




Mother Tongue

Amy Tan




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- Language is a means of communication. It is the medium by which thoughts are conveyed from one person to another.
 - Mother tongue refers to the language that a human learns from birth from mother--refers to the language a child is first exposed to, particularly from birth to 9 months.
 - Bilingual homes can have more than one mother tongue.


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- Importance of Mother Tongue or Languages
 - Connects and strengthens our roots
 - Knowledge of our culture
 - Develops a Sense of belongingness
 - Develops a sense of Respect for other languages & culture
 - Develops better linguistic skills
 - Helps for a better society
 - Saves the language from extinction


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- Mother language for emotional and mental growth Nelson Mandela says “If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language that goes to his heart”.
 - Mother tongue is an indicator of cultural identity


“Mother Tongue”


- Amy Tan explains that she began to write stories using all the Englishes she grew up with. How these different Englishes or even a language other than English contribute to identity is a crucial issue for adolescents.
- The ways that the individual negotiates those different Englishes within a so-called standard dialect contributes to his or her success with the mainstream culture


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- Englishes that you grew up with speaking or now use.
 - How does the way you speak with your family differ from the way you speak with your teachers, friends, and colleagues?
 - Think of a time when someone made assumptions or even a judgment (negative or positive) about you based on your language usage (written or spoken).


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- Amy Tan's short story, "Mother Tongue," is a wonderful tale that addresses the substance of languages and how language is not only a tool for communication, but a sociological tool of measuring individual worth.
 - The author notes that the language her mother speaks is very different from "American English,"

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- When Amy Tan recalls growing up, her mother would have Amy speak on the phone, *pretending* to be her mother, so that people would take her more seriously.
 - Stockbroker
 - Doctor
 - In both cases, the perception based on her mother's "limited" English gave people the idea that Amy's mother wasn't very bright, or worse, was not worth their time. This is the sociological aspect of language.

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- When Amy first decided she wanted to be a writer, she was not encouraged to do so: English was her second language, and the peculiarities of the language often confused her.
 - When she began to write fiction, she made a *conscious decision* to write to a specific audience: she decided to write to her mother; as she was writing about relationships between mothers and daughters in her stories.

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- It was *most* gratifying to Amy Tan when her mother read *The Joy Luck Club*, Amy's first book. Her mother gave her praise that meant a great deal to Tan:
 - ...I knew I had succeeded where it counted when my mother finished reading my book and gave me her verdict: 'So easy to read.'

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- There is a play on words with the title, "Mother Tongue." It literally means one's first language. If raised in Italy, it is Italian; in France, it is French.
 - This is not to say that people of other countries do not learn English as well, but generally there is a language specific to the place where they were born: this is their mother tongue.

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- However, in Amy Tan's story, she is making a statement about her *mother's* form of English: her *mother's tongue*.
 - While it may be difficult for some people to understand it, it is part of *who* she is, and it does not reflect negatively on her mother because it is "different."
 - She is just as special a person, despite what language she uses or how she uses it.