

BuT yOuR eNgLiSh Is So GoOd!

A five-minute choreopoem

By Paloma Sierra

Contact:

Paloma Sierra

pa.sierra.hernandez@gmail.com

CAST OF CHARACTERS

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER, a speaker for whom English is their second language, who may or not speak with an accent when conversing with others in English; a friendly acquaintance to MONOLINGUIST, yet on the same professional and/or educational level.

MONOLINGUIST, a native English speaker who only speaks English, who's part of a greater collective of native English speakers; a friendly acquaintance to ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER, yet on the same professional and/or educational level.

MONOLINGUISTS, greater collective of native English speakers.

SETTINGS

A professional and/or higher education setting.
(Ex. A library, an office, a court, other)

PRODUCTION NOTES

// signals an interruption, or where the next line by another character begins

A professional and/or higher education setting, crowded with MONOLINGUISTS, each involved in their own activities.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER and MONOLINGUIST are involved in a friendly conversation. This conversation is either mimed or mumbled, intelligibly.

UNTIL:

MONOLINGUIST

But your English is so good!

The room freezes along with everyone in it, except for ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER is dumbfounded -- "Did they just?" -- yet reacts silently.

The silence is kept up until it becomes unbearable and the moment, uncomfortably awkward.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

(to self or to audience)

Every time I hear this statement
my world stops
as it is revealed to me that
finally
after speaking fluent English
for what is now...

(counts with fingers, first
mumbling then projecting
loudly as they reach "20")

1...
2...
3...
4...

5...
 6...
 7...
 8...
 9...
 10...
 11...
 12...
 13...
 14...
 15...
 16...
 17...
 18...
 19...
 20 years!

after 20 years of speaking
 fluent English
 for the first time
 my English is
 - AT LAST! -
so good
 or at least,
 good enough to be understood,
 that is deserving
 of such a great compliment

MONOLINGUIST restarts their
 dialogue, AND/OR is joined by a
 second MONOLINGUIST in their
 dialogue.

MONOLINGUISTS also unfreeze and
 restart their activities during the
 length of MONOLINGUIST's dialogue.

MONOLINGUIST

But your English is so good!

MONOLINGUIST and MONOLINGUISTS
 freeze.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

And every time
 I hear this statement,
 I try to make sense of it,
 yet can only bring myself to play dumb
 since the statement
 only makes sense
 if I play the part that it suggests
 - that of a dumb -
 a person who lacks the abi//lity to speak-.

MONOLINGUIST(S) restart(s) their
 dialogue, AND/OR is joined by a
 another MONOLINGUIST in their
 dialogue.

MONOLINGUISTS also unfreeze and
 restart their activities during the
 lenght of MONOLINGUIST's dialogue.

MONOLINGUIST

But your English is so good!

MONOLINGUIST and MONOLINGUISTS
 freeze.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

Every time
 I hear
 this statement-.

MONOLINGUIST(S) unfreeze(s) and
 restart(s) their dialogue, AND/OR
 is joined by all other
 MONOLINGUISTS in their dialogue.

MONOLINGUIST

But your English is so good!

All MONOLINGUISTS freeze.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

Every
time
What bothers me
is not the statement itself
but what underlies it -
how it matters
not *what* I say
but *how* I say it,

How
NO ONE
is really
listening-.

All MONOLINGUISTS unfreeze and
restart their dialogue.

MONOLINGUISTS

But your English // is so good!

All MONOLINGUISTS freeze.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

Every time
I hear this statement
this implied
condescension
that deems my speech
adequate
BUT //
Unacceptable

All MONOLINGUISTS unfreeze and
restart their dialogue.

MONOLINGUIST is the only one to get
closer to ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER in
what seems a consoling manner.

MONOLINGUIST

(consoling)
But your English-.

MONOLINGUISTS

But your English-.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER doesn't
hesitate -- they do not allow an
interruption. Instead, they
continue their dialogue:

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

From monolingualists
who have not
the ear or will
to understand sounds other than their own,
yet who are quick to compensate
their ignorance
with backhanded compliments

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER cues in all
MONOLINGUALISTS, mocking them as they
speak:

MONOLINGUALISTS

But your English is so good!

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER cues out all
MONOLINGUALISTS. They freeze.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

(swears in a non-English
language of their choosing)

FUCK!

(in English)

Sometimes I hear this statement
and I swear-.

Beat.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

What is worse
than hearing it
is that

Sometimes
I actually listen

"But your English is so good..."

and I believe
my accent
to be a noise
that cancels my voice.

And I swear
to never speak again,
And take a vow of silence.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER is silent for
10 seconds.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER
But my English is so good!

MONOLINGUISTS
But your English is so good!

MONOLINGUISTS envelop ALMOST NATIVE
SPEAKER in a dance. They speak in
place of MONOLINGUIST,
interchangeably.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER joins in,
slowly.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER
(to a random MONOLINGUIST)
Do you really think so?

ADDRESSED MONOLINGUIST
It is.

A MONOLINGUIST
(with a so-so gesture)
Good good.

A DIFFERENT MONOLINGUIST
So good!

ANOTHER MONOLINGUIST
 Your English is
 so
 good!

MONOLINGUIST
 So good!

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER
 Good?
 My English?

ANOTHER MONOLINGUIST
 Soooooooooooo
 goooooooooood!

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER
 Good?

MONOLINGUIST
Good.

MONOLINGUIST (pronounces slowly)	MONOLINGUISTS (spell it out)
GOOD.	GOOD.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER
 Other times-.

MONOLINGUIST (pronounces slowly)	MONOLINGUISTS (spell it out)
YOUR.	YOUR.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER
 When I hear this statement-.

MONOLINGUIST (pronounces slowly)	MONOLINGUISTS (spell it out)
IS.	IS.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER
 I do entertain-.

MONOLINGUIST
 (pronounces slowly)
 SO.

MONOLINGUISTS
 (spell it out)
 SO.

Its false validation.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

MONOLINGUIST
 (pronounces slowly)
 GOOD.

MONOLINGUISTS
 (spell it out)
 GOOD.

Thank you!

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

It is

MONOLINGUIST

MONOLINGUIST
 (spells it out, then
 pronounces slowly)
 GOOD.

MONOLINGUISTS
 (spells it out, then
 pronounces slowly)
 GOOD.

Thank you.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

GOOD.

ALL MONOLINGUISTS
 (spell it out and/or
 pronounce slowly)

Other times-.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

GOOD.

ALL MONOLINGUISTS
 (spell it out and/or
 pronounce slowly)

I am too tired.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

ALL MONOLINGUISTS
 (spell it out and/or
 pronounce slowly; they
 repeat as needed)
 GOOD.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER
 Too tired
 to play dumb
 or to pretend
 to be flattered

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

too tired to speak
 and not be listened to

ALL MONOLINGUISTS
 (pronounce slowly; they
 extend as needed)
 GOOD.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER
 too tired
 to be
good.

All characters reset to their
 starting positions and actions by
 the end of the word "good."

The conversation between ALMOST
 NATIVE SPEAKER and MONOLINGUIST
 continues from where it stopped:

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

GOOD.
 UGH.
 Wow.
 Thank you.

Your English is pretty good, too!
 How are *you* so good?

END SCENE.

Paloma Sierra is the Emerging Poet Laureate of Allegheny County, 2020-2021.

“BuT yOuR eNgLiSh Is So GoOd!” is used with permission.

[City of Asylum](#) received a [RADical ImPAct Grant](#) from the [Allegheny Regional Asset District](#) (RAD) for the project [All Pittsburghers are Poets: Poet Laureate Program](#).

