

Chapter 17: Research Remix: Soundwriting Studies of the English Language

By Jennifer J. Buckner, Gardner-Webb University, Boiling Springs, NC

with Benjamin Flournoy, Katie Furr, Sarah Johnson, Katie Lewis, Angela Meade, Hannah Ray, Garrett Simpson, Kate Vriesema, and Ally Ward

5. Angela Meade's Discourse Ethnography: Theater Discourse

Angela Meade goes behind the scenes to learn about the activities and terminologies used by a theater community.

Transcript

[Multiple overlapping voices make high-pitched lip trills, quieter but continuing under the following narration.]

Angela Meade: Welcome to the Millennium Playhouse, the theater at Gardner-Webb University.

[Angela's narration is interspersed with field audio, as in the next two lines.]

SM: Five minutes!

MM: Thank you, Five.

Angela: Generally, people make the trip to the theater in order to see a show, what we consider our finished product. But now, I'm going to take you behind the curtain and show you what a theater really sounds like. First, I wanted to know how the cast and crew members communicate with each other inside the theater and I received some great insights.

AW: Um, inside the theater, yelling *[laughter]* is normal. We normally yell at each other, but in that loving way.

KE: *[interrupting]* Yeah, yeah, yelling. But not when we are in the middle of a show. In the middle of a show, there's lots of random hand signals that go on because you can't talk, especially in the theater that we are currently in, working on shows: the Millennium Playhouse.

Angela: But it's quiet. Surprisingly quiet, I noticed as I observed the rehearsals. Quiet, except for warm-ups.

HS: One, two, three, four. . . .

SM: Four minutes!

MM: Thank you, Four!

HS: Munaguna, munaguna, munaguna.

Group: Munaguna, munaguna, munaguna.

Angela: Warm-ups aren't something you'll ever really see, unless you're in the theater, or you have someone to perform them for you, says one of our actors.

KE: If you'd walk in on the middle of our warm-ups, we'd sound completely insane because we're talking about things like "mother pheasant pluckers" and, and, um, "slitting sheets" and, uh, "race horses" and all those fun things that if you walked in and had no idea what we did or where you were, you'd think we were all a bunch of lunatics mimicking each other.

HS: She stood upon the balcony . . .

Group: She stood upon the balcony . . .

HS: . . . inexplicably mimicking him hiccupping . . .

Group: . . . inexplicably mimicking him hiccupping . . .

HS: . . . while amicably welcoming him in.

Group: . . . while amicably welcoming him in.

Angela: Warm-ups are what actors used to prepare themselves physically and mentally for a performance. They begin with physical warm-ups, which consist of stretching and light movement. Then, the infamous vocal warm-ups begin, which help the actors safely increase their vocal range and volume as well as practice lots of tongue-twisters so they can deliver their lines more clearly. Warm-ups aren't even the hardest part though.

SM: Three minutes!

MM: Thank you, Three!

Angela: What was the hardest thing to learn when you first started theatre?

AW: [*simultaneously with next line*] Stage directions.

KE: Stage directions and what those meant.

Angela: But why?

AW: Stage direction is one of those things that hit me really hard and I had to learn it.

Angela: What are some of those, like, terms in Stage Direction that might be tricky to learn?

AW: Upstage Left is confusing cause it's away from the audience and to the right from the audience's perspective, so it's a little bit confusing, when you first hear it.

Angela: [*laughing*] Sure.

AM: [*as narrator*] In essence, it's backwards.

KE: Cause you have your left and your right, but when it's written in your script it's "Stage Left" or "Stage Right." Gotta know what that means. Which just means the actor's right and left. And then Upstage and Downstage are a little more confusing as well, cause stages used to be raked, which meant they looked like . . . if you took stadium seating but instead of the seating being that way it was the stage? That's how it was. So if you're moving Upstage, you're going towards the back like you were walking up that raked stage, or if you're going Downstage you move down towards the audience.

SM: Two minutes!

MM: Thank you, Two!

[*vocal warm-ups continue in background*]

Angela: I suppose it's considered a necessary evil cause it's used constantly in the scripts. Stage directions ensure that every actor knows where they're going, or even where a certain prop or set piece will suddenly appear on the stage. Actors, directors, stage managers, even some script writers have adopted a kind of short-hand when it comes to writing out stage direction. They will take the first letters of the direction and write those initials as an abbreviation. For example, "Stage Right" would be written

“SR,” and “Upstage Center” might be written as “UC.” These abbreviations are found everywhere.

AW: I have a book that has not only the script but the blocking, and where people are supposed to stand and when to move.

Angela: That doesn’t include scripts and notes.

SM: One minute!

MM: Thank you, One!

Angela: During rehearsals, there’s a lot of stopping, adjusting, and restarting.

AW: If the blocking just seems really weird from the director’s point of view, if he feels like a line’s not being delivered well enough or doesn’t have the right feel behind it, or if there’s something he feels like needs to change.

Angela: Then, the general action stops. Stage direction tends to be thrown around during these adjustment times. And then, the action will begin again.

Group: Three, two, one, three two one, three two one, three two one. Two, one, two, one, two, one, two, one. One, one, one, one!

Angela: *[overlapping with group warmup above]* Now, the show is about to begin. Everyone, take your seats!

SM: Places!

AC: Thank you, Places!