

Edith asked Caroline if she would be willing to attend a conference on the topic of communication through the language barrier. Caroline agreed. Caroline is now at the conference. It is a three day conference. The first day went quietly, Caroline had checked in to the hotel where the conference is being held on the previous day, and had enjoyed listening to the talks the first day of the conference. It is now the second day of the conference. Caroline is not presenting a paper, yet there is in the last time slot of the afternoon session a Quick Talks period, for one hour. Caroline knew of this before attending and has brought with her a copy of the set of cards, and the text localized into English printed on a piece of paper, for the third poem of the two Poetry through the Language Barrier events - just in case there is an opportunity to present a Quick Talk.

It is the afternoon break. People are chatting.

“Could we go back in please.” a voice calls out. People gradually move to the room where the Quick Talks are to be presented.

The chairperson of the Quick Talks period opens proceedings.

“Now we come to the Quick Talks period.”

There is a buzz of excitement in the room.

“I have arranged for four speakers to each give a Quick Talk of around ten minutes length and then we can have some time for questions.”

The first talk takes place. It finishes after eight minutes. There are a few questions but after them the schedule is running a few minutes early.

Caroline wonders if this will be the trend, and indeed it is.

It is eight minutes to five, with the session due to finish at 5 pm.

‘Now,’ thinks Caroline, ‘this may be my chance to present my talk. I wonder if anybody else is wanting to present a talk.’

The chairperson moves to the front of the room, faces the audience and speaks.

“Well, thank you to our four speakers, indeed we are finishing a few minutes early.”

People begin to stand to leave the room.

Caroline seizes the moment.

“Excuse me Point of Order Err” calls out Caroline.

The chairperson looks to his left at Caroline who is stood at her place near the end of a row of tables about half-way back in the room.

“Um yes?” asks the chairperson, somewhat surprised.

People stop moving and turn to observe the exchange.

“I have a Quick Talk that I would like to present please.”

“Well, we’ve finished there isn’t time. It’s nearly five o’clock.”

“Well, the program says that if there is time then there can be speakers from the floor. I can present within the time available.”

There is a pause.

“Go on, let the girl give her talk.” is from an elderly man sat near the front “We were all young once give her a chance.”

“Very well.” says the chairperson somewhat reluctantly.

People resume their seats.

“Who are you please?” asks the chairperson.

“Caroline Appleby.” replies Caroline.

“Are you representing an organization?”

“Yes, Localizable Sentences and their Applications Research Association, often known as LocSARA.”

“Oh.” replies the chairperson somewhat reluctantly. “Very well, please present your talk. Five minutes.”

Caroline picks up her folder and walks to the front of the room. The chairperson moves to a chair at the end of the front row to his right.

Caroline opens her folder, removes a sheet of paper and places it on the lectern.

Caroline then removes a pile of cards, each A4 in size, and places them to her right.

Caroline looks to make sure that everything is in its right place for her presentation, checking twice, then pauses and looks up at the audience.

A pause to settle, going from the making of the preparations to becoming ready to present the talk.

Caroline begins her talk.

“I am presenting a poem through the language barrier. Each line of the poem is a complete sentence and is represented by a language-independent glyph. As I display each glyph I speak its meaning localized into English. The poem is one of several poems each of which is written using only glyphs from a set of twenty-six glyphs, four for seasons, seven for weather, and fifteen for colours. Many of the glyphs for colours include lines related to the well-known Petra Sancta system for depicting colour using monochrome lines.”

Caroline pauses, then performs the poem, lifting cards and showing them to the audience and speaking the text in English.

It is summer.
It is sunny.
The colour is sky blue.
It is summer.
It is raining.
It is summer.
It is sunny.
The colour is red.
The colour is orange.
The colour is yellow.
The colour is green.
The colour is blue.
The colour is magenta.
It is summer.
It is sunny.
The colour is sky blue.

There is a pause.

There is a polite ripple of applause.

The chairperson stands and walks to the front.

“Well, thank you Caroline, I think we’re done now it is just before five o’clock so yes you did present during the session. Thank you.”

“Jim, I’ve got a question well more of an observation really.”

The chairperson is a bit disconcerted.

“Err yes.”

“Well, it was all very enchanting, but it only makes sense if the people in the audience all understand English which clearly they do here as the conference is in English. It does not communicate through the language barrier.”

The chairperson is somewhat concerned what to do. It is not really a question and he wonders whether he should ask Caroline to comment. Caroline looks at the chairperson.

Before he has a chance to respond, a female voice calls out.

“Excuse me, I am bilingual in English and Japanese and I wonder if I may have a go at presenting the poem - if Caroline agrees and turns the cards for me. I gather that Caroline has the English version on a sheet of paper on the lectern? I can translate as I go along.” says Anna.

The chairperson looks at the clock.

It is now just after five o’clock.

The chairperson notices the audience looking at him, clearly interested.

The chairperson looks at Caroline with the implied question of whether she is happy to participate as Anna has suggested.

“Yes certainly, I am happy to participate.” says Caroline.

“Very well.”

Anna moves to the front and has a quick conversation with Caroline; both smile in agreement.

The chairperson moves to his seat.

The performance begins, Caroline displaying the cards to the audience and Anna speaking in Japanese. Yet when the colours of the rainbow are listed, Anna raises her right hand as if pointing to the colour bands of the rainbow, gently lowering it slightly as she goes from red through to magenta. Then at the end using both hands in motion to indicate all of the sky being sky blue as she speaks in Japanese.

There is applause, polite applause from most people and very enthusiastic applause from a group of people in the second row, just behind where the chairperson is seated. This enthusiastic applause is noticed by everybody and the chairperson returns to the front.

The man who commented before speaks out.

“Exactly. To those who know the language in which it is spoken, it makes sense, to everybody else it is just a display of some meaningless symbols well symbols that may have meanings to some people who work with them but not to most people.”

The chairperson is concerned, it is now after five o'clock.

“Jim, I speak Welsh. Maybe I am the only one here who understands Welsh. Can I try it in Welsh please, but as time is pressing may I suggest that we continue in the lounge at nine o'clock this evening, after dinner.” says David.

Jim pauses, not knowing quite what to say.

“I second that suggestion.” says the same man who got Caroline her chance. “I find this very interesting.”

The chairperson looks a bit confused and reluctant, yet looking around him nobody objects, so he speaks. “Very well. We will resume in the lounge after dinner, at nine o'clock if anyone wants to come along.”