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Multilingual theatre: Community value and future education necessity

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MULTILINGUAL THEATRE: COMMUNITY VALUE AND FUTURE EDUCATIONAL
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MULTILINGUAL THEATRE: COMMUNITY VALUE

This Study by: Diana Garles

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MULTILINGUAL THEATRE: COMMUNITY VALUE

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Introduction

This project is the culmination of my two passions: theatre and language. For me, these two things are priceless pieces of human identity, whether used consciously or not. I imagine there are very few people who have never played a role, or portrayed a certain character to embody a facet of their personality. I believe this research presents a natural, practical option for community and educational development through the use of theatre techniques. Language is a supporting element in theatre, and theatre can use language as an educational tool for exposure and for further understanding of many different cultures and backgrounds.

My first international experience was as an exchange student through Rotary International in 2005. It is easy to recognize the importance of language after landing in a foreign country without a ride; when I arrived in Brazil, I found myself at the airport without anyone holding a sign with my name, and only a couple years of high school Spanish under my belt. From that moment on, I was determined to learn Portuguese. This became an effortless task, as I immediately fell in love with the beautiful landscapes, people, and the rich language and culture of a blossoming country. That experience prompted a second trip to Brazil in 2010.

It was these journeys that led me to this project: yet another journey. I feel almost religious when I preach about the importance of the acceptance (or tolerance), support, and, most of all, curiosity for other cultures and languages within U.S. borders. The world is blending and mixing faster than it can be understood, so opening doors to diversity and difference will only promote a greater appreciation for the future.

It is often said that what separates humans from the rest of the animals is the ability to communicate through language. Words are what make one human, in addition to other attributes, and it is remarkable how much variety of expression one can create with words. Language is an essential component of theatre; Aristotle incorporated it as one of his six

elements of drama because language can affect thought, character relationships, and plot (Pritner & Walters, 2005). In fact, without language, these components would not exist. This research focuses on plays and theatres that demonstrate multilingual theatre techniques, discussions of multilingual theatre, and its place within the broader field of multicultural studies.

The elements of multilingual theatre that I discuss demonstrate a possible approach to multicultural education on a public level, whether in schools or communities. People could be taught how to communicate through action, rather than giving in to ignorance and indifference. Prejudice and intolerance could be combated in the peaceful venue of the theatre instead of in violent streets and damaging courtrooms. Theatre provides opportunity in circumstances that other avenues cannot, because, while theatre is rooted in reality, there is an element of illusion and aesthetic distance that cushions the hard or uncomfortable truths for the audience and allows for analytical and intellectual contemplation while being vicariously involved in the situation.

This thesis will examine the spectacle of multilingual theatre in America by defining it, investigating existing multilingual plays and theatres from here and abroad, and the translation strategies used in their performances. I will then examine the challenges that multilingual theatre presents, the different uses of multilingual theatre as a tool for social change and as an aspect of multicultural theatre studies in education.

Methodology

I planned to show that language should not be thought of as a barrier or restriction, but as another tool with which theatres, schools, and communities could expand their understanding of culture, especially with the abundance of population changes and migrations occurring in the United States today. I believe the research supported this idea. First, I collected as much information I could find on multilingual or bilingual theatre, which was difficult, and then

broadened my search to incorporate multicultural theatre and related topics. With the help of the analyses of certain plays, I used my research and those textual examples to support my definition, explanation, and proposal of introducing multilingual theatre into the daily lives of students and communities throughout the United States.

I began with an online search using different terms, from “multilingual” to “foreign language theatre.” There were many dissertations on foreign language theatre that were unavailable or difficult to attain, which left a restricted field to search through. I found few authoritative texts in the Rod Library at the University of Northern Iowa on the subject of existing multilingual theatres and techniques in the United States, but was assisted by the staff to find other online sources, some dissertations and articles. The sources that I was able to use provided supplemental information on theatre and language.

To provide textual examples from plays involving foreign language and variations of the English language, I used my own collection. I obtained a few of the plays through performing them and the others were from theatre analysis classes. In either instance, I was already familiar with the plays and some of their special linguistic qualities. I chose to limit the number of plays referenced due to time constraints, and function; some plays are easier to perform than others in today’s theatres and communities. Language resources, such as native speakers and language coaches, are usually attainable, but they are useless if there is no appeal present for foreign language theatre. Many factors must be considered when picking material, but this task can be incorporated into the educational curriculum. Students could work beside their teachers to choose scripts and prepare for language study.

My own experiences abroad and in theatre contributed the most to my ideas of multilingual theatre, along with the sources I discovered during this process. I used my

knowledge and familiarity with the subject to connect the qualitative information from my sources with the suggestions I provided. Overall, my methodology of study led to an extended literature review and an analysis of existing and prospective strategies to make multilingual theatre a realistic practice in American theatre today.

Literature Review and Analysis

Language and its use can be somewhat controversial in theatre. In modern theatre, it can be accepted as a convention equivalent to lights or scenery, or also ignored and taken away to create contrast. In the beginning of this research, multilingual theatre was considered to be theatre involving any language other than English in any way, whether as an integral part of the action or simply as the authentic, original written language of the play. After some study, the definition changed, as explained later in this analysis.

The term multilingual is often encompassed by a broader label, multicultural theatre, which includes cultures within the American melting pot that speak English but are of other ethnic backgrounds (e.g., a piece written in Dutch, but performed in English by a Dutch person for an American audience). There is only one source that used the phrase “multilingual theatre,” John Weinstein’s *Multilingual Theatre in Contemporary Taiwan* (2000), but the other references and examples contributed greatly to the final conclusions about the term, and its use as a theatre convention.

Defining Multilingual Theatre

Multilingual theatre is a division of multicultural theatre studies, just as language is a facet of communication. It can be defined in a multitude of ways, because multilingualism has not been identified as a specific convention in theatre. First, I will examine the aspects of this term that led me to the final definition that I used throughout this study.

There are two major strategies that distinguish kinds of multilingual theatre: using texts originally written in two or more languages, including the native language of the audience, and translating texts originally written entirely in one language into one or multiple foreign languages, including adaptations as well as literal translations. A language that is considered

foreign in this section simply means a language other than American English. For an example of the first case, Sarah Ruhl's play *Clean House* (2004) was originally written with parts in English, Portuguese, and Spanish, although the play is mostly in English. The audience is still being exposed to the use of foreign language(s), and language then becomes a theatrical convention instead of a simply artistic element. Plays in Spanglish, such as Luis Valdéz's *Zoot Suit*, are another example. Language is being used purposefully to affect the audience in some way, while the story may be understood without study of the foreign language(s).

In the second case, the goal is still the same, but the method is different. For English-speaking audiences, using language as a convention in this instance would entail translating a play originally written entirely in English into a different language, or performing a play not originally written in English in its authentic language. Sheila Biggs and Katherine Rosati are two theatre artists who were approached with this very idea. According to the Back Stage article *Au Revoir, Adios, Auf Wiedersehen* (Jacobs, 2002), these women developed an idea that involved "strobe lighting and other feats of theatrical prestidigitation [that] allowed for a single performance to occur in two languages" (p. 6). The "bilingual theatre pioneers" (p. 6) produced and directed plays in their authentic language, and English, such as Molière's *Tartuffe* simultaneously in French and English.

The article labeled the practice: "bilingual theatre", since the plays were confined to two languages, although Biggs and Rosati incorporated English, Spanish, French, German, and Shakespearean English in their array of productions. This example of Biggs' and Rosati's accomplishments demonstrates the variability and potential for the term "multilingual theatre."

The second case was an example from the perspective of an English-speaking audience, but the foreign perspective is also possible. As previously mentioned, *Clean House* (an example

of the first case) was originally written so one of the main characters, Matilde the maid, is Brazilian and speaks Portuguese. For a Portuguese-speaking audience to have a similar experience with this play as an English-speaking audience, the languages would have to switch in performance, as well as the translation of cultural references. This change would lead to an adaptation, as opposed to a literal translation of the text. For example, I translated the beginning of Act I which starts with a joke, provided by Ruhl, told by Matilde in Portuguese, followed with a monologue by another character in English (Ruhl, 2004, p. 52):

Original Text

1. Matilde

Matilde tells a long joke in Portuguese to the audience.

We can tell she is telling a joke even though we might not understand the language.

She finishes the joke.

She exits.

2. Lane

Lane, to the audience.

LANE: It has been such a hard month.

My cleaning lady—from Brazil—decided that she was depressed one day and stopped cleaning my house.

I was like: clean my house!

And she wouldn't!

Translation

1. Matilde

Matilde conta uma longa piada em português para a platéia.

Podemos ver que está contando uma piada que talvez não entendemos

Ela termina a piada.

Ela sai.

2. Lane

Lane, à platéia.

LANE: Esse mes foi tão difícil. Minha

empregada—brasileira—decidiu que estava deprimida-doente um dia e parou de limpar minha casa.

Eu disse: limpe minha casa!

E não fazia nada!

We took her to the hospital and I had
her medicated and she Still Wouldn't
Clean.

And—in the meantime—I've been
cleaning my house!

I'm sorry, but I did not go to medical
school to clean my own house.

Nós a levamos ao hospital e eu mandei
ela ser examinada e ela Ainda Não
Limpava.

E—entretanto—eu estou limpando
minha casa!

Desculpa, mas não estudei medicina para
limpar minha propria casa.

The example above shows the flexibility of multilingualism within a single text, as it can be literally translated quite easily, but it also shows some of the cultural restrictions that can occur when a play comments on society or cultural norms. This translation would be considered literal, whereas an adaptation might overcome some of the content challenges in multilingual theatre, such as portraying meaning and providing relevant messages to the audience.

In either strategy, multilingualism in a performance can be a positive, enriching experience. Another source that led me to an operational definition of multilingual theatre is John B. Weinstein's (2000) discussion of theatre in Taiwan, suitably titled *Multilingual Theatre in Contemporary Taiwan*. Weinstein's description of multilingual theatre was the only source found that referred to it in a way that coincided with the definition presented in this analysis.

In the introduction, Weinstein (2000) claimed that multilingual theatre “enables the playwrights to explore issues of identity more extensively” and it “feels natural to playwrights, actors, and audiences in Taiwan” (p. 269). He first mentions using multiple languages in a performance as a “multilingual technique,” and then later confirms it as the term “multilingual theatre” (p. 269). Throughout his review, Weinstein maintains that multilingualism is “a necessity, not just a clever gimmick to sell more seats” (p. 270). While the opposite result appears often here with the United States, more empty seats than sell-outs, his argument is still valid.

Basic knowledge of Spanish linguistics and reference to Guy Deutscher's linguistic expertise in *Through the Language Glass* (2010) helped to support the view of language in this analysis. Deutscher maintained that culture has influence over the perception of language. Culture can influence language in different ways, whether by affecting the actual structure of the language, such as the syntax or vocabulary, or the general attitude towards the language (i.e., social acceptance).

The review of playwrights, actors, and essays of theatre critics provided examples of existing theatres that use foreign languages, either by performing plays in their original languages, such as the Italian play *La Marcolfa* in *Full-Scale Theater Production and Foreign Language Learning* (Ryan-Scheutz & Colangelo, 2004), or by performing in a language meant to affect the audience, as in Cherríe Moraga's plays in *Functions of Code-switching in Bilingual Theater: An Analysis of Three Chicano Plays* (Jonsson, 2009) and John Weinstein's (2000) essay *Multilingual Theatre in Taiwan*. These examples, more fully discussed in the strategies of existing theatres section, helped specify the final definition of multilingual theatre and the role of language in theatre.

Language can be minimized to distance the audience from the text and direct focus to a different theatrical element, such as movement, or imagery through tableaux, a still or posed depiction of a scene. These strategies are often used in deaf theatre; Kanta Kochhar-Lindgren (2006) described Robert Wilson's *Deafman Glance* that "explored . . . communication, predominantly visual and kinesthetic . . . [and] challenged audience expectations about hearing and language in a surreal theatre of silence" (p. 64). In this case, the audience was immersed in a different kind of language: "slowed movement, and the lack of narrative in the theatrical collage"

(p. 65). The reactions varied from boredom and confusion to fascination and curiosity. This example can be considered a type of multilingual theatre.

A production at UNI that involved deafness and American Sign Language was *Mother Hicks* (1994), a play about a young girl's search for identity in the Great Depression, narrated by a deaf character named Tuc. The story is signed by Tuc, but told verbally by a chorus, written similarly to the Greek choruses from around the 5th century B.C. Not only does the chorus speak outside of the action at the beginning of each scene, but they also speak in verse, another alternative linguistic strategy similar to poetry or song:

CHORUS:

My name is Tuc.
I cannot speak. I cannot hear.
I use my hands and the words appear.
I hang these words in the air for you
To tell a story that I know is true;
'Cause I heard every word with my eyes. (Zeder, 1994, p. 8)

Rhyming verse, poetry, and song are frequently used in theatre. They could be used in foreign languages as well, to help sustain a mood or complement the theme of a performance.

Many people are not aware that American Sign Language is a recognized language, let alone that it is used in theatre. The plays in *Hearing Difference: The Third Ear in Experimental, Deaf, and Multicultural Theatre* (Kochhar-Lindgren, 2006) and *Mother Hicks* served as excellent explorations of this type of work. Kochhar-Lindgren (2006) commented "that as a cultural construct, deafness often resonates as a signifier for the absence of language, rather than simply the absence of sound . . ." (pp. 64-65). For this reason, the definition of multilingual theatre does not have to include the assumed lack of language, as language is often present even when sound is not.

Weinstein's (2000) study examined the relationship between language and the audience, as well as the earlier mentioned Kochhar-Lindgren's book (*Hearing Difference: The Third Ear in Experimental, Deaf, and Multicultural Theatre*, 2006). Both authors indicate that language can represent the perspective of a certain quality or person, such as "deaf" or "Japanese", and that it can challenge the accepted norms in society in a positive manner. Similarly, Luis Valdéz's theatrical presentations and other theatres involving politics and language (e.g., Theatre of the Oppressed, examined in *Theater of the Oppressed as an Instructional Practice*, Kosnik et al., 2005) are rarely used to hurt people, but to expose the truth of people who are being hurt by the oppression in their lives. The audience is no different from the actors, their community is the same.

Other Latino (Latin American or of Spanish-speaking decent) and Chicano (specifically Mexican-American) theatres and plays were also considered in the definition of multilingual theatre, including the Spanglish writing in *Functions of Code-switching in Bilingual Theater: An Analysis of Three Chicano Plays* (Jonsson, 2009). In piecing together the description of multilingual theatre, Jon D. Rossini's (2008) book surfaced: *Contemporary Latina/o Theater: Wrighting Ethnicity*, which addressed the definition of ethnicity and major Latino contributions to the theatre world. He discussed the origins of the term ethnicity, as it is difficult to differentiate from race or culture. Ethnic generally refers to a certain race or culture, so the difference is sometimes difficult to detect: ethnic theatre could be different from multilingual theatre. After some deliberation over the various definitions given, from anthropological to essentialist, it was decided that ethnic theatre would involve performances in the authentic language and authentic context of the text or play, without translation of any kind. Classifying ethnic theatre in this manner categorizes it as the most extreme version of multilingual theatre.

Without contextual or textual translation, the audience would be exposed to a pure form of multilingual theatre.

The conflict in defining “ethnic” is that it involves some judgment from the observer. Rossini (2008) encouraged the approach of “wrighting” ethnicity: “creating something new in the process of correction and revision that moves beyond cultural assumptions that limit thinking and place Latinos in demarcated cultural spaces” (p. 25). The multilingual theatre practice proposed in this analysis is an outlet for this kind of innovative work, open to not just the Latinos in the United States but also to all races, cultures, and ethnicities.

Elinor Fuchs’ (2000) article *Crumbs from the Global Table* also criticized the lack of foreign language theatre, which I considered to be equivalent to multilingual theatre. She too supported the development of a more involved and more diverse theatre community, comically remarking that “one never knows whether to demean oneself with gratitude for the little that is given, or embarrass oneself with complaint against what little one gets” (p. 72). The lack of multilingualism appears even in New York, where Fuchs resides and where people believe the heart of theatre lives. If the New York theatre, the gateway to the melting pot, cannot flourish when exposed to foreign culture, it could be a challenge for multilingual theatre to succeed in any place. Fuchs’ article does show, however, that foreign countries are not always aware of the multicultural theatre centers in the United States, or of how to get involved with them. Many times, they are also unaware of America’s intentions to get involved. Multilingualism is a two-way, often multi-way street that must have a common goal between the native and the foreign sides for promoting exposure and cultural awareness. This cultural exchange is a benefit of multilingual theatre.

Based on the information gathered from these plays and theatres, my definition of multilingual theatre is the use of language(s) foreign to the target audience as a theatre convention. Beyond linguistic communication, language itself is being used purposefully to affect the audience in some manner. Where there is language, culture usually follows, and vice versa. Whether seeing a piece performed in Irish Gaelic, or seeing the translated version, both circumstances could be viewed as multilingual theatre; I consider multicultural theatre to be producing in English but by native Irishmen performing. Again, these situations are from the perspective of a native, English-speaking North American audience; otherwise, the language would not be considered a convention.

The trend of this analysis so far leads to the definition of a positive and effective theatre technique that can be adjusted easily to the needs and wants of schools and communities. There is a large variety of expression that can be achieved through manipulation of language and its multiple forms, whether spoken or performed physically. Many aspects can affect and change multilingual theatre, which is what makes it a great solution for educators facing bilingual students, and communities facing bilingual members.

The Importance and Benefits of Multilingual Theatre

Theatre is often used as a tool for social change and as a method to raise awareness of social issues. The significance of using multilingual theatre as this type of tool is due to its variety of approaches to cultural issues. The University of Northern Iowa's Interpreter's Theatre recently staged a production called *Journey through the Night* which simulated crossing the U.S.-Mexican border. Audience members, principally students, were improvising participants, and came in direct contact with what Thulani Davis (Uno, 2002) in *The Color of Theatre* called "our struggle" (p. 22). The artist's struggle encloses the underlying desires of innovative theatre,

such as those in most multilingual and multicultural theatre: “[to] not simply replicate and preserve, as is the priority when people are first cut off from homelands, but we follow another tradition . . . to make new kinds of work” (p.22). Cultural awareness is vital for rousing community involvement, and an evolving style of theatre that can present reality and inspire solutions is the overall goal; simply seeing is not doing. Multilingual theatre provides opportunity for creativity and intellectual growth.

Education is evolving, and educators must be encouraged, and possibly required, to evolve with it. Cultivating strong support for multilingual theatre could increase community involvement in schools and schools’ involvement in the community. Obviously, some of the actors, or students, may not speak the language; the solution could involve developing exercises to discover methods of understanding and performing foreign text, such as the games discussed in *Full-Scale Theatre Production and Foreign Language Learning* (Ryan-Scheutz & Colangelo, 2004), and exercises in talking and listening (using emotion to fuel responses, using the language). Also of use to actors would be evocative movement, such as the work in *Hearing Difference: The Third Ear in Experimental, Deaf, and Multicultural Theatre* (Kochhar-Lindgren, 2006). Using solely the immersion process to teach a foreign language through the production of a multilingual piece would be sufficient to effectively engage students in learning. A focus on other techniques already used in the theatrical world today could ensure the success of the production.

The case study *Full-Scale Theatre Production and Foreign Language Learning* (Ryan-Scheutz & Colangelo, 2004) presented somewhat anecdotal experiential evidence of foreign language theatre production. This qualitative study gave current standards, suggestions, and techniques for foreign language in theatre production and in the classroom. It also provided

sample games and suggestions for helping student actors comprehend and portray a character in another language in a fun and creative way. The results of the study were favorable and supported the implementation of multilingual theatre into school curricula. A typical game used to promote conversation study was titled Alibi (Ryan-Scheutz & Colangelo, 2004, p. 387):

Alibi

Purpose: Practice with the past tense, work with vocabulary words, encourage students to pay attention to details of the environment in which a work of literature is set, encourage spontaneous communication

Time: 10-15 minutes

Description: Two participants leave the room and must decide upon a story to explain what they were doing from 9:00 to 11:00 p.m. the previous night. They return to the room (one at a time) and are cross-examined by the “jury,” composed of the rest of the class. The jury asks specific questions to try and discover discrepancies in their stories (e.g., “But what color was the car?” “What did you order at the restaurant?” “How many minutes of previews were there before the movie?”).

Games and situational exercises provide opportunity to use the language for improvisation, and for the students’ identification with realistic, current conversations that apply to their lives.

The analysis and review of multilingual theatre is not to prove that these techniques should always be used in theatre, but to recognize the communal significance and educational value of multilingual theatre could open doors that until now may have been locked. The study of the Italian Theatre Workshop (ITW) pilot program at the University of Notre Dame, *Full-Scale Theater Production and Foreign Language Learning* (Ryan-Scheutz & Colangelo, 2004), provided many reasons why “foreign language theater production [is] an effective means of teaching a foreign language and encouraging the continued study of the language and its culture(s)” (p. 374), and how monolingual American students and audiences could benefit. I understand that being American involves people of many cultures and ethnicities, (i.e., Mexican-

American, Asian-American), but to provide better distinction between labels in this section, American refers to native Caucasian English-speakers.

The authors Ryan-Scheutz and Colangelo (2004) cited the “five C’s” of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages’ (ACTFL) National Standards for Foreign Language Learning (p. 375): “communication, culture, connections, comparisons, and communities,” and hailed communication as the key to learning a language, especially through a theatrical process. Communicating the purpose of performing a multilingual piece in a positive and inviting manner is essential to the gradual introduction of multilingual theatre. In order to have solid communication, a true give and take relationship, the community must be aware of the needs and wants of its members, and respond to these needs in return; this kind of communication happens in the theatre. Awareness and recognition of multiculturalism leads to community response, which engages communication that is developed by comparison, connection, and compromise.

Theatre can perfectly facilitate a foundation for this exchange to occur. For example, the ITW (Ryan-Scheutz & Colangelo, 2004) asked students at auditions in what way they would like to participate, whether as an actor, stage manager, or designer, which “allowed language learners who did not feel comfortable on stage as actors to still participate fully in the immersion environment” (p. 378). Students still had the opportunity to learn Italian without the pressure of the stage: communication and compromise. This sort of production could easily be replicated at the community level, which could then involve native speakers of the foreign language living within the community and promote connections among its members.

Another advantage cited by the authors was in Haggstrom’s view of the educational aspect of multilingual theatre. The preparation that goes into the production of a play “can

accomplish all of the major goals for an introductory literature course: The experience helps students improve their reading skills, teaches them how to discuss literature intelligently and confidently, and helps them to strengthen their writing abilities” (Ryan-Scheutz & Colangelo, 2004, p. 376). The play that was performed was selected because it provided relevant vocabulary and idiomatic expressions told through cultural and historical themes that reflected the customs and politics of the time period (p. 378). A theatre workshop like this could replace or be used in conjunction with literature and history classes so students could learn in an interactive, energetic setting where the acquired information is then applied in performance. Jonsson (2009) suggested that code-switching, for example, “should be explored in many different areas . . . especially in language teaching” (p. 1309).

Multilingual theatre is somewhat uncommon, oftentimes due to simple reasons, such as finances or location. Still, it could easily become the norm in theatre society through training. Many educational institutions, such as UNI, already have the diversity necessary to stage a multilingual production. With the use of example theatres and review of the importance of the language of the text in different productions, it was possible to present a selection of instances that describe current practices and potential advantages of linguistic application choices.

There are some theatres and communities that are already benefiting from multilingual or multicultural theatre, but there is still room for growth. As Rustom Bharucha (2000) suggested in his book *The Politics of Cultural Practice: Thinking through Theatre in an Age of Globalization*, cultures and peoples can benefit only when they are recognized (p. 44). Exposing communities and schools to various cultures and backgrounds would not only promote understanding, but could also foster relationships between peoples who otherwise may not interact. This is a great potential benefit of multilingual theatre. Bringing a second or even third

language and perspective to the table allows for a deeper exploration of art in a cultural context. Limiting theatre to solely one language limits options that are present with multilingual performance. A word or phrase that is more fittingly expressed in a different language could be integrated into a piece in English, and vice versa.

As an example, *saudades*, a word in Portuguese with no literal translation in English, is used very frequently in Brazil. One translation is the feelings of missing [someone/something], but it is used in different situations; for example, I miss you in English can be translated as *tenho saudades de você*, literally meaning I have [feelings of missing] you. The feeling and specificity that is achieved through the use of *saudades* is different than *sinto sua falta* (I feel your absence). Otherwise, the word would be unnecessary. Carla Jonsson (2009) cited Backus' 'Specificity Hypothesis' in *Functions of Code-switching in Bilingual theater: An Analysis of Three Chicano Plays* which explained "when a word is said to be highly specific, it cannot be replaced by something that is even more specific, except when it is paraphrased. A general word, on the other hand, is easily replaced by something more specific" (p. 1304). Jonsson related this concept specifically to code-switching, (e.g., Spanglish), but this idea is applicable in monolingual texts and other linguistic phenomena as well. When an author or director is provided with more options, such as more languages, the craft can become more specific, and the power of language suitably valued.

Monolingual American students and communities could benefit from the education of an immersion project similar to the ITW, but the other half can benefit as well. Bilingual and multilingual students and community members would have a chance to contribute to the life of their peers and present a piece of their lives with pride. In the introduction of *The Theatre of Nelson Rodrigues* (2001), Joffre Rodrigues explained that he decided to translate his father's

plays into English because of pride. Translating the plays was a difficult task, and Rodrigues collaborated with his friends and relatives to “[introduce] Nelson Rodrigues to the English-speaking world” (p. 8). He was proud to show his father’s work, which beautifully and unabashedly depicted Brazilian culture and society, presenting a view of that culture.

This type of national pride can be misconstrued when the identity of a culture is already unfamiliar. Rossini (2008) described the controversy in 2006 when a Spanish translation of the national anthem was played on the radio “in support of immigrants’ rights” (p. 2). He stated that the public reacted extremely negatively, feeling threatened by the invasion of bilingualism in the United States and the system of power that could follow. Similar instances of resistance and lack of tolerance to a different language and cultural background happened with the Pledge of Allegiance. A parent of a student did not want the child to speak the Pledge of Allegiance because it states “under God,” and their religious views were different from the general Christian population’s views. It appears in these cases, what was not understood was feared. The current reality is that the United States is still a developing country in terms of multiculturalism. The stereotype of being American is often given too much priority and the opportunity within the borders is overlooked. Through global involvement and interest in other cultures, the U.S. could absolutely benefit; after all, the country was founded and colonized by immigrants. Education could become internationally focused and culturally well-rounded.

Identity was brought up the most in regards to multilingualism in my research. Playwrights in a multilingual genre are constantly questioning identity in the reality of their (the characters’) situation(s). Whether through self-composed works or already existing pieces, people can explore their identities and contributions in a multicultural society. Just as language can be a connecting, unifying element, it can discriminate as well. Weinstein (2000) described a

character, from a Taiwanese play *Phoenix Trees*, who because she is “neither fully Japanese nor fully Chinese, she belongs nowhere” (p. 278). There is so much that Americans do not see within the groups that are classified and stereotyped, such as Mexican-American, Asian-American, and so forth. Theatre can allow communities and students to explore what being American means to them, whether reinterpreting part of the past or analyzing the present and future.

People of other cultures could also take advantage of multilingual theatre by being exposed to American theatre. The idea of multilingual theatre is an exchange, not simply minorities presenting their struggles and desires, but their reciprocation of interest in others’ struggles as well. This exchange would lead to further understanding and achievement of the “five C’s” (Ryan-Scheutz & Colangelo, 2004). No one culture has a higher value than the other, and all peoples, foreign or native, could benefit from the exchange and sharing that theatre has to offer.

Strategies of Multilingual Theatre and Pre-existing Techniques

Some strategies already used in American theatre to resolve the battle with language barriers were discovered primarily in *Multilingual Theatre in Contemporary Taiwan* (Weinstein, 2000), *Functions of Code-switching in Bilingual theater: An Analysis of Three Chicano Plays* (Jonsson, 2009), and *Au revoir, Adios, Auf Wiedersehen: Biggs & Rosati, Bilingual Theatre Pioneers, Say Farewell* (Jacobs, 2002), in addition to example productions such as UNI’s *Mother Hicks* (Zeder, 1994). The sources presented similar ways of confronting the language barrier issue, but the scenarios varied in languages.

Other cases collected of multilingual theatre and theatre artists included the articles *Theatre Talkback: Speaking the Same Language* (Brantley, 2010), *The Hispanic and Luso-*

Brazilian World (McMurray, 1987), Elinor Fuchs' (2000) *Crumbs from the Global Table*, and the Bilingual Foundation of the Arts (BFA) of Los Angeles website. In 1987, Petrovsky called BFA "an excellent resource for introducing students to classic and contemporary plays in Spanish" (McMurray, 1987, p. 129), and the theatre is still running today. These articles showed past and current multilingual theatre presences, as well as support and optimism for the future; for instance, Fuchs' article, "assesses the prospects of a more international future" (Fuchs, 2000, p. 72).

All these examples varied greatly in presentation style. The number one question is whether to translate or not to translate. Opera faces this challenge: the actor must affect the audience even if the audience does not speak the language; but opera seems to suffer less prejudice than other multilingual theatre. I examined how theatres are battling this predicament, primarily for audience members. The strategies often coincided with solutions that I contemplated during my research, such as projected supertitles or translations printed in the playbill or program.

The Taiwanese plays in *Multilingual Theatre in Taiwan* (Weinstein, 2000) involve many languages (even up to eight) in a single performance, but sometimes chose to subtitle in only one language, such as Japanese, to cater to the older audiences that do not speak the "national language," Mandarin (p. 271). Taiwan's history includes occupation by different powers and therefore different education systems. When the article was written, the older generation of Taiwan had been "educated during the Japanese occupation" and did not understand Mandarin (p. 271). The people of Taiwan were used to hearing a variety of languages on a daily basis, similar to many places in the United States.

In one of the plays Weinstein described, *Play Hard*, he said the “humor [in a particular scene] would be largely lost without subtitles; for the meaning to come across, the play must sacrifice some of the ‘natural’ effect” (p. 275). While subtitles or supertitles projected above the actors are a familiar (often used in film) and somewhat obvious solution, they do remind the audience that they are in a theatre seeing a play, a style which is not always desirable. The theatrical contract of realism is compromised to facilitate complete understanding of the text. As defined by Pritner and Walters (2005), “A theatrical contract is an informal understanding or agreement between a theatrical production and audience”, informal meaning it “evolves as the play proceeds” (p. 34). The audience generally accepts rules of a play (e.g., realistic vs. nonrealistic) established by the performers and the production team if choices are consistent (p. 34).

One of the directors Weinstein discussed used “copious explanations [of the characters] in the program” (p. 274), an idea that I also considered in my assessment of strategies, although in broader terms. A brief overview of each scene in the program would suffice for most audiences to get an outline of the plot and understand the action on stage. However, even with the combination of these two strategies in Taiwanese theatre, Weinstein (2000) said that “performing these plays in a non-Chinese-speaking environment . . . for an audience that understands none of the languages, [will] clearly [lose] the layer of meaning from the continuous subtext of identity” (p. 280).

Studying the authentic language of a play is not enough, because the language itself may have evolved into its current state. The examples of plays discussed distinguished between cultural systems and language, using Carl Pritner and Scott Walters’ model of given circumstances from *Introduction to Play Analysis* (2005) to examine language at the time of the

play's writing and setting versus current language conventions and uses in theatre. The question of translation could transfer over to other multilingual theatres as well; as Pritner and Walters (2005) stated, "We can be certain that translation has, to some degree, changed meaning" (p. 26). They discussed how playwrights often use language to demonstrate social class or status and education (p. 25), often displayed through mispronunciation or improper grammar and usage. Playwrights make choices about characters constantly, and every single choice makes a difference toward the meaning of the play. Strategies can depend on the present culture and time at which the production is being performed. For example, the plays in Weinstein's (2000) essay used mostly minimal subtitling in Japanese as opposed to Chinese or Mandarin because of the age of the target audience. However, this could change in the future as the newer generations speak Mandarin but do not speak Japanese, and the plays could reflect this evolution of culture.

In *The American Stage* (Senelick, 2010), Luis Valdéz wrote about his Chicano theatre, El Teatro Campesino. Understanding the origins of a multilingual theatre can often determine the value of translation or authenticity. Opting for no translation, the community would essentially compromise to being exposed to the foreignness of the production, which could counteract the desired effect if the audience is uncooperative. These arguments were examined particularly in conjunction other Latin American sources, *Contemporary Latina/o Theatre: Wrighting Ethnicity* (Rossini, 2008) and *Theatre in Latin America* (Versényi, 1993).

In Senelick's collection of essays, *The American stage: Writing on theatre from Washington Irving to Tony Kushner* (2010), Valdéz explained El Teatro Campesino: "It is a farm workers' theater, a bi-lingual propaganda theater, but it borrows from Mexican folk humor to such an extent that its 'propaganda' is salted with a wariness for human caprice" (p. 651). The Teatro uses original material to "reach the farm workers" (p. 651) and to raise awareness and

funding for the *huelga* (strike) for migrant workers in California. The performances are mostly in Spanish, and combine comedy with the drama of actual situations to the eventual win of the workers. Part of the irony in *El Teatro Campesino* is the bilingualism of the play reflects the real life bilingualism between the workers and bosses. Valdéz provided an example of one of their performances in which they depicted a governor who was coming to speak to the workers. The character, DiGorgio, started off objecting that he does not speak Spanish but got pushed onto the stage and forced to speak by his “cronies” (Senelick, 2010):

“*No Huelga*,” they exhorted, “just say *no Huelga!*”
“And *no boycoteo*,” insisted DiGorgio. (p. 654)

This hilarious interaction precedes the governor attempting to speak in Spanish, “though brokenly at first, [then] so ardently that he turned into a Mexican.” His cronies pull him off the stage “to the laughter and applause of the farm worker audience” (p. 654). Their cause is just, and therefore the governor could not, even physically, persuade them otherwise.

Also, Jacqueline O’Connor’s essay on Luis Valdéz’s *Zoot Suit* in *Interrogating America through Theatre and Performance* (Demastes, 2007) served as another example of where theatre comes from (e.g., the struggle), and why language choice is crucial. His play uses much code-switching, which is also exemplified through the works of Cherríe Moraga in *Functions of Code-switching in Bilingual Theater: An Analysis of Three Chicano Plays* (Jonsson, 2009). Code-switching is when the speaker chooses certain words and phrases to be expressed in another language, and is most commonly utilized by bilinguals; Spanglish is a familiar example. An examination of Jonsson’s analysis presented instances of code-switching, and other linguistic outcomes.

Jonsson (2009) told that Moraga “uses linguistic devices such as code-switching to enhance and support the representation of the characters” (p. 1309). Rossini quoted an interview with Moraga when she said:

In theater I don't have to explain. I can take what are my pressing concerns and what I perceive as being *real* issues within our community by simply putting them on stage and let the characters try play it to each other (p. 178).

The language is allowed to speak for itself.

Other strategies could include simultaneous translation, as outlined in the Back Stage (Jacobs, 2002) article on Biggs and Rosati, but I have not found any further information specific to their use of lighting to achieve this. A production that did include a sort of simultaneous translation was *Mother Hicks* (1994), performed last fall by the University of Northern Iowa's Theatre. The story is about a little girl finding her identity, but is narrated by a deaf boy named Tuc. Tuc, as written by the playwright Susan Zeder (1994), is supposed to sign while a chorus speaks what he is saying. For one of the performances, students and members of the deaf community were invited to attend. Because American Sign Language (ASL) is a visual language, an interpreter/signer was hired to insure the view and enjoyment for the entire audience. The interpreter was also signing lines that were not written to be signed, which is the majority of the play. This could be considered simultaneous translation, even though ASL is visual and not solely spoken.

El Teatro Campesino and other theatres and playwrights use a combination of strategies and linguistic devices, such as code-switching, to translate the text and/or meaning of the work. No matter what strategy is employed, it is up to the directors, actors, and production team to decide what is important: the words or the meaning of the play. Obviously, in the majority of theatre, words are essential to the meaning of the play, and for that reason should be used as a

convention to affect the audience, instead of a gimmick or party trick. Weinstein (2000) says that for the Taiwanese plays he examined, without “deeply portrayed characters, well-structured plots, and universal human themes . . . the plays would not succeed . . . and the multilingual element would be reduced to merely a gimmick” (p. 280). While no translation is perhaps the most striking and effective choice, there are strategies that can make multilingual theatre more accessible to general audiences.

The Outskirts of Multilingual Theatre: What is Foreign?

Multilingual means many languages, languages that are representative of certain cultures, ethnicities, and races. However, there are other forms of language in writing that could constitute as a different language, as demonstrated earlier by Kochhar-Lindgren’s (2006) *Hearing Difference: The Third Ear in Experimental, Deaf, and Multicultural Theatre*. Theatre conventions about language and its use vary in every production. In *Speaking in Tongues: Language at Play in the Theatre*, Marvin Carlson (2006) described dialect theatre, which can produce the same effect as a foreign language: “Dialects, like foreign languages . . . provide a potential disruption of the normal assumption that a theatre will utilize the same language as its surrounding culture” (p. 62). As a result, defining multilingual theatre as simply a language other than English was too vague, due to the varieties of its approaches.

An example playwright of theatre in dialect is David Mamet. *American Buffalo* (Mamet, 1976) is the most famous example of his kind of speech, which the theatre world often calls Mamet-speak:

DON: What is it?
BOB: I saw him.
DON: Who?
BOB: The guy.
DON: You saw the guy?
BOB: Yes.

DON: That I'm talking about?
 BOB: Yes.
 DON: Just now?
 BOB: Yeah. He's going somewhere.
 DON: He is.
 BOB: Yeah. He's puttin' a suitcase in the car.
 DON: The guy, or both of 'em?
 BOB: Just him.
 DON: He got in the car he drove off??
 BOB: He's coming down the stairs...
 DON: Yeah.
 BOB: And he's got the suitcase.
 DON *nods*.
 He gets in the car...
 DON: Uh-huh...
 BOB: He drives away. (pp. 22-23)

Mamet uses slang, colloquial phrasing with apostrophes and added punctuation, and a sort of elusiveness that reflects the understanding of confidentiality between the characters.

In the introduction, Gregory Mosher says Mamet “made it sound like people talking, and he made it funny” (Mamet, 1967, p. xi).

This sort of slang language could be considered almost a completely different dialect of American theatre, perhaps not from a native perspective, but from a foreign perspective. English, one of the newer languages on a worldly spectrum, has come to many different forms throughout history. Another play that demonstrates a foreign version of English is *On the Verge* by Eric Overmeyer (1986). The story is of three female explorers that begin their journey in 1888 and unknowingly travel through time to the 1950s. The language at the beginning of the play is advanced for the average audience:

FANNY: Whenever I must palaver with pasha or poobah, I don this tonsorial getup. And lay out a formal tea. It never fails to impress. (p. 4)

The character Mary, in particular, has a superbly colorful vocabulary:

MARY: The bane of my many travels in the tropics is a bland, mucilaginous paste called manioc, made from the forlorn and despicable cassava, a tuber of dubious provenance. A vile concoction, manioc tastes, in the best of recipes, like the bottom of a budgie's cage—and is more suite for masonry than human consumption. Manioc is the quintessential native chop, occurring circumglobularly in the tropics. For those with a taste for prussic acid, manioc may be just your cup of tea. (p. 12)

Some words and references are archaic, hardly ever used, or completely unfamiliar. Eventually, the play reaches the 1950s and a language that even this generation of texters and IMers can understand.

Shakespeare has the same effect on the world of theatre. Audiences will not always understand what is being said, but the stories are familiar due to their long history of popularity. Without study, Shakespeare is somewhat incomprehensible at first listen. Although the characters speak English, there is a foreign quality to the text because the language is distant from modern day English, in vocabulary and rhythm, as he often wrote in iambic pentameter and used apostrophes to shorten words. For example, most know the first line of Hamlet's famous suicidal speech "To be, or not to be" (Worthen, 2000, p. 316), but not many know of Prospero in *The Tempest* (Worthen, 2000):

Know thus far forth.
 By accident most strange, bountiful Fortune,
 Now my dear lady, hath mine enemies
 Brought to this shore; and by my prescience
 I find my zenith doth depend upon
 A most auspicious star, whose influence
 If now I court not but omit, my fortunes
 Will ever after droop. Here cease more questions.
 Thou art inclin'd to sleep; 'tis a good dullness,
 And give it way. I know thou canst not choose. (p. 346)

Many of the words are individually understood, but when put into Shakespeare's context, the language can seem very foreign to modern audiences.

These examples do not necessarily fit into the spectrum of multilingual theatre explored in my research, but the idea of what is foreign is something to consider. It is obvious that even though a play can be written in one language, the vocabulary or lack thereof could transform the text into a seemingly different dialect or language.

Finally, language manipulated through the lack of spoken language can be considered foreign. Performance pieces with movement, a language of the body, are also common in theatre. While almost all plays involve some kind of movement work, movement-based pieces, similar to dance, can be used to interpret texts. This concept is applied in deaf theatre, as Kochhar-Lindgren (2006) discussed in *Hearing Difference: The Third Ear in Experimental, Deaf, and Multicultural Theatre*: “the spectator views the visual panorama that unfolds on stage, and it is through the gaze that the reading of the performance occurs” (p.17). The actors embody the story and present it in a way that is personally relevant to them.

Challenges of Multilingual Theatre

Some of the challenges of multilingual theatre were already addressed throughout this research. One of the biggest challenges in any type of theatre is often availability, whether it is availability of a performance space, of a sufficient cast or crew, or of material. For multilingual theatre, there must be a strong desire to work and a population large enough to accomplish this type of multidimensional production. Many times, especially in secondary education, there is a lack of knowledge about a language or culture and no one to provide this information. If the entire community is involved, a language guide is often obtainable. Again, multilingual theatre productions would not need to be the standard for all high school drama seasons, but they could be wonderful assets in multicultural education.

Many challenges face the actor when approaching a foreign script. In a way, every script is foreign until the actor becomes the character and lives as him or her on stage. The same

kind of familiarization is achievable in multilingual theatre, as demonstrated by the study *Full-Scale Theatre Production and Foreign Language Learning* (Ryan-Scheutz & Colangelo, 2004) of the Italian Theatre Workshop (ITW). What made the workshop successful was that total immersion process. If the actor/student/community member is completely immersed in a language, he or she will learn. I know this from experience, and the results of the study were also favorable to this idea. Theatre is an interactive process that requires a lot of homework and attention, so any participant could easily benefit from this type of mental and physical engagement. Actor homework involves textual research on the character, such as given circumstances, the biographical information provided by the playwright, and the play in its entirety. Other types of supplemental information assist with character development, like the study of character physicality and the character's action in the play.

Theatres must also address the issue of cultural norms within the context of multilingual plays. As Jonsson (2009) stated, "Language data cannot be analyzed without understanding and taking into consideration the social, cultural, historical, and, sometimes, political context in which they were produced" (p. 1297). If presenting a play written in 12th century Spain, a director must realize, before any kind of translating, that the language has probably changed (like, old English vs. modern English). Political systems and norms within the society also could have changed and could therefore affect the meaning of the text. An adaptation is one way that this issue could be addressed, an option that I discussed in an earlier section. An adaptation differs from a direct translation in that the author can modify the text to be more applicable to current society within the current norms. Adaptation is not always the best option, as the meaning of the text could get lost in translation and distorted, but this is avoidable through careful conversion from one language to the other.

Another challenge lies in the financial requirements of theatre and the popularity of multilingual/multicultural theatre. To make money, seats must be filled. Apprehension and resistance to exposure to different cultures and ideas are some of multilingual theatre's biggest foes. However, if more schools and communities start incorporating theatre in multicultural education, apprehension and wariness to change will diminish greatly. Change will ultimately be inevitable as the United States continues to follow a trend of increasing cultures and ethnic backgrounds.

Due to the different potential approaches in multilingual theatre, many challenges are unpredictable, but almost any argument can be diffused with the idea of positive change towards a more globally-conscious United States. Everything seems foreign at first because it is different than what has been and different from what has worked in the past. Theatre would be a great approach to experimenting with new learning strategies and to promoting multicultural understanding for Americans native to the United States, and Americans foreign to the United States.

Conclusion

I originally assumed that my idea of multilingual theatre was new to the theatre world, but after performing my research I realized I was wrong. True, the term multilingual theatre may not be as integrated into theatre vocabulary as other labels, but I hope, and believe, this will change. My analysis is a brief overview of this type of theatre practice, but is a step towards familiarity and acceptance of the subject at the community level. No matter what it is called, bilingual or multilingual or multicultural, theatre that uses foreign language as a convention to affect the audience is feasible, practical, and effective.

It is important to examine this type of theatre because it provides an avenue for community togetherness through cultural understanding and education. After studying abroad twice, the first time at the age of 16, I am a strong believer in multilingual education and foreign language exposure in educational settings. I think our ever-changing society is now providing the perfect environment to utilize multilingual theatre as a diversifying yet unifying strategy in community involvement and development, especially with the increasing Mexican-American population and the international availability of the internet. Playwrights, actors, and students could have support to not only present a piece from their own backgrounds, but they could also perform works outside their racial specifications. If Caucasian actors can get a spray tan and be considered ethnic, Hispanic actors should be playing Hamlet daily. More importantly, however, people of other ethnicities should be invited and encouraged to perform their own works. In short, I believe this research is important because our world is steadily mixing cultures, while often neglecting to appreciate or understand them. Multilingual theatre is an attractive outlet for cultural education and awareness, and a principal constructive device for modern American theatre.

Limitations aside from time restraints that affected my research were finding free, available sources, and my own focus in my analysis. Many sources on the type of theatre I wanted to examine were dissertations or articles from journals that were difficult to find or too expensive. I was able to find a good number of resources, but it took more time than I expected, which also led to some distraction. Any of the theatres, plays, or playwrights that I briefly discussed could be analyzed individually for a different thesis entirely. I would like to study more deeply the sources I used in my research, particularly Rustom Bharucha's book *The Politics of Cultural Practice: Thinking through Theatre in an Age of Globalization* (2000). Also, I plan to examine Theatre of the Oppressed and other types of interactive theatre. I fully believe that theatre is more than just art; it is possibility, body, soul, life, and legacy.

Theatre participants should challenge themselves to develop new kinds of performance, be it multilingual through the spoken word, or through body and movement. Theatre is meant to be innovative, a creative way to inspect and challenge concrete ideas or assumptions. Theatre gives people permission to act in more ways than one, to do things: to consider, to dream, to choose. Multilingual theatre in the United States could open these options to everyone, and allow for a greater respect, appreciation, and understanding of this consistently mixing, constantly growing, multicultural world.

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