

lung-VWIJ



## ***P is for Pro-BAB-il-it-ee***

I remember being angry the first time someone had corrected my English: *but it's the way my parents say it, what do you mean I'm wrong?* My teachers, friends, and TV all confirmed it: my wrongness. My way of language, passed down by my heritage, was wrong. I had been on the wrong side of a one-way-glass, witnessing a world that wouldn't look back at me. When Mrs. Birkbeck, my fifth-grade teacher, sternly corrected my pronunciation of "probability," I felt heat spread throughout my body, and my face reddened with shame. I pounded on the glass with desperate fists, begging for someone to let me in. To be on the right side. Bitter and seeking vengeance, I sought to make this language that had been made foreign to me my own.

Is it possible for a child of immigrants to excel in English? Is it possible that a second generation American may speak English as well as her peers, whose families have lived in this country for generations? In my head, Mrs. Birkbeck smiles knowingly: "There's zero probability of that."

## ***Q is for KVESH-CHUN***

English isn't like numbers or science—it's not a universal language, which makes it so much harder. I steeled my instinct to make "w's" into "v's" and "o's" into "u's." I drawled my "a's" and emphasized my consonants. My Gujarati at home became worse, while my English in school thrived. Was the sacrifice worth it? I could hardly communicate with my grandparents now. I heard my father's mother express to my mother regretfully, "*Pacha nana chokra hutha tho kew saru? —nana hatha thyaare chokra joray sath vat kurvanu selu huthu*" (Why can't they be little kids again? It was so much easier to talk to them). But it was all worth it. Because I was going to speak English the RIGHT way. And being right was worth it. Right?

Sometimes, when I pronounced a word the American way, I imagined a diminished yet incessant banging in the far corner of my mind. Fists against glass. Something screaming to be freed and uncensored, careless and uncorrected. I could feel it, my unconscious, judging the conscious, but pushed too far away to really have a voice. My unconscious beared witness to what I was consciously doing, to what I was consciously sacrificing. Faintly, I made out the unconscious pleas: *Will you really give up who you are? What was passed down to you? Is it really worth so much?*

## ***R is for res-TRAWNT***

"Can I please have a margherita pisa?" The waitress's pen stops for a second as she processes my dad's words, almost imperceptibly, and then continues to scrawl down the order. My dad smiles and hands his menu to her.

After she walks away, I can't help myself: "Dad, it's pizza, not pisa."

It's the first time I remember correcting my father's English, and a glint of rebellion appeared in his eyes. "If one billion people in the world say something the wrong way, are you better off trying to correct them or join them?"

## ***S is for SAW-ree***

I won some Speech and Debate competitions, and judges told me that my diction and voice were "extremely compelling and coherent." My grandparents didn't congratulate me in Gujarati, because they knew I wouldn't be able to respond.

I didn't mean to blindly forgo my language for another. I had adopted the foreigner's tongue, at the expense of my own. My parents tell me all the time it's a shame I can't speak my mother tongue. Whose approval had I sought with my glowing, perfect English? Theirs, the very ones who I had sought to defy.

## ***T is for THRUTH***

I lost the mother of my tongue. When I travel to India, my English, Americanized to perfection, belies the color of my skin. Or is it the other way around? Foreigner, they think. Are they wrong?