

## Jamila Lyiscott: 3 Ways to Speak English

(Note: This is a spoken word piece and was written to be heard. Listen to the poet perform it herself:

[https://www.ted.com/talks/jamila\\_lyiscott\\_3\\_ways\\_to\\_speak\\_english?language=en#t-127735](https://www.ted.com/talks/jamila_lyiscott_3_ways_to_speak_english?language=en#t-127735)

Today, a baffled lady observed the shell where my soul dwells  
And announced that I'm "articulate"  
Which means that when it comes to enunciation and diction  
I don't even think of it  
'Cause I'm "articulate"  
So when my professor asks a question  
And my answer is tainted with a connotation of urbanized suggestion  
There's no misdirected intention  
Pay attention  
'Cause I'm "articulate"  
So when my father asks, "Wha' kinda ting is dis?"  
My "articulate" answer never goes amiss  
I say "father, this is the impending problem at hand"  
And when I'm on the block I switch it up just because I can  
So when my boy says, "What's good with you son?"  
I just say, "I jus' fall out wit dem people but I done!"  
And sometimes in class  
I might pause the intellectual sounding flow to ask  
"Yo! Why dese books neva be about my peoples"  
Yes, I have decided to treat all three of my languages as equals  
Because I'm "articulate"  
But who controls articulation?  
Because the English language is a multifaceted oration  
Subject to indefinite transformation  
Now you may think that it is ignorant to speak broken English  
But I'm here to tell you that even "articulate" Americans sound foolish to the British  
So when my Professor comes on the block and says, "Hello"  
I stop him and say "Nooooo ...  
You're being inarticulate ... the proper way is to say 'what's good'"  
Now you may think that's too hood, that's not cool  
But I'm here to tell you that even our language has rules  
So when Mommy mocks me and says "ya'll-be-madd-going-to-the-store"  
I say "Mommy, no, that sentence is not following the law  
Never does the word "madd" go before a present participle  
That's simply the principle of this English"  
If I had the vocal capacity I would sing this from every mountaintop,

From every suburbia, and every hood  
'Cause the only God of language is the one recorded in the Genesis  
Of this world saying "it is good"  
So I may not always come before you with excellency of speech  
But do not judge me by my language and assume  
That I'm too ignorant to teach  
'Cause I speak three tongues  
One for each:  
Home, school and friends  
I'm a tri-lingual orator  
Sometimes I'm consistent with my language now  
Then switch it up so I don't bore later  
Sometimes I fight back two tongues  
While I use the other one in the classroom  
And when I mistakenly mix them up  
I feel crazy like ... I'm cooking in the bathroom  
I know that I had to borrow your language because mines was stolen  
But you can't expect me to speak your history wholly while mines is broken  
These words are spoken  
By someone who is simply fed up with the Eurocentric ideals of this season  
And the reason I speak a composite version of your language  
Is because mines was raped away along with my history  
I speak broken English so the profusing gashes can remind us  
That our current state is not a mystery  
I'm so tired of the negative images that are driving my people mad  
So unless you've seen it rob a bank stop calling my hair bad  
I'm so sick of this nonsensical racial disparity  
So don't call it good unless your hair is known for donating to charity  
As much as has been raped away from our people  
How can you expect me to treat their imprint on your language  
As anything less than equal  
Let there be no confusion  
Let there be no hesitation  
This is not a promotion of ignorance  
This is a linguistic celebration  
That's why I put "tri-lingual" on my last job application  
I can help to diversify your consumer market is all I wanted them to know  
And when they call me for the interview I'll be more than happy to show that  
I can say:  
"What's good"  
"Whatagwan"  
And of course ... "Hello"  
Because I'm "articulate"