Jagen och rösterna: Goffman, Viveka och samtalet
Selves and Voices: Goffman, Viveka and Dialogue

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The Politics of Language and Parish
Storytelling: Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe Takes on 'English Only'

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1. Separation of State and Church
It is Fall 1994, and throughout Los Angeles, factions are forming around an impending ballot initiative (Proposition 187), which would deny education and social services to undocumented immigrants. Promoters are casting the initiative as the means to 'Save Our State (SOS)'. Proposition 187 would strengthen an 'English-Only' ballot initiative in effect in California since 1986 by eliminating a sizeable population of non-English speakers from state institutions. Latino community organizations respond with media broadcasts and mass demonstrations to raise awareness of the largely anti-Mexican character of the measure.

In the midst of this impending political decision, on the first Sunday of September at St. Paul's Catholic Church, the Mass is being dedicated to las Guadalupanas, a group of Latino parishioners (predominantly women) who work throughout the year preparing for the annual church festivity of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, the patron saint of Mexico and by extension of Latin America.¹ The patron saint and festivity have been officially sanctioned by the Catholic Church worldwide for many years, although the imple-

¹ In 1945 Pope Pius XII proclaimed the Virgin of Guadalupe the "Queen of Mexico and Empress of the Americas" (Poole 1996).
mentation of the festivity is more or less elaborate, according to each parish.

Seated in the front two pews as always during the first Mass of the month, they proudly wear their medallones of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, tied with a red, white, and green ribbon around their necks. The festival is organized according to its own calendario Guadalupano, beginning in January and culminating on the December 12, the feast day of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe. For las Guadalupanas gathered for their Mass, there are barely three months remaining before the street procession, Mass, and celebration is to take place, and there is much to do. All of the details will be discussed at their regular first Sunday of the month meeting, which takes place immediately after the service.

Although state politics surrounds them, las Guadalupanas are focused on organizing the event, planning and holding bake and tamale sales to raise funds. In these and other ways, St. Paul’s parish constitutes a sanctuary and social hub for the Latino congregation. The parish offers an opportunity for both Spanish-dominant and English-dominant members to promote and familiarize their children with certain values and practices of their heritage. To this end, since 1970 the Latino congregations have operated a Spanish-medium religious education program for children called doctrina. At this time in the calendario Guadalupano, doctrina children are busy learning both how they are expected to participate in this year’s festivity and details of the story of the apparition of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe in Mexico in the year 1531.

The organization of these events could be understood in terms of a model of State and Church as discrete hierarchical structures, as depicted below:

![Diagram of State and Church Relationship]

In this model, State policy-making and Church policy-making operate independently of one another. In terms of the language rights of immigrants, for example, California state law asserts an English-only policy for all state public institutions. Catholic and other religious organizations, however, are not bound by this stipulation. Instead, these organizations have their own decision-making bodies (e.g. Catholic Archdiocese and Parish Councils) that articulate and implement guidelines and procedures regarding the use of language in religious texts and activities.

An in situ ethnographic examination of the practices and ideologies of the St. Paul’s congregation, however, suggests a more permeable boundary between State and Church, as depicted below:

![Diagram of State and Church Relationship]

In this model, political decision-making in the public domain of the State infuses what transpires in the realm of religious organizations. As elaborated below, State-implemented policies regarding linguistic and social rights of immigrants are echoed in political courses of action within St. Paul’s parish.

II. Entanglement of State and Church

The intertwining of state and church politics is evidenced in parish discourses across church activity settings. A primary example of the blending of secular and sacred worlds is found in doctrina classroom discourse surrounding the festivity of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe. Of central importance in the teaching of the famous story of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe is the involvement of the doctrina students, whose parents are recent immigrants to the state of California.
Teachers, many of whom are Guadalupanas, invite the children to co-tell the events that took place almost 500 years earlier in Mexico. In the following excerpt, teacher and student collaboratively recount the apparition of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe to Juan Diego, an Aztec Indian:

Teacher: ella se vino a aparecer
She came to appear
a quién?
to whom
a un indio.
to an Indian

⇒ Pedro: se llama Juan Diego.
His name is Juan Diego

Teacher: a Juan Diego.
to Juan Diego
el-…el era el era muy bueno,
He was very kind
y:
and
de tan bueno?
being so kind?
la Santísima Virgen le dio la gracia
that the Blessed Virgin gave him grace
de que la-de que la viera,
so that he would see her

More subtly, the teachers instill the notion that they are part of a history of oppression and redemption, as storytelling from another doctrina class indicates:

Teacher: Y por qué se quiso aparecer la Virgen en México
and why did the Virgin want to appear in Mexico

Enrique: Para cuidar a México?
to take care of Mexico
(0.5 sec. pause )

⇒ Teacher: Claro. para rescatar a a los (0.5 sec. pause) indígenas
Of course, to rescue the Indians
de la opresión de los españoles.
from Spanish oppression.

These and other continuities invoke a sense of shared religious and political history that dates back to the Spanish conquest. Moreover, the teachers implicitly socialize the children into a language for viewing not only past events in Mexico but also present social conditions in California. In these ways, the storylines of State and Church are intertwined.

The potential impact of state discriminatory policies on Latino life in the parish is palpable in other church contexts as well. Latino cultural affirmation at St. Paul’s church is tempered by the fact that Latinos constitute a minority within its mostly European American congregation. The cultural activities of las Guadalupanas and doctrina teachers and their students depend upon local parish politics, that is, the consent of the non-Latino pastor and predominantly non-Latino parish council. While Latinos have established an institutional presence for two decades, in the Fall of 1994, they are uncertain of their continued standing at St. Paul’s. A nervousness prevails: Doctrina teachers are especially mindful that their classes do not disrupt the other activities of the parish, rushing the children out of the classroom and the church vicinity. During their monthly meetings, las Guadalupanas worry about how to keep Father John on
their side. One of the group, Aurea, suggests that perhaps they should share the proceeds of their bake sales:

Aurea: Estaba pensando yo
I was thinking

a ver que ustedes qué dicen
Let's see what you say

(0.8 sec. pause)

darle de la- de la bake sale al padre
to give from the bake sale to father

porque eso es lo que a él lo anima más
because that is what encourages him more

a dejarnos hacer
to let us do

lo que estamos haciendo
what we are doing

(…)  
está bien le doy un cheque de veinte dólares
Is it okay if I give him a check for twenty dollars?

(0.5 sec. pause)

okay *okay

(1.0 sec. pause)

*Alright

Uhm (1.0 sec. pause) y ya saben que ya viene la
And you know that it is coming

El día de la Virgen de la procesión
The day of the Virgin of the procession

(1.0 sec. pause)

Vamos a necesitar (0.8 sec. pause) movernos y
We are going to need to move on and

(1.0 sec. pause)

pa la procesión no?
for the procession, right?

This sensibility is warranted, given the highly charged anti-Latino sentiments in California.

Yet, despite the eventual passage of Proposition 187 in November 1994, the Latino and non-Latino congregants are able to sustain valued life-worlds that do not completely overlap. Throughout the following year, a delicate cooperation is managed, mainly through exchanges of goods and services (e.g. financial contributions, concessions of time and space). While Proposition 187 is contested in the courts and an intense political focus on the Mexico-U.S. border dominates the media, doctrina classes continue, and the December 1995 feast of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe is celebrated again.

The year 1996, however, ushers in more negative attention to minorities in California. Slated for the November elections is Proposition 209, an initiative that would eliminate affirmative action policies that attempt to establish ethnic and gender balance in the workplace, higher education institutions and other state instituted programs. Echoing the spirit of Proposition 187 ('Save Our State (SOS)'), proponents call it the 'California Civil Rights Initiative'. At the parish, Father John has left, replaced by Father Ron, who has different plans for the parish. Tensions increase between the Latino and non-Latino parishioners. The point of contention becomes the Spanish-based church program, including doctrina classes, the Spanish Mass, and the festivity of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe.

III. Spanish in the Church: Non-Latino Voices
Throughout Spring 1996 the impact of statewide policies and prevailing exclusionary sentiments becomes increasingly visible and finally crystallizes in parish official policy. The Parish Council of St.
Paul's holds a series of meetings to discuss the possibility of eliminating the Spanish-medium classes and combining them with the English-based catechism classes. At the same time, the non-Latino parishioners publicly question the need for church activities that cater to Spanish speakers and that promote their distinct culture.

Some non-Latino parishioners argue that the current arrangement gives the impression of two parishes operating at St. Paul's. Others charge that the program fosters backward thinking and "superstitions". In April 1996, Nancy, the director of the English-medium catechism program and member of the Parish Council, sums up her position to ethnographer Patricia Baquedano-López as follows:

Nancy: You-you-you-your: (0.2 sec, pause) people (0.2 sec, pause) have turned too (.) too superstitious.

Informal and formal social encounters become occasions for working out positions on language, culture and religion. Laced throughout these discussions are stories of ethnic relations within the parish. Some of the stories are about recent events that transpired in the church; others are hypothetical narratives that relate how events should or could have transpired or could unfold in some future time. Storytelling universally is a means for helping human beings to cope with an uncertain world (Goodwin 1990, Heidegger 1962, Ochs 1994). At St. Paul's, repeated storytelling interactions serve to affirm a collective morality they feel should be established in the parish at large.

Nancy, for example, uses a hypothetical narrative to augment her stance against the Latino congregants’ preference for separate Spanish medium religious practices at St. Paul’s parish. To bolster her disapproval of immigrants refusing to learn English, she proposes a scenario in which she is a protagonist, specifically in which she might find herself in Mexico:

Nancy: I know myself () if I went-to Mexico and I wanted to learn the language I wouldn't want you to talk to me in English.
(...) If I have to learn Spanish Then I'm going to have to do it cold turkey.
(0.8 sec, pause) Okay, otherwise I'm going to be an emotional cripple.

This hypothetical narrative then broadens out to make a more generic point: Heritage language and tradition, Nancy reasons, may have their place in the family but not in the church:

Nancy: If they come from a family where they've gotta talk to their grandparents cause that's the language () or they want to continue the language (0.5 sec, pause) wonderful. They're bilingual. They've got a place. (1.8 sec, pause) But. (3.5 sec, pause) I don't know.--

In other words, Nancy believes that Latino families ought to leave their linguistic and cultural practices at the church portal. This perspective runs counter to the raison d'être of las Guadalupeñas and doctrina storytelling.

Across different parish settings and constituents a politics of language is being played out through narrative and other problem-solving discourses. Many non-Latino parishioners believe that
Catholicism transcends language and ethnic traditions. They say that the essence of Catholicism lies in the sacrament of the Eucharist. That is, the Eucharist (and Catholic practice by extension) supersedes and normalizes diverse cultural expressions. In arguing for the primacy of this practice, they formulate it as a set of prescribed non-verbal actions (e.g., the taking of the host).

If we follow the logic of this argument, the language used in this central practice should be unimportant. Yet, at St. Paul’s those who advocate de-Mexicanizing Catholic practice are also advocating the primacy of English and mainstream United States Catholicism. Illustrating a widespread phenomenon in culture contact situations, these non-Latino parishioners distinguish cultures, languages, and traditions as pertaining to others, while the larger society’s practices are taken for granted.

Moreover, this interpretation of normative Catholic practice at St. Paul’s instantiates wider public discourses that draw upon the myth of the United States as a “melting pot”, whose progress depends on homogenization of its people. This notion, which motivated the ‘English-Only’ movement in California and the passing of Proposition 63 in 1986,2 is visible in the domain of the neighborhood parish. ‘English Only’ is not a slogan in parish discourse, but its tenets are on the lips of the congregants.

IV. Spanish in the Church: Latino Voices
While these sentiments are being expressed by the majority of the parish, the Latino congregants are vested in promoting a Spanish medium, Mexican-oriented Catholicism. Many parents worry that the religious practices that they learned in Mexico will not be taught to their children. Las Guadalupanas are vested in preserving and maintaining such practices, in particular, ensuring generational continuity in the celebration of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe. Elimination of the doctrina classes would mean that children would not become themselves carriers of treasured cultural and religious knowledge.

As illustrated above, the way in which the story of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe is constructed with the children is essential to their developing an awareness and appreciation of their role in history. Although the story is told as well in English-medium catechism classes, it is recounted in a more impersonal and condensed manner (Baquedano-López 2001). “Our Lady of Guadalupe”, for example, is cast as one of the many instantiations of Mary around the world, along with “Our Lady of Fatima” (Portugal), “Our Lady of Lourdes” (France) and others. The children in the catechism classes are not socialized to identify with one particular Mary or to know the details of any one particular apparition. Rather than promoting a sense of emotional affiliation with a single set of extraordinary events, the catechism teachers instill a sense of cultural relativity. While aimed to foster tolerance of diversity, cultural relativity fosters among students an emotional detachment from the cultural phenomenon recounted.

These and other concerns eventually emerge in the monthly meetings of las Guadalupanas. Although it is unlikely that the festivities will be eliminated, given its formally sanctioned status, they fear: that their activities will be streamlined or perhaps transformed. As las Guadalupanas, they represent more than the promoters of the festivity; they are the staunch and proud keepers of a culturally hued religious past. While not on the official agenda, their concerns shape discussions of festivity arrangements.

In between agenda items, las Guadalupanas collaboratively narrate what they have heard about Parish Council discussions. These narratives are not so much recounted to one another as with one another. That is, the storyline has not already been pre-determined then articulated to the group. Rather, the storyline is worked out through collaboration among those present (Ochs, Taylor et al 1992, Ochs & Capps 2001). Similar to the informal storytelling that marks encounters among non-Latino parishioners, storytelling among las

2 The English Language amendment to the State Constitution was supported by 73% of the California electorate (Crawford 1992).
Guadalupanas constitutes an important medium for group problem-solving and for articulating their position with regard to the future of Spanish medium religious education at St. Paul's.

Consider, for example, an excerpt from a lengthy narrative interaction that emerges during the April meeting of las Guadalupanas. The narrative is initiated by Ema, a veteran Guadalupana and doctrina teacher and responded to by Aurea, who is the President of las Guadalupanas. The story recounts a conversation that Ema had overheard between Nancy, the director of catechism and Alma, the director of doctrina, concerning a question that a member of the Parish Council had asked during the April Parish Council meeting. At this meeting, no Latino representative was present. The social organization of the co-narrators and protagonists involved in this narrative exchange is depicted below:

This chain of embedded narratives resembles that of He-Said-She-Said sequences analyzed by M. Goodwin (1990). In the present narrative exchange, Ema recounts with Aurea what Nancy recounted with Alma about what a Parish Council Member asked in a meeting.

The narrative that Ema introduces concerns the Parish Council discussion of the possibility of fusion of the catechism and doctrina religious educational programs. She begins by telling the others that she had overheard Nancy and Alma talking.

Ema: YO-yo oí a Nancy
1-1 heard Nancy

cuando le estaba diciendo a Alma
when (she) was telling Alma

(0.8 sec.pause)

ayer,
yesterday

At this point, Ema recounts Nancy's report of what a non-Latino council member had asked during the April meeting:

Ema: que hubo.
That there was

pero yo no sé quién
But I don't know who

ni qué: dijo
or what was said

que para qué querían
that why they wanted

(0.2 sec. pause)

no le tomé mucha atención
I didn't pay much attention

pero sí oí que dijo que querían que-
But I did hear that she (Nancy) said that they wanted to that-

(0.2 sec. pause)

→ “Por-que” decían que “Para qué había doctrina en español.”

"Why," they said that “For what reason was there doctrina in Spanish?"
In translating into Spanish what Nancy had reported, Ema uses affect-loaded language that indexes the negative attitudes of the non-Latino members of the Parish Council towards doctrina instruction. Specifically, in translating the question that the Parish Council member asked, she uses the interrogative form para qué (lit. ‘for what’). Ema even cuts off her use of the more generic por qué in favor of the more affective negative para qué. This form often conveys an implicit challenge, much like ‘how come’ in English is commonly used to implicitly disagree with the ideas or actions of the addressee (e.g., ‘How come you’re not doing your homework?’).

In this reported speech context, para qué is more than a literal translation of an English interrogative pronoun used in a query about doctrina at St. Paul’s. Para qué represents a pervasive skeptical attitude held by Latino congregants concerning non-Latino congregants’ attitude concerning Latino congregants and their practices. While we have no record of the actual original question, para qué infuses the non-Latino’s question with motives that are consequential for the Latino congregants, as represented below:

![Diagram]

This diagram illustrates how the translation represents the positionalities of both those who formulate the question and those who are being questioned.

3 Notice that Ema tries to place herself on a higher moral plane by noting a certain offhandedness about her listening in on Nancy and Alma’s conversation (“no le tomé mucha atención”).

After Ema translates Nancy’s reporting of the council member’s question, she goes on to recount how Alma, the doctrina director, had responded to Nancy:

Ema: y que ella había dicho, and that she (Alma) had said
(1.2 sec. pause)
que: porque era la tradición
because it was the tradition

According to this account, Alma had used the expression la tradición, the very term that Nancy in a prior interview had deprecated, as a rationale for keeping doctrina alive. Recall that in the interview, Nancy had dismissed “tradition” and “culture” as justifications for maintaining Spanish instruction in the Church. For Nancy, “culture” and “tradition” ought to be distinct from “religion”.

Upon hearing how Alma responded to Nancy, Aurea launches a critique of this argument. Aurea and Ema each offer their own versions of what they would have said to Nancy in response to the questioning of doctrina at St. Paul’s. Aurea’s argument is that the Latinos are first and foremost Christian and that Spanish is just a way of practicing Christianity:

Aurea: Pero pero no no e-debiera de haber dicho la tradición But but she shouldn’t have said the tradition
sino que (.) somos cristianos but that we are Christians
nada más que en español:]; it’s just that we speak Spanish
(0.2 sec. pause)
Aurea: N[0?]
While Aurea presents an ecumenical argument, Ema posits a hypothetical retort that accuses Nancy and the other non-Latino congregants of introducing Proposition 187 and its exclusionary thrust into Church practices:

Ema:  
> [Yo-yo si si hubiera estado allí]
               Me-me if I had been there

Aurea:  
> [somos católicos]
               we are Catholic

Ema:  
le hubiera dicho
               I would have said

"Oiga usted ya quiere traer
"Listen you already want to bring

la ochenta y siete a-aqui
               the eighty seven here

a-llas en iglesia? también"
               to the church also?"

Ema’s reference to Proposition 187 indicates how statewide politics of ethnicity has a bearing on parish tensions. The proposition is used as an interpretive frame for making sense out of a non-Latino’s question about doctrine practices. Both Ema and Aurea utilize conversational storytelling to collaboratively construct a politics of language in the church.

These Latino sensibilities about Spanish in church activities are mirrored in other Catholic congregations. In a study of Mexican immigrant women’s narratives of their language experiences in southern California, for example, Relaño-Pastor analyzes an account of exclusionary practices at a parish (Relaño-Pastor 2000, 2001). The narrative centers on a family’s anger following their bilingual priest’s refusal to deliver services in Spanish during Holy Week prior to Easter:


cuando miré que el párroco que el diácono que habla español
When I saw that the priest the deacon who speaks Spanish

cuando iba a dar la lectura en español la dio en inglés
When he was going to do the reading in Spanish he did it in English

me sentí que era una CELEBRACIÓN RIDICULA
I felt it was a RIDICULOUS CELEBRATION

( . . )
y me salí TAN ENOJADA que les dije a mis hijos
"VÁMONOS=VÁMONOS!!"
and I left SO ANGRY that I said to my children ‘LET’S GO=LET’S GO!!’

"¿qué pasa!!"
"what’s wrong!!"

"VÁMONOS!!"
"LET’S GO!!"

y ya cuando salimos les dije
And when we were outside I told them

And when we were outside I told them

→ me sentí que esa celebración no era para nosotros
I felt that celebration was not for us

por eso la dieron en inglés,
that’s why it was in English

no era para el pueblo, para la gente para los hispanos.
it wasn’t for the people the community for Hispanics.

Me sentí que esa no es una celebración cristiana.
I felt it wasn’t a Christian celebration

In this passage, the narrator recounts how she admonished the priest, left abruptly, and explained her views of language and Christianity to her children. Like the Latino members of St. Paul’s church, she socializes her children to identify the Christian experience with Spanish language practices; the two are intertwined.
V. Las Guadalupanas and Doctrina Teachers Fight Back
The storytelling passages of the parishioners of St. Paul's illuminate a complex phenomenology of language politics in the church. Control over which language is used in the religious domain is a well-discussed topic in informal social encounters. Narrative exchanges within and across ethnic boundaries instantiate and evaluate conflicting language ideologies. A range of informal narratives and counter-narratives provides a basis for political moves taken by different actors within the parish.

One such move is taken by the Parish Council of St. Paul's church, when later in the year it votes to officially end the doctrina program. The Fall 1996 academic year begins with the official merger of the two religious tracks into a single English-medium catechism program with a single director. The Council compromises by appointing Alma, the former doctrina director to this position.

Another series of moves are carried out by Alma and other members of the Latino congregation at St. Paul's. At the start of the 1996 academic year, the religious education program under the new leadership of Alma implements an unofficial agenda. Although parish officials had made the decision to eliminate the doctrina program, the new director, Latino teachers, parents, and pupils reorganize religious education within the new language policy: The Latino teachers officially hold "catechism" classes for Latino children but unofficially continue to employ Spanish as the medium of instruction. The European-American parishioners note this practice activity yet choose not to take issue with it.

While linguistic and cultural minority groups face challenges and disruption to their life worlds, the actions of the Spanish-speaking community at St. Paul's remind us that language and cultural practices and policies can be at once official and unofficial. A group operating in the margins of a social institution can apparently yield to pressure and conform to mainstream rules, but all the while it can exercise agency and formulate alternative stories and strategies for perpetuating their own socio-historical dispositions.

References