

Example by StudyDriver

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What does Mother Tongue Mean to Amy Tan? Example

Mother tongue commonly means the language first learned by a person, but for the author, Amy Tan, it has a special meaning. In Amy Tan's essay "Mother Tongue", Tan reveals how she was sculpted into the successful writer she is from the struggles of language speaking her mother had to face. By revisiting past occasions where her mother spoke in "broken English", Tan explains how people developed preconceived notions of her mother's intelligence based solely on how fluently she spoke. Through the use of casual analysis, repetition, and comparison, Tan suggests that the spoken word is meant to capture "her intent, her passion, her imagery, the rhythms of her speech and the nature of her thoughts" (Tan 6). Tan expresses this when saying she wanted to capture what language ability tests cannot reveal about her mother.

By evaluating how the opinion of her mother was affected by her mother's English, Tan realizes that she, too, forgot the true objective of the English language - to reflect one's personality in its entirety. Tan confesses that "she was ashamed of her English" (Tan 4). Tan belittles her mother's thoughts simply because she could not express them perfectly. However, she comes to a revelation that quality of expression has no relation with quality of thought. Tan confirms this train of thought when she affirms her mother's tongue "was the language that

helped shape the way she saw things, expressed things, made sense of the world" (Tan 4), which asserts the power of language. The language we are accustomed to hearing affects our thoughts and beliefs, which in turn influences the type of language that we use to express these ideas. That is why Mrs. Tan taught her daughter that spoken English is a reflection of one's truest self.

The use of repetition in this instance is to emphasize how, in her opinion, there is no right way or one way of speaking English. The English that Amy Tan speaks with her mother is very different from the English she speaks to her teachers or classmates. Mother's tongue is usually referred to as the first language a person is taught, however Tan's use of the phrase is much more intimate in a sense that she feels that her English, or her mother tongue, is unique to her. Tan can obviously understand her mother's language because it is so deeply engrained in her life. Moreover, she uses the words "broken", "fractured", and "limited" numerous times, these words suggest what other people may view her mother's English. Although her mother's English may be "limited", in Tan's opinion it is not strike her as being wrong as so many people would think. "Some say they understand none of it, as if she was speaking pure Chinese. But to me, my mother's English is perfectly clear, perfectly natural" (Tan 4).

By recalling some of her own academic statistics, Tan compares her results in the SATs in math and English. In mathematics, she "scored in the ninetieth percentile or higher" (Tan 5). Whereas in English, she only scored "in the sixtieth or seventieth percentile" (5). In some respect, math can be easier than English in that there is no subjectivity involved, if an answer is wrong, it's wrong. Personally, math is an easier subject for me because there is no room for debate when achieving an answer. In my opinion, for every student to succeed in English standardized testing they have to be trained to read and interpret each question in the identical manner. This can prove to be difficult since students come from a multitude of backgrounds and life experiences. Language ability tests may cause the misconception that English is a right-or-wrong subject, whereas in reality, it's a shockingly unsolidified field of study meant to reflect the flexibility that is an individual's mentality.

Ultimately, Tan makes use of casual analysis, repetition, and comparison to send her message and make it loud

and clear. English is the window to the soul, so there is more than one type of English as long as you keep an open mind. Throughout the essay, Tan uses simple and easy to read English, however at the same time we are able to understand the complexity of her argument. The method Tan uses to tell her story was an insightful approach because it allows everyone to relate to what she was talking about. Communication problems effect people's day to day lives as it subjects some to low self-esteem and being taken advantage of. Amy Tan suggests a shift in the approach English writing be taught and made to aid in avoiding language speaking barriers.