

The Tongue is the Strongest Muscle

I identify myself through language. But only by losing myself in it, like an object. [1]

(reiterated Google translation in several languages)

I recognize the language but I lost myself in it.

There are 12 vowels in English speech.

It takes over 85 muscles to produce one sound. The entire bone structure and two bundles of nerves.

There are 1.5 billion English speakers in the world.

There are 400 million native English speakers in the world.

(Drone and sift granulated speech)

1.1 billion foreigners. 1.1 billion ghosts. 1.1 billion Others.

Who are these 1.1 billion? Did they choose to be here? Many didn't. Some did.

(silence)

I did.

Why?

(train sound effect)

Why does one leave their mother tongue with its entirety? Why do we choose to half ourselves?

Half this, half that.

Half there, half not. [2]

Mother tongue = from the Latin lingua materna, which initially referred to the vernaculars against the learned language, Latin. [3]

How many mothers can one have?

(music box playing Boom Boom Boom by The Vengaboyz)

When I was 7, Santa brought me a teddy bear in a pink plastic backpack. What should I name it? Has it been named already? G-i-r-l. Girl. Girl had a voice. A hidden voice.

(winding toy noise transitioning into typing)

(Daisy, Bell Labs [4])

'This female machine that gave me the gift of language I called a language mother. I could only write the signs which she already carried in and on herself. Writing for me meant nothing but repeating her, but that way I could be adopted by the new language.' [3]

(dreamy pentatonic strings and harp)

English is accepting. English is forgiving. English is not sexist. English has no genders. English is not classist. English is flexible. English is connected. English is potential. English is abundance. English is opportunity. English is opaque. English is plural.

(Bernard Shaw, Spoken English & Broken English [5])

I am now going to address myself especially to my foreign hearer. I have to give them another warning of quite a different kind: Do not try to speak English perfectly, because if you do, no one will understand you.

The first thing you have to do is to speak with a strong foreign accent and speak broken English. That is, English without grammar. Then every English person with whom you speak will at once know that you are a foreigner. He will not expect you to be polite and to use elaborate grammatical phrases. He will be interested in you because you are a foreigner and pleased by his own cleverness in making out your meaning and being able to tell you what you want to know.

You must not speak too well. If you do he will think you're a beggar or a confidence trickster.'

(electronic and vocal hissing)

We'll start on the floor. Lay in a supine position like you're asleep. Let your hands be free. Let your jaw be free. Let your tongue give into gravity. [6]

(room tone, breaths, mouth noises)

What is good speech?

Good speech ensures that you are understood.

Good speech helps you feel confident expressing your thoughts in a manner that feels true to yourself.

Good speech makes you feel in control. [7]

Now.

Let's stretch the face. Stretch the body.

Chew face.

Chew body.

Circle tongue around the mouth. With the tongue out, speak various lines.

Let's try this line from Shakespeare:

'What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.'

(Repeat line in multiple overlaid translations obtained from Google Translate)

(bleep)

Bibliography

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[3] Yildiz, Y. (2014). *Beyond the mother tongue : the postmonolingual condition*. New York: Fordham Univ. Press.

[4] *Daisy Bell* (1961) available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=41U78QP8nBk>

[5] *Spoken English & Broken English*, British Library Archive, available at: <https://sounds.bl.uk/Accents-and-dialects/Early-spoken-word-recordings/024M-1CL0005132XX-0200V0>

[6] Exercise taken from the Voice for Performance class taught at the Central School of Speech and Drama, 2022

[7] Berry, C. (2003). *Your voice and how to use it*. London: Virgin Books.

[8] Dolar, M. (2006). *A voice and nothing more*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Mit Press, Cop.

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[10] NOWNESS, (2021). *Reimagining civilisation with Indonesian experimentalist Rully Shabara in Days of Being Lucid*, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZ8UC8q_M7g

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