

Mother tongue essay



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Rhetorical Analysis of “ Mother Tongue” written by Amy Tan “ So easy to read”(p. 4). Amy Tan ends her essay, “ Mother Tongue” with this short and even grammatically wrong sentence. She tells us this mother’s brief review is a proof of success of her writing. Why does she think that easiness is an essence of her writing? She suggests answers to this question by her essay. In her essay, Amy Tan effectively convinces her readers that “ broken English” is not an inferior language, but just a different style of English that has values in it by depicting her personal experiences and strong appeal to pathos.

She makes her readers to have sympathetic emotions for her mother and hostile emotion for people who was rude to her by presenting vividly depicted personal anecdote. Also, she does not end her essay with her personal stories but broadens the topic to a social level. Amy Tan is a well known Chinese American writer who is famous for her major work, The Joy luck club. She usually writes about the mother and daughter relationship. The essay “ Mother Tongue” was originally published in The Threepenny Review in 1990 and also included in The Best American Short Stories 1991, edited by Joyce Carol Oates.

In this essay, Tan is likely to reach out to immigrant families that went through similar hardships on communication that she and her mother experienced. In the beginning of her essay, Tan realizes that she uses different kind of English according to the situation. Then, she suggests reasons of the change in her own speaking. She presents personal anecdotes relative to her mother. She shows the way her mother speaks English

imperfectly and how her mother was treated rudely by various people because of her language.

In Tan's childhood, she thought her mother's imperfect English is shameful. She thought her mother's ability to think is also limited, as she uses imperfect English. Her mother's distinctive English influenced Tan's English skills. She could get good grades on math and science, while she struggled with English achievement tests. In spite of the influence of her mother's English and discouraging comments about her writing from others, she rebelled against them and became a successful writer.

Now, she thinks all languages she uses including her mother's tongue should be used in her writing. She decided to "[seek] to preserve the essence", her mother's "intent, her passion, her imagery, the rhythms of her speech and the nature of her thoughts" in her essay. (p. 3-4) The most powerful rhetorical strategy of her essay is personal anecdote. Her personal anecdotes not only support her argument but also appeal to pathos. Her essay can be seen as a just collection of anecdotes, but she definitely has an argument in her essay.

By presenting personal anecdotes of Tan and her mother, she maintains that people who use "broken English" are often treated disrespectfully even though their thoughts are not limited. Also, she lets her readers to compare her stories to their own and make them to think thoroughly about their own languages. Her mother's utterances are not just from Tan's memory, but videotaped and then transcribed by Tan. Also, Tan does not simply explain

the way her mother talks, but presents her utterance line by line showing distinctive features like lack of grammaticality of her language.

This procedure makes her anecdotes more authentic and vivid that makes readers feel like they are actually listening to the utterances. She also repeatedly compares her mother's utterance with her revised standard English version. In the story that happened to her and her mother in the bank, first she presents her mother's utterance " Why he don't send me check, already two weeks late. ", and then she presents her utterance " You had agreed to send me the check two weeks ago, but it hasn't arrived. "(P. 2) that is said in perfect English.

This comparison shows the clear differences between English and its variation, and makes readers to easily figure out what her mother's language actually is. Although her mother's tongue is imperfect, Tan says that her mother's thought is not inferior at all. She rather tells that " my mother's English is perfectly clear, perfectly natural. It's my mother tongue. Her language, as I hear it, is vivid, direct, full of observation and imagery. That was the language that helped shape the way I saw things, expressed things, made sense of the world" (P. 1).

This part clearly shows Tan's affection to her mother and mother's language. Tan's admiration to her mother helps readers to understand Tan's mother and to be more attached to her. After she shows the way that her mother talks, she tells us two stories about her mother that she received unfair treatment in bank and hospital because of her language. Especially, anecdote regarding the CAT scan effectively appeals to pathos by arousing

reader's sympathy for her mother. Her mother went to hospital to hear a result of her brain CAT scan, but the hospital lost her CAT scan.

However, they did not apologize to her mother, and they wanted her have another appointment to get a diagnosis. Surprisingly, after Tan's phone conversation with the doctor, they could get a sincere apologize and promise of the original CAT scan. This personal experience clearly shows that there is discrimination toward the people who cannot speak English fluently. Tan evoke hostility in the reader toward people shows disrespectful behaviors to people who use variation of English. She does not end her essay by listing her personal experiences.

She raises her topic to a social level to make people discuss the following issue. She says that she has been asked, " why there are not more Asian Americans represented in American literature" (P. 3). While she tries to answer this question, she broadens the subject of the essay from her and her mother to Asian American society. She maintains that Asian American students could be steered away from writing by the teachers who assume that they are good at math and science, not English writing.

Once more, she comes back to her personal experience the she overcame the social stereotype of Asian American, and succeeded to be a writer. Also, she suggests her firm decision she made before that she is going to use " all the Englishes that she grew up with", including her mother's English regarded as limited and broken (P. 3). She maintains that all languages have their own values and mingled language is the essence of her writing. By helping her readers to relate themselves with her hardships and also her

success as a writer, she inspires them to challenge the negative assumption on them.

Tan repeatedly claims that her mother tongue is not an inferior language, but it has its own value like standard English. She maintains that regarding variation of English as an inferior one should be rejected and revised. She also encourages her aimed readers to challenge the stereotype on them. She delivers her message by telling us detailed and lively portrayed anecdotes. Tan successfully makes her readers emotionally attached to her personal stories and makes them to find values in the variation of English.