

MUSINGS

Talk to me



First, a little quiz: What do you call a person who speaks three languages? (Tri-lingual.)

And what do you call a person who speaks two languages? (Bi-lingual.) So, what do you call a person who speaks one language? (American.)

Truth be told, I'm amazed that anyone speaks anything at all. And more amazed that anyone ever understands anything that is said. Or do we?

But then hope springs eternal: There is the recent scholarly work out of the department of zoology at Australian National University confirming that birds of different species, living in the same area together, learn each others' languages. The sounds and meanings of bird calls are very different from one species to another. The inter-species meaning differences are not known automatically. Birds who have not had studied contact with birds of a different species do not automatically understand the idiosyncratic calls of the other.

The birds put effort into this study because it is of amazing benefit. It is good to have the benefit of the knowledge of your different neighbors. More eyes aware of predators or weather

changes or approaching environmental disasters make for longer life. They have an innate understanding of the call of the Three Musketeers: "All for one and one for all."

Who knows what else they may be saying? Especially since we humans, American or otherwise, tend to deny or ignore communication in foreign packages. Whether the communication package is from a different human culture or a different species, we tend to label the different as barbarian, as less capable of containing meaning. Or, at least, there is often the assumption that the meaning of the other is not meaningful enough to inspire translation or decoding. I remember the Three Stooges adding their own refrain to the Musketeers: "And every man for himself (sic the patriarchal usage)."

If we accept that meaning can come in very different packages, what could change? Could we not undo, in one fell swoop, the chaotic result described by many ancient mythologies in their attempt to explain the origin of different languages? Many mythologies explain the formation of various languages as the emanation of fear or punishment from gods concerned about the unlimited potential of humans acting as one with one voice. We recall the Tower of Babel or Brahma's destruction of the World Tree as just two instances of forced fractionization that emerged as response to this mythic concern.

Noam Chomsky, the formidable philosopher and linguist, posits a universal grammar, the knowledge of which is innate, built into the very fabric of what it is to be human. He highlights, in cur-

rent academic format, that which the ancient mythologies found to be the mythic concern of the gods. Like all great pioneers of human knowledge, he opened doors of new vision. And like all pioneers, he has left us with the urgent task of expanding his work. We need to take his essential pirate understanding and make it even more radical.

For if obliterating the elitist walls that stifle communication among human types is so noteworthy to the gods, how much more powerful would be the destruction of inter-species elitism?

Language is a system to communicate in which signs, sounds, gestures, or other marks are understood to convey meaning. How can the meaning be unveiled if we do not see the veils?

How can the meaning by unveiled if we do not see that the effort required to remove the veils is of incalculable benefit?

Perhaps what is required first is deep realization that, even with our sophisticated systems of mark up languages that expose the logical structure of electronic messages, we are all speakers of pidgin. The term pidgin came into use in the 16th century to describe the simplified speech used to communicate between people of different languages so that the basics of trade could be accomplished. The communication required for the



pragmatics of the newly blossoming world trading was mastered.

Beyond that pragmatic mastery, little else was of concern.

So this pirate envisions a new pragmatic, a new necessity. We can no longer afford to create small frames that leave any living being outside the mother tongue. We can no longer afford the scattering into pieces of isolated meaning that take us from the reality of our interdependence, our inter-being. It is the realization of this largest framed one that will propel us all into a new mythology.

It's time to write this new story: Let's talk, all. ■

— Rx is the FloridaWeekly muse who hopes to inspire profound mutiny in all those who care to read. Our Rx may be wearing a pirate cloak of invisibility, but emanating from within this shadow is hope that readers will feel free to respond. Who knows: You may even inspire the muse. Make contact if you dare.

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