

This essay belongs to Casandra Hsiao, who got into Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Columbia, UPenn, Dartmouth, Cornell and Brown for the Class of 2021. Read article:
<https://afterschool.my/news/72793-2/>

Follow my social media for more valuable college admissions content :)

Telegram: https://t.me/Rakhimoff_Amir

Instagram:

https://www.instagram.com/rakhimoff_amir/profilecard/?igsh=b2l1bWpneWxoMXk=

LinkedIn:

https://www.linkedin.com/in/amir-rakhimov-153821251?utm_source=share&utm_campaign=share_via&utm_content=profile&utm_medium=ios_app

YouTube: https://youtube.com/@rakhimoff_amir?si=u3nPcDdVIQnuX8eP

In our house, English is not English. Not in the phonetic sense, like short a is for apple, but rather in the pronunciation – in our house, snake is snack. Words do not roll off our tongues correctly – yet I, who was pulled out of class to meet with language specialists, and my mother from Malaysia, who pronounces film as flim, understand each other perfectly.

In our house, there is no difference between cast and cash, which was why at a church retreat, people made fun of me for “cashing out demons.” I did not realize the glaring difference between the two Englishes until my teacher corrected my pronunciations of hammock, ladle, and siphon. Classmates laughed because I pronounce accept as except, success as sussess. I was in the Creative Writing conservatory, and yet words failed me when I needed them most.

Suddenly, understanding flower is flour wasn’t enough. I rejected the English that had never seemed broken before, a language that had raised me and taught me everything I knew. Everybody else’s parents spoke with accents smarting of Ph.D.s and university teaching positions. So why couldn’t mine?

My mother spread her sunbaked hands and said, “This is where I came from,” spinning a tale with the English she had taught herself.

When my mother moved from her village to a town in Malaysia, she had to learn a brand new language in middle school: English. In a time when humiliation was encouraged, my mother was defenseless against the cruel words spewing from the teacher, who criticized her paper in front of the class. When she began to cry, the class president stood up and said, "That's enough."

"Be like that class president," my mother said with tears in her eyes. The class president took her under her wing and patiently mended my mother's strands of language. "She stood up for the weak and used her words to fight back."

We were both crying now. My mother asked me to teach her proper English so old white ladies at Target wouldn't laugh at her pronunciation. It has not been easy. There is a measure of guilt when I sew her letters together. Long vowels, double consonants — I am still learning myself. Sometimes I let the brokenness slide to spare her pride but perhaps I have hurt her more to spare mine.

As my mother's vocabulary began to grow, I mended my own English. Through performing poetry in front of 3000 at my school's Season Finale event, interviewing people from all walks of life, and writing stories for the stage, I stand against ignorance and become a voice for the homeless, the refugees, the ignored. With my words I fight against jeers pelted at an old Asian street performer on a New York subway. My mother's eyes are reflected in underprivileged ESL children who have so many stories to tell but do not know how. I fill them with words as they take needle and thread to make a tapestry.

In our house, there is beauty in the way we speak to each other. In our house, language is not broken but rather bursting with emotion. We have built a house out of words. There are friendly snakes in the cupboard and snacks in the tank. It is a crooked house. It is a little messy. But this is where we have made our home.