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# Rethinking acculturation in second language acquisition

## Abstract

In this article, the language practices in two immigrant families in Canada are contrasted. In one subtractive bilingualism took place and in the other bilingualism flourished. Drawing on research conducted by the author, the insidious effects of racism on language loss are discussed and some central assumptions about acculturation in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) are questioned. It is argued that there is a fundamental tension between theories of acculturation in SLA and theories of bilingualism. While 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 further argued that theories of acculturation in SLA do not pay sufficient attention to the inequitable relations of power that exist between second language learners and target language speakers. Despite their investment in the target language, second language learners may have little opportunity to interact with target language speakers and improve their language learning. Finally, the argument is proposed that teachers and researchers need to be proactive in bringing research on subtractive and additive bilingualism to the attention of immigrant parents.

## Introduction

In a recent longitudinal study of immigrant language learners in Newtown, Canada (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 and Lapkin 1991). Subtractive bilingualism takes place when a second language is learnt at the cost of losing the mother tongue, while additive bilingualism is associated with the development of second language proficiency with little loss to the mother tongue. In this article, I wish to 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 bilingualism flourished. This will lead to a discussion of the relationship between identity and the development of bilingualism, focusing in particular on the insidious effects of racism on language loss. I will make the argument that some 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. A discussion of the implications of my research for classroom pedagogy is given in Norton (1998).

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 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 to her mother tongue, Polish. The central questions I wish to address in this article are as follows:

1. Why did subtractive bilingualism take place in Mai's family, while additive bilingualism flourished in Katarina's family?
2. To what extent do theories of SLA predict the scenarios described in Mai and Katarina's homes?

It is important to note at the outset that this analysis does not claim to be 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 between mother tongue maintenance, identity, and acculturation. In the second section of the discussion, I describe the language patterns in these two families as seen, in particular, through the eyes of Mai and Katarina, respectively. Next, I examine the implications of these data for theory, focusing on a central contradiction between acculturation models of SLA and theories of bilingualism. I conclude with a summary of central insights from the study.

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

In order to address my first question, it is essential to gain a more comprehensive understanding of what could be called the linguistic ecology of Mai and Katarina's families, respectively.

## Mai's family

Mai was born in Vietnam in 1968 and arrived in 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 Vietnamese, and Mai is fluent in both Vietnamese and Cantonese. She had no knowledge of English before coming 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, she had not lived in any other country. Mai remained in her brother's home in Newtown for the duration of the data collection period — from January to 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, Vietnamese-born, aged 14 at the time of data collection; Mark, Canadian-born, aged 12, and Kevin, Canadian-born, aged eight. The brother with whom Mai lived had been in Canada for approximately ten years at the time the data were collected. He is at least ten years older than Mai. The family lived in an opulent neighbourhood in Newtown. Mai's brother, Ming, worked in a government department and had been financially successful in Canada. Her sister-in-law, Tan, had her own sewing business that she ran 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 good command of English, but Tan spoke only limited English. Mai's nephews spoke English only. This meant that Mai's parents and Mai's nephews were unable to communicate with one another, and that there was limited communication between Mai's nephews and their mother. As Mai explained in her diary entry of 5 March, 1991:

### Extract 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 will examine is that between Mai's nephews and their parents. Consider Extracts 2, 3, and 4. 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 1 March 1991 and 24 February 1991, respectively.

### Extract 2

B. You hear a lot of English here at home?

M. 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.

### Extract 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.

### Extract 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. Part of her desire to learn English was driven 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. Her sister-in-law had no authority in the home, little relationship with her sons, and 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 1 March, 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 thinks that Vietnamese and Chinese people are 'low' while Canadian

people are 'high'. Even though he himself is Chinese/Vietnamese and his wife is Vietnamese, he doesn't like the Vietnamese and Chinese people and thinks they are 'bad people'. Mai says that her brother tries to think he is 'Canadian' but that other people don't see him that way. He tries to have Canadian rather than Vietnamese friends — and treats 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 7 June meeting. Of particular significance to this paper is the way in which Mai's three nephews were socialised — not only in the home, but in the larger community. Mai said that her nephews had been brought up as 'Canadians' and have never been encouraged to learn Vietnamese — only the eldest has any understanding of Vietnamese. They have no interest in finding out about Vietnam or Vietnamese people, and have said on occasion that they 'hate' their appearance. When I was taking Mai home from a diary study meeting on March 1, Mai was describing 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 anglicised 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'.

At a diary study meeting Mai described herself as 'always in the middle', interpreting between her parents and her nephews, and occasionally between her nephews and their mother. This gave 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 ten years. Mai's diary extract of 21 February illustrates this clearly. Mai writes: '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. It was not long before she was hospitalised for depression. In Mai's diary entry of 28 February, Mai described her mother's eviction from her brother's house and her own personal distress:

#### Extract 7

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 six 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 eight at the time of data collection. Katarina, who had an MA degree in biology, had been a teacher in Poland. Her husband is similarly qualified. The family immigrated to Canada because they 'disliked communism'. Before coming 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 first arrival in Newtown. Thereafter, Katarina and her husband looked for a two-bedroom apartment to rent. This apartment building, which tends to be less expensive than others in Newtown, is in a community which accommodates many recent arrivals in Canada. Little English is heard in this community. Katarina says that she is happy she came to Canada, a place where there is much diversity in the population. In her December 1991 essay she wrote:

#### **Extract 8**

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, while 'in Canada they accept me'. She indicated in the first questionnaire (December 1990) 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 their arrival in Canada, Katarina was concerned that her daughter might lose command of her mother tongue, Polish. At a diary study meeting on 1 March, Katarina said that when she arrived in Canada she cried every day because she realised that her daughter would 'grow up speaking English'. When asked to explain, she said that she was afraid Maria would grow up speaking another 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 had 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 language 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, it was clear that Katarina felt uncomfortable speaking English in front of her daughter. On one occasion, when I was at Katarina's home, Katarina read an English text on to 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 speaks English to her daughter or husband, something she said is 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 17 February, 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. Now Maria knows all these texts in Polish. In her diary, Katarina indicated the importance of motherhood to her when she expressed disapproval of women who had gone to 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 was in strong support of 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. Although three languages were spoken in Mai's home — Vietnamese, Cantonese, and English — it was English that was the language of power in the home. 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 resulting 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', interpreting 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 be 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.

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 do not share equality with white Canadians and that the Vietnamese language has little value in Canadian society. Mai herself indicates that she will always feel like an immigrant in Canada. Apart from her accent, Mai says she does not have the features of a white Canadian, and is immediately recognised as 'different' by strangers. As she said in her final questionnaire:



### Extract 9

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, as indicated above: 'With your hair, your nose, your skin, you will never be perfect Canadians'. Although Mai believed that you cannot dismiss your history and your language, she did not actively resist the racist belief that perfect Canadians exist and that perfect Canadians are white. 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.

At face value, then, an elementary school teacher encountering eight year-old Kevin and eight 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, while Maria's Polish was flourishing; that Kevin had great difficulty communicating with his mother, while Maria had a strong, productive relationship with her mother; that social relationships in Kevin's family were under great strain, while relationships within the Polish family were secure.

Having come to a better understanding of the situations of subtractive and additive bilingualism in Mai and Katarina's families, I now wish to turn to the second question outlined in the introduction to this article: To what extent do theories of SLA predict the scenarios described in Mai and Katarina's homes?

### Rethinking acculturation

In the field of SLA, the most influential model addressing processes of acculturation is that associated with the work of Schumann (1978a, 1978b, 1986.) There are a number of reasons why I wish to examine his Acculturation Model of SLA in some depth. 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' argues Schumann (1978b: 47). As such, it is particularly germane for understanding the language practices in Mai 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 [sic] acquires the second language' (1986: 384). Third, Schumann (1978b: 48) states that the model 'argues for acculturation and against instruction'. 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; McGroarty 1988; Spolsky 1989; Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991; Ellis 1997).

Drawing on his research with adult immigrants in the United States, Schumann argues that certain social factors can either promote or inhibit the relationship between two linguistically distinct social groups which 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 [sic] 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 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' patterns of the two groups; cohesiveness and size of the second language group; congruence between the two cultures; attitudes of the two groups towards each other; and intended length of residence in the target language area. Specifically, if there are positive attitudes between the two groups, second language learning is more likely to occur than if there are negative attitudes between the two groups.

Apart from these social factors, there is a second set of factors that Schumann associates with acculturation and which he argues are 'causative' variables in SLA. These are the affective variables of *language shock*, *cultural shock*, *motivation*, and *ego-permeability*. It is important to note that while Schumann associates the social factors with 'group' behaviour, he associates the affective factors with the behaviour 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 favourable to SLA, and they may not learn when the conditions are favourable to SLA. In sum, Schumann's (1986: 379) 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.

The strength of Schumann's model is that it highlights the socio-cultural context of language learning without neglecting the role of individuals in the language learning process. It recognises, furthermore, the importance that must be placed on regular contact between language learners and speakers of the target language for successful language learning to take place. However, with reference to data from Mai and Katarina's families, I wish to problematise 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.

The first point to note here is that the Acculturation Model does not theorise '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 Boshier (1997: 594) convincingly argues in the United States context, current theories of SLA 'underestimate the challenges faced by racially and culturally distinct groups that choose to assimilate into U.S. society'.

The second point to note, in relation to Assumption 1, is that even though Mai's family felt marginalised in Canadian society, they did not 'resist' learning English. On the contrary, they strongly believed that 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 the people who 'resist' interaction are more likely to be members of the dominant language group rather than

immigrant language learners (Skutnabb-Kangas and Cummins 1988; Peirce 1995; Goldstein 1996; Smoke 1998).

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

While it is clear that positive attitudes between the target language group and the second language group will enhance SLA, the Acculturation Model does not take into account that, in general, the second language (L2) group is far more vulnerable to the 'attitudes' of the dominant group than the dominant group is vulnerable to them. It is the L2 group that needs to make contact with members of 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 maximise 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 maximise their contact with the target language group and enhance SLA.

Assumption 3 given above is described in the Acculturation Model as the integration strategy of 'assimilation' (Schumann 1986: 381) and refers to what Schumann calls 'type two acculturation' (Schumann, 1986: 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 maximise 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 ten 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 amongst the children in the family. This process must be understood within the context of covert and sometimes overt forms of racism in North American society (see Bannerji 1993; Ferguson, Gever, Minh-ha and West 1994). Under these conditions, it is not difficult to see how Mai's nephews could have grown to reject not only their history and their appearance, but their language. Mai was aware of this tragedy, and, as indicated in Extract 1 above, 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 one case where a family rejected its own values and lifestyle in favour 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 (Wong Fillmore 1991). In this study, Wong Fillmore found convincing evidence of subtractive bilingualism in hundreds of families across the country, and argues as follows (Wong Fillmore 1991: 341):

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.

## Conclusion

Drawing on my data, I have argued that we need more textured theories of acculturation in order to understand and promote both second language acquisition amongst adult immigrants and mother tongue maintenance amongst their children. In previous research (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, and that those who listen regard those who speak as worthy to speak. Bourdieu (1977: 648) argues persuasively that an expanded definition of competence should include the 'right to speech' or the 'the power to impose reception'. It is crucial that we acknowledge the inequitable relations of power between target language speakers and second language learners so that we 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. There is much literature in the field of

bilingual education (see Cummins and Swain 1986; Genesee 1994; Cummins 1996) which demonstrates convincingly that the validation of an immigrant's language, culture, and history not only serves to maintain the mother tongue amongst 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, however, what both young and older immigrant language learners have in common is the struggle for identity in a new and sometimes threatening world. Both young and older immigrant learners have multiple and sometimes conflicting identities and both struggle for recognition and respect in the wider community (see Peirce 1995; Goldstein 1996; Martin-Jones and Heller 1996; McKay and Wong 1996; Hunter 1997; Morgan 1997; Norton 1997; Schecter and Bayley 1997). Teachers, researchers, and language planners need to take this struggle for identity seriously 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: 6) notes, while researchers and educators recognise 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'. Although Kevin, at age eight, was an enthusiastic, successful student, there is no guarantee that he will remain so (see McKay and Wong 1996, for example.) Furthermore, even by age eight, Kevin's loss of his mother tongue, although invisible in the school, constituted a significant personal and educational loss. My research indicates that it is not enough to seek to understand 'these children's backgrounds'. We need to understand and address broader social inequities which have concomitant effects on identities and language practices in immigrant families. In this spirit, a number of insights can be gained from this study:

1. It is appropriate, I believe, to revisit some of our assumptions about acculturation in the field of SLA. In the field of second language education, there appears to be a fundamental tension between theories of acculturation in SLA and theories of bilingualism. While 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.
2. Theories of acculturation in SLA do not pay sufficient attention to the inequitable relations of power that exist between second language learners and target language speakers. Despite their investment in the target language, second language learners may have little opportunity to interact with target language speakers and improve their language learning. It would be both inaccurate and irresponsible to assume, as some people do, that immigrants who have limited proficiency in the target language are necessarily 'unmotivated' or 'indifferent'.

3. The study suggests that the loss of the mother tongue amongst children can have devastating effects on the social fabric of the family. Children who are racial minorities may be particularly vulnerable to language loss. We need to be proactive in bringing research on subtractive and additive bilingualism to the attention of immigrant parents. In Australia, Clyne (1997: 196) notes the promising trend in which parents are turning to linguists for advice and are adopting the 'one parent one language principle' for bilingual language acquisition. In sum, language educators should strive to encourage immigrant language learners to invest in both the immigrant language community as well as the target language community. Not only will this help to maintain the social fabric of family life, but the larger community and society will be greatly enriched.

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