


Chapter 18

Interpreting Solidarity: Bilingual Teachers in New Latino South Spaces

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ABSTRACT

In metro Charlotte, North Carolina, dynamic newcomer Latinx communities have changed the demographics of K-8 education as the region has emerged as a new gateway for an influx of immigrants and migrants. Today, in what has come to be known as “the New Latino South,” K-12 teachers are eager to expand their knowledge base for working with this relatively new population. To that end, bilingual (Spanish/English) educators are increasingly tapped to serve as impromptu interpreters as monolingual administrators and teachers interact more frequently with Spanish dominant communities. Drawing from an in-depth interview sequence, the chapter narrates a Dominican-American’s lived experience with simultaneous K-12-based interpreting as a K-12 student teacher, and a licensed early-grades educator. This chapter theorizes the layered emotional and professional advocacy of heritage-language bilingual school-based professionals and their agency in advancing access and equity to public resources with recommendations for policy and practice.

Over the past twenty years, dynamic newcomer Latinx communities have changed the demographics of U.S. K-12 public education (Portes, Salas, Baquedano-López, & Mellom, 2014). This is especially true in the “New Latino South” where the Carolinas and Georgia have emerged as new gateways for a historic influx of immigrants and migrants (Salas & Portes, 2017). By 2014, North Carolina ranked

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11th nationally in terms of its Latinx population and that demographic shift has come to re-shape the state's urban, suburban, and rural school compositions; and, K-12 teachers and teacher-leaders are eager to expand their knowledge base for working with this relatively new student population (Gill, 2018; Graves & Smith, 2010; Smith & Furuseth, 2006). As a consequence, at the K-12 school level, bilingual (Spanish/English) educators increasingly find themselves tapped to serve as impromptu interpreters as monolingual administrators and teachers interact more frequently with Spanish-dominant communities (Colomer & Harklau, 2009). Even as many bilingual teachers are willing to take on the double role of teacher/interpreter, in K-12 contexts, teacher-interpreters enter a complex ethical space that sometimes puts them at odds with traditional codes-of-conduct for interpreting.

Marianna Castillo (a pseudonym) was one such bilingual educator. A child immigrant from Santo Domingo, Castillo grew up interpreting for her immediate and extended family in Brooklyn. She began her teaching career in the North Carolina piedmont, first as a student-teacher and then as a licensed educator. Along the way, Castillo found herself once again in the role of interpreter—frequently called upon to help teachers understand parents and vice versa in the dual-immersion K-8 school where she began her student-teaching and continued as a licensed K-8 educator for some six years.

Juxtaposing literatures about the roles of K-12 interpreters and intercultural communication against an in-depth interview sequence (Seidman, 2013), the chapter narrates Castillo's lived experience with impromptu K-12-based translation and interpretation as a K-12 student, a student-teacher, and a licensed professional. Taking up Castillo's story as a synecdoche, the chapter theorizes the layered emotional and professional advocacy of heritage-language bilingual school-based professionals and their agency in advancing access and equity to public resources. Our argument is that Castillo's story matters both for K-12 education and for the translation/interpreting community of practice. To that end, the authors align the analytic narrative that the authors present here with a growing chorus of scholarship committed to understanding Black and Brown teachers' decision-making processes through the lived and narrated perspectives of Black teachers themselves (Dillard, 2019). In sharing Castillo's story, our purpose is to contribute to a larger discussion surrounding the agency of bilingual (Spanish/English) educators serving as interpreters in K-12 education.

School-based interpreters are expected to adhere to the ethical cannon of disassociating themselves from the interpreting act. However, by so doing, interpreters may inadvertently hinder the communication process and ultimately be a disservice to traditional core values in K-12 education such as caring, interconnectedness and facilitating access to public resources. While Castillo's "intercultural moves" in interpreting solidarity that the authors will describe in the sections that follow may seem unconventional and disruptive to normative interpretation scenarios, her moves embrace the overarching communication principles for engaging educators in "the process of supporting diverse learners in communicative [...] tasks that move them towards linguistic and cultural equity" (Khote, 2018, p. 154). Bilingual teachers may reluctantly face challenges in terms of agency, advocacy and even neutrality as they perform their duties (like Castillo herself) because of their unique positionalities.

In this chapter, the authors argue the need for redefining the concept of 'neutrality' in current codes of professional interpretation conduct in ways that capture the nuances of today's K-12-based interpretation. Finally, the authors suggest that school systems formalize the role of a school-based 'bilingual advocate' to serve as a cultural ambassadors promoting communication accessibility and cultural awareness in school environments. The formalization of such a role could inculcate the interconnectedness urgently needed within and beyond the increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse schooling contexts of the underserved immigrant populations in the New Latino South (Rodríguez-Castro, Salas, & Murray, 2016).

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