BuT yOuR eNgLiSh Is So GoOd!

A five-minute choreopoem

By Paloma Sierra

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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...
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 ability 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
duration 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) MONOLINGUISTS
But your English--.

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

From monolinguists 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 MONOLINGUISTS, mocking them as they speak:

But your English is so good!

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER cues out all MONOLINGUISTS. 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.

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 MONOLINGUISTS
But my English is so good! 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?

ADDRESS MONOLINGUIST
It is.

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

A DIFFERENT MONOLINGUIST
So good!
Your English is so good!

So good!

Good? My English?

Sooooooo good goooooood!

Good?

Good.

Good.

Other times-.

Other times-.

When I hear this statement-.

When I hear this statement-.

I do entertain-.
MONOLINGUIST (pronounces slowly) MONOLINGUIST (spell it out)
SO. SO.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

Its false validation.

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

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

Thank you!

MONOLINGUIST

It is

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

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

Thank you.

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

GOOD.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

Other times-.

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

GOOD.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER

I am too tired.
ALL MONOLINGUISTS       ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER
(spell it out and/or        Too tired
pronounce slowly; they     to play dumb
repeat as needed)         or to pretend
good.

ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER
too tired to speak
and not be listened to

ALL MONOLINGUISTS       ALMOST NATIVE SPEAKER
(pronounce slowly; they   too tired
extend as needed)         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.
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