Heritage Intercepted Ep.2: All Things Language Transcript

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

heritage, organisation, language, communities, experiences, important, identities, pronouns, terms, culture, people, work, british, colour, change, white, person, understanding, diversity, issue

SPEAKERS

Jasmine, Tapiwa, Yokio, Harman, Jasmine

Yokio 0:38

My name is Yokio. I'm 19. My pronouns are he him, and I work in the fashion industry and I also do acting as well.

Harman 0:51

Hi, I'm Harman, I'm 17 my pronouns are she her and I volunteer in the heritage sector.

Jasmine 1:03

Hiya, my name is Jasmine, my pronouns are they them. I am 25, I'm a journalist and public speaker in mental health and diversity and inclusion.

Tapiwa 1:21

Hi, my name is Tapiwa. I'm 18 years old, my pronouns are she her, and I'm quite into youth activism and public speaking in general.

So to me, heritage is a life that I live now. I'm living on the shoulders of the history before me, because I'm my mother's daughter, but I'm also the one that taught her what it means to be me.

In terms of the decolonising language around heritage, I feel like that's important because not a lot of people realise that the slurs and the caricatures that they use, make people's life a living hell. They make life and death situations out of things that shouldn't be.

I know from a lot of experiences personally, but also from people around me, like with bullying and racism. It has been a situation where people don't understand

themselves. So they're teeter tottering on a tightrope between effectively life and death, because they don't know who they are.

Jasmine 2:25
Okay, so, for me, I think that there are obviously lots of really practical things that we have to do to make sure that people feel included.

I think there's something about the way heritage is spoken about, like the language that is used, even the tone. It's very white it's very traditionally British, and obviously it leans into certain isms at some point. I think the language we use is really important, when we're thinking about how people like us feel in those spaces.

Yokio 2:54
I feel like, maybe it's just me, but I feel like it's a very taboo topic. It seems like words like slavery scare people and it shouldn't because that's part of our history but we did so much more. Like, we built things, we have languages, and there are all types of stuff. It's lost but we still know it is there.

Jasmine 3:34
I feel like we potentially feel uncomfortable in these spaces or less welcomed in these spaces, because like you said, it's the conversation that's happening, the language is always negative. It's either something negative that we or they did or the language that they're using to talk about us is sympathetic or patronising. So we are always associated with something negative.

I don't go on a day out to feel negative, I don't want to go somewhere to see and hear negative aspects about me, I want to hear about India's contributions to World War Two. Our people's efforts resulted in the Nazis no longer being in power. We don't hear about our efforts, but I know that my grandfather fought in that war. I just don't know where he was, and that's what's important to me, I want to know where.

Yokio 4:31
 Yeah, it's a disconnect between those events and what led up to the present day. It's about reestablishing that and being well connected to those people.

Tapiwa 4:44
I feel like the language that we sometimes perpetuate through caricatures is the reason why we don't have that connection. For so long people would attack my identity and because I did not know what it was I struggled with having conversations about my culture and language. I couldn't stand up for it because I didn't know myself.

So when we put these harsh languages on people's identities we are projecting what they should be. It's like how Black they should be or how Asian they should be, how this and that and the other. When we put people into a box, we have to ask ourselves where is their freedom to explore who they are and who they belong to?

When we think of institutions like the NHS, the government and universities, these organisations push an agenda for people from marginalised groups. For example the term, global majorities. That is such a stickler, because what do you mean global majorities? In the UK that I am living in, am I the majority? No. My experience is an experience felt by a lot of minorities. My experience is that I've been marginalised, I've been pushed aside, so don't refer to me in a way that covers up my experience.

Yokio 6:04
When they use that term, globalised communities, they put different communities together that are marginalised, and that's where the issue comes from, with terms like BAME. You're assuming that everybody has the same sort of problem, where, in fact, the history behind those problems are very different. So it is an injustice to group us together and think that we have the same problems, therefore we all need the same solution and help to get healing.

Jasmine 6:31
I think it's a really obvious side of performance, when you're working with an organisation, and certain people be like, Oh, we don't say BAME, we say, Black, Asian, minority ethnic, because it's rude to say BAME. If you can't differentiate in your recruitment between different groups within the Black and Asian communities, it shows immediately that you've not done the work.

I think there's an important sisterhood, brotherhood, community, unity, that comes from people like us who are not the same race, but we're all not white. Having a conversation about our experiences of racism, that's important for us to have those conversations. Organisations that are white majority, that's not the work that they should be doing. We're about bringing each other together and forming a community, they need to identify very specific prejudices they will have when interacting with different identities.

Suggesting that all of one race is the same is ludicrous. Grouping identities together makes it easy for people to pat themselves on the back to feel like they're doing really well. For example, saying we have 5 BAME people in the organisation but not knowing their heritage. It is worse. I'd rather you didn't hire us, I'd rather we could just be like you're racist because you're not hiring people.

Tapiwa 8:17

I feel like a lot of that wording is rooted in colonialism. It reflects the way we're viewed as people. For example, diversity hiring and schemes to progress people that are from 'BAME' 'POC' backgrounds. It implies that we are a slave to something or to someone and yet not all of us were slaves. We were colonised and there's still forms of imperialism now. I would like to be viewed as a whole person and my experiences holistically, not one of them.

Yokio 9:02

Quite frankly, within an identity there's so many different issues that one person can't face that another person within the community will not face, like issues of colourism. There are so many internal issues within communities and organisations need to realise a diversity hire based on race alone is not enough. For example, there are different religions within different ethnic groups so they would need to cater to those types of niches as well. You cannot lump people into one pool. Another example is sexuality.

It's so disrespectful, because it's like you are sweeping the issue under the rug to stop communities of colour from complaining. You're not fixing the problem, you are just dragging it.

Jasmine 10:02

I think it's the language that you use in the organisation that matters. You can add as many rainbow flags and talk about how inclusive you are of different races and how important multiculturalism is to you, but what matters is the language you use.

When you decolonise the space, you acknowledge that there's no educational level attached to language. There's no capacity attached to that language. I work with revolution hive. They are amazing and they specifically focus on systematic racism and holistic education. One of our best speakers speaks in his own voice, and he's from Lewisham. So it's very, like relaxed, but he did not connect with this one person. She was like, oh, you need to change the way that you speak.

How can you not understand who he's trying to connect to say that he needs to change the way that he speaks? So I think you've got to think about why are you hiring these people? Who are you trying to access? How do you allow them to actually bring their authentic selves rather than a whitewashed version of themselves, that is only acceptable in the workplace?

Yokio 11:30
It's about perspectives isn't it? You can't tell someone's story or experience for them.

Jasmine 11:42
You can mess it up, you can miss the important bits.

Yokio 11:45
Yeah you could ruin it.

Jasmine 11:46
It becomes your perspective not their perspective.

Yokio 11:49
Yeah, for sure.

I think the first thing to address is intentionality. Is it out of fear? It's very rare for it to be genuine. When it's out of fear, you can tell someone has been forced to do stuff. When you're trying to improve the culture of an organisation, essentially, it's very hard to get marginalised communities to respond and engage with you because of your own culture.

And because it's so rooted in the culture, it's hard to just change and update it because it is generational.

Tapiwa 12:50
What do you then change the terms to because it's easier to change the way that you react to ethnic minorities, but what do you say that encompasses the people that you're talking about and is holistic to an individual's experiences? I know there's some people that are very uncomfortable with referring to people by skin tone and prefer BAME but it's very easy to hide behind a term.

Jasmine 13:39
I think a big issue with acting on this is going to be structural capacity. So we want people to tell their own stories. If we think about it, in terms of the structure, right? There's the performer and then there's the director. So like, the person telling the story is the performer, but the director is still the one picking the stories, audiences and platform. It can become performative. It's like come and tell your story, we haven't had this one before, it is going to be so interesting to our audiences.

Yokio 14:16
It feels like ticking boxes, saying we have a person of colour telling the story.

Jasmine 14:21
We need to be represented in the structure. I don't think we don't need to become part of the system, we need to be given control in the system. So maybe we need a board that is specifically made up of community activists rather than highly educated people to advise. So that someone who is not white is watching how organisations operate. Like Yokio said, if you don't have the correct perspective you can't tell the story properly. So it is reductionist to recruit one person of colour to tell a story especially if your organisation is not representative, it will be an echo chamber because the community was not involved.

Yokio 15:20
I think changing that hierarchy is really important, but also making sure that hierarchy is not isolated. There definitely needs to be open communication and conversation and this where you can see change that is more sustainable.

Tapiwa 15:40
Yeah, for longevity, if you're gonna put in some infrastructure and make something that's concrete. So if you're gonna make a new policy make sure that you commit to it and make sure everybody is on board.

It is easy to do a diversity training course and tick that box but it needs to be something that's so immersive that you can kind of weed out people that are tokenistic.

Yokio 16:46
Another thing is that not a lot of people hold them accountable. So they get away with being tokenistic.

Yeah, because it's very much like, we did the training, checked the box so what's there to complain about? Why are you complaining?

Today, wow, today has been, you know, such an important and eventful day. I feel like it's so important to have these conversations and it has to be with a group of people.

Tapiwa 17:27
Yeah, today has actually been really good. I feel like we have a lot of different lived experiences, and different friendships and backgrounds, which has been really useful when talking about language. Personally, I love linguistics and understanding the sort of intonation and structures behind it in a grammatical sense, but other people prefer the sort of the culture aspects, the historical aspects. It has been good to hear

everyone's opinions, experiences, and collect them together to get a holistic view on what they feel Heritage is.

Jasmine 17:59

I think working with other young people today has been really amazing. It's been really refreshing. Everybody's very confident but they're also very considerate. I think it is a beautiful balance to have people who are extremely passionate about what they do, but also extremely passionate about ensuring they're informed about different perspectives. It's also been a laugh, it's been lots of fun, which is really nice.

Harman 18:30

I think we all kind of healed today. There were people from all sorts of backgrounds as well as different personalities and we got through it with a lot of humour. There is so much that we carry on our backs, we speak to different people, we're trying to make systematic change, we've tried to, you know, change it inside out. It's just really nice to hear people from different cultures explaining to you in a way that you might not feel comfortable to help you form a bigger picture of what meaningful change looks like.

Jasmine 19:30

I think just in terms of it being like an abstract concept, heritage is a stuff that is given to you. It is gifts from your family or gifts from your culture or gifts from experiences. It allows you to collect knowledge that you can then use in your life. So if there's no heritage, there's no accumulation of knowledge, there is no passing down of understanding. So I think heritage plays a really important part in how we progress as human beings.

I think my heritage is something that as a mixed race person I didn't really look into because my dad was quite assimilated when I was born. So together heritage is something we explore together and find confidence in together. So it's one of those things that brings communities together as well, which is why it's really important for me.

It is fundamental to decolonise heritage spaces if you want to have a genuine heritage, if you want to have real history. White British heritage has fundamentally been fueled by BIPOC British heritage since the beginning of how we see modern England. We are missing parts of stories and it's about white people, but it's missing how the BIPOC people have fueled the successes of those white people. So I think inclusive heritage is about ensuring that people are given credit where it's due. It's also about taking responsibilities for when England was negatively impacting British

colonies and understanding that is British history and that those people are British by their approximation to English culture.