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Thoughts to Words

Jeff Kilpatrick

I see the struggle on my language students' faces
As they outthink their words,
Prisoners to their own perceived ineptitude.

Their hands fly up in feigned resignation
At the effort required to produce even the
Simplest of ideas or thoughts.

Then, a scrunched up nose and narrowed gaze
Signal that a connection has been made.
The light bulb of comprehension glows dimly.

The words come out with hesitation,
Every sentence a question,
Their eyes filled with horror and excitement.

The adult reverts to the child,
The thick skin of maturity stripped bare,
Exposing the tender under layer of innocence.

They look to me for approval,
Confirmation that the thought-speech
Circuit is complete and working.

I lend my support in the form of a nod.
There is still a long journey ahead,
But they are now on the path.

Les Mots Justes

Jeff Kilpatrick

You wander the matrix
Of your mother tongue,
That treasonous sponge
Of firing neurons,
Where your new language
Mingles with the old,
Searching for the words
To match your thoughts.

A tangled string of sounds
Trickles down your tongue,
And congeals on the tip.
You pull it from your lips
Like seaside taffy.

The viscous jumble emerges,
Holes in the surface,
Strands clinging to your teeth.
It struggles to maintain its shape,
Folding in on itself, a distorted
Offspring of your thought.

Your inadequacy mocks you;
A twisting, taunting matador,
Who snaps away that hope of success,
And pricks you with another frustration.

How envious you are of
The toddler who wavers on unsteady feet,
Ignorant of her failures,
Unconscious of her inabilities,
But confident of her success.

You no longer have that bliss,
You now rely on willfulness,
Aware of your flaws, embracing them,
In order to learn and improve.

Soon, you will wade through the snarled
Brambles of grammar with ease,
A spider, dancing along its web
To trap its prey, your prey,

The right words.



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