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Translaboration in the Rehearsal Room: Translanguaging as Collaborative Responsibility in Bilingual Devised Theatre

Abstract

This article explores the role of translaboration in an area where collaborative translation and co-creative processes intertwine: a bilingual devised theatre rehearsal room. Scholarship has tended to focus on translated plays as cultural products, and on the difficulty associated with making bilingual theatrical products accessible to unilingual audiences. Here however, our focus is translation within the creative process. We use two bilingual projects as examples. Each project brought together participants from two cultural backgrounds: in one case German and Czech young people; in the other, deaf and hearing people from the UK. Possessing varying bilingual competencies, these participants employed their shared communicative repertoire to ensure the collaborative creation of new, bilingual theatrical material. Their diverse communication strategies can be regarded as translanguaging, a fluid, non-hierarchical practice that challenges the notion of uni-directional translation from a source text. We argue that in this setting, translanguaging is the practice that enables translaboration. This practice is compromised by the imposition of top-down structures that inhibit the organic development of democratic and potentially transformative environments in which problematic power relationships can be reworked. Such transformativity relies on collaboration

in both devising and translation, co-creation and translaboration, and the two are mutually interdependent.

Keywords: translaboration, collaboration, devised theatre, co-creative theatre, bilingual theatre, translanguaging, transformativity, translation, interpreting

1. Introduction

This article explores the role of translaboration and its potential for transformativity to rework problematic power relationships in an area where collaborative translation and co-creative processes intertwine: the rehearsal room of collaboratively created bilingual theatre.¹ Drawing on Theatre and Translation Studies as well as case studies of two separate devised theatre projects, we aim to explore how we can conceive of translaboration in the rehearsal room, and how, conversely, the notion of translaboration can help us to understand the collaborative – co-creative, co-communicative – processes of multilingual devised theatre and its assumed potential for transformativity. We thereby hope to contribute to filling a gap in Translation Studies by focusing on the *process* of creating bilingual theatre

¹ ‘Creative collaboration’ or, in the UK, ‘devising’, are the terms used for creating theatre without pre-existing scripts (see section 2 for further discussion).

rather than on the *product*. We further aim to contribute to ongoing discussions in Translation Studies that explore alternatives to envisaging translation solely as interlinguistic transfer (e.g. Kershaw and Saldanha 2013; Tymoczko 2010), by proposing that in specific contexts interlinguistic collaboration through translanguaging may provide a desirable alternative to more prototypical forms of translation.

2. Two Cases of Collaborative Creativity in a Bilingual Rehearsal Room

In 2017, two separate bilingual theatre workshops brought together young people from two different linguistic backgrounds respectively. In June, Michael Richardson initiated a five-day British Sign Language (BSL)/English workshop in Glasgow, Scotland, to explore how different methods of theatre making might encourage equal participation in performance processes by deaf and hearing people. Five self-identifying hearing and five self-identifying deaf people from Scotland and Northern England worked together to create nine sketches using different techniques of bilingual theatre that would be accessible to signing and English-speaking audiences alike. There was no restriction in terms of topic; participants' own ideas informed the creative process.

All participants had an interest yet varying experience in theatre. All deaf actors identified as BSL users with additional varying competence in written English. Three can also use spoken English. All hearing participants were first language users of English. One was also proficient in BSL and

another had recently started a beginners' BSL course online. The leader of the workshop and research project was a hearing first language English user with sufficient fluency to communicate with deaf participants in BSL. Additionally, two professional, paid BSL/English interpreters were available, interpreting the introductory sessions on day one and then remaining on stand-by for when participants felt they needed communication support.

The second project took place in August 2017, when the *čojč* Theaternetzwerk Böhmen-Bayern brought together ten Czech and ten German speakers aged 14 to 26 in the Czech city of Plzeň (Pilsen) for *Like/Hate*, a weeklong residential theatre workshop focusing on social media usage and its influence on young people. During the first of two project weeks, the participants collaboratively created a variety of scenes based on stimuli such as photos, texts, interviews or concepts in small, linguistically mixed groups of two to six. During the second project week in September 2017, twelve sketches were selected and rehearsed for performances in Plzeň and Passau.

The *čojč* rehearsal room was a bilingual, Czech-German, if not multilingual space; the two applied theatre specialists (one German, one Czech) who led the workshop consciously gave instructions in both languages or in *čojč*, a hybrid language created by the network, which mixes

both languages at word, phrase or sentence level.² The linguistic profiles of the participants were diverse, ranging from no or basic knowledge of the other language to functional bilingual fluency in the case of a handful of Czech participants. By contrast, only very few German participants had any knowledge of Czech, acquired mostly through extra-curricular activities rather than as part of formal education. To complicate matters, the group included three non-native speakers of German with approximately B1/B2 level competency and no knowledge of Czech. Rather than using a *lingua franca*, such as English, participants drew on their shared semiotic repertoire to communicate and create theatrical material.

The participants' diverse language profiles reflect the particular linguistic backgrounds against which both projects were undertaken. German was, until 1945, the first language of a significant number of people in Bohemia and retains a certain linguistic foothold in the Czech Republic. Similarly, English has dominance over BSL. Indeed societal attempts to eradicate the use of signed languages are one element of socially accepted, often unquestioned, practices that discriminate against deaf people, described by Humphries (1975, quoted in Bauman 2004, 240) as 'audism', i.e. "the

² The word *čojč* illustrates how this made-up language can work. It is a blend of the Czech word for the Czech language, *česky*, and the Czech spelling for *Deutsch* (German): *dojč*.

notion that one is superior based on one's ability to hear or behave in the manner of one who hears.”

These two examples of bilingual theatre are particularly suited to exploring ideas of translaboration because they rely on ‘devising’, a method of theatre practice often used in Applied Theatre (AT) (Ackroyd 2000; Nicholson 2014) that requires a high degree of collaboration among the participants.

The starting point is the absence of a script; theatrical material is developed by members of the ensemble themselves, using their own innate creativity (Richardson 2015). There is an expectation of “members of the group contributing equally” within “a model of cooperative and non-hierarchical collaboration” (Heddon and Milling 2016, 4), a process that is often dependent on the absence of a defined leader or director (Richardson 2015).

According to Heddon and Milling (2016), devising has the ability to foster a theatrical participatory democracy that can undermine dominant institutions, provide a vehicle for self-representation and make visible the previously suppressed. Participants are encouraged actively to disempower themselves in the pursuit of democratic collaboration which recognises differences

instead of promoting homogeneity (Nicholson 2016; Pfeiffer and Weiglhofer 2019). The ensemble becomes a model for social interaction and democratic engagement in its own public sphere, in which social and political issues can be freely discussed with a view to influencing or challenging existing societal hierarchies (Neelands 2007). AT thus aims at the personal, educational, social and/or political transformation of

participants through a redistribution of power between facilitators and participants (Jeffers 2017; Neelands 2007; Nicholson 2014).

It is the potential for the čojč and BSL/English project participants to transform into a democratic community of effective translaboration that we aim to explore in this article. How do participants use communication in their collaborative efforts of creating theatre? Conversely, how and to what extent do participants collaborate to ensure effective communication? And finally, what are the factors that stimulate and/or impede the transformative potential in these processes? Before analysing one selected episode from each project to suggest answers to these questions, we will outline our theoretical foundation.

3. Translaboration in Bilingual Devised Theatre

Translation for and on the stage has been an expanding research area in the past two decades but the bulk of scholarly attention has been on translated plays as cultural products (Aaltonen 2000; Anderman 2005), transferred from one linguistic, cultural context to another. Here, multilingual performance, or theatrical heteroglossia, described by Carlson (2009) as the use of more than one language (or dialect), tends to remain peripheral to the monolingual mainstream. In the context of performance, multilingualism can however serve as a powerful discursive strategy to foreground questions of identity and culture (Ladouceur 2013; Lehmann 2006).

Cross-linguistic interaction amongst ensembles in the *process* of creating bilingual or multilingual theatre has so far been largely ignored. This is all the more interesting given the recent shift in Theatre Translation Studies from the theatrical product to the complex web of creative and collaborative processes involved in creating, producing and staging translated plays (Baines et al. 2011; Bigliuzzi et al. 2013; Marinetti and Rose 2013; Brodie 2015; Görtschacher 2013). This echoes recent developments in the wider field of Translation Studies, where the centrality of collaboration in translation, sparked by the broader endeavour to concentrate on social aspects and the significance of agency in the translation process, is finding increasing recognition (see, for example, the contributions in Jansen and Wegener 2013; Cordingley and Frigau Manning 2017; Alfer 2017). Notably, the majority of studies that interrogate the theatrical creative process concentrate on the collaboration of theatre and translation professionals, including sourcers (such as authors or choreographers), producers, performers, and audiences (Aaltonen 2013; Baines et al. 2011), each representing different, assigned roles. Even if roles are fluid and overlap (Aaltonen 2013), agents are generally chosen on the basis of their specific backgrounds and professional expertise.

The situation is very different in our contexts. While participants come with an interest in and often some experience of theatre, they predominantly do not have a professional background in translation. Only one participant in

the deaf-hearing ensemble and one in *Like/Hate* have experience in translation and interpreting, studying towards degrees in BSL/English Interpreting and German Studies respectively. Moreover, both ensembles develop the theatrical product from scratch without a pre-existing source text that is subsequently translated. In other words: in both projects, there is no underlying source text, little uni-directional linguistic transfer, no clear separation of languages, and normally no exclusively assigned role of a translator. Instead, cross-lingual communication is integrated into the devising process, drawing on the ensembles' collective communicative repertoire; collaboration is key to both creation and communication.

3.1 The Notion of Translaboration

In an attempt to tackle the recent flood of explorations of collaboration in translation and their conceptual underpinnings, Alfer and her colleagues introduced the “‘blended’ concept” of ‘translaboration’ “to bring translation and collaboration into open conceptual play with one another” (Alfer 2017, 286). Defining collaboration as “a process of joint decision making” that “cut[s] across autonomous and independent groups”, Zwischenberger (quoted in Alfer 2017, 283) highlights the potential inherent in collaboration: it “offers a new vision of reality” (ibid.), in other words, fostering the creation of something different, something new, something that would otherwise not be created. Zwischenberger’s (2017) understanding of collaboration builds on Gray’s (1985, 5) assumption (again highlighted by

Alfer 2017, 283) that collaboration is “a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible.” Both aspects – the idea that collaboration enables innovative creation and that individual actors stretch their own limits in the process – are particularly applicable to our contexts and underlie not only collaborative translation, but also the central ideas of devised theatre practice: the outcome achieved by the amalgamation of different actors’ input is not just additive, but transformative.

3.2 Devised Bilingual Theatre as Translanguaging

While existing studies on bilingual theatre tend to focus on describing multilingual strategies inscribed in the theatrical *product*, our studies reveal how participants communicate across languages and semiotic modes during the devising *process*. In group work and without top-down direction, participants make contributions using both languages, sometimes swapping languages mid-sentence; participants repeat their own utterances in different languages and collaborate with each other or ask for help from others if they lack the necessary linguistic resources; they use movement and gesture to direct or act out scenes; paper and pen may be used to storyboard scenes and to capture outlines of dialogue.

These strategies all fall within the notion of ‘translanguaging’. The concept, translanguaging, was developed to challenge traditional views of

bilingual behaviour that emphasise socio-cultural boundaries of named languages (see Otheguy et al. 2015 for discussion). Instead it emphasises the dynamic fluidity of communicative practices employed by individuals in multilingual spaces. Notions such as code-switching or code-blending are regarded as too limiting to describe the creative flexibility noticeable in an individual's use of communication. Translanguaging also allows us to acknowledge that an individual's communicative repertoire includes linguistic as well as other semiotic modes such as gesturing, pointing, use of objects etc. (Kusters et al. 2017). Descriptions such as Kusters' (2017) of translanguaging practices employed by people in multilingual contexts (here between deaf and hearing people in urban spaces) highlight the situatedness of translanguaging practices, where interlocutors adapt to specific situations and the reactions of their interlocutors, using forms of trial and error to accomplish their communicative goals: "Translanguaging thus transforms repertoires as resources are added, expanded, revised and sometimes sedimented onto particular functions and within particular contexts" (Kusters et al. 2017, 220).

A focus on translanguaging emphasises fluidity not only in terms of an individual's communicative repertoire but also in terms of their identity: "People cannot be straightforwardly associated with particular (national, ethnic and socio-cultural) groups and identities; their meaning-making practices cannot be assumed to 'belong' to particular (sub)cultures through specific languages" (Kusters et al 2017, 221). By "attempting to wipe out

the hierarchy of languaging practices that deem some more valuable than others” (García and Leiva 2014, 200), translanguaging has the potential to become transformative. In other words, it may contribute to the creation of what Bhaba (1990) would call a “third space,” “displac[ing] the histories that constitute it, and set[ting] up new structures of authority, new political initiatives,” “giv[ing] rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation” (1990, 211; see also discussion in Jonsson 2017). Our case studies will provide examples where a move towards prioritising translanguaging over more conventional translation practices based on uni-directional transfer does indeed increase the potential for creating what Alfer (2017) refers to as a third space of translaboration.

3.3 Translaboration in the Rehearsal Room: The Intrinsic Integration of Collaborative Translation and Collaborative Creativity

The two projects on which we focus here are built on the idea of the transformative potential of collaboration, consciously recognising the benefits of collaborative creativity, and perhaps less consciously exploiting the benefits of collaborative translation embedded within those bilingual creative processes. It is this notion of transformative collaboration that we regard to be at the forefront of translaboration in the rehearsal room. Indeed, the transformative potential of collaborative translation and translaboration in particular has been highlighted in the literature. As Saadat (2017, 351-

352) suggests, “[t]ranslaboration not only posits that translation can be collaborative and collaboration can be translational, but also brings to the fore questions of power, participation and affect as intrinsic values of translational action” (see also discussions by Schwimmer 2017 and Alfer 2017).

What is particularly noteworthy in our cases, however, is the integral interweaving of two types of collaboration, translational and theatrical; both are intrinsically integrated into the devising process, inherently interlinked and overlapping. Furthermore, in the absence of source texts for the translaboration, ensembles are invited to explore different ways to combine, merge and blur languages in the process of creating theatrical material as well as to transcend linguistic modes of communication by drawing on their full and shared semiotic, communicative repertoires, in other words to develop translanguaging practices that result in effective translaboration.

Challenging translation as transfer, this process deviates from dominant translation practices that treat translation as an “add on”, or as an afterthought that makes monolingual communication accessible to other linguistic communities in a secondary process, usually with relatively few resources.³ Instead, cross-lingual communication is prioritised and regarded

³ Consider, for example, Romero-Fresco’s (2013) observation that only 0.1%-1% of a film budget is allocated to translation.

as an intrinsic and necessary component of both projects. In fact, the deaf-hearing workshop was explicitly born out of the desire to move away from providing uni-directional transfer as an add-on as is the case in the unsatisfactory default practice of scheduling sign language interpreted performances (Richardson 2018).

In the theatre project studied here, collaborative translation processes become the shared responsibility of each ensemble. Unlike commonly described collaborative translation practices, roles are, at least in principle, neither assigned top-down nor separated into the different functions of sourcers, producers, performers or translators; rather, participants share responsibility for each of these aspects, while roles may crystallise intuitively and fluidly at different points in time. In other words, it is through the absence of regulated, prototypical translation, and through the development of collaborative translanguaging practice, that an effective space for translaboration is – at least in theory – created.

4. Methods

Our case studies are both part of larger research projects. The BSL/English workshop was initiated by Michael Richardson as part of his doctoral project. Michael designed the workshop structure and facilitated group activities (for further discussion see Richardson 2019). His field notes are supplemented by (a) the reflective diaries of participants, written in English and/or video-recorded in BSL, and produced for research purposes during

the course of the theatre workshop; and (b) by video-recorded reflexive group interviews in which participants interviewed each other on the final day of the project. This project draws on action research and participatory methodologies (e.g. Chambers 1994; Wurm and Napier 2017), which regard participants as co-researchers who actively and collectively contribute to the exploration of the research questions. In light of this, participants were given the option to be named in this research, something to which all agreed.

The čojč workshop *Like/Hate* formed part of a case study for the CoHERE Critical Heritages: Performing and Representing Identities in Europe project.⁴ Ethnographic principles were employed for data generation. Kerstin Pfeiffer spent the first workshop week as a participant observer with the ensemble in Plzeň. Her field notes, visual materials (drawings, photos) and a series of semi-structured interviews with six project participants about their experience of the workshop and facilitators form the basis of the second of the two case studies we will discuss. As some prefer not to be named, we will refer to participants as follows: their function within the workshop (P= participants, PL= Project leaders), their main language (C= Czech, G= German), and a number where appropriate, for example P-C-2.

⁴ CoHERE has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme, grant agreement No 693289.

We will now take a closer look at two specific episodes, one taken from each case study, illustrating the interdependence of translaboration and creative collaboration in bilingual devised theatre. The first episode, taken from the BSL/ English workshop, presents an effective example of translaboration. The second episode provides a snapshot of an afternoon in *Like/Hate* when translaboration in the rehearsal room is temporarily suspended and replaced by the top-down allocation of roles in the language transfer process.

4.1. BSL/English Workshop

Participants in the BSL/English workshop worked in small groups to devise new theatrical material, and over the course of the five days, nine sketches in total were created. Progress was slow at times as participants were required to work collaboratively between BSL and English within the creative process, and most had little experience in translanguaging or working with interpreters. Furthermore, the internalisation of audism by both hearing and deaf participants was felt throughout the project, most acutely when mixed groups of deaf and hearing actors chose to work using only spoken English. Dan, one of the actors, points out in his reflective diary that in one of his groups “there was a power imbalance though, and the deaf actor was largely left out of the writing process.” Improvements did occur during the week, however, and this section presents an example of

participants successfully transforming into a community of effective translaboration.

The group in question worked on the afternoon of day three and throughout day four of the project. It had four participants. Of these, two are deaf. Moira uses only BSL, but Sean uses hearing aids and is accustomed to communicating in either spoken English (for example with his hearing parents) or BSL (with his deaf friends). Of the two hearing actors, Michaela has minimal BSL, Jasmine has none, but both are highly physical performers, adept at gestural communication and mime. All four have at least some access to written English. The group also had the option of using a BSL/English interpreter if they found themselves unable to communicate.

The reason for focusing on this group is their willingness and effort not to prioritise one language over another in the creative process. Rather, each participant made it their personal responsibility to enable intra-group communication using all the communicative resources at their disposal. All participants gestured and wrote notes; deaf participants used lip-reading; hearing participants used simple BSL signs; and occasionally we witness intra-group interpreting, particularly by Sean. Each recognised the necessity for their own active contribution to the collaborative process, and in putting aside language ideologies they created a translanguaging working environment in which communicative collaboration was the norm.

Importantly, mime and gesture became a *lingua franca*. In her reflective video diary, Moira notes that “[w]e started with movement; we held back on dialogue and just did actions to help the improvising. It helped us think of the words that we would put into a script but for now, we kept that to one side and just focussed on the actions.”

At the same time, each actor made the effort to build their bilingual competence to aid intra-group communication. Michaela and Jasmine, the hearing actors, started to use signs that they had learnt during the week: “Learning more BSL words/phrases every day has helped me understand and communicate – and it was very easy to pick it up” (Michaela, written diary). At the other end of the language continuum, Moira, a deaf actor who, in the outside world, does not use her voice to aid communication, attempted to develop her lip-reading skills, working separately with Michaela: “When we were ready, we sat with each other like in a mirror and I was watching her lip pattern, so we could practice picking up our cues from that” (Moira, video diary). Indeed, by the afternoon of Day 4, Moira reports that “it all comes from practice. Compared with the first or second day when it was really confusing, now I feel much more confident to discuss things with hearing people and to try to lip read.” Additionally, the group created a simple cue-sheet that summarised the action of the sketch in simple English, accessible to all the actors.

Despite these efforts by the actors, communication could still be difficult, but when translation was required, little use was made of the professional interpreters. Instead, Sean (who is deaf but can access spoken language through his use of hearing aids) took responsibility for intra-group interpreting, which Jasmine notes in her reflective diary as being particularly useful: “Having a BSL to English speaker in the group made it easier to negotiate dialogue and what was going to be said.”

The group only asked for support from a professional interpreter twice during a whole day working together, on occasions when they found that they were unable to broker communication using only their own resources. This was a break with the practice that had developed during the project (mirroring practice in the outside world), in which professional interpreters were considered by the participants to be a pre-requisite for effective communication. The responsibility for translation then fell entirely to the interpreter, translation sat outside of the creative process, and the potential for truly collaborative working was compromised. The group under consideration here, however, rejected that proposition trying to be as self-sufficient as possible. Collaborative translanguaging practices enabled group members to build rapport and direct relationships with each other that supported translaboration.

Furthermore, no observable hierarchy was created within the group, and this enhanced the collaborative process. Throughout the week, both Moira and Jasmine demonstrated clear leadership skills in different groups,

and Sean adopted a position of power when he acted as the group's interpreter. In other words, the group appeared to create the theatrical participatory democracy described by Heddon and Milling (2016). Moira notes that everybody "is throwing in ideas." From outside the group, the project leader observed that the hearing actors did not assert audist language practices by dominating conversations in English, and neither did the deaf actors create boundaries between themselves and others by using BSL. Instead, they brought to bear a range of communicative competences to ensure equal participation. Translanguaging was the practical mechanism that supported translaboration, which in turn provided the route to collaborative creativity by allowing the actors to interact directly in a non-hierarchical environment where both languages were treated equally, rather than being dependent on professional interpreters and their emphasis on directional translation practices. The opposite was the case in the episode we analyse here in relation to the *Like/Hate* workshop, where hierarchies and fixed roles in the language transfer process were temporarily reinstated for one afternoon. The effects on the participants' ability to use material from this afternoon in their creative work is remarkable.

4.2. Communication Breakdown: The Čojč Workshop *Like/Hate*

On the afternoon of day two of the *Like/Hate* theatre workshop in Plzeň, a Czech digital media expert was invited to share expert information in an interview that was supposed to act as a trigger within the devising process.

However, the only element from this afternoon that found its way into a collaboratively created scene is visual: the image of a funnel, drawn onto the blackboard by the expert in order to illustrate a marketing strategy. The verbal information he provided failed to provide a stimulus for creative work.

Four of the Czech participants, chosen because of their German language skills, were assigned different roles by the project leaders during the process: P-C-3 was to act as the interview moderator and to ask pre-prepared questions in both languages; three others, P-C-2, P-C-6 and P-C-7 were responsible for interpreting the expert's answers into German. None of them were trained professionals. Like all other participants, throughout the week they drew on translanguaging strategies to communicate and to collaboratively create scenes in small group work. Their excellent German skills allowed them to self-translate their contributions to small group and whole group discussions, and while they were sometimes called upon to peer-translate in the latter, their role as 'interpreter' usually remained fluid and negotiable. They had no or very limited experience with formal interpreting, and they and the project facilitators underestimated the difficulty of the task they were asked to perform.

The expert interview lasted just under two hours and started with everybody seated in a circle. The assigned interpreters, P-C-2, P-C-6 and P-C-7, were placed at regular intervals in the circle. Figure 1 illustrates the room layout at the start of the interview.

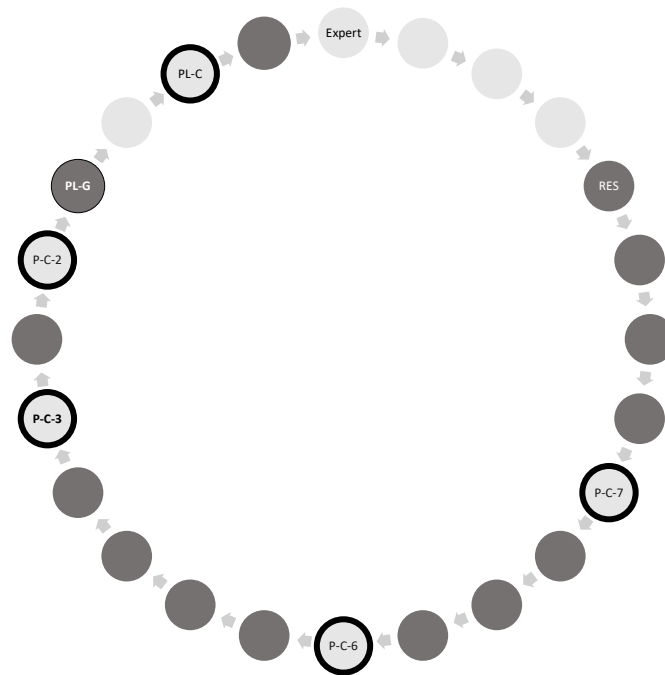


Figure 1: Room layout at the start of the interview. German-speaking participants are marked in dark grey, Czech-speaking participants in light grey. The assigned interpreters, P-C-2, P-C-6 and P-C-7, are indicated with a black outline. RES is the participant observer.

The acoustics in the room soon proved problematic. Firstly, there was considerable feedback from the microphones used by the expert and the moderator. Additionally, there were almost always several voices at once in the room: that of the expert guest speaker and those of the designated interpreters. Thus, the volume in the room multiplied within seconds, making it difficult to filter out individual voices. This provided extremely difficult working conditions for the interpreters – and listening conditions for everybody else.

The remaining participants soon clustered around the designated interpreters to be able to hear better. The increased proximity underlines their dependence on these individuals. Figure 2 illustrates the change in the room layout.

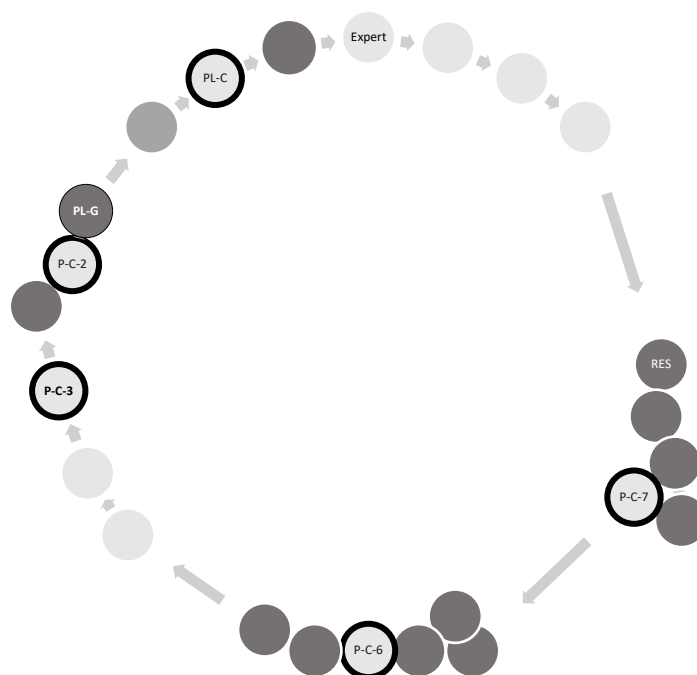


Figure 2: Room layout ca 10 minutes into the interview.

For the first couple of questions, P-C-2, P-C-6 and P-C-7 were unsure about how to approach their task, which did not come as a surprise as they had no training or pointers as to how to go about achieving language transfer. At first, they hesitated; then all tried to interpret simultaneously, speaking into the room rather than to specific individuals. Their interpretation trailed off halfway through an answer or they stopped altogether when they realised that they were not being heard. They soon settled for different approaches. P-C-6, who was studying towards a degree in German Studies and had

some, albeit quite limited, experience with translating and interpreting, opted for chuchotage. She moved her chair slightly backwards so that the German speakers around her could lean in to hear her. She was the only one who continued in her role for the duration of the interview. P-C-2 and P-C-7 attempted a consecutive mode of interpreting, providing German versions following the answers in Czech, sometimes heavily summarised. Both sought to elicit help from other workshop participants at various points. P-C-2 drew on P-C-3, the moderator, either by trying to catch his eye or by directly addressing him and asking for help.

Both P-C-2 and P-C-7 soon showed signs of feeling overwhelmed with the task. After about 40 minutes, P-C-2 finally called out with noticeable frustration in her voice: “I sometimes understand the content, but I don’t know how to translate it”. P-C-7 was barely audible over the noise of other voices in the room. In ‘his’ group, a second level translation process was taking place as one German-speaking participant interpreted from German into Arabic for two others. Nevertheless, P-C-7 managed to sustain his concentration for about an hour. Then he announced that he had to give up because of a throbbing headache, got up, and sat down with his head between his hands at the other side of the room. PL-C, the bilingual Czech facilitator, took over his seat and his role. P-C-2 continued to struggle as the interview progressed. After approximately 80 minutes, she asked the expert to provide an answer in Czech and English. As the use of English is normally discouraged within the čojč theatre network, her request can be

seen as an indication of her mounting frustration. She also continued to try to elicit collaboration, for example, when she asked PL-C to help with vocabulary pertaining to technical possibilities within digital media. At this stage, PL-C provided a summary translation for the whole group. The remaining two participant interpreters, P-C-2 and P-C-6, increasingly drew on PL-C's help when the conversation turned to business, the economy, and fake news. The latter was the topic that made P-C-2 bow out of the process.

It was not only the Czech participant interpreters who found the situation challenging. The three non-native speakers of German moved away from the group towards the corners of the room and lay down after about an hour, one leaving the room entirely. In the group discussion following the interview, all participants were reluctant to engage in any form of language transfer, leaving it to PL-C to ensure translation into German. And when the participants were asked about their assessment of the afternoon in the evening reflective round, "demanding" and "boring" were the two most frequently used adjectives.⁵

A couple of days later, P-C-7 reflected: "Jeez, I was totally finished." He stressed that his interpreter role was not only psychologically but also

⁵ All quotations were translated from German into English by the authors. Comments made by participants in Czech were translated into German by themselves, by other participants, or by PL-C during the reflective discussions.

physically challenging because of the airlessness of the room and the high summer temperatures. Moreover, the lexical complexity of the conversation and the fact that several people relied on him for understanding overwhelmed him:

This was the first time [I had to do anything like this]. So, well, yes, for these people it was the first time.... I only [translated] for one or two people before but not for ten... and I had to translate so quickly, because I couldn't hear the Czech. Yes, difficult, difficult... The words were really special. They were technical terms, for example to do with computers, and these things I can't say in Czech. *(Laughs)*

Nevertheless, he values the experience in retrospect: "It was a good experience," and asserts: "it was good practice for me." Indeed, as became apparent in the research interviews, the desire to develop language skills was widespread amongst Czech participants. By contrast, the German participants tended to emphasise the theatrical experience as the prime motivation for attending. P-C-10, the media assistant in the workshop, also highlights the responsibility, the pressure, and the satisfaction that comes with being assigned an interpreter role:

For me it was so weird because I was always the guy that was listening. And then one day the leader of one project came to me

randomly and said: “Hey, I got it, you will translate.” And then she [went] away. And I was like “Uh, oh, what? I don't even know my ... uh ... ah...” And then I was like “oh yeah,” and I did well. And then I thought maybe it's not that hard. But it's definitely good. ⁶

Both P-C-7 and P-C-10 recognise that their linguistic competence gave them a position of power in the rehearsal room, or as P-C-7 remarks with a certain amount of mirth: “I am important here. Very important.”

The facilitators express frustration with how the afternoon went during their reflective meeting in the evening, albeit for different reasons than the participants. PL-C thinks it “a little lazy” of the participants to rely on him for language transfer in the latter part of the afternoon. He is keenly aware that his linguistic competence as a bilingual speaker of Czech and German gave him authority in the rehearsal room setting (additional to his authority as a facilitator), but his view is that “we teach the kids to communicate, and the method we use is theatre”, that is, he conceives of bilingual *čojč* workshops, such as *Like/Hate*, first and foremost, as a *Begegnungsmethode* (a method for facilitating encounters) that “can build a linguistic bridge for encounters between Germans and Czechs, which is accessible from both sides” (*čojč* 2018). In other words, the notion that communicative collaboration fosters non-hierarchical, participatory processes (Heddon and

⁶ The interview was conducted in English.

Milling 2016) which underpin the workshop comes into conflict here with the perceived responsibility to “teach” the participants. While, as we have seen, the participants perceive the desired shift in authority in the rehearsal room mainly in terms of responsibility, this is something the project leadership does not always seem to appreciate.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

As we have seen, translaboration in the bilingual rehearsal room occurs when participants collaborate using their shared multi-lingual, multi-semiotic repertoire, fluidly and naturally adapting their roles and communication strategies to the situation and their interlocutors, that is, when they are translanguaging. Translaboration of this kind supports the aims and the democratic ethos of devised theatre because it facilitates the participation of all in the creative process and, in doing so, encourages non-hierarchical collaboration in the development of material for performance.

The *Like/Hate* case study illustrates that problems arise when processes become regulated and hierarchies are (re-)introduced in the (ideally) non-hierarchical space of the bilingual rehearsal room. For the duration of the afternoon described above, selected participants were assigned specific roles by the facilitators, including that of “interpreter”. This re-asserts the power of the facilitators but also confers additional authority on individual ensemble members. The participants perceive this authority overwhelmingly

in terms of responsibility. Assigned from above, their roles become fixed. The desire to collaborate and ask for help, i.e. to negotiate roles fluidly, instinctively remains, yet the sharing of tasks is now perceived as disruptive. Labelled as “interpreters”, participants feel obliged to engage in translation practice in the more common sense of uni-directional linguistic transfer from source to target language – for which they are neither trained nor prepared. Translation now becomes difficult – the responsibility of individuals. While this is perceived by some as a challenge with positive side-effects, leading to a sense of achievement and pride as well as skill development, the benefits for the ensemble are arguably minimal. Consequently, members across the group are dissatisfied, bored, or frustrated. The task becomes a source of stress with adverse effects on the groups’ creative potential.

By contrast, where communicative practices are fluid and communicative roles develop naturally in the devising process, in other words, where *translaboration* is achieved by prioritising *translanguaging* over more formal *language transfer*, a multilingual third space of translaboration (Alfer, 2017) can emerge. The BSL/ English workshop case study provides an example. Here communicative responsibility is shared between four deaf and hearing participants collaborating to devise a sketch. All strive to draw on their full communicative repertoire and are open to adopting different roles within their group throughout the process. Ideas, inputs, as well as

modes of communication are blended: the group is translanguaging in support of a translaborative process. The resulting translaboration creates a space where creativity can flourish.

As Kharkhurian (2012) observes, working in more than one language promotes linguistic creativity and is less likely to lead to premature closure because participants can draw on broader experience and additional conceptual prisms through which the work can be viewed. As evidenced in the two case studies presented here, translaboration facilitates creative collaboration, enabling all participants to contribute equally; in turn, the methods and practices of devised theatre which were employed in both workshops encourage translanguaging and successful communication because they require the participants to collaborate effectively in order to co-create material for performance. In other words, translaboration (realised by translanguaging) and co-creation are mutually interdependent in the bilingual rehearsal room.

To what extent translaboration fosters the potential for full transformation – understood as challenging participants’ perceptions of themselves or the social world around them (Jeffers 2017; Nicholson 2016) – remains debatable; further, longitudinal data would need to be generated to assert this. As Applied Theatre scholarship has repeatedly pointed out, collaborative work does not automatically have its desired effect (Snyder-

Young 2013; Thompson 2009). Translaboration in the rehearsal room is unlikely to right historical wrongs or erase linguistic power imbalances.

However, the transformative potential of successful translaboration becomes – at least momentarily and on a small scale – observable in the episode of the BSL/English workshop described above in the sense that it enables participants to create a democratic atmosphere where wider structural power differences are – at least temporarily – revoked. Participants here show notable appreciation and understanding of their partners' efforts and leave the rehearsal room visibly enthused by the process, feeling positive about themselves, their group and the product they created.

Arguably, however, it is not only the positive, but perhaps particularly the problematic experiences that enable potential for transformativity. Translaboration can highlight and articulate difficulties that reflect wider societal structures and underlying difficult relationships. Repeatedly commenting on the effects of wider structural hierarchies in the BSL/English rehearsal room, participants notice, reflect on, but also have the potential and motivation to explore and revoke problematic power imbalances. This is encouraged by the provision of an open, flexible space, allowing participants, through trial and error, to establish successful democratic collaborative practice. As the *Like/Hate* example demonstrates, attention to the underlying principles of the workshops was diverted when processes became regulated and roles fixed. Prohibiting dynamic fluidity in

communicative practice together with the uni-directional transfer from Czech into German throughout the interview reinforced the socio-cultural boundaries of Czech and German. Interestingly, however, it did not encourage participants who were at this stage either bored, resigned or stressed, to reflect actively and constructively on these issues. The transformative potential was compromised.

Captured nicely by the term translaboration, it becomes apparent that collaborative communication cannot be separated from collaborative creative processes in a devised bilingual rehearsal room. Translaboration, for us, highlights the importance of integrating cross-lingual, cross-modal communication as the translation activity of choice, rather than imposing conventional translation as an afterthought and thus reinforcing division through uni-directional transfer. Moreover, it highlights collaboration as the underlying principle. Roles are not assigned but organically adopted; translation and co-creation become the shared responsibility of the ensemble. As such, translaboration in the bilingual rehearsal room becomes the cornerstone of the pedagogical potential that devising is considered to hold.

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