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Short Assignment #1

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Exploring "Englishes"

Everyone is an adapting animal. Just as a cuttlefish changes colors, texture, and pattern, a chameleon camouflages, and a mimic octopus shape shifts and alters its behavior for protection, we change our speech, poise, and behavior to suit the situation we are in. Most of these alterations are natural and happen without forethought. Many times, however, I find myself intentionally changing the way I speak in order to accommodate for who I am talking to. The word choice and pace of my speech differs whether I am talking to adults, my parents, and peer musicians.

Having grown up in Korea, where there are unspoken rules of how to show respect for adults, the way I approach adults and people my age differs. In Korea, we are taught to attach different endings to reflect respect. Instead of asking "want to grab dinner (or lunch)?", I invite my grandparents: "The dinner is ready. Come to the table to eat, please." When I see them, I bow, and rather than the usual greeting with friends, such as "hey", "how are you", and "what are you up to?", I start with "hello" and ask "how have you been?", "are you doing all right (health-wise)?", etc.. Talking to them is more formal than with friends, and I am not allowed to argue back. I would never dare to respond to adult, "no, I don't think you're right." You would always reply "oh, I never knew that" or continue listening. In order to avoid the clashing with the cultural norms, I have adjusted my speech and responses so that they are acceptable.

Conversations with my parents are not as formal as those with adults but not as lax as those with friends. I have to be conscious of when I decide to mix Korean and English and how I pronounce certain words. When talking to them, I speak slower and enunciate more to decrease the likelihood of miscommunication. One day, to my mother's question 'what are you doing?', I responded quickly, 'I'm playing a board game.' Due to the faster pace, the words were slurred, and each word flowed into each other, making it hard to distinguish syllables. 'You're doing what? Are you bored?' my mother questioned. When I responded 'no', she wondered what a bor game was. I repeated "board game", but all she heard was a mix of "bor-game". In attempts to clarify, I said in Korean "bo-deu", separating the word into two syllables. Though "board" and "bo-deu" may not seem different, my mom finally understood me. The subtle difference between the pronunciation changed the comprehensibility. Therefore, anything important (such as deadlines and performance dates) is said in Korean to avoid confusion, and other casual topics are spoken in English. Regardless of the language, I have to make sure that I do not use slang and be careful about the way I speak. For the ease of conversation, I have adopted this manner of speaking in front of my parents.

In many musical situations, I have to form my sentences in order to not only encourage but also criticize. As the leader of the chamber group, I would ask for suggestions after we play and comment, trying not to sound harsh, take too much control, and allow everyone to have a say. Once we finish, I ask "what did you think?" and "any comments?" in order to incorporate everyone's opinions and create a sense of unity. I then consider the options and try some to figure out which option would allow the group to get better. When I am playing by myself or with one other person, I do not have to exchange questions and develop a discussion or vote but simply comment. However, sometimes, quick fixes without discussions need to me made. In these situations, I try to avoid degrade others by directing to sections---"make sure everyone uses more bow"---rather than questioning a single person---"why aren't you using more bow?". Instead of "this sounds awful. Nothing is together", I imply the same by suggesting that we try to follow the bass line and each section listen to ones they harmonize with in order to stay together. I learned to not use negative and direct accusations such as "you're out of tune" and instead use encouraging words such as 'should' and 'try'. By changing the tone of my voice and diction, I am able to lead and direct the group without devastating anyone or damaging the unity of the group.

Varying situations requires people to utilize the different "Englishes". The different modes depends on who you are speaking to and the motive. Use of the wrong "English" may result in consequences and cause you to receive criticism in lack of cultural understanding or care. However, we switch our diction, tone, and pace naturally in our daily lives since these habits have been embedded in us through our experiences in the cultures we have lived in.