

Our decolonial conversations with Performance voice training in Higher Education in the South African pluriverse

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This article shares conversational thinking around the complexities present in the vocal development of the actor-in-training in a multilingual, multicultural training context, specifically referring to South African Higher Education. It is framed from the authors' lived experience and discusses the pedagogical constructs present in the pluriverse where voice is central in the performance of identity. Organic congruencies, humans as multimodal bodyminded beings and embodiment are discussed as points of departure. The interlinked relationship between voice and language is considered. Searching for a humanizing pedagogy, translingualism and embodied learning, amongst others, are offered as possible means to engage human congruencies in the multilingual, multicultural setting. Certain principles of Lessac Kinesensics are engaged with in this on-going project contributing to a decolonial approach to performance voice training in Higher Education.

Keywords: conversational thinking, decolonial, multilingual, multicultural, pluriverse, voice pedagogy, Lessac Kinesensics

Contextualization

The preparation of the actor for performance is a complex issue in a monolingual, monocultural community. This complexity is vastly multiplied in multilingual, multicultural training situations. These multiplicities bring together into the same program potential actors from a wide diversity of backgrounds, where each background needs, in some way, to be honored, appreciated, and then built upon towards the common goal of character presentation in a heightened performance domain. As such, the uni-verse (sic) of the voice-training program needs to draw on the pluri-verse of

the participant profile.¹ A pluriverse, as defined by Escobar (2018, xvi),² is “a world where many worlds fit” which includes the diverse life-worlds and positionalities of the community within the specific context, which for us is performance voice training in Higher Education in South Africa.

We contribute to this pluriverse as the complex life worlds that shaped us are vastly different. We are three South Africans working and living in South Africa, yet our differences outnumber our similarities. We are from different generations, different parts of the country, different ethnicities, different genders, different cultures. We have different educational backgrounds, and we ‘speak in different tongues’. Borrowing from Chimakonam and Ogbonnaya (2021: 3) we seek to speak together through a process of “conversational thinking”, to ‘con-verse’³ as we grapple how to “delegitimize intellectual... borders as instruments of constraints, marginalization and discrimination.” They offer that conversational thinking as a decolonial practice “demonstrates the significance of other epistemic fronts and the viability of other manifestations of reason” (2021:4).

Within the context of conversational thinking, the purpose of this article is to converse about our reflections, considerations, and concerns, perhaps our discomforts and empathies (following Zembylas & Papamichael 2017, 2) as we seek to strategically navigate the classroom as a micro pluriverse. Our journey(s) are framed from our ontological positions and lived experiences navigating multilingual and multicultural actors-in-training in performance voice classes. We acknowledge and foreground that we do not necessarily share or can identify with the lived experiences that shaped the actors-in-training in our pluriversal classrooms. Each one of us merges, and performs, our idiosyncratic self, informed by our genders, ethnicities, generations, cultural and socio-linguistic binds. We contextualize our conversations from our perspective(s) as facilitators that often do not share language on an L1 level with the actor-in-training participants. As we ‘con-verse’, we continue to learn from every actor-in-training in a performance voice class.

¹ Following Martinez-Vargas’ (2020) position on decolonizing Higher Education in South-Africa.

² Escobar draws here from the Zapatista of Chiapas (Harvey 1998). A discussion on the Zapatistas falls outside the scope of this conversation.

³ ‘From Latin conversari “to dwell, live with, keep company with” (<https://www.etymonline.com/word/converse>).

In the spirit of Escobar, Martinez-Vargas, Zembylas & Papamichael, we invite you to participate in our process of conversational thinking as we ‘con-verse around’ and meander through various interrelated themes that inform performance voice training within the South African pluriversal classroom.

First Conversation: Complex Identity and Language entanglements within the South African pluriverse

South Africa is a country that celebrates 11 official languages, multiple ethnicities, and diverse socio-cultural practices. Following Nyoni (2013, 87), we posit that the multiple identities, life worlds and socio-cultural complexities contribute to the need to navigate South Africa as a pluriverse. We acknowledge the historical inequalities that have shaped our reality in South Africa. The colonial legacy is deeply embedded, complex and layered. In Higher Education, strategies towards decoloniality have been endeavored, yielding outcomes that are often superficial (Khumalo 2021, 4) as pedagogies and methodologies still reflect a colonial lens. Martinez-Vargas (2020, 120) reminds of the complexity of decolonial education and offers that it should not be about elimination or unification but rather diversity and plurality to “preserve the heterogeneity of the world, its worldviews and epistemic systems.” In the performing arts, this implies reimagining and de-centering the influence of colonial methodologies, aesthetics and perceptions, conveyed through the body.

Considering that the body (and therefore the voice) is central to understanding, ‘meaning-making’ and identity as one engages with the world (Csordas 1994, 138), we pose the pedagogies and methodologies applied are crucial as we engage with students’ embodied sense of self in the performance voice class. We realize, as we attempt to grapple with these complexities, that we must, before considering a decolonial performance voice pedagogy, take cognizance of the multiple modalities of humans, the embodiment of becoming, the developmental progression from voice to language and the performance of identity through the voice/language continuum.

Complexities

Multimodal bodyminded beings

Bodymind, as a monist concept, counters the dualistic notion of the human body as corporeal object, housing, and in service of, the mind. Haarhoff, Munro and Coetzee (2022, 235) describe bodymind as “an understanding and performance of self, established through the coalescence of multimodal, interrelated systems simultaneously present and operative...the primary connection to, and agent of, being-in-the-world.” Consequently, we perceive and honor humans as complex (crediting Blommaert 2014), multimodal⁴ bodyminded beings (Munro 2017, 8-9), continuously developing and shifting in their sense, perception and performance of self (Munro 2018,5-6). These continuous developments and shifts are due to bodyminded plasticity (Meloni 2019, 9-10) which is congruent to all humans. Bodyminded plasticity evokes humans as relatively stable beings continuously becoming, due to their interaction with and through the environment, with and through themselves, and with and through their reactions to their own responses to the environment, resulting in the ever-evolving idiosyncratic being of self in the world. This plasticity, present in all humans, and the idiosyncratic becoming, determines the fluid interweave of object/subject or instrument/agent that manifests through the bodymind in the presentation of self and the self’s perception of, and engagement with, their life world.

Developmental progressions since gestation, through birth, and specifically during early childhood, are significantly congruent yet unique. These developmental progressions include various modalities, for example: the physical, emotional, social, cultural and linguistic. The fetus is exposed to the languages that the biological mother speaks. The language that the mother typically speaks while pregnant, is referred to as motherese. The new-born is able to respond to motherese from very early on (Parlato-Oliveira, Saint-Georges, Cohen, Pellerin, Pereira, Fouillet, Chetouani, Dommergues & Viaux-Saveton 2021, 2) but very quickly starts responding to the languages, behaviors and actions used to communicate with the child by their primary care givers. As the child interacts with their environment, the ‘ways of doing’ present in that life world are mirrored and explored by the child.

⁴ Multimodal in this context implies various interrelated aspects found within humankind i.e physical, psychological, spiritual, emotional, cultural etc.

These ‘ways of doing’ are multiple and include socio-cultural, linguistic, and spiritual practices. Due to bodyminded plasticity, these ‘ways of doing’ steer the development of the child, contributing to the idiosyncratic becoming of the child, resulting in a personally unique object/subject interweave and building into (and onto) the individualized genetic profile manifestations through the process of embodiment.

Embodied process of becoming

Lauwrens (2022, 8) posits that embodiment is the process of the simultaneously being, experiencing and ‘meaning-making’ of the “material body and the body’s orientation in the environment” through all modalities. Embodiment thus implies that the bodyminded being does not function, experience or express in isolation, but in a corporealized socio-cultural context. Varela et al. (1993, 51) declare that to be human implies that one is always in a situation or context, thus the individual cannot be separated from the world in which they live and act (Dourish 2008, 18). Human experience is therefore dependent on context, and, as a result, the embodied experience is always concrete and individual (Bowman 2000, 43), shaping the individual as bodyminded self. By implication, the system or process of embodiment reaches beyond self-awareness to extend to social and cultural contexts. Evidence of this unique process of being and becoming is provided by several areas of scholarship regarding humans.⁵

Because humans, as bodyminded beings, manifest their complex, multimodal selves through their behaviors and actions, culture and language intertwine when used and expressed through their bodies (including voice).⁶ Rudwick (2018, 5) reminds of the interweave of “language, culture and ethnicity”. As such, the child in their process of becoming acquires specific or multiple ‘linguaging’ processes shaped by culture as they observe, mirror, and apply what they encounter and engage with in their life world (see Cole, Hakkarainen & Bredikyte, 2010). wa Thiongo (1986) posits that language as culture must be seen to be a product of the history it, in turn, reflects. Barker and

⁵ Of note here, for our argument, are the areas of cultural neuroscience and language development.

⁶ It is the intertwining of behaviour, actions, culture, and language that compel us not to refer to voice but rather to *bodyvoice* in our pedagogical practices.

Galasinski (2001, 4) articulate this phenomenon when they note that "... it is the primary language that allows for the transmission of specific cultural and traditional ideas from one generation to the next. To understand culture is to explore how meaning is produced symbolically through the signifying practices of language." In this embodied process of becoming, engaging with and through their life world, making sense of their life world, learning to engage with that specific life world, sensing, perceiving, and performing themselves in that life world, voice, languaging and enculturation are interwoven.

From voice to language

Humans, barring pathology, are born with voice.⁷ At this point of development, voice, as part of, and a continuum from, body is reflexive. Voice soon develops into a mode of expression and communication (Burnham, Kitamura & Lancuba, 1999). It is very early on, in the development of voice, that range of tone, inflection patterns and the shaping of vowels, observed by the child in their immediate environment, are explored and mirrored by the child (see Hoff 2015, 451-496). During these phases, the vocal instrument⁸ of the baby evolves to ensure speech capability. This process of preparing and exploring the shift from voice to speech demonstrates the fluid and continuously present object/subject intersect (Steyn & Munro, 2015). Exploration of the shaping of the oral cavity to produce vowels is followed by exploring potential places of constriction in the oral cavity to produce consonants. A lively interplay, exploring, mirroring and echoing vowels and consonant/vowel patterns observed in their life world, particularly communicated to them by their primary care givers, leads towards language acquisition in action. Languaging develops from, relies on, and is interrelated with voice.

This organic development of voice through speech to language/s is immersive and, as previously indicated, infused with socio-cultural practices (Hoff & Tian, 2005). As human development is multimodal, the embodied process of becoming-in-action interweaves the various

⁷ We acknowledge the potential problems around this statement. A discussion on the post-human perception of voice falls outside the scope of this argument.

⁸ Perhaps as a fluid and subjective object of becoming.

modalities, shaping the idiosyncratic, the ownership and expression of self, evolving towards the manifestation and performance of identity, thus a multimodal bodyminded being. The adult bodymind is, as such, inclusive of, manifesting and/or performing, the various modalities simultaneously present in the becoming of self in action, resulting in a personally unique individual, despite, and because of, human congruencies.

Manifesting Identity through the voice/language continuum

Within the continuous embodied becoming of the self, voice, speech and language are thus interwoven and simultaneously present, relying on the fluid object/subject (instrument/agent) intersect. With specific reference to voice, speech and language, the 'object' implies the so-called vocal apparatus or instrument, which is, in itself, personally unique based on its anatomical and physiological form and function, shaped over time. The unique structure of the vocal instrument results in a specific acoustic output (Podesva & Callier, 2015; Scott & McGettigan, 2016), generally referred to as the 'tonal quality of the voice'. The acoustic output is determined, amongst other aspects, by subglottal pressure, the size and height of the larynx, the length and depth of the vocal folds, length and width of the resonator, the size and shape of the oral cavity and the movement of the articulators (see Scott & McGettigan 2016, 290-291; Zhang, 2016). Most effective use of the vocal apparatus, or 'voice as object', ensures vocal health and optimal acoustic output possible within each human's unique anatomical and physiological parameters at a specific time of their lives.

Equally, or perhaps even more importantly, is the manifestation and/or performance of identity in and through the vocal sound/tonal quality. This performance is deeply subjective and manifests the multimodal sense of self being in the world (see Creese & Blackledge, 2015). The performance of identity in and through vocal sound is the (mostly) sub-conscious 'shaping' of the 'objective' sound of the vocal apparatus to express intent, emotion, engagement, a personal point of view and identity in communication. These expressors may be specific to a cultural practice, may be in response to a cultural practice, or may be context driven, but are always a subjective manifestation and/or performance of identity. Examples are a 'breathy' or a 'creaky' voice (Scott & McGettigan 2016, 292) which are not contributing to vocal health or acoustic output but contribute to the

embodied performance of the personally unique multimodal bodyminded self. This subjective shaping of the objective voice is continuously present in various elements of languaging.

The unique usage of voice, in connected speech, within a specific language is known as prosody, thus the varied and nuanced application of pitch, intensity, and duration in connected speech (Lemmer & Munro 2019:301). Prosody performs intent and may manifest the speaker's identity within the specific communicative context (see Duff 2015, 62), shaped by the environment or life world of the bodyminded being. The use of prosody in languaging can indicate positionality in communication, behavior, and action. Creese and Blackledge (2015, 24) offer that bilingual or multilingual speakers may manifest a repertoire of identities depending on varying/shifting socio-cultural contexts and complexities. Such contexts and complexities are evident and audible in pronunciation, dialect and accent (Trofimovich & Turuševa 2015, 235).

Given the above, it follows that languaging cannot be separated from voice and speech, nor from any of the modalities simultaneously present in the bodymind. This interweaving of cultural, vocal identity and language are foregrounded in South African languages. Tension is potentially created when colonial pedagogies and methodologies, designed to engage with a single or dominant language are applied in a multilingual setting. Such practices run the risk of adhering to “the coloniser’s cultural codes, reproducing colonial languages and colonial figures” (Martinez-Vargas 2020, 116).

Acknowledging this inevitability has direct and irrevocable implications for any bodyminded orientated performance voice training program in Higher Education in the South African pluriverse.

The performance voice classroom dynamic is further shaped by the actors-in-trainings' perceptions of the (or, more specifically, their) performance voice and performance voice expectations. Such perceptions and expectations may present tensions between their idiosyncratic selves and the colonial perceptions and aesthetics enforced by the colonial oppressive past during which colonial performance voice pedagogies were directly transplanted to South African education without honoring the idiosyncratic complexities of the South African pluriverse. It is these idiosyncratic complexities that cry out for a decolonial approach to ensure inclusion and belonging.

Second conversation: Decolonial education

Decoloniality implies the removal of the “centrality of Whiteness as an instrument of power” (Arday et al. 2020, 298) and it challenges social categories of race and power (Zembylas 2018, 2). Decolonial education strives to collapse power in the classroom and to create an environment where peer teaching and learning are embraced. It aims to acknowledge the knowledges, insights, and wisdoms that each student has regarding their own lived experiences and life worlds. Martinez-Vargas (2020, 120) reminds that “decolonisation is not substituting one hegemonic system for a new one represented by a single ethnic group but rather, being able to put into value different perspectives and thus, epistemic systems.” In the performance voice class such a paradigm sets out to create and promote a space where the facilitator has expertise regarding the specific discipline while ‘meaning-making’ and learning are the shared responsibility of all participants. This practice potentially diffuses the presence of power. The shared meaning-making is a non-linear and rhizomic process where each participant explores the subject knowledge and skills in relation to their own complex multimodal sense of self, which may include spiritual, socio-cultural and linguistic idiosyncrasies. In terms of performance voice training, this meaning-making process extends to voice, speech, language, and the socio-cultural or spiritual notions of what functional and expressive aesthetic voice quality and effective speech might entail. As such, colonially infused performance voice training approaches must be disrupted and reimagined in a way that centers the subjective voice within performance voice training in South Africa. Ultimately, a decolonial performance voice pedagogy should become a humanizing pedagogy (Zembylas 2018, 1) that seeks to enable each participant’s full humanity by reclaiming language, space and identity (Zavala 2016, 2) and acknowledging each participant as an expert of their own unique experiences as a multimodal bodyminded being.

Locating the performance voice in the South African pluriverse

Bells (2008, 15) suggests that arriving at a single definition of performance would be an injustice, as it is interpreted differently by different people and cultures. It could be deemed a

heightened form of communication of the bodyminded self to an audience⁹, that is simultaneously a product and a process. The 'audience' might be a formal construct, or a collective such as a community, the other members of a class situation, or participant-observers within various pluriversal practices.

Within this context, it can be inferred that performance, through the utilization of bodymind and by implication bodyvoice,¹⁰ can convey, perform or re/present a product (such as a story) through behavior and action within diverse contexts, influenced or shaped by a range of pluriversal expectations and contexts. McDougall (2006, 336) posits that "the human body is a verbal signifier that encodes movement... as a condition of culture". We offer that performance is an embodied and envoiced process of communicating, to self and/or audience, a story,¹¹ using bodyvoice as an integral instrument and agent. To this we ask: what is the intersection of the subjective bodyvoice expressors in South African performances that concern themselves with cultural, spiritual or traditional identification? What role does bodyvoice play in these performance spaces, and how important is it? These questions require that we speak through the context where "Africans do not conceive of themselves as separated from the cosmos but as being completely integrated into a universe that is much larger than any of them" (Mazama 2002, 220).

Identity in the African paradigm extends beyond a mere surface identification. Gleason (1983, 1) attests that "identity studies had to conceptualize the linkage between the individual personality and the ensemble of the social and cultural group as opposed to it being solemnly about relations of individuals to society". By implication, African identity intersects language, culture, heritage, ethnicity, ancestry, spirituality, tradition, tribe and so forth.

Chinyowa (2000, 87), argues that aesthetics of African performance is rooted in ritual performances and thus rely on orality. Gilbert and Tompkins (1996, 57) contend that oral-based performances appear to be more fundamental to the performance process than mere semantics. With

⁹ Schechner (2002) describes performance to be a marker of identity that adorns the body to tell a story.

¹⁰ As alluded to in footnote 4.

¹¹ In the widest sense of the word.

such a strong connection, it becomes imperative to converse through performance voice training, applying a decolonial lens, as we seek to understand what role bodyvoice plays as manifestation and performance of the multiple identities within the South African pluriverse.

Performance voice training in Higher Education in the South African pluriverse

In accordance with the policies of the South African Department of Higher Education and Training, most classes, including performance voice, are taught in English (Hibbert & van der Walt 2014, 15), even though ten other official languages may be present. This is viewed as a pragmatic arrangement but cannot be divorced from the lingering impact of colonialism, and by implication, the Eurocentric cultural paradigm and the danger of a hegemonic knowledge. The practical use of English as lingua franca results in an artificial space where classes are taught in English although there may be no L1 English speakers in the room. The use of English as language of instruction at a tertiary level thus perpetuates a power structure. This creates tension between the language mode presented in the classroom and the different language systems that the actor-in-training draws from in their life world (see Stein & Newfield 2006, 4). Such hegemonic power structures should be collapsed and dismantled as the actors-in-training, as active agents in the learning process, discover their own vocal expression, while balancing the fluid object/subject intersect which is key to performance voice training.

The complexities in navigating this linguistically artificial space have been the subject of research and discourse (Msila 2007; Stein & Newfield, 2006). These complexities intensify in the performance voice class where actors-in-training need to sense and connect with, embody and envoice, their own bodyminded self in action, specifically to explore and enhance the function and expression (Hackney 2002, 42, 48) of bodyvoice in performance contexts. It is the object/subject intersect that foregrounds, in the complex multimodal bodyminded self, the notion that language activates feeling even when the content is not emotional (Buccino & Mezzadri 2015, 197). Emotion is ever present in the performance voice class since bodyvoice is extended to the expression of words and cannot merely be conveyed cognitively, linguistically and vocally, but embodied, envoiced or expressed through the bodyvoice (drawing on Berry 1988, 22).

It is at this point where the intersect of voice, speech and language becomes crucial as the sound system of the actor's L1 will inform the resonator shaping that extends to the forming of vowels and consonants. If training is conducted from a colonial perspective with English as the dominant language (of teaching and exploration) it will influence the way, and the paradigm from which, the training is applied. Such training may cause the South African actor-in-training to question the 'correctness' of their sound production and revert to colonial practice. Such training will possibly illicit insecurities and a cellular memory of oppressive hegemonic 'othering' (following Martinez-Vargas 2020, 116) that is in direct contrast with the purpose of performance voice training.

The goal should be to find, embrace, honor, explore and develop each actor-in-training's own bodyvoice as manifestation and expression of the idiosyncratic bodyminded self – to honor the self, first. The actor-in-training should be guided to work towards this goal though a process of self-teaching through 'organic instruction' (Lessac 2019, 22) which implies learning from and through one's awareness and sense of self. This activates the actors' self-regulation of vocal output and secures agency which will aid in collapsing the power structures associated with language. Systemic power structures may be present even if the actor-in-training is encouraged to 'translate and apply' performance voice training strategies and explorations to the phonemes of their L1. Creese and Blackledge (2015, 24) pose that multilingual speakers, using languages that have a perceived lower status, suffer what they term the "violent dominance of the dominant language" as they negotiate the manifestation and/or performance of their identities. Considering that the continued prominence of English is not only the consequence of colonialism but has a continuous central role as language of instruction, it may still be deemed dominant within the South African context. It is this power structure yielded by language that requires shifting to enable the actor to discover voicing that is more aligned with their performance of identity, embodiment and emotive expression. A more syncretic translingual approach may be considered to evolve performance voice training in the South African pluriverse.

Our translingual practice

Within the multilingual South African context, specific patterns occur linked to linguistic identity. Such patterns include code-switching when multilingual speakers consciously or subconsciously move between two or more languages creating a seemingly grammarless mixture of languages (Setati, 1998 34) signaling belonging to specific groups and cultivating a personally unique linguistic ‘community’. To empower the students’ linguistic identities, we employ a translingual approach (Munro & Lemmer, 2019). Translingualism could be viewed as the everyday shifting between languages in a manner that does not create defined boundaries between languages (Buff 2015, 60). We argue that this is relevant in a multilingual context as translingualism in performance voice training can be aligned with what Fisher-Lichte (2014, 11) refers to as the “interweaving of performance cultures.” The outcome is an engagement between different language systems that does not favor one dominant language and enables the speaker to draw on their unique cultural and linguistic resources. This reduced differentiation between languages could be applied in the performance voice class to dismantle the power relationship associated with specific languages. Guiding the actor-in-training to discover and develop their bodyvoice by means of translingualing enlivens the individual’s unique resources and could promote the interrelationship of body, breath, sound and self, supporting and enhancing the manifestation and performance of the bodyminded self in action while recognizing and navigating the various subjective multimodal (such as spiritual connections) presences in the process. It may dismantle the power structures in the performance voice class. A translingual approach requires disruptive shifts in and reimagination of the application of the typically colonial approaches in the performance voice class.

To enable translingual explorations, no singular target language should be applied, and the actor should be invited to freely explore the production of phonemes using their L1 as base (Lemmer & Munro 2019).¹² This aligns with what Lessac (1997, 5-6) terms ‘organic instruction’ or the initial conscious perception of internal physical experiences that ultimately lead to ‘self-teaching’ or the harmonic unifying of the feelings and images physically experienced and embodied. The actor must

¹² For information about translingual explorations please consult Lemmer and Munro (2019) and Munro and Lemmer (2019).

be encouraged to utilize a natural activity, experience or image as a ‘familiar event’¹³ to activate this process of letting their bodymind teach them instead of them oppressing their bodyminded selves. This enables the actor to notice their habits through experiencing and sensing (Hurt 2009, 191). The familiar event therefore initiates the explorations and then becomes a point of reference for further explorations, foregrounding each participant’s idiosyncratic self. Indeed, the translingual requires a deliberate decentering of generally accepted processes and a revisioning of performance voice training to ensure inclusivity and belonging. By implication then, the actor-in-training’s personally unique vocal discovery should be facilitated rather than prescribed. A translingual approach could assist in initiating the organic sensing of sound that potentially reduces power and removes the ‘centrality of Whiteness’, while enabling each student’s unique linguistic expression.

Enabling an idiosyncratic process

Individual discovery could be facilitated by enabling individual ‘storytelling’ that promotes claiming, renaming and remembering (Zavala 2016, 2) rather than monolingual explorations and prescriptive applications to text/material. The cultural shaping of the bodyminded selves should always be front and center in the pluriversal classroom (McAllister-Veil 2007, 97). No perceived ‘model’ favoring a dominant culture, and by implication a dominant language, should be provided. Rather, the actor should be guided to discover their own voice, informed by their complex multimodal sense of self – which includes all modalities while emphasizing a physical and cultural awareness, manifestation and performance of self. This would also imply deliberate and clear invitations to apply translingual expression and examples thereof.

Third conversation: Our ongoing decolonial attempt

¹³ See discussion on ‘familiar event’ below.

In a pluriverse, we pose that decolonial performance voice training should seek a dynamic and fluid balance between object/subject or instrument/agent – thus the performative skills (subjective object or instrument) demanded from performance with the unique lived experience of the performer (objective subject¹⁴ or agent). This requires developing voice/speech/language as idiosyncratic adhering to individual vocal health (and acoustic optimization). It also means honoring voice/speech/language as subjective, fostering key markers of expression of self, allowing each actor-in-training, as equal participant, to ‘give voice’ to themselves through their own unique bodyvoice. It is the task of the facilitator to seek and create strategies to facilitate embodied learning that do not employ pre-determined notions of what the performance voice should be (by targeting, for example, supposed exemplars of ‘excellence’) but facilitate discovery, exploration and skills building that serves the various life worlds present in the pluriversal classroom. Such an approach requires the facilitator to learn and consciously unlearn predetermined notions of what vocal performance ‘should be’. We pose that this process is actioned through co-created, collaborative, embodied learning.

Embodied Learning

Embodied learning relates to embodiment and can be described as a somatic approach to learning that considers the individual’s entire experienced history and current being-in-the-world (Kerka 2002), thus the bodyminded self in action. Johnson (1999, 12-13) holds that meaning is grounded in the body and that reason is an embodied process, supporting our perception of a complex multimodal bodymindedness of being, shaped by, and through, lived experiences within a unique life world. It is indeed the embodiment of the lived experiences that results in bodyminded idiosyncrasies. Voice specifically has been defined as an expression of personal and communal power (Barnwell, as cited in Armstrong & Pearson 2000, 55). Therefore, facilitating the individual’s vocal development, through embodied learning, should promote bodyminded idiosyncrasies. Bakker *et al.* (2011) describes the process of embodied learning as one that starts with expressive exploration that leads to embodied schema and culminates in embodied metaphors. Munro (2018) offers principles of

¹⁴ Lauwrens (2022, 13) reminds of the Sobchack notion of subjective object and objective subject.

embodied learning that can be applied to navigate the pluriversal classroom and potentially collapse power. These are holistic integration, organic congruencies, personal uniquenesses, sensory awareness, the inner and outer, continuous change, habitual patterns, re-patterning and self-teaching. The outcome of the use of embodied learning is an elevated awareness of the bodyminded self in functional and expressive action (see Gustafson 1998).

Another consideration is the responsible use of imagery to assist the actor-in-training with discovering their voice. Since bodyvoice is reliant on inner sensing, images can be used by facilitators to enable the actor-in-training to interpret and sense specific aspects. Inevitably, such facilitator-driven image ‘guidances’ are dependent on the facilitator’s own training and cultural specificity. Riley (2004, 447) states that ways should be sought to communicate imagery and movement without generating a mind/body dualism.¹⁵ This could be aided by the facilitator sharing images from their unique lifeworld. These images should evidence the intersect of the various modalities that are prominent within their sense of self.¹⁶ We caution that although example images may be highly effective in elements of the vocal development, the actor-in-training should rather be invited to find their own idiosyncratic or culturally specific images drawing from their modalities shaped by their life worlds. They should be encouraged to pay attention to and share their images as these are borne into their consciousness by being alert to introspective sensations (breath and heartbeat), physical sensations, affective feelings and idiosyncratic perceptions. This will enable the use of images that emanate from the ‘self’ and are free of cultural and symbolic misinterpretation or reference. Such practice aligns with the Kinesensic concept of Inner Harmonic Sensing, while acknowledging the fluid intersect of object/subject within bodyvoice. This perhaps serves as a step toward a decolonial training process where each actor-in-training’s life world and each actor-in-training’s story is invited in (Zavala 2016).

Honoring congruencies and idiosyncrasies through developmental progressions

¹⁵ Lessac (2019,73-75) reminds that metaphors and images can be ‘borrowed or rented’ but not enforced.

¹⁶ An example of an idiosyncratic use of metaphor is the invitation to engage in a ‘pleasure smell’, which is defined within LK as each person’s recall of an aroma (as familiar event) that stimulated in them a sense of well-being (see Sowndhararajan & Kim 2016). Drawing from the olfactory sense is valuable as the olfactory sense stimulates the amygdala and hippocampus, which relates to memory (see Soudry, Lemogne, Malinvaud, Consoli, & Bonfils, 2011).

Within the pluriversal South African classroom where complex selves manifest and perform various ethnicities, genders, languages and cultures, where decolonial education should be honored and applied, we suggest that developmental progressions from voice to speech to language present during early childhood development, provide guidance on how to create strategies that will be applicable to the multiple selves and ensure inclusivity.¹⁷ Table 1 (Lemmer 2018, 41) provides an indication of how the humanly congruent developmental progression of voice to speech to language/s can inform performance voice training. Note that the indicators of age should serve as fluid markers of organic development and not as exact moments in development.

Table 1: Developmental progression of voice to speech to language/s (Lemmer 2018, 42. Adapted from Luchsinger and Arnold (1965) and Hoff (2006))

Age	Developmental aspect	Corresponding aspect in actor training
1 month	Tone in reflex cries	Exploration of tone connected to body and breath
2 months	Structured sounds of babbling	Exploration of tone, phonation, resonance and initiation of resonator shaping (vowels)
8–10 months	Beginning of speech comprehension and association with linguistic elements	Production of vowels and consonants

¹⁷ We are aware of the discourse on ‘post-development’ that calls for a de-linking from “cultural and ideological bases of development” (Demaria & Kothari 2017, 2). Although not aligned with the context in which we refer to development here, it cautions against the essentialist lens promoted within hegemonic knowledge systems.

13–18 months	Symbolic consciousness initiates and words and monoverbal sentences develop	Application of tone and phonemes to words and carrier sentences
18–24 months	Biverbal sentences	Application to connected speech and text
3–4 years	Structured pluriverbal sentences and completion of language acquisition	Application to performance, which implies employment of prosody

Reflecting on the table above, we offer that the actor-in-training’s performance voice development follows an organic and embodied learning paradigm. Such an embodied learning program may align well with Lessac Kinesensic training which offers three Vocal NRGs namely Tonal NRG, Structural NRG and Consonant NRG (1997). Munro, Kinghorn, Kur, Aronson, Krebs and Turner (2017) offer that Tonal NRG, which we define as the conscious engagement with the sensation of the vibration of vocal tone, leading to effective vocal fold function and resonator length and shape, effectively explored and applied through inner sensation, contributes to the idiosyncratic development of the tonal quality of the voice while supporting vocal health. We posit that a person’s vocal tone and concomitant use of Tonal NRG is intersectional to their sense and manifestation of self. Structural NRG is the organic use of space and shape of the oral cavity to provide clarity of vowels during languaging. The facilitator should provide strategies and explorations that empower the actor-in-training to draw from their processes of sensing and feeling, to rely on their ‘teacher within’ (Ibid 2017, 4) and to allow themselves to explore the shapes and sizes of their oral cavities as they discover the vowels present in their own specific process of languaging. The facilitator, working towards clarity through optimal shaping of vowels in the language(s) the actor-in-training identifies with, could provide the opportunity of agency regarding space and shape within the oral cavity within different contexts. Consonant NRG relies on the sensing and feeling of places and manners of constriction within the oral cavity to create consonants (Ibid 2017, 4). The facilitator should provide the actors-in-training with strategies and explorations in which they can take ownership and find

consonants from their own languaging within various places, and through various manners in their oral cavities, then effective use of consonants in whatever language and situational contexts may occur. The Vocal NRGs allow for the creation of strategies and explorations that can be applied in the pluriversal classroom in a manner that honors the complex multimodal bodyminded manifestation and performance in action. Furthermore, idiosyncratic use of tone quality, pitch levels, loudness and other prosodic factors contain social information that should be used in manifesting and performing the differences (Roth & Tobin 2010, 12).

A pedagogical principle within Lessac Kinesensics that we find of value here is the familiar event. Kinesensics considers *familiar events* to be a process that invites the actor-in-training to search for sensations or ‘awarenesses’, which they organically engage with, gracefully and with ease. These events may "stem from instinctive, intuitive behavior" (Lessac 1997, 6) that contributes positively to their sense of well-being within their idiosyncratic life worlds. The familiar event is a phenomenon that encapsulates and encourages the fluid intersect between the so-called objective instrument and the subjective multimodal bodyminded self. In this way the specific idiosyncratic self of the actor-in-training participant is honored and substantiated, after which this substantiation can be used as a base from which to ‘venture out’ into other performance contexts, characters and creative endeavors. During this next phase of performance voice training, the elements and processes shared above will be mirrored and echoed, as the characters’ multimodal bodyminded self, shaped by their life worlds will be layered onto the idiosyncratic self of the actor-in-training.¹⁸ The onus is on us as facilitators to be aware of potential power patterns present within Lessac Kinesensics as a previously transplanted colonial approach and then reimagine the approach towards a decolonial practice that enables voice/speech/language/s to emerge organically from the bodyminded being without pre-conceived notions of ‘correctness’ or ‘appropriateness’ or othering.

Effective performance voice training within the South African context should be a decolonial practice where each actor-in-training maintains their own power and actively engages with self-

¹⁸ An in-depth discussion of this process falls outside the scope of this conversation.

teaching. This requires that the facilitator respects the different selves through an invitation for each actor-in-training to manifest and perform their unique languaging, informed and shaped by their culture and their spiritual relation to voice. These complexities call for decolonial education strategies that facilitate each participant to voice *themselves*, to tell *their story* towards *reclaiming and healing* (Zavala 2016). As we continue to strive towards decolonial facilitation we acknowledge that we cannot fully remove nor delink ourselves from our own journeys that were strongly informed by colonial methodologies, languages and aesthetics.

We are aware of moments of discomfort (Zembylas & Papamichael 2017) where we question our own lenses habituated through our own processes of becoming. We are aware of moments where we fail abysmally as we fall back into our idiosyncratic life worlds and revert to our “space(s) of domination” (Martinez-Vargas 2020, 113), however different they may be. In our conversations and practices, we continue to grapple and question whether decolonial facilitation is possible when many structures are still reflective of a colonial legacy. In our current phase on our journey towards decoloniality, we resolve to have empathy (Zembylas & Papamichael 2017). We acknowledge our idiosyncratic shortcomings, be they due to our ethnicities, generations, cultural and socio-linguistic binds. We commit to empower the actors-in-training to collaborate, co-express and co-create.

Conclusion

Our aim with this article was to converse with the complexities that constitute the training of the performance voice in the South African pluriverse. It was our goal to highlight the complex and specific dynamics of voice/speech/language as markers of identity that are deeply connected to the multimodal bodyminded self, manifested and/or performed in behavior and action. We argue that the continued dominance of English as a language of instruction potentially establishes a power structure in the performance voice training context that does not honor nor contribute to a decolonial pedagogy. From our perspectives and experiences as multilingual voice facilitators, we offered ideas towards a

potential translingual approach that requires shifts in the application of the colonially infused approaches transplanted during our colonial oppressive past.

In our conversational thinking, we drew from our shared knowledge, skills and idiosyncratic experiences as Kinesensic trainers and South African bodyvoice facilitators to decenter typical performance voice training practices that favor a hegemonic practice. Within this context, we suggest that principles and concepts from Lessac Kinesensics can possibly be reimagined to serve the pluriversal classroom. In our conversations, we specifically referred to invitations for idiosyncratic use of metaphors or images; Vocal NRGs as aligned to the development of voice, speech and language; allowing for simultaneous presences of various languages within the multilanguage classroom; fostering familiar events from each participant's life world that put each actor-in-training at the center of their own performance voice education; and encouraging inner harmonic sensing and the teacher-within as means to provide agency and to collapse the hegemonic power in the classroom.

In our conversational thinking, we acknowledged and responded to the need to disrupt the colonial presences in Higher Education in South Africa (Martinez-Vargas 2017). We specifically grappled with responsibly reimagining and disrupting the dominance of colonial performance voice training practices. For us, our task to create a performance voice “world where many worlds fit” (Escobar 2018, xvi) is an ever-evolving process and warrants continued commitment, discussion, failure and research. Our decolonial attempt to facilitate a pluriversal performance voice classroom is far from perfect and far from complete. It is a process that will evolve as we continue to ‘con-verse’.

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