

## 16 Investment, acculturation, and language loss

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### Introduction

In a recent longitudinal study of immigrant language learners in Newtown, Canada<sup>1</sup> (Norton Peirce, 1993, 1995), I collected valuable data on what is often called *subtractive* and *additive* bilingualism, particularly with respect to language learning among children (Lambert, 1975; Swain & Lapkin, 1991). Subtractive bilingualism takes place when a second language is learned at the cost of losing the mother tongue, whereas additive bilingualism is associated with the development of second language proficiency with little loss to the mother tongue. In this chapter, I provide a detailed analysis of language practices in two of the families I studied – one in which subtractive bilingualism took place, and the other in which additive bilingualism flourished. This analysis will lead to a discussion of the relationship among investment, acculturation, and the development of bilingualism, focusing in particular on the insidious effects of racism on language loss. I make the argument that theories of acculturation in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) could have the presumably unintended and undesirable consequence of promoting subtractive bilingualism in children. I argue, specifically, that a major challenge for language teachers is to ensure that language learners have an investment in both the target language and the mother tongue.

I do not claim that this analysis is definitive. It is a window through which teachers and researchers can revisit some assumptions about SLA and the development of bilingualism. In particular, it provides some insight into the relationship among investment, acculturation, and language loss. In the following section, I introduce the notion of *investment* and describe how I use it in my work. I next describe the language patterns in the two immigrant families as seen, in particular, through the eyes of the language learners, Mai and Katarina, respectively, and examine my data in light of theory on SLA, focusing on a central contra-

This chapter is a revised version of the article, "Rethinking Acculturation in Second Language Acquisition," *Prospect: A Journal of Australian TESOL*, Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 4–19, 1998.

<sup>1</sup> Names of places and people have been changed to protect the identities of participants.

diction between acculturation models of SLA and models of bilingualism. I conclude with a discussion of the implications of my study for teachers and researchers.

### Investment and language learning

In previous work (Norton Peirce, 1995), I have argued that theories of motivation in SLA do not capture the complex relationship among power, identity, and language learning that I have found in my research. I have argued that the concept of *investment* rather than *motivation* more accurately signals the socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language, and their sometimes ambivalent desire to learn and practice it. The notion is best understood with reference to the economic metaphors that Bourdieu uses in his work – in particular the notion of *cultural capital*. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) use the term to refer to the knowledge and modes of thought that characterize different classes and groups in relation to specific sets of social forms. They argue that some forms of cultural capital have a higher exchange value than others in a given social context. I take the position that if learners invest in a second language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital. By *symbolic resources* I mean such resources as language, education, and friendship, whereas I use the term *material resources* to include capital goods, real estate, and money. Learners expect or hope to have a good *return* on the investment in that language – a return that will give them access to hitherto unattainable resources.

Thus the notion presupposes that when language learners speak, not only they are exchanging information with target language speakers, but they are constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. In essence, the notion attempts to capture the relationship between identity and language learning. It conceives of the language learner as having a complex identity and multiple desires, constantly changing across time and space. In this spirit, the central questions in my own work are not, Is the learner motivated to learn the target language? What kind of personality does the learner have? Instead, my questions are framed as follows: What is the learner's investment in the target language? How is the learner's relationship to the target language socially and historically constructed? It was by asking such questions that I was able to gain greater insight into the patterns of language use in Mai's and Katarina's families. Of particular importance, for the purposes of this chapter, was the question, What investments did Mai's and Katarina's families have in the mother tongue?

## **A tale of two families: Mai and Katarina**

My case study of immigrant language learners took place over a 12-month period in 1991. The participants – all women – were Mai from Vietnam, Katarina and Eva from Poland, Martina from Czechoslovakia, and Felicia from Peru. A major source of data collection was a diary study in which the participants kept records of their interactions with Anglophone Canadians and reflected on their language-learning experiences in the home, workplace, and community. During the course of the study, we met on a regular basis to share the entries the participants had made in their diaries and to discuss their insights and concerns. I also drew a substantial amount of data from two detailed questionnaires I administered before and after the study as well as personal and group interviews and home visits.

Although the primary purpose of my original study was to come to an enhanced understanding of adult language learning, I gained insight into the language development of children in the immigrant families of my adult participants. What was particularly striking was the emergence of two very distinct and contrasting profiles in Mai's and Katarina's families. In Mai's extended family, I observed a breakdown of social relationships and a situation in which parents had difficulty conversing with their children. It was a family in which the children were monolingual speakers of English, having gradually lost proficiency in their mother tongue, Vietnamese. In Katarina's family, social relationships were strong, and the child in the family was learning English with no loss of her mother tongue, Polish. The central questions I address in this chapter are as follows: Why did subtractive bilingualism take place in Mai's family, while additive bilingualism flourished in Katarina's family? To what extent do theories of SLA and bilingual development account for these differences? How can teachers and researchers respond creatively to these findings?

Addressing these questions requires a comprehensive understanding of what could be called the *linguistic ecology* of Mai's and Katarina's families, respectively.

### *Mai's family*

Mai was born in Vietnam in 1968 and arrived in Newtown, Canada, in October 1989, when she was 21 years old. She immigrated with her elderly parents "for my life in the future." Mai's father is Chinese, her mother is Vietnamese, and Mai is fluent in both Vietnamese and Cantonese. She had no knowledge of English before going to Canada. Mai has eight brothers and sisters, two of whom live in Canada. One of her brothers who lives in Newtown helped to sponsor Mai's immigration to

Canada in the "family" class. Before coming to Canada, Mai had not lived in any other country besides Vietnam.

Mai remained in her brother's home in Newtown for the duration of the data collection period – January–December 1991. The occupants of the house included her brother (Ming), her sister-in-law (Tan), three nephews, and her mother and father. Mai's nephews were Trong, born in Vietnam, age 14 at the time of data collection; Mark, Canadian born, age 12; and Kevin Canadian born, age 8. Mai's brother is at least 10 years older than she is. The family lived in an opulent neighborhood in Newtown. Mai's brother Ming worked in a government department and had been financially successful in Canada. Her sister-in-law Tan ran her own sewing business from home.

Significantly, three languages were spoken in Mai's home on a continual basis: Vietnamese, Cantonese, and English. Mai's parents spoke Vietnamese and Cantonese, but no English; her brother Ming and sister-in-law Tan spoke Vietnamese and Cantonese; Ming had a good command of English, but Tan spoke only limited English. Mai's nephews spoke English only. Mai's parents and Mai's nephews thus were unable to communicate with one another, and communication between Mai's nephews and their mother was limited. As Mai explained in her diary entry of March 5, 1991,<sup>2</sup>

1. It is funny when I think about my family. It's not too big but always had spoken by three languages.

My parents can't speak English. I had to speak with them by Vietnamese or Chinese. I always spoke Chinese when my family's friends who are from Toronto came to visited us. They are all Chinese. With my brother and his wife, I spoke Vietnamese because they used to speak with each other by that language. And my nephews they didn't know any other language except English, so I spoke English with them although it is the language I spoke more than the other. For me it doesn't matter when people who speaks with me by Vietnamese, Chinese, or English. The only thing that I feel so sorry for my parents and my nephews because they can not talk with each other. It is very worst in the family. I think I won't let it happen to my children if I have in my future.

The most important set of relationships I examine consists of those between Mai's nephews and their parents. Extract 2 comes from a private interview with Mai in December 1990; Extracts 3 and 4, from my journal notes after diary study meetings on March 1, 1991, and February, 24, 1991, respectively.

2. (the author): B: You hear a lot of English here at home?

2 Punctuation, spelling, and grammatical errors that impede meaning in the written texts of participants have been corrected.

- M (Mai): Ya I do. For my nephews, they all speaking English, so I'm have to speak with them.
- B: Now do they speak any Chinese or Vietnamese?
- M: No they don't.
- B: Nothing? Nothing at all?
- M: No.
- B: Why not? Does your sister-in-law not speak to them in Chinese or Vietnamese?
- M: No. Because, um, for my sister-in-law she got this business, so she has to speak English, so she didn't want if she speaks Chinese with her kids, so she will lose her English. So she just try to speak English. My nephews speak better than her because they was born here and they go to school –
- B: But does she not speak Vietnamese to them?
- M: No. No. Not at all.
3. I asked Mai how her sister-in-law speaks to the boys if the boys do not speak Vietnamese and her sister-in-law's English is so poor. Mai said she hardly does speak to the boys. When she does, it takes a long time to make herself understood and the boys make fun of her efforts.
4. [Mai] says her brother and his wife are obsessed with making money. So much so that their children call the mother "Money" instead of "Mummy." Her nephews treat their mother with extreme disrespect because she doesn't know English. The boys say to the mother, "Shut up, Money."

With reference to these data, it appears that Mai's sister-in-law avoided speaking Vietnamese to her children because she thought her command of English would improve if she spoke English to the boys. Her desire to learn English was driven partly by economic need. Her children, however, who attended Anglophone schools, very soon became more competent in English than she was, and she began to lose her authority over them. The boys, in fact, seemed to exert power over their mother and used their English as a weapon against her: "Shut up, Money," they said. Mai's sister-in-law had no authority in the home and little relationship with her sons, and she spent her days and evenings in the basement making garments and drapes for clients. The father worked long hours every day.

There is another important point to note, however. At our diary study meeting on March 1, Mai discussed how the breakdown of the family structure and the use of English in the home were related to her brother's perception of Vietnamese and Chinese people in Canada. She said that her brother thought Vietnamese and Chinese people were "low" whereas Canadian people were "high." Even though he himself is Chinese and Vietnamese and his wife is Vietnamese, he didn't like Vietnamese and Chinese people and thought they were "bad people." Mai said that her brother tried to think he was Canadian but that other peo-

ple didn't see him that way. He tried to have Canadian rather than Vietnamese friends – and treated the two groups very differently.

When she arrived in Canada, Mai was struck by the fact that her brother had “changed” so much and had little respect for his own parents. “You can't just throw away what has been passed down from generation to generation,” said Mai at our June 7 meeting. Of particular significance to this chapter is the way in which Mai's three nephews were socialized – not only in the home but in the larger community. Mai said that her nephews had been brought up as Canadians and had never been encouraged to learn Vietnamese; only the eldest had any understanding of Vietnamese. They had no interest in finding out about Vietnam or Vietnamese people, and had said on occasion that they “hated” their appearance. When I was taking Mai home from a diary study meeting on March 1, Mai described the alienation that her nephews experienced as Chinese-Vietnamese people in Canada. The eldest child, Trong, for example, had chosen to change his name from a Vietnamese one to an anglicized one. Mai told her nephews that they should not reject their heritage, explaining, “With your hair, your nose, your skin, you will never be perfect Canadians.”

Mai described herself as “always in the middle,” meaning between her parents and her nephews and occasionally between her nephews and their mother. This earned Mai respect and authority in the eyes of her nephews, who were impressed because she could speak English better than their mother, who had been in Canada for more than 10 years. Mai's diary extract of February 21 illustrates this clearly: “One time Trong told me ‘I hope you won't be like someone they just care about money then they forget about English. It's no good in the future.’ I understood what he means.” Mai's parents, furthermore, were not spared from social tensions both within the family and in the larger community. Mai said that her parents “have no voice” in Canada. Her non-English-speaking father was no longer the patriarch; Mai said he had no “power” in Canada. Mai's mother cleaned the house, did the cooking, and spent the rest of her time in her bedroom, alone and alienated from her extended family. Within a few months of her arrival, she took up a position as a childminder in a Chinese family and stayed with her employer's family. Before long she was hospitalized for depression. In Mai's diary entry of February 28, Mai described her mother's eviction from her brother's house and her own personal distress:

5. I am feeling so sad and very lonely now. Tonight will be the last night I can close to my mother. Then tomorrow she moves to someone's house and stays there all the time. She's going to take care of one child who is 6 months old.

Since I was born until I came here, I used to stay with my parents. I couldn't miss them even ten days. But now, I can't help when something

happens. It hurts me a lot come to think of it. Before we were living in Vietnam we always hoped that we could come here soon to see someone in family that we haven't seen for long time. Then we'll stay together and enjoy the time we have. But now so many bad things happened to us. It made my parents feel bad, because they never think about something like that happening to them. My parents didn't feel like staying in my brother's house any more. They tried to find some place to go. They don't care about that what's going to happen. At least they can get out of this house.

Two months ago my father already left. He went to Toronto to take care of one kid. Last month when he talked with me, his tears was dropping on his face. He said he never think that, at the last short time of his life, he can't have a good time. I just sat there and cried. And now my mother has to go too. For me, I can't move with my mother or my father and it is hard for me to find any place to take them go to stay with me. I feel so sorry for my parents and for myself. I think we are not supposed to be apart like that, but I can't do anything to make life of my parents any better. Even me, I don't know where to go now. I am confused. What's going to happen with my parents and I in the future? Around me now all storm and big windy. I am not sure if I am strong enough to stand up in this situation.

The frayed social fabric of Mai's home is starkly contrasted with the relatively cohesive structure of Katarina's home, a description of which follows.

#### *Katarina's family*

Katarina was born in Poland in 1955. She arrived in Canada in April 1989 with her husband and daughter, Maria. Her daughter, like Mai's nephew Kevin, was 8 at the time of data collection. Katarina, who had a master's degree in biology, had been a teacher in Poland. Her husband is similarly qualified. The family immigrated to Canada because they "disliked communism." Before going to Canada, the family spent a year in Austria. Apart from her mother tongue, Polish, Katarina knew some German and Russian when she arrived in Canada. Although Katarina had no knowledge of English, her husband was reasonably fluent as he had worked in international trade in Poland and had used English in his job. Katarina and her family's immigration, in the refugee class, was sponsored by the Catholic church, and she stayed at a sponsor's home on arrival in Newtown. Thereafter, Katarina and her husband looked for a two-bedroom apartment to rent. This apartment building, which tended to be less expensive than others in Newtown, was in a community that accommodated many recent arrivals in Canada. Little English was heard in this community.

Katarina said that she was happy she had come to Canada, a place where there is much diversity in the population. In her December 1991 essay she wrote,

6. Most people feel good in Canada. A great deal of people came here after the Second World War, but many came here in recent years. Most of them spent one or two years in Austria, Germany, Greece, or Italy. Austria is a beautiful country – but only to visit – not to live in. Other nationalities don't feel good in this country because most of people there were born there. Immigrants feel good in Canada because they are aware of various nationalities. In Canada life has a high standard. The Government gives possibilities for people to study. The mothers with children but without husbands have help from the government. People who aren't able to work or can't find jobs receive social welfare. I think that Canada is a "good country for immigrants."

At our diary study meeting on April 12, Katarina compared her experiences of living in Austria with her experiences of living in Canada. She said that in Austria, Polish people are "second category" people, whereas "in Canada they accept me." She said that a good education and knowledge of English give people options in life – the choice, for example, of doing a variety of jobs: "Life is easier when somebody can communicate with other people – can explain exactly what one thinks – can do another job than one has to do – because somebody has a good education and is a good speaker of English."

From the time of the family's arrival in Canada, Katarina was concerned that her daughter might lose command of her mother tongue, Polish. At a diary study meeting on March 1, Katarina said that when she arrived in Canada she cried every day because she realized that her daughter would "grow up speaking English." When asked to explain, she said that she was afraid Maria would grow up speaking a language that Katarina couldn't speak well. Katarina was afraid that she would lose contact with her daughter. The Polish priest at Katarina's church confirmed her fears. Katarina said that the priest had strongly urged all his parishioners to speak the mother tongue at home "not for patriotic reason, not for love of the language, but for the parents." He told them that when the children grow up, and the parents want to talk about things that mean a lot to them, the parents would not be as comfortable in English as they would be in their mother tongue. In order to keep contact with the children, he strongly encouraged them to speak their mother tongue in the home. The priest had said that the children would always be fluent speakers of English, so the parents did not have to be concerned about their integration into Canadian society.

When I interviewed Katarina in her home on a number of occasions, she clearly felt uncomfortable speaking English in front of her daughter. On one occasion when I was at Katarina's home, Katarina read an English text into the tape recorder. Her daughter walked by and said her mother sounded like a "child." This was very unsettling for Katarina. She was happy to watch English TV with her daughter, read English



newspapers, and listen to English news programs, but she was adamant that the spoken language in the home should be Polish. She never spoke English to her daughter or husband, something she said was a “hard” thing to do.

Thus the Polish language meant more to Katarina than a link to the past – it was an essential link to her future and her identity as a mother. At our first diary study meeting on February 17, Katarina talked at length about her daughter, who was about to have her first communion. Katarina said that she wanted her daughter to have her first communion in Polish because “that’s the way I did it. I remember it so well – in the long white dress.” She also said that if the major communion texts, “Our Father” and “The Ten Commandments,” were in Polish, she could help Maria learn them, but if they were in English, she could not. Maria learned both texts in Polish. In her diary, Katarina indicated the importance of motherhood to her when she expressed disapproval of women who had gone to serve in the Gulf War, leaving children with fathers. “Mothers have been at the war and children at home with fathers. I don’t understand. What is more important – ‘war’ or ‘children.’” Katarina strongly supported the heritage language classes run by the local school board and sent her daughter to learn Polish every Saturday morning.

### *Comment*

It is instructive to compare the language patterns in Mai’s household with those in Katarina’s. In Mai’s household, although three languages were spoken in the home – Vietnamese, Cantonese, and English – English was the language of power. The people who had access to this language had access to power. Conversely, those who did not have access to this language had, in Mai’s words, “no voice.” The effects on the family structure were devastating. It was a domestic situation in which the mother was almost at the mercy of her sons, in which the grandparents felt they had no place, and in which Mai survived by virtue of the fact that she could serve as an interpreter in the home, “always in the middle” between her parents and her nephews and occasionally between her nephews and their mother.

In Katarina’s home, in contrast, Polish was the only language spoken. Katarina was aware that the use of English in the home may not have been in the best interests of the family unit and might drive a wedge between her daughter and herself. She actively sought to ensure that her daughter Maria maintained her mother tongue by sending her to heritage language classes, by speaking to her only in Polish, and by attending the Polish church. Despite occasional setbacks, Katarina indicated that Maria was successful in maintaining proficiency in the Polish language.

It could be argued that these are isolated cases in which, perhaps because of good but misguided intentions, Mai's nephews lost their mother tongue. The data paint a far more complex picture, however. They suggest that the language loss experienced by Mai's nephews can be partly explained by racist practices (either covert or overt) in Canadian society. Over time, Mai's brother grew to believe that Vietnamese people did not share equality with White Canadians and that the Vietnamese language had little value in Canadian society. Mai, herself, indicated that she would always feel like an immigrant in Canada. Apart from her accent, Mai said she did not have the features of a White Canadian and was immediately recognized as "different" by strangers. As she said in her final questionnaire,

7. I'm an immigrant in Canada, even if I'll be living in Canada for my whole life. Because I have a lot of things that are completely different – like the accent, customs. Even sometimes people ask when they don't know me too well "Are you Chinese? It makes me have more feeling that I'm immigrant, or Chinese Canadian citizen.

Under these conditions, it is not difficult to understand why Mai's nephews grew up despising their appearances, rejecting their histories, and eschewing their language. The ambivalence that Mai herself felt is eloquently captured in her comment to her nephews: "With your hair, your nose, your skin, you will never be perfect Canadians." Although Mai believed that one cannot dismiss one's history and your language, she did not actively resist the racist belief that perfect Canadians exist and that they are White. In contrast, Katarina's daughter, Maria, did not share the anguish experienced by Mai's nephews. Although she had been a "second-category" citizen in Austria, Katarina felt comfortable and accepted in Canadian society. Thus Maria grew up in a Polish-rich environment, in which her mother immersed her in the Polish community, sent her to Polish language classes, and took her to the Polish church. She had no need to feel ashamed of her "hair, her nose, her skin." She was, in Mai's words, a perfect Canadian.

Although Mai's extended family may have experienced overt or covert forms of racism in Canadian society, it would be simplistic to argue that such practices were solely responsible for language loss and social disintegration in Mai's family. Possibly, racist practices in Vietnamese society had had a deleterious effect on the family even before arrival in Canada, and identity conflicts were reinforced in Canada. Gender inequities may have also been more salient in Mai's family than in Katarina's family. Furthermore, the contrasting class positions of Mai's and Katarina's families may also be an important issue to consider. Following Connell, Ashendon, Kessler, and Dowsett (1982), I take the position that "it is not what people are, or even what they own, so

much as what they do with their resources" (p. 33) that is central to an understanding of class. Even though Mai's family had every appearance of being middle class and Katarina's family was still struggling to regain the social status it had enjoyed in Poland, the ways in which each respective family chose to use its resources is significant. Mai's sister-in-law was under pressure to bring in as much money as possible in a full-time domestic business, a time-consuming activity that her sons greatly resented, whereas Katarina was better placed to meet her daughter's needs while upgrading her own professional skills for future gain.

At face value, then, an elementary school teacher encountering 8-year-old Kevin and 8-year-old Maria would probably be satisfied with their progress in learning the English language. Both children were excellent students and had no difficulty in communicating in English. What teachers might not have been aware of, however, was that Kevin was in danger of losing his mother tongue whereas Maria's Polish was flourishing; that Kevin had great difficulty communicating with his mother whereas Maria had a strong, productive relationship with her mother; that social relationships in Kevin's family were under great strain whereas relationships within the Polish family were secure. A complex intersection of race, gender, and class relationships, in which overt or covert forms of racism appear most salient, are implicated in the language loss experienced by the elementary school boy.

## **Rethinking acculturation**

Having come to a better understanding of the situations of subtractive and additive bilingualism in Mai and Katarina's families, I now turn to theories of acculturation and bilingualism in the field of language education. To what extent do such theories predict the scenarios described in Mai and Katarina's homes?

In the field of SLA, the most influential model addressing processes of acculturation is that associated with the work of Schumann (1978a, 1978b, 1986.) I wish to examine his acculturation model of SLA in some depth for a number of reasons. First, the model was developed specifically with a view to explaining the language acquisition of adult immigrants: "This model accounts for second-language acquisition under conditions of immigration" (1978b, p. 47). As such, it is particularly germane to understanding the language practices in Mai's and Katarina's families. Second, the model is based on the premise that there is a causal link between acculturation and SLA: "SLA is just one aspect of acculturation and the degree to which the learner acculturates to the TL [target language] group will control the degree to which he acquires the second language" (1986, p. 384). Third, Schumann (1978b) states that

the model "argues for acculturation and against instruction" (p. 48). In other words, according to Schumann, if acculturation does not take place, instruction in the target language will be of limited benefit to the language learner. Finally, the model has been highly influential in the field of SLA, featuring prominently in the established literature on SLA theory (see, for example, Brown, 1987; Ellis, 1997; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991; McGroarty, 1988; Spolsky, 1989).

Drawing on his research with adult immigrants in the United States, Schumann (1978b) argues that certain social factors can either promote or inhibit the relationship between two linguistically distinct social groups that are in a contact situation. This in turn will affect the degree to which the second language group will acquire the target language. The first social factor is what Schumann calls *social dominance* patterns. Schumann argues that if the second language group is politically, culturally, technically, or economically superior (dominant) to the target language group, then it will tend not to learn the target language. Conversely, Schumann argues that if the second language group is inferior or subordinate to the target language group, then there will also be social distance between the two groups and the second language group will resist learning the target language.

The second social factor involves what Schumann (1978b) calls the *integration strategies* of assimilation, preservation, and adaptation. Schumann argues that if the second language group gives up its own lifestyle and values and adopts those of the target group, contact with the target language group will be enhanced and acquisition of the target language promoted. If the second language group chooses preservation as an integration strategy and rejects the lifestyle and values of the target group, there will be social distance between the two groups and less likelihood that the second language group will acquire the target language. If the second language group chooses adaptation as its integration strategy, then it adapts to the lifestyle and values of the target language group but maintains its own lifestyle and values for intragroup use. This will yield various degrees of contact with the target language group and thus varying degrees of acquisition of the target language. The last five social factors discussed by Schumann refer to *enclosure*<sup>3</sup> patterns of the two groups, cohesiveness and size of the second language group, congruence between the two cultures, attitudes of the two groups toward each other, and intended length of residence in the target language area. Specifically, second language learning is more likely to occur if there are positive attitudes between the two groups than if there are negative attitudes between them.

3 *Enclosure* refers to the degree to which the second language group and the target language group share the same churches, schools, clubs, recreational facilities, and so forth (Schumann, 1978, p. 30).

Apart from these social factors, Schumann (1978b) associates a second set of factors with acculturation and argues that they are causative variables in SLA: the affective variables of language shock, cultural shock, motivation, and ego-permeability.<sup>4</sup> Although Schumann associates the social factors with group behavior, he associates the affective factors with the behavior of individuals. Schumann argues that it is the affective variables that account for counter examples to his model. That is, individuals may learn under social conditions that are not favorable to SLA, and they may not learn when the conditions are favorable to SLA. In sum, Schumann's definition of acculturation is as follows:

I would like to argue that two groups of variables – social factors and affective factors – cluster into a single variable which is the major causal variable in SLA. I propose that we call this variable acculturation. By acculturation I mean the social and psychological integration of the individual with the target language (TL) group. I also propose that any learner can be placed on a continuum that ranges from social and psychological distance to social and psychological proximity with speakers of the TL, and that the learner will acquire the language only to the extent that he acculturates. (1986, p. 379)

The strength of Schumann's model is that it highlights the sociocultural context of language learning without neglecting the role of individuals in the language-learning process. It recognizes, furthermore, the importance of regular contact between language learners and speakers of the target language if successful language learning is to take place. However, with reference to data on Mai's and Katarina's families, I problematize a number of theoretical assumptions that are brought to the model:

*Assumption 1:* If a second language group is inferior or subordinate to the target language group, it will tend to resist learning the second language.

First, the acculturation model does not theorize inferiority and superiority with reference to inequitable relations of power, in which some immigrant groups are socially structured as inferior to the dominant group. The data from my study indicate that Mai's extended family did not arrive in Canada feeling inferior to Canadians; they were constructed as such by the signifying practices of Canadian society. As Bosher (1997) convincingly argues in the U.S. context, current theories of SLA "underestimate the challenges faced by racially and culturally distinct groups that choose to assimilate into U.S. society" (p. 594).

The second point to note in relation to Assumption 1 is that even though Mai's family felt marginalized in Canadian society, they did not resist learning English. On the contrary, they strongly believed that

<sup>4</sup> *Ego-permeability* refers to the extent to which inhibition levels can be lowered (Schumann, 1978b, p. 33).

command of the English language would rid them of the Vietnamese-Chinese label and help them obtain the opportunities for which they had come to Canada. Indeed, research suggests that members of the dominant language group rather than immigrant language learners tend to resist interaction with the other group (Goldstein, 1996; Norton Peirce, 1995; Skutnabb-Kangas & Cummins, 1988; Smoke, 1998).

*Assumption 2:* Positive attitudes between the target language group and the second language group will enhance SLA.

Although positive attitudes between the target language group and the second language group will clearly enhance SLA, the acculturation model does not take into account that, in general, the second language group is far more vulnerable to the attitudes of the dominant group than is true in reverse. It is members of the second language group who need to make contact with the target language community if language learning is to improve, and they have a great deal more invested in this relationship than does the target language group. The model, in other words, does not address the fact that immigrant language learners are generally in a relatively powerless position with respect to the target language community and that their group identity, culture, and values may be under siege. Specifically, the model does not acknowledge that inequitable power relations based on race and ethnicity may compromise attempts by the second language group to maximize their contact with target language speakers, notwithstanding the positive attitudes of the second language group.

*Assumption 3:* If members of the second language learning group give up their lifestyles and values and adopt those of the target language group, they will maximize their contact with the target language group and enhance SLA.

Assumption 3 is described in the acculturation model as the integration strategy of "assimilation" (Schumann, 1986, p. 381) and refers to what Schumann calls "type two acculturation" (p. 380). This position takes for granted that the target language group is willing to accommodate attempts by the second language group to assimilate and that the target language group will reciprocate the positive attitudes of the second language group. More significantly, however, it does not consider the possibility that subtractive bilingualism in children can take place if members of the second language group give up their lifestyle and values in an attempt to assimilate.

Mai's brother and sister-in-law hoped that if they distanced themselves from the Vietnamese-Chinese history and culture, they would win greater acceptance in Canadian society. Notwithstanding the predictions of the acculturation model, the family's rejection of their lifestyle and values did not maximize contact with the target group and enhance

SLA. As Mai indicates, White Anglophone Canadians did not give her family the friendship and respect they hoped for. Furthermore, Mai's sister-in-law was still struggling to speak English after more than 10 years in Canada. Members of this family did not resist learning English, as the acculturation model might suggest, nor were they unmotivated or indifferent. Of even greater concern is that in attempting to become Canadian, Mai's extended family grew to despise its history and ethnicity, and a process of subtractive bilingualism took place among the children in the family. Mai was aware of this tragedy and, as indicated in Extract 1, vowed the following, "I think I won't let it happen to my children if I have in my future."

Crucially, the acculturation model does not acknowledge – or perhaps has not anticipated – the devastating linguistic and domestic consequences associated with giving up one's history, lifestyle, and language. The study indicates that situations of additive and subtractive bilingualism must be understood with reference to larger and frequently inequitable social processes in which racism and ethnocentrism can lead to language loss. Indeed, it is a tragic irony that in the only case in which a family rejected its own values and lifestyle in favor of the perceived values of White Anglophone Canadians, the social fabric of the family was destroyed, together with any hope of bilingual language development.

My study, conducted in Canada, supports findings from a large-scale study of children from linguistic minority families conducted in the United States. In this study, Wong Fillmore (1991) found convincing evidence of subtractive bilingualism in hundreds of families across the country, and argues as follows:

Second language learning does not result in the loss of the primary language everywhere. But it does often enough in societies like the United States and Canada where linguistic or ethnic diversity is not especially valued. Despite our considerable pride in our diverse multicultural origins, Americans are not comfortable with either kind of diversity in our society. (p. 341)

### **Implications for research and teaching**

I have argued in this chapter that more textured theories of acculturation are necessary to understand and promote both second language acquisition among adult immigrants and mother tongue maintenance among their children. In previous research (Norton Peirce, 1995), I have drawn on Bourdieu (1977) to argue that language educators cannot take for granted that those who speak regard those who listen as worthy to listen or that those who listen regard those who speak as worthy to speak. Bourdieu argues persuasively that an expanded definition of

competence should include the "right to speech" or the "the power to impose reception" (p. 648). Language educators must acknowledge the inequitable relations of power between target language speakers and second language learners so that they can support language learners in attempting to claim the right to speak. Furthermore, I take the position here that the right to speak refers not only to the target language but to the mother tongue. Much literature in the field of bilingual education (see Cummins, 1996; Genesee, 1994) demonstrates convincingly that the validation of an immigrant's language, culture, and history not only serves to maintain the mother tongue among children but can promote their learning of the target language, particularly with reference to the development of academic literacy.

Despite differences in their language-learning experiences, what both young and older immigrant language learners have in common is the struggle for identity in a new and sometimes threatening world (see Goldstein, 1996; Hunter, 1997; Martin-Jones & Heller, 1996; McKay & Wong, 1996; Morgan, 1997; Norton Peirce, 1995; Schecter & Bayley, 1997). Their investments in the target language and the mother tongue are no less fraught than their relationship to their past and their desires for the future. Teachers and researchers need to understand these multiple and sometimes conflicting investments in order to understand, for example, why the social fabric in Mai's family disintegrated, why Kevin experienced subtractive bilingualism, and how Maria became a successful bilingual. As Genesee (1994) notes, although researchers and educators recognize that children from minority sociocultural groups frequently experience academic difficulties, "they have had trouble understanding the precise nature of these children's backgrounds, and therefore the exact reasons for their academic problems" (p. 6). My research indicates that it is not enough to seek to understand "these children's backgrounds." Language professionals need to understand and address broader social inequities that have concomitant effects on the investments that immigrant families have in both the mother tongue and the target language. The implications of this study for teachers and researchers can be summarized as follows:

1. In the field of second language education there appears to be a fundamental tension between theories of acculturation in SLA and theories of bilingualism. Whereas theories of acculturation in SLA give implicit support to cultural assimilation, theories of bilingualism place greater emphasis on the importance of validating the histories, identities, and contributions of immigrant groups. It is appropriate, I believe, to revisit some of the assumptions about acculturation in the field of SLA.
2. Theories of acculturation in SLA do not pay sufficient attention to



inequitable relations of power between second language learners and target language speakers. Such theories need to recognize that attitudes and motivation are not inherent properties of language learners but are constructed within the context of specific social relationships at a given time and place. This study suggests that target language speakers and second language speakers often have unequal investments in their mutual relationship, which in turn affects opportunities for second language learning. It is both inaccurate and irresponsible to assume, for example, that immigrants such as Mai's sister-in-law, who have limited proficiency in the target language, are necessarily unmotivated or negative. Theories of acculturation in SLA should address the complex relationship among investment, language learning, and larger social processes.

3. The study suggests that the loss of the mother tongue among children can have devastating effects on the social fabric of the family. Children who are racial minorities may be particularly vulnerable to language loss. Teachers need to be proactive in bringing research on subtractive and additive bilingualism to the attention of immigrant parents. Subtractive bilingualism represents more than the loss of language; it puts identities into crisis.
4. Teachers should strive to encourage immigrant language learners to invest in both the target language community and the immigrant language community. Like Katarina's priest, teachers need to make parents aware that mother tongue maintenance has little to do with patriotism, nationalism, or love of the language but much to do with the very fabric of family life and productive relationships between parents, children, and the wider community.

### **Suggestion for further reading**

Corson, D. (1993). *Language, minority education and gender: Linking social justice and power*. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.

This book examines three groups who seem most affected by unfair language practices in education: women and girls, minority cultural groups, and minority language groups. The author argues that reforms in language education policies can help address these inequities.

Cummins, J. (1996). *Negotiating identities: Education for empowerment in a diverse society*. Ontario: California Association for Bilingual Education.

Cummins focuses on the way power relations in the broader society influence interactions between teachers and students in the classroom, arguing that culturally diverse students have been frequently

disempowered in North American society. The author challenges educators to resist historical patterns of disempowerment that frame bilingualism as a problem rather than a resource.

Fase, W., Jaspaert, K., & Kroon, S. (Eds.). (1992). *Maintenance and loss of minority languages*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

This edited volume includes papers from a wide variety of language contact settings in which one or more languages are in the process of shift. Data are presented from countries as diverse as Korea, Finland, and Tanzania. The focus of the book is on the precarious position of minority languages internationally.

Genesee, F. (Ed.). (1994). *Educating second language children: The whole child, the whole curriculum, the whole community*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

This edited volume incorporates the work of fifteen elementary school educators who support an integrative approach to educating second language children. It goes beyond language teaching methodology to include a wide range of issues affecting both the social and the academic success of language minority children.

Norton, B. (in press). *Identity and language learning*. London: Longman.

The author makes the case that there is an integral relationship between identity, investment, and language learning. She argues that theories of second language acquisition need to pay greater attention to inequitable relations of power between language learners and target language speakers

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