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## ENG 100: The Ya'll Conglomerate

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Professor Turley

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### The Ya'll Conglomerate

Growing up in Cromwell, Kentucky--a town so small that everyone knew everyone else's business--English was the only language I ever heard. The most complex thing I had to decode was my uncle's words after he'd enjoyed a few too many sweet teas. It's funny how language works. There were some clear similarities and differences between Amy Tan's essay and my own experiences, especially in how people reacted to our accents, how we communicated with family, and the emotions our dialects stirred up.

People have a habit of treating others differently based on how they sound. In Tan's essay, she highlighted how her mom faced different reactions because of her unique way of speaking (Tan 517). My own experiences have been a bit different but still eye-opening. Online gaming, for instance, has been a real learning curve. I'd be deep in a game with my brother, and we'd say something like, "I'ght ya'll, check dis move I'm bouta do rite quick." More often than not, other players would then start talking in the most over the top country accent, asking about relations with our sister. But in the real world, things have been smoother. Maybe it's because I've mostly stayed within the comforting borders of Kentucky and its neighboring states.

There was one summer when my family decided to take a trip to Colorado to visit my aunt. It was my first time venturing out of the Southeast and I can't tell you how many times my aunt brought up our "super country" accents. She'd say stuff like, "It's funny how you guys say y'all a lot." To which I replied, "Well, at least when I say y'all, I'm not a mile high on THC." She

didn't find that one too funny. While I was there, I didn't really notice them speaking that much differently, which I guess *she* did. Overall, it was really an interesting experience because I never experienced someone commenting on my accent in real life until that point.

It's interesting how our way of speaking can change based on our company. Tan and her mom had their unique way of communicating when it was just the two of them (Tan 516). I've noticed the same thing with my family. With my brother, our conversations are easy and relaxed. I don't have to think about how I sound or if he'll understand a particular word or phrase. But when I'm around new folks, especially in more formal settings, I find myself speaking a bit differently. It's not that I'm trying to be someone else; I just want to make sure I'm understood. I want them to focus on what I'm saying, not how I'm saying it. With my brother, though, there's no need for any of that. We can chat away, using the same familiar words and phrases we've always used, without a second thought. We speak. We hear. We understand.

When I take a moment to think about my language and accent, it's a mix of feelings. Tan wrote about feeling both embarrassed and proud of her mother's English (519). For me, the dominant feeling has always been indifferent. I never really cared about what other people think about me. I will say it is part of who I am so in that regard I would be proud that I'm speaking differently than other people.

Language is so much more than just a way to communicate; It reflects our history, upbringing, and experiences. It can evoke a range of emotions, from pride to uncertainty. But the most important thing is to stay true to ourselves. Like I mentioned in my high school speech, "Don't be NPCs, be the main character," if you don't know, an NPC is a nonplayable character in a video game, they only have a set of things they do to be in the main character's story, not

their own. It's a reminder to embrace our uniqueness, to celebrate what sets us apart. In a world where everyone is trying to fit in, it's our differences that make us stand out.

In conclusion, our language, dialect, and accent are all part of who we are. It shapes our interactions, influences how others perceive us, and plays a significant role in our self-identity. Whether it's the rolling drawls of Kentucky or the unique cadence of Tan's mother's English, every dialect has its own beauty and charm. It's a testament to our history, our culture, and our experiences. And while it's essential to be understood, it's equally important to be true to ourselves. So, here's to celebrating our unique voices, to being proud of our roots, and to always being the main character in our own stories.

Word count: 783

Work Cited

Tan, Amy. "Mother Tongue." *Reading Life*, edited by Inge Fink and Gabrielle Gautreaux, Thomson-Wadsworth, 2005, pp 515-519