

Making It Their Own :
Investigating a comprehensive approach to foreign language learning

Sakae Fujita

The Language Program at the University of California, Santa Cruz has been producing a foreign language theater called International Playhouse annually for the past eight years. This theater is comprised of various language groups that perform a play in their respective language for their fellow students, faculty and the community. This paper is based upon a qualitative case study which I designed to investigate the process of preparing, rehearsing and performing a theater piece for International Playhouse. The preparation took place over a period of 15 weeks and was conducted in the context of Japanese language-learning. My analysis of video-taped rehearsals, audio-taped interviews, and the participants' journal entries---which provided the major data for this study---revealed a series of themes. This paper will discuss the most salient features of these themes, including the intensity of the participants' effort to make their character's role, or an embodiment of the language/culture their own. It will also discuss how each student brought their own history and belief systems to the tasks of rehearsing and performing and thereby transformed both the tasks and themselves. One of the themes that was most fascinating for me was the improvisation sessions in which the students attempted to personalize the language, often with great humor, in an attempt to "make it their own."