

1. Our transcription conventions are as follows: (.) indicates a pause (‘I mean (.) when’); underlining indicates a stressed word; = indicates a sentence that continues after an interruption (‘he’s=…=done’); **bold** indicates utterances of analytical focus; [ indicates the onset of overlap (‘[He said…]/[No he didn’t’).
References


