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English Composition 110

Response to *Mother Tongue*

Amy Tan's *Mother Tongue* resonates with me in a number of ways. Probably the most glaring argument made in her essay is that people who speak in broken English are made out to be lesser and because of this their ideas and expression are not taken as seriously as opposed to a native English speaker. I admit, like Tan, I fell into this line of thinking with my father. My father is from Ghana, West Africa and immigrated here somewhere in the eighties or nineties. Now, my father probably had an easier time assimilating his English into the standard form because Ghana was colonized by the English and there is still a very strong Eurocentric influence in that region of Africa. However, I soon realized that I could articulate myself with more complexity and sophistication than he could and I used to hold this against him. I was embarrassed when we went out and he talked to people with a tinge of authority in his voice because in my mind he sounded ridiculous trying to get his point across. To me, he simply wasn't doing it *well* enough. But reading this text opened my eyes and really explored ideas that I haven't even thought to glance at. So often you hear people speak broken English and one's reaction is to try and get them to "improve" their speech. The backhanded compliments of "your English is getting better" and "you're easier to understand "

implies that they were speaking some sort of foreign dialect before. They're speaking the same language we are, using the same words we do. It may not be with the same inflection, laden with grammatical errors and weaved with thick accents but I understand my father as well as I understand my friends and my professors.

Another lens that Amy Tan uses that happens to resonate with me is through the lens of a writer. I can perhaps attribute my ability to articulate myself orally with the fact that I can articulate myself in the written form. I think it's a symbiotic relationship, and I've always walked around with the pride that I know the biggest words and I have the fanciest line of speech. It wasn't until recently I realized that words are not meant to impress and display your proficiency, but to evoke emotion and imagery. Articulation in any form is meant to express yourself in a way that you want to get your point across, and the words you use should reflect that desire. Once put under that light, it really does not matter if your English is "broken" or not.