

# MASTERTALK

## The Language Of Master/Slave Relationships

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"Two people approach reality. They experience it. They come away with different experiences. They cannot share reality as they do not have it. But they can share their experiences of reality, for those they have. Sadly they often argue over whose experience is the "right" experience. It is as though you and I went to a beautiful national park for a weekend. We each took a video camera and took pictures all weekend. When we come back we have two sets of tape. Then we get into an argument over whose tape had the right pictures. Foolishly we keep one tape and hide the other, when we should treasure both. And remember, if you want to know what you look like in the world, you need to look at my tape. And if I want to learn how I come across, I need to look at your tape." Al Turtle 1999.

A challenge I believe that faces a couple or a group needing to make decisions is avoiding the dysfunctional form of hierarchy. Fortunately functional and dysfunctional differ readily and can be identified practically. I think they can even be measured. Unfortunately, I believe the dysfunctional hierarchy is the most common form of relating in our culture. Thus I see the solution to this challenge as a simple but almost constant effort. Often talking well is just a matter of how we speak, the syntax and the semantics. And I believe the most critical piece of semantics is the clarity of ownership - WHO's is this? My thought or your thought. (For a full presentation of background of this subject read my other paper on [Master/Slave](#).)

### Story: The General

Cresting the ridge, the army paused and looked over the peaceful valley with its meandering river and gentle slopes. But the expected enemy was not in sight. In frustration, the General cried, "Dammit!" By next morning the Corp of Engineers had.

### Identifying Functional vs Dysfunctional Hierarchy

As I see it, the purpose of a functional hierarchy is to provide a "successful compromise between a group's need for decision(s) and the valuable diversity of opinion present in the group." The purpose of a dysfunctional hierarchy is obedience.

Dialogue, because of its rich flow of data, is the form of communication in a functional hierarchy. MasterTalk is the form of communication in a dysfunctional hierarchy because of its acuity at discovering and surfacing trends of disobedience.

Dialogue involves the joining of two or more points of view into a larger and more complete view of the world. Dialogue is a collegial way of talking. Points of view are shared and added to other points of view. For the making of quality decisions, dialogue is highly desired.

MasterTalk centers around the competition of points of view. Its purpose is to ensure the dominance of a single view with the concomitant extinguishing of other viewpoints.

#### MasterTalk

MasterTalk is dismissive of other points of view.

The language of threat

The language of "Truth".

The language of Emotional Symbiosis.

The language of bullies (conscious or unconscious).

In the presence of MasterTalk people tend to feel "invisible."

A temporary language, unstable, but necessary in an emergency.

#### Dialogue

Dialogue involves the invitation for all to share fully.

The language of safety.

The language of connection

The language of functional diversity.

The language of friends and peers.

In the presence of dialogue people tend to feel "visible".

The language of long range stability.

This felt sense of threat seems particularly true in a community that teaches and frequently practices Dialogue. I have been watching this problem in community for over two years. My common observation is that when speaking to a group the use of MasterTalk seems to instantly trigger threat, anxiety and resistance in a large number of those listening. In the last year, every conflict in our community I have observed to be initiated by the use of MasterTalk.

### Definitions: MasterTalk vs Dialogue

- I define MasterTalk as "any sentence that implies a single truth."
- I define Dialogue as "any sentence that implies multiple truths."

As MasterTalk is to ubiquitous, so common, it may seem that it is hard to notice. But I've found it quite simple to recognize.

### E-Prime

The following is from another community of thinkers that has noted the existence of MasterTalk. Their point of view seems to be that MasterTalk prevents generative thinking and promotes rigidity. People who resort of MasterTalk often speak of facticity, reality, truth, correctness, etc. Listen for those key words. Check out E-Prime on the web.

1A. The electron is a wave.

1B. The electron appears as a wave when measured with instrument-1.

2A. The electron is a particle.

2B. The electron appears as a particle when measured with instrument-2.

3A. John is lethargic and unhappy.

3B. John appears lethargic and unhappy in the office.

4A. John is bright and cheerful.

4B. John appears bright and cheerful on holiday at the beach.

5A. This is the knife the first man used to stab the second man.

5B. The first man appeared to stab the second man with what looked like a knife to me.

6A. The car involved in the hit-and-run accident was a blue Ford.

6B. In memory, I think I recall the car involved in the hit-and-run accident as a blue Ford.

7A. This is a fascist idea.

7B. This seems like a fascist idea to me.

8A. Beethoven is better than Mozart.

8B. In my present mixed state of musical education and ignorance, Beethoven seems better to me than Mozart.

9A. That is a sexist movie.

9B. That seems like a sexist movie to me.

10A. The fetus is a person.

10B. In my system of metaphysics, I classify the fetus as a person.

The "A"-type statements (Standard English) all implicitly or explicitly assume the medieval view called "Aristotelian essentialism" or "naive realism." In other words, they assume a world made up of block-like entities with indwelling "essences" or spooks- "ghosts in the machine."

The "B"-type statements (E-Prime) recast these sentences into a form isomorphic to modern science by first abolishing the "is" of Aristotelian essence and then reformulating each observation in terms of signals received and interpreted by a body (or instrument) moving in

space-time.

Relativity, quantum mechanics, large sections of general physics, perception psychology, sociology, linguistics, modern math, anthropology, ethology, and several other sciences make perfect sense when put into the software of E-Prime. Each of these sciences generates paradoxes, some bordering on "nonsense" or "gibberish," if you try to translate them back into the software of Standard English.

### **The Origin, Etiology, of MasterTalk**

As far as I can tell MasterTalk is a function of our historical cultural practice of warfare.

I sometimes tell a story of two primitive villages fighting in the mists over a single food supply. The battle went on for days and days and was inconclusive. The swampy ground was covered with the dead bodies of many. Then one day a character climbed an old tree and looked out. He could now see the lay of the swamp and where all his people were and where all the enemy were. He, from his vantage point, started calling out what to do. At first no one paid him any attention. After all he couldn't fight up there. But eventually his people realized his advice was good. His village did what he told them. They rapidly won and extinguished the other tribe. After that they made a rule. "The village that wins has a leader up a tree and let's make sure that there is always one up there."

Anyone who has been in the military knows that the fundamental lesson in boot camp is to get used to this idea.

"At any moment, there is always one, and only one, person present who's point of view counts."

When six soldiers are present, the senior person has the last word. When some more soldiers join, their first action is to figure out who now is the senior person present.

I think it obvious that in warfare, efficiency is the most critical of attributes. Thus absolute obedience is trained into all members.

My experience is that most western culture is based upon that "Roman Army" model and families become little platoons even when no war is present. Childhood seems more an extended boot camp than a process of nurturing thinking members of a free culture. The training tool in all boot camps is MasterTalk.

### **Active vs Passive MasterTalk**

As conversation is a relational process, MasterTalk takes two forms: that used by the "Master\*" and that used by the "Slave\*".

The Master form contains statements of "facticity". Remember that the purpose of this form of conversation is to train or test for obedience to the Master's point of view. Therefore MasterTalk does not send a message of data, but sends the message of position. "I am one up, to you." If resistance is encountered, if another point of view surfaces, training continues.

The Slave form asserts lack of "facticity." Here are some frequent examples: "What really happened?" "I don't know." "What is the meaning of that?" "I'm just trying to do the right thing!" I think the purpose these statements is to avoid trouble, signal a posture of submission, and to seek comfort by avoiding personal responsibility.

### **Threat and Removing It**

As I said before I believe MasterTalk to be the language of Threat. Whether it is used with the intention of threatening diversity or whether it is used out of a cultural habit, the likelihood that listeners will feel threatened is very high.

After living in our culture, I believe both the use of MasterTalk and the responding sense of threat are now mostly unconscious in most people. If I say a MasterTalk statement, listeners, I believe, will have heightened blood pressure, increased flows of adrenaline, whether they are conscious of it or not. When I speak using dialogue statements I believe listeners will remain in, or develop a deeper sense of safety.

## How to Handle MasterTalk

The simple response to a Master Statement is to mirror, and in the mirroring to convert the statement to its dialogical form.

Example. Statement: "You are picking on me!" Mirror: "So you believe I am picking on you."

I have come to realize that the listener's nervous system, their [Lizard](#), will relax when it hears the second statement from their own mouth or even inserted sub-vocally. I call this a Boundary Insert - inserting the dialogical component of ownership into the master statement. Listening to lots of MasterTalk, and thus doing many boundary inserting seems exhausting.

One way to learn to speak dialogically is to practice using writing. As a speaker you may not notice your MasterTalk. As a reader you may. Write your words and then look back at your writing. Are your sentences full of your story, your beliefs, your thoughts, your ideas, your awarenesses. Or are they full of attempts to speak for all people - dogma, universal statements, etc.

I am also aware that mixing dialogical "ownership" statements with Master Statements is very soothing. I believe I can say up to five master statements followed by one ownership statement and people seem to remain relaxed. My favorite ownership statement is "These are all my thoughts and I'm aware that my thoughts plus a dollar get me a cup of coffee."

## The Tyrant Scale

In the office I often test people on their ability to be dialogical. The test involves me mirroring a strong Master statement, using a Boundary Insert, and then watching the response. E.g. "George Bush is a crook!" My response is "So you believe George Bush is a crook. Did I get that?" The responses to my mirroring tends to indicate the willingness of the speaker to be dialogical or tyrannical. Since most people are unaware of their MasterTalk, measuring their willingness to shift into dialogical space is useful.

+5	"No. It is fact that he's a crook!"	High Tyrant, perhaps means to be threatening. Needs a lot of work.
0	"Yeah, who cares."	Neutral. You know nothing of this person's position. May need some work.
-5	"Yeah, that is my opinion. I can only speak for myself. What do you think?"	Lo Tyrant. Perhaps ready to be a help in teaching others dialogue.

## Summary

To keep listeners safe, to make sure that the hierarchy is retaining its function, I believe it critical to avoid MasterTalk and to maintain the primacy of Dialogue, frequently. Sub-vocally mirroring lots of MasterTalk to me is very tiring.

## Note

\* I chose the terms "Master" and "Slave" several years ago after trying many other terms. My goal was to evoke a visceral response in couples and to invite them to move toward being Dialogical. This year I found that the same terms were used by the philosopher, HEGEL, (Phenomenology of Spirit -1807). He wrote of the Master/Slave Dialectic. The concept appears essentially the same as here. I've also heard that Aristotle used the same terms.