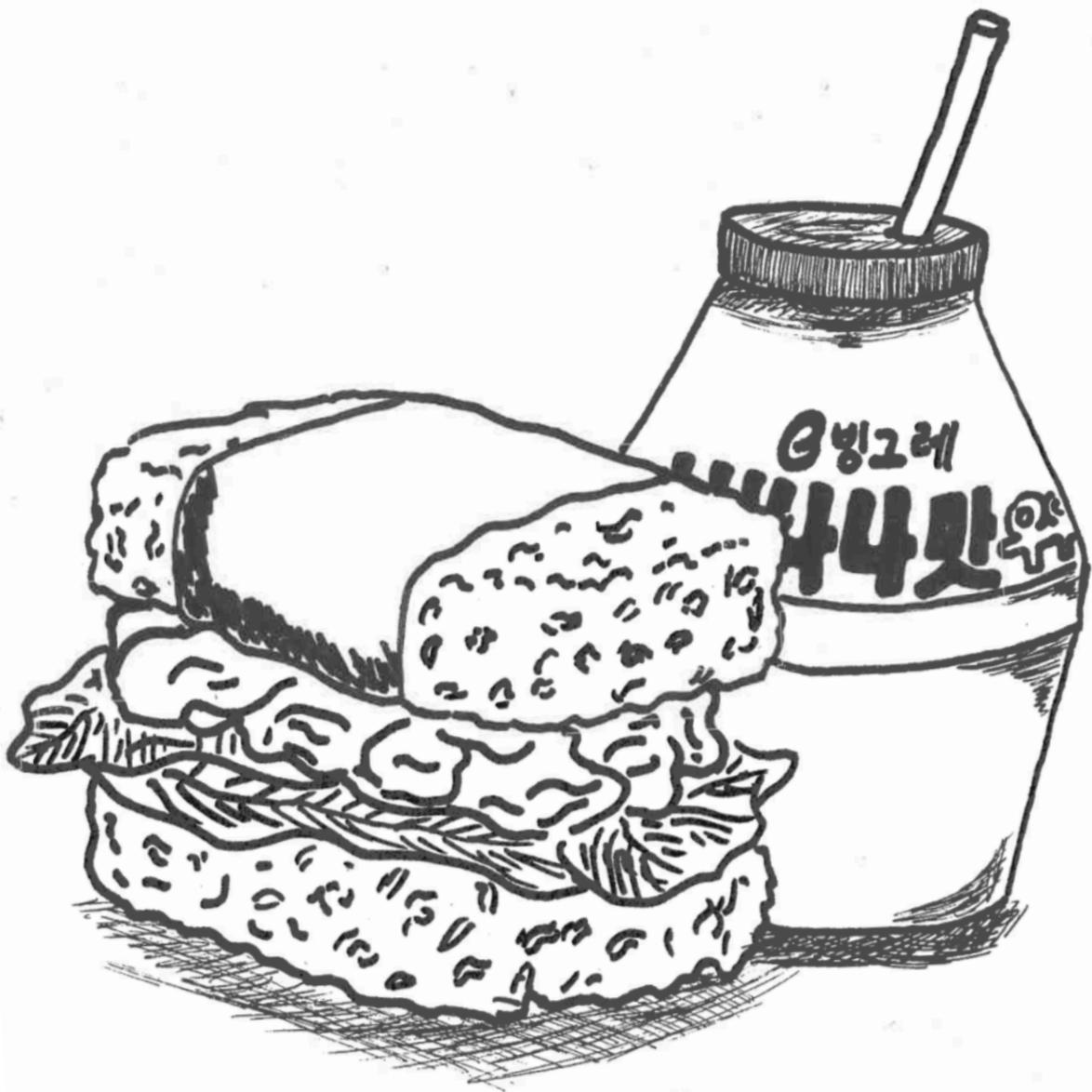


rice burger and banana milk

By Ho June (Sean) Rhee, 이호준



Writer's Note

Since this project was neither a persuasive essay nor a research paper, I was initially lost and didn't know where to start. However, I realized that I cannot rush this type of project. That is, I didn't want to force myself to write four poems in one sitting like a formulaic paper. I could have started this project right before the due date, but those poems would have been products of artificial creativity, not of natural creativity. Hence, I told myself that if I wasn't ready, my poems were not ready. Some days I couldn't even write a single word. Other days, I was able to write endlessly. I simply waited until I had the inspiration or the motivation to write. Once I had my thoughts on paper, I began to refine my stylistic choices. For example, while I wanted "Huh?" to sound childish, I wanted "애국심 (Patriotism)" to sound solemn. Thus, I used a mixture of rhyme patterns and free verse styles to deliver these tones. To augment these sentiments, I decided to add small illustrations that give each poem a personality. Further, I originally did not include about-the-poem sections, but I realized that the analysis was an effective tool that clarifies the readers' lingering questions about the poems. However, rather than analyzing the poems (because that's just boring), I focused on writing about my motivation and personal connection to them. Even though this project was time-consuming, I enjoyed every second of it! I learned a lot about my creative writing style through this project.

Author's Note

Welcome to my writing project for Professor Shawna Shapiro's class, "English Language in the Global Context" (WRPR/EDST0101, Spring 2018). As a final project, we were asked to write "beyond the walls of our classroom, to consider the implications of our course learning for a public audience." Throughout the semester, we explored various aspects of the English language and discussed its influence in the world. Even though the topics discussed in class were thought-provoking, I didn't want a 5-6 page, Times New Roman, 12-point font, double-spaced research paper as my final project. Rather than looking outward into the global issues of languages, I wanted to look inward into my relationship with languages. So, I invite you to my life and I hope you can discover your relationship with languages.

rice burger and banana milk. It's an interesting title, isn't it? An appetizing one at that. If you are wondering, I was not hungry when I was thinking of a title for this collection of poems. It was difficult finding an appropriate title to encompass all emotions and thoughts that I have expressed in this project. However, as I was staring at the blank page, I thought of an old memory. During my ESL class, my teacher asked the students to name a food(s) that represents them. Many of the friends chose the mainstream answer and named their national dish such as bibimbap, pancit, sushi, mapo tofu, etc. When it was my turn, I said, "rice burger and banana milk." I said that odd answer for two reasons. First, standing out as much as possible in the ESL class meant that my chances of graduating the program were higher. Second, I didn't view myself as a specific food. I was always floating among cultures growing up. I was an "in-between" and I saw myself as a fusion dish, a crossbreed of cultures. Hence, I compared myself to foods that could express my Asian heritage (South Korea and the Philippines) and my exposure to the western world (the United States and Latin America/Spain). I hope you enjoy what I have deliciously prepared for you!

Huh?

I am confused
Actually, is English confused?
In English, you see,
When you're *bad*,
You're good.
And might I add,
Even when you're *sick*,
Somehow, you get all the chicks,
I...I don't know,
maybe English is just a lunatic.

I still don't get it!
being a *tool*
Doesn't mean you're cool
But means you're just a fool...?
Man, English is just cruel!
They never taught me that at my school.

And please tell me,
Because I'm lost
On pronouncing everything,
Are you sure it's "post" not paw-st?
You know what, I'll just have to agree.

But where heck is the "v" in "Stephen"
So, you're gonna make me believe in
Something without any reason?
I...I just can't even...

I guess I'm going to take pity
On the regulators of the English committee
And on their language that is so shitty.
At this point, I just have one thing to say,
English is kinda iffy...



About the poem

Even after almost 7 years of learning English, I still don't consider myself "fluent." I am comfortable speaking it in daily conversations, but its grammar, idioms, and pronunciation still confuse me. If there is one thing that I am certain about English, it is that English breaks rules all the time for its convenience. I wanted to express this sentiment as a non-native speaker of English through this poem. My excessive use of rhymes is intended to make the poem sound childish in order to deliver the sarcasm toward the eccentric nature of the English language.

애국심 (Patriotism)

저는 한국인입니다.	(I am Korean.)
“I am an Americanized Korean.”	
한국인으로서 대한민국이 자랑스롭습니다.	(As a Korean, I am proud of South Korea.)
“I’m not really attached to Korea.”	
그런데, 왜 외국인 취급을 하시나요?	(But, why do you treat me like a foreigner?)
“Please think of me as a foreigner.”	
한국어는 당연히 쓸 수 있는데,	(I can obviously use Korean.)
“I hope you can understand my awkward Korean!”	
예의범절도 당연히 지킬 수 있는데,	(I can obviously be respectful.)
“I know all about the Korean respect culture.”	
“It’s like a rap, you basically put “yo” at the end!”	
왜 영어로 대답하시나요?	(But why do you respond in English,)
“I can understand English too!”	
왜 한국어를 잘 한다고 칭찬하시나요?	(Why do you compliment my Korean?)
“But I swear my Korean is still good!”	
“Annyeonghaseyo?”	
왜 이방인 취급을 하시나요?	(Why do you treat me like an outsider?)
“I’m pretty much a banana.”	
말할나위 없이 한국인이었을 때가 그리웁습니다.	(I miss being Korean without suspicions)
“Am I “Korean” enough?”	
저는…진정한 한국인입니까?	(Am I a real Korean?)



About the poem

This poem is my personal favorite since Korean is my first language. Ever since I left South Korea, I've never quite felt Korean. Living outside of my home country, I had to use English more often and I was not exposed to the Korean culture as much as I would have been if I stayed. Granted, there was a period in my life when I was embarrassed by my Korean origin and "feeling" Korean was not a big deal. However, I have recently been noticing my waning Korean and my weakening connection to the Korean culture. My parents are intentionally using their broken English over the phone with me—maybe because they think I understand English better. Moreover, when I visited South Korea for the first time in 7 years, I was often perceived as "Americanized." I couldn't write this poem for a long time because I felt apathetic toward my origin. Fortunately, when I watched the historic inter-Korean summit, I felt a jolt of nationalism and was inspired to write this piece. This poem captures the concern of not knowing who I am and where I came from. The lines written in English are (embarrassing) statements I have made in the past about my Korean heritage and those written in Korean are contrasting statements that reveal my inner thoughts. Now that I have rekindled my Korean pride, I hope I continue to feed the flame. I hope that flame never goes out again.

Home Tour

da seat belt signs turn off
and da pilot speaks with a heavy breath,
mabuhay ang Pilipinas! (welcome to the Philippines)
welcome to my home.

taga dito ka, diba? (you're from here, right?)
no
marunong kaba mag-Tagalog? (do you speak Tagalog?)
konti lang... (a little)
tourist ako (I'm a tourist)

pero, pinoy is more dan
tagalog,
brown skin,
black hair,
eyes with a slight tilt.

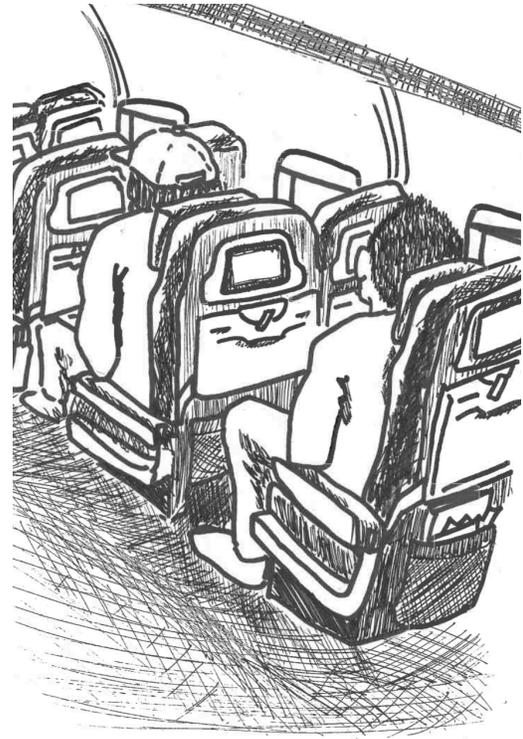
i still think Jollibee
is more masarap dan McDo (delicious)
i still use spoons and forks
instead of knives
and I am sure
dat everything is more
fun in the Philippines

so, if you think
I don't have
da pinoy spirit,
hay nako...
ang tigas ng ulo mo!

o-o, tourist ako,
pero, a tourist with a pinoy spirit

(oh no...)
(you're so hardheaded)

(yes, I am a tourist)



About the poem

The biggest regret I had when I left the Philippines was not learning the native language, Tagalog. I knew basic phrases and idioms, but I never attempted to learn the language and culture. It is most regrettable when I meet someone who speaks Tagalog and cannot fluently converse with them. Nonetheless, I still consider the Philippines as my second home. Although I am often perceived as a tourist, I feel at home whenever I visit that beautiful tropical country. I decided to keep this poem simple and include the things I miss from the Philippines. I can't help myself reading the poem multiple times because I can use my Filipino accent! I actually shared this poem with a couple of my Filipino friends on campus, and we all felt a strong sense of nostalgia. In fact, the long conversations we had afterward transcended the contents of the poem and made me a little homesick. However, having those conversations is my exact intention for these poems. I want people to not only read the poems, but also to share their thoughts and discuss beyond what is written. With that, I simply want to say salamat po (thank you)!

Pasos de Bebé

a class that I started
sólo para un credito
turned into something
que disfruto con pasión

soy un bebé
when it comes to Spanish
pero,
like, I'm getting there
por lo menos, creo que sí.

entonces, tenga paciencia
because I'm just taking baby steps

sin prisa y sin pausa

pronto,
aprenderé y caminaré,
maduraré y correré,

pronto,
miraré atrás y ver
las huellas que he hecho
miraré hacia delante y
daré otro paso
al camino interminable
buscando de un nuevo hogar



About the poem

As the poem states, I started Spanish because I needed a language credit in order to graduate high school. After visiting Nicaragua, however, I fell in love with the romance language and developed a passion for it. Even though Spanish can be hard, particularly its grammar, I am glad that I added it to my language collection! One day, I hope that I can feel at ease with using Spanish. That day may be years away or might not even come. But I'm going to continue learning this wonderful language. Hence, this poem represents my desire to improve my Spanish and to find a new "home" within its culture, similar to what happened in the Philippines. I attempted to depict this hope through the gradual decrease of English in the poem, illustrating the transition from English to Spanish.

Afterword

Thank you for reading these poems. I have not done a creative writing project since middle school, so please be gentle with the criticisms! During this school year, I was drowning in countless formulaic, banal academic writing assignments. Frankly, those papers drained me physically and emotionally. Hence, this final project came across as a pleasant surprise. I was able to practice my (rusty) creativity and revisit what I truly enjoy—self-expression. The project was a cathartic release because I love free-writing and drawing, both of which I have not done in a long time. Likewise, I am often hesitant to express myself due to many reasons such as fear of criticism, self-doubt or simply lack of time. After completing the project, however, I made myself a promise to continue these types of self-expression. Whether it be drawing or journaling, I hope I continue to give myself time to relax and to take a retrospective look at who I am. And I hope the same for you.

“I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment”
SHJR

Personal Meaning of the Ward Prize

The Ward Prize means quite a lot of things on both personal and academic levels to express it in a few words, but I will try my best. The Ward Prize made me take a retrospective look at the past eight years of my English learning experience. During the initial years, the hardest struggle I had was not having an authentic voice in my written works which immensely undermined my confidence as a writer. Frankly, I still don't feel confident in my own writing, especially when I am writing academic papers. I feel like a literary fraud who is imitating people's unique styles and parroting their voices. However, *rice burger and banana milk* showed me the exit to step outside of the ivory tower and roam around my inner thoughts and emotions. I didn't feel the pressure to use specific jargons and complex sentence structures to make my work sound more "sophisticated." I simply transcribed what I felt into words and lines. I was finally able to find my voice and share my thoughts. In a way, the Ward Prize was a gentle nod of recognition that the readers heard my voice and that I should be more confident—that I should speak up. To a non-native speaker of English, that simple nod goes a long way and means the world to him or her. My voice is still dry and raspy, but I look forward to embellishing it.

Moreover, all of my written works are a culmination of the guidance, support, and trust of the people who walked alongside me through my journey of English learning: my parents who provided a fertile foundation for my growth; my teachers who planted the knowledge and skills that I know today; and my friends who accepted me unconditionally. Hence, the Ward Prize is the hard-earned, sweet fruition of the many mentors who have come into my life.

Annotated Bibliography

- Bolton, K. (2010). Creativity and World Englishes. *World Englishes*, 29(4), 455–466.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-971X.2010.01674.x>
This article inspired me to choose this poetry project and explore my relationship with languages. In particular, I was pleasantly surprised to read Danton's letter that had a mixture of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation of Philippine English. The letter gave me a strong sense of nostalgia and I wanted to experience that more. Thus, this article helped me realize the beauty of multilingual creativity and expression.
- Hertog, J. (2010). Mother Tongue: a moving account of interlingual farrago from a mother who wants smart children. *Exquisite Corpse*, 1-10.
Judith Hertog's writing and visit solidified my decision to pursue this project. Her narrative as a concerned parent captured the struggles of a multilingual family and the unspoken bond between non-native speakers of English. I wanted my project to contain a similar sentiment that expresses the struggles and benefits of non-native speakers.
- Tan, A. (1990). Mother Tongue. in *The Threepenny Review*, 43(1), 315-320.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4383908>
Amy Tan's moving piece debunked my view on what "good" English is. Like Tan, I had a strong belief that a complicated, mind-boggling sentence is the best when writing in English. However, I soon realized that as long as my writing can deliver my thoughts and intentions effectively, I don't need to use sophisticated words or grammar. Hence, this reading shaped my writing style in this project. For the first time in a while, I was not stressed about how I was writing; I was more focused on what I was writing.