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Rhetorical Analysis Essay 1

Amy Tan is a Chinese American author who has written many books that covers a range of topics such as Chinese traditional lifestyle vs. modern lifestyle, Asian female identity, and the relationship between Chinese mothers and their American born daughters. Tans 1990 personal essay, *Mother Tongue,* dives into the personal and social struggles many Asian-Americans experience. Tan argues that “the language spoken in the family, especially in immigrant families which are more insular, plays a large role in shaping the language of the child” and affects different aspects of their lives (Tan, para. 13). She supports this claim using personal anecdotes, highlighting the different interpretations of the Standard English language and the limitations it creates in the different aspects of the speaker’s life. Although she is Asian, her intended audience goes beyond the Asian community and connects to any individual who either is an immigrant or come from a family of immigrants.

Tan opens her essay in a humble tone, letting her readers know that this essay will not teach the proper way of using English, but rather the personal experiences she can account for with the language (Tan, para. 1). Even more, she establishes ethos by establishing her status as a writer and discussing the books she has written. By doing so, her audience will become receptive and considerate of the claims she will make in her essay. In the first half, Tan gives many personal anecdotes that depicts where the English she would use around her peers is completely different from what she uses with her family, especially her mother. She includes conversations with her mother and with her peers so that her readers can visualize the “Englishes” she uses. Tan recounts instances when her mother was disregarded or treated as incompetent because of her accent and “broken” English. Her inclusion of academic failure in subjects related to language and literature allows her audience to understand how the variation of language spoken at and outside of home affects areas outside of the speaker’s personal life such as academics and professional life. She has now established basis for her thesis. Tan takes on a reflective perspective of these instances throughout the essay, giving insight on her emotions and how these situations have affected her and her mother. Slowly, she is building pathos within her audience, offering any possible connection to the subject and ground for persuasion.

Tan’s broadens the perspective of her narrative by shifting it from personal to general. She discusses observations she has made in society such as the lack of representation of Asian Americans in literature and creative writing programs, and the abundance of Chinese students in engineering. (Tan, para. 17). She subtly attacks teachers she had encountered who tried to push her into studies like math and science despite her interest in English. She also recounts the data from a survey that displays the disparities of achievements of Asian students in Mathematics than English and connects it to her claim that the limitations “broken” English these students are surrounded by also limits their achievements outside of home. Tan employs logos to strengthen the validity of her claim and reasons with her audience.

Tan concludes her essay on a positive note by describing her “rebellious nature” against those who tried to push her away from her dreams. She describes her successful journey in the pursuit of becoming a writer and celebrates the difference in her “Englishes.” She adopts a peaceful tone, celebrating her mother’s English by describing it as “passionate” and “rhythmic.” With the combination of persuasive power, Tan is encouraging her audience to not let society’s perception of their “limited” English stop them from pursuing their goals.