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“Mother Tongue” by Amy Tan Rhetorical Analysis

In this essay, I will be analyzing “Mother Tongue” written by Amy Tan, briefly discussing the author who grew up in California as well as Switzerland and later studying English and linguistics at San Jose State University. In addition to Berkeley University, the author was a creditable and successful freelance business writer in 1987. Amy Tan’s essay Mother Tongue, published in “Under Western Eyes” in the Threepenny Review, 1990. This text touches upon terms like “broken” or “standard” English and their effect on immigrants in their everyday lives and how it is important to take into account how capable as well as intelligent these people are who speak “broken” English. Taking a closer look at the text we will see the author's use of being an effective writer using the rhetorical feature of Pathos, appealing to the reader through emotion or imaginatively. In this essay, we will touch upon themes within Tan’s essay for example Accents/ articulation not being a measurement of one's intelligence, forms of the English language, discrimination against immigrants in America, as well as how the different varieties of English are useful and just how Tan used these points to appeal to her readers emotionally.

Tan appealed to her audience/ readers using pathos by firstly discussing how accents do not measure the intelligence of others by using the personal experiences she has had with her mother who is a Chinese immigrant. Within the text you will see Tan using her mother as an example within the second to the third page of the text, she discusses her mother's intelligence by using examples of her mother's understanding of the English language

through various resources such as magazines, books, newspaper articles, “You should know that my mother's expressive command of English belies how much she actually understands. She reads the *Forbes* report, listens to *Wall Street Week*, converses daily with her stockbroker, reads all of Shirley MacLaine’s books with ease— all kinds of things I can't begin to understand.”(page 419). Tan perhaps is using the rhetoric strategy of pathos to appeal to her readers by trying to relate to her mother's education. Many immigrant parents can relate to this or feel connected with this by understanding that they are just as smart by reading similar text as these listed above as to those who speak “standard” English. Thus appealing to her reader's empathy with their own feelings of feeling incompetent.

Tan continues within the text by discussing varieties of English and usage within different settings such as with family or with academic peers. Within the text, we can see the author’s possible usage of pathos using this example by discussing the forms of English they use around her significant other and those within her work field and how different they are from each other thus appealing to readers' relatability to their own forms of English in different settings. In the first example during an academic talk she held, Tan tells her readers “all the forms of standard English that I had learned in school and through books, the forms of English I did not use at home with my mother” (page 418) while as later in the passage she states “Just last week, I was walking down the street with my mother, and I again found myself conscious of the English I was using, the English I do use with her. We were talking about the price of new and used furniture and I heard myself saying this: “Not waste money that way”” (page 418). Now the possible usage of this rhetorical strategy can stem from how many can connect with the idea of using presenting themselves differently to family while presenting themselves in a professional setting. People find themselves conducting themselves in different mannerisms just as Tan stated. This connects to Tan’s point of

different forms of English within one's consciousness, creating the feeling of relatability through this empathy.

Tan uses the rhetorical strategy of pathos by possibly appealing to readers' empathetic sides by discussing the repercussions those like her mother face in society due to their "broken" English. Using examples from the text we can further this point by going to Tan's statement on the treatment her mother has faced by simply being a Chinese immigrant with what some might deem as "poor" articulation in English, "My mother has long realized the limitations of her English as well. When I was fifteen, she used to have me call people on the phone to pretend I was she. In guise, I was forced to ask for information or even to complain and yell at people who had been rude to her. (page 419). Briefly summarizing this quote Tan is discussing a point in her life where she would have to pretend to be her mother to receive good service within her mother's affairs. Why this is important to the argument being made is due to the premise of discrimination amongst immigrants it is known that the underlying racism within society against immigrant and their families is due to how they are simply perceived, Tan simply points out this fact using this as an example establishing another connection with her readers.

In conclusion, concepts like "broken" or "standard" English and the impact on immigrants' daily lives, as well as how important it is to consider how capable and intelligent these people who speak "broken" English are. With a close inspection of the discovered things the author's use of the rhetorical feature of Pathos, appeals to the reader through emotion or imaginatively. This essay discussed themes within Tan's piece such as accents/articulation not being an indicator of intelligence, forms of the English language, discriminatory treatment against immigrants in America, as well as how the numerous varieties of English are useful, and how Tan used these points to emotional level appeal to her readers.

Citation

Tan, Amy, and Samuel Cohen. "Mother Tongue." 50 Essays: A Portable Anthology, Fourth ed., Bedford/St. Martin's, Boston, 2014, pp. 417–423.