

Response 3: Quote Exercise

Bakhtin, a Russian scholar and theorist, wrote about language, and one of the ideas he wrote about is his belief that there is such thing as “the authoritative word” and that it stands in contrast to “the internally persuasive word.”

Bakhtin says that “the authoritative word” is language you see as belonging to someone else, words that are separate or distanced from you. Some examples might be the words in an academic journal of a field that you don’t belong to, the language of textbooks, or the words of a teacher. Bakhtin says that these authoritative words are ones that may not hold a lot of meaning for you, that maybe you would never use on your own. You might study them to memorize them for a test or so that you can parrot them back to an instructor, but you don’t really interact with them – you don’t question them or modify them.

Then, there’s the internally persuasive word – words that *do* mean something to you, words that you understand and use and relate to. These are words that belong to you. You hear them and they enter into your brain and mingle with other thoughts and language that are already there.

Authoritative words don’t mix with your internally persuasive language; they might even overpower that internally persuasive language and sometimes silence it. Most people have had this happen whether they realized it or not. Perhaps when you were preparing for a Biology test you just took the words in the textbook for face value, repeating them word-for-word on the test and then quickly forgetting them afterwards. When you do this, you often leave the authoritative words and the ideas they describe behind.

Your assignment: Look back at one of your scholarly sources for the research essay. Reread it and pick out the places that sound most “authoritative,” most unrelatable or least understandable to you. Choose 3 quotes and copy them onto a piece of paper. (This will work best if you choose somewhat lengthy quotes.) For each of the quotes, you will complete a separate task:

- 1. For one quote, change the author’s words into words that make sense to you (that still represent the author’s original ideas). Feel free to use slang and nonacademic or informal language. Do what you need to do to make it make sense and sound like something you would say (while remaining true to the original ideas).

- 2. For a different quote, create a dialogue between you and the author where you ask him/her to explain what s/he means by this quote. You should go back and forth with the author at least four times, asking for further clarification until you think you reach a suitable, understandable phrasing.

→ 3. Rephrase your last quote in 3 different ways: First as if the quote was being said by a teenage girl. Second, as if it was being said by a second-grade teacher. Third, as if it was being said by a highly intelligent but not very sociable physicist.

Wednesday we will have a short discussion about what you did to change the quotes or passages, and how language is always half-ours, half-someone else's.

3 quote