

Language Liberation for Native English Speakers

The following is a talk given by Xabi Odriozola, the International Commonality Reference Person for Languages and Interpreting, at a topic table for native English speakers at a September 2012 workshop in Poland.

Hello, and welcome everybody to this table. It is important that you are here so that we can do this piece of RC work together: going from language oppression to language liberation. Thank you very much for coming.

This is a group that makes me feel pride. Native English speakers have made important contributions to the world. For instance, global communication and mutual understanding have risen a lot since we've had the English language in almost every corner of the world. It was almost unthinkable in the last century that two people would understand each other so quickly. English has facilitated a big percentage of people getting to know what is happening on the other side of the world at almost every minute. What looked like insuperable language barriers have fallen down.

On the other hand, you must know that every time you open your mouth and talk in English, non-native English speakers will react in mainly two ways:

- They will admire you, will want to be like you, will wish to be a native English speaker, and will try to imitate you—because they have been conditioned to feel less than you.

- Or they will act like a snail. (As soon as a snail feels something touch its antenna, it goes quickly into its shell and does not want to know anything else about the outside.) As they hear English coming from your mouth, they will withdraw inside, and then perhaps criticize, attack, or otherwise try to hurt you.

In either case, it is not thinking. It is conditioning and restimulation and not useful at all.

I think you need to live being aware of language oppression. Most people in our societies carry deep hurts and humiliations that have left strong prejudices and feelings about certain languages and those who speak them.

(Four-minutes-each-way mini-session)

From my point of view, the biggest contribution the English language has made to this world in the last period is RC. Re-evaluation Counseling was created and grew in a native-English-speaking working-class mind. Thanks to RC, hundreds of thousands of people are saving their lives and helping other thousands to live better, to have a perspective that humans have rarely been able to elaborate before. So, English is a nice, correct, useful language. You should be proud of that, everywhere you are on this planet, always.

At the same time, you who are native English speakers have been badly hurt into feeling that you are superior to the speakers of other languages. This has created on you a thick layer of isolation and confusion about yourself and the rest of humanity that follows you every place you go. Most of the time you are not aware of it, because of how badly and persistently you have been conditioned and damaged.

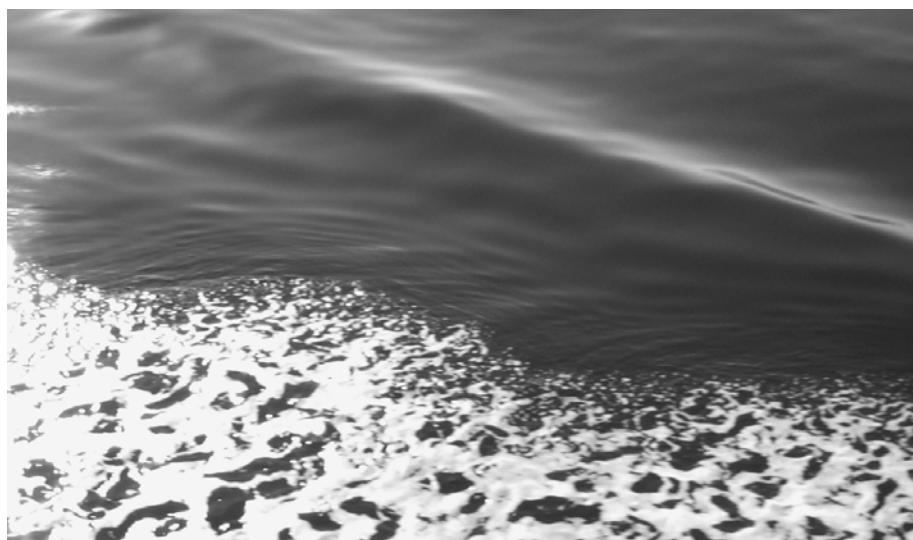
PRIDE, NOT ARROGANCE

We who have not undergone that kind of conditioning can see you suffer. Every time you

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MATT WEATHERFORD

LIBERATION

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oppress someone, you suffer along with that person. And we do not want you to suffer, or to have a limited life.



We need you proud of yourself and at the same time not arrogant. That's the balance you need to achieve. In the same way that you have taught us a lot of things, we can teach you something that will help you have a much better life. When you have a better life, our lives get better—and that's nice.



I will give you some ideas for how you can act proud in a non-arrogant way and “be in the second row” but not be passive or completely quiet.



First, let's have a second mini-session about what I said. (*Mini-session*)



As you know, our *Guidelines*¹ require us to agree on only one point: that we will work together to free our minds from distress recordings and do that in a *peer* relationship. So, the interesting job for you native English speakers is to figure out the answer to this question:



How can I be in an equal, peer relationship with someone who, as soon as she or he hears my voice, will feel inferior and become my unthinking follower and admirer or want to hurt me?



BILL HORNE

If you can find that safe place, that place of pride but not arrogance, you will know what to do. It's a safe place for everyone in the world. It's a place that all of us non-native English speakers are waiting for. We want to meet you in that place. There is a lot of work to do—from your side, and from our side—but that is the best thing we can do now. We were born to go to that place, that neutral place, in which you try a little to come to me and I try to come to you.

¹ The *Guidelines for the Re-evaluation Counseling Communities*—the policies for the RC Communities

Let's have another mini-session before going on. (*Mini-session*)

Are you fine? Is this very hard for you? If it's hard, I am sorry. But you are brave—I know you know you are.

Native English speaker: It's hard, but it's similar to the work I have done on class: being proud but not arrogant.

Yes, it is not easy. In fact, I have never known any liberation work that was easy. Coming from a Christian background, I could think of it as having heaven and hell together. That's what liberation and life often can be like. Sometimes I am in heaven—which could be something similar to a non-distressed environment—and suddenly I find myself in hell—which could be the maximum expression of all kinds of distresses being acted out at the same time and in the same place. When I am in heaven, I feel happy, and I am afraid of going to hell. But I know that if I go to hell, it is as bad as it can get, there is nothing worse, and it will end sometime. And then I will go back to heaven again. I have learned to like being in hell sometimes, because, thanks to discharge, hell is not an unbearable thing or something “forever,” and I always have the opportunity to learn something from it, to grow up, and to become smarter and stronger than before.

THE NEUTRAL PLACE

Okay, I would like to say a few things about how you can get to that neutral place in which every relationship can work well.

Some of you are there already. I can see you. Some of you are not. All of you want to be there. Going to that neutral place is like everything you do in RC: before acting, you think. You have that capacity.

You can think about the person you are going to meet—in the hall, in the bathroom, in the class—three seconds before meeting. Your mind can be working on, thinking about, that upcoming meeting, that person. You only need to discipline your mind.

In three seconds, you can mentally scan that person: “Oh! She's not a native English speaker. So which language is hers? Who is she? Where does she come from? Can she speak English?”

This simple effort (you trying to think about her) is going to change everything between you and her. The attitude of thinking about someone who may not speak your language is going to change your unaware perspective. Something will change in you—in your facial expression, your posture, your tone of voice, your gestures—and the person may feel, “This time you are trying to reach me, you are trying to see me, and it pushes me to feel like I want to meet you and not just be your enemy.”

If you do not stop yourself and take three seconds to think about the person you are about to meet, if your language arrives before you do, if your arrogance arrives before your mind and your love, that person will be like the snail whose antenna has been touched and will go inside her shell.

BEING SECOND, YES, BUT NOT PASSIVE OR QUIET

There are a lot of ways you can think about non-native English speakers. One is very simple and a big challenge: let them speak the first word.

You need to be active in the relationship, but not by being first. You can be active by being second and thinking about what is going on² between the two of you. Being secondarily active is the best way to learn from the person in order not to step on him.

You can also learn one word of that person’s language and try to speak it. If you do, some closed doors will open and the relationship will go in directions that you didn’t expect and that will be liberating for you and for him.

If you want to try this last idea, please remember not to become a client while you are trying the person’s language; that may be oppressive.

² “Going on” means happening.

Last two-minutes-each to discharge and think about this. (*Mini-session*)

How can I be in an equal, peer relationship with someone who, as soon as she or he hears my voice, will feel inferior and become my unthinking follower and admirer or want to hurt me?

someone, they make a lot of noise so that they cannot hear or see how the oppressed person is suffering.

For me, as an Indigenous person, the volume of your English is like the volume of a little bomb or a shot. It’s not a peaceful volume. It’s like a noise from someone who is afraid to have equal human contact and prefers to avoid it, someone who prefers that we be separate and not united, because he does not know how to establish the relationship. It sometimes sounds like the enemy’s sound—not because you are the enemy, but because the noise is saying, “I do not dare to be with you. I do not dare to stand up in front of you so that you can see all my ugly stuff. I prefer to ignore you. It would be easier if you disappeared right now.” Other times it

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ISRAEL • RANDI FREUNDLICH

LIBERATION

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sounds like, "You are less than I, and I don't want you in my way."



Your high volume pushes people away from the neutral-equal space, from the way to be with you. You can think about your volume. It's a nice thing: how you laugh, how you clap. But your joy and happiness are heard more than some other people's.



We are here at this table today, hearing all this, so we are doing very well.



FEAR OF MISTAKES

Something that can freeze you and keep you from playing an active secondary role is how afraid you (we) are of making mistakes. Making a mistake can feel terrible. But if you realize you have messed up with someone because of your language attitude, that is a victory, then we are winning. That is the first step. Congratulations!



The second step—as you know, and as Harvey³ would say—is to go to the person, apologize, and clean up the mess.



You may feel stupid because of your mistake and because you are trying to apologize, but do not discharge with the person while you are



³ Harvey Jackins

apologizing. Just apologize, and then go to someone else from your constituency and discharge.

Then try to make contact again with the same person, or with another person who is not from your group. Try the same thing you were trying to do. Do not give up. Not giving up is more important than doing it well.

How to apologize? Try to apologize in the person's language. You can learn the words for "excuse me" or ask someone who speaks that language to teach you how to say, "I made a mistake with you, and I will try not to do it again." You can read it to the person you are apologizing to and afterward offer to listen for a couple of minutes about what you just said. There are many opportunities to make the snail come out of its shell, which is one of the most beautiful things you can experience.

DIFFERENCES AMONG YOU TOO

You also need to take into account the many differences among native English speakers and how native English speakers oppress each other. For instance, owning-class people oppress middle- and working-class people, men oppress women. In the United States, rural people speak differently than city people and will often be oppressed by them. It depends which country you come from; which part of the country you belong to (south, west, north, east, countryside, seaside, city, town); your class background, age, sex, race—you will have more of this, or less of that—but you will always have some kind of domination and competition to work on. The oppressive system is always using some kind of difference to get you to oppress each other and avoid unity. It is something you need to check. The more united you are, the less you oppress.



ELLIE PUTNAM

**FREEING YOURSELF AS YOU
END THE OPPRESSION**

You need to learn about your own culture and the other cultures around you, including those that were there before yours. This will give you keys to your liberation. Be proud of your culture as it is today—and at the same time improve it forward, always.

You don't have to give up your intelligence; you only have to give up acting on your patterns, and that is something you really want to do.

It's a big opportunity to free yourself. Every place you go in life is soaked in language oppression and saturated with other oppressions. Any piece you choose is a good piece to work on. From my point of view, your being here and having the courage to listen to me and work on what I propose is a hero's work. I see you as heroes at this workshop. From

now on, the pace of this workshop, its rhythm, will be completely different—thanks to each and every one of you.

It is hopeful to think that you may understand these ideas and be the messengers of them to your people. So, from the bottom of my heart, thank you very much for listening. *Eskerrik asko*.⁴



Remember that all the languages are just fine, completely right, and the fruit of thousands and thousands of years of human intelligent thinking.

Language is not the problem. The problem is our behavior around language. Language is the solution.

Xabi Odriozola
Donostia-Gipuzkoa, Basque Country

⁴ "Eskerrik asko" means "thank you" in Basque.




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Herbert A. Shepard

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