La Orquesta: Symbolic Performance in a Multilingual Community of Practice

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Introduction: Symbolic Competence and Second Language Socialization

Researchers in second language socialization (SLS) perceive meaning and learning as events that are co-constructed in discursive practice. In taking this view, SLS studies can examine non-pedagogical events and interactions, such as those involving access to and integration within a community of practice. Because, as Duff (2007) stated, “SLS participants […] may not experience the same degrees of access, acceptance, or accommodation within the new discourse communities as their L1 counterparts do” (p. 310), newcomers in both instructional and non-instructional language learning settings draw upon a variety of social and communicative strategies to gain acceptance in a target language community. As shown in Duff (2007), Norton (2001) and others, strategies to gain access may or may not be successful depending upon differing levels of investment by the learner and/or resistance by their community of practice.

The reason for these differing levels of success has much to do with the challenges involved in integrating both newcomer’s and the target communities’ differing notions of social meanings, as well as the relevance of their particular histories and experiences. Kramsch (2006) and Kramsch and Whiteside (2008) referred to these issues as *symbolic competence*, which involves the ability to strategically access social and political histories in order to “play with various linguistic codes and the various spatial and temporal resonances
of these codes” (Kramsch & Whiteside, p. 664). Interlocutors co-construct meaning through this play, which in turn paves the way for intersubjectivity, or how otherwise disconnected individuals may “know or act within a common world” (Duranti & Goodwin, 1992, p. 27). As Kramsch (2002) stated, “In cases where interlocutors lack a common indexical ground of reference or are unable to co-construct one […] it is difficult to establish a sphere of intersubjectivity, and the encounter is likely to end in failure” (p. 13).

In a previous article, I examined two learners of Imbabura Quichua in a naturalistic (non-classroom) learning situation, using Lave and Wenger’s (1991) framework of legitimate peripheral participation (Back, 2011). In this article I now reference Lave and Wenger’s communities of practice and legitimate peripheral participation while analyzing how one of these individuals attempted to reframe his own symbolic competence to the context of a particular interaction within his community of practice. I employ a close discourse analysis of a conversation between the musician, Alejandro, and members of his community in order to highlight how certain symbols and beliefs were indexed in what was, on the surface, a lighthearted conversation. I show how some members of the community resisted Alejandro’s displays of expertise and symbolic competence—in other words, his symbolic performance—and examine the implications of this resistance for Alejandro’s socialization into the community. The findings of this study add to a new body of literature that operationalizes and problematizes the notion of symbolic competence in SLS contexts.

From Symbolic Competence to Symbolic Performance

Kramsch (2006) originally proposed symbolic competence as a response to the emphasis on communicative competence in language learning environments, arguing that competence in communicative skills is not sufficient for becoming a fully-fledged speaker of
a second language. Often, issues such as power and status color interactions between language learners and their target communities, leading to the failed encounters referenced above. “In order to understand others,” Kramsch argued, “we have to understand what they remember from the past, what they imagine and project onto the future, and how they position themselves in the present. And we have to understand the same things of ourselves” (p. 251). Kramsch and Whiteside (2007) suggested that a successful language learner is therefore one who “not only accrues new linguistic knowledge, but who also [...] puts his or her various languages in relation to one another and in relation to his or her many roles and subject positions” (p. 918).

The issue of multiple roles and subject positions is particularly pertinent in naturalistic language learning situations, where learners interact in a variety of environments, most of which are far removed from a classroom-type situation. Kramsch and Whiteside (2008) portrayed these multiple environments through an analysis of multilingual interactions among immigrants in San Francisco. They showed how these interactions indexed not only multiple codes, but also multiple meanings within these codes. “The participants in these exchanges are physically and emotionally living in several areas of space and time that are embodied in their daily practices” (p. 658). They illustrated how using a particular language in a particular context positioned the interlocutors in different “symbolic spaces” with particular cultural memories and social symbolic power—what Blommaert (2005) referred to as historicity (Kramsch & Whiteside, p. 665). They also demonstrated how the use of these different codes, with their accompanying memories, is performative in nature, allowing multilingual individuals to “create alternative realities and reframe the balance of symbolic power” in interaction (p. 666).
In an analysis framed by notions of symbolic competence, Kramsch and Whiteside showed how Whiteside’s participant Don Francisco played with the sociohistorical subtexts of English, Spanish, and Maya in a series of seemingly innocuous interactions with shopkeepers and acquaintances in his neighborhood. Don Francisco’s strategic use of Maya and Spanish with Asian shopkeepers gave him what Kramsch and Whiteside (2008) termed a “prestige of distinction” relative to other immigrants in the community (p. 661). This prestige was rooted simultaneously in the history of these languages in Don Francisco’s memory, in the shopkeepers’ notions of Mexican and Central American immigrants, and in the memory of their combined interactions. The use of these languages in Don Francisco’s “little lessons” reframed the assumed discourse of the linguistically challenged immigrant, allowing Don Francisco to negotiate a distinct subject position that favored his own views of Maya and Spanish.

The word “competence” has a complicated history in linguistic research, from Chomsky’s (1965) competence versus performance, to Hymes’ (1966) ethnographically oriented communicative competence, to numerous other permutations (e.g., Canale & Swain, 1980, Bachman, 1990). Although Hymes and others added a much-needed social and contextual component to the notion of competence, the underlying definition of competence as something within the learner has remained unchanged. As such, discussing competence is problematic when analyzing discursive events, as it implies access to cognitive processes and memories beyond the interaction at hand. Kramsch admitted her own discomfort with the term, but felt that there was not a reasonable alternative that encompassed “both 1) a certain understanding of the symbolic nature of language and 2) an ability to perform symbolic acts of reframing” (personal communication, 1/25/12).
Given the relationship between understanding and performing, it may be more appropriate to speak of symbolic performance when analyzing discourse that indexes an interlocutor’s symbolic competence. Although the term “performance” is also polyvalent and imbued in historical complexity, I argue that the work done by Bauman (1975, 1987, 2000) and Bauman and Briggs (1990) can allow us to perceive performance beyond Chomsky’s original conception. Defined by Bauman (1987) as a “specially marked way of speaking” that opens itself up to audience scrutiny (p. 8), the notion of performance is now used to analyze a variety of discursive events as performances of gender, ethnicity, expertise, and other subjectivities. Kramsch and Whiteside’s (2008) analysis of symbolic competence also demonstrates how employing different symbolic codes is a performative act that creates and reframes interaction (see above).

In his interactions with his community of practice, Alejandro illustrated the four principle manifestations of Kramch and Whiteside’s (2008) symbolic competence—subject positioning, historicity, performativity, and reframing. However, rather than successfully performing his symbolic competence to his community, Alejandro pushed the community further away from a shared notion of symbols and histories. The conversation that I examine in this article involves Alejandro teaching some of the community members a song he learned while studying at the Conservatory of Music in Quito. His repeated exhortations in Spanish with respect to the ease of the song, combined with a specialized music vocabulary, showed a symbolic performance that was unfamiliar in many ways to the community. Their difficulties with the song and reactions in Spanish and Quichua showed an orientation to distinct cultural memories and beliefs. At the same time, Alejandro’s one attempt to speak Quichua was oriented to by some but not all of the members as legitimate, while the
community’s use of Quichua reframed the context of the informal lesson and allowed the members an opportunity to reassert their symbolic capital, despite their difficulties learning the song. In the sections to follow I describe the participants and the data before analyzing four relevant excerpts from the lesson.

Participants: The Runa Takiks

In this article I use data from a multi-sited ethnography of an Andean folkloric music band that spends most of the year living and working in Seattle, Washington. The band, which I call the Runa Takiks (musicians; literally, people who play), is composed of bilingual (Spanish-Quichua) Ecuadorians from the towns of Otavalo, Peguche and Agato, in northern Ecuador. The members of the band vary in terms of age (19-50 years), time with the band (1-12 years), and experience as musicians. The Runa Takiks also vary with respect to language acquisition; some of them learned Quichua first and then Spanish in school, while others grew up with both languages in the home. Many are also proficient in or at least knowledgeable about other languages, such as English, due to their work in the United States and other countries. Most of the members identify themselves as Otavalos, an ethnie of indigenous peoples from northern Ecuador’s Imbabura province. The Otavalos are characterized by a high level of transnational commerce and relative economic success compared to other indigenous groups in Ecuador.

It is important to note that speaking Quichua is a point of pride with most of the musicians, mostly due to the movements for indigenous rights that took place in Ecuador in the 1990s (Back, 2009; Colloredo-Mansfeld, 2002, 2004). Even those individuals who are not fully proficient in Quichua find themselves motivated to speak it with their more proficient peers. Moreover, many of the songs that the Runa Takiks compose and play have
lyrics in Quichua, which hearken back to nostalgic visions of pre-colonial life in Ecuador, love, and Otavalo traditions such as Pawkar Sisa, the annual spring festival. Speaking Quichua in the United States is therefore not so much a social liability, as Whiteside’s (2006) research showed for some speakers of Maya, but a symbol of prestige among the group and even an important part of their moneymaking activities. For this reason band members who speak Quichua well are also the most respected members of the community.

Similar to proficiency in Quichua, the band members also convey respect upon those members with musical expertise, although this expertise is not earned through formal education, but rather through a combination of self-instruction and apprenticeship to a more expert musician or group of musicians, similar to other Otavalo folk musicians (Kyle, 2000). Most of the Runa Takiks play “by ear” and have not learned to read music. Also, rather than specializing in one instrument, most of the band members play several, including wind instruments such as the quena and sikuri (panpipes), string instruments such as the violin, guitar, and charango, and handheld drums. During performances, veteran musicians usually take leadership roles, which include being at the front of the stage, singing lead, and playing the wind instruments, which are viewed as more typically Andean. The older members of the band also manage the composition, arrangement, and production of the Runa Takik’s annual CD. Newer members of the band accompany on rhythm guitar, bass or other string instruments, sing backup, and/or assist in selling CDs. Newer members are also less likely to be visible participants during the performance, and are usually positioned towards the back of the group (see Figure 1). This positioning also takes place offstage, when newer members defer to more veteran members in conversations.
During the year of my fieldwork, Alejandro, a Spanish-speaking mestizo (person of mixed Spanish-indigenous heritage) from the capital city of Quito, began working with the Runa Takiks. It was the first time a mestizo had played with the band. An expert composer and producer of Andean music, Alejandro had been recruited by the leader of the Runa Takiks precisely for these talents. However, Alejandro’s expertise was earned through different channels than the other Runa Takiks. Alejandro was the only member of the band who had formal training in music, having studied at Quito’s Conservatorio Nacional de Música (National Conservatory of Music) for several years. The Conservatory offers a more academic type of musical training than the other members of the Runa Takiks had experienced; therefore, Alejandro’s acquisition of musical training was viewed as prestigious, but also quite removed from the daily reality and histories of the other band.
members. Despite being a new, non-Quichua speaking member, Alejandro took on roles traditionally reserved for more veteran members of the band, including playing wind instruments and composing several songs for the band’s CD. This assumption of veteran roles may have played a part in the resistance of other, more senior band members to Alejandro’s professed expertise in Andean music. This resistance was displayed in part by the event I analyze below.

Alejandro was motivated to learn Quichua because of his love for Andean folkloric music, but mostly because he wanted to understand the conversations of his band mates. His efforts to make friends with the other band members mirrored the experiences of many language learners as they attempt to socialize themselves into a target discourse community and culture (Norton, 2001; Kinginger, 2008). Although Alejandro had the benefit of a common language (Spanish) and nation (Ecuador), the differences between Alejandro and the indigenous members of the band were often more salient than the similarities. This was evident not only in his explicit attempts to learn Quichua (already documented in Author, 2011) but also in moments when language learning was not the primary goal, such as during the lesson Alejandro gave to a few veteran band members. Though lighthearted in tone, an analysis of this lesson suggests a performance of differing symbolic competences that relate not only to competing notions of musical expertise, but also to the role of mestizos and indigenous peoples both in Ecuador and as transnational laborers in the United States.

Analysis: “La Orquesta”

I analyze the data below using a combination of information gained from ethnographic field notes, interviews, and a close discourse analysis. This combination has been widely used in studies on language use, language learning, and SLS (e.g., Blommaert,
Kramsch and Whiteside (2008) refer to this type of analysis as an “ecological” view of the data, noting that this perspective “can build on the other analytic approaches, and view the unfolding events as the enactment [sic], re-enactment, or even stylized enactment of past language practices, the replay of cultural memory, and the rehearsal of potential identities” (p. 660). Thus, in this article, I build upon the close discourse analysis of a transcript of the event using the observed knowledge of past discursive practices and cultural memories that I gained from nine months of observation and interviews with the Runa Takihs.

Notwithstanding this approach, I also make an effort to emphasize this discursive event as locally situated and contextually relevant. Kramsch and Whiteside’s analysis of Don Francisco’s interactions is similarly context-dependent, indicating a focus on the interactions themselves as indexing social memories and histories, rather than referencing etic interpretations of interior knowledge. This focus demonstrates how indexicality is an expression (or even performance) of stance, as outlined by Gumperz (1996), Ochs (1996), and Agha (2007). As Agha states, “social effects mediated by speech are highly context-bound” (p. 14) and therefore should be interpreted closely with respect to the situation at hand. I find parallels in this interpretation with Korobov’s (2010) “discursive psychological” approach to positioning, which also focuses on “how social actions index features of social categories” (p. 268). Finally, in this analysis I acknowledge my own roles and subjectivities as a researcher, and present this interpretation of the data as one of many possibilities. I examine not only the musicians’ contributions to the event, but also my own contributions
and how these may have influenced what transpired. Before my analysis, I set the scene for the interaction that took place.

In early June, roughly two months into my observations of the Runa Takiks, I was with the band at a street fair in Puyallup, Washington. The event took place during the third and final set break of the day. Normally the band played a grueling eight to ten hours at street fairs, taking breaks every two or three hours. During my observations of the Runa Takiks I noted that the final set break was a particularly ripe opportunity for conversation, because members of the band had already run errands and eaten during previous set breaks. Therefore, they were more likely to stick close to the performance area and talk to each other.

Alejandro used the opportunity of the third set break to teach a song to Domingo, one of the more senior members of the band, and a few other veteran members (Baltasar, Jerónimo, and Allkurinchik). As will be seen below, Baltasar actively resisted involvement in the lesson. Jerónimo had to be coaxed repeatedly to join, but showed difficulty grasping the different parts of the song. Domingo and Allkurinchik were initially enthusiastic, but repeatedly questioned their roles in the song. After some struggle and much laughter, Domingo, Jerónimo and Allkurinchik abandoned the lesson.

The song that Alejandro attempted to teach the band had nothing to do with the Runa Takiks’s repertoire of Andean folk standards. It was a folk song of Austrian origin referred to in Spanish as “La Orquesta.” The song is a series of a cappella rounds in which the musicians explain the contribution of each instrument to the orchestra. In Alejandro’s recruitment efforts, he assigned each band member an instrument, taking as his own role that of the first instrument, the violin. (The English and Spanish lyrics to the song, which describe the role of each instrument, can be found in Appendix 1).
As I noted above, Alejandro’s first recruit, Domingo, was a willing participant, but Baltasar was a more difficult recruit. Although Alejandro insisted that “La Orquesta” was “primero de básico” (the first, basic thing) in musical education, Baltasar refused to participate and remained on the sidelines of the interaction, making comments and laughing about the others’ performance. An example of these sideline comments can be found in Excerpt 1, in which Alejandro used a combination of humor, cajoling, and language crossing to encourage the participation of a third member, Jerónimo.

Excerpt 1: “Shamuy tiu Jero”

75. BALTASAR: ( [ ] )

76. ALEJANDRO: [el compañero Jero, my friend Jero

77. ALEJANDRO: compañero Jero venga. my friend Jero come

78. JERONIMO: ((shakes head))

79. ALLKURINCHIK: (ah ese esta comIENdo)= (ah that one is eating)

80. BALTASAR: hh[HHH ]

81. ALEJANDRO: [solo ] ↑venga a oir, venga a oir porque, just come and hear, come and hear because

vas a escoger un instrumen[to, ven. you are going to choose an instrument, come.

-->83. BALTASAR: un instrumen[to (MUY jodi[do)] a very fucked-up instrument

84. ALEJANDRO: ↑ve]ní a come to

escuchar listen,

85. BALTASAR: ah.=

86. ALEJANDRO: =o estás tomando cola con las orejjas.
or are you drinking cola with your ears.

87. BALTASAR: huhHUHuhuhuhuh

---88. ALEJANDRO: vení. (3.0) >shamuy tiu ↑Jero, come. come uncle Jero

89. BALTASAR: hh[HHH]

90. ALEJANDRO: [por] favor?< please?

91. (6.0) ((Alejandro strums guitar, Jerónimo comes over))

92. BALTASAR: hhHHH (estando tan rígido no?)= being so rigid, right?

In line 88 Alejandro employs a language crossing into Quichua. Language crossing, defined by Rampton (2009) as “pointedly non-habitual speech practices,” are “more likely to be seen as anomalously “other” for the speaker, and questions of legitimacy and entitlement can arise” (149). Although Jerónimo did join the lesson after Alejandro’s “shamuy tiu,” in this way acknowledging its legitimate use, the crossing was not necessarily oriented to as legitimate by Baltasar, who laughed when Alejandro made the switch. Baltasar’s laughter marked the crossing similarly to his reaction to Alejandro’s admonition of Jerónimo “drinking cola with his ears.” Although Alejandro may have intended the crossing to be humorous, there is no laughter on either his part or the part of the other musicians after the utterance. Jerónimo appears to take it seriously enough, as evidenced by his response. Because Alejandro’s utterances in Quichua were very infrequent in his interactions with the band members, Baltasar’s reaction seems to index either humor or discomfort at this crossing. The fact that Baltasar orients to Alejandro’s “shamuy” as something laughable thus distinguishes it from both the humorous and non-humorous portions of the excerpt.
Another important element in Excerpt 1 is the level of familiarity being indexed, especially given Alejandro’s predilection for the use of the formal term “usted” throughout the lesson (see Excerpt 2, below). Alejandro’s use of increasingly informal commands to Jerónimo, ending in an informal Quichua command “shamuy” is the performance of a comfortable familiarity, as is his joke about Jerónimo “drinking cola with his ears.” The use of informal speech has parallels in the history of the two musicians’ interactions. Jerónimo, a bilingual from Otavalo, was Alejandro’s closest friend in the band, and one to whom he regularly confided his discomfort and distrust of the other band members. The use of “tiu”—a phonetic adaptation of the Spanish word for uncle, but more commonly used as an affectionate term between male friends—also indexed the friends’ mutual familiarity. Alejandro also used “tiu” in other interactions as a general term for male speakers of Quichua; for example, in a conversation with Jerónimo some weeks after this event, he claimed that he no longer wanted to be “tiu.” For Alejandro, the word “tiu” carried different symbolic implications at different times, from friend—a meaning that Jerónimo oriented to, as shown in his eventual participation—to Quichua-speaking other.

Although Jerónimo did orient to Alejandro’s crossing as legitimate, Baltasar’s non-laughter contributions to this interaction suggested both a resistance to the lesson and to Alejandro’s role as teacher. Baltasar first demonstrated this resistance through an expletive, “jodido,” regarding the instrument that Jerónimo would choose. Baltasar, a bilingual from Otavalo, was harnessing the symbolic power of Spanish for expletives. Again, this performance hearkened back to a previous conversation, in which the other band members and I had discussed strong curse words. The band members, Baltasar included, had noted that Quichua did not have an ample repertoire of expletives. The fact that Quichua was a prestige
language among the band members may have also played a role in Baltasar’s choice of Spanish. Kramsch and Whiteside (2008) discussed the “hierarchies of social respectability” among different languages and how these resonate subjectively “in the speaker’s embodied memories” (p. 662). Baltasar, as a veteran member who nevertheless deferred to Domingo, the default leader of the beta band and an avid Quichua speaker, drew upon these memories and hierarchies in order to find the strongest word, yet the least offensive one from a Quichua speaker’s standpoint, for his assessment. This evaluation reframed Alejandro’s earlier description of the song as “the first, basic thing” in a more negative manner than could have been done through the use of Quichua. At the same time, the comment is conveniently in a language that Alejandro can understand, similar to Baltasar’s later evaluation of Alejandro as “rigid,” which is directed to the others as an aside but, again, easily understood by Alejandro.

In the first excerpt we see how multiple histories both within and among individuals began to come into play, with both Alejandro and Baltasar using various symbols and histories to perform their respective orientations towards the lesson. As Alejandro continued teaching the song, Domingo, who was a willing first recruit, began to have more trouble with his part, especially when Alejandro introduced the round format. Although Domingo grasped that he was to sing in a round with Alejandro, he frequently lost his place, resulting in more laughter among the group. When Domingo overheard Alejandro teaching the clarinet section of the song to Jerónimo, he decided that he would rather be the clarinet. In the next excerpt Alejandro explains his reasoning for assigning Domingo the trumpet role.

Excerpt 2: “Es que Usted es alto”

164. DOMINGO: Tiene el clarinet y usted me manda a la trompeta.

165. you have the clarinet, and you’re sending me to the trumpet!
166. AUTHOR: hehe

-->167. ALEJANDRO: [eːes] que usted es ↑alto

it’s because you are an alto

168. DOMINGO: ((looks around as if checking out his height))

169. GROUP: hahahahahaha

170. ALEJANDRO: como le ↑dijó

he got told

171. DOMINGO: como me ↑dijó!

I got told!

172. ALEJANDRO: ya. es por esa razón.

so. it’s for that reason.

173. [no es que ( ) pero] que

it’s not that you are ( ) but that

174. DOMINGO: [la trom PE ta domina tata]

the trumpet dominates tata

-->175. ALEJANDRO: [usted es alto. casi sopra]no.

you are an alto. almost soprano.

-->176. DOMINGO: [tatata tata la trompeta= ]

the trumpet

177. ALEJANDRO: casi teNOR

almost a tenor!

178. BALTASAR: hhhHHHH

In Excerpt 2 we see a reframing of the lesson, as well as possible conflicting assessments of masculinity. Alejandro’s assessment of Domingo as “alto” was meant to be a comment on Domingo’s singing range and the reason he did not give Domingo the lower range clarinet part of the song. However, with an exaggerated gesture and the resulting laughter, Domingo reframed this interpretation of the Spanish/Latin word ‘alto’ to its more popular meaning of “tall.” Domingo’s performative gesture and the appreciative laughter that
it evoked from the other veteran members of the band also downplayed the range assessments of ‘alto’ ‘tenor,’ etc. that indexed Alejandro’s formal music training. In drawing the attention away from singing range and towards height (Domingo is 4 foot 9, hence the humor of this performance), Domingo also resisted the formal aspects of the lesson, such as assessment of singing range. This resistance is also evidenced by Domingo’s overlaps when Alejandro attempted to explain his assessment in lines 171 and 173.

However, Alejandro continued to use these terms despite the reframing, which caused Domingo to suddenly stop his overlaps in line 174, precisely when Alejandro evaluated Domingo’s singing range as “almost a soprano.” The abrupt stop, Alejandro’s quick amendment to “almost a tenor,” and Baltasar’s laughter again signaled some discomfort with Alejandro’s words. Listening further on in the conversation (not transcribed here), I noted that Domingo did not speak again until one minute after Alejandro’s initial assessment of “soprano,” despite laughter from the other members. His next utterance was a terse “sí, señor” (yes, sir) when Alejandro relented and gave him the clarinet part after playing it through again. Given that soprano is a singing range typically used for women, the use of this terminology, joined with Domingo’s abrupt end to his overlaps and long stretch of silence, could have signaled a threat to Domingo’s masculinity. Alejandro seemed to notice this by quickly amending the term to a more masculine “tenor.”

The use of the formal term of address “usted” (you) is also salient in this interaction. Generally during conversations in Spanish, the Quichua-speaking members of the band used “tú,” the Spanish informal term for “you,” while Alejandro used the similarly informal “vos.” However, Alejandro almost exclusively used “usted” with his fellow band members during this event, which was a performance of the formal teacher-student relationship in Latin
America. We see evidence of the performativity of “usted” in its absence, when Alejandro reverted to “vos” verb forms during certain moments in the interaction. For example, his aside to Jerónimo about drinking cola with his ears used the familiar verb form “estás.” Domingo’s uptake of the “usted” honorific showed an understanding of and agreement to this performance, although he contrasted this use with vehement protestations regarding his part in the song. The use of “usted” thus showed some agreement on the symbolic notions and histories of teacher-student relationships in Latin America, and the ongoing laughter indexed this performance as humorous.

Despite this partial meshing of histories, Excerpt 2 is notable for the conflict and discomfort displayed within. What began as a reframing of the band members’ singing range assessment led both Alejandro and Domingo into uncomfortable territory, as Alejandro’s repeated insistence on using the formal terminology for this assessment led to discomfort among the veteran band members. Alejandro attempted to save face by immediately offering Domingo the clarinet part, but both Alejandro and Domingo later concluded that Domingo was the best person for the trumpet part of the song, and Domingo continued with his original role. Alejandro then recruited Allkurinchik for the clarinet part, as Jerónimo was unable to learn it. Allkurinchik agreed to participate but, like Domingo, had difficulty with the round format. I offered to write down his part in order to alleviate some of this confusion; however, my abbreviations in the writing (most notably the musical notation bis, indicating that one should repeat the previous line) prompted an argument that something was “missing” from the transcription.

Excerpt 3: “Chachkamari”

378. MICHELE: pero, no [falta-]  
but nothing’s missing
After I argued that nothing was missing from the transcription, Allkurinchik employed a lexical switch into Quichua. While his initial use of the Spanish verb ‘es’ (it is) did not offer any specific subject for his assessment—it could have been my transcription, his performance, or the lesson itself—the resulting laughter and repetition by Domingo of “chachkamari” reframed the music lesson and, effectively, ended it. The laughter and repetition indicate what Tannen (2007) termed a “savoring” of the Quichua term. Alejandro, who did not participate in the laughter, did not orient to this savoring, most likely because he was unaware of the meaning of “chachkamari.” For this reason, the laughter took on a meaning that went beyond camaraderie, hinting at a performance of symbolic domination, described by Heller (1995) as that which “accord[s] legitimacy to certain forms of knowledge over others, and [...] restrict[s] access to valued knowledge” (p. 374). Domingo and the other band members’ appreciative response to Allkurinchik’s Quichua term also legitimized this evaluation, while the use of Quichua (and subsequent failure to explain the meaning of “chachkamari” to Alejandro) restricted Alejandro’s access to this knowledge. Allkurinchik’s
evaluation and the response it generated also served to end the lesson, although Alejandro continued to discuss the song with the band members.

Excerpt 4 “Sigue en la otra pausa”

\[\text{\textit{Excerpt 4 “Sigue en la otra pausa”}}\]

\[\text{\textit{---387. ALEJANDRO: no so\textit{t}ros toCAbamos pues en el, en}}\]
\[\text{\textit{we used to play in the, in}}\]

\[\text{\textit{---388. kinder ese.}}\]
\[\text{\textit{kindergarten that.}}\]

\[\text{\textit{---389. DOMINGO: serio? los muchachos est\textit{a}bamos}}\]
\[\text{\textit{really? the guys we were}}\]

\[\text{\textit{---390. ta\textit{ta}ta\textit{tas}} (todos somos de quito,)}\]
\[\text{\textit{we’re all from Quito}}\]

\[\text{\textit{---391. ALEJANDRO: porque eso es del conservatorio que}}\]
\[\text{\textit{because that’s from the conservatory that}}\]

\[\text{\textit{---392. nos ense\textit{n}an, algunos hasta asi nos ense\textit{n}an}}\]
\[\text{\textit{they teach us, some of them even teach us like this;}}\]

\[\text{\textit{---393. ALEJANDRO: ((singing)) los pollitos dicen [pio]}}\]
\[\text{\textit{the little chicks say}}\]

\[\text{\textit{---394. MICHELE: [pio]}}\]

\[\text{\textit{---395. pio pio cuando tienen hambre \textit{[cuando]}}}\]
\[\text{\textit{when they are hungry when}}\]

\[\text{\textit{---396. ALEJANDRO: [as\textit{i} las]}}\]
\[\text{\textit{just like that,}}\]

\[\text{\textit{---397. es\textit{ca\textit{l}as esas de los pollitos.}}}\]
\[\text{\textit{the scales, those of “los pollitos.”}}\]

\[\text{\textit{---398. ALLKURINCHIK: ya, right}}\]

\[\text{\textit{---399. DOMINGO: \textit{\textgreater{}sige} en la otra pausa=}}\]
\[\text{\textit{keep going during the next break}}\]

\[\text{\textit{---400. BALTASAR: \textit{\textgreater{}sige} en la otra pausa=}}\]
\[\text{\textit{keep going during the next break}}\]
In this excerpt, Alejandro once again referenced the ease of the song by explaining that it was something he learned in kindergarten. However, Domingo reframed Alejandro’s assessment of the song with an incredulous “serio?” and the phrase “todos somos de Quito,” in this way marking the song as something that would only be performed by mestizos from the capital city of Ecuador. Indeed, the round format of “La Orquesta” was quite removed from the Runa Takiks’ musical histories, both as individuals and as indigenous musicians. As Jonathan Ritter, an Andean ethnomusicologist, noted, “rounds are not to my knowledge found anywhere in Andean indigenous musical forms. Virtually everything is based on serial repetition with minor variations by the entire ensemble, not the kind of two- or three-voice counterpoint that a round or fugue produces” (personal correspondence, 11/17/08).

Despite Domingo’s indexing of “La Orquesta” as mestizo-like, Alejandro continued to describe “La Orquesta” as an easy song, similar to a well-known children’s song “Los Pollitos.” I oriented to this comparison immediately, as seen by my uptake of the performance of the song with Alejandro. However, none of the other band members took up this comparison in an obvious manner. The first response from the group is a brief “ya” from Allkurinchik. Although “ya” and its Quichua counterpart “ña” are often used as reactive tokens, “ya” can also be used in the sense of “that’s enough” or “alright, already.” Domingo and Baltasar’s rushed exhortations to continue the lesson during the next break, marking an end to the lesson for the moment, might have also shown an orientation to this meaning of “ya.” Thus, in this excerpt, Alejandro’s two attempts to describe the ease of the song, once with a reference to kindergarten and another with a comparison to a popular children’s song, are reframed and deflected by the other members of the band, first by referencing the
mestizo-like quality of the song and then by encouraging Alejandro to continue “during the next break,” a break that the members know will never come given that the band is about to play its final set for the day.

In my analysis I have shown how Alejandro performed his own symbolic competence, specifically his cultural history as a formally trained musician from Quito, in the discursive activity of a song lesson. I have also shown how Alejandro’s performance was oriented to and mostly resisted by his target language community, who performed their own symbolic competences by reframing elements of the lesson with laughter and the strategic employment of Spanish and Quichua words. In the section to follow I discuss these elements in more detail, as well as what they may have meant for Alejandro’s experiences as a legitimate participant within the Runa Takiks community.

Discussion: La Orquesta and Symbolic Performance

Throughout the lesson Alejandro performed several elements of his own cultural history. His use of musical terminology such as “scales,” “alto,” “soprano,” etc. referenced his formal music training at Quito’s conservatory of music. As a participant in this interaction with (limited) musical training of my own, I oriented to the use of this terminology, even employing an additional term (bis) when I transcribed Allkurinchik’s portion of the song. At the same time, Alejandro performed several elements of Western cultural history, both through the song “La Orquesta,” which talks about instruments such as the violin, trumpet, and clarinet and employs a round format, as well as through the song “Los Pollitos,” a popular children’s song in much of Latin America, albeit perhaps only for certain socioethnic groups in the region. My own participation in the lesson, whether through singing “Los Pollitos” with Alejandro or transcribing the lyrics with my own musical
notation, was a performance of the cultural history and knowledge that I shared with Alejandro.

Though Alejandro and I were able to successfully mesh our respective symbolic performances, Domingo, Baltasar and Allkurinchik’s responses revealed their own distinct sociocultural histories as indigenous Ecuadorian musicians. Domingo’s humorous reframing of his range assessment as “alto” and the group’s appreciative response to this reframing showed an orientation to the non-formal nature of the group’s musical training, while Baltasar’s and Allkurinchik’s assessments of the event in Spanish (“jodido,” “rígido”) and Quichua (“chachkamari”) demonstrated their own resistance to the lesson. This resistance stemmed from what Goffman (1981) referred to as “misalignments” between Alejandro and the Runa Takiks in expertise, cultural histories, and the relevance of prior experiences.

This knowledge and history were related not only to musical expertise, but also to the established hierarchy of the Runa Takiks as a community of practice. Cicourel (1995) noted, “the novice […] is part of a complex web of authority relationships and exchanges in which the domination of the expert appears to simulate a collegial atmosphere that masks the power both can sense” (p. 368). During this lesson, the seemingly collegial laughter masked the underlying power relationships among the members. These relationships surfaced when Allkurinchik and Domingo marked the end of the lesson; though Alejandro was supposedly leading the group in the lesson, it was the more veteran community members who decided when the lesson is over. I would also note that the longest and most appreciative laughter came not as a result of any of Alejandro’s comments but from the member reactions to those comments that fall outside of the “curriculum” (e.g., Domingo’s astonishment at finding himself “tall” and Allkurinchik’s evaluation of the lesson). Thus, despite Alejandro’s
attempts to position himself as the leader of the lesson, the indigenous members of the Runa Takiks reframed this subject position throughout the lesson with their comments and laughter.

The historical background for aspects of this interaction goes far beyond Alejandro and the Runa Takiks, spanning hundreds of years of indigenous-mestizo relationships in Ecuador. Alejandro’s insistence on “La Orquesta,” a European folk song involving Western instruments, being one of the bases of musical knowledge is in part the result of a history of domination of the more privileged Spanish-speaking mestizos over the indigenous peoples of Ecuador, a history that was challenged in recent years with the ousting of president Jamil Mahuad in 2000 by Ecuador’s most powerful indigenous group, CONAIE (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador; Colloredo-Mansfeld, 2002). When I spoke to the indigenous members of the Runa Takiks about their histories, they frequently spoke of the recent movements in the areas of politics and education, and the impact that these movements had on their own self-awareness as Quichua-speaking indigenous peoples. Perhaps this is one reason why the Runa Takiks reframed Alejandro’s referencing of Western songs and instruments, as well as his insistence on their importance.

At the same time, we cannot merely look at this interaction as a continuation of the oppressor/oppressed narrative, as the Runa Takiks, as members of the Otavalo ethnie, have also frequently acquiesced to an ongoing perception of them as a superior group of indigenous people. Kyle (2000) stated that the Otavalos since colonial times have been singled out “as a ‘race’ of Indians who are distinctly Ecuadorian yet also Incan nobility, primitive yet precocious, rural yet clean, Indian yet handsome” (p. 117). This view, combined with the relative economic success of the Otavalos in their transnational activities,
has granted them a great deal of prestige in Ecuador. Yet this perception has also been a double-edged sword, as these positive images mask a pervasive economic stratification within Otavalo communities and beyond. Given that the labor force in Ecuador is mainly comprised of mestizos who have not benefited economically from the transnational activities of the Otavalos, non-indigenous Ecuadorians often perceive the Otavalo’s economic success negatively. It is for this reason, Kyle (2000) suggested, that for many Otavalos playing folkloric music abroad may be “an escape valve for potential political tensions arising from the consolidation of a merchant class.” (p. 148).

These dueling cultural tensions provide some historical reference for the above interaction, in which an urban mestizo attempted to ingratiate himself to his community of practice by teaching them a song far removed from their own histories as the “chosen,” yet still oppressed, indigenous peoples of Ecuador. As Kramsch and Whiteside (2008) asserted with respect to their participants, “the protagonists in these exchanges are physically and emotionally living on several areas of space and time that are embodied in their daily practices” (p. 658). We can thus view this interaction not only as the continuation of the oppressor/oppressed dialogue, but also as the expressions of a transnational cultural elite confronted with unwanted symbols and histories. Their reactions to the lesson indexed what Myers-Scotton (1990, 1993) termed an “elite closure;” the use of the dominant language and culture to further eclipse Alejandro’s participation as a legitimate member of the group. Whether or not this was the band members’ intention, Alejandro soon began to distance himself from the others. Eventually, and despite his initial enthusiasm for learning Quichua and becoming part of the community, Alejandro withdrew from the group, interacting only when necessary with the other members of the band.
Towards an Understanding of Symbolic Performance in Language Learning

In this article I have shown how one individual attempted and failed to become a legitimate member of his community of practice by performing his symbolic competences and discourses of expertise. Alejandro, by performing formal musical expertise, not only was unable to perform this expertise successfully to his community, but also seemed to contribute to his marginalization from the Runa Takiks by failing to notice the differences in meaning and relevance of particular histories and types of expertise. As Agha (2005) states, “any use of a register performatively models specific footings and relations between speaker and coparticipants; yet the latter may or may not ratify these performances” (p. 2). This discursive event showed how some but not all members of the Runa Takiks ratified Alejandro’s teacherly register, as well as his brief language crossing, and lesson content. In the paragraphs to follow I examine the implications of these findings as they relate to language learning in a naturalistic setting. Although as a unique case study the above findings cannot be generalized, I offer some possibilities for further discussion and analysis below.

Learning another language presents a host of challenges, but naturalistic language learning situations, such as the case of Alejandro and the Runa Takiks, can offer a much more complex and nuanced environment if the newcomer decides to integrate—or not—with his or her community. As seen above, both newcomers and target community members may show resistance to this participation. This was seen in Rymes (1997), who found resistance to the use of Spanish in Los Angeles, where both native and non-native speakers of the language would “explicitly mark use of Spanish and limit its subsequent use” (p. 152). We saw a similar example of resistance by Baltasar, who through his laughter marked
Alejandro’s use of Quichua and may have prohibited him from using the language further. Among the Runa Takiks, communication in Quichua was restricted either to those who already knew the language or to indigenous learners; Alejandro’s attempts at speaking Quichua in this discourse event and others did not even result in the simple ratification or pedagogical interaction evidenced in Rymes, and eventually led to his marginalization.

As I have shown in this article, one reason for community resistance might be conflicting symbolic performances related to important elements of the community’s practices and power relations. Although some novices may perceive their symbolic competences as similar to those of their community (e.g., Alejandro perceiving his musical training and background as something the Runa Takiks would acknowledge as legitimate), expert and other members may not accept these sources as valid for community practices. As seen in the discourse event described above, what Alejandro perceived as a simple music lesson became much more complicated when performed with other members of the Runa Takiks. Because the failure to learn “La Orquesta,” was, like all interactions, co-constructed, we might ask how individuals such as Alejandro might overcome these difficulties in future interactions. It is clear that what Alejandro assumed was a legitimate experience from his past was not accepted as such by the other band members. In Alejandro’s case, the multiple hierarchy of being a novice Quichua learner, an urban Ecuadorian mestizo, and a musician with some expertise all led to misalignments with his community, which in turn played a role in excluding him from legitimate participation. Like this research, Rymes’ (1997) research also showed how sociocultural and sociopolitical issues have a profound effect on discourse routines among the target community, sometimes leading to a lack of encouragement of communication.
Alejandro’s interactions with the Runa Takiks, although a performance of his and their specific histories and experiences, do suggest the need for incorporating perceptions of symbolic competence and performance in language learning environments both in and outside of the classroom. Yet how might this be achieved? Some first steps would be to draw attention to what symbolic competence is and how specific histories and symbols might be relevant to and performed by members of a particular community of practice. As Kramsch (2006) stated, “these practices are especially necessary in situations where power, status, and speaking rights are unequally distributed and where pride, honor and face are as important as information” (p. 250). This was certainly the case with Alejandro and the Runa Takiks, and I would argue that it is an important lesson for most language learners who come from European or Western cultures. These individuals must not only learn to tread lightly on the different cultural landscapes of other groups, but also recognize that the groups in question might have different perceptions of the language learner’s own cultural memories. Exactly how to foster this awareness and reflexivity is an ample topic for future research.

Finally, language learners might look more closely at what constitutes expertise by a particular community, and act accordingly in those activities where that expertise is required. They might also benefit by attuning themselves to the hierarchy of a target language community; what Cicourel (1995) terms the “socially distributed authority and power relations” among members (p. 364). Learning who to talk to in the community, as well as how to talk to them, could play a key role in increased access to all community members. This access could in turn pave the way for augmented legitimate participation by novice language learners, encouraging alignment, or at least understanding, of their symbolic competences with those of the community of practice.
Notes

i All names of the band and its members are pseudonyms.

ii Duff’s review can be accessed at the following website:

References


Appendix 1: Lyrics to La Orquesta

Bellas melodias entonan los violines
primera, segunida, prepárense para tocar
The violins ringing like lovely singing.
The violins ringing like lovely song.

El clarinete dulcemente, toca dua dua
clarinet
clarinete dulcemente, toca dua dua da
The clarinet, the clarinet
Goes doodle doodle doodle doodle dat.
The clarinet, the clarinet
Goes doodle doodle doodle dat.

El fagot señala el contrapunto, la, la la la
el fagot señala el contrapunto, la, la la la
The trumpet is braying,
Ta ta ta ta ta ta ta ta ta ta ta ta

La flauta domina, con su trina, con su
la flauta domina, con su trina, trina, trina tra
La trompeta resuena, papapa parabapa
papapa parabapa
la trompeta resuena, papapa parabapa pa pa
The horn, the horn
Awakes me at morn.
The horn, the horn
Awakes me at morn.

En cambio el trombon no ofrece
problemas, sol, do, do, sol, sol sol sol do
The drums playing two tones
They’re always the same tones.
The drums playing two tones.
They’re always the same.

cancionero.asp?ver=t&cat=65 (Spanish version) and
Appendix 2: Transcription Key

Languages:

normal font  Spanish
bold font  Quichua

Conversation transcriptions:

( )  inaudible utterance
(bueno)  best estimation of nearly inaudible utterance
[  
[  onset of overlap of utterances
]  
]  end of overlap of utterances
=  utterances with no discernable silence between them
(0.5)  silence represented in tenths of a second
(.)  "micropause," ordinarily less than 2/10 of a second
.  falling/final intonation
?  rising intonation
,  continuing intonation
:  prolongation or stretching of sound.
-  cut-off or self-interruption
bueno
BUEno
BUEno  increased loudness
°  markedly quiet or soft talk.
↑↓  sharp rise (up) or fall (down) in pitch
<>  rushed stretch of talk
><  slow stretch of talk
<  talk starts with a rush
((cough))  transcriber description of events
hhHHH  aspiration or laughter

1 Retrieved and adapted March 22, 2008 from http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/soc/faculty/schegloff/