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Mother Tongue

The essay, *Mother Tongue*, is written by the American author Amy Tan, in which the author talks about the different methods she utilized during her childhood to speak to other people. The author illustrates how society judged her mother because of how she spoke. Amy Tan argues that the different dialects of English are just as effective in communicating a richness of language, and people should not become prejudiced towards the different ways of speaking English. The author aims to convince the audience by using ethos and pathos and submitting herself to the argument she is making.

At the beginning of the narrative, the author can conjure up sentences demonstrating her love of language and the functions a given language can perform. Amy Tan writes that “I am someone who has always loved language. I am fascinated by language in daily life. I spend much of my time thinking about the power of language – the way it can evoke an emotion, a visual image, a complex idea, or a simple truth” (Tan). Thus, the narrative that she provides to the audience is formulated on a strong foundation of a passion for language. This helps the audience understand that the author is someone who has a firm grasp of her subject of discussion. Moreover, the author establishes ethos in her essay by talking extensively about her personal experiences with language and how these illuminated her nuanced views on the multidimensional and multifaceted nature of language. The author talks about the difficulty she had with the standardized English tests as they measured only proficiency in a language only

from specific angles or dimensions. This personal narrative helps convince the audience as they establish the author's authority over the given topic. In addition to this, the author talks about the usage of language in her own family in the Chinese American community as a whole. The author asserts that the words that her mother spoke had vivid imagery, they were densely packed with emotions with feelings and had all the elements of a rich train of thought. But since the words she spoke did not conform to traditional rules of language, other individuals did not take the words she was speaking and the meaning they conveyed with any seriousness. Moreover, the author talks about the impacts such experiences have on the budding Chinese American community as a whole, that is, young individuals from similar backgrounds have difficulty in submitting to traditional norms and rules of language, which influences them to move away from studying the English language in-depth – as it is communicated to them that this domain is not their strong suit. Thus, the arguments the author makes about the nature of language are informed by her own experiences and the experiences of her family and community, which renders her argument a certain strength and helps convince the audience of her viewpoint.

In addition, the author uses pathos by eliciting in the audience members a sense of sympathy towards her experiences, which shapes the argument that she is making. The author talks in detail about her mother's difficult time communicating her intentions to others. Amy Tan's mother had to undergo several difficult situations throughout her life only because the English she spoke was different. The author talks about the difficulty her mother had in getting the reports of her brain tumor tests. The hospital staff where she went to get her test results did not render her the same respect that would be given to an individual who spoke the same standard of English. Talking about her mother's experiences, the author writes that "[the hospital staff] did not seem to have any sympathy when she told them she was anxious to know the exact

diagnosis since her husband and son had both died of brain tumors” (Tan). Only when the author spoke to the hospital staff herself, in a language that was not *broken*, the staff apologized for their rude behavior and agreed to resolve their issue. Such personal narrative serves to invoke sympathy in the audience members towards the author’s viewpoint, which makes her argument extremely effective.

In her essay, Amy Tan uses simple language in compliance with the argument that she is making about the utility of easy-to-understand language, which helps persuade the audience. Using this kind of language helps the essay feel like a conversation she is having with the audience. “You should know that my mother’s expressive command of the English language belies how much she really understands” (Tan). Sentences like these not only demonstrate her commitment to the argument that she makes but also put forth the point that she is engaging with the audience directly, that she is not standing delivering a speech to an audience, that she is not compelled to submit to the rules that are laid in settings like these, that she cares most about getting the message of her essay across. This helps the audience to understand the nature of her argument better and enables them to connect with the author on a personal level, which makes the author’s argument highly effective and persuasive.

In conclusion, in the *Mother Language*, the author talks about the utility of different modes of speaking English and how people ought not to get prejudiced by these different modes. The author argues for her point by using ethos and pathos and following her message in the essay.

Works Cited

Tan, Amy. "Mother Tongue." *The World Is a Text: Writing, Reading, and Thinking about Culture and Its Contexts*, 2003, p. 291.