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An Apology To Dad

We all make mistakes. Mistakes are always forgivable if one has the courage to accept them. It's ok to say sorry for a mistake we made. But, sometimes we make such mistakes where just saying sorry doesn't work, we have to improve that mistake in order to apologize for it. "My Father's English", by Mindy Rogers is a reflection of her guilt of losing her traditional language and culture and eventually her family, as suggested by her repeated listening to the Scots-Irish accent recording which is similar to her father's English though she still can't fully accept her mistake of mistreating her family for their thick accent. She apologizes through this short story as her father and other paternal family members are also a part of the audience. Rogers has added many details to the literacy narrative that conveys her indirect apology for her discouragement of her traditional culture and language during childhood. She explains many moments of her childhood that led her to not accept her family's accent and describes how she regretted this during her adulthood.

Rogers starts the literacy narrative by talking about her father and his thick accent. She starts describing her father's earlier accent by saying, "My father's diphthong extends his "bye" into multiple syllables" (Rogers, 302). This suggests that she is missing her father and is feeling sorry about how she treated him for his accent. In the text "My Father's English: Changing Language, Changing Class", Mindy Rogers narrates how her father and other members of her

family had a different way of speaking English as they grew up in a small town of Vermont which made her relationship with her father and other members of her paternal family complicated. The overall text suggests that there was an imaginary wall of differences between Rogers and her father. The author writes, “He and my mother separated while she was pregnant with me, and I barely remember him before this day, except for a vague awareness of turmoil when he visited and an impressive purple sedan in the driveway” (303). The quote suggests that the wall of difference of perspective between Rodgers and her father was not just because of her father’s thick accent but was also because she was separated from her father for many years.

Whenever we feel or get to know that we have made a mistake, we caution others so that they don’t repeat it. As an ESOL teacher, Rogers encouraged her students to continue using their native language. She also wanted them to accept their multicultural diversity and different history as she wrote, “I want them to accept themselves and their complex histories, to value their multicultural backgrounds” (305). She wanted them to know their cultural history and pass it to their next generations. She also wanted them to be proud of their diverse culture. This shows that she was having a guilt for how she didn’t cherish her cultural identity which damaged her relationship with her father and didn’t want her students to make the same mistake. This also suggests that she wants a good relationship between her students and their parents. In this way, she doesn't want her students to face the same guilt that she is feeling in her adulthood.

In the literacy narrative, Rogers describes one event where she listened to different recordings from an interactive map of Englishes around the world. She was amazed to see all the varieties of British Isles accent. Then she came across a recording named Ulster Scots, in which an old man was having a rise and fall in his speech. He had a different way of pronouncing

consonants and vowels. She found that the recording sounded similar to her father's accent in English. She remembered her father after listening to the recording. She wanted to listen to that recording again and again as it felt homely to her. She writes, "I click again, listening over and over to this man who sounds so familiar." (306). This makes us think that she is missing her father and eventually her paternal family as she recalls her childhood. This is indirectly making us think that she wants to live her childhood again in which she would be proud of her culture.

Though it might be argued that the writer was still not accepting her diverse identity and cherishing her native language in her adulthood. Also, there is no hint or clue about any moment when she would have directly apologized to her father or any other member of her family for her misbehaviour. Some people might have a problem with her profession as an ESOL teacher as it suggests that she was the person who was forcing the students who were not native English speakers to learn English. But, her helpful nature and encouragement towards the students for adorning their native culture and aspects of it proves her image built up as an ESOL teacher wrong. Contradictory, some might also consider the writer a hypocritical character because though she encourages her students to cherish their language and identity, she hasn't described any event when she had cherished her culture or participated in any traditional event, not even in her adulthood. She regrets that she was not able to follow any of these ideologies or cherish her culture during her childhood and she doesn't want her students to make the same mistake; as suggested by the statement, "I want them to be proud as they move between worlds, rather than trying to hide what is different about them and their lives. I haven't applied the same principles to myself" (305). Additionally, critics might also point out the details of the text analysing the

description the author uses for her family. After listening to the Ulster Scots accent recording of an old man, Rogers narrates, “My mind travels across an ocean as I imagine some distant relative in worn work clothes, perhaps swinging a scythe or a sapling, or eating a grease-smear’d potato”(306). This seems as if she considers her father and other paternal family members as distant relatives. But, it also shows that she is missing her family and is also guilty about her past behavior with them.

The views about language in general given by Rogers proves all the contradicting statements against her apology false. “Language carries history, be it of hardship or conquest, and tells stories of contact between peoples”(306), as described by the narrator of the literacy narrative. This quote is self-explanatory of Rogers’ knowledge of literature. This understanding of the writer about language suggests that she has become very adaptive for different languages and knows the importance of a language and the legacy it carries. Although, growing up in a family speaking differently than the local people, the writer felt very insecure of her linguistic ability. During her childhood, she tried very hard so that she didn't get the accent of her family. She used to do verbal exercises like reading out loud, separating each word and carefully tonguing them. She always tried to live far from her family so that she didn't get the accent of them. But, her reason behind doing all this was not her hatred for her family or their language. It was the fear of discrimination and ignorance she had. She gives a brief description by narrating, “My early confusion over my father’s language transforms into the realization that his accent distinguishes us from transplants to the area- most of my classmates, teachers, doctors and friends- everybody who matters. It marks our class, and I quickly learn the assumptions applied to this difference in speech: ignorance and provincialism”(304). This suggests that her fear of

lagging behind or remaining alone from the local public led her to remain far from her family.

From my personal experience, I can say that whatever she did was natural to do and was relevant. I also try to include some American accent in my language when I'm with people who are ignoring me for my looks. Regardless, the writer regretted doing all these in her adulthood.

Rogers reveals that for her, accepting her own complex history and linguistic identity was way harder than advising her students to do so, as she writes in the text, “Advocating for my students feels easy, but accepting my own linguistic history, and the tones and phrases that creep out at times I am tired, distracted, or speaking to someone from Vermont, is not so simple” (305). Though this might seem that Rogers still doesn't want to accept her traditional culture, it also shows that she has started to accept her native identity and aspects like language, history, food, etc associated with them. This is the reason I think the writer Mindy Rogers is guilty about treating her father differently for his British Isles culture and apologizes to him by writing this literacy narrative. I feel like Rogers narrative is not just her apology to her father, rather it stands for all the unsaid, unrevealed apologies from every child to their parents/grandparents for the moment they felt ashamed of their culture, language or the way they behaved.

Work cited

Rogers, Mindy. *My Father's English: Changing Language, Changing Class*. The Carolina Reader