Negotiating Power and Translation in a Bilingual 
(British Sign Language/English) Rehearsal Room

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ABSTRACT

Deaf people are typically encouraged to participate in theatre through the medium of sign language interpreted performances, translation events that the majority of deaf spectators do not consider effective in providing accessibility. This article draws on doctoral research that interrogates theatre-making techniques that might provide equality of participation in performances for deaf and hearing people. Drawing on Participatory Action Research and Applied Theatre methodologies, deaf and hearing actors create bilingual (British Sign Language and English) performances without pre-existing source texts, a process that is dependent both on the translation strategies employed within it, and on the societal conditions of deaf-hearing inequality. A socio-analysis of the power dynamics within two examples of practice is facilitated by conceptualising deaf and hearing as Bourdieusian fields. The analysis suggests that, whilst it is possible to over-ride the impact of hierarchies within such a translation event, more typically societal inequalities that impact negatively on translation processes are maintained.

Keywords: Deaf; Bourdieu; Freire; Applied Theatre; Translation; Interpreting