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From the head to the heart: A less-than-orthodox means for foreign language teaching and learning through theatre practice

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Abstract

In this article I reflect on the use of theatre as a tool to teach a foreign language. Within the context of language education, theatre practice does not focus on the final product. On the contrary, it emphasises the process of learning a foreign language. Between 2020 and 2022 I conducted in-class theatre projects with students learning Spanish at the University of Otago in New Zealand. These projects entailed the translation of literary texts from English to Spanish, which later were dramatised. The translation was carried out as an in-group discussion about grammar and vocabulary. The dramatised reading encouraged students to use a variety of tones and levels of volume to physically embody the text. The dramatisation allows students to design their performance with freedom, because they are not 'acting themselves', but are performing a different person. The final presentation of these projects filled students with pride because the work was done entirely by them, from selecting the text, to the translation and finishing with its dramatisation in front of an audience. These projects prioritised freedom of expression and promoted autonomy in students to integrate and apply the learnt content within a specific context in another language. This paper provides a detailed description of how theatre-based instruction developed different aspects of the learners' language skills with students ranging from 100- up to 300-level.

Keywords: teaching/learning, foreign language, theatre, translation, dramatisation

Introduction

The use of theatre in the teaching of a foreign language is a growing field of practice and research (Stinson & Winston, 2011). There are numerous studies and analyses for and against its practice as a pedagogical tool (Dunn & Stinson, 2011; Howard, 2004; Schewe, 2013). For some time, theatre has been successfully used in the teaching of a foreign language, and many teachers are likely to attest to its benefits and effectiveness in improving the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Corral

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Fullà, 2014). In this article I would like to reflect on the use of theatre in my Spanish classes, with students ranging from 100- up to 300-level.

This idea arises from my own theatrical experience learning German as a foreign language in the 1990s at a German school in Chile, where theatre was used as a tool to learn the language. Indeed, in the subject of German literature, for example, we had the opportunity to create oral presentations using any medium we wanted, including dramatised readings or plays produced by ourselves. A prominent example is the play we created of the poem *An diesem Dienstag* by Wolfgang Borchert performed in 1993.

As a student I truly enjoyed participating in these activities. The linguistic possibilities and creative freedom that theatre gave me to develop a particular topic that would otherwise have been a generic power point presentation brought me closer to the language and the German culture. The sense of accomplishment these activities gave me promoted confidence and demonstrated that I could use the language without the fear of being wrong or making mistakes.

Now working in the Programme of Languages and Cultures at the University of Otago I use theatre as a tool for teaching Spanish at beginner, intermediate and advanced levels. Under this premise, I created the *Laboratorio de Teatro en Español* (Theatre Lab) in 2018, to which I invited students of all levels to participate, creating a collaborative learning environment where students could support each other in their learning. The production of a play requires several sessions of rehearsal and, following the work of Amenábar Folch (2021), the focus was "always in the positive" (p. 246) to evidence what has been achieved so far. This approach promoted in the students a feeling of security (Levine, 2021), freedom and confidence in their ability to communicate in another language, regardless of their level.

The first play produced by the Theatre Lab was *Tiempos de Radio* (2018), originally written in English by Dunedin-based actress Cindy Diver for her own drama classes in 2017. The play, set in the 1950s, narrates the story of a Radio station going bankrupt. In the last effort to save it, the employers decided to put on a radio show, inviting potential investors and school children to see the performance. In 2019 we produced the play *Niño Terremoto* by Andrés Kalawski Isla (2011). The play begins with the aftershock of an earthquake. A group of children take refuge in the warehouse of their school where they find many books on the floor. Here they read a story of the Shuar peoples, a tribe from the Ecuadorian Amazon, explaining the existence of earthquakes, personified as a baby that cries until the earth shakes.

For both plays we met once a week for one hour for ten weeks. For *Tiempos de Radio* only 100-level students participated. We had only ten sessions to produce a play, so each session had a different learning activity beginning with focusing on the words

they understood and how to effectively use cognates to correctly guess the meaning of a whole sentence and the overall plot of the play. We spent four to five sessions on pronunciation and reading the play until all concepts, situations and characters' intentions were clear. After these sessions I allocated the different roles. This process was somewhat organic because we read the play so many times that students could read different characters each time. The role allocation was based on students' choice but also on how comfortable and confident they felt reading their texts. In the following five sessions, we spent three sessions staging the play, that is organising stage entrances and exits, as well as the interaction and relationship between characters. During this period, students could work with the text in hand, that is, they were slowly memorising their text through repetition and play, so they could read their text if needed. We also worked on intentions behind each text and how to voice those intensions depending on the urgency of the situation. The final two sessions were dedicated to full rehearsals, without the aid of the written text. I remained silent most of the time, enabling students to sort out for themselves any problem they encountered during each rehearsal. Each session we rehearsed the play up to three times. For *Niño Terremoto*, a mix of 100- and 300-level students participated and used a similar rehearsal structure. The interaction between students with different levels of proficiency worked perfectly as they helped each other understand the play and with pronunciation. That year, due to several challenges, we decided to do a dramatised reading of this play.

This hour of Theatre Lab was in addition to the four hours of Spanish classes students have weekly. For 100-level students, this Lab complemented their learning most significantly in pronunciation, vocabulary and cultural understanding of the use of the language. For 300-level, this Lab consolidated students' intercultural awareness and understanding of the Spanish speaking world through dramatising an Ecuadorian oral narrative. Student participation in these Labs was reflected in their oral presentation grade.

Overall, these first two workshops worked well, but although students were engaged, the number of participants was low. In 2020, I included the Theatre Lab within the 300-level class as a year-long assessed project, thus ensuring a good number of participants and attendance. This project aimed to translate the English version of the play *Blood Wedding* (1932), written by Federico García Lorca, into Spanish, during the first semester. The main theme of the play is life and death. These topics are treated in a way in which myths and landscapes introduce the reader to a world of dark passions that lead to jealousy, persecution and end in tragic death. The second part of this project, during the second semester, entailed students performing a dramatised reading of their own translation. The choice of this play was based on the need to inspire 300-level students with work that would simultaneously challenge and provide a great sense of achievement after its completion.

The first half of this project was conducted during the COVID-19 lockdown. Due to how challenging the situation was beyond class time, some students experienced difficulty collaborating with the whole class via Zoom. They suggested that it could be better to do this exercise in smaller groups. In view of the feedback, the following year, I redesigned the activity to engage with short stories by renowned English writers, keeping the whole activity (translating and dramatising) within the same semester.

This article will analyse the role of theatre as an effective pedagogical tool for language learning. Then it will examine how the translation process of these different texts were carried out by students. I will continue with a discussion on the dramatised readings and how through theatre students were able to embody the language.

Theatre as a pedagogical tool: Role-playing and language learning

Theatre applied in education is understood as the use of theatre in other disciplines and for other purposes, different from those of conventional theatre (Motos & Ferrandis, 2015), where the emphasis is placed on the participants and their process (Sedano Solís, 2021). Language learning through theatre is worked on as a whole because it encompasses a multiplicity of structures and vocabulary, substantially expanding the competence of students in the use of the language (Corral Fullà, 2014). In addition, theatrical activities may greatly impact the learning environment as they allow for the construction of a value system based on respect, cooperation, and tolerance (Danzi, 2019).

In England in the 1960s and 1970s the first Theatre in Education programs emerged. Here the precursors of a now international movement worked with the aim to improve teaching and learning processes (Sedano Solís, 2021). This encounter between education and theatre is framed within a constructivist model of learning that introduces a change in the perception of the role played by teachers and students. Within this model, students are conceived as protagonists of their learning and teachers as mediators of this process (Sedano Solís, 2021). Teachers of the English language and literature began a strong methodological and didactic renewal in education in which theatre played an important role in the inclusion of experimentation, creativity, interaction, and learning through experiences within the classroom. In addition, the importance of play in personal development was emphasised and included dramatic activities of verbal and non-verbal expression, as well as dramatisations, simulations and role playing (Pérez Gutiérrez, 2004). Boquete Martín (2011) defines play as an innate way of learning, where participants have the capacity to integrate and connect with the culture and reality in which they are immersed.

Of all forms of play that exist, theatre is the most complex (Huizinga, 1949). In the context of using theatre as a tool to learn a foreign language, I argue that the stress is

not on the acting skills or in the truthfulness of the emotions expressed in each scene. The stress is on the process, as a way of learning through experience (Sedano Solís, 2021). In this context, theatre stops being "a consumer product of bourgeois society" (Bartolucci, 1975, p. 9), and becomes an activity in which a group of students communicates their knowledge to another group of students, thus sharing an educational process (Torres Núñez, 2004). In this sense, theatre becomes a medium, an instrument and a strategy to promote the development of linguistic, sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and intercultural competences (Nicolás Román, 2011).

Theatre-based language teaching and learning proposes a strong connection between pragmatics and intercultural competence. In her book *Introducing Language and Intercultural Communication*, Jackson (2024) defines pragmatics as one of the core components of language that is "concerned with the rules or norms for the appropriate and effective communication, e.g., rules for turn-taking, expressions of politeness, switching of register depending on the communication partner" (p. 59). In short, pragmatics is the branch of linguistics dealing with language in use and the context in which it is used. In the publication *Intercultural Competences: Conceptual and Operational Framework* by UNESCO (2013), intercultural competence is defined as:

> having adequate knowledge about particular cultures, as well as general knowledge about … issues arising when members of different cultures interact, holding receptive attitudes that encourage establishing and maintaining contact with diverse others, as well as having the skills required (in) … interacting with others from different cultures. (p.16)

Pragmatics and intercultural competence are important concepts to this article on theatre as a tool for language teaching and learning. As an actress myself, when rehearsing a play, we are constantly dealing with pragmatics and intercultural competence (not all plays are from our cultural background) to effectively communicate what the character needs to say in a particular situation during the play. Ishihara and Cohen (2014) highlight how pragmatics interfaces with culture in human interaction and that it is important to underscore this link in language teaching. The authors understand pragmatics as a social phenomenon "constructed not by native speakers of the language, but by pragmatically competent expert speakers, native or non-native" (p. x) where language learners negotiate their identity and sense of belonging to a specific community. As with theatre practice, Ishihara and Cohen emphasise "the speaker's goals and intentions, the way that they are interpreted by the listener, and the likely consequences of the interaction, whoever the speaker and the listener may be" (p. x). Theatre applied to language learning does exactly that, it promotes an activity that not only highlights and values the social aspects of language learning, but also encourages students to interact and react according to what is being said. In addition, Ishihara and Cohen not only discuss the learning of pragmatics from

a cognitive point of view but also from "social, cultural, psychological, and emotional perspectives" (p. xii), which also affects and influences students' response to specific texts when dramatising a reading.

Following the work of Byram (2020), I argue that language teaching should be oriented towards personal development, fostering a sense of self in relationship to others. As foreign language teachers our interest should be in helping individual language learners not only to develop a set of abilities, but a complex competence to be able to communicate with people speaking other languages and/or from other cultural contexts (Byram, 2020). The use of theatre to teach and learn a foreign language gives the opportunity to students to be open to experiencing and analysing other ways of life and, therefore, their own. To achieve the necessary openness students need an attitude for learning. Byram explains that "There is a logical priority that appropriate attitudes are needed before other competences can be learned, but it is also possible that attitudes will develop as skills are taught" (p. 59). Developing this attitude is central to engaging in any learning process and I argue that theatre activities provide students with inspiration and the necessary engagement to develop an appropriate attitude towards language learning. In the first Interdisciplinary and Virtual Conference on Arts in Education, Danzi (2019) explained how in the last decade, new neuroscientific research has highlighted the predominant role that the synergies between body-mind-learning have played in the learning experience. The results of these investigations have challenged language teachers to reflect and seek new pedagogical and didactic methods for language teaching. In this sense, the contribution of theatre to glottodidactics, that is, the "scientific discipline concerned primarily with teaching and learning foreign languages, as well as language acquisition, foreign language teacher training, and the design of teaching materials" (Róg, 2014), is evident, since it favours the processes of linguistic acquisition (Danzi, 2019). Theatre promotes the development of the emotional aspects involved in learning a language. It helps students to overcome shyness and improve personal relations (Torres Núñez, 2004). Through theatre, it is possible to foster motivation in students, interaction within the classroom, confidence in oneself and others. It promotes a serene and collaborative work environment, where students exercise their ability to face problems within a common project and their will to solve them. Above all, theatre creates a playful and creative space to experience the foreign language with joy and without fear (Danzi, 2019).

Theatre offers the possibility of teaching a foreign language within a living context, which is close to the daily use of the language being taught (Nicolás Román, 2011). The use of theatrical resources allows students to clearly visualise and personalise the course content, in a way that is probably not comparable with any other activity that we may be able to design (Nicolás Román, 2011). The different sociolinguistic contexts that arise through theatre practice allow an almost natural assimilation of the

language structures and vocabulary in collaboration with their classmates. Robinson (1980) points out that the use of theatre "helps to take individual education out of its customary social vacuum and enables children to learn openly from each other in an atmosphere of social interaction" (p. 158). In addition, Wessels (1987) explains that theatre:

> helps the learner acquire new vocabulary and structures in a fully contextualized and integrated manner – so it fulfils the aims of the communicative approach. By making the language more accessible to the learner, it builds confidence in the learner's ability to learn the language. (p. 114)

Mehisto et al. (2008) ascertain that through theatre, language content is more likely to become embedded in long-term memory, fostering a sense of confidence, which is achieved "as the new vocabulary and discourse patterns are being used in a highly meaningful context" (p. 220). Another interesting aspect of using theatre to teach a foreign language is that it develops students' proficiency in the use of the language, because students acquire an active role in their own learning. This means that students are actively involved in several actions: reading the script, listening to what others are saying, and reacting by speaking/reading their lines appropriately to the context.

The textbook-based language teaching that we usually use in classes, with its language examples and grammatical exercises, although necessary, probably fails to create a contextual atmosphere that gives pragmatic meaning to the vocabulary and its syntax (Calderón de la Barca Fernández, 2015). This is a topic of considerable debate. In his article *Grammar Teaching – Practice or Consciousness-Raising?* Ellis (2002) starts by assuming that grammar has to be taught and sets to explore how it should be taught. Ellis argues that grammar exercises provide students with opportunities to practise these structures by isolating specific grammatical features to produce different sentences. Through this approach students absorb and only memorise these structures without fully understanding how they work and what their purpose may be. In contrast, Ellis proposes the term Consciousness-raising, that focuses on facilitating the student's understanding of a specific grammatical characteristic. Ellis states that "the aim is not to enable the learner to perform a structure correctly but simply to help students to 'know about it'" (p.3). Following the work of Ellis, I argue that this teaching style provides the student with agency to think and decide what they want to say and most importantly how they want to say it, depending on their purpose. This is precisely what these Theatre Labs encouraged students to do when translating and dramatising their chosen texts.

One of these grammar practice exercises performed "under controlled conditions" (Ellis, 2002, p.2) is role-playing, which represents one of the most exploited resources in the language teaching classroom. Role-playing exercises, including scenarios such

as ‘at the restaurant/hospital/airport’, only offer students a superficial situation from which they must improvise a dialogue (Corral Fullà, 2014). In my experience as a foreign language student and as a Spanish lecturer, most of the time these dialogues are very short and lack substance. It seems to me that these role-playing exercises are dead before they even begin. There is no real motivation to engage in them, most of the time dialogues are inert and dry, because the communication that occurs in these exercises is not even close to the communication that could occur within the real cultural context. These dialogues are created because students must learn the vocabulary or because it is an assignment, but not because they need to communicate something.

I argue that the key concept here is the need to express/say/do because the situation and the general context of the play is guiding the students to do so. By working on the voice and pronunciation through theatre, the student will be able to apply the appropriate speaking style according to the situation in the play (Hayes, 1984), without leaving aside articulation, stress, intonation, and volume. Santos Sánchez (2010) emphasises that the use of theatre to learn a language “re-presents communication in all its dimensions with subtexts, gestures, conversations, silences and looks” (p. 37), mostly because learning a language also involves “knowing how to make and interpret the facial expressions, gestures and postures with which native speakers sign or substitute their verbal messages” (Gelabert et al., 2004, p. 7).

Translation and transposition: A discussion about the correctness of grammar and lexicon

In 2020, when the Theatre Lab was included as one of the assessed activities for 300-level Spanish in my program, the first task the students had to work on was translating Lorca’s *Blood Wedding* into Spanish. From 2021 onwards, students had to find a short story in English of a prominent author, including Roald Dahl, Agatha Christie, Edgar Allan Poe, Ray Bradbury, and Jane Austen, and translate it into Spanish.

Reviewing the literature on Translation Studies to define if what we are doing is a translation, an adaptation, or a transposition, I think the most appropriate term is that of transposition. This term places the accent on the “creative process” (Cid, 2011, p. 24) that operates in the transition from one text to the other. The term transposition also “designates the idea of transfer, but also that of transplantation, of putting something in another place, of removing certain models, but thinking of another register or system” (Wolf, 2001, p. 16). This concept moves us away from the assumption inherent in the idea of translating a text from one language to another, that an accurate copy of an original work can be made across languages. Instead, I am

acknowledging that the process of transposition creates a new object, precisely drawing from other language and cultural contexts.

The concept of transposition is very useful for this language exercise, because as Calderón de la Barca Fernández (2015) explains "the text must be adapted to the real circumstances" (p. 44) within the classroom format, including the number of students and time available to complete the task. Sometimes it becomes necessary to delete sections of text. This happened with *Blood Wedding*, since the number of students was greater than the number of characters. In the case of the short stories, the students themselves adapted the text to theatre, deleting sections if necessary. The suppressed texts did not alter the meaning of the narratives, nor the order of the events and despite everything they retained the characteristic style of each author.

The main purpose was not to create a linguistically or stylistically accurate version of the original text. I encouraged students to use these stories, styles, and languages to express their version of these texts. In fact, the work consisted of paraphrasing and/or writing an approximation of the meaning not only because "there are words or expressions that are impossible to translate" (Calderón de la Barca Fernández, 2015, p. 44). I wanted students to look for "the most appropriate register to translate a text of a certain age into another language" (Calderón de la Barca Fernández, 2015, p. 44) without depending on Google translate, and collaborating with their group mates. One student commented "I was amazed at how much vocabulary I remembered and not being able to use an online translator made it much more rewarding when I remembered the correct word".

Regardless of whether students were translating a play or a short story, the translation was done in similar manner. The translation was thought of as a group exercise in which the students could discuss the text and ask each other how they would state this or that idea. Students reflected on grammar, vocabulary, and the wide variety of possibilities of saying the same idea using the Spanish they already knew. One student reflected on this exercise commenting that "I like to find different ways to say something with just the words and grammar I know".

Throughout this task my guidance consisted in asking students a variety of questions that helped them to read carefully and slowly developing pragmatic awareness in my students. Some of the questions I asked included:

- What is the story about?
- What genre is it? Historical? Comedy? Horror? Love? Adventure? Fantasy?
- Is there a narrator? What is his/her tone? Do they know everything? Is one of the characters narrating?
- Who are the characters? Do they know each other? Do they like each other?

These questions and many more encouraged students to analyse the intention of the characters and helped them to make decisions regarding what phrases to use and to justify their reasons for their linguistic choices. Students attempted to translate pragmatic language to the best of their abilities, not without challenges and resistance. McConachy (2023) discusses the notion of "pragmatic resistance" (p. 176) which refers to cases in which students seek to deviate from the pragmatic norms of the foreign language they are learning because they feel that these norms are incongruent with their own way of being. In addition, McConachy argues that it is the emotional side of pragmatic resistance that pushes students to make certain decisions regarding pragmatics. This emotional aspect is anchored in the understanding students have of what is correct or incorrect social behavior, and this is what would trigger "complex evaluative processes" (p. 176) that could lead to poor linguistic decisions being made in a specific context.

During the translation task one group was translating the short story *The Hichhiker* by Roald Dahl (1977) and they experienced a somewhat pragmatic resistance. The story is about a successful writer who picks up a man who is hitchhiking. The men decide to see how fast the driver's car will go, but they are pulled over by a police officer when they hit 120mph. The police officer gives the driver a ticket; however, the driver gets out of it because his passenger is a talented pickpocket who had stolen the police officer's notebook. The voice of the pickpocket character was that of an uneducated person. He spoke poorly, used slang, did not pronounce complete words and his grammar was off. This group was faced with the task of creating a poor translation, that is, writing a text with grammatical errors and incomplete words. They asked me many times if this would affect the final grade of their text, because it seemed terrible to them to submit work with errors. It struck me that this group resisted the pragmatics of the character and the exercise itself. They had to understand that the character spoke like this, with errors, and that their mission as translators was to translate those same errors into Spanish. If they corrected the character's speech, then this translation would be poorly evaluated, because that was not the character that Roald Dahl had created.

The biggest challenge for the students was recreating those errors. Foreign language students make errors without knowing that they are made, and as students they strive to do the best work possible when being assessed. In this case the errors had to be conscious. To solve this puzzle, students translated the text into Spanish in a way that they could handle and then worked on the errors. They watched some YouTube videos to listen to different accents and ways of speaking that would help them recreate the errors. For example, in Chile the ending with "I" is used when speaking informally; instead of saying "cómo estás?" (how are you), people say "kmostai" (one word); the sound of the Spanish "Z" was also used to write words with "S" and they replaced the final "S" in some words with an "H" to make the words sound weaker when read.

Through the translation process, students learnt that the correctness of grammar depends on contexts, because "the information in the text is conditioned by the situation" (López-Abadía Arroita, 1992, p. 81). There are many examples in popular culture, where characters speak with a syntax or grammar that is perceived as wrong or bad. Hansen talks about "bad English… a mix of grammatical errors, random pronunciation and made-up words" (TED, 2018, 0:42). However, when Master Yoda in *Star Wars* says, "Patience you must have, my young Padawan", or Gollum in *The Lord of the Rings* happily states "We likes it!", or Dory in *Finding Nemo* speaks Whale, which is not even a human language, their bad English is actually correct.

Depending on the plot and on who the character is, students had to translate appropriately. According to Hansen, the way people speak reflects who they are, their background, identities, and culture (TED, 2018). Hansen encourages language learners to focus on their ability to adapt and to recognise a variety of voices which will open the door to cultural understanding through the appropriate use of bad English (TED, 2018). In this sense, the translation did not only entail the transposition of words from English to Spanish but also to creatively imagining and constructing the context of the story understanding who each character was, what they wanted and needed, the situation they were facing and what was happening throughout the play. According to these understandings, students would choose the most appropriate vocabulary and syntax to that context. In the case of the translation of stories, a group decided to translate a chapter of *Harry Potter* by J.K. Rowling. When they translated the character of Professor McGonagall, they decided to use Spanish from Spain for this character in contrast to the Latin American Spanish used by the other characters. This decision was based on their desire to experiment with the *vosotros* voice unique to the European Spanish. Another example includes a group translating a story which had a cat as one of the main characters changing the English *meow* to the Spanish *miau.* In the case of *Blood Wedding*, the same principle applied. *Blood Wedding* is a poetic and theatrical production framed in an Andalusian landscape becoming a very useful tool for making students aware of the past and present cultural and historical background of Spain. In addition, the work collects Andalusian customs, which are still present in contemporary Spanish society. Furthermore, the play also includes symbolisms announcing tragedy, in addition to the natural elements that are represented by allegorical characters such as the moon and death dressed as a beggar. Students were challenged to translate symbols, myths, poetry, and allegory in a way that they would be understood as such in Spanish. By no means was this an easy task. One student commented on this process stating:

> This exercise was very different, and I really liked it. In general, I think it was a very important activity to show the importance of choosing the words we use, because the meaning of the phrase can change a lot if you use a different word.

As part of this first stage of the project, students wrote a report reflecting on the translation/transposition processes of these stories. The assessment evaluated how the different voices of characters were expressed in Spanish. This included the correct use of vocabulary and grammar within each specific context.

Embodying the language through dramatised readings

The second part of these projects involved the dramatised readings of the previously translated texts. A dramatisation is understood as a form of learning through experience (Sedano Solís, 2021), focusing on the process, rather than the final product. The result showed that students improved communication, enhanced creativity, and developed their perceptive and expressive abilities through the exploration of their own vocal instrument in collaboration with other classmates within their groups (Núñez Cubero & Navarro Solano, 2007).

The process of a dramatised reading involves a whole set of activities organised around one or more objectives. It encompasses the students' ability to embody a text. Following Bruner's (1998), I argue that language, thought, and action are interconnected. This means that when dramatising each idea becomes action. We must consider the main purpose of this text, what the character wants to achieve with what is being said, and how these ideas should be expressed to fulfil the character's goal. Reflecting on these objectives, López-Abadía Arroita (1992) states that "[w]hat you say, and how you say it, have to be understandable and, if possible, convincing" (p. 80), mirroring the way in which we speak in real life.

In a dramatised reading, students are required to vocally perform another individual. To fully understand their purpose, each group read their text repeatedly, numerous times, slowly discovering their different main goals. Following my approach for the translation, my guidance in this case also consisted in asking students to consider the following pragmatic aspects:

- What does my character want?
- Why do they talk like this?
- Why do they react like that?
- Who are they talking to or are they talking to themselves? Why?

After considering these main points I asked them to reflect on the quality of the sound they thought was the most appropriate to produce, including volume and tone, specifically being aware of their emotional undertone: sarcasm, kindness, fury, hurt, being in love.

Amenábar Folch (2021) argues that "[t]he voice is the communication vehicle par excellence and imprints in itself, inexorably, life" (p. 242). As prominent theatre director, Grotowski points out "the voice cannot be separated from the body, the body cannot be separated from the drives and actions, the drives and actions cannot be separated from meaning" (Brook & Banu, 2009, p. 115). Indeed, expression and communication are linked to each other (Amenábar Folch, 2021) because the context of the word is the entire body, so the speaker cannot separate intonation from gesture or attitude. Language is embodied, it is inscribed in the voice, the face and the space shared by the speaker (Calderón de la Barca Fernández, 2015). Through a dramatised reading students must create the reactions of another being, engaging in inner work that focuses on what drives the character's actions and how these are reflected externally through the voice (Corral Fullà, 2014). In addition, I argue that teaching and learning and foreign language must include the repertoire of highly codified gestures and interjections that accompany the message and complete the meaning to fit into a situation (Calderón de la Barca Fernández, 2015). Most of our conversations in daily life are filled by gestures and sounds that have no precise meaning, "mh", "ah", "urg", which provide significant information about the situation we may be facing. These interjections add to the non-verbal layer of communication. The same happens when creating a character for a dramatised reading: participants will come up with sounds and gestures that add to the physical existence, however brief, of their characters.

For many students one of the biggest barriers was not language, vocabulary, or grammar, but reading out loud. When learning a language, the emphasis is, most of the time, on correct pronunciation, not on effectively communicating what is being read. For example, one of the groups had a text stating, "shush you are going to wake up the baby!". In this case I pointed out that when you have such a text it is because other characters are either making a lot of noise or talking very loudly. This is when students realised that this scene was a fight between lovers, and therefore they had to adjust their volume and emphasis accordingly to be able to continue the fight without waking the baby up.

Reading out loud in class usually turns out to be robotic, with students rushing or stumbling over words, fearing making mistakes, producing a feeling of strangeness since students sometimes do not recognise their own voices in the other language. Following the work of Goitia Pastor (2012), I argue that dramatised reading enhances the involvement of students not only on an intellectual level, but also on "an emotional, imaginative or creative level, in addition to helping to combat inhibitions" (p.103). Dramatised readings allow student to "pretend to be someone else, freeing themselves from learned roles" (Martínez Cobo, 2007, p. 147), slowly rediscovering their own sound in another language, promoting their self-esteem and confidence in their ability to produce language-specific sounds.

In my classes, the process of rediscovering one's own vocal identity was carried out through a series of activities that included tongue twisters and pronunciation exercises. The main purpose of these exercises was to learn how and where inside the mouth certain sounds, words and sounds are formed in Spanish. These vocalisation exercises involved fostering an awareness of the "anatomical dimension of the four mechanisms that intervene in the sound process" (Amenábar Folch, 2021, p. 243):

1. The Respiratory System: the engine of the voice. Students learnt to control how much air to inhale and exhale to be able to say one idea in one breath, as we normally do, but when we are learning the language, we tend to speak - each - word – separate - ly.
2. Phonation: throat and mouth. This is the organ where air vibrates and becomes sound. The students practiced producing sounds such as M, N, Ñ a nasal sound unique to the Spanish alphabet, S, Spanish double R (rr), and double L (ll).
3. The articulatory mechanism: the function of tongue and teeth to create different sounds and words. Students practiced producing sounds such as T-D, P-B, F-V, K-G, B-V, P-M, among others. The combination of phonemes relates to the place where these sounds are produced in the mouth differentiating them by how strong/soft they are from each other. A prominent example is the case of one student who struggled pronouncing the Spanish double R (rr). I noticed that she had no problems pronouncing the word "madre" (mother) because she could push her tongue against the back of her upper front teeth to produce the soft "DR" sound. When it came to the double R sound, like the word "ratón" (mouse), she turned the R into an L changing the meaning from "ratón" to "latón" (brass). The struggle happens because the double R sound is produced by blowing air to the tip of the tongue rapidly fluttering behind the upper front teeth. I asked her to place a D in front of any word starting with R. She started saying "dratón", slowly moving towards 'dRatón', until she finally said 'dRatón'.
4. Resonance spaces: located in the face and amplify the sound for students to project their voices across the room or to be heard even when whispering.

The summative assessment of learning and achievement of the dramatisation evaluated pronunciation, inflection, volume, and energy in alignment with the character who spoke within the context of the work. A notable example is the work of one student during the dramatised reading of *Niño Terremoto*. She had three different characters, which encouraged her speak differently, however relaxed they all seemed to her on paper. Once she started reading her texts out loud, the text took on new life and perspective through her body and mind, encompassing new layers of meaning, context, tone, gesture, and a multiplicity of new truths were generated. She realised that one

character who initially she understood as relaxed was quite stressed. This character had fainted, which explained why she was speaking slowly initially until the character remembered the earthquake and started shaking, changing the quality of her voice completely. The other characters were two animals, a manatee and a sloth. She decided to imagine the manatee with dreadlocks, which immediately gave her a relaxed stance with bended knees and swaying as she was constantly listening to reggae, allowing her voice to come out of her body with longer vowels and a deeper tone. In contrast, the sloth was just slow. For this character she used her own voice at a slower pace by breathing in before saying each word.

At the end of each process, we invited teachers, alumni, and friends to come and listen to the version students created of these translated texts. The feedback from audiences was an overall amazement at how much vocabulary they learnt, how fluent they sounded, and how the use of different inflection and volume could change the voice of one person.

Conclusion

The use of theatre as a tool for language learning has enormous possibilities for developing different skills (linguistic, sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and intercultural communication) in a single integrative activity. The use of theatre presents the student with a complete experience that integrates cognitive, physical, and emotional aspects involved in language learning. The use of theatre for teaching a foreign language facilitates language practice (Smith, 1984) and encourages students to "listen to themselves as well as to their surroundings" (González Díaz, 1987, p. 50).

By using theatre to teach Spanish I could demonstrate to students their ability to use this foreign language in different activities including comprehension, expression, and oral and written interactions. They also realised their ability to engage in a situation of intercultural communication, by developing through theatre sensitivity or empathy towards other cultures (Nicolás Román, 2011). I argue that performing a dramatised reading in Spanish is a success, and that, "[w]e all need successes, as they encourage us to work towards other successes" (Richard Via, in Holden, 1981, p. 10). Indeed, the sense of accomplishment filled students with pride because the work was done entirely by them, from selecting the text, to the translation and finishing with its dramatisation in front of an audience. The feeling of success was not dependent on the final product, because the emphasis was placed on the process, prioritising freedom of expression, and promoting autonomy in the students to integrate and apply the learnt content within a specific context in another language.

According to Goitia Pastor (2012), this is the type of learning project that motivates students the most, that is, engaging in activities that involve expressive and linguistic

challenges related to the practice of "specific grammatical structures, new vocabulary, set phrases, and significant intonation patterns" (p. 106). The main problem that Santos Sánchez (2010) identified in acquisition of a foreign language is that:

> The classroom is the only space in which the student is exposed to the language. What happens in class is disconnected from the reality of Spanish as a language and its speakers, leaving aside a series of aspects that theatre can cover and contribute decisively to the student's motivation: the lively use of the language, the most purely communicative and discursive aspects, speech actions in real contexts. (p. 13)

As the facilitator of these experiential and collaborative learning experiences, my main purpose was to prove to students that with the language they had acquired so far, they could translate, read, and most importantly enjoy and engage with any text, using a language that was affectively close to them, including colloquial vocabulary appropriate to their level of proficiency. On that note and following the work of Byram (2020), I argue that foreign language objectives should be qualitative, that is as educational objectives, where the process and the experience of learning are centre and front of the curriculum, not proficiency objectives. Byram states: "I propose … to ignore the constraints of defining objectives always in behavioural terms externally observable and always measurable" (p. 84). Byram notes that assessment should be useful for tracing learners' progress, and he emphasises that assessment is not limited to testing. I argue that the activities and processes described in this article offer different ways of assessing the objectives of intercultural competence and pragmatics, so that language learners have the opportunity to develop as independent and critical citizens in a culturally and linguistically diverse world. Through theatre, the integration of language and character, with all their particular, cultural and linguistic characteristics, is strengthened thanks to the repetition inherent in theatrical practice. It helped students "to learn new vocabulary and structures in an integrated and completely contextualized manner" (Wessels 1987, in Torres Núñez, 1995, p. 567), in addition to offering better results in pronunciation, intonation and integrating a variety of sociocultural gestures (Corral Fullà, 2014). Finally, and following the work of Sedano Solís (2021), I argue that the use of theatre as a tool to learn a language constitutes a valid alternative to deal with challenges imposed by modern life, offering a range of possible horizons and contributing significantly to the development of the socio-emotional competencies that individuals and communities require in a complex, dynamic and constantly evolving environment.

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