The Multiple Realities of Multilingualism



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Personal Narratives and Researchers' Perspectives

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ET – to my parents, Nevena and Boris Todev

JC – to my mother, María Victoria Iragui

Preface

This book gathers personal stories of multilingualism and discusses the ways the authors of these stories have learned multiple languages, either purposefully or almost unintentionally. In some cases the authors wanted to learn the languages that they did; in other cases, they had to learn certain languages or learned them through sheer exposure. The narratives highlight diverse backgrounds of language acquisition, show various ways of learning, and provide the reader with highly interesting insights into the learning processes and their different outcomes.

The twelve autobiographies included in the book were written by linguistically oriented language learners who were willing to share their reflections on their individual multilingualism with a wider audience. All the contributors have at least six languages in their repertoire; most have had contact with and studied twice this number of languages.

This collection of personal narratives, along with the analysis of the introspective data from these narratives provided in two theoretical chapters in the book, marks the beginning of a new branch of multilingual research. We are sure that, combined with theory building in general and the development of appropriate research methodologies, the investigation of individual learning and acquisition stories will shed light on aspects of multilingualism and research in the field of applied linguistics which have not been explored to date.

Furthermore, we hope that this collection of personal stories will invite other multilingual storytellers to put their stories together along the lines suggested in the first chapter of this book and, at the same time, will encourage researchers to use these stories as sources of investigation in the study of multilingualism, exploring learning processes in their intricate complexity and studying the outcomes and the effects of multilingualism, as well as the factors that shape multiple language acquisition and learning. We see this volume, with its clear focus on the etic and emic perspectives on the dynamics of multilingualism, as an important first step along the way to a challenging and promising direction of research.

Britta Hufeisen and Ulrike Jessner

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Chapter 1

Multilingualism: Emic and etic perspectives

Elka Todeva and Jasone Cenoz

"We see the world not as it is, but as we are."
James Mapes, 1996: 72

The last decade or so has witnessed promising shifts and exciting developments in the study of language learning and language use but the key players in the learning of languages, the learners themselves, still remain marginalized and essentialized in much of the research literature. Despite a more or less steady trickle of published larger linguistic autobiographies and shorter first-person language learning narratives[1], the voices of millions of multilingual speakers around the world are still unheard or have not been given the attention they deserve. This volume offers introspective data from twelve individuals shaped by quite different contextual factors, all of whom reflected on the various forces and processes at play in the development and maintenance of their multiple languages. The book then analyzes these twelve first-person learning narratives against the background of existing language development research findings. The aim is to redress the imbalance between *emic* and *etic* studies by giving greater prominence to the emic, i.e. the insiders' perspectives, while juxtaposing these insights with etic, scholar-generated, research priorities and findings.

This chapter makes the case that, rather than being an exception, multilingualism is a widespread phenomenon around the world. Given this

1. Language learning personal narratives are stories based on the writers'/speakers' personal knowledge and experiences with learning languages. The stories can be either spontaneous or elicited through various procedures. Personal narratives are variably referred to in the literature as *linguistic autobiographies, language learning protocols, language learning accounts, Sprachbiographien, language journals or diaries,* and *language memoirs* (see, for instance, Pavlenko 2007 and Pavlenko 2008 for a discussion of some of these terms). New technologies offer other possibilities, among them new hybrid forms such as blogs and discussion forums.

fact, we summarize existing trends and recent findings reported in studies on multilingualism. The chapter emphasizes the regrettable dearth of data on the development, maintenance and attrition of languages in multilingual speakers and learners, pointing out that information is particularly scarce with regard to learning and maintenance processes that involve more than three languages. Offering the introspections of learners with experience with seven (and more) languages, the narratives in this book are seen as an attempt to fill this important lacuna. The chapter then specifically addresses the importance, and current lack, of enough first-person, *emic* data reflecting the perspectives and insights of the multilinguals themselves, as opposed to *etic* data that captures the perspectives of researchers. The rest of the chapter is a detailed review of the significance of personal narratives in the field of language studies and other areas of research. We contend that with their holistic nature and emphasis on process, rather than solely on learning outcomes, personal learning accounts align well with more recent approaches to language development such as complexity and dynamic systems theory and various sociocultural and ecological approaches. The final section of the chapter offers a description of how the present narratives differ from previous ones and sheds light on the logic behind the book's organization.

The study of multilingualism

Multilingualism is a common phenomenon around the world due to the influence of many factors, among which a growing trend to maintain and to promote the use of regional or minority languages, and a need for people to know other national or international languages in order to stay competitive in an increasingly demanding job market. As Hoffmann (1998) points out, we are witnessing a coexistence of two powerful and complementary trends: regionalization and internationalization. As a result, the presence of two or more languages in contact can be found in many countries around the world (Edwards 1994), particularly in the schools, where different types of multilingualism can be identified according to educational, sociolinguistic and linguistic variables (see Cenoz 2009, chapter 2). The study of multilingualism can be approached at either the societal or the individual level. Different studies have emphasized one or the other. However, the interaction of these two levels always needs to be taken into account when explaining the intricate processes of acquiring and using multiple languages.

As indicated in Grosjean (1985), Block (2003), Pavlenko (2005) and others, for years language acquisition research has shown a "monolingual bias" in the sense that learners of additional languages, second and beyond, have typically been judged by strict native speaker norms and have invariably been found lacking. Cook (1995) proposed that L2 users are fundamentally different from L1 users and should be examined in their own right. Because of the presence of more than one language in their repertoire, he argued, L2+ users develop a complex multi-competence, which is qualitatively different from the competence of monolingual speakers of a language (Cook 1992). In fact, some multilinguals achieve a very sophisticated, but different knowledge of a target language that goes beyond the common core mastered by many native speakers. Because of their richer experience with languages, bi- and multilingual speakers of a language can also manifest creativity and language playfulness elusive to monolingual speakers of the same language. Jessner (2006) highlights the specific characteristics of multilinguals by looking at the role of metalinguistic awareness.

For a long time, studies of second language acquisition (SLA) and bilingualism have been neglecting prior and simultaneous language learning experience. In the case of SLA, despite claims that the field covers not only second language acquisition but the development of any additional language as well, attention has been focused mainly on the acquisition or use of a second language and the influence of the first language on the learner's developing interlanguage. In the case of bilingualism, the main focus has been on the cognitive outcomes of being proficient in two languages or on the development of competence in two languages in early bilingualism. Such approaches ignore the possible effect of additional languages and the interaction between languages. Fortunately, the study of multilingualism, understood as going beyond second language acquisition and bilingualism, to examine the acquisition and use of three or more languages, has made notable progress in the last few years (see Auer and Wei 2007; Aronin and Hufeisen, in press). Among the areas that have received recent attention are: early trilingualism (Barnes 2005; Cruz-Ferreira 2005), pragmatics (Safont 2005), grammar (Leung 2007, 2009), phonetics (Gallardo 2007), multilingual language processing (Gibson and Hufeisen 2006; Jessner 2006; De Angelis 2007), attitudes (Lasagabaster and Huguet 2006), emotions (Aronin 2004; Pavlenko and Dewaele 2004; Pavlenko 2005) and education (Sagasta 2003; García, Skutnabb-Kangas and Torres-Guzman 2006; Cenoz 2009). The publication of the *International Journal of Multilingualism,* a specialized journal focusing on the

processing and use of multiple languages, and the biannual *International Conferences of Third Language Acquisition and Multilingualism* have also contributed to the development of the field.

Trends in the study of multilingualism

The shift in focus in recent years toward the acquisition of third or additional languages, as opposed to second language acquisition only, has followed some internal developmental trends. At the same time, however, this heightened interest in multiple language acquisition has been enhanced by the emergence of new approaches to exploring language and language development that apply more generally to any kind of language acquisition research.

One of these approaches is *Complexity Theory* (CT), which embraces holistic models and discourages reductionist explanations (see, for example, Larsen-Freeman 1997; Larsen-Freeman and Cameron 2008; De Bot 2008). CT looks at learners as self-reflective intentional agents and considers a wide range of learner and learning factors in their dynamic complexity in order to gain a deeper understanding of how the cognitive and the social interact. Involving more than two language systems, multilingual learning is by definition a complex phenomenon. It offers a great opportunity for researchers to examine the development and maintenance of multiple languages in a single individual as an intricate socio-cognitive trajectory that constantly reconfigures, adapts and evolves.

CT indicates that complex systems are very sensitive to initial conditions. The behavior of systems with different initial conditions, no matter how similar, diverges exponentially as time passes (Larsen-Freeman 1997: 144). This observation has significant implications for the study of multilinguals and their language development if we look at prior knowledge as an initial condition which defines future development. CT also argues against linear cause-effect reductionist models. Language acquisition, it contends, works as a nonlinear complex system because a cause of a particular strength does not result in an effect of equal strength (Larsen-Freeman and Cameron 2008: 143). As will become clear from the narrative data in this volume, effects are often disproportionate to their cause and learning trajectories are indeed determined by a multitude of interacting factors.

Another related approach, informed by Complexity Theory and based on an ecological perspective on foreign language education, has been

proposed by Kramsch and Whiteside (2008; see also Herdina and Jessner 2000; Kramsch 2002; Leather and van Dam 2003; van Lier 2004). What this approach promotes is viewing "language learning and language use as a nonlinear, relational human activity, co-constructed between humans and their environment, contingent upon their position in space and history, and a site of struggle for the control of social power and cultural memory" (Kramsch and Whiteside 2008: 390). Kramsch and Whiteside analyze the way multilinguals use languages in natural contexts and report that they have an ability to play with various linguistic codes that goes beyond linguistic and communicative competence. Kramsch (2006) calls this ability *symbolic competence*. She defines this notion as an ability not only to approximate someone else's language but also to navigate between languages and dialects to ensure emotional connectedness and successful transactional outcomes. While emphasizing the fact that symbolic competence is not unique to multilingual speakers in multilingual settings, Kramsch and Whiteside (2008: 401) rightly point out that multilingual encounters "increase the contact surfaces among symbolic systems and thus the potential for creating multiple meanings and identities".

A third Complexity Theory model also worthy of mention is Herdina and Jessner's *Dynamic Model of Multilingualism* (2002). It explores the psycholinguistic dynamics of multilingualism and shows how the constant interaction between a speaker's multiple languages creates new structures and emergent properties that are not found in monolingual systems.

When looking at the differences between monolinguals, bilinguals and multilinguals, one area that has received growing attention is the influence of bilingualism and multilingualism on the acquisition of additional languages. The folk wisdom is that bilinguals and multilinguals are more experienced learners and, as a result, have advantages over monolinguals when acquiring additional languages. Research studies focusing on this issue indicate that when learning an additional language, bilinguals do indeed have advantages over monolinguals in tests of general proficiency in the target language, particularly when L3 acquisition takes place in additive contexts and when bilinguals have literacy skills in their first two languages (see Cenoz 2003a, 2009, and De Angelis 2007 for a review). For example, research on the acquisition of English as a third language in the Basque Country has reported that bilingual learners obtained higher scores than their monolingual counterparts in the acquisition of English (see Cenoz and Valencia 1994; Lasagabaster 2000; Cenoz 2009).

Similar results were obtained by Bild and Swain (1989) with learners of French in Canadian immersion programs, by Thomas (1989) with learners of French in the US, and by Sanz (2000) with learners of English in Catalonia. These advantages can be related to a more developed metalinguistic awareness on the part of learners, which can be linked not only to their previous experience as language learners, but also to their knowledge of different linguistic systems and how these interact (see Jessner 2006).

The advantages associated with multilingualism have also been linked to a wider use of learning strategies (Kemp 2007). Bowden, Sanz and Stafford (2005: 122) observed that, "multilinguals behave like successful learners in the way they approach the task of learning a language. They look for more sources of input, make an early effort to use the new language, and show self-direction and a positive attitude toward the task". The opportunity multilinguals have to build on their prior knowledge of languages is also reported by Stakhnevich (2005), who conducted a diary study on her acquisition of Spanish as a Russian/English bilingual. The study revealed numerous instances where the learner made cross-linguistic comparisons and used her bilingualism as an important resource for decoding input and encoding output. These observations support the conclusions made by Rivers (2001) that experienced language learners exhibit a higher level of learner autonomy and employ "self-directed language learning strategies to modify the learning environment and aspects of the learning process" (Rivers 2001: 287). Other studies have looked at the relationship between the number of languages known by the speaker and various aspects of language acquisition. For example, Gibson and Hufeisen (2003) reported higher accuracy rates for multilinguals in a translation task into a shared target language.

However, not all research on the effect of bilingualism on third language acquisition reports clear advantages. Some studies have analyzed the degree of proficiency achieved in the third language by bilingual immigrant students and majority language monolingual students and have found no difference (Sanders and Meijers 1995; Van Gelderen et al. 2003). These results can be explained by factors such as socioeconomic status and cultural identity, which can affect the acquisition process.

Another difference between second language acquisition and bilingualism as compared to the processes of acquiring and using multiple languages is diversity in terms of directionality and scope of influence. As Cenoz (2000: 40) points out, "when two languages are involved in the acquisition process, we only have two possible acquisition orders: the

Table 1. Examples of different possible orders of acquisition involving seven languages

1.	L1.....L2.....L3.....L4.....L5.....L6.....L7
2.	L1.....L2/L3.....L4.....L5.....L6.....L7
3.	L1.....L2.....L3/L4.....L5.....L6.....L7
4.	L1.....L2.....L3.....L4/L5.....L6.....L7
5.	L1.....L2.....L3.....L4.....L5/L6.....L7
6.	L1.....L2.....L3.....L4.....L5.....L6/L7
7.	L1/L2.....L3.....L4.....L5.....L6.....L7
8.	L1/L2.....L3/L4.....L5/L6.....L7
9.	L1/L2.....L3/L4.....L5.....L6.....L7
10.	L1/L2.....L3/L4.....L5.....L6/L7
11.	L1/L2.....L3/L4.....L5/L6/L7
12.	L1/L2.....L3.....L4/L5.....L6.....L7
13.	L1/L2.....L3.....L4/L5.....L6/L7
14.	L1/L2.....L3.....L4.....L5/L6.....L7
15.	L1/L2.....L3.....L4.....L5.....L6/L7
16.	L1/L2.....L3.....L4.....L5/L6/L7
17.	L1/L2.....L3/L4/L5.....L6.....L7
18.	L1/L2.....L3/L4/L5.....L6/L7
19.	L1/L2.....L3.....L4/L5/L6....L7
20.	L1/L2.....L3.....L4/L5/L6/L7
21.	L1/L2.....L3/L4/L5.....L6/L7
22.	L1/L2.....L3/L4/L5.....L6.....L7
23.	L1/L2.....L3/L4/L5/L6.....L7
24.	L1/L2/L3.....L4.....L5.....L6.....L7
25.	L1/L2/L3.....L4/L5.....L6.....L7
26.	L1/L2/L3.....L4/L5.....L6/L7
27.	L1/L2/L3.....L4.....L5/L6.....L7
28.	L1/L2/L3.....L4.....L5/L6/L7
29.	L1/L2/L3.....L4.....L5.....L6/L7
30.	L1/L2/L3.....L4/L5/L6.....L7
31.	L1/L2/L3.....L4/L5.....L6/L7
32.	L1/L2/L3.....L4/L5/L6/L7

second language can be acquired after the L1 or at the same time as the L1". The number of languages involved in multilingual acquisition multiplies the possible acquisition orders. For example, in table 1 we can see examples of possible acquisition orders involving seven languages, which is the minimum number of languages in the multilingual narratives in this volume. We can see that languages can be acquired consecutively (for example L1 … L2 … or L5 ... L6 ...) or simultaneously (for example, L1/L2/L3 or L5/L6). Simultaneous language acquisition can involve sev-

eral languages but the thirty-two different possibilities included here do not go beyond the simultaneous acquisition of three languages, reported in several of the narratives. The examples in table 1 are in fact a simplification because they represent the acquisition of languages linearly without taking into account the dynamic nature of multilingualism and phenomena such as attrition or the relearning of languages. This diversity adds complexity to the study of multilingualism with exciting theoretical and practical implications. It shows, for instance, that learning several languages is potentially different from the sequence L1 ... L2 commonly used in studies of second language acquisition.

Research on the acquisition of a third or additional languages has also focused on cross-linguistic influence (CLI) in order "to explain how and under what conditions prior linguistic knowledge influences the production, comprehension, and development of a target language" (De Angelis 2007: 19) and to see how any subsequent language(s) may influence one's earlier languages, including the L1 (see, for instance, Jarvis and Pavlenko 2008 and the references therein). The main CLI areas of investigation cover the effect of different factors such as typological distance, language status, characteristics of the context, proficiency and recency of use of the language(s) influencing the target language. In general, speakers borrow more from the language which is typologically closer to the target language (Cenoz, Hufeisen and Jessner 2001, 2003; De Angelis 2007; Ringbom 2007). For example, Cenoz (2003b) observed that learners used Spanish more often than Basque as the source language of borrowings into English, both when Spanish was the first and the second language. Another factor that can predict cross-linguistic influence is the so-called foreign language effect or L2 status (Hammarberg 2001). Several studies have reported that learners tend to use the L2 or languages other than the L1 as the source language of cross-linguistic influence (Clyne 1997; Williams and Hammarberg 1998). De Angelis (2005) proposes the existence of two interacting constraints that trigger the use of languages other than the L1 as source languages: perception of correctness and association of foreignness. Learners perceive that L1 information is often unhelpful when learning an additional language and, at the same time, non-native languages are cognitively associated as different from the L1. So far there are not enough studies to compare the relative weight of the effect of typological distance vs. foreign language effect/L2 status. Cenoz (2001, see also 2009) reported that when telling a story in English, Spanish L1 students who had learned Basque and had Basque as the language of instruction used Spanish as the main source language. It seems that in

this case, typology has more weight than foreign language effect/L2 status. These learners seem to perceive linguistic distance and realize that Basque, a non-Indo-European language, is less likely to work as a source language of transfer. Thus they choose the language that is "less different" rather than "less foreign", a choice similar to the ones reported in other contexts (cf. e.g. Odlin and Jarvis 2004). However, as Cenoz (2001, 2009) points out, there may be an additional factor that can favor the use of the L1 Spanish rather than the L2 Basque as a source language, the relative strength of Basque and Spanish in the sociolinguistic context. Basque is a minority language and even though it is the main language of instruction for participants in the study, Spanish is highly activated at all times as the default language. The interaction of sociolinguistic factors, such as language vitality and status in the community, is not often taken into account in studies of cross-linguistic influence, but it cannot be dismissed.

Cross-linguistic influence in the acquisition of a third or additional languages has also been related to the level of proficiency in the target language; and less proficient learners have been reported to transfer more elements from their L1 than more advanced learners (Ringbom 1987; Williams and Hammarberg 1998). Another factor that can potentially affect cross-linguistic influence is frequency of use. It can be hypothesized that learners are more likely to borrow from a language they actively use than from other languages they may know but do not use. However, here again the interaction of other factors can change that.

Dewaele (1998), Hammarberg (2001), and Jarvis and Pavlenko (2008) report results related to the role of recency of use. Their evidence seems to suggest that the language that was learned just prior to the target language is the most likely candidate for transfer. This is a somewhat different position from Poulisse (1999) who also acknowledges the effect of recency but defines it as the language most recently used.

Other factors that can determine the presence of cross-linguistic influence are related to the specific context in which communication takes place, including the interlocutors, the setting and the topic of the conversation. Grosjean (1998, 2008 chapters 4 and 5) believes that these factors determine whether the speaker is in a bilingual or a monolingual mode. Some L3 studies have confirmed Grosjean's stance. For example, Dewaele (2001) found that the level of formality affects the total number of mixed, dual or triple language utterances, which proved higher in informal contexts.

The last trend in the area of multilingual studies we would like to comment on is the much richer research agenda we are witnessing today

with regard to questions related to language development and emotions (see, for example, Pavlenko and Dewaele 2004; Pavlenko 2005). Wierzbicka (2004) considers this a significant development since emotions are an essential aspect of human cognition. While the study of some affective variables such as attitude and motivation has a long tradition (see, for example, Gardner and Lambert 1972; Gardner 1985; Baker 1992), other factors such as anxiety have become the object of serious exploration only in more recent years (Horwitz and Young, 1991; Dewaele 2002, 2007). Importantly, attitude, motivation and affect are currently seen as dynamic, ever-changing complex phenomena, rather than as static personal attributes. In an interesting study focused on anxiety, Dewaele (2002) found that learners show higher levels of anxiety when learning a second language than when learning additional languages.

Looking at the field as a whole, Pavlenko (2006) subdivided the inquiries concerning multilingualism and emotion into three groups. The first one is centrally concerned with multilinguals' *emotional experiences*. These are some of the key questions there: "Are some emotional concepts experienced in culturally unique ways, as argued by Panayiotou (2004) with regard to physical correlates of the Greek 'stenahoria' (discomfort/sadness/suffocation)? And if this is the case, does second language socialization reroute 'the trajectory of feeling' (Hoffman 1989: 269) and engender new forms of emotional experience?" (Pavlenko 2006: 312).

The second group of questions addresses multilinguals' *preferred language of expression*. The common assumption has been that the dominant language, which in most cases is the first language, is typically the language of emotion. Sifting through the existing evidence, Pavlenko (2005: 236) cautions that to think of the first language as the language of emotions or the self and of the second or an additional language as the language of detachment is to oversimplify the relationship between languages, emotions and identities in bi- and multilingualism.

The third distinct area of research regarding emotions looks at the way the same *emotions are expressed in different languages*. Wierzbicka (2004: 102) contends that a language is "a conceptual, experiential and emotional world" and therefore there are different ways of thinking and feeling associated with different languages. This can explain the difficulties multilinguals experience in identifying certain emotions when there is a great distance between cultures (Dewaele 2005).

The new approaches to emotions and multilingualism are not only richer in their theoretical orientation; they are also methodologically much more diverse, using different types of data. These include *introspec-*

tive data, such as self-reports and linguistic autobiographies, *experimental data,* such as electromagnetic recordings of skin conductivity amplitudes, *performance data,* such as oral narratives and interviews, *ethnographic data*, combining direct observations and field notes, and *clinical data* from case histories and sessions with patients who speak more than one language (Pavlenko 2006: 314).

Despite the diversity of data described with regard to emotions, research on multilingualism as a whole remains primarily based on *etic* data. In the next section we discuss the importance of providing another perspective on multilingualism in its intricate complexity, namely the inside *emic* perspective of users and speakers of multiple languages.

Narratives as valuable and legitimate data in multilingual studies

In recent years there have been growing appeals in the field of SLA to open a new discursive space where first-person narrative introspections can productively supplement third-person, researcher-generated accounts of language learning (cf. e.g. Firth and Wagner 1997; Pavlenko 1998; Marx 2002; Block 2003; Larsen-Freeman and Cameron 2008). This section will highlight the significance of personal narratives in various disciplines, focusing in particular on the ones related to language development studies. While written more or less in a classic review format, this overview can be looked at as a mini narrative itself, which depicts unfolding "substories" in the evolution of narrative use, presents various "protagonists", i.e. different researchers with their dissenting or consenting voices, and reveals "plots" with challenges, dominances and possibilities. Our role as narrators will be to facilitate a journey of inquiry, offering different perspectives, pointing out biases, and identifying lacunae as well as potential for richer explorations. Not unlike the experience of the characters in Kurosawa's classic movie *Rashomon* (1950) about the subjectivity of perception, the narrative told here is no more than a strand in a much richer story demanding multiple voices.

The backdrop of the story

Personal narratives have always been an important meaning-making tool at the core of human experience, giving us a holistic understanding of the contributions that actions and events make to particular outcomes (Polkinghorne 1988). Their potential for making sense of things and for

cross-fertilization has only grown stronger with the introduction of new media and the opportunities created by cyberspace for millions of people to be part of much bigger and more flexible communities[2]. Recognized as a fundamental cognitive activity, narratives are being accepted as a valuable source of information in various disciplines and research efforts as well: psychology, history, medicine, musicology, cognitive science, immunology, pedagogy, political science, disaster management, anthropology, law, gender studies, sociology, neuroscience, teacher education and media research (cf. e.g. Hunter 1991; Cortazzi 1993; Lieblich et al. 1998; Johnson and Golombek 2002; Rogoff 2003; Groopman 2007; Sacks 2007; Doidge 2007). In some of these disciplines, such as medicine and anthropology, it is perhaps more accurate to talk about a renewed interest in narratives, which are now collected and analyzed in more sophisticated ways than before.

The pro-narrative voices

Personal narratives were marginalized under the influence of rationalist epistemology and experimental methodology with their preoccupation with objectivity and powerful generalizations rather than individual experiences (Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000). Their rediscovered value is reflected in the epithets different scholars have used to describe them. Narrative is "a primary act of mind" (Hardy 1987: 1); "the primary scheme by means of which human existence is rendered meaningful" (Polkinghorne 1988: 11). Narratives are "overt manifestations of the mind in action: windows to both the content of the mind and its ongoing operations" (Chafe 1990: 79).[3]

In the field of multilingual studies, first-person language learning narratives are a critical source of data, well aligned with different newer theoretical frameworks and approaches such as Complexity Theory, poststructuralist SLA, and various ecological models, for instance (Larsen-Freeman and Cameron 2008; Herdina and Jessner 2002; van Lier 2000). This alignment comes from the fact that narratives offer a holistic, qualitative type of inquiry, which moves us away from more traditional

2. Suffice it to mention the burgeoning blogosphere and the unprecedented opportunities it offers for patterned narrative analysis of the type offered in Harris (2007).
3. These three quotes are all cited in Cortazzi 1993: 1–2.

subject manipulation and focuses instead on learners in their natural environments, with all their complexities and interconnectivities.

Being more process than product oriented, personal narratives of language learning are valued for adding a longitudinal, historical perspective on things and for revealing the multitude of infinitely complex factors which shape learning outcomes and multilingual learner/speaker positioning: from race, social status, age, ethnicity, sexuality, to (dis)ability and culture (McGroarty 1998: 598; Pavlenko 2001). Furthermore, since they present the voices of language learners and users, narratives are believed to offer insights with greater psychological reality. This is arguably the case because the same observable outcomes can be attributed to different underlying processes. Hence, by getting the perspectives of those actually juggling a multilanguage system, as opposed to relying solely on the conclusions and observations of researchers, we gain greater plausibility.

Language learning diarist Stakhnevich comments that "as authors of our own personal stories, we have a unique perspective on what our specifics are in time and space, both of which might not be shared by others" (Stakhnevich 2005: 217). This is, she reminds us, what Bakhtin calls the "surplus of seeing" – each one of us sees processes, critical experiences and interconnectivities that others may overlook or not have. By adding the "surplus of seeing" that one person possesses to the surplus of another, a better and richer picture of reality emerges.

Countering those who view first-person narratives with skepticism as subjective, unreliable, or at best as capturing individual differences and idiosyncrasies more than commonalities, Benson similarly argues that perhaps the "growing visibility of such 'atypical' learners in research could lead to a new view of the more 'typical' learner" (Benson 2004: 20). He further points out that narratives nicely capture the dialectic between learner and situation, allowing mental actions to transpire as a "synchronized mechanism of the internal and the external" (Benson 2004: 43). Lantolf and Pavlenko also see the mental and the social as intimately connected. To them, social context is not merely a backdrop to mental development; it is the very source of this development (Lantolf and Pavlenko, 2001: 144). Analyzing a number of published post-modern personal accounts of language and culture border crossings, Pavlenko (1998) draws attention to the fact that this brand of narratives takes us into a new universe where the metaphor of language is drastically different. Instead of "language acquisition" we are dealing with a metaphor of "participation" and of "becoming- and being-in-language"; acquisition sug-

gests that the self is "in control" (it possesses the language) while the metaphor of participation presents languages as separate worlds that shape and transform us with each border crossing (Pavlenko 1998: 15, see also Sfard 1998).

The cautionary voices

While having undoubtedly gained in stature as a unique way of externalizing inner experiences, narratives are still being viewed as somewhat suspect data by some, while other scholars only warn that they need to be treated with caution. A common caveat is that what narratives report is subjective, already "filtered through the perceptions and biases of the learner, especially important when the learner is a linguist professionally interested in SLA theory" (Schmidt and Frota 1986: 238). There is no such thing as an innocent eye, Bruner observes, "the brain is never free of precommitment" (2004: 709).

Others make the point that we should consider personal narratives as discursive constructions, much more than factual representations (Johnson and Golombek 2002; Bruner 2004; Pavlenko 2008). What this means is that what we choose to tell in our own story is always influenced by what we already know about other people's stories and experiences, and what we say or do not say is shaped by what we believe to be of interest to particular audiences. To capture the phenomenon of narratives always influencing other narratives, Julia Kristeva coined the term "intertextuality", a succinct way to indicate that from the onset every text "is under the jurisdiction of other discourses" (Kristeva 1980: 69).

Importantly, narratives are also susceptible to influence from the language in which they are told. As languages tend to segment reality in different ways, it does make a difference which of our multiple languages we use to tell our story of language learning. Also, it matters if the language of the telling and the language of the experience coincide or not (Koven 1998; Marian and Neisser 2000). Because of the unavoidable effect of these linguistic and intertextual influences, what is not said in particular first-person narratives may be more interesting and telling than what has been articulated (see Pavlenko 2007).

A further caveat mentioned in the literature on narratives is the untenable nature of a "learner as a linguist" position since, more often than not, things are too complex to be understood by linguistically naïve learners and language users. Schmidt (1995) offers some counterevidence to this stance of untenability and invites researchers to consider the possibil-

ity that learners may be aware of more than they are being given credit for. "It is misleading", Schmidt points out, "to assume ignorance when ignorance has not been demonstrated"(Schmidt 1995: 40).

Others have argued that since much of our learning and language use happens below the level of conscious awareness, people are perhaps unable to remember the actual processes of acquiring rules and various language components, from their vocabulary development to their mastery of target language pragmatic and pronunciation norms[4]. Again, keeping in mind Schmidt's objection above, one can say that while we may not remember most or many of the specific reconfigurations of our developing multilingual competence, what we do remember is significant, despite its subjectivity. Benson (2004: 14) makes the argument that the inevitable memory deterioration that occurs between a language learning experience and its description is counterbalanced by one's intimate knowledge of the contexts of one's own learning and by the insights that are gained from a more longitudinal view of the learning process.

Narrative clusters

Probing deeper into intertextuality, one can identify certain clusters in the language learning narratives that have emerged in our field over time. The early introspections focused almost exclusively on single aspects related to learning, typically anxiety, competition and motivation (Schumann F. and J. Schumann 1977; Bailey 1980, 1983; Schumann 1980). Two early diaries (Rivers 1979; Schmidt and Frota 1986) offered much more comprehensive data but they stayed with the learning as "acquisition", rather than "participation" metaphor (Sfard 1998).

Four published individual learning accounts and one collection of personal narratives show marks of, or acknowledge, being influenced by feminist and postmodern/poststructuralist theories with their emphasis on language not only as a symbolic capital but as a site of identity construction and negotiation, where gender, age, ethnicity, class and race grow or diminish in role in an intricately fluid web of social relationships (Pavlenko 2002; Kramsch 2008). The authors of the individual publications are all women – Lvovich (1997), Ogulnick (1998), Marx (2002), and Stakhnevich (2005) – each providing a richly contextualized description of her language learning experiences and concomitant linguistic identity transformations. All white, middle-class academics, the authors nev-

4. See, e.g. the sources in Schmidt and Frota (1986).

ertheless offer precious variety in terms of the context of their experiences, respectively Italy/France/USA, Japan, Germany/Canada, and Mexico.

The narrative collection, entitled *Language Crossings* (Ogulnick 2000, ed.), contains significantly shorter pieces whose aim is to offer insights into the complicated interplay between gender, social status, nationality, race, class and language learning. It is interesting to point out that if one conducts a detailed analysis of the tenor and the language of these narratives, a well defined semantic field will emerge, densely populated by words such as "displacement", "loss", "painful journeys", "struggle", "dislocation", "regret", "severed roots", "fragmentation", "shy and broken languages", "outsider", "stranger", "identity crisis", "confused", "humiliated", "hopelessness", "helplessness", "exasperated", "exhausted", "shame", "guilt", "frustration", "anger", "difficulties", "disappointment" and "humiliation". Only four of the twenty-five narratives included in the collection foreground the authors' enrichment rather than their painful repositioning and difficult identity re-negotiation. In a fascinating personal narrative called *Split Self*, Nicholas Papandreou also offers an exploration of the wounds one suffers from multiple language allegiances. He, however, dwells equally, if not more, on the innumerable treasures of one's split as a multilingual and multicultural person (Papandreou 2004).

Within the "language as participation" framework, the literature on narratives has given particular attention to linguistic autobiographies by acclaimed multilingual and multicultural writers and scholars, such as Rodriguez (1982), Hoffman (1989), Kaplan (1993), Todorov (1994), Wierzbicka (1997). Some of these autobiographies are longer, book size, literary pieces. Like the narratives from Ogulnick's collection, these also depict the pains of an immigrant's initial "displacement" and "life on the hyphen" (Pavlenko 1998: 3). They all are, at the same time, astounding records of remarkable social repositioning and linguistic accomplishment.

Two recent collections, published just three years apart − Belcher and Conner (2001) and Benson and Nunan (2004) − have their own distinct profiles as well. Belcher and Conner's book contains narratives written by outstanding academics from various disciplines, many of them well-known language specialists, who all offered their reflections on how they developed literacy in multiple languages. Benson and Nunan's collection, on the other hand, is all about stories from the classroom with a focus on motivation, affect and strategies. Despite the book's title, *Learners' Stories. Difference and Diversity in Language Learning*, these are re-sto-

ried experiences with the researchers rather than the learners being the principal narrators.

Not unlike the collections mentioned above, the narratives in the present anthology also show some intravolume intertextuality. The latter is not so much the result of a process of editing or revision, but is more due to the backgrounds of the contributors included. These and the organization of the book are described in some detail in what follows.

This volume

In a series of articles, Pavlenko (2001, 2002, 2007) points out that narrative analysis offers our field much more than ethnographic and linguistic data. It pushes us to analyze our own roles in privileging certain narrative voices and styles while marginalizing others.

The personal narratives in this volume depict the learning trajectories of twelve multilingual individuals, affected by quite different contextual factors and representing a wide range and combination of dialects and languages from both similar and very different linguistic families. The combinations explored include some lesser-known languages that come from under-researched areas, such as the African continent and certain parts of Asia, the Middle East and Eastern Europe.

As a genre, the narratives offered here belong to the more global introspective and retrospective type, called either linguistic autobiographies or language memoirs, as opposed to the more synchronous in nature diaries and journals (Pavlenko 2007). Because this is a collection of narratives, they are naturally all shorter pieces compared to the book size global introspections one sees in Hoffman (1989) and Kaplan (1993), for instance. Content-wise the narratives explore in some detail the acquisition of the various components of language (grammar, lexicon, pronunciation and pragmatics), while offering insights into the ways one creates a more fluid and complex identity when positioned in various speech and learning communities. The voices of the individual contributors were completely honored through no editorial interference with regard to terminology and narrative organization.

The contributors

The contributors to the present volume have listed from seven to up to twenty-one languages as part of their repertoires. These numbers call for

an immediate methodological clarification. Many have written about the lack of agreement concerning the way we define multilingualism, from full native-like mastery of two or more languages to a minimal knowledge of additional languages (see, e.g. Baker 2006).

For the purposes of this anthology, namely to allow researchers, and anyone else interested in language development, to get a glimpse of some of the processes of language acquisition and maintenance in a multilingual mind as well as to get a sense of what determines one's investment in learning multiple languages, the methodological challenges around the definition of multilingualism are, to some extent, a non-issue. We will use multilingual competence as a neutral term, in the sense of Cook (1999) where it is defined as knowledge of more than two languages, free from any judgment of good or bad according to some outside criterion. As will become clear from some of the narratives, even a minimal knowledge of a language, limited to a particular aspect of its syntax or phonology, for instance, can prove critical for the activation of what Ringbom and Schmidt call "system learning", as opposed to "item learning" (Ringbom 1982; Schmidt 1995).

In this volume we use the term *multilingualism* both for its individual and societal dimensions, following the definition given by the European Commission: "the ability of societies, institutions, groups and individuals to engage, on a regular basis, with more than one language in their day-to-day lives" (European Commission 2007: 6). The term *plurilinguism* (from the French *plurilinguisme*), used only for individual, as opposed to societal, multilingualism, has been gaining ground in Europe since the publication of some important Council of Europe documents (e.g. Council of Europe 2001). This term is connected with an important shift in the way language learning is conceptualized. Instead of projecting learning outcomes as a final state, it promotes a dynamic, emergent or process view (Larsen-Freeman and Freeman 2008). With its emphasis on the close nexus between language and identity, the term *multilinguality* proposed by Aronin and Ó Laoire is also very close to the spirit of this anthology (Aronin and Ó Laoire 2004). At this point, however, we decided to stay with *multilingualism* as the more familiar term in most parts of the world.

A brief terminological note on *polyglot* vs. *multilingual*. The former is typically defined as a generic term for a multilingual person, not infrequently in reference to people with an impressive number or mastery of languages (en.wiktionary.org/wiki/polyglot – "one who masters, notably speaks, several languages"). We prefer the term *multilingual* because of its phonological closeness to *multilingualism* and more neutral nature with regard to level of proficiency and number of languages involved.

The contributors to our anthology were selected according to the following key criteria: 1) the number of languages in their repertoire, 2) the linguistic distance between the languages and/or dialects involved, 3) the way the languages were developed – simultaneously or consecutively, in naturalistic vs. instructed settings etc., 4) age of language development – from birth, young learners, younger and older adults, 5) the types of writing systems and literacy skills involved, 6) patterns of language maintenance and language attrition, 7) types of multilingualism – incipient, coordinate, compound, active, passive, etc. We aimed at both maximum language and regional diversity as well as varied types of multilingualism. All the selected contributors have seven or more languages in their language repertoire. Though privileged in some ways, these individuals do not represent some sort of an exceptional language achievement. They all reveal rich multilingual competence, a not uncommon phenomenon around the world, which still remains underrepresented and undertheorized in the language development literature.

The contributors to this volume have not only acquired multiple languages but they also work with languages as teachers, translators, or academics. Clearly, this specific background is not shared by many other multilingual speakers, which means that their language learning experiences may reveal somewhat different patterns. The plus side of the contributors' background, however, is that it allows them to explain certain things in a more precise technical way than that of a layperson. The writers in the anthology are people who are keenly aware of the manner in which they use and study languages and the narratives in the following chapters show the depth of their reflections.

Not many of our contributors had to learn languages because of forced displacement, which triggers its own dynamics of linguistic identity negotiation and learning. The narratives in the anthology deal more with empowerment and enrichment rather than loss. They are different from the old "success" stories of assimilation, however (cf. Pavlenko 2007). In a way, this leaning towards enrichment may be viewed as a counterpoise to the already mentioned recent narratives around displacement and loss. Having more varied learning narratives is beneficial not only for research, but, through intertextuality, more variety will impact positively on future writers of personal narratives as well.

We would like to invite the readers of this anthology not only to savor its narratives as sources of fascinating glimpses into how individuals develop and maintain multiple languages, but also to look at the book in their hands as an opportunity to think about their own experiences with

managing different dialects and/or additional languages. By engaging more people to reflect on their multilingual experiences and by inviting them to join the public discourse around multilingualism, its processes, benefits and impact on the way we perceive the world and others, we can have outcomes that go far beyond the advancement of language development theory and practice. Through more introspection and discussion, we can gain openness, enrichment and flexibility that facilitate better cross-cultural communication, cooperation and understanding.

In the spirit of TED's mega projects[5] exploring school and media stories, and along the lines of Clandinin and Connelly's (1995) "story constellations approach", we would like to encourage our field to consider creating an open-ended electronic database where bi- and multilingual learners and speakers from around the world, with different professional backgrounds and life experiences, can post their stories. The idea is to make an unprecedented amount of data accessible for analysis, free for anyone interested in language. Such a database will be one way to ensure that no languages or language combinations will be unduly favored in mainstream language acquisition research, nor whole regions of the world unjustifiably ignored, as has been the case for so long. Another factor to consider when setting up such an international open-ended database is the language of the personal narratives. These days, English is undeniably the international language of choice, but as mentioned earlier, studies have repeatedly shown that memories become more accessible when the linguistic environment at retrieval matches the linguistic environment at encoding, i.e. multilinguals remember different aspects of their experiences to a varying degree depending on the language they use for their narratives (Marian and Neisser 2000: 361). The project we are proposing should encourage multiple language narratives, as well as narratives written in their entirety in a language other than English. This may seem at first blush impractical, particularly to "inner circle" re-

5. TED, which stands for Technology, Entertainment, Design, was founded in 1984 with the intention to bring together outstanding thinkers from these three worlds and make them part of a global community which seeks, and freely disseminates, knowledge. Since then, its scope and membership have become much broader. For more information on TED and their mission, see www.ted.com. For TED's stories projects, see Harris 2007 and http://www.onceuponaschool.org/stories. The "story constellations approach" can be described as a type of exploration which takes into account multiple clusters of stories, and many versions of stories narrated by multiple tellers (Craig 2007).

searchers (in Kachru's sense, 1985), but there are, on the other hand, hundreds of bi- and multilingual language scholars around the world who have the language ability and expertise to use these multilanguage data for all sorts of interesting and important comparisons that they can later report through the media of English. The benefits of such an undertaking will be double: a richer empirical base for our theoretical studies and a great opportunity for more researcher voices to be added to our still Western and Anglophone dominated field of study.

Organization of the book

The Multiple Realities of Multilingualism consists of two theoretical chapters and twelve first-person language learning narratives. Each of the latter starts with a summary of the languages explored in it and concludes with a series of reflective questions and points for further inquiry. While primarily aimed at graduate and undergraduate students of language, these questions are also designed as a general impetus for a deeper and more multifaceted exploration of various aspects of multiple language development. The theoretical chapters first explore the role of personal narratives in the context of recent developments in the area of multilingual research and then analyze the emic data from the anthology against the background of important findings from etic studies.

The twelve personal narratives are the centerpiece of the book. Deciding on how to group the narratives, and on the order in which to present them, posed somewhat of a challenge as the contributors' contexts, their language combinations, as well as the manner and sequence of their language development all defied clear-cut categorization. The language learning experiences of every single contributor took place in a variety of contexts, on more than one continent. Also, each language combination explored in the narratives contains languages from various language families and covers both cognate and non-cognate languages. Furthermore, the experiences described reflect both simultaneous and sequential language development, and learning in both instructional and naturalistic settings. Acknowledging the fact that any possible division would prove to be a mixed bag, we decided to place the narratives along a continuum. We begin with predominantly non-naturalistic, instructed learning with some limited natural acquisition at one end, and finish with narratives dominated by experiences in naturalistic settings with much less instructed, non-naturalistic learning.

This order of presenting the narratives offers opportunities for some intriguing juxtapositions. The first two narratives at the more instructed learning end of the continuum, for instance, are written by two Eastern Europeans from neighboring countries, Serbia and Bulgaria, which allows for somewhat different and yet complementary perspectives on contexts that share many common features. The next three narratives are by authors who all reside in Africa and who have some of the same languages in their repertoires. One of these authors, however, is a native son of Africa, who grew up with three mother tongues, while the other two contributors are of European descent and both have a world language as their L1, English and German, respectively. The third narrative cluster reveals the introspections of three Americans with very rich and almost balanced naturalistic and instructed learning experiences, all with some European, Middle Eastern and Asian dimensions. To a certain extent, the two narratives following this cluster are in a category of their own because of the heavy emphasis on Esperanto in one of them, and on Chinese in the other. The last two narratives, written by an Italian-American and an Irishman, respectively, are the ones that reveal a variety of mostly naturalistic language learning experiences. The authors' partially overlapping contexts of learning and significant number of shared languages again allow for some interesting comparisons revealing both commonalities and some fascinating differences and idiosyncrasies.

The last chapter of the book presents findings from second language acquisition (SLA) and third language acquisition (TLA) research within several thematic areas, particularly multiple language learning as a complex dynamic system; the influence of bilingualism/multilingualism on the acquisition of additional languages; cross-linguistic influence; emotions, identity negotiation and positioning, attitude and motivation. These topics are used as filters for analyzing the information in the twelve narratives, which both confirms and disconfirms the evidence found in the research literature. The aim of this analysis is to allow some meaningful comparison of the extent to which *etic*, researcher-generated, and *emic,* learner-offered perspectives fit or diverge, and also to identify any possible new questions that the emic data may add to our current research agendas.

The juxtaposition of issues and insights relevant to the researchers with those relevant to the researched is further enhanced in the reflective questions included in the anthology. Containing references to important research findings and related to data from the narratives, these questions invite the readers to do their own comparative analysis. Furthermore,

they encourage the readers to enrich the etic and emic perspectives offered in the book with their own language learning related insights, shaped by their particular life circumstances and their sensitivities.

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Chapter 2

A long, adventurous road to (im)perfection

Radmila Popovic

When you set out on your journey to Ithaca,
pray that the road is long,
full of adventure, full of knowledge.

Always keep Ithaca in your mind.
To arrive there is your ultimate goal.
But do not hurry the voyage at all.
It is better to let it last for many years;
and to anchor at the island when you are old,
rich with all you have gained on the way,
not expecting that Ithaca will offer you riches.

Constantine Kavafis, *Ithaka*

Languages Explored: Serbian/Croatian/Bosnian, English, Russian, French, German, Italian, Modern Greek, Macedonian, Slovene, Latin, Old English, Old Church Slavonic

1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been an upsurge of interest in first-person narratives written by second language learners as a source of data offering fresh insights into language learning processes. Broadly speaking, this story can be said to belong to this genre. However, it also has specific characteristics that set it apart from the established genre types: this is neither an immigrant, nor an ethnic autobiography. It bears closest resemblance to a cross-cultural narrative (Pavlenko 2001: 215) because it describes transitions and interactions between both languages and cultures, written from the perspective of someone who has done the bulk of language learning in classrooms far removed from the native speakers of the target language, and who has had a chance to spend longer periods of time in the target cultures only after gaining considerable proficiency

in the second language. In other words, this is a self-reported case study about the outcomes of instructed second language acquisition. As such, the account probably reflects the experience of many language learners who have done the bulk of language learning in the country of their origin, and who have gone out of their way to hone their language skills to near perfection.

2. "How many languages do you speak?" "Well, it is hard to tell."

When I was embarking on an English teacher career in my early twenties, this was the question I found extremely difficult to answer. Whenever asked how many languages I spoke, I would pause as if completely baffled, and then would confuse my interlocutor with a laborious and evasive reply. Only when really pressed to commit myself, would I unwillingly admit to speaking English and Russian, in addition to my mother tongue, Serbian. What made this fairly simple question so difficult to answer was precisely what seemed to be straightforward – defining what *speaking a language* actually amounted to. The scale most frequently employed to measure the level of proficiency that had to be attained before one can legitimately claim to be a speaker of a language was native-like fluency. Although I was fairly proficient in both English and Russian (I could read literary texts, newspapers and magazines, write essays, and express myself in most formal and informal situations), I would nevertheless hesitate before giving an answer, feeling uncomfortable because in my heart of hearts I was wondering whether I had really met the set standards, and also sensing that something was amiss. The standpoint that the ultimate attainment in language learning equals *near-native* abilities, and that anything less than that is at best deficient, came to be criticised as a monolingual bias**,** but nonetheless still pervades the field of second language acquisition (Block 2003). In the meantime, a different definition of language proficiency was outlined, and multilingualism came to be viewed as knowledge of more than one language in the same mind (Cook 2002). It can be claimed that such a stance has gained official support. The document *Principles and Guidelines*, approved by the Council of Europe, explicitly states that partial and specific competence of a language ought to be taken into consideration when describing someone's linguistic competences (Little and Perclová 2001). I eagerly embraced this shift of perspective as the official endorsement of the idea that limited or partial knowledge of languages counts as well. It definitely helped me

assess what it is that I can do, but has not been of much use when it comes to counting how many languages I speak.

Meanwhile, other changes occurred. The language I considered my mother tongue, Serbo-Croatian, disintegrated together with Yugoslavia, the state I was born in, into three nominally different languages: Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian. One would think that such a development is favourable for enhancing my multilingual profile. True, it rarely happens that one can add new languages to their linguistic repertoire without going through the throes of learning them. Nevertheless, I believe that the lengthening of my language list ultimately depends on my attitude to what is still a focus of controversy, whether Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian are dialects of the same language, or three distinct languages. This is a political, as much as a linguistic matter, and for me emotional as well. For the time being, I am going to avoid committing myself on this delicate issue, and stick to the slashed name version, Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, now in widespread use in Slavic departments all over the world. However, I will return to the three dialects or three languages dilemma later in the text. To return to the issue of counting, it seems to me I can say that the assets belonging to my linguistic capital include Bosnian/Croatian /Serbian, English, Russian, German, French, Italian, Modern Greek, Latin, Old English, Old Church Slavonic, Slovene and Macedonian. These are the languages I have learned at various points of my life, with a varying degree of success, and have used for different purposes. Bringing them under my command was a lengthy process, far from smooth, but nevertheless enjoyable and quite exciting. In what is to follow, I am going to reconstruct my language learning history, elaborate on details I find relevant, and in the end attempt to evaluate the outcome of my efforts.

3. Why did I take up languages as my profession?

I often ask myself what made me opt for languages as a profession. Coming to think of it now, I would say that the driving force behind it was that language learning seemed effortless to me. At the age of six, I could memorize long English poems and stories in no time, and would act them out before an admiring audience consisting of my parents, grandparents and other enthusiastic relatives. I derived enormous satisfaction from the praise I would invariably gain ("Oh, she sounds *so* English!"), and also immensely enjoyed uttering words that contained the sounds I was not

accustomed to, but could nonetheless discern and reproduce pretty successfully. Rolling melodious words off my tongue was something that I liked so much that I frequently did my language gigs in front of a mirror.

Another impetus came from good role models in my immediate surroundings: my paternal grandfather studied medicine in France and Germany; my maternal grandfather learned the tailor's trade in Budapest; my father was proficient in four languages. For this reason, I probably came to believe that language learning was not an outstanding accomplishment, but rather an ordinary thing**,** part and parcel of becoming educated. In addition, this joint family experience was handed over to me in the narrative form (anecdotes from my grandfathers' lives) supported by visuals (a stack of yellowed photographs), which possibly added an aura of mystery to the whole story. It opened the door of the foreign world to me and, in a way, initiated me into other cultures. Hence, my decision to pursue a linguistic career was not accidental: it was driven by a certain knack for languages, systematically fostered positive attitude, support and encouragement in my social environment.

4. How did I choose my languages? Where did I learn them?

I think I can be best described as a subsequent bilingual, which means that I learned my second strongest language, English, after I had acquired my mother tongue. I started with English early, when I was 5 years old, added Russian at the age of 9, commenced with other languages mainly in my teenage years, with the exception of Old English and Old Church Slavonic, which I came into contact with at university. However, what I think really matters in my language learning history is that I am a simultaneous bi-literate, because I learned to read and write in two scripts at the same time. This is not a special feat, and all Serbian children achieve it, since Serbian uses both Cyrillic and the Roman script. I cannot remember when I learned how to read; all I know is that at the age of five I was versed in both alphabets. I mention this fact because it does not seem to me that its significance for language development is appreciated enough: at an early age, I became aware that signs are arbitrary**,** and that their meaning is actualized depending on the code they belong to. Hence, in Roman the letter <p> denotes the /p/ sound, whereas in Cyrillic <p> is sounded /r/. For this reason, I chose *P* for my personal symbol, because it fittingly blended my initials in two alphabets, the beginning letter of my name written in Cyrillic (P for Радмила = Radmila), and my sur-

name written in Roman script (P, for Popovic). Bi-literacy was cherished in the education system in the former Yugoslavia. Thus, I was required to write one assignment in Cyrillic, one in the Roman alphabet. As a result, I achieved a high degree of automaticity in reading and writing in these two scripts: if someone took a book away from me and asked whether it was written in Cyrillic or the Roman script, I wouldn't know, or it would take me a moment to recall, because that was not something I would pay deliberate attention to. My reactions are still automatic − when filling out a form, I use the script it is written in.

In defining the context in which my language learning evolved, I am going to use Figure 1, which depicts possible learning scenarios with regard to two variables: whether learning occurs in +/− classroom environment, and whether the target language is present in the community (Block 2003: 34).

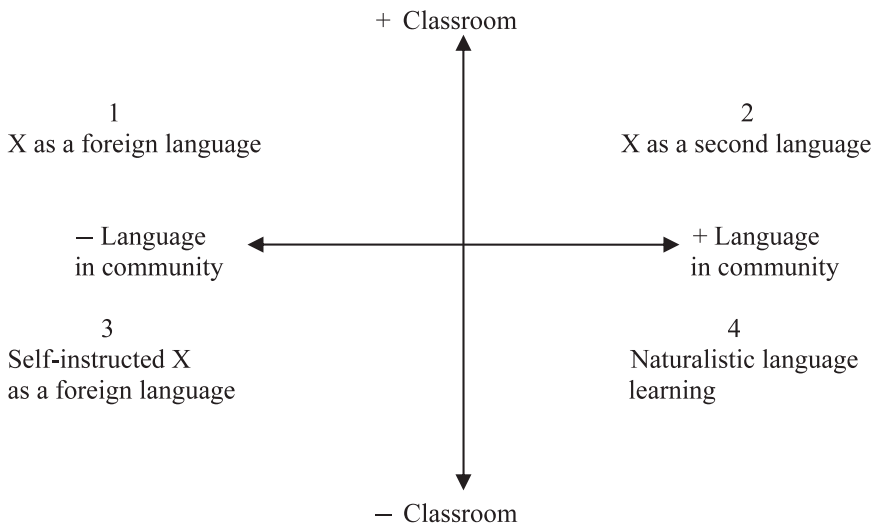


Figure 1. Second language learning scenarios

I experienced all four scenarios at some points in my life. Although I can neatly map my languages onto corresponding quadrants, things are not so clear-cut. For example, the development of my strongest languages, English and Russian, predominantly took place in Quadrant 1, + classroom, − language in the community, but also in the other three quadrants, but for shorter periods of time.

As previously mentioned, most of my learning evolved within the boundaries delineated by the axes in Quadrant 1. Some of the languages

appeared there by choice, some by chance. My first foreign language, English, was picked for me by my father. In those days, children in Serbia would typically start one compulsory foreign language at 4th or 5th grade, French, German, English and Russian. That was too late, in my father's opinion. He firmly believed that I should start with a foreign language as early as possible, and that that language should be English, rather than French (the language all his family spoke and that he knew best), because, in his view, that was "the language of the future". Thus, when I was five, I was enrolled in a private language school, which I attended until college. When I turned nine, I began learning Russian because that was the language assigned to the school I happened to attend. At that time, students could not choose a foreign language – the Ministry attempted to ensure the equal distribution of the four languages by imposing quotas. I did not have much of a say concerning my second school language either. Again, because of the quota, I was forced to start learning German in the 2nd grade of *gymnasium*, high school preparing students for university education. If I had been given a choice, I would have probably selected French because I felt it was part of the family tradition. As a conscientious student, I accepted the state of affairs, but also decided to pursue my ambition and added French to my already packed extracurricular schedule. Thus, my adolescent days were marked by intense language learning: Russian, German and Latin at school, and English and French as after school activities. Old languages were considered an indispensable part of the expert knowledge, and I therefore accepted studying Old English and Old Church Slavonic as a necessity. Unlike most of my fellow students, who begrudged having to memorize endless declension and conjugation tables, I rather enjoyed getting acquainted with language archaeology. Was this only learning for learning's sake? I don't think so. Generally speaking, old languages helped me understand language change, seeming inconsistencies and illogical paradigms. Also, at some point, all these languages came to support each other. English was a main source for German, my French benefited from Latin and English, Old English was not difficult at all because I could make use of Latin, English and German, whenever in trouble.

Quadrant 4 is occupied by Italian and Greek, the languages I came into contact with on summer holidays. Interestingly, both emerged in that field, and then shifted to Quadrant 2. I picked up Italian in Rovinj, Croatia, which I used to frequent until the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Istria, the peninsula on the border with Italy, was inhabited by a significant Italian minority, and had Italian as the second official language. So, in

summer, I had massive exposure to Italian, and managed to learn enough to get by in everyday situations. When I gained a solid base in Latin and French, things began to change. All of a sudden I realized I could read signs, menus, inscriptions without major problems, and this whetted my appetite – I equipped myself with *Italian in 100 lessons* and began to study it on my own. The situation was similar with my second holiday language, Modern Greek. At first, I entertained myself trying to decipher various inscriptions and labels I happened to come across. The challenge was twofold: it involved decoding Greek letters (many of which were known to me as mathematical symbols), and then figuring out the meaning. This process was not unlike detective work – some cues, such as *mikros* 'small', or *gala* 'milk', were easily recognizable, whereas others required deeper processing, searching for matching meaning components in the networks stored in my mind. Following this procedure, I found out that *dinamis* was 'strength', whereas *polemos* meant 'war'. Some connections I managed to establish were somewhat unusual and even funny. I clearly remember the moment when I managed to discern the word *katharos* on the washing powder, associated it with 'catharsis' and figured out that it must have meant 'clean'. I could not have missed the irony, is this how catharsis is accomplished? The discovery process I described was doubtlessly engaging, but the rate of progress was slow. To speed it up, I bought several dictionaries and course books and burrowed into them. The results were good, but unfortunately my learning was terminated when I stopped spending my holidays in Greece.

The languages spoken in the former Yugoslavia belong to Quadrants 3 and 4, + environment, and +/– classroom. Growing up and being educated in that country involved regular exposure to all variants or standards of what was then called Serbo-Croatian, both through the media and press, through personal contacts, and also at school, through regular reading of Croatian and Bosnian authors, and to a lesser degree, Slovene and Macedonian ones. These languages were part of my language socialization, the way language practices were organized for me in my school days, and for this reason I feel they belong to my culture. Therefore, the dilemma of three distinct languages or three variants of the same language is not as important as the consequences brought about by the fragmentation of my mother tongue, Serbo-Croatian. Yugoslavia dissolved into six states, the former constitutive republics, and it seemed that the newly emerged elite wanted to divide up the cultural heritage on the same principles the property and debts of the ex-federation were portioned out. Hence, the mutually intelligible variants (differences be-

tween them can be compared to differences between American and British English) were proclaimed different languages. My professional self has been able to "dissect" the situation calmly, and diagnose it as an instance of capitalising on language differences with the aim of creating new identities. However, my private self finds it hard to come to terms with this state of affairs. For me, the forcible creation of language boundaries along with ethnic division lines amounts to linguistic and cultural dispossession. I was denied access to parts of my cultural heritage, and I refused to accept a new linguistic identity, which I felt was forcefully imposed on me. I experienced this most acutely when I was inquiring informally about a job vacancy at an international organization and was told I did not qualify because I was a "non-native speaker of Bosnian". Could I pass as a near-native, I wondered? The absurdity of the situation was staring me in the face: I could perhaps come to terms with the near-native, imperfect status regarding English. Now my native speaker competency was challenged, and I was designated "imperfect" with regard to my own mother tongue. It seems that I am fated to always approach perfection, but the ultimate prize is elusive.

5. What strategies did I use in my quest for perfection?

What did I do to learn my languages? Reflecting back on the experience in its totality, I would say that my language learning benefited when I started to own my learning. Once I began to monitor my development, assess outcomes and undertake remedial work as I deemed it necessary, I was propelled upwards in my learning trajectory. I would say I progressed most when I discovered how to recognize what was truly beneficial for me and then followed that line. For instance, while still in grammar school, I would frequently add a twist to the assignments our Russian teacher gave us – translate an extra paragraph, do more grammar exercises, or choose an additional story to read. On one occasion I even ventured to change homework altogether. We were doing Pushkin's *Evgeny Onegin*, and the teacher told us to learn the famous Tatyana's letter to Onegin by heart. For some reason, I could not force myself to do this – the letter in which the young girl professed her love to the blasé man of the world looked silly to me, unworthy of my attention. Since I did not want to get a bad mark either, I decided to learn a different excerpt – Tatyana's sermon to Onegin at the very end of this novel in verse, in which the roles are reversed: he declares his love to her, but she

demonstrates moral superiority and rejects him. I still cannot explain why I decided to alter the task. Was it perhaps because I found the content of the assigned passage impossible to accept? I don't know; all I can say after so many years is that I clearly remember the discomfort I felt while reading Tatyana's letter, and a strong desire not to repeat the humiliating lines.

I think I became a truly autonomous learner when I enrolled at the university to study English and became disappointed in my competences – they were not what they were expected to be, or what I hoped they would have been after 13 years of studying English. True, English was not part of my formal education, but I was undoubtedly a fluent speaker of it. However, on the very first day it became clear to me that I was lagging behind some peers who had had English at school and also attended additional classes, or had been educated in English-speaking countries. That was a bitter, but sobering lesson – the long years of learning did not automatically translate into the expected level of proficiency. Just for a short while, I harboured resentment at what I saw then as injustice (there were no travel restrictions in the former Yugoslavia, but budget constraints were considerable – although middle class, my parents could not afford to send me to England). Fortunately, I managed to overcome the "righteous anger" stage quickly, made a firm decision to outperform my peers and reach perfection one day, and took the initiative. I did all I could to immerse myself into English – I read English newspapers ad nauseam, even the sections I never read in Serbian, watched movies without subtitles, listened to and transcribed popular songs, in short, tried to create an input-rich environment. This was not easy. I often felt overwhelmed because the texts I selected were too difficult. Doing it over and over again on my own soon brought about boredom, but I continued with this practice because I was determined to succeed, and was disciplined enough to stick to the plan. I eventually managed to get to England and work as an au-pair, but it was only after I had obtained a BA in English.

In order to propel my learning forwards, I employed a number of learning strategies. Expanding on all of them would take up too much space, and would not be especially revealing. For this reason, I am going to focus only on those I found most helpful.

Before long, I became aware that autonomy implied assuming responsibility for my own learning. To achieve my objective and outshine my peers, I had to eliminate the biggest obstacle standing in the path of my success – grammar mistakes. No mistakes equalled the best grade, I

thought, so I started practicing grammar on my own. Once I had gone through all grammar and self-study exercise books I could get hold of in Belgrade (and this was not a feat, for in those days resources available to us were limited), I realized I had to find other ways to secure sufficient opportunities for practice. Therefore I began designing exercises on my own: I would take a text, delete target items (usually prepositions and articles), leave it aside for a couple of days, then come back to it and fill out the blanks, and, in the end, check the results going back to the original version. I learned later that I had actually devised cloze tests. At times, I would come up against a wall. I couldn't understand why something was correct, and was unable to find an answer in the reference books in my possession. For instance, the difference between *lack of* and *a lack of* was extremely difficult to grasp: *a lack of money*, *a lack of prudence*, but *lack of sleep* and *lack of attention*. This led me to a focused search for examples. The whole cycle evolved in the following manner: I would notice a problem, couldn't find an explanation, then I would collect more examples of the same kind, and finally had another go at discerning the pattern and resolving the mystery. It could be said that in the absence of the feedback I felt I could benefit from, I made an effort to construct my own scaffolding. I was not always successful, the beams occasionally rested on shaky support, or I relied too much on what was supposed to be only temporary props.

As regards learning vocabulary, my favourite strategy was working out mnemonic associations. For example, for some reason, the Greek word *nosokoma,* 'nurse', was difficult for me, I couldn't link it with anything I knew, and therefore I divided it into parts familiar to me, *nos* (a 'nose' in Serbian), and *koma* 'coma', and came up with *a nose for comma*. I managed to establish a sound association and meaning connection (a bit stretched, but efficient). I utilized this strategy for all languages, but went further only with English. I kept a special vocabulary notebook in which I diligently scribbled new words, novel phrases and also tried to spell out why I found particular expressions appealing. This is my entry for *linchpin*: "Linchpin or lynchpin. Sounds like a leach with a pin. In order to become one, do you have to be a leach, and let yourself be pinned on the jackets of important people?" I must admit that I did not invent entries for all the words I put in the notebook. Besides, not all inscriptions were funny or witty. But whenever I could, I played with language. My experience seems to provide evidence in favour of the importance of ludic functions of language and communication for language learning (Cook 2000; Block 2003: 70−71).

In my persistent efforts to improve the other productive skill, writing, I resorted to journaling in English. While in elementary school, I took to keeping a diary, because a Serbian teacher advised us it was beneficial for developing sentence flow. In my freshmen year, the stiffness and artificiality of the sentences I was producing came to be a source of deep dissatisfaction, so I thought that writing entries in English on a daily basis might imbue my words with the suppleness they sadly lacked. At the beginning, it felt very odd. I patiently and persistently registered events in plain, unsophisticated, dry language. On re-reading the accounts, I was painfully ashamed of my creation: I sounded like a ten-year old child**.** Not once was I on the verge of giving up; writing a journal in English felt awkward, artificial, and so pretentious. It took me quite a while to detect changes for the better. In an outburst of anger, I managed to compose an extended piece that seemed to have what I then called "flesh and blood", something that I recognized as part of myself. I persistently pursued this routine, and, after a while, started to alternate English with Serbian entries, in the same manner I switched between Cyrillic and Latin alphabets. I think this was the breakthrough in my learning, the critical moment when I began to feel English flowing in my bloodstream, together with Serbian. Of course, I could not express what I wanted with the same force in both languages straight away. Whenever I noticed this was the case, I would try to fix my language, amend my compositions by looking for different, more appropriate words in English, going through dictionaries, and reading, reading and reading, then playing with newly acquired words, then experimenting with them in writing, then starting the procedure anew. Gradually, my manner of expression progressed. I learned that there are two different temperature scales, one appropriate for English, one for Serbian, and that the trick was to discover where zero was placed, and how many degrees it contained. In a way, it was something like Fahrenheit and Celsius scales: in the Fahrenheit system, 33 degrees denotes the temperature when water turns into ice, while in the Celsius measurement scheme this digit indicates very hot weather. This analogy helped me to truly comprehend the sense of the words I thought I knew. The key issue, I realized, was learning to understand a system in its own terms.

Was journaling the process which allowed me to develop a new, English voice? It could have been, I don't know. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that it was probably a specific form of self-translation, the only one I could fall back on under the circumstances. From my subjective point of view, the major difference from the established type of self-

translation (Pavlenko 2001) and my experience lies in the fact that mine was sought for and self-imposed. Since it evolved in the L1 environment, it may have lacked the force and dynamics of its distant relative. In the absence of a better term, I would call this journaling *voice appropriation.*

My learning did not end once I obtained a degree. The six months that I spent in London as a childminder provided me with plenty of opportunities to use English and significantly boosted my self-confidence. When I returned home, I got a job as a teacher at the same language school I had formerly attended, started an MA in linguistics, and also tried my hand at translating. The latter came as part and parcel of my position – English experts living in their countries of origin are frequently asked by their friends to translate for them. It was almost impossible to refuse because it would call into question my own professional credibility. I had a lot of friends in academia, mainly in the field of medieval history, art history and archaeology, and they kept asking me to translate summaries and abstracts of their articles. I would not be telling the truth if I claimed that I approached this task without apprehension. Translating into your second language is at best too ambitious, if not foolhardy. Nevertheless, I couldn't say no for the previously mentioned reasons. I consoled myself with the knowledge that I was translating summaries, so they were not going to be compared with source texts, and therefore I should not worry too much about translation equivalence. At that time I discovered discourse and genre analysis, and this new knowledge encouraged me to go for textual and meaning equivalences – my task was to translate the message in the form of academic English acceptable in that particular field. That led me into a detailed analysis of English and Serbian historical discourses: I searched for macro levels, ways of expressing time and space in English and Serbian, for instance, cause and effect, and argumentation. In order to vouch for the perfection of translation, I asked a colleague, a native speaker of English, to edit my translations. We would split the fee and I received much needed feedback. I would carefully scrutinize her corrections (mostly articles and an occasional preposition) and continue to learn English. This scheme seemed to have been effective – my friends received positive feedback ("An American friend of mine said it doesn't read like translation.", I would frequently hear), and I received more commissions. At this moment of my language development I resorted to essentially the same strategy – the employment of all my knowledge and skills supplemented by collaborative learning. I learned a lot about history, and had an opportunity to creatively apply my knowledge of linguistics. This is how I gradually translated my way to academic language proficiency.

As regards other languages, I was as ambitious as circumstances would allow me to be. When I started learning French and Greek, I was already a fluent speaker of English, an accomplished learner, and it was pretty hard for me to speak and make basic mistakes (knowing that they were inevitable didn't help much). More importantly, when I was trying to communicate in those languages, after a while my interlocutors would as a rule realize that I knew English, and then would switch to it. Or I would, to save myself from further embarrassment. So, in order to boost my confidence, and signal to interlocutors that I was worth the trouble, I rehearsed a short speech with which I would usually start a conversation: "I'm learning your language and I don't speak it very well. But I can understand a lot if you speak slowly". The manner in which I uttered those lines mattered, too, so I made sure that I pronounced this chunk with the appropriate tone and intonation. My little piece seemed to impress people, and, as a result, they became more attentive and patient with me, made an effort to produce more delicately tuned input, so that I was finally able to communicate with less concern.

Regarding nonverbal aspects of communication, such as gestures and body language, I employed a completely different strategy**,** shadowing. I learned to pay attention to how people directed their gazes, attempted to register the frequency of their glances, what gestures they made, how they moved in space, how much space they needed. I would act only after accumulating a sufficient body of knowledge that made me feel confident. This may seem exaggerated and artificial, but on the other hand, it was the only course of action I could take, since I had an opportunity to visit Britain for the first time at the age of 23. I was very much aware that I could not rely on the information offered by BBC costume dramas I intently watched, and, as a consequence, had no choice but to develop appropriate strategies. Now I think I know what gestures should accompany the language I happen to be using, so when counting in English I start from the little finger; in Serbian, from the thumb. The strength of my handshake changes with the surroundings, I know when I should hug the American way, or kiss both cheeks lightly in the French style, or kiss three times, as is done in Serbia. However, I do my best to remain watchful and cautious in these matters. I would rather be taken as a little bit reserved than be perceived as a zealous foreigner who has overlearnt her lesson. I definitely don't want to make the mistake made by some foreign visitors to Serbia, who, having been told that we kiss three times, end up kissing indiscriminately in all situations.

6. What is the end result?

So, where am I with my languages after this long journey? How far away is Ithaca now? Without doubt, my English is closest to the ultimate goal, in many respects. That is the language I can use with native-like proficiency, which is attested by three different international examinations (Cambridge Proficiency, IELTS, and TOEFL) that I had to take at different times of my life when applying for various scholarships, and passed with flying colours. In spite of my high scores, I am sure I can never be taken as a native speaker of English. The next position on the ladder is taken by Russian. My reading comprehension of it is high, whereas my listening and speaking skills are at an intermediate level, and writing scores are the lowest, at a solid pre-intermediate level. My Russian definitely became weaker as my English improved. Now I make a conscious effort to maintain my knowledge at its current level. I read books for pleasure, but only 19th century classics, I speak it when I meet Russian colleagues, but only sporadically. My pronunciation has changed, too. Sometimes it is very hard to believe that rough, accented sounds jarring on my ears actually come from my mouth. If I persist, or have a chance to use Russian for several days in succession, then it improves. As for French, I am able to satisfy routine social demands and limited work needs. At present, I occasionally read women's magazines, and that is all. Greek is still my holiday language, I can make myself understood in shops and restaurants, and I can satisfy basic survival needs and courtesy requirements. As for German and Italian, I lost them along the way, so they score 0 on all scales, no ability.

7. How do my languages interact?

My languages peacefully coexist and actively interact in my mind. They feel to me like a constellation of permeable celestial bodies, which come closer or move away from each other travelling along their own orbits.

In this tiny galaxy, the central position is taken by Serbian and English. Most of the time these languages are interconnected, then occasionally merge, when I switch from one to another, and also grow apart − when for a while I happen to use one language more frequently than the other. Russian orbits a distance away from them, but maintains direct air links with the central bodies. French and Greek are barely visible, dwarf planets with little solid matter, subsisting at the very edge of the system.

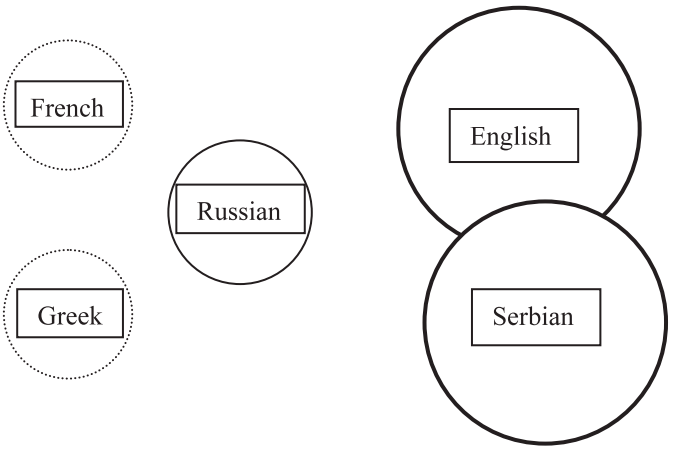


Figure 2.

Nonetheless, when needed badly, some centripetal forces draw them closer, so that they gradually gather up speed and begin to rotate faster. Centrifugal forces are at work, too. They are negatively charged and have the power both to repel the stars and restructure the constellation. Thus, too demanding a task in one of my weaker languages (say, leading a prolonged conversation in French) can cause explosions and dust storms, but eventually the state of equilibrium gets restored.

From time to time, I code-switch from English to Serbian and vice versa, only when I know that my interlocutor is versed in both languages. This code-switching is effortless, at times spontaneous, occasionally deliberate. I resort to it if I want to signal that a particular expression in Serbian or English really encapsulates what I want to say. For instance, I tend to use the word *humble* when speaking Serbian, probably because it does not have a good translation equivalent. Besides this, I have noticed that I sometimes switch into my mother tongue when I talk to my good friends who live in Britain or the USA, when we are in the company of native speakers and converse in English. That bit of Serbian is invested with a special role – solidarity building, bonding, or evoking something from our shared past. Also, I switch into an easier language when I cannot find proper words. When I talk about professional matters, that language is English. In my opinion, this is a negative outcome of using English to talk about language learning. I am aware that I take the line of the least resistance: I don't know how to say *scaffolding* or *roughly-tuned input* in Serbian, and for the sake of ease and precision, I adopt the easiest strategy – shifting into English.

I have registered occurrences of Russian-English code-switching as well, but it is qualitatively different from its English-Serbian and Serbian-English counterpart. First, it is unidirectional, and second, it is enforced: it takes place when my Russian fails me. Four years ago I stayed in Almaty, Kazakhstan, for two weeks and for the first time after many years had to use Russian on a daily basis. I clearly remember the situation when I was shopping for nail scissors, and to my great annoyance could not recall the Russian word for it. It was the English *scissors* that my search engine immediately retrieved, not the Serbian *makaze*. Other instances of the involuntary Russian-English code switching included discourse markers and fillers, such as *actually*, *as a matter of fact*, *you know*, *hang on*. Why was it that I reached for those expressions? Why didn't I experience anything similar when I was still actively involved in language learning in my early twenties? A possible explanation could be that now I fall back on L2 patterning, even though L3 (Russian) is much more similar to my mother tongue, Serbian, because my L2 has probably turned into the default setting – *other-than-mother*, or a *talk foreign* cognitive mode (Odlin 2003).

With regard to interaction across my languages, interference certainly occurs, and English influence on Russian is most obvious at the moment. What is less evident and more covert is transfer from English into Serbian. This is something I keep detecting in my writing. Serbian is a language with a very flexible word order, and under the influence of English I seem to have forgotten to make use of its full potential. I noticed that I tend to stick to a subject-verb-object or subject-object-verb order. The resulting sentences and paragraphs have a rather monotonous flow, and not infrequently seem to lack a focus.

As can be seen from this account, my English has definitely improved throughout my adult life, but the knowledge of other languages (Russian, French, Greek) has deteriorated, while German and Italian have shrivelled out of disuse. Now and then I ask myself why this is the case, wondering if I could have done better. An answer to that question partially lies in the external social circumstances I happened to live in. In a decade of Serbia's political isolation, my own life on the brink of survival, I fought hard to maintain my Russian, perfect my English, and become an academically literate professional. Under the circumstances, I knew that improving French or working on Greek would have taken up a lot of effort and time, and that it would have had little practical value. Definitely, I was much better off with English.

8. What have I gained?

The language learning road I happened to take was lengthy, convoluted, occasionally fraught with difficulties, but nevertheless joyful. Sometimes it crosses my mind that the outcomes may not be quite commensurate with the effort I put into the venture. Perhaps I could have attained higher proficiency in more languages. Perhaps I could have earned more palpable riches. I realize, however, that the pace of travelling inevitably slackened as I gradually accumulated valuables of a different kind: linguistic and cultural treasures, professional skills, and, most importantly, opportunities to meet so many wonderful colleagues, students and friends from all over the world, who helped me chart my own route to the ultimate goal. The voyage to Ithaca, I am happy to say, has not ended yet.

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Reflective questions and points for exploration

1. The author of this narrative attributes her interest and success with languages to the ease with which she seems to learn languages and to good role models and prevailing positive societal attitudes. Do you have good role models in your family for bi- or multilingualism? What are

societal attitudes to learning foreign languages where you live? Are you influenced by these attitudes? In your environment, are any particular languages considered as more desirable than others? If yes, why so?

2. Radmila Popovic wrote that, "Old languages were considered an indispensable part of the expert knowledge, and I therefore accepted studying Old English and Old Church Slavonic as a necessity. Unlike most of my fellow students, who begrudged having to memorize endless declension and conjugation tables, I rather enjoyed getting acquainted with language archaeology. Was this only learning for learning's sake? I would not say so. Generally speaking, old languages did help me understand language change, seeming inconsistencies and illogical paradigms. Also, at some point, all these languages came to support each other". Where you are, is multilingualism considered part of being educated? What are attitudes to languages such as Latin and Greek?

3. The narrative describes a painful linguistic and cultural dispossession as a result of the partitioning of former Yugoslavia. In the author's case, this resulted in her now having "more languages" in her language repertoire. Are you aware of any other similar cases of language "addition" or, conversely, of cases where people are in command of very distinct dialects and yet are traditionally defined as monolingual? Do you find both the latter situation and cases like Radmila's adequately reflected in the literature on multilingualism? Have a closer look at a few SLA/multilingual studies and see if, in your opinion, the descriptions of the subjects used provide enough background information, linguistically and otherwise, for a truly meaningful exploration of the research questions of these studies. De Angelis (2007), in fact, insists that "ideally, all of the information listed below should be provided whenever possible, as all of these parameters have already been shown to have some effect on multilinguals' cognitive and psycholinguistic processes:

- age of acquisition of each non-native language
- sequence of acquisition of all languages
- proficiency in all non-native languages and how proficiency level was measured
- exposure to native and non-native language environments
- classroom language of instruction for each non-native language (if learned in a formal setting)
- amount of formal instruction in each non-native language (years and hours per week)

- manner of acquisition (formal/instructed acquisition vs. natural acquisition)
- context in which each language is or was used
- active or passive use of all languages
- number of languages known to the speaker
- productive and receptive skills for each language and how these were measured"

(De Angelis 2007: 12)

Do you find this list exhaustive enough and do you see researchers facing any methodological challenges with it?

4. Like some research studies, the author of this narrative emphasizes language play as an incentive and instrument for learning. What is your experience in this area? Are you "more playful" in some languages than other?

5. This narrative is rich in describing various language learning strategies? Compile your own list and compare it with what is in the narrative. Do you tend to use different strategies with your different languages?

6. The author describes how she has adapted throughout the years with regard to body language, proxemics, etc. What are some of your adaptations and transformations in this area? Do you find yourself more flexible in some respects than others? For instance, you stick to your L1/home culture personal space bubble, as you feel most comfortable there, but you adapt your gesture system according to your target language, you move your fingers differently when counting in your different languages, etc.

7. If you happen to have a language or languages at a high proficiency level, do you try to "pass for a native speaker" or do you embrace your variety for what it is, invariably incorporating some features from your L1 or any other additional languages?

8. Like Radmila, do you typically keep a language journal? If yes, what is your primary motivation for doing so?

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Chapter 3

Multilingualism as a kaleidoscopic experience: The mini universes within

Elka Todeva

Languages Explored: Bulgarian, English, French, Italian, Norwegian, German, Spanish, Latin, Greek, Japanese, Russian and a few other Slavic languages

1. Introduction

All my life I have loved watching multilinguals in action. I have seen many, minors and venerables, in collars blue and white. In a more detached way, the linguist in me has always been intrigued by polyglots like Cardinal Giuseppe Mezzofanti, the Oxford English Dictionary editor James Murray, writer Anthony Burgess, and the enigmatic hyperpolyglots, Uku Masing and Ziad Fazah, with their alleged mastery of more than 60 languages.

Having moved to a country with an incredible richness of languages, yet amazingly monolingual ideologically, I am thrilled when, in the streets of New York, I hear English drowned in a sea of other languages. In this linguistic mecca, and in other places within earshot of people engaged in multiple language conversations, I eavesdrop shamelessly. Hearing fluid code-switching fills me with awe, a touch of *envie noble*, and curiosity about how the speaker got there.

This is the story of my personal journey in the land of language learning, a vast territory forever offering captivating glimpses into human psychology, culture, different worldviews and intricate identity negotiation. It was in my genetic blue print perhaps to be a lover and explorer of languages. One of my maternal great grandfathers was very language savvy. In 1762 he wrote an influential book appealing to his countrymen to honor their mother tongue and not disown it by using Greek in key social domains. Fluent in several languages, another great grandfather

was appointed advisor to a Turkish sultan. I embarked on my own journey totally unaware of all this. It was many years later that my parents, my brother and I started talking about our family history. With hindsight, this seems difficult to fathom, yet mine is not an uncommon story of linguistic roots not immediately acknowledged and celebrated.

2. Summary of my language learning experiences with a biographical sketch

To give the reader an immediate idea of my language learning profile, I am going to use a framework from Block (2003: 34). It does not reflect the more nuanced and complex nature of some of my learning experiences, but it is a useful graphic organizer.

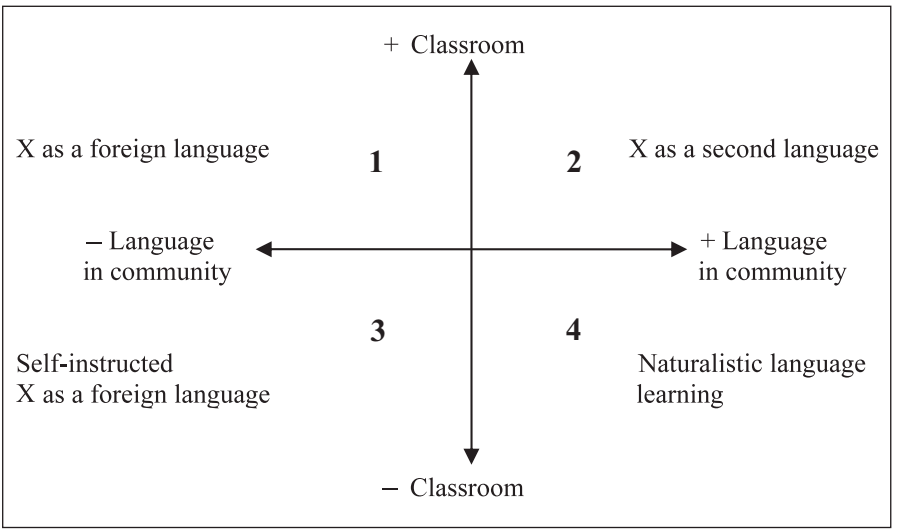


Figure 1. Language context scenarios

The languages I have had exposure to and/or studied to various degrees fall into Block's quadrants as follows:

quadrant # 1: English, Russian, French, Italian, Norwegian, German, Spanish, Latin, Greek
quadrant # 2: Spanish
quadrant # 3: Norwegian, French, Spanish, German

quadrant # 4: Japanese, Norwegian, Serbian/Croatian/Bosnian[1], Czech, Polish, Macedonian, Greek, Spanish, Romanian, English, Russian, German

My love affair with languages started with French at age ten. I always took my mother tongue, Bulgarian, for granted, the way one takes a healthy body for granted. You are not even aware of it until you experience a problem.

I am not exactly sure what first attracted me to French. Most probably a combination of things: Johnny Hallyday, Nana Mouskouri, Adamo and Charles Aznavour were on the air all the time and the neighborhood kids and I never had enough of Louis de Funès and his *Le Gendarme de Saint-Tropez* series. I was perhaps also influenced by the fact that my parents' generation and the generation before them had all learned French at school. I never visualized myself using the language in any particular way. Still it had a magnetic pull for me that I found difficult to resist.

Succumbing to its allure, I started taking French at a local community center. All education was free when I was growing up. Still, I envied young people "from the West" who seemed able to take on summer jobs and learn a foreign language "on the spot".

At eleven I added Russian as a mandatory school subject. It had a different flavor as a language but I loved the fact that I became fluent very fast by using massive lexical transfer from my mother tongue. Russian grammar was very different from the grammar of my L1 but its clear logic made it a joy to learn. Because of deep-rooted historical connections between Russia and Bulgaria, like most Bulgarians, I embraced Russian as an object of study. Sentiments were quite different in some other Eastern European countries where Russian was also mandatory.

At fourteen, I started attending a five-year English language school in Bulgaria, where we went from absolute beginners to taking all subjects in English within just four months. Apparently we were given powerful learning shortcuts because my entire class transitioned smoothly and effortlessly into academic English. All the instructors, with one exception, were non-native speakers of English. The method used in the school was a rather eclectic combination of communicative language teaching, au-

1. See Popovic in this volume for the continuing debate around these three language varieties. The designation "Macedonian language" is not without its controversies, either.

dio-lingual method, a solid daily diet of vocabulary, and contextually grounded focus on form with a consistent emphasis on quite sophisticated metalinguistic awareness through the introduction of various linguistic concepts and terms. English was my primary language of instruction with Russian and French also part of the curriculum.

Torn between my loves of languages, photography, music and mathematics, at age nineteen I became an English major at the University of Sofia, Bulgaria, with Italian as my minor. With its marble staircases, statues and mahogany walls, my alma mater felt like a temple of learning. Temples are peaceful, serene places but they have a touch of solemnity as well. Having to take Latin for two years, therefore, seemed like a perfectly appropriate thing to do. This solid dose of Latin greatly facilitated my English and Italian studies and convinced me further that human languages have a strong internal logic and a propensity for coherence.

A short course in Greek also boosted my ability to decipher and learn new words, including new words in my L1. As is known, for centuries Greek had a strong lexical influence on other languages through the academic world. When one is made aware, as I was, of some frequent and productive Greek affixes and roots, hundreds of words from different languages become easy to segment and understand. This "detective" work is a lot of fun, too. See, e.g. **phil**anthropy <*philos* 'loving' + *anthrōpos* 'human being'>, **phil**ology <*philos* 'loving' + *logos* 'word'>, **philo**gyny <*philos* 'loving' + *ginia*/*gyny* 'woman'> (as in **gyn**ecology).

Aware of the English *~er* word formation pattern, I took a liking to and instantly internalized, after a single exposure, the word **philo**graph<u>er</u> 'a person who likes to collect autographs'. When I tried to type the word russo**phile,** another word which easily found its way into my lexicon years ago**,** my computer marked it as problematic. It turned out that russophile was not included in most on-line and regular dictionaries I checked while working on this paragraph. The beauty of this is that analogy and morphologic awareness counterbalance low frequency and facilitate the acquisition of any lexical item. Compare russo**phile** with the analogous anglo**phile**/biblio**phile**/franco**phile**. To me, such a "morphological analysis" not only facilitates and expedites learning but allows a fascinating, deeper understanding of the words we add to our lexicon, e.g. **phil**osophy <*philos* 'loving' + *sophia* 'learning, wisdom'>. Morphology <morph 'shape/form' + logia 'study of'> helps me with my spelling as well. My familiarity with the morpheme **philos** takes a burden off my memory. I never have to wonder if **philo**sophy is spelled with "i" or "y", despite

tempting interference from words such as ph**y**sical or ph**y**totherapy, for instance.

Knowing some Latin and Greek not only made thousands of English words semantically transparent to me but, as an added bonus, later I knew that I could risk using many of my Latin and Greek words in Spanish and Italian since they had already proven their transferability potential with English. Compare, for instance *philologia*, *agronomia*, *astronomia* (Latin/Greek) with *philology*, *agronomy*, *astronomy* (English), with *philologia* (Italian), *filología* (Spanish), *agronomía* (Spanish), *agronomia* (Italian). As a multilingual, I was getting many such "free rides" and was empowered significantly. I was in a position to activate word formation patterns in my mental lexicon after minimal exposure. Having developed an eye for recognizing slight variations, I did not need much input to figure out, for instance, that the Spanish suffix ~*ción* is quite similar to the English ~*tion*, or that the Spanish ~*miento* more or less corresponds to ~*ment* in English and ~*mento* in Italian. I will revisit the process of pattern recognition in the next section where I will go deeper into what Ringbom (1982) and Schmidt (1995) refer to as "system learning".

The reader has noticed, no doubt, that quite a few of the languages in my repertoire appeared in several of Block's quadrants. This is because I started many of my language learning experiences in a classroom, "non-naturalistic", setting, and it was only years later that I could continue my studies with natural immersion in a country where a particular target language was spoken (e.g. English in the USA and Spanish in Mexico). Norwegian was an exception in this respect. First I had a chance to spend several months in the country as a visiting scholar and then I took a Norwegian language class in Bulgaria.

The nature of this progression – starting with non-naturalistic learning and later experiencing naturalistic immersion – impacted my language development in a number of different ways. I will use English as an example here. I developed a rich English vocabulary in Bulgaria, much of it highly specialized because of my work as a simultaneous and consecutive interpreter at conferences whose topics ranged from seismology to aeronautics, ballet and patent rights. My spelling was excellent as we were regularly encouraged to explore various spelling patterns in class. The schooling I went through also helped me develop analytical abilities allowing a faster and easier understanding not only of the workings of English, but of the other Germanic, as well as Romance, languages I studied.

On the flip side, I spoke with an accent and my English was marked at times by what some call spelling pronunciation. Furthermore, I knew

words like *procrastination, hypoglycemia* and *holography*, but I was unsure of or lacked some basic everyday expressions that one typically learns within days when naturally exposed to the language. Also noteworthy, my English "deteriorated" significantly during my first few years in the U.S. This was my first immersion in an English-speaking country after over twenty years of studying and using the language in non-English speaking environments. After people in Michigan started questioning my usage or simply failed to understand me at times (they changed my *torch* (BrE) to *flashlight*, /*ga:lə*/ (BrE) to /geilə/, and repeatedly had problems with my *honey*, *hotpot*, and *chamomile*), I found myself "playing it safe" and reducing my English to a subset of what I actually knew. I started avoiding words containing sounds I realized I had problems with, words with pronunciation variation, or words that had served me well at home and abroad but did not seem part of the core of American English such as the word *philately*, for instance.

The description of my language background will be incomplete without mentioning Japanese since, in its case, for the very first time I was naturally exposed to a new language over an extended time period, 1995–1999. Excited about the novelty of the experience, I made a conscious decision, which I deeply regret in hindsight – no grammar books and no classes, just sheer immersion in the language!

Being a strong visual learner, but not knowing any kanji, hiragana, or katakana[2], in a sense, I was initially deprived of visual input that could trigger any tangible learning. Experiencing a major information overload, my brain tuned out substantial amounts of written input, particularly during the first few months of my stay in Japan. Also, I could not use language transfer the way I had with the Romance, Germanic and Slavic languages in my repertoire. I just picked up typical intonation contours and the general melody of the language, which was a deviation from my usual progression with a new language. Another early language component that I acquired was myriads of expressions which keep the communication channel open, e.g. 1) *ah soo desu ka*, 2) *honto (ni)?*, 3) *kawaii*, 4) *kawaiso*, which, depending on the situation, can be translated in English as 1) 'I see', 'no way', 'gee', 2) 'really', 'no kidding', 3) 'cute', 'cool', 'great', 'lovely', 4) 'poor you'.

Spending my days with *gaijin* colleagues[3] at work, I had few opportunities for real, meaningful interaction in Japanese. Men seemed to have

2. Kanji, hiragana and katakana are three mutually complementary writing systems in Modern Japanese.
3. A Japanese word meaning 'foreigner' or 'outsider'.

better luck in this respect. My male colleagues became pretty fluent chatting away over sake and Kirin beer in the local *izakayas*. My mostly female Japanese friends consistently switched into English and it was mainly strangers, vendors or fellow travelers, who allowed me to put my limited Japanese to use.

I had massive exposure to Japanese through TV, but the lack of truly comprehensible "negotiated input" substantially slowed down my acquisition process. Using contextual clues, I just learnt numerous common ritualistic expressions, a considerable portion of them as unanalyzed chunks. Not surprisingly, because of its high frequency and semantic transparency, the weather forecast terminology became the first solid unit in my Japanese.

Wrapping up this overview, I can imagine how some may look at my experiences with languages as elitist and thus atypical. By universal standards, mine has been a life of many opportunities indeed. Yet, in my own country, my family was "bez privilegii", i.e. one of the unprivileged ones[4]. My parents were not members of the communist party and were labeled ideological marginals because of cruel historical circumstances beyond their control. As a result, we were deprived of certain job opportunities and were disadvantaged in innumerable subtle and not so subtle ways. Upon graduation, for instance, I was denied the opportunity to go to England despite a merit-based grant I had received from the British Council. Ironically, the same government institutions that limited foreign contacts and travel also demanded and strongly supported language learning. I was just one of the many beneficiaries of these educational policies. Two languages were mandatory in the regular school system while many more were readily available to anyone with an interest in learning, particularly in the bigger cities. At the University of Sofia, for instance, Japanese, Swedish and Norwegian, among at least another dozen foreign languages, were popular courses offered free of charge to the general public. Under the socialist economic system, most students in these language classes could not even dream of the possibility of ever visiting a country like Japan, which might as well have been part of a parallel universe to the one Bulgarians inhabited. I look at my multilingualism as nothing more than taking full advantage of opportunities offered by a society that embraced languages and offered an infrastructure that supported their learning.

4. This was a term more or less officially used until November 1989.

3. Cognates, pattern recognition and system learning

I will start the more detailed exploration of my language learning with two anecdotes of recent experiences I had with Spanish and Serbian. The aim of these anecdotes is to illustrate the way cognates expedite my learning. In the cases described, my combination of languages made possible massive amounts of positive transfer. I would like to point out, however, that I am always on the lookout for cognates even with typologically unrelated languages. In fact, I consider it a sweeter learning victory to be able to identify any not too easily recognizable cognates, e.g. the Japanese *besuboru* 'baseball', *rabureta* 'love letter', *reja* 'leisure', *gorufu* 'golf, *serufu esutiimu* 'self esteem', *pa-sonaru konpyu-ta* 'personal computer'.

Stranded at Miami airport for three days because of severe weather in the Northeast, I spent many hours in the bookstore at my terminal. Browsing through the books on display at the Spanish section there, I learned countless new words through a game-like cognate hunting experience. It involved probing into every single one of my prior languages, both distant and close to Spanish. I fished out *colibri* 'humming bird' and *canela* 'cinnamon' with the help of my native Bulgarian, a Slavic language, while other lovely words such as *vida* and *unicornio* added new melody to their relatives from French, Italian and English.

Two months later I had a similar bookstore experience in Belgrade, Serbia while waiting for a bus connection for over thirty hours. It was mercifully supplemented by many conversations with delightfully talkative people, from shoeshine boys and sleek businessmen to fashion conscious women and a bear trainer. Finding a good bookstore, I did my routine of flipping through books and magazines, actively looking for cognates. My multilingual mental lexicon immediately kicked into action. I had instant success with some words, while others pushed my language detective work to the limit. Compare the easy *бестселера* 'bestseller' with *одштампан* 'printed', deciphered with the combined help of German, Bulgarian, and some far-fetched English.

Drawn to analyzing any kind of language input, from graffiti to menus, I always look for cognates first. Latin is a tremendous asset in this respect. Given the history of its (vocabulary) expansion, English is an equally powerful ally to me as a learner. Having borrowed an unprecedented number of lexical items from French after the Norman conquest, English itself was not a difficult language for me to learn because I had already studied French for years. Later on, my advanced knowledge of English in turn helped me further my mastery of French.

Tapping into one's prior linguistic knowledge becomes quite easy once one learns, with experience, to see beyond phonological and graphological variations. Through the years I realized, for instance, that even though my L1 is a Slavic language, it shares many words with French, Italian, English and German. Some of this shared lexicon is the result of direct borrowing from these four languages, while another part came from Latin. This awareness of lexical units belonging to multiple languages greatly facilitated my vocabulary learning in Spanish. Many of these shared units were "marked in my mind" as Latinate, which meant that I could risk using them in Spanish with a high probability of success. Some like to object that this has more to do with use rather than acquisition. As argued in Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008), this is a false dichotomy. We learn language through using it, testing tentative hypotheses. In fact, as many know from experience, the approach "learn first, apply later" often results in what Larsen-Freeman (2003) calls the inert knowledge problem.

Pattern recognition is another significant factor in my learning, both within a single language and across languages. It took little exposure to the language, for instance, for me to build the hypothesis that I can form words in Spanish with ~*dad* and ~*ción* recognizing their similarity to the productive English suffixes ~*ty and* ~*tion,* respectively.

An important clarification is called for here, however. Reflecting on my language learning processes, I have repeatedly become aware that I employ patterns and positive transfer very selectively. I will briefly explore the English ~*ity* vs. the Spanish ~*dad* pattern correspondence to illustrate what I mean by selectivity here. I will not hesitate at all and will readily integrate a word like *oportunidad* in my Spanish lexicon given that the English word 'opportunity' sounds Latinate to me and given that I am aware of cognates of this word in several other languages, including my L1, Bulgarian. Cf. e.g. *oportunist* (Bulgarian), *opportunisme* (French), *opportunista* (Italian), *oportunistiy* (Russian), *oportunist* (Romanian). On the same grounds, I will boldly integrate other similarly patterned words into my Spanish: e.g. *brutalidad, extremidad, identidad, profanidad, seguridad.*

I would be very hesitant, however, to try and coin a Spanish word out of 'oddity', for instance. To me, 'odd' and 'oddity' feel very Anglo-Saxon. For starters, they are short words, unlike all the ~*ity*/~*dad* words in the previous paragraph. Furthermore, doing a split second search, my brain cannot find a single cognate of these two words in any of the languages I have studied so far. *Oddidad* does not even sound right to me. Therefore I reject it as a possible unit in my developing Spanish.

Since I started thinking about this personal narrative and started monitoring my thought processes more closely, I noticed that I showed hesitancy with the *~ity / ~dad* pattern on two occasions. In some casual conversations in Ecuador recently I needed to use translation equivalents for the English words 'uncertainty' and 'rarity'. Even though both had roots that I could positively identify as Latinate (cf. e.g. the French *certainement and rareté*), there was something that bothered me about these words and I shied away from coming up with Spanish coinages following the general pattern illustrated above, namely *raridad* and *uncertainidad*.

It was above all the prefix "un" in 'uncertainty' that did not seem right. Again in a split second decision-making, my brain could not retrieve a single Spanish word that I knew which started with the negative prefix "un". Resorting to the classic strategy of *avoidance,* I recast my sentence in a way that avoided the word 'uncertainty' altogether. It gives me some satisfaction that while writing this paragraph I checked an English–Spanish dictionary and found out that my linguistic intuition was right. The translation equivalent the dictionary offered was *incertidumbre*, a word definitely not following the more regular ~ity / ~dad pattern!

I would like to point out that many Spanish words, like some of those described earlier, became part of my vocabulary through a process of pattern projection rather than through input exposure. For instance, knowing that the English *~tion* generally corresponds to the Spanish *~ción,* I came up with words like *felicitación* and *simulación* when I felt a communicative need to use these words. Such a mode of lexicon expansion is not unusual. We humans all do it. Pinker (1999) rightly notes that words which follow productive regular patterns often have no history. Only patterns and rules exist. We need some concrete tokens to deduce a rule but once that rule is acquired, we do not need *all* the forms that follow this rule to be stored in our mental lexicon in order to understand and use them. A rule creates a regular form and then that form can be thrown away because the rule is always around to create the form again the next time (cf. Pinker's examples *oinked* and *out-Gorbachev'd* with my *oportunidad*, *promoción*, and quite recently, *Harrymania* and *Potterphobia*).

In my view, my heightened sensitivity to linguistic patterns, often perceived on the basis of limited input, reflects a significant difference in the way mono- and multilinguals learn languages. To explain what I mean I will use Schmidt (1995). He considers awareness as key for learning and sees it in two forms: "noticing" and "understanding". Noticing involves conscious registration of a linguistic item and is thus defined as "item

learning". Understanding, on the other hand, involves the recognition of a general rule or a pattern and refers to a deeper level of processing that can be defined as "system learning" (Schmidt 1995: 29−30).

I will use examples from two language domains to illustrate how almost instant system learning differs from a much more gradual item-to-system learning. While learning Spanish, a monolingual English speaker may notice, for example, that Hispanics often drop sentential subjects. In a natural acquisition setting, it will perhaps take some substantial exposure before this monolingual person truly understands the implications of this initial noticing. If a bi- or multilingual learner of Spanish is already familiar with the pro-drop phenomenon, it will take far fewer examples for him or her to realize that Spanish is a pro-drop language like many others, e.g. Russian, Bulgarian, Japanese, Romanian and Italian. As a linguist, I needed even less data since the heavy marking of the verb in Spanish, in my mind, qualified it as a classic pro-drop language.

My second example is from the area of pronunciation. Through feedback in the form of teasing, I soon realized that, unlike my L1 or German for instance, English does not allow final consonant devoicing. Compare the German *Guten Tag* pronounced /guten ta**k**/ with the English 'ta**g**' and 'do**g**', which are very different from 'ta**ck**' and 'do**ck**'. Once I gained awareness about the impermissibility of devoicing with regard to two pairs, namely **g / k** and **b / p**, I realized that I had to apply this new rule across the board to cover ***d* / *t***, ***z* / *s*** and ***v* / *f*** as well, cf. rib ≠ rip and kid ≠ kit. One can say, in other words, that I achieved quick *understanding* (in the sense of Schmidt's definition) covering a vast pronunciation territory. I hasten to say, however, that to this day I am not in complete control of this final voiced / devoiced consonant opposition. If I do not monitor enough, I pronounce 'bi**d**' and 'bi**t**' or 'go**d**' and 'go**t**' very much alike. Things tend to be a little better with words like 'bead' and 'league' as the length of the vowel gives force, or shall I say "gives voice" to the consonant following it.

I will finish this section by mentioning a study by Tomlin and Villa (1994) as it allows me to offer a finer representation of the processes impacting my language learning. Drawing on cognitive science research on attention, the authors contend that noticing may not be as critical a factor as *alertness*, *orientation* and *detection*. They define alertness as an overall, general readiness to deal with incoming data. Alertness can work independently or modulate a second function − *orientation*. Orienting attention commits attentional resources to sensory stimuli. Having atten-

tion oriented toward some aspects of language increases the likelihood, but does not guarantee the activation, of yet another function – *detection*, the latter being a cognitive registration of particular data. Detected information then becomes available for further cognitive processing.

The model Tomlin and Villa (1994: 197) propose looks like this:

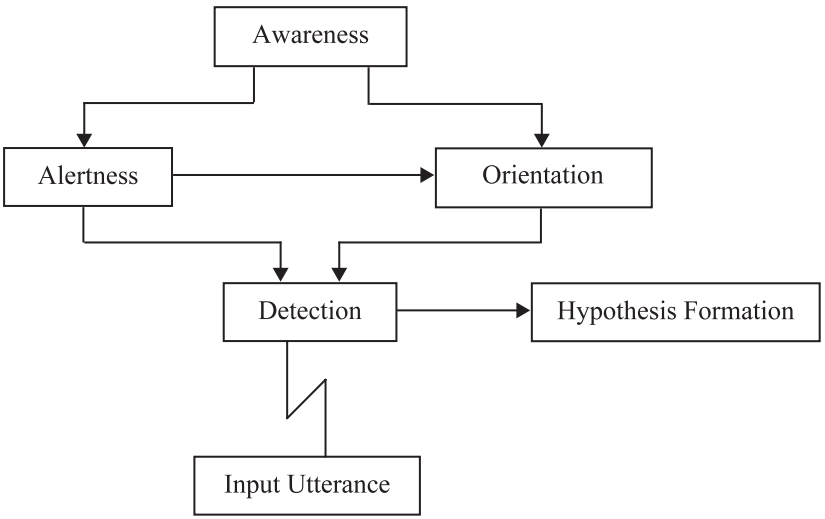


Figure 2. Tomlin and Villa's model

As someone always excited about learning a new language and interested in achieving better mastery, I could say that my brain is typically in a high state of alertness. Furthermore, my prior language knowledge and my linguistic background allow me to orient my attention to specific features in the input, which I may be getting incidentally or seeking deliberately. This orientation to particular structures, as argued by Tomlin and Villa (1994), facilitates detection and allows faster hypothesis formation.

Also noteworthy, however, as was made clear with several examples discussed in my narrative, at times I start with a hypothesis, based on prior knowledge and pattern projection rather than on specific input. It is only after this initial hypothesis formation that I proceed to confirm or disconfirm it by orienting attention to a particular aspect of the target language input. In other words, by anticipating things, my learning proceeds in a way that can be captured through the following modification of the above model:

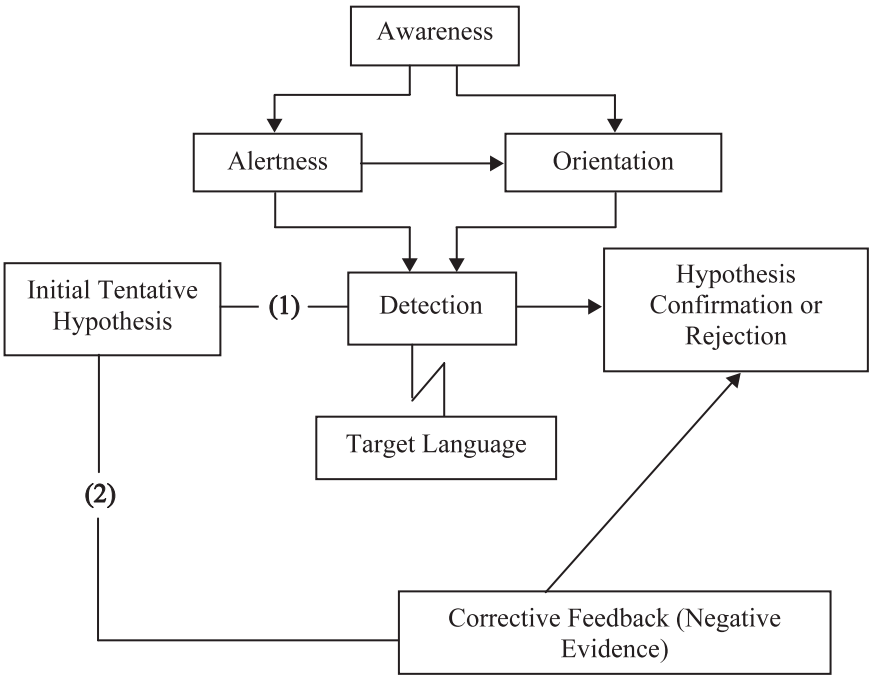


Figure 3. Tomlin and Villa's revised model

My final hypothesis about a target language feature can be shaped through either (1) or (2) above, or both. All learners of an additional language, mono- and multilinguals alike, have some initial hypotheses even before getting relevant confirming or disconfirming input from the target language. I believe that these pre-target-language-input hypotheses (PHs) are a subset of what materializes as positive or negative transfer. Presumably, a multilingual learner is in a position to generate more PHs, particularly when acquiring typologically related languages. Equally important perhaps, these PHs are more likely to result in acceptable TL outcomes as, in a way, many of them have already demonstrated their cross-linguistic viability. Consider again some of the cognates and word-formation examples I shared earlier, or my pre-input hypothesis about Spanish being a pro-drop language, where the heavy verb marking led me to this hypothesis even before I had had an opportunity to notice any subject omission in my input.

4. My learning across language levels

I have always loved exploring the grammar and lexicon of languages. Pronunciation, however, has never been center stage for me with any of my languages. I can think of several reasons for this lack of interest in pronunciation: a/ I have always had more of an "instrumental" rather than an "integrative" motivation for learning languages (Gardner and Lambert 1972), b/ My accent is part of my identity, c/ Since I started my first foreign languages in a non-naturalistic environment at an age past the assumed critical period for pronunciation, I must have realized, subconsciously perhaps, that I was unlikely to ever speak a language totally accent free. Thus my energy was redirected to what must have felt like more achievable and worthwhile goals. I have to admit, however, that to this day I am somewhat irked by compliments about how people like my accent and find it "interesting", "fascinating", "charming" or "endearing". English is the object of my professional life; it has been the main language of my daily communication for close to twenty years now; I live, love and dream in it; I play with it; and yet I am still being reminded that somehow I am not "the real deal".

With all my languages I make an effort to have the *phonemic features* right, i.e. those features that are meaning distinctive. In English, for instance, I try to pay attention to the distinction between the so called short and long vowels, e.g. *dip vs. deep*, *knit* vs. *neat* (a non-existent contrast in my L1), and I put some effort into my interdental consonants to avoid accent fatigue in my interlocutors or communication breakdown, cf. e.g. then ≠ den, thin ≠ tin. I typically disregard most *phonetic* features, however. The latter give me a foreign accent, my unaspirated initial "p"s and "t"s for instance, but seldom interfere with communication.

I fail to hear many of the above-mentioned distinctions in normal speech. My awareness of features that I do not have in my L1 comes primarily through visual input or contrived audio input. By contrived input I mean all the cases when an interlocutor or an instructor specifically enunciates a sound to make it more salient for me, e.g. deed (vs. did − short /i/). For sheer comprehension, my sensitivity to contextual clues compensates for my deficiency of perception.

It is difficult to describe the many dimensions of my acquisition of grammar given the limited space of this narrative. I will touch upon some aspects of morphology acquisition in the next section where I will go into some of the challenges Spanish morphological endings have been posing

for me. Here I will offer just one example which probably captures experiences characteristic of other multilingual learners as well.

By learning multiple languages I soon became aware that individual languages segment and organize reality differently. Indeed, one rarely witnesses a complete one-to-one correspondence between similar grammatical categories from different languages. Even when we have the same category in two languages, their scope may still be different. Both Bulgarian and English have present tenses, for instance. The fact that English subdivides its present tenses into Present Simple and Present Continuous, while Bulgarian possesses just one present tense, precludes any easily grasped correspondences.

Given the low likelihood of complete cross-linguistic correspondence, I focus on figuring out the meaning and scope of a new language category rather than resorting to transfer, counting on the possibility of one-to-one correspondence. This strategy usually prevents me from making false starts and orients my attention to contextual clues, which help me with the understanding of the category under study. To take tenses as an example again, when trying to figure out the verbal system of a language, I pay attention to adverbials and other situational and contextual clues. Put differently, using these clues, I try to grasp the semantics of a particular tense rather than opting for an $L_{1/n} \rightarrow$ TL tense mapping.

To move on to pragmatics, the main challenge for me is norm interpretation. What I mean by this is that at times it is difficult to distinguish between a feature of the target language and the speech characteristics of particular individuals or communities. I will use as an illustration the conflicting input I was getting with regard to turn-taking in English. Initially, I was taught that unlike my L1, or French and Italian for that matter, English embodied a "monochronic" culture. Monochronicity is generally described as a tendency to have one person speak at a time while polychronicity accepts jump-ins and parallel contributions, without viewing them negatively as interruptions (Hall 1959). Monochronicity is not exactly what I experience with quite a few American friends in New York. Many other native English speakers of Southern European heritage are not very monochronic, either.

I have experienced similar norm interpretation challenges with some other categories in the area of pragmatics, such as the intricate art of hedging, for instance. On second thought, an even bigger challenge than norm interpretation is actually conforming to some TL pragmatic norms. Every now and then I get tired of monitoring myself with regard to my polychronicity, for instance, and I slip into L1 pragmatic mode. This

typically pushes buttons with most native speakers, a situation I try to defuse through jocular venting that cross-cultural communication can benefit from some sort of a middle ground, rather than unilateral dominance.

Finally, a comment on the graphological component of language. After I arrived in the United States, I noticed that I wrote as a foreigner in English, and by this I do not just mean following somewhat different rhetorical patterns. I noticed that the slants and angles of my letters looked different. On a whim, one day I asked several colleagues from my department to jot down the sentence "I don't speak English." on a piece of paper with their names at the back and I was able to tell the native from the non-native speakers with one hundred percent accuracy. It seemed that, like accents, graphological foreignness was a hard thing to shed.

My experience with the Japanese syllabaries katakana and hiragana, on the other hand, sensitized me to the fact that even the slightest modification in a line's slant or a squiggle can have a dramatic effect on one's ability to process written input. Driving around in Japan, I often failed to read a store sign or a restaurant banner because the "letters" were fatter or more rounded than what I was already used to. Having gone through this experience, now I have much more empathy for people struggling with the written word. Just imagine the challenges of a non-Roman alphabet person if offered no assistance in recognizing as identical the following few symbols: E Ɛ Є ε e or a ɑ A.

5. Productive vs. receptive skills

One of the questions that I always find difficult to answer is "How many languages do you speak?". Often asked this question, I find myself prefacing my answer with "Well, I have formally studied quite a few languages and have a high level of comprehension in still more". Then, as a rule, I explain that English and Russian are perhaps the only languages I speak fluently, in addition to my L1, of course. I often wish people would ask instead "How many languages can you read in?" or "In how many languages do you have decent listening comprehension?" but I guess we humans tend to show interest in more tangible outcomes.

My rich language learning experience assists me tremendously in breaking the code of new languages, particularly if they belong to a language family from which I already know one or more languages. Things

are quite different on the productive plane, however, at least as far as *accuracy* is concerned. It is often exactly my ability to make good use of contextual clues and my ability to resort to massive positive transfer that prevent me from achieving accuracy. My learning of Spanish is a case in point. Assisted by English, Italian, French, Latin and Bulgarian, I have very high listening and reading comprehension, ranging from 50−99% depending on the topic. My productive skills, however, have been a source of frustration for quite a few years now.

When exposed to Spanish, both in a naturalistic and in a classroom environment, for the most part I immediately grasp the meaning of what I am reading or listening to. This is done, however, primarily through salient markers such as temporal adverbials, for instance (e.g. Yo visité a mi mama ayer/Yo visitaré a mi mama la próxima semana). Swain (1995) and others describe this as *semantic*, as opposed to *syntactic*, processing. I recognize numerous morphological markers and extract their meaning but this seems to be accomplished through a fleeting registration with no retention which could eventually lead to control and internalization. As a result, for years now, my accuracy on the morphological level has been lagging behind. Usually I create a false impression about my mastery of the language by mumbling most noun and verb endings. I have a harder time "faking it" in writing where my lack of accuracy becomes more easily apparent.

For some reason, my high motivation and consistent efforts to focus on form do not prevent me from slipping into primarily semantic processing. Grammar books and massive input also make little difference. My vocabulary is enriched but my retention of most morphological markers remains at a low level. For seven years now, I have had numerous opportunities for interaction with native speakers, going to Mexico on business. The sound images I carry in me from constant conversations with people help with certain morphological endings but others still remain a challenge.

6. Emotions and multilingualism

Finally, I would like to pull the curtain a little to allow a glimpse at the intimate dance between my languages and my emotional responses to things. The first "in"-sight will involve three of my very different languages − English, Bulgarian and Japanese. When thinking of Japan, a country that I have basked in and come to love dearly, I activate different

words of reference. When feeling nostalgic about the temples, shrines and the Zen gardens there, my very vivid memories activate the Japanese word for Japan, *Nippon*. I mentally use the Bulgarian word *Yaponia* when I think of the feminine side of Japan, which I associate with things like maiko-sans, geishas, kimonos, pearls, tea ceremony and calligraphy. This internal linguistic switch is influenced by the fact that, to me, the Bulgarian word has a typical feminine morphological ending "a". Nippon, on the other hand, is a classic masculine name to my inner ear because of its consonant ending. Nippon therefore is the word activated first in my mind when I think of Japan's samurais, sumo, or its beautiful swords. The English label *Japan* springs into action when I think of the country's efficiency, modernity, and its electronics and cars. I love being in the company of people where I can externalize these preferences and switch back and forth between Japan, Yaponia and Nippon.

I have similar experiences, both internally and externally, with all my languages. *Quatro formaggio pizza* makes my mouth water while four cheeses pizza leaves me unmoved. Only the English *jerk* captures all the things one associates with a real jerk. None of my other languages offers a word that comes even close. I need a pile of words to express the physical and emotional wellness of being encapsulated in the Japanese giant of a mini word, *genki. Cafecito, amorcito, mamacita,* and any other Spanish diminutive is more than music to my ears as these "wordlets" trigger sweet childhood memories, connected for me with Russian and Bulgarian soul-melting, ear-caressing diminutives. I whole-*heart*-edly agree that when learning the subjunctive, one surrenders to a world of "… mystery. Of luck. Of faith interwoven with doubt. It is a held breath, a hand reaching out, carefully touching wood. It is humility, deference, the opposite of hubris" (Morano 2007: 121).

7. Conclusion

Finishing my narrative, I am aware that, unlike some other people's stories, mine has shown mainly the joys and pleasures of creating for myself new linguistic personae, revealing little loss or pain. This is because all my experiences constitute what the research literature, in its detached way, defines as additive, as opposed to subtractive multilingualism. Indeed, with each language I have studied or briefly explored, I have felt enriched in many new ways. Lacking ongoing contact in my mother tongue, at times I struggle for words. As a former active simultaneous

interpreter, I am painfully conscious of some significant lexical gaps in my L1 for things that were not part of the world I left behind almost seventeen years ago[5]. Every time I go home, it disturbs me to see the extent to which English has ousted my mother tongue from signs, menus, billboards, and even typical Bulgarian handicraft[6]. Emotionally at least, my mother tongue still feels safe and honored, but now as an alternative means of expression and a handy secret language, which gives me a soul-saving vent for all sorts of unmentionables.

I am also aware that I have told this story speaking with several voices – that of a perennial and always enthusiastic language learner and that of a linguist, SLA researcher and a language educator. To some extent, this polyphony is unavoidable because it is often my linguistic and SLA background that shapes the way in which I process input from a particular target language or determines the speed with which I understand a particular language structure. At the same time, through the years, my language learning experiences have often guided my research interests and offered helpful insights for my teaching. The literature offers much on the value of such cross-pollination on the interpersonal and interdisciplinary level. The story of its power in the intrapersonal domain is still in the making.

5. I never seem to make an effort to fully fit into a target culture. I have never had a particularly strong Bulgarian identity, either. I love being a cosmopolitan and somewhat of a linguistic and social chameleon. The ability to go back and forth at will between distancing and getting "more native" has its excitement and privileges, but it also comes with a price.
6. It will be worth seeing, on the other hand, how the wide availability of input in numerous languages in addition to one's L1 (most daily products and medication in Europe these days come with labels in over a dozen different languages) affects the way we process input and go about breaking linguistic codes and learning languages. The juxtaposition of linguistic material from different languages is likely to stimulate increasing amounts of subconscious, and for some people at least, more conscious comparisons.

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Reflective questions and points for exploration

1. In a recent comprehensive resource book on Second Language Acquisition, de Bot et al. (2005) describe a newer dynamic model of the multilingual lexicon. The key words in this model, they say, "are 'association' and 'activation'. The words that are heard, seen, or used most often are the words that are most easily accessed again and will have the most associations with other information such as how it is used. Words that are heard, seen or used the least will be more difficult to retrieve. This would explain that it is just as easy to 'forget' words, even in an L1, as it is to 'acquire' them. It would also explain how one can be fluent in an L2 when talking with a friend about a common interest but have difficulty understanding a radio programme about a less known topic" (de Bot et al. 2005: 49). Do you find that this narrative, and particularly the information in section three, entitled "Cognates, pattern recognition, and system learning", confirms or disconfirms the above claims? What has been your experience with vocabulary learning and retrieval?

2. Like other contributors to this anthology, the author of this narrative has commented on the positive effect Latin and Greek played in her subsequent language learning experiences. Have you ever taken classes or studied on your own any of the so-called classical languages? Do you know someone who has? Do you think it would be a good idea to have Latin and Greek as widely offered school subjects or do you consider the studying of these two languages an outdated practice with a Eurocentric slant?

3. Have you been in a situation where your gender has hampered (or helped with) your efforts to learn a foreign language? What was the context? What were the specific factors that affected you either positively or negatively?

4. If you consider yourself a bilingual or a multilingual person, would you describe yourself as "balanced in ability and use of two or more languages" (Baker 2006: 18)? Which language do you think in? Does this change in different contexts? In which language do you dream, count numbers, talk to babies and animals? If scared or angry, which of your languages will trigger first? Can you think of any contextual variables here as well?

5. If you know more than one language, which one would you describe as "your language of endearment", i.e. as your language for expressing emotions, affection, etc? Try to think of specific examples.

6. How do you define in your mind someone who is a multilingual – as someone with a native-like mastery of more than two languages, someone who habitually uses multiple languages, or someone who has some knowledge and skills in more than two languages? Try and find some sources in a country's language census. Can you tell by the way the census questions are worded whether multilinguals are defined as you defined them? Does anything strike you about the wording of census questions? Do you find the questions inclusive enough or limiting? You can take this inquiry a step further by examining and comparing language census information from several countries. The internet offers numerous sources in this area.

7. Have you had any experience where the political climate has had any influence on your access to languages learning resources and opportunities? Are you aware of people who have had such an experience? If yes, what were the languages involved?

8. In section 3, the author talks about pre-input hypotheses about a target language that a person with a multilingual experience and/or a background in linguistics may have. She also contends that these pre-input hypotheses often facilitate system, as opposed to item learning. Do you think theoretical models of language development should consider an extended interpretation of input where the concept of input covers not only target language data but prior linguistic knowledge and metalinguistic awareness as well?

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Chapter 4

My ways to Rome: Routes to multilingualism

Heike M. E. Tappe

Languages Explored: Moselle Franconian, German, English, Latin, French, Zulu, Arabic

1. Growing up in a diglossic environment

Originally, I planned to commence my paper by saying that I am actually writing in my first second language, English, but then I realized that my multilingual "career" began even before I started to learn English.

This statement holds because I grew up in a *diglossic environment* (Fishman 1967) in a rural area near the western border of Germany. At the time our village had about 500 inhabitants and the biggest city was Trier with a population of approximately 100.000.

The area's striking linguistic feature is the pride that people take in their respective local dialects. These dialects vary slightly even from village to village. In this situation the local dialect can be regarded as the *low variet*y language, which is spoken in the community, at public gatherings, and even in church. Standard German, spoken in the media, can be seen as the *high variety* language (Fishman 1967).

The strong preservation of dialectal idiosyncrasies is due in a large part to the fact that the area is located close to the most western border of Germany. Infrastructurally, the region is comparatively underdeveloped and was for a long time quite isolated from the rest of the country; it was no "throughway" for travelers and had no significant influx of newcomers. People from my area did not travel much either. I know many people of my grandparents' generation who never ventured out of the village in their entire lives.

Our local dialect belongs to the *Moselfränkisch* (Moselle Franconian) group, which constitutes one of the oldest dialect families in Germany (and in neighbouring Luxembourg)**.** It differs from Standard German primarily in large parts of its lexicon. The dialect lexicon contains words

form Old High German, Old Anglo Saxon and Old French. Further differences from Standard German are found in its syntax, morphology, phonology – and most strikingly in its intonation contours.

In terms of morphological differences to Standard German, Moselle Franconian uses, for instance, the accusative case marking (*-n*) for both the nominative and the accusative case. One instance of this is the masculine pronoun *hen*. In Standard German, the nominative case of the masculine pronoun is *er*, whereas the accusative case is *ihn*.

Intonation contours in Moselle Franconian are similar to the ones in French. Words run into one another with the final consonant receiving a voiced pronunciation if the following word begins with a vowel.

At home we spoke Standard German because my mother comes from Berlin. However, my father's family are from the area so, at family meetings and visits, we spoke Moselle Franconian. Also, all of my peers were mother tongue speakers of Moselle Franconian. Thus, I grew up with two varieties of German, which differ greatly.

It did not bother me as a child that I would use very different structures in order to express exactly the same thing. When talking to my mother, who is a speaker of Standard German, I would use Standard German grammar and morphology. When I talked to my peers and neighbours, I would use Moselle Franconian grammar and morphology. See, for instance:

(1) a. Standard German
Komm zu mir!
$\text{Come}_{\text{Imperative}}$ to $\text{me}_{\text{Dative}}$

b. Moselle Franconian (local dialect)
Komm bei mich!
$\text{Come}_{\text{Imperative}}$ to $\text{me}_{\text{Accusative}}$

While the preposition *bei* can only be used in a locative sense in Standard German and assigns the dative case to its argument, e.g. *Ich bin bei Elke* (literally: 'I am at $\text{Elke}_{\text{Dative}}$', meaning 'I am at Elke's place'), in (1b) *bei* is used in a directional sense and assigns the accusative case to the argument of the prepositional phrase. This latter structure is ungrammatical in Standard German.

In terms of lexicon and intonation contours, my Standard German was, however, highly influenced by the dialect. This resulted in some challenges when I moved to northern Germany because people would not understand me, even though I used Standard German grammar.

The differences between Moselle Franconian and Standard German could be the main reason why most of my peers found Standard German a demanding subject during the first couple of years at school. In contrast, both my brother and I, who were raised with both Standard German and Moselle Franconian, did not share this experience.

Thus, I did not grow up bilingually in a classical sense. However, I experienced early in life that states-of-affairs can be expressed linguistically in a variety of ways and that the same event can be encoded in different grammatical structures. This experience proved an advantage for my further language learning. This is compatible with hypotheses stating that natural bilinguals find it easier to learn additional languages than monolinguals (Cummins 1979; Hakuta and Bialystok 1994).

Having acquired Standard German simultaneously with Moselle Franconian, I also understand Luxembourgish, which belongs to the Moselle Franconian family. It shares many grammatical features, lexical items and pronunciation patterns with my home dialect.

My childhood diglossic experience perhaps also explains why I find Germanic languages in general quite easily accessible, an ease mostly attributable to cognates, i.e. shared word stems. I think my ability to recognise similar patterns in different languages is enhanced by an early exposure to more than one language system or two varieties of one language.

Both Dutch and Afrikaans are comprehensible to me in the written medium, i.e. with some effort I can read texts in both languages. I am also able to follow simple spoken conversations when they are contextually embedded. In a de-contextualised setting I am still able to understand isolated words. To a lesser extent this also holds for Swedish, Danish and Norwegian. I can understand a fair amount of a written text in any of these languages but I am not able to follow a spoken conversation.

Moreover, my acquisition of French was probably enhanced by the similarities with my home dialect in terms of intonation contours and vocabulary. In Moselle Franconian we say e.g. *Ich hab die Flemme* from the French *J'ai la flemme* (≈ 'I have had enough'). Until I learned French I was not even aware of this borrowing, which is not common in Standard German.

2. English

My first "real" second language was English. Most people in West Germany embraced English after World War II because English was per-

ceived as the language of the "liberators", and "saviours" i.e. the English and American allies. They defeated Nazi Germany and their support after the war helped rebuild the German economy and saved many Germans from starvation. Moreover, the late sixties and early seventies brought Rock 'n Roll and the Hippie movement to Germany. Both were celebrated to a great extent by the post Nazi generations, who felt the need to redefine themselves and to move away from what had been identified as "German under Hitler".

Thus, my motivation to learn the "in" language was very strong. My uncle, who is four years older than me, introduced me to Van Morrison, Jimi Hendrix and Rory Gallagher when I was only nine years old. He was adamant that I could only consider myself as having any culture if I knew this kind of music.

My intrinsic motivation of wanting to become a "cool" teenager, make an impression on my uncle, and learn this highly esteemed language was, however, not enhanced at school. I was thoroughly disappointed during my first year of English because of the dull language drills we had to endure. Unfortunately, our learning material was all about some *Müller* family. The Müllers travelled to London to go to museums and do sight seeing. None of this could excite me much as a ten year old. I could spend hours listening to English songs, rewinding the tapes again and again in order to write down their lyrics in some kind of "phonetic" approximation to English. But I was utterly bored with the school book exercises and found the vocabulary we were asked to learn of absolutely no use.

We were a huge class of 43 pupils and during English lessons we were called up by the teacher to provide English equivalents for various German terms. Or, we did dialogues that usually involved a member of the notorious Müller family and a London citizen. Thus the opportunity to actively use English was very limited. Regrettably, our school was not well resourced. We had neither a language lab nor a TV-set, both of which might have helped us to engage with and get exposure to the language. This lack of exposure to authentic and interesting material was especially unfortunate because our English teacher spoke with a very strong German accent. This made us laugh heartily but discouraged us from engaging with him in any conversation.

Besides being bored, I failed to understand the lengthy grammar explanations our teacher tried to engage us in. We did not have any prior knowledge of grammatical concepts as they were not part of the curriculum in our German classes, where we mainly read fiction and then carried out text analyses.

As a consequence of all these factors, my grades were extremely low at the end of my first year of English. Both my parents and I were truly surprised because I really wanted to learn English. So my family decided that I was going to spend the summer holidays with my aunt in England.

My cousins and my aunt's husband do not speak any German. Thus I was immersed in an English speaking environment. I did not find the situation at all unsettling. Finally I could use English in contexts that were interesting to me. My German speaking aunt offered some help at the very beginning but soon enough I could communicate with my cousins, their friends, my uncle and the neighbours on my own. My initial Pidgin variety of English rapidly became richer and more grammatical as time progressed.

When I came back, the new school year commenced and I shot up from one of the lowest places in the English class right to the top, where I stayed until my final year. I went back to England frequently and eventually studied English and got a Master's degree in *English Language, Literature and Culture*. Today I live in South Africa, where I work as a Professor in Linguistics. Both in my professional and in my private life I predominantly speak English.

In sum, what helped me most as a young learner of English was my immersion in the language. From the outset I had a strong intrinsic motivation to learn the language because of its high social status (both in my community at large and – more importantly – for my peers) but I still needed a contextualised exposure to the language. In the natural communicative environment I was in, I had a chance to try things out without being disciplined for my mistakes.

My advancement in English was also enhanced by being in an environment where people were mother tongue speakers whom I sought to imitate. In contrast, we all found my English teacher's accent embarrassing. I had a strong feeling of not wanting to speak with him, let alone like him.

For me, a classroom setting with small numbers of pupils and authentic input – through tutors, videos or a language lab – would have been the ideal learning environment. Also, I would have loved stimulating course materials focussing on age appropriate topics and pragmatic skills, rather than grammar. Even though I might have unconsciously profited from the early grammar drills, I never really understood the underlying concepts until much later. However, when I came back from my first extended stay in England, I did not make many grammatical errors anymore and had thus obviously acquired tacit knowledge of the grammatical system.

3. Latin

I started Latin as my second foreign language when I was twelve. Latin was not a popular choice. More than three quarters of my classmates chose French instead. In fact, there were no other choices at our school. Thus, we were a very small group of Latin students. We had to live with the ridicule of the French students for having chosen the language of long gone weird people in funny dresses. Both aspects made Latin almost an in-group language to us. My motivation to learn Latin was very different from the one that I had with English. English allowed me to belong to the crowd. Latin made me different from the crowd. In addition, I had a functional motivation for wanting to know Latin. I aspired to become a veterinarian and knew I was going to need Latin to study veterinary medicine. Even though I gave up on that idea later, I am very grateful for having chosen Latin. It is an entrance requirement for the Humanities at most German universities. I thus needed Latin to study linguistics and languages.

Learning Latin was tedious because it all came down to grammar lessons and heavy loads of vocabulary memorization. We also translated texts but the main emphasis was on the grammar. This did, however, not bother me half as much as it had with English two years before. First, I was more mature and second, I did not have the same expectations with regard to Latin that I had had with English. Latin was not the language of the pop and rock stars and there was no image attached to it. Moreover, I never expected to speak Latin, or to converse with someone in the language. Thus, I did not really mind the "dryness" of the subject and soon came to like its logic.

Through Latin I got an in depth understanding of grammar. Latin examples with their rich morphology made the case system, verbal inflections, the tenses, modals and quantifiers easily accessible. The intensive study of grammatical dependencies and of derivational morphology had a positive influence on my writing both in German and English.

I began to conceptualize language as a discrete combinatorial system and to explore its possibilities in my other languages. I spent a lot of time inventing new words by exploring derivational morphology. I started to "play" with language structures, i.e. creating word puns and syntactically ambiguous sentences. I had always been an avid reader but prior to my second year of Latin I was primarily interested in the plot of what I read. Now I was beginning to savour the beauty of the language as well. I developed an appreciation for unconventional sentence structures and

expressions and started collecting "beautiful" sentences and words. Moreover, Latin helped me to better understand what I read because many words in German and English derive from Latin word stems, thus I started reading more demanding books. As my command of Latin increased, my general comprehension developed because expressions that had previously been unintelligible became more easily decipherable.

Latin also helped me figure out the Romance languages. While in the process of acquiring French later on, I also started to understand a fair amount of Italian and Spanish without ever having learnt these languages. I cannot actively use either of them. Much to my own surprise, I discovered that I can read both reasonably well as long as the respective text is in Standard Italian or Standard Spanish and explores a familiar topic.

4. French

At fifteen I wanted to start learning French as a third foreign language but I was unable to because of a curriculum conflict. French should have been prominent in our daily lives given the fact that the French border was only a thirty minute drive away. In addition, Saarburg, the small town where I went to grammar school, hosted a huge French garrison. However, neither of these factors led to much exposure to French.

Crossing the border was not very popular at the time. Many people had strong sentiments against their immediate French neighbours that stemmed from the First and the Second World Wars. Moreover, people had engaged in fights over the land on both sides of the border even before the World Wars. Thus, while a few young people travelled to the French Atlantic or Mediterranean coastlines or to Paris, they would refrain from crossing the nearby border.

In addition, the French garrison was a town in its own right with shops, a cinema, hairdressers, dry cleaners, pre-schools, schools, etc. The French and German governments did not seem eager to encourage the French soldiers and their families to mingle with the German population. Against this background, I happened to literally bump into the shopping cart of an adventurous French woman who was exploring the German selection of goods in a grocery shop. At the time of our encounter, I was eighteen. And because of the above-mentioned curriculum restrictions, I did not speak any French. Due to the isolation of the French garrison, neither Catherine nor her family spoke any German. Despite not having

any language in common, Catherine and I instantly liked each other. Using many gestures and a very rudimentary English, Catherine invited me for coffee.

I cannot remember how we managed to communicate in the early days of our friendship but we started seeing each other at least once a week. When I went to visit Catherine's family, I mostly participated in dinners by eating delicious food, listening, watching and smiling.

After about four months, I suddenly realised that I could understand French. In my memory it was a very sudden moment, it felt as if a switch had been turned on. Soon after I started speaking French and rapidly became fluent. Catherine and her family were my regular companions and I spent great amounts of time at their flat, at the garrison, shopping at the *Supermarché*, going to the French cinema and restaurants, attending a lot of functions as well as taking rides across the border to Thionville and Metz. So even though I was already eighteen when I first encountered Catherine, i.e. at the border of the critical period for language acquisition as proposed by Lenneberg (1967) and others, I acquired French in an immersion environment by listening to the language in contextually rich, real life situations. I think that my knowledge of English and Latin helped tremendously with the acquisition of French. Many French words are of Latin origin and also many English words have word stems in common with French. The similarities between Moselle Franconian and French must have aided as well.

Moreover, my motivation to speak and understand French was very high because I wanted to communicate with my friends. I was curious about their culture, literature, music, theatre, shopping malls, and restaurants, of course.

When I was twenty-two, I moved to Hamburg. Hamburg is about 700 km North of Saarburg. Soon thereafter my friends returned to France. We are still in contact through letters, emails, occasional phone calls and rare visits. My written correspondence is still a source of fun for my friends because I never learned the French orthography. Therefore some of my supposedly French words have very idiosyncratic spellings. I do not usually look up words in the dictionary because this makes letter writing tedious. My friends gather and one of them reads the letter out loud. Through these tactics they inevitably figure out what I want to express because my idiosyncratic orthography is phonetically "grounded". I have no problems with understanding spoken and written French, though. My strength is, clearly, with the spoken register because I do not have any formal training in French.

My spoken French has become "rusty" over the years because in the past twenty-three years opportunities for speaking French have been rare. I tried to keep French alive by meeting with German friends who also wanted to maintain their French. However, I proved to be an extreme case of a person who goes into *language modes* (Grosjean 2001). Being in a language mode means that I find it difficult to suppress the knowledge that there is a more "natural" language accessible to both my communication partners and me. In my mind languages seem to be "stored" alongside their speakers and if someone has the "label" German, English or French mother tongue speaker attached to them, I have trouble communicating with them in another language.

The only exceptions to this rule are friends who are balanced bilinguals in my two dominant languages, English and German. With this subgroup I am able to speak English and German almost equally well with a slight advantage for the respective person's mother tongue.

Clearly, in my mental lexicon(s) the threshold (i.e. the overall activation) is higher for lexical items from the current interlocutor's native language than that for lexical items from any other language I am capable of producing.

This is quite remarkable from the point of view of language dominance. German is still my dominant language, i.e. the language in which I produce the smallest number of grammatical errors and have the highest level of overall proficiency. Yet, German does not necessarily seem to be the most activated language in my language system across situations. Rather activation patterns seem to be dependent on my current language mode.

Interestingly, my spoken French is quite poor in "artificial" situations, i.e. situations in which I want to produce French with a non-native speaker of French. However, it kicks back into action the moment I have one of my monolingual French friends on the telephone. Even though I experience signs of language attrition because of the long years of scarce use of French, I mainly battle to find vocabulary. I can still uphold a conversation and have no problems with comprehension. This is astonishing given that I have not had any regular exposure to French over the past twenty-three years. I attribute the preservation of the language to the fact that I acquired rather than learned it and that I have had the chance to speak French very frequently in natural environments throughout four years of my life. In contrast, most of my friends who learned French at school over the same time span can no longer communicate in French after much shorter periods of not using French. Most of them say they lost their French completely after about five years.

It is also intriguing that in cases where I battle to find the appropriate word in French, there is a clear competition from my English rather than my German lexicon. For example, imagine a situation where I struggle to find the French word *cadeau*. I have to suppress the English translation equivalent *present* of the target word and do not experience tangible competition from the German lexicon (i.e. *Geschenk*). In my opinion this effect is not attributable to the fact that I live in an English speaking country. I still speak German on a daily basis and have been living in South Africa for a mere four and a half years. Furthermore my latest experience along these lines was during an extended stay in Germany where I did not speak any English for three weeks and spoke to my French friends the day before I flew back to South Africa.

It would be fascinating to access experimentally the introspective experience I just described because it speaks against some models of lexical access in bilingual speakers which propose that lexical access in a foreign language will always be mediated through the lexical items of the mother tongue (e.g. Manchon, Murphy and Roca 2007).

5. Zulu

Since I moved to South Africa in June 2004, my motivation to learn Zulu has been high. First, Zulu is the language of the majority of inhabitants of KwaZulu-Natal (approximately 72% of the population are mother tongue speakers compared to only 15% of mother tongue speakers of English according to the 1996 census). Second, many of my students are Zulu and I want to learn about their language and their culture in order to enhance my teaching. Third, I have wanted to learn a non-Indo-European language for a long time and it seems sensible to learn the most dominant local language. Fourth, I have made friends with Zulu speakers, some of whom have young children with little or no command of English.

My first attempt to formally learn Zulu dates back to 2005, when I enrolled for a conversation course with the continuous education unit at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The course took place in the early evening twice a week and targeted adult learners who wanted to learn conversational skills. Thus, the teacher mainly focussed on dialogues. We got handouts with dialogues printed in Zulu and their English translation and CDs with an audio recording of the dialogues spoken by native speakers. The class was very big. Thus, the language practise in class was

mainly the teacher taking the role of one interlocutor in the dialogue and the class as a whole taking the other, e.g. (2a and 2b).

(2) a. (teacher): *Sawubona*. [general greeting]
a.' (class): *Sawubona*.

b. (teacher): *Kunjani*? [How is it?]
b.' (class): *Ngiyaphila*. [I am fine.]

Moreover, we trained such exchanges amongst one another, which I found highly embarrassing. I attribute this feeling of embarrassment to the following factors: I did not really understand what I was saying. Zulu is an agglutinative language and the language "chunks" remained totally unanalysed. Even though the general, overall meaning had been explained to us I felt uncomfortable with reproducing strings of language without knowing which part of an utterance corresponded to the subject, etc. Most importantly, however, I found it almost impossible to memorise the phrases because they were presented as opaque wholes. In addition, my language mode problem also hindered my progress. I met a friend in my Zulu class, which decreased the feeling of embarrassment because I did not have to converse with a stranger. However, my friend is bilingual German and Italian. As we share the same mother tongue I found it hard to communicate with him in a foreign language.

In reaction to this one semester disaster, I borrowed a textbook and learned the basics of Zulu grammar and quite a bit of vocabulary in self study. Immediately, I could memorise all the phrases I had previously battled with because now they made sense and it was fun to actually see how the new language expressed things in different and new ways. This experience reminded me strikingly of the fascination I had felt earlier in my life when I studied Latin.

Still, I did not learn to speak Zulu. In the meantime I have acquired some very close Zulu friends who try to teach me Zulu and to speak Zulu with me but I am not getting enough exposure. My friends swiftly revert back to English the moment they feel that I cannot follow what they are saying. In this sense they are different from my French friends who just did not have any option but to speak French to me in the lack of a common Lingua Franca.

In order to learn more Zulu I enrolled as a regular student with the School of Zulu's introductory modules *Zulu for Non-Mother Tongue Speakers* in the first and second semester of 2007. Both modules were taught as evening classes taking place twice a week between 5.30 p.m.

and 7.30 p.m. The time is quite taxing after a normal work day. The classes were small (9 students the first semester and 4 in the second semester). Instead of taking advantage of this and engaging us in true communication, the evening classes follow the same curriculum as the day classes. The latter see enrolment numbers of up to one hundred students. Consequently, the contact periods with the students are spent with huge amounts of Zulu grammar. Students are expected to develop their active language skills during tutorials and in the language lab. However, the evening classes, which have fewer contact periods, have to keep up with the day class's progression in terms of grammar without the benefit of tutorials. Thus, studying Zulu was a very tough call. We had to learn new grammatical structures at an insanely fast pace with no time to actually *use* the forever new structures.

Zulu grammar does not in itself pose a problem even though it is extremely complicated and rich. I got the impression that the fact that I am a trained linguist helps. Moreover, the learning process seems to be enhanced by the fact that my mother tongue is German. German has a fairly rich morphology and shares with Zulu the feature that it demands subject-verb agreement throughout. Students with an English background seem to find it much harder to "think about" overt agreement marking when speaking Zulu.

Actually, learning Zulu in a formal setting is fairly similar to the experiences I had when learning Latin because both entail "drilling" a lot of complicated grammatical structures with a clear underlying logic. This estimation finds some empirical evidence in the fact that the student with the highest mark in our Zulu classes is a classics lecturer. She remarked many times how much Zulu grammar resembles Latin grammar. Interestingly, we both outperformed the body of students in our Zulu classes who have another Nguni language as their mother tongue, Xhosa, closely related to Zulu. While these students found the orals much less demanding than we did, they struggled enormously with the emphasis on grammatical knowledge.

Similarly to what I had experienced earlier with my formal English classroom training, while learning Zulu at university, I grew more and more frustrated that I failed to achieve communicative competence in a language that I wanted to *use*. My Zulu friends found many of the structures that I learned in the Zulu class rather strange. There seemed to be some sort of a gap between the standard Zulu taught at the university and the colloquial Zulu spoken by my Zulu friends. I felt that this almost "embarrassed" my friends and diminished my motivation to use my "classroom Zulu" with them.

I learned a huge amount of Zulu grammar in a short time but I unfortunately forgot much of it almost as quickly as I learned it. I got very high marks but they mostly reflect that I was able to learn the respective content by heart rather than being any indication of my competence in Zulu. This is mainly due to the two facts I already highlighted. First, we had to learn many new structures for each assessment but there was never time enough to practise them thoroughly. Thus, I managed, for instance, to consistently apply the possessive in sample sentences which each contained a possessive in a test situation but I am still struggling to spontaneously produce a sentence containing a correct possessive in natural conversation. Second, in many instances I could not apply the grammar learned in class in naturally occurring conversation because the Standard Zulu we learned did not "translate" into Colloquial Zulu.

Currently, I am revising the grammar I learnt in the formal Zulu classes on my own time and am using as much Zulu as I can both with friends and with Zulu speakers in everyday situations. Slowly but surely I am attaining a level of functional competence in Zulu.

6. Arabic

My progress in Zulu might have been both delayed and enhanced by the fact that in April 2006 I started to study Arabic. A possible delay might have resulted from the fact that learning any language is very time consuming and that I could have spent the extra time I invested in Arabic in learning more Zulu. On the other hand, however, I am not sure whether I would have indeed done this because as a beginner learner there is only so much material to go through and even without learning Arabic in parallel I might not have revised Zulu twice as much as I did.

Rather, I think that learning two foreign, unrelated languages simultaneously has some advantages for me in that I got into a "language learning routine" where constant exposures to new words and new structures became "normal" events. Thus there was an enhanced memory and training effect. The fact that the two languages are so different moreover prevents confusion and interference effects.

It is worth noting that I am learning each of these two languages through my second foreign language, namely English, instead of through my mother tongue, German. So while my native German grammar and my knowledge of Latin grammar assist me in understanding Zulu and Arabic grammar, lexical access seems to be influenced by my dominant

second language, English. Thus, my access to both the Arabic and the Zulu vocabulary is mediated through English. When I try to remember a word in Zulu or in Arabic, I use an English word as the prompt and not its German equivalent. For example, it feels more efficient to me to "think" something like "What is the Arabic word for 'dog'?" to retrieve كلب than to think "Was heißt 'Hund' auf Arabisch?"

This seems to affect my lexical access patterns. With Arabic and Zulu, my English lexicon seems to be even more activated than when I am using French. I would be interested in conducting lexical access experiments with speakers who have a language constellation similar to mine.

I learn Arabic through private tuition, one-on-one for an hour and a half once a week. The first six months I basically had to learn how to read and write Arabic. As is known, written Arabic flows from right to left and uses a totally different writing system from the Roman alphabet shared by all my other languages. It was a humbling experience to be basically illiterate after so many years of intensive reading and writing.

It is, however, the alphabet that attracts me to Arabic to a great extent. I admire the beauty of the script. I spend long hours trying to write words that look like Arabic and are somewhat well balanced. In the beginning my words would keel in all directions quite unpredictably and the "dimensions" of individual letters would be entirely out of proportion. After endless hours of practise my writing has started to look somewhat neat. This feels like a great achievement and makes me admire everyone who learns reading and writing for the first time at an advanced age.

Learning to read Arabic is just as intimidating to me. It took me some time before I could figure out unknown words from the individual letters. As with any other language, known words will eventually be recognized as Gestalts. In Arabic it is more difficult to read an unknown word because in written Arabic the vowels do not appear as letters per se but rather as diacritics above and below the consonants. More often than not, however, they are omitted. So to the new reader, it is difficult to figure out even the phonemic representation of the word in question. Moreover, one letter can appear in very different "forms" depending on where in a word it is situated. For example, in (3a) and (3b) the Arabic letter 'kaf' is the first and the last consonant and thus the first and the last letter in the word, thus: ـكـ and ـك, respectively (remember to read from right to left).

(3) a. كتاب (*Keetabun* = book)
b. هناك (*Hunaka* = there)

For me, the greatest challenge in learning Arabic – after having mastered the relationships between the graphemes (letters in the alphabet) and the corresponding phonemes – is pronunciation. The Arabic alphabet has twenty-eight basic letters, many of which represent phonemes that I can hardly (or not at all) differentiate when listening to them. Moreover, I find myself unable to correctly produce them. Thus, I do not actually expect that I will ever be able to speak Arabic. The fact that I am well beyond the critical period for language acquisition (Lenneberg 1967) seems to have the most severe consequences for my learning of Arabic, as compared to the other languages I learnt, or, am currently learning. My apparent loss of phonemic differentiation abilities dampens any serious aspiration for acquiring the language as a communicative tool.

In this respect, my experience with learning Zulu and with learning Arabic is very different. As far as the phonetic system is concerned, Zulu is easier to me than Arabic. While I have no illusions about the fact that my clicks are vastly off target, they seem, however, comprehensible to Zulu interlocutors. Also, I have no problem differentiating click sounds. All other phonemes in Zulu do not pose much of a problem. Interestingly, my Zulu friends have an amazingly good pronunciation in the few German phrases that they have learned with me. Their German sounds much better than the German produced by English, French, Italian and Chinese friends of mine.

Also, I find it almost impossible to "sing along" to Arabic songs, or to recite Arabic verses that I have heard over and over again, whereas Zulu songs are strikingly different in this respect. Often I have no idea what the respective Zulu song is about and I do not know the words. However, I can still emulate the sounds, something I can hardly do with Arabic. Alongside this problem, the grapheme-phoneme relationship in Zulu is very clear to me whereas in Arabic it causes a huge challenge that is due to the difficulties with the writing system described above.

This latter aspect is also reflected in the fact that my progress in Arabic is very slow. Since the learning of the writing system consumed so much time and every lecture has a "pronunciation training part" to it, I am still at a level where I can produce and understand simple declarative sentences only. After approximately the same time I am able to read simple stories in Zulu and I have a much greater command of the language.

"My ways to Rome" – Concluding remarks

The different languages I have learnt have quite different learning stories attached to them. Generally, it was very beneficial for me to have early experiences with more than one language variety. The second important, and not that novel, aspect is that languages one wants to converse in are, in my experience, best learned in a naturalistic environment. Thirdly, grammar can be fun. Also, I find grammar absolutely essential for my learning of non-European languages. I would probably not be able to learn Zulu or Arabic without grammar and some analytic knowledge about these languages. However, as my experience with Zulu showed, there needs to be a balance between grammar and practice.

Languages enrich my life. Learning a new language opens doors to my imagination and helps me adopt new perspectives on the state-of-affairs in the world. Each language encodes "things" and "eventualities" differently and thus may give expression to thoughts that I already had but did not have a means to express succinctly because a word or a structure seemed to be missing in the languages I already knew. Sometimes a new language also helps me see and conceptualize things in ways that I had not previously thought of.

As second language learners, we might be more sensitive to the idiosyncrasies of a language than its mother tongue speakers. An example is a friend learning German who remarked that German is a very dramatic language. On one occasion, she said: "Just think of the word *Sehnsucht*. Doesn't it literally mean 'longing addiction'?" I had never thought about it this way but I can see her point.

Probably the idea that each new language provides new ways of encoding concepts is what fascinates me the most about learning multiple languages. Language learning helps me maintain flexibility of thought and remain fascinated with language as such. Importantly, languages unlock doors to the literature and culture of other countries and bridge communication gaps between people. If I had a wish I would choose to know many more languages than I will be able to learn in my lifetime – and to be granted a singing voice. But that is a different story.

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Reflective questions and points for exploration

1. When you were acquiring your first language(s), were you exposed to a more or less homogenous target or were you exposed to more than a single dialect? In hind sight, if you have any memory of the experience, how did this impact your language learning experience?

2. If you had any prior linguistic experience before starting to learn an additional language, how did this prior knowledge and experience impact your subsequent learning? Can you say that related languages facilitated your learning better or have you had experiences like the present author where a totally unrelated language helped more than a related one?

3. How have school policies and instructional practices affected your language learning? Think of as many specific examples as possible. Were some of your languages more immune to these external factors than others? If yes, how so?

4. On page 85, the author comments on the importance of grammar concepts for her understanding and effective processing of input in a new language. Are you a believer in metalinguistic awareness and what has been your personal experience in this area?

5. Talking about Latin, and later on, about her entire language learning experiences, the author of this narrative describes her fascination with the beauty of language. She sees this beauty in unconventional structures and in the internal logic of language. What attracts you to languages that

seem beautiful to you? What, in your experience, makes some languages more pleasant and enjoyable than others and what makes you shy away from certain other languages?

6. Do you share the author's experience that it is difficult to use a particular language with certain interlocutors when you are aware that you have a "better known language" in common? Perhaps you can think of additional considerations that counteract the proficiency factor and make the use of the lesser-known language desirable, enjoyable and unproblematic.

7. Have you had an experience similar to the one described in this narrative where the language you were exposed to in the classroom substantially differed from that of the target language community? What are some of the possible effects of this mismatch on one's learning experience?

8. Can you relate to the following statement made in this narrative or do you have a somewhat different experience and take on things? "Learning two foreign, unrelated languages (Arabic and Zulu) simultaneously has some advantages for me in that I got into a 'language learning routine' where constant exposure to new words and new structures became a 'normal' event. Thus there was an enhanced memory and training effect. The fact that these two languages are so different moreover prevents confusion and interference effects."

9. In which area of language do you typically face most challenges – pronunciation, orthography, lexicon, grammar or pragmatics? Have these varied depending on your target languages and the languages already part of your repertoire? Try and list specific examples.

10. The last section of this narrative enumerates a number of specific benefits of multilingualism for the author – from general enrichment to thought flexibility and unexpected and fascinating reconceptualization of things. What have been some of your personal benefits as a result of being a multilingual? Any detrimental effects?

Chapter 5

Incomplete journeys: A quest for multilingualism

R. Wildsmith-Cromarty

Languages Explored: English, Afrikaans, Latin, Italian, French, Spanish, Russian, Zulu

1. Introduction

This is a story with a difference. It does not fit the usual academic discussions on the topic of multilingualism, which tend to include arguments both for and against bi-/multilingualism with reference to notions such as cognitive deficit and liability (Hoffmann 1991: 127; Romaine 1989: 235), or increased cultural and linguistic resources in individuals born into bilingualism but who proceed to become multilingual (Baker and Prys Jones 1998: 65; Hamers and Blanc 1989: 50). Rather, this is a story about an individual born into monolingualism, but who attempted to achieve a state of multilingualism throughout her life. Languages were not readily available to learn in my linguistic environments. I had to seek out opportunities to acquire them.

The languages which I have experienced at different points in my life are as follows, in chronological order: English (L1), Afrikaans, Latin, Italian, French, Spanish, Russian, Zulu. Five of these are cognate with English, being either Romance languages or of Germanic origin, while Russian is a Slavic language and Zulu, a member of the South-Eastern Bantu family of languages. With the exception of Spanish and French, I encountered and developed all these languages in a formal, class setting and only later, in informal, natural settings, except for Russian, which, sadly, never developed! I encountered Spanish and French in informal settings first and only later learned them more formally. My proficiency level for Russian in terms of interaction, was, and still is, zero, even though I was taught the language by means of an audio-lingual approach. My spoken proficiency levels for Afrikaans and Spanish remain at pre-intermediate level through lack of exposure, and my proficiency

levels for Italian and French were upper intermediate/advanced at the height of my acquisition, but have dropped to intermediate through lack of use. My proficiency in Zulu could be around the pre-intermediate/intermediate level with reference to casual conversation, depending on the topic under discussion. However, I am able to talk about abstract ideas or things not present in the context if I am the one to initiate the topic. It is a language I am trying to develop continuously, using every opportunity to practise it with native speakers in informal settings.

Part of the reason for my struggle to become at least a moderate multilingual was that I had the (mis)fortune of having a world language as my primary language. I grew up in a monolingual environment where the only foreign language I heard were snippets of French (and some Italian) idioms and phrases sprinkled throughout my mother's educated English. Phrases such as *faut pas*, *enfant terrible, un certain je ne sais quoi, savoir faire, joie de vivre* and *che sera, sera* became an automatic part of my knowledge of English. They were learned contextually and idiomatically as formulas or unanalyzed chunks (Ellis 1985; 1994), which served to communicate my intentions quite adequately. I never stopped to consider what their English equivalents might have been, and even to this day an English translation of such phrases would seem awkward, and would certainly not carry the full connotation of the French or Italian. Such phrases also served to acquaint me with the sounds and intonation patterns of these languages, so that they did not seem alien to me when I encountered them again later in my life.

So much for my early childhood linguistic experiences, which basically consisted of only one language until the age of nine, when the family emigrated to South Africa. This was a new linguistic environment for me, containing languages that were both cognate and non-cognate with my mother tongue. We settled in a suburb of Johannesburg where I had considerable exposure to a number of African languages, particularly Zulu. However, at this stage of my life I was an observer of the language rather than a participant, as I was often surrounded by Zulu mother tongue speakers, who would carry on conversations amongst themselves. Eventually, exposure to the patterns of the language must have become internalized to some extent as I never struggled with the individual sounds, phonology or intonation contours of Zulu when I learned it more formally in later life.

2. Afrikaans

My first encounter with instructed second language acquisition was learning Afrikaans as a compulsory subject at primary school. I studied this language for nine years and matriculated with a pass. Although this would be defined as a *second* language because it was one of the official South African languages, it was not necessarily a language that I had access to as a native English speaker in the community. Living spaces in South Africa were clearly demarcated for the various language groupings at the time (which still holds true for parts of South Africa today), and my family lived in an area where English was the dominant language. We had to be sent to rural areas for week long farm-stays for experiences of natural immersion. Not surprisingly, it was after these sojourns that my fluency and accuracy increased slightly, only to decrease again after long periods with no natural exposure.

In general, my experience of learning this language was unfortunately negative as it was forced onto us by the government in power at the time, with no other languages offered as curricular options. The teachers taught us in Afrikaans from the first lesson and we struggled to understand. This, in itself, is not a bad thing, as increased exposure to the language should, theoretically, aid learning. However, my affective filter (Krashen 1981) was fairly high (due to subtle language and power issues between the English and Afrikaans populations) thus creating a continuous, and very effective, resistance to input. In spite of this resistance, however, I must have internalized a substantial amount of the input as my memory of the language returns fairly quickly if I find myself in an Afrikaans-speaking environment, and I can make myself understood as the language node becomes activated. Later, I took Afrikaans en Nederlands as one of my first-year degree courses, which gave me further exposure. I also received an endorsement for Afrikaans for the postgraduate certificate in education, which was compulsory for anyone who wished to become a school teacher. At present, I occasionally find myself writing an email to my university colleagues in Afrikaans, or preparing and delivering a speech at functions for which I generally need help from mother-tongue Afrikaans speakers.

Afrikaans word order differs from English – it is a SOV (subject-object-verb) rather than a SVO (subject-verb-object) language. This was my first experience of different syntactic patterning to my L1 and I often transferred the English patterns to an Afrikaans utterance, as in the following example. In Afrikaans, the sentence ‘He will make it for you’ is

expressed as *Hy wil dit vir jou maak,* but at my particular stage of development, I would say *Hy wil maak dit vir jou,* following the English word order. Eventually I progressed from this stage to a verb-final placement in the utterance, at the same time learning to inflect the verb for past tense as in *Hy het dit vir jou gemaak,* 'He made it for you' and adding the past marker *het.* This structure was sufficiently different from my L1 structures to be available for noticing (Robinson 2003), selection and commitment to working, and later, long term memory. My knowledge of Afrikaans syntax is fairly accurate, perhaps because I learned it over a period of ten years. However, my knowledge of the lexicon has diminished considerably through lack of exposure and use.

3. Latin

My second encounter with an additional language was learning Latin at senior school, which I took up to Grade 12. Studying Latin suited my visual-analytic learning style, as I experienced it as a puzzle where I had to crack the code by recognizing and identifying patterns. Although I had become aware of morphology when learning Afrikaans, especially the inflections for past tense which are prefixed to the verb e.g. *leer/geleer* 'learn/learned', as opposed to English, which uses the suffix *-ed*, or morpho-phonological changes as in *wil/wou* 'wants/wanted', my focus was more on learning utterances and phrases with communicative intent rather than on the formal features of the language itself. This was because the approach used for teaching Afrikaans was communicative for acquiring aural/oral skills, and content-based for acquiring reading and writing. It was acquired as a language to be used.

Latin, on the other hand, was an analytical challenge, which probably laid the foundation for all my future learning of languages, both cognate, such as Italian, French and Spanish, and non-cognate, such as Zulu. I learned to identify prefixes added to verbs and nouns, which would help me to guess the meanings of new words. For example, *circum* 'around' helped me to deconstruct words like *circumvenio* 'to surround, trap'; *circumsto* 'to stand around' and *circumeo -ire -ii -itum* 'to go round'; *con* 'together' helped me understand *concurro* 'to run together', and *prae* 'in front, ahead' helped me understand *praemitto* 'to send on ahead'; *praedico* 'to predict' and *praepono* 'to deem more important, to put first'. These prefixes reappeared in my Romance languages as well, particularly Italian and Spanish, with some morpho-phonological modification.

Studying Latin also introduced me to the agreement system operating in languages, especially case endings, which I later encountered in Russian, and verb conjugations. These stood me in good stead for learning French, Italian and Spanish. I enjoyed translation exercises with extended texts where I could identify agreement patterns such as the accusative forms *-em* and *-um* in the following text (Kennedy 1962):

(1) *Artem earum rerum esse quae sciantur; oratoris autem omnem actionem opinionibus, non scientia, contineri.* (Cicero)
[That art belongs to the things which are known; but that the whole sphere of an orator is in opinion, not in knowledge.]

Finally, the agreement system helped me match verb conjugations to subjects as in the following example, where the subject does not head the sentence, but can be retrieved from the nominative case ending *-ius* (as opposed to the accusative *-um* in *Africanum)* and matched to the verb ending *-at* in *laudat* 'praises':

(2) *Laudat Africanum Panaetius quod fuerit abstinens* (Cicero)
'praised' (Kennedy 1962)

4. Italian

The third language that I added to my repertoire was Italian. I chose it as one of my major subjects for my BA degree at University because it intrigued me and, possibly, because instinctively I knew that I had acquired a solid foundation for learning such a language from studying Latin. For the first six months of the course our lecturer used English, after which she switched to Italian completely. This was the best strategy she could possibly have used for comprehension training as we were forced to listen for familiar vocabulary and sentence structures in order to piece together her meaning. We were helped, of course, by the textbook and board work, which catered for the more visual side of our learning styles, but it was having to follow the lectures in Italian for a full fifty minutes each day that made a difference to my acquisition of the phonological and syntactic patterns of the language. I also learned to write academic essays in Italian on various topics for assignments and examinations and could read a novel by the end of the second year.

This formal training served me well when I finally went to Italy to work for a family in Rome after my studies. Although I struggled with production in the early stages, my linguistic structures were accurate. I just needed to develop my knowledge of the Italian lexicon which was aided by the total immersion in the language I was experiencing. As my interlocutors could speak very little English, my acquisition of Italian was rapid and I soon became fairly fluent. My erstwhile knowledge of Latin also helped in this regard, as many Italian words resembled those I had been exposed to during my Latin studies, among them words such as *vindicare* 'to revenge/punish' (Latin *vindico*); *traduire* 'to translate' (Latin *traduco*); *tenire* 'to hold' (Latin *teneo*). In terms of Herdina and Jessner's (2002: 20) systems-theoretic model, my knowledge of earlier language systems affected my later language systems.

I believe that one of the reasons why I was so motivated to learn Italian was that I was seeking an *alter ego* after having experienced a sense of alienation and isolation in the two communities where I had grown up. In South Africa, I was regarded as an outsider because of my British accent, and when I returned to England at the age of twenty, supposedly my home country, I was asked where I came from! This caused an identity crisis, which I subsequently resolved by moving to Europe where I clearly did not belong, initially, but to which I gradually assimilated through my proficiency in the two languages. This theory was further borne out by the fact that I avoided using English whilst I was living in Europe and kept within my group of Italian (and later, French) friends with whom I did not speak English. It was as if I chose a "third space" within which to build a new identity – one of my own choosing and in which I felt comfortable. Pavlenko (2005: 193) explains this phenomenon as a case where identity-related emotions "force speakers to reject their first languages (and) prompt them to fashion alternative or additional identities in later learned languages". This type of motivation is clearly of the integrative kind (Gardner 1985; Gardner and MacIntyre 1993) and it helped me form close ties with people from these countries, and assimilate more easily to the culture.

In terms of Scherer's (1984) (cited also in Pavlenko 2005) five dimensions of assessment of emotional and motivational relevance of agents, events and objects in the language learner's experience, my motivation would fit the category of "compatibility with self- and social image". The other dimensions include intrinsic pleasure, novelty, coping potential and need or goal significance. I readily used Italian gestures and exclamations, and even picked up part of the *Romanesca* dialect.

5. French

The next language in my repertoire was French, which I briefly studied for six months in primary school as an additional subject. However, I did not make much progress and discontinued the lessons. Later in life, I found a job in a French-speaking canton of Switzerland near Geneva at an international summer camp for children. I was thrown in the deep end, as I was responsible for hiring youth leaders for groups of children from various parts of the world which entailed numerous telephone calls and liaison with Swiss government and municipal departments. I had to learn to communicate in French very rapidly in order to carry out my duties, as I was often left alone to run the office in the Director's absence. I spent ten months in this job before moving to France to take up a position at a language school in Bordeaux. In this context, my knowledge of French significantly improved as I was immersed in it. I only spoke English with my students during working hours. In my social life, I spoke only French and became quite fluent. My fluency improved as a measure of my motivation, which, as with Italian, was mainly integrative as I desired to become part of the target group. This situation lasted for one and a half years.

My experience of learning French was the inverse of my experience learning Italian, as I was first introduced to it in a natural setting, without any significant formal instruction. Only later did I enroll at a university for two years of French after I had returned to South Africa. My knowledge of French basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) (Cummins 1991: 71) aided my studies, especially in retrieving the silent letters, which are so much a part of French vocabulary and morphology. For example, the phonetic realization for the following words in spoken French is /vwa/: *vois* 'I see', *voit* 's/he sees', *voix* 'voice', *voient* 'they see'. Their meanings can only be retrieved from the context itself. However, my basic knowledge of French helped me to recognize such words in their written form without difficulty as I was familiar with their meanings. Interestingly, although I had the same amount of formal instruction in both Italian and French, and a similar amount of exposure in an immersion setting, French is the language that comes to me more easily in informal conversation with native speakers or with my peers. I am also more able to sustain an interaction in French than I am in Italian. French represented an emotional experience for me as I enjoyed the French way of life and made many meaningful friendships. This is probably the reason why it has remained accessible for spontaneous production after such long periods of inactivity.

6. Spanish

Spanish was the next language that I attempted to learn although it was mainly self-taught by means of grammar and textbooks. I used my knowledge of Latin and Italian to reconstruct the language in the absence of exposure. Because of my prior linguistic experience of morphology, I was able to create Spanish words based on Latinate roots and various morphological endings. For example, I quickly learned the word formation patterns in Spanish, such as *-ción* (equivalent to the English *-tion*) in words such as *información* 'information' (It: *informazione*, Fr: *information*); *emocional* 'emotional' (It: *emotivo*, Fr: *emotif*), and *-dad* (equivalent to the English *-ity*) in words such as *ciudad* 'city' (It: *citta*), *dualidad* 'duality', (It: *dualita*, Fr: *dualité*).

Because of my previous experience of changes in word order, and syntactic patterns in general, I anticipated a different word order in Spanish. Thus, if I wished to negate an utterance in Spanish, I would place the negative marker in initial position, contrary to English, in which the negative marker is carried by the first auxiliary verb. An example would be:

(3) *Non me gusta bailar* (It: *Non mi piace ballare*)
[I don't like dancing]

where the Spanish and Italian patterns differ significantly from the English structure. I also anticipated that Spanish would be a pro-drop language, similar to Italian, and therefore did not experience interference from my first language. It was this type of syntactic awareness that enabled me to make myself understood when I paid a short visit to Spain during my travels. I created the language as I went along, making many errors along the way, and using Italian as support, particularly with my formation of syntactic structures. I was also able to guess at words in Spanish using my knowledge of English, French, Italian and Latin. To this day my receptive skills are still adequate for information retrieval purposes and I can understand a fair amount when I read Spanish.

7. Russian

Russian was the only language I learned as an intellectual exercise. I was, however, genuinely interested in learning the language, so I chose it as

an intensive five-week language learning experience in a Master's degree programme, hoping that I would learn enough of the language to motivate me to learn further. The main goal of the course was to sensitize us to the problems language learners encounter when trying to acquire a new language. The audiolingual approach was used, based on a course text called *Passport to Moscow* (O'Toole and Culhane 1972). This approach was necessary as it was difficult to decipher Cyrillic script, although phonetic equivalents were provided. In my case, the sensitization process was successful, as I experienced how disempowered learners must feel when deprived of visual input, in this case, the written word. My language learning, on the other hand, did not progress very far. I struggled to understand the words when relying purely on aural input, and found myself going through the laborious process of first matching the sounds to the phonetic script, and then, in turn, matching these to individual letters in the Cyrillic script. This slowed down my progress considerably. To make matters worse, there were only two of us in class, and my peer seemed to be coping far better than I was. Having so few learners in class created a competitive atmosphere which further eroded my self-esteem!

In relation to the grammatical system, Russian follows a different word order to English. Adjectives are placed after the noun they modify as in *girl pretty* 'pretty girl' but as I had already encountered this in French, it did not cause difficulty. I found case endings rather difficult in spite of having encountered them in Latin. Russian case endings seem more complex. For example, feminine nouns have a special accusative form *-y* or *-ю* so the distinction between nominative and accusative (subject and object) in the singular is clear. However, masculine, animate nouns have the same form in the accusative as in the genitive, and in the plural, both masculine and feminine animate nouns have an accusative like the genitive. In addition, inanimate nouns differ in their case endings from animate nouns. These distinctions in relation to case caused great confusion for me which was compounded by the fact that I had difficulty in identifying them in an unfamiliar script. What might have helped their acquisition, of course, would have been regular practice in authentic contexts where the various case distinctions were clear. In the case of Russian, it would appear that morphemes such as case endings are rule-learned rather than rote-learned (Suzman 1999), which tends to cause overgeneralization to inappropriate instances in the absence of practice.

A second source of difficulty which caused interference was the lack of a copula equivalent in the present tense in Russian, which I kept wanting to supply. For example, the structures:

(4) дом там
House there
[There is a house]

(5) вот дом и мост
Here house and bridge
[Here are the house and bridge]

lack both the article and copula. I found myself seeking an equivalent copula form for such structures. In sum, my experience of learning Russian was one of frustration and I lost my motivation to learn further.

8. Zulu

My acquisition of Zulu has also been challenging in a way that my learning of the more cognate languages was not. Unlike Russian, Zulu has been available in my environment, but not always accessible. Because of the lack of interaction among the various language groups in South Africa, one has to actively seek out interlocutors in order to acquire and learn it in a natural setting. In addition, the African languages have, until recently, carried no status in political, judicial or educational domains so that there was no real incentive to learn them as additional languages, except for people who live in rural areas on farms where the local population know very little English or Afrikaans.

I have enjoyed sporadic naturalistic exposure to the language, mostly with child minders who lived in. Our conversations were limited to domestic topics for which I developed some useful, fixed routines. For example, we would discuss the weather:

(6) *Libalele namhlanje*
[Nice weather today]

(7) *kumakhaza/kuyabanda namhlanje*
[It is cold today]

(8) *ngicela ukuthi uphe izinja ukudla ebusuku namhlanje ngoba ngiya emsebenzini eThekwini*
[Please would you give the dogs food tonight as I am going to work in Durban?]

However, I was unable to extend my discourse into more complex sentences, or inflect for tense and aspect very easily. For example, a standard expression *njani?* 'How are you?' carried a multi-purpose function for me as I overgeneralized it to both past and present time. When asking about a past weekend, I would say:

(9) **Njani impelasonto yakho*
[How *is* your weekend?]

instead of the grammatically accurate:

(10) *Ibinjane impelasonto yakho?*
[How *was* your weekend?]

Njani 'how' was in grave danger of becoming an overgeneralized, unanalyzed chunk in my interlanguage to be applied indiscriminately without inflecting for person or tense. Because of the pervasive agreement system in Zulu, the concord marker *-ibi-* indicates both past tense and marks the particular noun class to which *impelasonto* 'weekend' belongs, class 7. Without complete and intensive immersion in such a language, especially one with a typology very different to English, the learner is obliged to process and plan each utterance laboriously. I therefore found myself monitoring for appropriate and accurate marking of the noun class and agreement system before producing the utterance, and then often backtracking to correct a morphological element which had been inaccurately selected.

Because my interlocutors were unable to provide me with the finely-tuned input that I required, or explain aspects of the grammar to me (although they did provide corrective feedback, they could not explain why I was wrong), my acquisition reached a plateau. It was only when I enrolled for two introductory Zulu courses at the universities where I worked that I was able to tackle more complex utterances in extended discourse. These courses were taught using the grammar-translation method with one session dedicated to conversation. As there were about sixty students in the class with a number of my own first year students among them, I found this experience quite intimidating. The teachers would move around the class asking questions and I would count the number of sentences before it was my turn so as to be prepared with an answer in order not to lose face. Trying to speak the language in front of sixty other students was enough to inhibit my acquisition of the language at the time.

There were other aspects of the teaching approach that made learning Zulu in an instructed setting a somewhat frustrating experience for me. Vocabulary learning was based on the morphology of the language as the two are closely associated, especially for nouns. We were thus presented with lists of decontextualized lexical items grouped according to the particular noun class to which they belonged. Some noun classes are grouped semantically, such as the person classes which carry the prefix *-um-* (Class 1), for example *umlimi* 'farmer', *umntwana* 'child'. The plural prefix for this class is *-aba-* as in *abalimi* 'farmers', *abantwana* 'children'. I had no difficulty acquiring the prefixes for this class because of their semantic grouping and the salience of the morphological elements. Nouns from this class are also used frequently in conversation.

However, lexical items in other classes are not necessarily linked semantically, which makes it difficult to create associative networks. Class 2 nouns, for example, also take the prefix *-um-* but they include items such as *umsebenzi* 'work', *umgodi* 'hole' and *umuthi* 'tree'. The plural prefix is *-imi-*, which has some consistency in the sound (*-m*), making it it easier for me to remember. However, my accuracy in supplying the correct NC prefix to nouns in this class was far more variable. Another such class is Class 5, which takes the prefix *-im-/-in-* and contains items as disparate as *incwadi* 'book', *inkukhu* 'fowl' and *imbuzi* 'goat'. The plural prefix for these nouns is *-izi-* as in *izincwadi* 'books', *izinkukhu* 'fowls' and *izimbuzi* 'goats'. This plural marker is also found in another class (4), the *-isi-/-izi-* class for nouns such as *isikole* 'school', *izikole* 'schools' and *isitulo* 'chair', *izitulo* 'chairs'. I found class 4 prefixes easier to remember and produce because of the sound of the agreement patterns *-isi-/-izi-*. Because of the way the noun classes were presented, I was obliged to rote learn them, which hampered their retrieval from long term memory as they were not contextualized.

In a study of the acquisition of Zulu morphology by L2 learners in schools in KwaZulu-Natal, Wildsmith-Cromarty (2003) found substantial variability across learners in both acquisition and use. Learners tended to confuse subject markers, especially those from Noun Classes 3 and 5, which use the prefixes *-u-* and *-i-*, often overgeneralizing the latter. This was also my language learning experience. From an acquisition perspective, two different types of morphemes have been identified in Zulu (Suzman 1999; Wildsmith-Cromarty 2003) both of which have implications for the ease in which they are acquired. Type 1 morphemes are rote-learned in association with a noun, which allows them to become formulas or unanalyzed chunks for spontaneous, automatic use at a later stage.

These morphemes include the object markers such as *-si-* as in the phrase *isiphuzo esibandayo* 'a cold drink'; adjective markers such as *-ba-* as in the phrase *abantu abaningi* 'many people' and possessive markers such as *-li-* as in *ikati lami* 'my cat', *-si-* as in *isandla sakho* 'your hand' or *-zi-* in *izandla zakhe* 'his hands'. I tended to confuse or avoid these morphemes in the early stages without exposure to frequent input where the agreement system becomes salient, and where these structures serve a meaningful, communicative purpose.

Type 2 morphemes, on the other hand, are rule-learned as pronouns and "carry an anaphoric, multipurpose element for L1 children" (Suzman 1999). These are the morphemes that are often overgeneralized, for example, the subject marker *-i-* (NC7) in:

(11) **Iphi ikati?*
[Where is the cat?]

which should be replaced by the marker *-li-* (NC5) as in:

(12) *liphi ikati?*
[Where is the cat?]

Iphi thus becomes an unanalyzed chunk to be used for all nouns irrespective of their noun classes. Another Type 2 morpheme is the object marker which is not necessarily learned in association with the noun like Type 1 morphemes, thus making it more difficult to learn. An example of object markers belonging to this type *-m-* and *-ku-* is in:

(13) *ngiyambona*
I him/her/it see
[I see him/her/it]

(14) *ngiyambiza*
I him/her ask
[I ask him/her]

(15) *ngingakusiza ?*
I can you help?
[Can I help you?]

Often, I would transfer, unanalyzed, the object marker *-m-* to a context where it did not apply as in the following:

(16) **Ngiyambona, ikati*
I see it, the cat
[I see the cat]

instead of using the correct marker *-li-* as in:

(17) *Ngiyalibona, ikati.*
I it see, the cat
[I see the cat]

I found that I used both rote and rule-learning for these morphemes, although I was obliged to make more use of rule-learning as a strategy for learning Zulu as I did not have sufficient exposure to input in the environment to be able to identify patterns naturally and formulate unanalyzed chunks for more spontaneous use. In fact, without such natural exposure, I initially tended to omit the morphology that was not salient to me, especially the subject markers such as *-u-* in: **baba* (*ubaba)* 'father' or

(18) *ubaba *gijima* (*ubaba uyagijima)*
[father is running]

The communication skills section of the course, however, provided opportunities for implicit learning of Zulu morphology. According to Doughty and Long (2003: 294) "where complex knowledge is learned in context, implicit learning is more successful". For example, practising the object concords within the context of a dialogue helped me internalize them more easily, and provided me with formulas that I could practise with interlocutors and then gradually analyze. For example, the object markers *-m-*, described earlier, and *-ku-* appear in the structures:

(19) *ngizombisa*
I will her call
[I will call her]

(20) *ngizokunika*
I will you give
[I will give you]

I found it far easier to learn and store these morphemes when they appeared in the following dialogue:

(21) Sam: *Ngicela ukukhuluma noThandi*
[I wish to speak with Thandi.]

uMama: *Ngizombiza. Bamba kancane. Cha, akekho uThandi.*
[I will call her. Wait a little. No, Thandi is not here.]

Sam: *Kulungile. Ngizokunika umlayezo wami.*
[Alright. I will give you my message.]

The fact that these markers had been presented formally first facilitated my noticing them in a communicative context such as a dialogue or a role play exercise. This explicit knowledge (DeKeyser 2003) gradually became implicit as I began to practise these structures in other communicative situations. I also looked for opportunities to supply other object markers such as *-ni-* [you pl]; *-si-* [us]; *-ba-* [them]. Although Schmidt (1990) does not consider rule understanding necessarily crucial for learning, he does concede that it can be facilitative, which was my experience. An even stronger argument is put forward by Tomlin and Villa (1994) who maintain that it is *detection*, and not selection with noticing, that determines whether input becomes intake. Based on explicit knowledge, detection seems to be necessary for further processing of input. It was eventually my metalinguistic awareness of the way language works, and what to seek out in terms of morphology that forced me to pay closer attention to, and supply, the subject markers and noun class prefixes consistently – something I was unable to do in my learning of Russian case endings.

9. The status quo

At the present time, I head up the modern languages department at a South African University and so get to use Italian with the Italian lecturer, French with the French lecturers and Afrikaans with my Afrikaans colleagues. Unfortunately I often experience performance reduction in these situations, partly because I have lost a great deal of fluency and automaticity in my production through lack of sustained practice, and also because of role and status issues relating to my position in the University. As a professor and head of department, it is a case of not losing face with my peers whilst struggling to make myself understood, so my risk-taking behaviour, which normally comes to the fore in naturalistic situations, is significantly inhibited in the professional domain, which is the only context where I currently have exposure to these languages.

My performance is reduced to short, formulaic utterances and carefully planned, longer syntactic units which, if I am interrupted, often get lost in the conversation. I try to avoid my interlocutors completing my sentences for me so I ensure that I have pre-planned what I want to say before articulating it. At times, this can be painfully slow as I monitor for accuracy in every element of the utterance to ensure that individual structures and words are in agreement with the others, after which I often resort to completing the utterance with a formulaic phrase which suffices to carry my communicative intent. These formulas are expressed fairly fluently, which then gives the impression that I am keeping up with the flow of the conversation, which, in turn, invites more input!

Having provided a chronology of my acquisition of various languages from late childhood to adulthood, how might I best describe my present state of multilingualism? In spite of the language attrition that I have experienced over time, when one or other language became more dominant at different times, I would suggest that my multilingualism has been both *subordinate* and *coordinate* in terms of my individual trajectory. According to Pavlenko (2005: 8), subordinate bilinguals "learn one language through the medium of another, most often in the classroom" whilst coordinate bilinguals acquire their languages in distinct contexts. The former attach new lexical items to already established representations, whereas the latter have "fully distinct representations corresponding to their two languages".

Most of the languages in my repertoire were learned through the medium of English – a subordinate process – whereas French was learned initially in a distinct context in which I managed to get to the point where I was thinking (and dreaming) in the language. In other words, I was using the language directly without translation from the L1. This simple distinction between subordinate/coordinate bilingualism is not entirely appropriate for describing my linguistic experiences, however. Some of the languages, learned formally in the initial stages, were later developed in distinct contexts where I became an L2 *user* (Cook 2002; Pavlenko 2005), for example, Italian, for which I developed further representations from my immersion in the socio-cultural context itself. At one point during my sojourn in France, Italian and French were equally balanced, and I could alternate between them for social purposes quite easily. I often found myself as translation mediator between my Italian and French friends when the former were visiting me in France.

In the case of Zulu, however, English is definitely used for translation purposes and when I cannot find an appropriate word or expression to

convey my meaning in Zulu, I code-switch. This strategy rarely occurs at the level of morphology, however. Herdina and Jessner (2002: 23−24) regard transfer, interference and code-switching as separate phenomena, and not as "individual variants of the same phenomenon", which is generally regarded as *transfer*. In this case, my transfer of English into the sentential unit could be regarded as purposeful integration of the two language systems when appropriate. However, this integration was of three types in my experience of code-switching between my languages in the course of the acquisition process: borrowing (from an L2 deficit perspective), purposeful transfer (from the L1 perspective) for emphasis or for sharing common socio-cultural understandings in a particular context, and purposeful transfer from an "identity-theoretic" perspective (Herdina and Jessner 2002: 21) in contexts where I wished to create a sense of solidarity with my interlocutors.

As an example of purposeful transfer for sharing socio-cultural understandings, I often have cause to enter into a French conversation in my professional setting as follows:

(22) *Est-ce que tu vas au timetable meeting ce soir?*
[Are you going to the timetable meeting this evening?]

An example of purposeful transfer from an "identity-theoretic" perspective took place on a trip to the island of La Reunion in the Indian Ocean, where I would code-switch from French to English and back with the French-English bilinguals who were my hosts at a conference. A further example of this type occurs with my Italian colleague, where utterances such as the following are not infrequent:

(23) *I would like to describe in depth the experiences of gli scrittori dall'estero* [the writers from abroad/from elsewhere]*, especially those from the Diaspora*

(24) *Che cosa facciamo allora*? [What are we doing then?].
Do we approach the topic from a structuralist perspective or from a postmodern one?

The problem with transfer is that it does not "push" my acquisition of the language to a higher level. Rather, it invites fossilization as comprehensible output (Swain 1985) becomes compromised.

My story is one of incomplete journeys − adventures on the road towards a state of multilingualism where my mastery of each language

has been of short duration. Each of my linguistic systems could be characterized as "transient stages" (Herdina and Jessner 2002), either on the way to attaining competence in the target language, or on the way to attrition. Although I had, to some extent, achieved mastery in Italian and French at one time, I currently experience only sporadic exposure to Afrikaans, Italian, French and Zulu, mostly in my professional environment. This mixing of languages on a fairly regular basis causes some confusion, as words from all the other languages pop up in a totally unpredictable manner whenever I attempt to retrieve words from my mental lexicon. My repertoire seems to be a complex dynamic system with its own characteristics and parameters and containing unique linguistic interactions. Only Zulu remains my daily challenge − a battle to break through the restrictions of my limited context to higher levels where I would be comfortable taking part in the discourse at meetings, for example. As Pavlenko (2005: 9) so aptly puts it: "What happens in the lives of many individuals, then, is the ongoing change in dominance, competence, and proficiency in all languages in question".

So I continue on my linguistic journeys, realizing that they can never be complete. The challenge to try and complete them, however, will always be there.

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Reflective questions and points for exploration

1. In recent years the literature on multilingualism and second language development has given much more prominence to learner agency and learners' contributions to the processes of language acquisition, identity negotiation, and one's repositioning through additional languages. We are also witnessing a shift in dominant field metaphors, from "language acquisition" to "participation" and "becoming- and being-in-language". The former suggests that the self is "in control" (it possesses the language) while the latter present languages as separate worlds that shape and transform us with each border crossing (Pavlenko 1998: 15). The author of this narrative indicates in her opening paragraph that hers is a story of a person who was born into monolingualism, and who proceeded to struggle to achieve a state of multilingualism throughout her life. Languages were not readily available to learn in her linguistic environments. She had to actively seek out opportunities to acquire them.

Having read this narrative, in your opinion, what is the impact of agency on learning outcomes? Also, what is your personal experience with language learning? Have you been a pro-active learner or has your learning been primarily shaped by the instruction you were exposed to and by the general societal attitudes and opportunities?

2. Describing her emigration to South Africa, the author comments how initially she was just a language observer rather than a participant, as she was often surrounded by Zulu mother tongue speakers, who would carry on conversations amongst themselves. Through this exposure she eventually internalized the individual sounds and the intonation contours of Zulu and did not have any problems with them when she studied the language more formally in later life. In another narrative in this volume, Todeva shares a similar experience with Japanese, where her lack of meaningful interactions in the language limited her language acquisition to intonation contours and numerous common expressions that she inter-

nalized as not fully analyzed chunks. Have you had similar experiences where you were simply exposed to a language without many opportunities for interaction? Was the language cognate or non-cognate to your prior languages/L1? Did the latter factor determine the language components you acquired through sheer exposure, for instance, intonation, lexicon, certain aspects of grammar, etc.?

3. The author describes her limited success with Afrikaans despite the fact that it was one of the country's official languages and that she studied the language for nine years. Revisit the reasons she offered for this relative lack of success and see if you can prioritize them in any way. Once you are done with the prioritization, reflect on your decision-making process. What determined the relative weight you gave to the different factors involved – was it the data from the narrative, some relevant personal experience you have had, things you know from research, a mixture of all the above, or something else? Do you find such a distinction between primary and secondary factors of influence plausible or somewhat theoretically questionable?

4. Talking about the powerful influence of Latin on her subsequent language learning, the author of this narrative describes her experience with this language as primarily an analytical challenge, a cracking of a code, and a puzzle. What is your experience in this area – do you use different approaches to the various languages you have studied or have been naturally exposed to? Have you approached some more analytically while others more holistically? If yes, what exactly determines your difference of approach?

5. This narrative mentions five types of motivation driving one's learning. One is "compatibility with self- and social image". The author wrote, "I believe that one of the reasons why I was so motivated to learn Italian was that I was seeking an *alter ego* after having experienced a sense of alienation and isolation in the two communities where I had grown up. In South Africa, I was regarded as an outsider because of my British accent, and when I returned to England at the age of twenty, supposedly my home country, I was asked where I came from! … By learning Italian (and later French) and by using these two languages with people around me, it was as if I chose a 'third space' within which to build a new identity – one of my own choosing and in which I felt comfortable". The other dimensions of motivation mentioned include intrinsic pleasure, novelty, coping potential and goal significance. What is the type of moti-

vation defining your language learning experiences? Any category that goes beyond the five types spelled out above?

6. The following quote from this narrative reveals an interesting relationship between emotions and language acquisition and maintenance. "Although I had the same amount of formal instruction in both Italian and French, and a similar amount of exposure in an immersion setting, French is the language that comes to me more easily in informal conversation with native speakers or with my peers. I am also more able to sustain an interaction in French than I am in Italian. French represented an emotional experience for me as I enjoyed the French way of life and made many meaningful friendships. This is probably the reason why it has remained accessible for spontaneous production after such long periods of inactivity." Can you relate to this observation and what other connections do you see between emotions and language use and development?

7. Risk-taking is typically described in the SLA literature as a learner attribute while this narrative reveals a much more nuanced picture and some substantial contextual variability. How would you evaluate yourself along this dimension? Is your risk-taking context dependent and influenced by any other factors?

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Chapter 6

The joys and pitfalls of multiple language acquisition: The workings of the mind of a simultaneous multilingual

Chimwemwe Mayinde Mystic Kamanga

Languages Explored: Chichewa, Chitonga, Chitumbuka, Chibrazi, English, Chisena, Chiyawo, French, Zulu/Chingoni, Xhoza, Setswana, Sepedi, Sesotho, Chilomwe, Chinese, Chisenga, Esperanto, Kyangonde, Kilambya, Kiswahili[1]

1. Introduction

This narrative is the story of my experiences with the acquisition and learning of multiple languages. I was born in a multilingual family whose multilingual disposition is based on intermarriage and migration. My father is Tonga by tribe and he has always spoken to me in Chitonga, Chitumbuka and English, with a bit of Chichewa. My mother is Sena by tribe, but she has always spoken to me in Chitumbuka, Chichewa and English, with a bit of Chitonga. With my brothers and sisters, I have always spoken a combination of these languages. I acquired Chitonga, Chitumbuka and Chichewa as mother tongues simultaneously, and English as a second language.

2. My current profile as a multilingual speaker

I have different levels of linguistic competence and performance in more than ten languages, which I have grouped into three categories. I am an

1. The author of this article opted to use the anglicized version of the African languages in his repertoire (e.g. *Zulu* instead of *isiZulu*) for the sake of consistency with the terms used in chapters 4 and 5.

accomplished speaker of Chibrazi, the urban contact vernacular (Sebba 1977) of Malaŵi, Chicheŵa, Chitonga, Chitumbuka and English. These five languages make up the first category of my linguistic repertoire. Chicheŵa, Chitonga and Chitumbuka, which are all Malaŵian languages, are my mother tongues. I was first introduced to Chibrazi through my elder brother at home. I learnt more of this language from friends at school and in the playground.

The second category consists of Chisena, Chiyawo, French, Zulu/Chingoni, Xhoza, Setswana, Sepedi and Sesotho. I have good knowledge of these languages, but I cannot sustain conversation in any of them, although I can understand them sufficiently. Chisena and Chiyawo are Malaŵian languages. I only know Chisena through listening to other people, especially on radio and television, through music, and through enquiry. I have learned Chiyawo in the way I have learned Chisena, but in addition to that, I have received some coaching from a friend, and I have lived among the Yawos for some time. Zulu is one of the majority languages spoken in South Africa and Xhoza is its cognate, also spoken in the country. Chingoni is the variety of Zulu that is spoken in Malaŵi and it is the one that I was first introduced to. My recent stay in South Africa has enabled me to have more access to these three varieties. I am also learning Setswana, Sepedi and Sesotho. In the case of French, I learned the language up to intermediate level in a semi-formal class set up, but I have not had enough chance to practice my knowledge.

The third category of my linguistic repertoire includes Chilomwe, Chinese, Chisenga, Esperanto, Kyangonde, Kilambya, Kiswahili and other official languages of South Africa including Tshivenda, Ndebele, Sitsonga and Siswati. I have very scanty knowledge of these languages. Chilomwe, Chisenga, Kyangonde and Kilambya are Malaŵian languages. My exposure to Chilomwe and Kilambya comes through radio and through music, although I have also come into contact with people speaking the languages. My limited knowledge of Chisenga and Kyangonde came through my interaction with speakers of the languages when I lived among them while I was young, and through music. My knowledge of Kyangonde is much stronger than that of Chisenga because I lived among the Nkhondes longer than among the Sengas. In fact, I did reach a stage of considerable competence in Kyangonde; I have only lost the language due to discontinued interaction with it. Kiswahili is an East African regional language, but it is carried into Malaŵi through Tanzania, which borders Malaŵi in its northern region. Kiswahili is slowly becoming a language of trade in northern Malaŵi. I cannot pinpoint the

exact origin of my Kiswahili because I have encountered it at many points in my life. In the recent past I have received Kiswahili from my relatives (for example, my sister and her family) and from other speakers in the context of trade. I was exposed to a bit of Chinese and Esperanto in a semi-formal class set up, but as with French, I have not had practice with these languages. I cannot speak Tshivenda, Ndebele, Sitsonga and Siswati, although I understand a little of each one of them, mainly on the basis of their similarity to other languages that I know.

I can also divide my current linguistic repertoire on the basis of language family. On the one hand, most, if not all of the African languages that I know fall into the group of Bantu languages (Mchombo 2004; Zeller 2004). There are a lot of similarities among these languages, which allow varying degrees of mutual intelligibility among them. Grammatically, all Bantu languages have the same basic subject-verb-object (SVO) structure, although they differ in terms of the subject-verb inversions that they allow. My competence in these languages is highly dependent on their similarities, although subject-verb inversion and other syntactic modifications are a serious stumbling block in my success to learning. I am particularly aware of the mutual intelligibility among Chicheŵa, Chitonga and Chitumbuka. I can use the example of the word *msungwana* 'girl', which exists in all three languages. The only difference is that while in Chicheŵa the word is considered to be an instance of "deep language" (i.e. marked), the word is the conventional (i.e. unmarked) term used in Chitonga and Chitumbuka. One very good example of the mutual intelligibility among the African languages is the lexical similarity that manifests in the word for people. Some of the Bantu equivalents of the word are *montho, munthu, buntu* and *muntu*, which are similar morphologically and phonologically.

To me, English, Esperanto and French are also similar. As Indo-European languages, they share many lexical similarities, despite some phonetic and orthographic differences. There are also syntactic differences. The one outstanding grammatical difference is that while English is a subject-verb-object (SVO) language, French and Esperanto are not. In some cases the similarities help in my endeavours to speak French or Esperanto, while in other cases they become a source of confusion. The confusion is most pronounced in my reading of French. Many times I tend to read French as though it were English. I usually interpret French words on the basis of the English words that are morphologically, phonologically or orthographically similar to them. The result of this is simply chaos. It is important for me to mention that my knowledge of English,

French and Esperanto helps me to have a little access to other Indo-European languages when I hear them; however, I need a lot of time to process them. These include German, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and Afrikaans. I understand a few vocabulary items and common expressions in these languages.

In a world of its own is Chinese, which I have only learnt at a preliminary level in a semi-formal set-up. In the little interaction that I have had with the language, I have discovered that it is completely different from any of the other languages that I know. As such, I cannot use any of my languages to learn Chinese. As already indicated above, I do not speak Chinese at the present time because it is irrelevant in my daily interactions, but I occasionally do so alone as a matter of practice just because I find the language fascinating, and I foresee it becoming another international language.

My linguistic repertoire also includes my idiolect, which I call Landwich. The word *landwich* is a corruption of the English word *language*, first used by somebody as a result of influence from Chichewa. I can describe my Landwich as either a language or a way of speaking that I have developed through years of a combination of different life experiences, creativity and multilingualism, and interaction with friends and family. It can partly be said to be a conglomeration of all the languages that I know, and partly a unique medium of what I may call "figurative communication". It is highly coded, but at the same time easy to adapt to, judging by the fact that some of my friends and family members have been able to adapt to it. The language utilizes all kinds of relationships that exist among vocabulary items, expressions or languages; some even far-fetched in the ears of people who hear them. It mainly utilizes metaphorical relationships that exist among words and expressions in the different languages that I know.

The last point concerning my linguistic repertoire is that I use the different languages that I know in different contexts based on different factors. The most important factor that determines the context in which I (can) use each of the languages is the person(s) whom I engage in conversation with as a cooperative communicator (Grice 1989). Typically, whenever possible, I use the language(s) that my interlocutor is most comfortable in. I speak Chibrazi, Chichewa, Chitonga, Chitumbuka or English with the same level of clarity and consistency, in any relevant context, but many times I find myself switching among these languages. Therefore, there is no consistency regarding my patterns of use of these languages. Sometimes I just feel more inclined to use one language or a

certain combination of the languages than another; sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously. However, Chicheŵa or the Chicheŵa version of Chibrazi and English enjoy the most time. In addition to that, I can modify my speech in these four languages and my idiolect, which I restrict to my interactions with people who understand it. I can use various styles or registers in accordance with different contexts as determined by each language system on the basis of factors such as setting, function, form, topic, medium and interlocutor. However, I cannot do the same with my other languages because of lack of competence.

3. The dialectology of my linguistic repertoire

There is a very rich dialectal dimension to my linguistic repertoire. While I feel that I am most competent in four languages and my idiolect, it is important to also mention the dialects involved. I can only talk about the language-dialect distinction comfortably with regard to my mother tongues, Chibrazi, English, and to a certain extent, Zulu/Chingoni. With the other languages, I do not think such a distinction exists in my repertoire. The main dialectal variable in my repertoire is accent. I am able to vary my accent of Chibrazi, Chicheŵa, Chitonga, Chitumbuka and English in a number of ways. I speak three varieties of Chibrazi by virtue of my mother tongues: the Chicheŵa variety, the Chitonga variety and the Chitumbuka variety. I can speak and understand the following Chicheŵa accents: Doŵa, English and other foreign accents, Lomwe, Mchinji, Nkhotakota, Sena, Tonga, Tumbuka and Urban. I can speak and understand Chitonga with both Tumbuka and Cheŵa accents; and Chitumbuka with both Cheŵa and Tonga accents. I can attempt the following English accents: American English, British English, Jamaican English (Patwa), Black South African English, Indian English, Zimbabwean English, Nigerian English or Ghanaian English, on top of my own Malaŵian English, which I can speak with accents based on each of my mother tongues and other Malaŵian languages. As for Zulu, I speak a mixture of the Malaŵian variety, Chingoni and the South African variety.

I choose these dialects or accents depending on the context of communication, especially with regard to participants, topic and place. For example, one day while I was at Chiya Lagoon in Nkhotakota, negotiating the price of fish with the indigenous fish mongers, I spoke the Nkhotakota dialect of Chicheŵa in order to incorporate correctly. Chiya Lagoon is a place in Nkhotakota, one of the districts in the Central Region

of Malaŵi, which is particularly famous for its nice fish. As such, many people passing through the place want to have "a taste of the place". Because of this popularity, the fish are very expensive. By negotiating the price in the language of the land, I was able to persuade the sellers to give me a good price as a "brother". I also employ different accents or dialects for comic purposes. These different accents and dialects also come in very handy in my teaching sometimes, especially regarding sociolinguistic issues like solidarity and dialectology. For example, I demonstrate how one word can be given different interpretations within different dialects or with the help of a different accent. Such differences in interpretation are a recipe for many language jokes.

4. My current proficiency in the languages of my repertoire

My competence and performance in the languages that I know vary. In order to give the reader an idea about my present linguistic competence and performance, I have developed Table 1 below indicating my current proficiency in each of my languages according to the four language skills on a 0−5 scale (the ACTFL scale). My proficiency in the comprehension and speaking skills is to be understood in the literal sense of these words, but reading and writing need to be explained. The asterisk next to the numbers indicates that the proficiency does not necessarily indicate comprehension. That is to say, I can decode what is written even though I may not understand what is meant; and I can encode what I hear even though I may not understand it. The logic behind this is that I simply use my ability to read and write the other languages that I know very well, taking advantage of the family resemblances that the languages share.

There is another interesting point about my competence in languages other than my mother tongues and English. I find content words to be much easier to learn and remember than function words. In fact, my speech in these languages is usually full of grammatical mistakes. My failure to conform to the grammatical rules slows me down in my performance. Many times I find myself knowing exactly what to say in order to get a certain message across, yet finding the way to say it a very big challenge. At times I use words of one language with the grammar of another. That is why I end up switching to other languages in which I am competent. If it was not for grammar, I would be boasting of good levels of competence in all the languages that I have learnt and am still

Table 1. Language proficiency

Language	Comprehension	Speaking	Reading	Writing
Chibrazi	5	5	5	5
Chichewa	5	5	5	5
Chilomwe	1	0	3*	3*
Chinese	1	1	0	0
Chingoni/Zulu/ Xhosa	2	2	3*	3*
Chisena	2	1	4*	5*
Chisenga	1	1	3*	5*
Chitonga	5	5	5	5
Chitumbuka	5	5	5	5
Chiyao	3	2	4*	4*
French	2	2	2	0
English	4	4	4	4
Esperanto	1	1	3*	4*
Kyangonde	3	1	3*	4*
Kilambya	2	1	3*	4*
Kiswahili	3	2	3*	4*
Landwich	5	5	5	5
Setswana/Sesotho/ Sepedi	1	1	2*	2*
OSAL	1	1	3*	3*

Key
0 = No ability
1 = Able to satisfy basic survival needs and courtesy requirements
3 = Able to use the language with sufficient accuracy and vocabulary
4 = Able to use it with accuracy in most informal and formal contexts
5 = Able to use the language like an educative native speaker

OSAL- Other South African languages (excluding Afrikaans)

learning. I can say that learning languages has become easier with every language that I have added to my repertoire. The more languages I know, the more linguistic information I have as a resource to learning additional languages.

I also think that the more languages I have learned, the more difficult it has become for me to store and maintain information about my different languages. I often find myself mixing information from different languages without realising it. In worse cases I even fail to account for the language to which some piece of information that I produce belongs. This is more pronounced in my Zulu and the other South African lan-

guages that I am currently learning. I know a lot of words, but I do not know to which languages they belong.

Because of my multilingualism, my lexicon is a very complicated entity. I believe that I have one lexicon that is made up of different sub-lexicons. In other words, the individual lexicons of the different languages that I know are systematically combined into one massive lexicon. Naturally, the different lexicons latch onto one another at the different levels of linguistic structure. When a lexeme in one language is activated, other lexemes in other languages, which are similar to it (phonetically or semantically), also get activated. I actually have to make a deliberate effort to keep some lexemes from activation sometimes. This conscious effort tends to slow me down in my endeavours to speak the languages in which I am not yet very competent because I become hypercorrective. Often, in such cases I simply resort to code-switching. However, I would say that with time my brain has learnt to systematize the use and storage of my different languages, which makes the communication process smooth regardless of the intermingling of my languages.

5. Code-switching patterns

Through my years of multilingualism, code-switching has become a very important aspect of my daily interaction with people of different languages. There are two main reasons for which I code-switch during conversation. On the one hand, I code-switch in order to maximize communication. This applies in the case of my mother tongues, the urban contact vernacular, my idiolect and English. I code-switch because I know all of them so well that they compete during communication, a mark of my desterity with these languages.

Perhaps the most important factor that determines when and why I switch between languages in the case of my mother tongues, the urban contact vernacular, my idiolect and English is the participant(s) with whom I interact. I switch languages according to the languages that the people I am speaking with speak and are comfortable with. But, I only switch to the urban contact vernacular when I am speaking with people to whom the language is appropriate. I usually switch to my idiolect as a way of "teasing" the people I am speaking with, excluding others, or just to get them to speak in the "idiolect mode". For me, the idiolect makes communication much easier than sticking to conventions since the idiolect allows all the languages that I know to "intermingle freely"; in it grammatical constraints are minimal.

On the other hand, I code-switch as a result of lack of competence. This is typical of the rest of the languages that I know. I cannot sustain a conversation in these languages, especially when interacting with mother tongue speakers or near-native speakers. They tend to intimidate me because I always think they will be checking my performance and do all sorts of things that would embarrass me. Under such circumstances, code-switching allows me to "escape" such embarrassment, and it saves me the trouble of having to "dig" for the right words and grammatical rules when speaking. Code-switching is actually the only way in which I can manage to go through a conversation. If I try to stick to the one language in which I am engaged, I "freeze". It is interesting that if I am speaking with a fellow learner, I can sustain conversation with considerable competence. I thus believe that my problem is more a matter of confidence than competence. Inadequacy of linguistic knowledge causes anxiety in me, which in turn triggers a feeling of lack of confidence, which then leads to code-switching. Interestingly though, my awareness of this problem does not seem to help me.

I find code-switching to be advantageous because it enables me to communicate effectively and efficiently. If I can not express myself in one language, I can do so in another. It also helps me to communicate with people of different language backgrounds. Over time, it has become very difficult for me to sustain a conversation in any one language for any length of time because of the frequency of my code-switching, especially when interacting with people who know my mother tongues and the urban contact vernacular. In this respect, I find code-switching to be disadvantageous in that it limits the development of some of my additional languages and it "kills" some of those that I already know. The reason for this is that I tend not to bother too much to figure out the languages I am less competent in because I know there is always a way out through the ones I know very well. In this way, my development in these languages is stalled. The two languages that are spared in terms of this problem are Chichewa and English.

I also need to mention that I believe code-switching takes place at two levels: at the level of thinking, as in Pinker (1994) and Fodor (1995), and at the level of articulation. What happens in the first instance is that I tend to change the language in which I think, whereas in the second instance, I actually change the language in which I express my thoughts. In terms of thinking, I generally switch among three modes of thinking: the mother tongue mode, the English mode, and the idiolect mode. The idiolect mode is a cross-cutting mode; therefore, it is more prevalent. In

terms of articulation, the way I code-switch was explained in the paragraphs above. The general trend regarding the mode of thinking is that I think in my mother tongue when speaking African languages, whereas I think in English when speaking my other languages, including English itself. There are some overlaps, however. My use of the singular form "mother tongue" as opposed to the plural "mother tongues" in this section as well as in section nine is significant. The expression is used as a generic term. However, each of my mother tongues functions as a separate "thinking mode", and I even switch among them sometimes. This sounds mixed up, but my point is in the mix itself. While my choice of the language of communication is sometimes conscious, my "choice" of the thinking mode is always subconscious.

6. Crosslinguistic influence among the languages of my repertoire

My speech demonstrates all kinds of crosslinguistic influence: influence from one mother tongue to another; from a mother tongue to a second language; from a mother tongue to a third language; from a second language to a mother tongue; and from a second language to a third language. However, I am not yet sure if I also exhibit influence of any of my third languages on either my second language or any of my first languages.

The literature (e.g. Tremblay 2006; Wei 2006; Mitchell and Myles 2001; Sharwood-Smith 1994) points out that language transfer can be overt as well as covert. Perhaps the most common type of overt transfer that I exhibit is grammatical. I often employ the grammatical structure of one language while using another. Transfer is obvious in my accent(s) and through characteristic morphological, grammatical, semantic and even pragmatic mistakes during performance. In general, apart from influencing one another, my mother tongues influence all the other languages that I have learnt and am learning. They also influence different aspects of the different languages. That is, for example, while one language is mainly influenced at the syntactic level, another one is mainly influenced at the morphological level. For instance, my mother tongues mainly influence my English at the syntactic level, yet they influence my Zulu and my other South African languages mainly at the lexical, morphological, phonological and semantic levels. As an example of the former, I usually confuse 'borrow' and 'lend' when I am using English because such a distinction does not exist in my mother tongues; the single word *bwereka*

applies. Interestingly though, my French is mainly influenced by my English, and not by any other language.

The one big limitation regarding overt transfer in terms of the exploration herein is that I cannot remember the exact nature of the language transfer that I have exhibited, even though I am fully aware that I transfer. This is largely because the transfer happens subconsciously. I only realise that I transferred when I look back at my speech while it is still fresh in my mind. My exploration of covert transfer is also highly limited by the problem of expressibility: It is difficult for me to explain something that did or does not actually get articulated precisely and succinctly. What I am sure about though is that avoidance, code-switching, disfluency and confusion, just to mention a few, are some of the results of covert language transfer that I exhibit.

7. Language loss and diminution

I have encountered both language loss and diminution over the years mainly due to migration and time. By moving from one place to another across Malaŵi, I have been exposed to different languages at different times and for different durations. Generally, the languages that I have been exposed to for the longest periods of time have thrived, while those that I have only had short exposures to have encountered diminution or loss altogether. For instance, because I have had little contact with Kyangonde, I have lost the language. My mother tongues and English also present an interesting scenario. Because I have stayed longer in Chichewa-dominated areas than in Chitonga or Chitumbuka areas, I am more comfortable with Chichewa than with the latter two. I am even more comfortable with English in all the language skills than I am in Chitonga and Chitumbuka because I have had more contact with English than with either of the latter two. With regard to reading and writing, I am most comfortable with English.

I see language loss and diminution at work even with regard to the languages I have recently learnt and am currently learning. My knowledge of the languages keeps on coming and going. For example, after my *premiere partie* 'part one' French, I took a six-month break before embarking on the *douxieme partie* 'part two' of the short course in basic communication. During that break, I forgot most of what I had learnt because I never practiced. But, during the *douxieme partie* course, my

knowledge of French "came alive". By contrast, as I am in close contact with Zulu, Xhoza, Setswana and Sepedi at the moment, my knowledge of these languages is growing stronger every day.

8. How multilingualism influences my life

Multilingualism has influenced and continues to influence my life in different ways. Being a multilingual has allowed me access to a vast body of knowledge of the world in general. In particular, English has enabled me to gain a lot of vicarious experience of many aspects of the world. Perhaps the most outstanding influence of multilingualism on my life comes in terms of my cultural orientation, since language influences culture and vise versa. My knowledge of different languages makes me aware of different cultural issues that are embedded in those languages. Consequently, multilingualism impacts on my manner of thinking, expressing myself and interacting with different people. My different languages have made me more tolerant of the differences of the peoples of the world. Therefore, being a multilingual has helped to transform my world view from a narrow beginning to a much wider present. Learning new languages gives me a sense of enrichment. I do not see myself as losing my identity because of learning new languages. Rather, I see myself as being able to embrace as many identities as possible.

However, I find myself "torn" among the cultures of the different languages I know, especially those of my mother tongues. Furthermore, these are somehow "abridged" or "hybrid" cultures because I did not acquire them in their "roots". And, they were further "abridged" by the other cultures I was exposed to through migration and education. Because of that, I see myself as having a "hybrid culture". There is always some element of cultural conflict in my language when I interact with other people, and I am always careful when I interact with people. In other words, as I communicate, I find myself "listening" to different "inner voices" about language and cultural requirements that I need to follow. My only consolation concerning my African languages is that there are more similarities among their corresponding cultures than differences.

9. My types of multilingualism

I am basically an incipient multilingual. I have a positive attitude towards other people and their languages, and I feel good when I communicate

with people in their preferred languages as a way of accommodation (Coupland and Jaworski 1999). However, the situation is different with regard to South African languages; I first check if my interlocutor can accommodate the fact that I can only speak and understand their language to a limited extent because from my experience, some people are very particular about their languages.

I can also describe myself as both a simultaneous and a sequential multilingual. I acquired my three mother tongues simultaneously through interaction with my parents and my siblings. I learned other languages in different sequences later on as my family migrated from one place to another in Malaŵi before our immigration to South Africa. Chibrazi, Chichewa, Chitonga, Chitumbuka and English are stronger than the rest of the languages that I know. In fact, I am active in these five languages and rather passive, to a different degree, in my other languages. However, I do not consider myself a balanced multilingual because I have not been consistent in my use of these five languages.

There are a few interesting scenarios regarding my language thinking process. Generally, I believe that I think in my mother tongue and translate into other languages that I know. English is unique though, because sometimes I translate from my mother tongue, while at other times I do not. Here, I am not talking about thinking in the sense of Pinker's *mentalese* (Pinker 1994) or Fodor's *language of thought* (Fodor 1995). Most of the times when I am speaking English, my selection of English lemmas is highly influenced by the mother-tongue lemmas. When I speak French, I use a two-step translation process. I think in my mother tongue, translate into English, and then further translate into French. Interestingly though, my mother tongues do not seem to have any direct influence on my performance in French. I can therefore describe myself as a coordinate multilingual as well as a compound multilingual. I can only speculate that the reason why I think in English rather than directly in my mother tongue when speaking French is the fact that French is structurally closer to English than it is to my mother tongues.

10. Strategies for learning and maintaining my languages

Through the years of my multilingualism, I have employed a number of strategies that have enabled me to learn the languages that I know and to maintain them as part of my repertoire. Let me start with my mother tongues. I cannot really talk about employing specific strategies in acquir-

ing my mother tongues, or Kyangonde and Chisenga, which I acquired naturally from living among native speakers, but lost with time. I cannot remember exactly how I went about the acquisition process during the early years. However, in my adulthood, I have realized that there is some imbalance among my mother tongues in terms of use: Chichewa enjoys more time than Chitonga and Chitumbuka or even Chitonga and Chitumbuka combined. Therefore, I have devised a strategy to keep all of them alive. I always make sure that I find some time for each of the languages. For instance, I can say my prayers in Chitonga or Chitumbuka just so that I use the language. Sometimes I teach Chitonga to my wife, who is Chichewa-Chitumbuka-speaking by mother tongue, and to our son, in order to give myself some time to use the language.

Here are some of the strategies that I have employed and continue to employ in learning my additional languages. Asking speakers of other languages about a few "important" vocabulary items has always been a very good starting point for me in learning new languages. The second strategy is simply listening to people as they speak the target language(s). I do this whether I am involved in their conversation or not. What I typically learn through these strategies is greetings, terms for body parts, swear words, and a few communicative chunks; like how to say who I am, how to ask who someone is, how to say where I am going, and other set phrases that are common in daily interaction. These two strategies are closely related to my third strategy, memorization. When I get information about a language, I try to memorize it. Memorization itself comes about through a number of strategies. For example, as I listen to people's conversations I sometimes mimic what they say either out loud or silently. Sometimes I write down what I hear to go over it later during some quiet private time.

Using the knowledge that I gain from such experiences, I engage in conversations with speakers of the languages just to practice my knowledge and access more input whenever I get a chance. Such moments help me put to practice the knowledge that I have just gained. They also allow me to see if I got the information right since I rely heavily on memory. In addition, I get the chance to receive direct guidance from accomplished speakers of the language. I am careful though when engaging in conversation, especially in the case of South African languages. I only engage in conversation with people that I know will understand my situation because I have met people who have been irritated by my lack of competence in their languages, even though they would want me to speak to them in their own languages. For this reason, my practice is limited to

interactions with friends and colleagues and, unfortunately, I do not have enough friends for my additional languages. With Malaŵian languages, I have never exercised such caution because I have never had any unpleasant experiences with the "owners" of any language.

My fifth strategy is what I may call "deduction using my mother tongues". I mostly use my mother tongues to learn the other African languages I know based on the many similarities and differences that exist among the languages, especially the similarities. When I get input from other languages, I try to figure out any such similarities or differences and use them in my learning. Thus, I am able to come up with my own rule(s) in the language(s), which I then generalize. In this regard, studying language and linguistics, which can be seen as another strategy, has helped me quite a lot. I have been exposed to different elements of the general structure of language, which has equipped me with a "tool box" that I (can) use for learning language. As you can see, generalization is another of my strategies. But, while these two strategies help in facilitating my learning process, they have their own drawbacks. Deduction is cumbersome and tedious. As a strategy, it is difficult to use in real time because it requires a lot of time. The process is also often marred by inaccuracy with regard to the generalizations, or rather overgeneralizations, that I tend to make.

Another strategy that I use is the media, especially television. My focus will be on television because I do not read newspapers or magazines much; neither do I listen to the radio that much. At the present time, I mainly use television in learning Zulu and other South African languages. I learn a lot about these languages from different programs on South African Broadcasting Corporation (S.A.B.C.) and other television channels that provide translation. I find these translations very useful. Though some research seems to suggest that television is a "dry" medium of learning, I benefit from it. What serves as evidence for the "dryness" of the medium is the fact that I can understand the languages far better than I can speak or write them. This strategy supports my earlier point that structural similarity helps me in learning new languages. I say this based on my experience with Afrikaans, which is also featured on S.A.B.C. and other television channels. I have not benefited from watching Afrikaans programmes that provide English translations. I believe this is because I have not figured out similarities between the language and my other languages.

I have also benefited from various strategies employed in the classroom with regards to Chichewa, which I learnt as a subject in school for twelve

years, and English, which I have studied for more than sixteen years and which I have used as a medium of instruction throughout my education. Some of these strategies are memorization, chanting, role-play, translation, dictation, reading for comprehension and writing. The strategies employed by my language teachers have helped me polish my Chichewa and English and raised them above my other languages. Let me use an example. A teacher would give us a poem to memorize, mostly through chanting. Later on, they would ask us to role play the story in the poem. In the course of memorizing the poem, I would learn the vocabulary and other elements used in the poem, which I would be able to use in the context of the role play. Based on this, I would be able to use the language learned in real time contexts similar to the one in the role-play. Such strategies have exposed me to various aspects of the two languages, and they have given me a chance to internalize them, and to practice using them in context. However, in the case of English, these strategies have not helped me adequately with respect to pragmatic aspects of the language. One of the reasons behind this is that I have heavily relied on second-language sources, both human and otherwise.

In addition to these strategies, I have also employed and continue to employ some personal strategies for learning English. These include reading all kinds of literature, watching films and television, listening to music, making deliberate efforts to speak the language even in situations where I was supposed to speak other languages, and writing literary works of my own. Jamaican English, or Patwa, presents the best example of how I have used music as a learning strategy. I have learned the language through listening to reggae and ragamuffin music, especially from Jamaica. Interestingly though, reggae music has not helped me to learn other languages.

The last strategy that I would like to mention is teaching language. In the course of teaching other people, I learn a lot more myself. English is the language that best illustrates this point for me. I have taught English as a second language at secondary and at tertiary level. Teaching the language has given me an opportunity to reflect on different aspects of the language and as a result I have developed a deeper understanding of it.

11. Conclusion

In closing, I would like to say that the story I have laid out here is far from exhaustive. Also, it was not easy for me to describe some of my experiences in a way that will immediately make sense to other people.

This goes to show how complicated multilingualism is, both as a subject of linguistic enquiry and as a "living concept" in some people's lives. I have tried to share as many of my personal experiences as a multilingual as possible in order to shed some light on how a multilingual mind works. One fact that stands out is that multilingualism is an amazing thing to have. Its advantages by far outweigh its disadvantages.

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Reflective questions and points for exploration

1. The literature on multiple language development gives much prominence to one's first language (L1), exploring its impact on any additional language in one's language learning repertoire. Newer sources indicate, however, that with the majority of the world population being multilingual, for many people it is not clear what constitutes their first, second, or third language (cf. e.g. de Bot et al. 2005: 6). This narrative, and to some extent those of Haiyan Hu and Neil O'Flaherty, are examples supporting the validity of this observation. What is your personal experience? Were you exposed to one or more languages and dialects from birth? How about the majority of people you are familiar with? Do their early years fall on the mono- or multilingual end of the language continuum?

2. If you are a speaker of more than one language or dialect, can you describe them as a socially preferred or a socially stigmatized variety? Have societal or peer attitudes with regard to the status of your dialect(s) or languages impacted your language learning experience, language maintenance or language loss? If yes, say in what ways? If no, what has sustained your motivation and positive attitude?

3. The author of this narrative has an impressive repertoire of both typologically related and typologically non-related languages. Some of his languages serve important communicative purposes in his daily life within his various local speech communities, while others are world languages, like English and French, and in a different way, Esperanto. Why do you think people who are native speakers of powerful world languages such as English, for instance, often show lack of interest in learning a foreign language or talk about their lack of aptitude for learning languages (cf. e.g. Edwards 1994), while millions of people like Chimwemwe continue with their language learning even when already in command of one or more world languages and knowing several local languages?

4. This narrative reveals a multilingual speaker who moves freely between accents and dialects in his interactions. Are you a linguistic chameleon yourself or do you tend to stick to your *default* accent in your various languages, e.g. American or British English, Mexican or Castilian Spanish, etc.? What in your opinion is the motivation behind such accent and dialectal switches for those who do them? If you are the type of person who is reluctant to shift accents or switch between dialects, what are the reasons for your being that way? Or maybe you fall somewhere in the middle in this respect. If yes, what are some of the factors that

shape your linguistic behavior under different circumstances involving different interlocutors?

5. Can you say that, like Chimwemwe, you find content words easier to acquire than function words? If yes, why do you think this is so? Examples of the former category are nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs (*sky, postpone, gorgeous, quickly*), while the latter covers prepositions, auxiliary verbs, conjunctions, articles and particles (*for, do, because, the, not*).

6. Can you relate to the following statement from this narrative or is your experience somewhat different in this respect? "I can say that learning languages has become easier with every language that I have added to my repertoire. The more languages I know, the more linguistic information I have as a resource for additional languages. I also think that the more languages I have learned, the more difficult it has become for me to store, maintain, and keep apart information about them. In addition, it is more difficult for me to keep my languages apart during communication. I often find myself mixing information from different languages without realizing it. In some cases I even fail to account for the language to which some piece of information that I produce belongs."

7. Chimwemwe talks about his language learning experiences as enrichment and does not see himself as losing his identity with the addition of more and more languages, though he feels "torn between the cultures of the languages he knows". He also states, "I see myself as being able to embrace as many identities as the languages that I know". This stance differs from some other narratives in the literature in recent years where people talk about traumatic identity re-negotiation and re-positioning when taking on new language personae. Do you believe that part of the reason for these differences may lie in the different experiences immigrants have as compared to the experiences of indigenous language minorities? Valdes and Figueroa (1994) coined the terms "circumstantial multilinguals", as opposed to "elective multilinguals", in order to emphasize the difference between those who have to learn another language to survive and those who choose to learn.

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Chapter 7

A life of learning languages

Sally Freedman

Languages Explored: English, French, Latin, Hebrew, Spanish, German, Akkadian, Arabic, Sumerian

At an early age I came to value language both as a practical tool for communication and an esthetic source of delight. I think this essential appreciation of language has helped to motivate me through a lifetime of learning languages.

I have studied English, French, Latin, German, Spanish, Hebrew, Arabic, and the ancient Near Eastern languages Akkadian and Sumerian. I can now claim native fluency and literacy only in English, though I was equally adept in French at one time. I studied German and Arabic in school and earned excellent grades on my report cards, but I never achieved much productivity, although I did learn to read German in specialized contexts. I studied Spanish intensively in an immersion setting, and in a few weeks I became more proficient than in several years of traditional classroom instruction in other modern languages. Studying Latin for a year in middle school provided a solid foundation for intensive study of different types of grammar in later academic settings. In college I started to study biblical Hebrew and ancient Akkadian, both of which I learned to read and translate. After college I made an attempt to learn the spoken Hebrew of modern Israel and achieved very good comprehension but very limited production. In graduate school I studied Sumerian and acquired some ability to read and translate.

There are significant similarities and significant differences in all this language learning. I studied some languages (English, French, Spanish, modern Hebrew) in order to use them in real-life situations; I studied some only in order to read texts for academic, scholarly purposes (biblical Hebrew, Akkadian, Sumerian). I studied some as part of a mandatory school curriculum (Latin, German, Arabic, Sumerian); I studied others because I wanted to (biblical Hebrew, Akkadian, Spanish). And I had

widely divergent levels of success in achieving what I needed or wanted to do with these languages. I have only spotty and general memories of the processes by which I acquired the languages I studied many years ago, but I hope the following narrative will elucidate what, in my view, were the factors that helped or hindered my learning.

English

English is my native language, but I didn't just pick it up – I learned it, and throughout my life I have continued learning it, even as I have learned other languages.

When I was a child, my mother taught me. She was an English teacher who loved the language and was meticulous about it. She insisted on correct grammar and pronunciation. She made sure I used *lay* and *lie* correctly, and she never allowed me to say "liberry" for *library*. From my earliest years, she also read to me. Even after I learned to read, she continued to read books to me that were above my reading level but not my comprehension level. When she no longer read to me, we still discussed what I was reading. She enjoyed providing an explanation for a word or expression I didn't know. If she didn't know it herself, we'd look it up in the dictionary together – and often take note of a few more interesting words on the same page.

Always an avid reader of fiction, I became a truly voracious one in high school. I read everything I could find – classics, adventure stories, contemporary thrillers, murder mysteries. At one point I went through a multi-volume series of an anthology called *The Best Plays of 19--*. I developed a large vocabulary from reading and from looking words up the dictionary. There wasn't much difference between my active and passive vocabulary. I used most of the words I knew from books, even though I sometimes pronounced them oddly. I didn't realize this would sound pretentious to some people.

I also learned English from writing. When I was young, I wrote fantasy stories about escaping from uncomfortable situations. In college I wrote poetry about love and suffering, as well as research papers. In my twenties I wrote three historical romance novels that were eventually published. After graduate school I had a job for three years working on a translation project. Then I worked for 16 years on a weekly university newspaper, first as senior writer and then as editor in chief. Later I was a freelance editor for a book publisher.

I believe that writing has continually contributed to my learning English. In searching for the right word to express what I want, I review my vocabulary. In constructing a sentence that conveys the meaning I intend, I try out different grammatical forms and structures. When I edit, I consider the writing from the viewpoint of a reader; I assess clarity and coherence; and then, as a writer again, I revise to achieve more effective communication.

French

When I was 10 years old, my father joined the Foreign Service. My first encounter with a foreign language was when we landed in France on our way to Switzerland. My mother and I visited a restroom staffed by an elderly attendant who took strong exception to the American coin my mother gave her. The old woman followed us out of the bathroom and down the street, shouting. We couldn't understand her words, but we had no difficulty comprehending her message.

I had my first formal lesson in French a few days later, when we arrived in francophone Geneva, where the curriculum of the International School included a daily French lesson for all students. After I checked in at the school office, the headmaster escorted me to a class already in progress, which happened to be French. Because I was new, I was sent into the hall with a textbook and another fifth-grader to tutor me. I have never forgotten the first page he showed me: *Ballon* 'a circle'. *Ballon rouge* 'a red circle'. *Le ballon rouge est sur la table. Le ballon rouge est sous la table.* I was both amazed and fascinated by how the simple line drawings made the meaning of the words as plain as day: ball, red ball, red ball on the table, red ball under the table.

I have no memory of any other French lesson, but I know the style of instruction was the standard grammar translation method of the late 1950s. This was well suited to my personality, as I was a good student, with a retentive memory and conscientious study habits. I had no objection to repetitive exercises, and I liked the feeling of accomplishment I got from completing them successfully. I was always good at grammar, and I learned to write competently, according to the standards of the classroom.

After a while I was able to navigate practical situations with ease – traveling on public transportation, making purchases in shops. I have no memory of feeling anxious or uncomfortable speaking French in Geneva.

Perhaps this was because the stakes were never very high, and I was never required to reach an advanced level. At first I only went to town with friends whose French was more fluent than mine, so I received support whenever I needed it. I didn't feel any pressure to compete or to prove myself. I could pace myself, taking on more difficult tasks when I felt ready. I never had to speak French in taxing or intimate social contexts, because all my friends were English speakers. I never tried or wanted to make French-speaking friends.

Latin

Starting in seventh grade, I dutifully took Latin in school, because Latin was something I thought educated persons ought to know (this idea probably came from my mother). I quickly recognized how much knowing Latin would improve my English vocabulary, and my French vocabulary as well. I intuitively came to use all three languages to make meaning across linguistic boundaries. Though this was especially true for lexicon, it also applied to grammar and other categories: Since French had a subjunctive, it seemed reasonable to me that Latin should have one too, and that a vestigial English subjunctive should provide the explanation for such turns of phrase as *if I were you*. Though I only took two years of Latin, what I learned in Latin class about grammar and syntax shaped all my subsequent learning of languages, and I was always very aware of how knowledge of one language could inform understanding of another.

French II

After five years in Geneva, we moved to Dakar, Senegal – another French-speaking city. Here I attended the public *lycée.* Although Senegal had gained its independence from France a few years before, this high school was still part of the French system, and there were two tracks of study – "classical" and "modern". The classical track included Latin and Greek, but my two years of Latin weren't enough to put me at the level of the students in the classical track, so I enrolled in the modern track. This involved starting German. I still remember the shock of realizing I was going to have to study German in French. And history, and mathematics, and physics, and … everything – in French.

Neither my parents nor I thought this would be so difficult. Didn't I already speak French? I had had a French lesson every day for five years,

and I could navigate daily life without effort. But it was exhausting to hear and speak and think and write in French all day. And then to come home and study and do homework!

There were no other foreign students in my class. There was no support system – no tutoring, no French for Speakers of Other Languages – but the school had an inherent multicultural character. Perhaps two-thirds of the students and some of the teachers spoke an African language (or several) in addition to French. A number of students who belonged to an ethnic group called Lebanese may also have spoken Arabic at home.

I don't remember teachers ever commenting on my language skills, except in French class, where academic grammar and style were part of the subject matter. This class, which was taught by a white Parisian woman, was tough. Every week we had to memorize 20 lines of poetry to recite. I learned to memorize, which stood me in good stead in other classes as well. I found I was a pragmatic learner: I could learn what I needed for a recitation or a test and then forget it. I retained details and specifics only so long as I was using them. What I did retain was structural fundamentals – forms, styles, conceptual issues. And, as in English, I found it easy to absorb vocabulary from the required reading. We read all sorts of literature – prose, poetry, drama, with associated commentary and criticism.

Another thing we did in French class was produce a two- or three-page essay every other week. Like my friends, I found this a chore, but I think this was what pushed me to the level of true bilingualism. Being required to produce a significant volume of language was important, but so, for me, was the opportunity to do it in writing – to compose and revise in private, to collect my thoughts, correct my grammar and make each piece as good as I could before having to expose it to anyone else. This helped build my capacity to speak without embarrassment or frustration.

By the time I finished high school I was performing in French at my true intellectual level, and people who didn't know me believed I was a native speaker. So it took me 8 years to achieve complete fluency, spoken and written: five years of daily classes in a French-speaking country, plus three years of total immersion in a rigorous academic setting. I believe that my learning was hindered to some degree by my personality, which made me reluctant to speak when I was uncertain of my accuracy; this slowed me down. On the other hand, forced production and ongoing correction over a long period of time eventually propelled me to a very high level of achievement.

Hebrew

In Dakar I had two good friends from school – a French girl I shared a desk with and a boy whose father was an Israeli diplomat. There were also a few teens from the US, children of Embassy personnel, who didn't go to the French high school. With my school friends, I spoke French; with the American kids, I spoke English.

The Israeli boy also spoke English. He came to Dakar a year later than I did, with less French, and he achieved proficiency in French more rapidly than I did. I think this was partly because of natural ability and an outgoing personality, but perhaps also because his parents provided him with a one-on-one tutor and because French was his third or fourth language (after Hebrew, German and English). He introduced me to the Hebrew alphabet, coaching me on how to form the letters. We analyzed how some variations would make the difference between legibility and illegibility, and other variations were irrelevant. I had never really thought about writing systems before, and I found this intriguing.

When I went to college I followed up my interest in Hebrew. At first I sat in on a modern Hebrew class that used a textbook designed to provide survival skills for new immigrants to Israel. The class was informal and didn't demand much. I remember almost nothing about it, except that it introduced me to Hebrew grammar. Though the book focused on memorizing practical vocabulary using a kind of audio-lingual method, I quickly became fascinated by what I could perceive of the underlying structure of the language, which was radically different from anything I knew. All the languages I was acquainted with were Indo-European. Though mutually incomprehensible, Latin, French, English and German all shared certain fundamental characteristics of structure and syntax. Hebrew was something else – a Semitic language.

According to scholars, the family of Semitic languages evolved from a common ancestor known as Proto-Semitic, which originated in the Middle East long before writing was invented. A fundamental characteristic of the languages in this family is a structure based on groupings of three consonants. A given "root" of three consonants expresses a concept, and different aspects of the concept are expressed by adding prefixes, suffixes and vowels to the root. For instance, in Hebrew the root DBR expresses the concept of speaking; the verb 'to speak' is *ledabber*, 'speech' is *dibbur*. The same affixes and vowel patterns can be used for different roots.

Once I discovered Semitic grammar, I pretty much abandoned studying Hebrew as a modern spoken language. I started studying the ancient

form of the language preserved in the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament) and enrolled in courses that focused on grammar and textual analysis – on learning about the language rather than learning to speak it. This really appealed to me. I had always liked grammar. I enjoyed learning about cases and conjugations in Latin, in German, in French. Grammatical categories made sense to me, and I loved analyzing structure. I found that discovering the meaning of a Hebrew text was a lot like working out a puzzle. You figured it out by identifying the consonantal roots and sorting out the various morphemic accretions that provided semantic refinement. All of these could be obscured by phonemic variations caused by fortuitous juxtapositions, and to make sense of the words you had to untangle them. I found this really fun.

Though I was no longer studying spoken Hebrew, when I visited Israel for the first time with my parents I was able to sound out street signs and advertisements in cursive and stylized modern fonts, and I found I could understand some words and expressions – but I wouldn't speak. When my mother wanted me to make inquiries at the bus stop, I said I didn't know modern terminology. I told her I couldn't say, "Where does this bus go?" All I could say was "Whither goeth this chariot?" She laughed, and we made our inquiries in English.

On the same trip my Israeli friend from high school took me to visit his German grandparents, who were gracious as I struggled to be polite and make conversation in their language. I believed I had acquitted myself tolerably, but as we left their house my friend said, "I thought you spoke German!"

"How should I speak German?" I replied defensively. "I only studied it for a couple of years in a classroom in Africa."

Perhaps he only meant to apologize for putting me in an uncomfortable situation, but I thought he was mortified by my performance, and I felt humiliated. I became even more resistant to speaking any foreign language I didn't know as well as English and French.

Nevertheless, after I earned my bachelor's degree I decided I wanted to take graduate courses in archaeology at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. All the lectures were given exclusively in Hebrew, so of course a prerequisite of enrollment was competence in modern spoken Hebrew.

On the basis of a written placement test, I arrived in Israel for five weeks of intensive Hebrew before the academic year began. The course met 33 hours a week, six hours on Sundays through Thursdays and three hours on Friday mornings. There were about 10 students in my class. Many were American, but there were native speakers of other languages

as well, and only Hebrew was used in class. The teacher was conscientious and thorough, but I don't remember any fun in the class, any laughter, any games. It was all business. There was virtually no spontaneous production of language, no interviews, no role play, no conversation. We followed the textbook. For homework we prepared exercises. Occasionally we wrote essays, but I felt crushed by the number of corrections on my papers when I got them back. Outside of class we were supposed to listen regularly to news on the radio, which was delivered in rapid-fire Hebrew that I found almost entirely incomprehensible. We were also told to refrain from speaking our own language and to practice speaking Hebrew as much as possible – with each other, with shopkeepers, busdrivers, casual acquaintances. But all the American students roomed together in dorms, so it was easy to avoid following this advice.

As the summer progressed, I did well enough in class, but I felt increasingly overwhelmed. I stopped making any attempt to socialize with Israelis and moved off campus with an English-speaking roommate.

When the academic year began, I started my archaeology classes and found that my comprehension improved daily, as I listened to lectures on topics that engaged me. I developed a fondness for the native Israeli lecturers, whose accent conformed to the pronunciation I had been taught, but I also learned to understand lecturers whose pronunciation was affected by some other first language. However, I was virtually mute. I came to class at the last minute and left as soon as the last word of the lecture was spoken, terrified that someone might speak to me. When one friendly boy asked if he could borrow my notes, I refused on the grounds that my atrocious spelling would make them unreadable for him. After that I made sure to keep my head down and avoid eye contact with anyone.

I got a job with an American archaeologist and started to work every afternoon with another American, whose Hebrew was virtually non-existent. With her, I developed a little more confidence. My Hebrew might be bad, I thought, but at least it was better than hers. When we went places I could order food or ask what things cost. Eventually I decided to try my Hebrew among the Arabic-speaking merchants of the Old City. All went well until I left my sunglasses in a little shop and went back to ask for them. When a look of shock came over the owner's face, I realized that, instead of saying 'I forgot my glasses' (*mishkafayim*), I had mistakenly said 'I forgot my pants' (*michnasayim*)! Scarlet-faced, I snatched the glasses off the counter and fled. Though I could see the funny side of this incident, it further reinforced my disinclination to speak Hebrew.

I never did become fluent. I also never learned to read or write very well. Modern Israeli texts are generally written without vowels; the reader is expected to supply the vowels (rather like the ads for Speedwriting in the NY subways: "Lrn Spdwrtng Gt Gd Jb!"), so my lack of fluency hindered my ability to read. Virtually all the articles required for my courses were in English, and I never took the time or trouble to read newspapers or magazine articles. I also never developed any facility in writing, because I was allowed to write my papers in English. I immersed myself in my English-speaking job and made plans to go back to the States. When I left at the end of the year, I went away with a profound sense of failure, even though I had completed my courses successfully and been accepted in a PhD program at the University of Pennsylvania.

What was the essential difference between my experience with French and my experience with Hebrew? I started learning French at a younger age and spent more years on it, but there were many factors that should have enabled me to learn Hebrew in less time: I was the same intelligent human being, the same conscientious student; I was motivated; I acquired a good foundation through formal instruction; and I put myself in an immersion situation. The essential difference, I think, was that my negative emotions interfered with my ability to learn. I didn't have enough support or positive reinforcement to offset my self-consciousness, so that each embarrassing setback made me more reluctant to risk another one. In a vicious cycle, as my discomfort increased, the rewards of speaking Hebrew decreased, until I abandoned the effort. It was a relief to go back to the States, to ancient texts.

Akkadian

Like Hebrew, Akkadian is a Semitic language. It was spoken by the people of ancient Mesopotamia (the area that is now Iraq), and although it died out by around 400 BC, archaeologists have unearthed many thousands of Akkadian texts written on clay tablets over more than two millennia.

I first became acquainted with Akkadian when I was in college and took a course in it while I was also studying biblical Hebrew. There was no Akkadian textbook for beginners. There was no simplified grammar, only a comprehensive linguistic study (in German) that ran to several hundred pages, with an appendix that included tables of declensions and

conjugations. There were one or two basic readers (also in German) that presented a few texts with translations and glossaries.

My first Akkadian teacher chose not to use any of the German readers; instead, he gave us the text of the Code of Hammurabi, a collection of laws written in Babylon around 1800 BC, which was available in a book that provided a transliteration into the Roman alphabet as well as an English translation. So my first experience of Akkadian was working from a transliterated text, learning grammatical principles as they happened to come up, using the big German grammar book for reference. This offered a basic introduction to the language – another application of the grammar translation method that had always been comfortable for me.

The linguistic structure of Akkadian is similar to that of Hebrew, and the process of reading Akkadian texts in transliteration involves the same kind of puzzle solving as reading ancient Hebrew. The difficulty of learning to read original Akkadian texts is not the language but the cuneiform writing system. Like the characters in Chinese and Mayan writing, cuneiform symbols were originally based on pictures, and in the earliest texts the signs are clearly recognizable as animals, plants, and so on. Over time, however, the pictorial shapes became stylized into combinations of wedge-shaped ("cuneiform") strokes. As the writing system developed and was adapted for different languages, the number of signs multiplied, as did the number of possible readings for individual signs, so that a given cuneiform sign might represent the item it originally depicted, a homonym of the word for that item, a syllable derived from the word for the item, or another concept associated with the item. (For instance, the sign that looks like a star may stand for *star* or *sky* or *god* or the adjective *divine* or the syllabic sound *an* – among other things.) The total number of individual cuneiform characters is something on the order of 600, and the number of possible readings for any one character may be as many as 10 or 12. To decipher a text, you have to first identify the signs and then determine the relevant reading for each one, based on context.

When I started my PhD studies, I had to become proficient at reading cuneiform. This was a new kind of task for me. Cuneiform signs are groups of vertical, horizontal and diagonal strokes; the most complex signs contain as many as a dozen strokes or more, and many common signs are complex. I now believe it would have been a good idea to pick 5 or 10 signs a day and learn to draw them, to use active techniques of producing signs myself. But I didn't do that; I learned the general outlines and relied on passive recognition – as if someone learned that the letters

c, o and *u* were small and round but didn't focus on the openings and relied on context to indicate whether a word was *cat* or *oat* or the meaningless *uat.* This was a lazy way, but I was more interested in the language than in committing the shapes to memory to improve my reading skills. I would start with a cuneiform text and create a transliteration, looking up each sign in a reference manual; then I would work from the transliteration to analyze grammatical structures and contemplate semantic nuances to make a translation. I was interested in poetical resonance and literary allusion and comparative linguistic lexical implications – in making meaning rather than becoming a practitioner of the language.

Arabic

My studies at the University of Pennsylvania were financed by a federal government fellowship intended to encourage the acquisition of non-European languages. At first, Hebrew was one of the languages supported by the fellowship, but then the criteria changed, and I switched to Arabic in order to remain eligible for the fellowship.

The people in my first-year Arabic class had very different goals and expectations. Some of them wanted to get jobs with oil companies; some wanted to reconnect with family roots; some wanted to read classical literature. I was the only one who was primarily interested in how Arabic compared to other Semitic languages.

I was alone in that class in another respect: I was the only one who had a solid foundation in grammar in any language. The teacher spent the first couple of classes explaining subject and object, pronoun and preposition – which were foreign words to many of the students. Once again I was studying a language according to the grammar translation method, and once again I did well.

Arabic is written with an alphabet which involves memorizing about 30 signs. Like Hebrew, it is written from right to left, and it includes both consonants that are always notated and vowels that are sometimes omitted – features that were familiar to me from Hebrew. Compared to cuneiform, Arabic writing was simple, and it wasn't hard for me to learn what I needed in order to shine in the classroom. Having already learned to pronounce unfamiliar sounds like the French *r* and the Hebrew *chet,* I was able both to hear and to produce Arabic sounds creditably, even the guttural *ain* and *ghain*. Perhaps this is because I have a good ear for music, and I can sing on key.

I quickly learned to read the texts in our reader, to compose acceptable sentences and to respond to predictable questions. I got straight A's – but I didn't learn the language. I didn't love it; I didn't need it; and I forgot everything as soon as I took my last exam. Ten years later I could hardly recall the alphabet; now, 30 years later, I don't recognize more than a letter or two, and all I remember how to say are a couple of curses and *Salaam aleikum* ('peace to you' for *hello* and *goodbye*). What I do remember is grammatical structure and word formation and how they relate to other Semitic languages, which is all I ever wanted to know. I also remember how to produce the phonemes.

Sumerian

In graduate school I also took two years of Sumerian, a language that is related to no other known language, ancient or modern. The people who spoke it invented the cuneiform writing system, and it was written for 1000 years in all kinds of texts (including royal inscriptions, myths, letters, laws, contracts, tax receipts). After Sumerian died out as a spoken language around 2000 BC, Akkadian speakers continued to use it for centuries as a scholarly and religious language (rather as the Catholic Church used Latin).

I was taught Sumerian much as I was first taught Akkadian: My professor handed out some charts of grammatical forms and told the class to memorize them. Then he read through relatively simple texts with us, elucidating grammatical points as they came up. This meant the grammar was presented rather haphazardly. I would have benefited from a more systematic presentation, more exercises designed to force me to memorize paradigms. I never did feel I had a good handle on Sumerian. Years later, when I had an opportunity to teach Sumerian myself, I had to study it more conscientiously so I could explain it to my students. I learned about the linguistic concepts of agglutinativity and ergativity, and it all began to make much more sense to me. But as soon as I stopped teaching and didn't need it, I quickly forgot it.

Spanish

Much later in life I enrolled in a program to earn a Master's degree in teaching English to speakers of other languages. In the course of these

studies I discovered many things that illuminated my previous language-learning experiences. To cite just two examples: The distinction between Basic Intercultural Communication Skills (BICS) and Communicative Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) articulated by Jim Cummins (Cummins 1979) neatly described the difference between the workaday French I had learned in Geneva and the educated French it took me another two years to achieve in Dakar; and the notion of the "affective filter" delineated by Krashen and Terrel (1983) helped explain how the negative emotions of performance anxiety and fear of failure interfered with my learning to speak Hebrew.

As part of the program I had the opportunity to teach English in a foreign country for eight weeks. I picked Mexico as my destination because I had been thinking I should become familiar with Spanish, and I knew that going to a Spanish-speaking country would be a strong motivator. The struggle of learning French and the trauma of trying to learn Hebrew were decades behind me. I was engaged in the new and exciting enterprise of learning TESOL, and I was energized by the prospect of experiencing language learning myself in a new way.

Before I left the US, I took Spanish lessons with two teachers who had been trained in the methods of experiential learning. Their classes were lively and empowering, with a lot of activity and a lot of laughter. I was able to speak sooner and with less resistance than in any other language I ever tried to learn though I still had attacks of self-consciousness that kept me from participating in some activities. I think I would have made even more progress if there had been a greater proportion of academic, grammar-based teaching, but I have no way of knowing for sure. Perhaps I would have just become more intimidated.

I left for my internship in Mexico feeling optimistic. It turned out to be an inspired choice. In Veracruz, where I was teaching, there were few US tourists or English-speaking locals. I roomed with another American intern, whose Spanish was much better than mine, which provided me with a sense of security in case of need, but we had different work schedules, so there was a natural incentive for us to function independently. My roommate was generous and supportive. Time and again we did something together that primed and prepared me to do the same thing later on my own. Moreover, the Mexican people were courteous and helpful; when I spoke Spanish, they wanted to understand, to meet me halfway. In a very short time I was able to negotiate my way into town on the bus, do basic shopping and errands. When I was able to go on a trip with a visitor who spoke no Spanish at all, I bought long-distance

bus tickets, coped with menus and waiters in restaurants, exchanged pleasantries with hotel staff, and even asked strangers for directions on the street.

All the time I was in Mexico, I read Spanish whenever I could. On the bus I constantly looked out the window at signs and billboards. At night I read books – first a translation of one I had already read in English, then a book that was short and relatively simple. I forced myself not to use my dictionary for every word I didn't know but to keep reading for the general meaning of a passage; I was surprised to find how often I could get the gist without knowing every word, and how much I gained from extensive reading.

By the time I left Mexico, I had learned more in eight weeks than I ever imagined I could. Of course I had only made a start, but I felt happy and excited by the whole experience. I felt a new kind of confidence, which was not diminished by the knowledge that Spanish is a famously "easy" language and that my familiarity with French had provided me with many lexical cues. I felt I had finally learned how to tackle the project of learning a new language.

Conclusions

Looking back over five decades of studying and learning many different languages, I find there are several motifs that recur.

I like to acquire a thorough grounding in grammar. This provides a framework for my learning. Without the framework, I feel insecure, and I find it hard to make sense of and keep track of specifics and refinements. This may explain why I was gone much farther with my studies of Hebrew and Akkadian than of Sumerian. When I started to study Hebrew, I first learned the basics of Semitic linguistics, which also applied to Akkadian; there was no similar introduction when I started to study non-Semitic Sumerian, and I didn't develop an interest in going on with it.

Also, I am essentially a pragmatic learner. I tend to learn well what I need to use. When I needed French in Geneva, I learned only as much as I needed for survival, but when I went to Dakar and needed more, I eventually achieved true fluency. If I don't need a language (like Arabic), I don't learn it thoroughly enough to retain it.

Perhaps the most important motivator for me is intellectual interest. I am essentially interested in language. When I learned French as a child,

I had very little choice about it, but the language learning I have done as an adult, of my own volition, has mostly been of the ancient languages of the Near East. I think these have been especially appealing to me for two reasons: because solving linguistic puzzles has engaged me intellectually (a positive reason) and because deciphering ancient texts doesn't require speaking (a negative reason).

My experiences and subsequent choices highlight the powerful effect of emotions on the enterprise of learning. At least for some personalities – such as mine – the emotional context of learning a language can be a make-or-break issue. Overwhelmed and discouraged, I developed such negative emotions about modern Hebrew that I was unable to learn it and abandoned the attempt, in spite of the fact that I was interested in it, needed it and had extensive knowledge of the grammar. By contrast, when I was interested in and needed Spanish, even without a solid foundation in grammar the upbeat environment in which I began to study the language, both in the US and in Mexico, helped me develop such positive emotions that I was able to make a great start and look forward to continuing to learn it.

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Reflective Questions and Points for Exploration

1. The author defines the driving forces behind her rich language learning experience in the following way: "At an early age I came to value language both as a practical tool for communication and an esthetic source of delight. I think this essential appreciation of language has helped to motivate me through a lifetime of learning languages". What would you say if you had to complete the blanks in these two sentences: "To me, language is _____. To me, language learning _____".

2. This narrative describes the author's learning experiences with a rich and rather unusual combination of languages, namely English, French, Latin, German, Spanish, Hebrew, Arabic, and the ancient Near Eastern languages Akkadian and Sumerian. In your experience as a student of language, what are the languages most often described and discussed in the language acquisition literature? Do you consider the available empirical evidence as skewed in any way? If yes, what are in your opinion the reasons for researchers favoring certain languages over others? Also, do you believe that there should be more of an effort to remedy this situation? How do you see this being done?

3. Part of Sally Freedman's description of her learning French reads as follows: "… the style of instruction was the standard grammar translation method of the late 1950s. This was well suited to my personality, as I was a good student, with a retentive memory and conscientious study habits. I had no objection to repetitive exercises, and I liked the feeling of accomplishment I got from completing them successfully. I was always good at grammar, and I learned to write competently, according to the standards of the classroom". She describes a similarly positive attitude to grammar with regard to her experience with Hebrew as well: "I started studying the ancient form of the language preserved in the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament) and enrolled in courses that focused on grammar and textual analysis − on learning about the language rather than learning to speak it. This really appealed to me. I had always liked grammar. I enjoyed learning about cases and conjugations in Latin, in German, in French. Grammatical categories made sense to me, and I loved analyzing structure. I found that discovering the meaning of a Hebrew text was a lot like working out a puzzle. … I found this really fun". These two descriptions are very different from what one typically sees in the literature with regard to the so-called grammar translation method. Have you had similarly positive experiences with this or other "discredited methods"? In what specific ways did they facilitate your learning? What does this tell us about the relationship between teaching and learning?

4. Despite being an exceptionally language savvy person in more than one way, throughout her narrative the author describes repeated instances of experiencing low self-esteem, lack of confidence, anxiety, and a sense of failure as a language learner. This insider's (emic) perspective differs to some extent from some researchers' (etic) perspectives on the correlation between these personal attributes and successful language learning. What is your experience in this area? What has been the dy-

namics between these variables in your experiences with your various languages? Has it been different for each language and also, has it been influenced by some additional factors?

5. Language attrition is usually defined as "the non-pathological decrease in a language that had previously been acquired by an individual" (cf. e.g. Köpke and Schmid, 2004: 5). In other words, language attrition means that a speaker of an L1 or a later learned second or foreign language can no longer do something linguistically which s/he had previously been able to do, and this loss of proficiency is not caused by a deterioration of the brain or speech mechanism due to age, illness or injury. Describing her foray into learning Arabic, Sally makes the following observations: "I quickly learned to read the texts in our reader, to compose acceptable sentences and to respond to predictable questions. I got straight A's – but I didn't learn the language. I didn't love it; I didn't need it; and I forgot everything as soon as I took my last exam. Ten years later I could hardly recall the alphabet; now, 30 years later, I don't recognize more than a letter or two, and all I remember how to say are a couple of curses and Salaam aleikum ('peace to you' for hello and goodbye). What I do remember is grammatical structure and word formation and how they relate to other Semitic languages, which is all I ever wanted to know. I also remember how to produce the phonemes". From this description, it seems that attrition has affected different dimensions of the author's Arabic in non-identical ways, and also that the reasons for this are also of a different nature. What, if any, is your experience with language attrition? If you happen to have any experience in this area, what were some of the factors determining the languages in your repertoire affected by attrition? Did you experience a similarly differentiated language loss in various components of the language(s) affected?

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Chapter 8

Linguistic cunning: From Burton to babelfish

Hamzah Henshaw

Languages Explored: English, Latin, French, Japanese, Nepali, Italian, Arabic, Urdu, Afrikaans

"Cunning linguist, daring explorer, superb translator, religious dabbler, amateur doctor, pioneering anthropologist, condemned sexologist, and mystical poet, Captain Sir Richard Francis Burton led a life of unparalleled intrigue." Thus began my Junior thesis at Harvard, a survey of the mystical meanderings of one of the nineteenth century's most intriguing personalities, a man who helped "discover" the source of the Nile and was one of the first Europeans to make the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina. Unbeknownst to my professor, or at least unacknowledged, my opening phrase, "cunning linguist", was intended as a cleverly risqué *double entendre*. The use of this term, passed on to me by my linguistically mischievous father in an email forwarded many years ago, had multiple meanings in this biography of Richard Burton, a man who had not only mastered 29 languages but was also the first translator of the Kama Sutra. This slight pirouette of grammatical gymnastics was meant to pay homage to the supreme multilingual mind of the nineteenth century. I'm sure Burton would have appreciated my naughty noun phrase, even if my professor did not.

My own multilingual narrative is not nearly as varied or fascinating as Burton's, but it does share some interesting parallels. Like Burton, it has been my exploration of Islam and the Muslim world that has ignited my passion for language learning and, more recently, teaching. Like Burton and many others, much of my adult language learning has been *in situ*, namely in smoky sheesha parlors and remote mosques far from my New England home. While my list pales in comparison to his, I too have often initially focused on a "mother" language (i.e., Classical Arabic) and then gradually tuned in to some satellite languages (i.e., Egyptian and Moroc-

can Colloquial Arabic, Urdu, etc.) orbiting the mother tongue. My journey also parallels Burton's in terms of where it began, namely the formal, stuffy atmosphere of grammar school.

The early years: English and Latin

The son of a high school English teacher and a Boston lawyer, books trumped television in my childhood home. Although I did enjoy reading as a youngster, I did not take to it as voraciously as my mother would have liked. Instead, the intricacies of English grammar became my preferred domain. On our early morning drives to school, I remember joining forces with my mother to pick out the grammatical inconsistencies of guests on National Public Radio. "Doesn't *everyone* know that "if" takes the subjunctive?" I would intone, "I mean, come on." Some did not look favorably upon my penchant for pointing out grammatical shortcomings. I remember my father's giving me an especially stern lecture when I corrected my high school headmaster after his making the unconscionable mistake of not using the possessive case with a gerund.

Much of this unbending grammatical fervor can be attributed to the training I received from the fifth through eighth grades within the rigorous confines of the Dexter School. An all-boys grade school whose students wear a coat and tie from Grade 5 on, Dexter was a zealous advocate of structure. In addition to drilling us in the formal, prescriptive rules of English grammar ("never use *that* in a restrictive relative clause – such is the strict domain of *which*"), Dexter was also where I was first exposed to a foreign language, namely Latin. Latin was a natural fit for the school's compartmentalized, ordered outlook on life. I still remember Mr. Coolidge drilling us on the nominative, genitive, dative, accusative, ablative and (on occasion) vocative. Although I shy away from such an extreme focus on grammar and discrete form in my teaching today, I credit much of my academic and linguistic success to these years of Latin study. I like rules, I like tangibility, I like structure. Latin provided all this and more. I trace my knowledge of English grammar, large portions of my French and English lexicon, and even my initial attraction to Islam to my training in Latin. Years later on the SAT, I was able to figure out the word "somnambulist" by breaking it into its Latin roots (viz., *somn* = sleep; *ambula* = walk; *somnambulist* = sleep walker). Even though this is not a language learning experience I aim to replicate in my classroom,

I will have achieved enormous satisfaction if I can influence my students to the same extent that Mr. Coolidge and Latin shaped me.

In retrospect, I believe that my Latin training proved to be effective because it so closely paralleled the type of training I was receiving in my native language. Thus, in linguistic terms, my training in Latin and English were *simultaneous*, and the one strengthened the other. The language teaching methodology employed by Mr. Coolidge, the grammar translation technique, perfectly dovetailed with the school's philosophy of education. A more communicative approach would likely have been much less effective, not only because the ability to communicate in a dead language has quite limited returns, but also because Dexter's academic philosophy of adherence to structure could find no better linguistic expression than in Latin.

High school: French and Japanese

As my journey through the world of New England private education continued, so too did my exploration of foreign languages. Next up on my slate was French, which I began studying in 9th grade on the bucolic, country-club like campus of St. Mark's School in Southborough, MA. The alma mater of my father, uncle, grandfather and countless other Henshaws, St. Mark's witnessed my continued study of Latin, and my first foray into a "live" language, namely French.

Although the St. Mark's French program still featured, much to my academic delight, a strong focus on grammar, what I remember most vividly about my French studies was the introduction of varied new media. In class we would sing songs such as *Bouge de La* 'Move Out of My Way' by MC Solaar, watch movies, including *Au Revoir les Enfants* 'Goodbye, Children', and listen to French newscasts. In addition to the more traditional emphasis on grammar, there was a great focus on French culture. For example, every April 1, we spent much of class trying to affix paper fish on the backs of fellow students in honor of the *poisson d'avril* 'April's Fish' holiday. While I would not call my classroom communicative, and there was nary a "small group" or "workstation" to be found, I remember feeling quite confident *en Français* by the time senior year rolled around.

Despite the relative success of my French studies, I still viewed my endeavors to learn the language primarily as an academic discipline. Unlike many of my peers who traveled to France or spent semesters studying

abroad there, I never fully immersed myself in French culture and as a result didn't imbibe the language as fully.

I did, however, get the chance to spend six weeks traveling in Japan during the summer after my ninth grade year. As one of twelve American youths participating in an International Camper Exchange Program (ICEP), I was given a blitzkrieg introduction to basic Japanese phrases upon arrival in Osaka. I became fascinated by some of the sociolinguistic features of the language, such as the varying levels of formality and politeness when saying "thank you", ranging from the grudging *arrigato* to the eloquent mouthful *domo arrigato gozaimashita*. While some of my fellow travelers made earnest efforts to learn the basics of the Japanese written system, I contented myself to learn a handful of useful lexical chunks. I still break these out to this day when trying to impress a new classroom audience. However, my misplaced query, "*Toilay-wa doko desu-ka?"* 'Where is the toilet?' is often met by confused stares from my Japanese students.

Upon returning to St. Mark's, I continued my exploration of French in the classroom. As a result of never being forced to use my French in the "real world", the mechanics of my French became quite strong, but I never mastered its nuances, and I thus never reached true French fluency. Owing to this, my French abilities have atrophied over the years, and attempts to resuscitate them, most recently during graduate school, have been stymied, in large part because of the static I have gotten from L2 interference. While the grammar of whether a given verb takes *être* or *avoir* in the *passé composé* came back fairly quickly (God bless "Dr. and Mrs. Vandertramp!")[1], my attempts to recall vocabulary landed me in some murky part of my brain, stuck between rusty French, active Arabic, and ever-present English.

While at St. Mark's, another event transpired that would prove incredibly influential in affecting the trajectory of my life − I met Nabil Kassam and later accepted Islam. The story of my first meeting with Nabil has achieved near legendary status, featuring an impromptu meal of goat curry and *masala chai* 'spicy tea' on the floor of Nabil's dorm room. Our relationship thus cemented by our shared love of food, Nabil and I became extremely close friends. Eventually he came to tell me about his

1. A mnemonic device that spells out "Dr. and Mrs. Vandertramp" in the first letters of all verbs which take *être* in the passé composé (viz., *devenir, revenir, monter, rester, sortir, venir, aller, naître, descendre, entrer, retourner, tomber, rentrer, arriver, mourir, partir*)

religion, and through his kindness, patience and generosity, I gradually came to realize that there was a gaping chasm in my spiritual life. Before meeting Nabil, all of my ambitions, desires and goals centered on leading a successful material life. As he explained the principles of Islam to me – the primacy of the Hereafter, the existence of a Day of Judgment and Heaven and Hell, the necessity to remember our Creator – I found my hair standing on end in awe. The fundamental principle of Islam, submitting oneself wholly to Allah, resonated with me as no other idea had before it. In the fall of 1993 I, along with two other friends from St. Mark's, decided to convert to Islam.

Now, don't get me wrong; although I "converted" to Islam way back in 1993, implementing the religion is a lifelong process. By no means did my life change overnight. My linguistic ambitions did, however, shift from a strong European focus to the languages of the Islamic world, primarily Arabic. Four years would pass, however, before I would begin my formal study of Arabic.

The gap year: Nepali and Italian

While I was fortunate to be exposed to several languages in my youth, most of my initial training came in very formal, classroom settings. Wanderlust and its concomitant feeling of rootlessness struck me relentlessly during the "gap year" between finishing at St. Mark's and enrolling at Harvard, when I had the opportunity to spend nine months on the road, traveling around the world.

After brief stopovers in San Francisco and Hawaii, my journey landed me in Kathmandu, where I was to complete a three-month Nepali cultural immersion program called Sojourn Nepal. Our first six weeks in the Nepali capital were divided between intensive Nepali language classes in the morning, a community service project in the afternoon (in my case teaching English at a local school), and experiencing life with a home-stay family in the evenings. Our language courses focused primarily on oral proficiency, and whatever writing we did was only in transliteration. Like my experience in Japan, much of my Nepali language learning centered around memorizing lexical chunks. Unlike in Japan, however, I spent much of my time in Kathmandu with a home-stay family whose English was only slightly stronger than my Nepali. The necessity of communication ("No, I would not care for that piece of goat ear; I realize it's a delicacy, but I must abstain.") forced me to become more proficient

in the language. I went from being largely a passive, classroom-based student of language, to being a much more active learner. I remember traveling with my home-stay father to slaughter a chicken, and pestering him to teach me the names of the various animals in the market. By the time of our Himalayan trek after two months in the country, I had developed sufficient conversational Nepali to exchange campfire banter with our porters. They even taught us how to play the drum and how to sing the lyrics to various folk songs, providing a cultural scaffold upon which to hang my language study.

My time in Nepal was eventually followed by a two-week stay in India, where I impressed myself by being able to distinguish between Nepali and Hindi while on a crowded city bus. My language studies during my three-and-a-half months on the subcontinent pale in comparison to the experience of Richard Burton, who writes about "breaking the back" of Hindi by studying with three servants during a four-month journey from Britain to India. As with Japanese, I achieved a passable level of conversational Nepali while in the country, but the language quickly slipped through my fingers, making an occasional cameo when I was trying to pad my résumé.

After visiting Greece and England, my gap year continued with a six-week stop in Venice to study Art History with the John Hall Pre-University Course. If I had managed to avoid the label of "ugly tourist" during my time in Nepal and India, I fully embraced this title during my stay in Italy. While the academic thrust of our studies revolved around the art and architecture of Venice, there was an optional Italian language add-on. When my mostly British colleagues and I did manage to wake up and attend these classes, we did so grudgingly and with little eagerness. The Italian classes were held at the Arsenale, an alluring Cinquecento naval base. Despite my relatively spotty attendance and poor work ethic, I did pretty well. Italian after all was a Romance language, and all those years of Latin and French came to my rescue. Within weeks I had perfected the phrases I needed to procure myriad canal-side snacks. Interestingly, the Italian courses were quite grammar heavy, and I remember convincing myself that it would be very easy to cram for the test given the relative regularity of the rules. I learned certain bound morphemes (e.g. *-issimo* for the superlative), and used to apply them at random to an amalgam of Italian, French and English adjectives ("the Rialto market is both *bellisimo* and *expensivissimo*"). Somewhat ashamed by the shoddiness of my efforts to learn Italian, I downplayed my abilities when my parents came to visit during Spring Break. Within hours of their arrival,

of course, my stepfather had managed to get us hopelessly lost in a Tuscan hill town. All eyes fell on me, the budding Italian scholar, snoozing in the backseat. I must say that I was quite proud of my performance under pressure, as I managed to both explain our plight and understand a good chunk of the directions. Once again, the problem-solving method of language learning seems to have borne fruit.

The college years: Arabic (part I)

Although the Arabic language had fascinated me ever since I became Muslim in 1993, I did not have the opportunity to study the language until I arrived at Harvard in the fall of 1997. The previous January, during my "gap year", I had spent several weeks visiting various mosques in central England. After a number of the daily prayers, I would watch many of my fellow worshippers retreat to a corner of the mosque, open up the Arabic text of the Quran, and begin reciting in a melodious voice. Meanwhile, I was stuck with my *One Minute Madrasah* book, struggling to memorize the Quranic verses in transliteration. Even more than the desire to read the Arabic text, I yearned to understand the revelation. During Ramadan in England that year, there had been one imam with particularly beautiful recitation. His reading, pleading at verses seeking God's protection and exulting at verses promising great rewards, brought tears to even the most stoic members of the congregation. I knew that my linguistic ignorance was handicapping me from experiencing the wonder of the Quran, and I thus enrolled in first-year Arabic with high hopes and strong motivation.

I point to that first year of Arabic as the greatest language learning experience of my life. Learning a new alphabet and orthographical system, which I expected to be among the greatest challenges of the language, turned out to be a non-issue. By Thanksgiving Break, my Arabic handwriting had leapfrogged my English in terms of legibility. What turned out to be more difficult was the utter lack of cognates when learning new vocabulary. Whereas my English and Latin background had helped speed my acquisition of French and Italian lexis, every new Arabic word had to be laboriously committed to memory. The grammar, too, bore little resemblance to any linguistic system I had previously been exposed to. Take, for example, the *jumla ismiyya*, or nominal sentence. In order to say "The boy is tall", one had to simply utter "*al-rajul taweel*" (literally "The boy tall"). The lack of the verb "to be" in the present

tense, among many others, was a very difficult concept for me. Fortunately, grammar was only one component of the introductory Arabic course. We were using Mahmoud al-Batal's brilliant *al-Kitaab fee Ta'aalum al-Lugha al-'Arabiyya* 'A Textbook for Beginning Arabic', which wove in videos telling of lovesick Maha and sophisticated Khalid and their struggle to fit in as Arabs growing up in New York. In addition to the videos, each chapter of the textbook would delve into some element of Arab culture. One thing that struck me early on was that Arabic was much more than simply a sacred language. My previous exposure to the language had been in mosque sermons or lectures on Prophetic traditions. Now, I realized that Coca-Cola commercials, Chiclets wrappers, and other decidedly profane activities were very much part of the modern Arabic tradition. I remember fuming after a test early on in my career that I hadn't known what a strange-looking, ultra-long Arabic word had meant. Smiling at my anguish, one of my sage classmates remarked, "Oh, you mean 'McDonald's'."

Back in those heady early days, my learning curve was incredibly steep. I remember marveling at how quickly the language was unraveling itself via the expert direction of our professor, Ayman el-Desouky. "Almost all words in Arabic have a three-letter root", he explained. "You must therefore learn the basic sense of a wide corpus of roots, and then, through the magic of morphology, your vocabulary will expand exponentially". Given that Ayman insisted on teaching his class in Arabic from very early on in the semester, I'm not sure I understood this message in quite such eloquent terms at first. Back in high school, my classmates and I had rolled our eyes at our French teacher's insistence on using the "French-only" technique. With Arabic, Ayman had so whet our palates that the desire to comprehend became extremely urgent. When he would occasionally shift into English to explain a particularly abstruse grammar point, I remember feeling some of the wind being taken out of my sails.

At the end of my freshman year, I undertook a job that was to further boost my acquisition of Arabic – I was hired as a researcher-writer for the *Let's Go Budget Travel Guide Series* in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. Scouring the back alleys of Damascus and the mountains of Lebanon for the best budget deals was the supreme communicative, problem-solving activity of a lifetime, and my language improved by leaps and bounds. Here was the vital combination missing in my earlier language studies: I not only had a strong grammatical and semantic understanding of the language (as had been the case with French), but I was also forced to *use* the language in authentic contexts (as with Nepali and Italian). Negotiat-

ing meaning over a shoddy phone line with a disgruntled embassy employee or coaxing information out of Palmyra's only 24-hour pharmacist is a far cry from completing a canned activity in a grammar book. Despite the relative success of my time as a researcher, the experience also helped me "notice the gaps" in my linguistic abilities. I returned for my sophomore year eager to move beyond the first five minutes of a conversation. Chit-chat was getting old; I wanted to delve into something more substantial.

Second year students of Arabic at Harvard have to choose between two distinct tracks: Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) or Classical Arabic. While the former focuses on the Arabic of the newspaper and al-Jazeera, the latter delves more deeply into the Arabic of the Quran and Hadith (Prophetic traditions). Choosing between these two tracks posed something of a quandary. On the one hand, the primary impetus for my learning the language had been to deepen my understanding of Islam. Meanwhile, that modern, more profane form of Arabic that I had heard in Syria and Lebanon had nestled into my heart. Ultimately, I made my choice for linguistic rather than philosophical reasons – while Classical Arabic would be taught predominantly in English, second-year MSA would be all-Arabic. Opting to continue with the immersion method that had worked so well, I thus continued with part II of Mahmoud al-Batal's MSA textbook. As the year progressed, however, I felt my learning curve begin to flatten. Language classes that had at first seemed so new and foreign had become rather blasé and pedestrian. While I continued to score well on the tests, this was largely because I had figured out my professor's "system" – memorize the chapter's major passage and drill on vocabulary and grammar and you are off to the races. Meanwhile, my religious life had followed a similar trajectory to my Arabic pursuits – I was spiritually flat-lining. From this mid-college morass arose a captivating idea; I would spend my Junior spring in Cairo, simultaneously reigniting my passion for both Arabic and Islam.

Unlike many of my former and subsequent plans, this one actually worked. From the moment I touched down in Egypt in January of 2000, I pursued the acquisition of Arabic with renewed vigor. I began studying colloquial Arabic with a perfume-drenched, über-fashionable professor at the American University in Cairo. Earlier I had viewed the colloquial dialects of Arabic with unmasked disdain. I wanted to learn "real" Arabic, the Arabic of the Quran. From the moment I first tried to hail a Cairene taxi, I knew this concept must be discarded. Egyptian Colloquial (or *'aamiyya masriyya*) soon invaded my tongue. How easy it was to not

have to conjugate verbs, to use the present participle in nearly every situation, to add the simple morpheme *bi-* to signify the present and *ha-* to switch into the future. More than for its linguistic simplicity, Egyptian *ʿaamiyya* appealed to me because it was the language actually spoken by the people. Even the most popular Islamic preacher in Cairo at that time, ʿAmr Khaled, could trace much of his popularity to the fact that he spoke the same idiomatic, colloquial Arabic that the masses heard on their favorite soap operas. There was, however, a dark side to this newfound love of colloquial Arabic – my grammatical skills in MSA, once so finely polished, began to corrode. Even when attempting to speak standard Arabic, a familiar Egyptian twang would shine through. As I returned to Harvard for my senior year, I decided that there was only one remedy for this linguistic backsliding: to switch to the classical Arabic track.

Thus, seven years after accepting Islam, I would finally be beginning my study of Quranic Arabic in earnest. Harvard's program, however, ruffled my spiritual feathers as it took an analytical, hermeneutical approach to understanding classical Islamic texts. I found myself parsing the structures of Quranic verses rather than internalizing their message. It was not until much later that I realized that syntactic and morphological analysis only served to deepen my awe at the beauty of the Quran. Nevertheless, after three years of communicative immersion classes taught solely in Arabic, I could not help feeling detached, nay even a bit guilty, at dissecting the language in English. I had to update Arabic grammatical terms to their more clumsy English equivalents ("jussive", "indicative", etc.). I also began to see how the language of instruction could influence the tenor of the class. Our teacher, a freshly minted PhD student, looked at the language from the outside in. Despite her highly refined linguistic skills, she always seemed to distrust the language, and thus failed to appreciate some of its rhetoric. She also seemed quite wary of the several practicing Muslims in the class, convinced that their worldview would hinder their scholarship, while unwilling to admit that the same might be true for her. As my time at college neared its conclusion, the next stop on my multilingual journey appeared – this time it would take me to the heart of Burton's adopted homeland, namely the Indian subcontinent.

The real world: Urdu, Arabic (part II) and Afrikaans

Although I had been exposed to Urdu and other languages of the Indian subcontinent by virtue of my many Indian and Pakistani friends, it was

not until I spent four months in the subcontinent that I finally had time to devote myself to the study of Urdu. The national language of Pakistan, Urdu very closely resembles Hindi, except that it is written in an extension of the Persian/Arabic alphabet rather than Devangari. Despite its relative similarity to Arabic, I never mastered the script of Urdu. Instead, my acquisition of the language, even more than Japanese, Nepali and Italian, has been essentially through socio-cultural osmosis.

Arriving in Pakistan in July of 2001, I had memorized only a few stock phrases courtesy of my many Indian and Pakistani friends in college. One of these phrases was actually a nearly one-minute-long introductory chunk of a religious sermon. Whenever I would unleash this memorized chunk, my Pakistani interlocutors would inevitably overestimate my linguistic proficiency, and rattle off a reply in fast-paced, incomprehensible Urdu. During these moments of uncertainty, I would often focus on the extra-linguistic features of my companion's speech. No quality proved more captivating than the ubiquitous head shake. Before long, I was shaking my way right into the heart of nearly every Indian and Pakistani I spoke to, despite my relative incompetence in the language.

During my four months in India and Pakistan, my daily routine found me sitting cross-legged on the floor for hours at a time listening to religious sermons in Urdu, which were subsequently translated into English. On occasion, one of my American peers or I would be the chosen speaker, in which case I heard English which was then translated into Urdu. This bi-directional process of translation proved to be a tremendous boon in acquiring aural proficiency in the language. I could always tell when my translator was mangling my words. Similarly, I began to be able to recognize eloquent Urdu, which seemed to be peppered with more Arabic words than its less refined, more colloquial cousin. When visiting new people, I could predict and therefore understand their barrage of questions with astounding accuracy: "What is your name? What was your name before Islam? Are you happier now or before? What did your parents say?" I would also notice when they strayed from the well-trodden conversational path: "Have you been circumcised?" A grizzled old man with a flowing white beard asked this rather personal question at a tailor shop where I was being fitted for a traditional shervani. Although I was initially taken aback, this tendency to pry and to ask rather blunt questions seemed to be a cultural norm in the subcontinent. Before long, I too was cavalierly asking people about their salaries and the like. As I spent more time in India and Pakistan, I became more adept at blending in with the crowd – or at least as best as a 250-pound pink Muslim can

hope to – by observing and adopting many of the physical nuances of my hosts. I would therefore freely hold hands with other men and offer to massage the legs of my elders, without any of the connotations that these acts might imply in the West.

Despite my relative progress in achieving cultural literacy, I never developed productive language skills in Urdu. My repertoire of stock phrases has expanded – I can now imitate a train-side samosa and chai dealer – but I am unable to be creative in my language production. I attribute this to my lack of a formal, grammatical foundation in Urdu. Never have I attempted to actually "learn" the language. I did, however, take one step that Burton would have doubtless approved of – I got married to a beautiful Indian girl … from America. Alas, even this step has not managed to solidify my Urdu knowledge, as my wife speaks her parents' native tongue scarcely better than I do. By contrast, upon arriving in India, Burton took for himself a "Búbú" or a "black wife", an Indian woman who served as a temporary mistress. Burton wrote the following about this experience, which was common among British soldiers in India at the time, "The 'walking dictionary' is all but indispensable to the Student, and she teaches him not only Hindostani [sic] grammar, but the syntaxes of native life" (Rice 1990: 50). During my Indian wedding and innumerable Indian parties with sari-bedecked Indian ladies, I too have learned the syntax of the native life of Indian Americans. As for the walking dictionary, I must rely on my in-laws.

After returning to America in 2001, I vacillated between careers, exploring the world of Islamic asset management in New York, Saudi Arabia and South Africa, before deciding that I was a man of letters and not numbers. I subsequently took up my current profession as a teacher. Beginning first at an Islamic school in Massachusetts, I later moved on to an international school in the United Arab Emirates. Despite using my Arabic (and Urdu!) nearly every day in the UAE, I longed to achieve a higher level of proficiency in the language. I had not formally studied Arabic since my time in college, and I felt that I would never reach the Promised Land of true fluency unless I took drastic measures. I therefore applied to CASA (The Center for Arabic Study Abroad), a one-year fellowship in Cairo funded by the US Department of Education.

In the summer of 2004 I therefore found myself in the exact same spot I had been nearly four years earlier, namely a language classroom at the American University in Cairo. Designed to be a "finishing course" for students who had completed four or more years of Arabic study, CASA had a demanding course load. Unlike in my earlier years of Arabic study,

where the learning curve had been so steep, I now felt as if my Arabic skills had plateaued. As one student put it, despite the many hours of homework, we "were swimming in the middle of the ocean, exerting ourselves, but seemingly making no headway". Our classes consisted of dissecting the latest al-Jazeera programming and reading novels of Naguib Mahfouz and Ghasan Kanafani in the Arabic original. While I was at first daunted by the prospect of reading a 300-page novel in a foreign language (and was often tempted to use the remarkable babelfish.com web translator as a crutch), I eventually came to take great pleasure in reading classic literature in a language other than my own. The idea that a language represents an entirely new *Weltanschauung* became crystallized during this time. Subtle nuances of stories such as Yahya Haqqi's *Qandil Umm Hashim* 'The Saint's Lamp', which I had earlier read in translation, began to reveal themselves as I made my way through the Arabic text.

One of CASA's strengths, or so I had heard, was its emphasis on mastering the colloquial Egyptian dialect. To accomplish this task, we watched thirty episodes of an Egyptian soap opera – a prime-time Ramadan special about a villager who had made it big in Cairo but who struggled with infidelity and the modernist tendencies of his children. The main actor from this show, Yahya Fakhrani, came to speak to the CASA fellows, as did other Egyptian and Arab luminaries. While learning colloquial English via the medium of Days of Our Lives or Seinfeld might seem to be a tenuous prospect, I was amazed at how many of the phrases and expressions our teachers extracted from the soap opera I later heard in the subway or on the radio. If nothing else, this style of teaching promoted *noticing,* and its use of authentic material helped prepare me to understand Arabic satellite TV. In the spring, I had a chance to study a variety of Islamic sciences with two scholars from Al-Azhar University. Although these classes were a challenge, their content-based curriculum provided a peg upon which to hang my linguistic aspirations. While writing a fifteen-page Arabic term paper was remarkably taxing, the feeling of satisfaction upon completion was one that more traditional language classes could not provide. My time at CASA convinced me that, on the one hand, teaching languages might very well be my calling, and, on the other, that I needed more training before embarking on a language teaching career of my own. I therefore decided to enroll in the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) Master's program at the School for International Training (SIT) in Brattleboro, Vermont.

Upon completing orientation at SIT, we immediately began two weeks of "disorientation" by studying a "shock" language that was completely

new to us. The intention behind this program was to show that just as language can be a tool for communication, it can also be a means of ex-communication. Beginning at absolute zero in a language was meant to replicate the experience many of our students would have when they began studying English. We were encouraged to keep a language learning log, highlighting what worked, what didn't, and why. The language chosen to shock my system was Afrikaans.

While my two weeks inside the Afrikaans language factory were a bit contrived, my reflections on this experience confirm and extend much of what my more authentic language learning experiences had hinted at. Here are a few excerpts taken from my language learning log:

> Having lived in South Africa before, I have some preconceived notions about Afrikaans. It strikes me as a "white" language and has some apartheid undertones. In the first lesson I'm struck by how English-like Afrikaans seems ("*Waat is you naam?*"), and all the talk about English being a Germanic language begins to make sense.
>
> I'm quite analytical, and I like to get to the grammar rules. I need to write things down in order to be able to produce them. I much prefer concreteness and analysis to forced creativity. When tired or overwhelmed, I have the tendency to flip the "off" switch. My classmates' praise of yesterday puts me in [*sic*] awkward situation of wanting to "prove my ignorance".
>
> Working in groups is helpful because explaining my knowledge helps to consolidate it. Hearing the mistakes of others can be very helpful. Also, being able to manipulate words kinesthetically helped teach the basics of grammar. Having time to formulate hypotheses is very helpful, but I do need to be able to test them. I become frustrated when group work drags because there's no one to bounce language hypotheses off of.

Although Afrikaans is the language I am least proficient in, these reflections written when I was in the midst of studying it reflect the simultaneously exhilarating and frustrating nature of language acquisition. They confirm that I am a grammar hog, and that I like to "break the back of a language" by understanding its grammatical foundations. They suggest that maintaining "face" – which for me consists of finding a happy medium between seeming capable but not domineering or arrogant – is an undercurrent in the language classroom. Finally, they seem to point to a methodology of language teaching – using small group work to encourage learners to bounce hypotheses off of each other – that I now use in my own ESL classroom.

Conclusion

Writing these memoirs has been both cathartic and challenging. On the one hand, it has been a great treat to look at my life journey through linguistic lenses. In exploring my language learning, I have had a rare opportunity to reflect upon the great variety of international experiences I have had the privilege to participate in. While my list of languages learned, books translated and countries visited still pales in comparison to Burton, I do recognize some of his adventurous spirit in my multicultural meanderings. More than that, I realize that learning languages – even bits and pieces of them – has become the defining feature of my wanderlust. Interestingly, the opposite is also true; I have never been to a Spanish-speaking country, in large part because I feel guilty for not having studied such an important language.

Writing this narrative has also afforded me the opportunity to reflect on the inner workings of my multilingual mind and on the relationship between my various languages. While it was my upbringing as the son of a lawyer and an English teacher that first instilled in me a passion for grammar and vocabulary, it was my early studies of Latin which helped develop a syntactic framework through which to "break down" future languages. While Latin cognates obviously helped expand my vocabulary in English, French and Italian, grammatical concepts learned in the Latin classroom – the accusative case indicating a direct object or the role of a predicate nominative – have proved indispensable in places as far afield as my understanding of Arabic grammar. As I have studied more and more languages, I have discovered numerous "shortcuts", features of language that transcend orthography or language family, that often allow me to pick up the basics of a new language more quickly than my peers. As a result, I often find myself drawing on seventh-grade Latin when trying to parse a particularly challenging Quranic verse or visualizing French conjugation charts when teaching English verb tenses.

The fruits of my multilingual exposure seem to be most evident in the areas of grammar and reading. As for other language skills, particularly speaking, I find that my multilingual background is sometimes a hindrance, as a second language often interferes with the production of a third or fourth. Interestingly, this interference is particularly evident when working with languages that I have studied in the classroom such as Arabic and French. On the other hand, languages that I have picked up through cultural osmosis, such as Urdu and Japanese, seem to encounter fewer instances of interference. I attribute this to an almost exclu-

sive reliance on lexical chunks in these languages as opposed to the more dynamic language production found in my "classroom" languages.

While I have become adept at acquiring a smattering of a wide array of languages, I have rarely managed to move beyond the initial stages of courtship with most foreign tongues. I have implemented the formula that seems to work best for me – formally studying the grammar of a language in a traditional classroom setting before plunging headlong into cultural immersion – with only one language, Arabic. Even if I have not managed to master as many languages as my truly multilingual peers, my exposure to a wide variety of languages has helped hone my consciousness of the idiosyncrasies of my native tongue. Just as Burton's fascination with language did not desert him even in America – "Getting liquored up" was an especial favorite of his (Rice 1990: 333) – so too has my awareness of English tenses, idioms, and socio-cultural variations increased as I have delved deeper into language teaching.

Although I have found myself relying more and more on technology in my teaching, I have learned that there is no substitute for old-fashioned sweat and tears when learning a new language. While many of my students (and I!) have become entranced by the allure of pocket dictionaries and web translators like babelfish, they eventually learn that computers are ultimately incapable of finding *le mot juste* 'the perfect word'. While computers may seem to have mastered every conceivable language, they are not truly multilingual.

Inspired initially by rigorous Latin teachers and my conversion to Islam, my desire to acquire languages has become an intrinsic part of my character. While I may not be as cunning as Burton, I do believe I'm a (multi)linguist at heart.

References

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Reflective questions and points for exploration

1. Like several other contributors to this volume, this author expresses his fascination and consistent interest in grammar. See, for instance, the following few excerpts: "Although I did enjoy reading as a youngster, I

did not take to it as voraciously as my mother would have liked. Instead, the intricacies of English grammar became my preferred domain. On our early morning drives to school, I remember joining forces with my mother to pick out the grammatical inconsistencies of guests on National Public Radio. … I remember my father giving me an especially stern lecture when I corrected my high school headmaster after his making the unconscionable mistake of not using the possessive case with a gerund. … I like rules, I like tangibility, I like structure. Latin provided all this and more. … I'm quite analytical, and I like to get to the grammar rules. I need to write things down in order to be able to produce them. I much prefer concreteness and analysis to forced creativity." Do you find that you are disproportionately interested in some components of language, let's say grammar and lexicon, at the expense of others, pronunciation and pragmatics, for instance? If yes, does your focus and interest vary with your different languages or are you consistently interested in one particular language aspect? What are some of the ways in which your interest affects your mastery of the language?

2. The author describes his analytical abilities in English and French, enhanced by his knowledge of Latin, and then comments that in Japanese and Nepali most of the lexical items he learned were acquired as unanalyzable chunks. What is your experience with learning vocabulary in a foreign language? Was the language you learned cognate or non-cognate to your L1?

3. This narrative describes two distinct settings for the author's multiple language learning: one, highly formal and structured language instruction, the other, immersion and natural exposure to his target languages. According to the author, this move to the latter type of setting transformed him from being largely a passive, classroom-based student, to being a much more active learner. What is your experience in this respect with regard to instructed learning, as opposed to natural acquisition? Where do you seem to show more agency and intentionality? Say in what ways.

4. In the final part of his narrative the author commented on the value of writing a detailed reflective piece on his various language learning experiences and identified several specific areas in which he found his introspection interesting and useful. Have you ever written a more detailed account of your language learning experiences? Do you usually keep a learning log or a diary when in the process of learning a language? Do you find personal narratives an important meaning-making tool and

an important source of information for theory construction and practice enrichment? Do you believe we need to hear more learners' voices representing a wider variety of contexts and language combinations? Do you also believe that most people have the ability to adequately describe their language learning experiences?

Chapter 9

A "new breed" of American?

Charles Kowalski

Languages Explored: Spanish, Japanese, Latin, Italian, French, Mongolian, German, Chinese, Classical Greek, Esperanto, Polish

I've been told I shouldn't exist.

I am a white, suburban, middle-class, third-generation United States citizen, the product of public schools … and I am multilingual. I can speak three languages besides English with reasonable fluency, and have varying degrees of proficiency in eight others. To hear people talk, a person from my background with this many languages is as rare as steak tartare. Among friends and colleagues, I appear to have become the stuff of tall tales; I hear people say of me, "He mastered Hangul on the bus to Seoul from Incheon Airport" (which is hyperbole; I did manage to decipher some of it but have forgotten it since) or "He learned Russian on the plane to Vladivostok" (which belongs securely to the realm of legend).

On my first day studying language pedagogy at the Monterey Institute of International Studies, the dean said to the veritable U.N. General Assembly of students gathered in the auditorium, "If you speak more than two languages, stand up. Three? Four?" I stayed on my feet until he stopped counting and asked the last ones standing about their backgrounds. They replied with fascinating stories like "I was born in Switzerland to a British father and a Greek mother, and went to high school in Japan …" and when my turn came, I had to confess to my undistinguished white-bread origins. The dean's jaw almost hit the lectern as he exclaimed, "You're *American* and you speak all those languages? You get free tuition!" If only he had been serious!

I've often been asked, "Why?" I have no answer. For the first twelve years of my life − long enough for the "critical period" to come and go − I never set foot outside North America, and never had any exposure to foreign languages except for snippets of Spanish from *Sesame Street.*

My mother gave me an ear for music and languages, but little opportunity to exercise the latter; her theological education had focused mainly on reading ancient and scholarly languages. My father, an artist who would prefer a picture to a thousand words any day, sometimes struggled for words even in his native English. Neither could teach me anything of their ancestral languages, Polish on my father's side and Czech on my mother's. If what they say is true about Slavs having a natural gift for languages, then my parents may have passed it to me through the blood, but not through the ear.

For me, the more relevant question is, "Why not?" What makes me such an anomaly? In much of the world, if I were asked how many languages I can speak fluently, my reply of "four" might earn me a response of "Is that all?" If I lived in Luxembourg, I would have 42% of the population for company, while the monoglots would languish in the lonely 1% minority (Hofstede 1997: 213). In such a diverse society as the United States, why is it that learning other languages, without an "advantage" like immigrant parents or a stint living abroad, is regarded as such a remarkable accomplishment? I'll come back to this question later, after setting forth the tale of my successful and not-so-successful forays into language learning and identifying what made the difference between the two.

1. Windows on the world

The body is a house of many windows; there we all sit, showing ourselves and crying on the passers-by to come and love us.

Robert Louis Stevenson

"Language as window" is an understandable image: learning a new language is like adding a new window to your house, looking out in a new direction, towards a new country or culture. Of course, windows look inward as well as outward. Our native language is a picture window that takes up an entire wall; it offers the broadest view out and in, but in neither direction can we see everything there is to see. The window of a new language is small at first, but as it expands, it offers a whole new set of views in both directions. My unscientific theory, with which other language learners have agreed, is that certain people are drawn to certain languages because those languages offer an opportunity to express a part

of themselves not easily expressed in their native language; a new language can open a window into a dark and musty room crying out for a little air and sunlight.

My first linguistic "window" actually looked out onto another world entirely. When I was ten years old and my mother read to me from *The Lord of the Rings,* I was so fascinated by the languages J. R. R. Tolkien created for his imaginary world that I set about trying to invent my own. Of course, with no background yet in real-world languages, I never produced anything that could stand up to repeated use on either aesthetic or practical grounds. I began to appreciate Tolkien's genius in inventing languages that were alien enough to be distinct from any of this world, but familiar enough to resonate with his readers. We can accept the morpheme *mor-* for something sinister because it has echoes of Latinate words related to death (*morgue, morbid, moribund* … and the similarity of the "black land", Mordor, to *murder* couldn't have been accidental). Tolkien himself could have told me where I was going wrong: "In making up a language you are free: too free. It is difficult to fit meaning to any given sound-pattern, or a sound-pattern to any given meaning. I say *fit*. I don't mean that you can't assign forms or meanings arbitrarily. Say, you want a word for *sky*. Well, call it *jibberjabber*, or anything else that comes into your head. But that's code-making, not language-building. It is quite another matter to find a relationship, sound plus sense, that satisfies, that is when made *durable*" (Tolkien 1992: 240, quoted in Fauskanger). Perhaps the blame lies with Tolkien for my obstinate refusal to believe my linguistics professors when they said that the relationship between words and their meanings was "wholly arbitrary".

After this glimpse through the "one-way" window into Middle-Earth, I began my first formal study of foreign languages. I made several attempts to put in new "windows" on my own, but I am still far from satisfied with my skills as a do-it-yourselfer. Most of the time, I required the services of professional glazers. I have had many language teachers, some of whom I admired greatly and others who frustrated me tremendously − and all of them taught me a great deal, in very different ways.

1.1. The Spanish accident

When I was twelve, I was asked whether I would prefer to study French or Spanish in my second year of middle school. I replied that I had no preference, little knowing that this was the start of a journey that would

eventually lead me to earn a Master's degree in the teaching of Spanish and to volunteer as a medical interpreter in Ecuador.

I owe my proficiency in Spanish almost entirely to my teachers in middle and high school. A community of speakers would have been readily available, since I grew up in the shadow of New York, but I never really took advantage of it, and never spent time in a Spanish-speaking country until after I graduated from high school.

My classes were a balance of many different activities: games, grammar exercises, model conversations, listening exercises, videos, short story reading and essay writing. The vocabulary and grammar we learned were supplemented with tantalizing glimpses into the geography, history, culture, and lifestyles of the Spanish-speaking world. By the fifth year, we were reading Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel García Marquez in the original, and discussing them in Spanish.

These Spanish classes awakened me to the fun of speaking another language. Like many boys that age, I loved games with complex rules, and learning the vocabulary and grammar of a new language was like learning a new game. When I met someone else who spoke the same language, I was delighted: "You know this game, too! Let's play!"

1.2. Latin: Deep calls to deep

Maybe I was a monk in a previous life, because when I met Latin in this one, it opened a window into my inner cloister or scriptorium. For me, Latin evokes images not of Gallic wars or Ciceronian orations, but of *cantus planus* resounding from the rafters of candlelit cathedrals. *Abyssus abyssum invocat* – 'Deep calls to deep' (Psalm 42: 7) – describes Latin for me; it gave the rich history and tradition of Christianity a voice with which to call to the depths of my soul.

Latin was also my occasion for meeting, in high school, one of those teachers who taught me a great deal through negative example. In the first place, for her, the era of Latin ended with the Visigoths; the rich treasure stores of medieval and liturgical Latin were closed to us. When reading aloud, no accent was permitted other than the "accepted" Roman one, which always grated on my ear; would Catullus really have been able to seduce anyone with "Weewamus, mea Lesbia"? For all that, we rarely came within hailing distance of a Roman author the first year; our core text consisted of artificial reading passages of the "Marcus and Sextus are sitting under a tree" variety.

More seriously, every Latin word could have only one English translation. I was reprimanded for translating *necesse est nobis facere id quod iubet* as 'We've got to do what he says' rather than 'It is necessary for us to do that which he orders'. Even at that age, I recognized that this was not good language teaching; that the focus of a translation should be the meaning behind the words, not the words themselves. There was no room for originality, nor for what was for me the all-important element of play.

If this teacher had had the final word, my love for Latin might have ended in heartbreak. Fortunately, though, I had outside help to keep the romance alive. The Episcopal church in New York that my mother served boasted a world-class choir, whose director loved to delve into libraries and transcribe manuscripts of obscure Renaissance motets. Thus, on Sunday mornings I could listen to music rarely heard anywhere else, my ears drinking in the exquisite harmonies as my eyes carefully followed the printed text and translation. For me, Latin lived in music. While continuing my Latin studies in college, I joined choirs and sang everything from plainchant through Palestrina to Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*. Recently, as a daily devotion, I read the Vulgate New Testament aloud and intoned the Psalter, relishing the music of the language … and the daily glimpse, through this "window" across time, of a medieval monk – perhaps my prior incarnation – chanting along with me.

1.3. An Italian grace note

When I went to Rome in my third year of college to study classical archaeology, the extent of my Italian was a few musical and culinary terms. Once I was there, however, the language practically fell into my lap. For one thing, with Spanish and Latin already down, Italian fell in its turn like a domino. For another, living in Italy offered constant reinforcement. My interaction with the community of speakers was unfortunately limited, since I spent most of my time with my American classmates. In spite of that, posters, newspapers, overheard conversations, and books – particularly translations of favorite English novels – combined to produce a rich source of input, of which I was happy to partake.

Finally, I had an excellent teacher. He began each class by asking us what was new, which got us talking about events in our own lives in Italian. We played guessing games where we had to give clues in Italian, debated mildly controversial topics, and listened to songs. And he somehow managed to slip in, unobtrusively, practically the whole tense system

of Italian, up to the imperfect and pluperfect subjunctives and conditionals. Thanks mainly to him, when I spent that Christmas with a friend in England and our paths crossed with some Italian tourists who spoke very little English, I was able to interpret – even, to my surprise as much as anyone else's, a lecture on the Cornish bardic tradition. Years later, in graduate school, I still remembered enough to teach a course in intermediate Italian.

1.4. Turning Japanese

When people ask me why I started studying Japanese in college, I can offer no better answer than that I wanted to challenge myself with something completely different from Western European languages, and Asia seemed home to the Himalayas of language. It was also a time when many Americans did business with Japan but few really understood it. An air of mystery shrouded the country like the mist around Mt. Fuji, and the allure of someday becoming one of the few who could penetrate it was irresistible.

If it was a challenge I sought, it was a challenge I found. The spoken language was not the problem; Japanese grammar was so simple and straightforward compared to the Romance languages that I sat in my first-year class thinking, "This can't be all!" The lack of cognates was a difficulty at first, used as I was to being able to improvise on even highly abstract topics in Romance languages using Latinate cognates. I learned later, however, that there are so many English loanwords in Japanese that, as long as you conform to Japanese phonological rules, you can do anything from ordering a 'hambaga' at 'Makudonarudo' to making a 'risukii benchaa' (risky venture) in business. The challenge lay in decoding the world's most complex writing system – and in keeping my interest through a class where, once again, frustration lit a fire under me to pursue further studies on my own.

My first Japanese class was conducted mainly through the Audio-Lingual Method, with incessant drills and repetition. What I learned stayed with me, but the class was agony. At a party just before graduation, my former teacher confessed, "Sometimes I even bore myself."

In addition, my teachers offered little support in my struggle with *kanji* (Chinese characters); the extent of their instruction was "Write them ten times each." As we learned more of them, I noticed that there were recurring elements, and the more complex characters looked like combinations of the simpler ones, but my teachers never explained the logic be-

hind the combinations, or gave more than occasional tantalizing clues as to the meaning of the components. "This part means *flower*, and usually appears in characters having to do with plants", one of them might mention offhandedly, as though sharing a bit of trivia rather than offering a key to a secret code.

I bought books and began to study *kanji* on my own. Once I had a grasp of what the elements meant, and how the simpler characters combined to form the more complex ones, I began to make up mnemonics, in spite of my teacher's discouraging remarks: "They're just one more thing to memorize." The character for "salt" is made up of "earth", "person", "mouth" and "dish". Well, naturally! You use salt in a *dish* to make it more pleasing to a *person's mouth* – and, of course, you can also be the "salt of the *earth*". My time spent studying *kanji* changed suddenly from a chore to a foray into a magical world.

Living and working in Japan, particularly in a small village where I was one of two native speakers of English, also pushed my Japanese along at a great pace. I acquired the language quickly through the conversations around me, with host family, co-workers, or girlfriend. I continued my study of *kanji* as well, because unlike in Europe, the samples of written language around me were no help. *Kanji* rarely offer clues to their pronunciation, so a Westerner cannot really acquire Japanese through the eye, only through the ear.

It also helped a great deal that Japanese was necessary for me to do my job effectively. I was often called on to help escort groups of Japanese students to our sister city in the United States, and guide American visitors around Japan, which included interpreting lectures at museums and cultural events, as well as between host families and guests. My colleague and I would often be in the office late into the night, brainstorming the words we thought we would be likely to need, and compiling bilingual reference sheets. Not only did these sessions do wonders for my Japanese vocabulary, they served me in good stead years later when I was assigned to teach university classes in English-Japanese interpretation.

If my Latin window looked inward to a cloister, my Japanese window looked into a tea room or Zen temple. It was no accident that Japanese was the window through which I first discovered Buddhism. And the ritual that suffuses Japanese life and language, such as the words to mark beginnings and endings that add a touch of grace even to the simplest of daily actions – starting and finishing a meal, entering and leaving the house or workplace, seeing people off and welcoming them home – struck a chord with the monk in me.

2. Portholes and peepholes

In addition to these larger windows, the walls of my house are pierced with smaller ones, no bigger than ship's portholes or even peepholes: languages in which I dabbled but was never able to achieve more than basic proficiency. I took classes in some, but for most, I was my own worst teacher.

In spite of my research on learner autonomy and "wilderness survival", or self-instruction without access to a teacher or community of speakers (Kowalski 2005), I often tended to get lost in the wilderness myself. I have the unfortunate combination of an introverted, solitary temperament and an oral/aural learning preference, meaning I need to listen and talk a lot but am often too shy to seek out a conversation partner! On top of that, my impatience also got me into trouble. I would rather spend my time pushing on towards new and unexplored realms than carefully charting the territory I had already traversed, with the result that what I taught myself, I often forgot soon afterwards.

I discovered that no matter how much vocabulary or grammar I taught myself, it would remain locked in my brain, inaccessible, until something happened to "unlock" it, and hear the language in context before trying it out myself. Any vocabulary or grammar activated in this way was at my command thereafter if let out of the vault.

2.1. French

I first tried to teach myself French in preparation for a visit to a monastic community in Burgundy. Before I left, I bought a workbook and borrowed tapes from the local library, so I knew the basic vocabulary and grammar I would need to find my way around, but it was not until I got to France and started hearing French that these were "unlocked" to the degree that I could use them productively. After that, most of the French I acquired was at the monastery, so I could recite the *Notre Père* or sing *Les anges dans nos campagnes* before I could ask my way to the train station. (I did eventually reach the point of being able to answer a passing truck driver who asked me for directions to the monastery. I was so elated that I forgot I was supposed to be on silent retreat.) Now, I can read books in French without much difficulty. I understand spoken French with some effort, but I would only give myself an ACTFL Intermediate-Mid rank at speaking it, at best (American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages, http://www.languagetesting.com/scale.htm).

2.2. Mongolian

When I learned that the village in Japan where I would be working had an exchange program with Mongolia – a country about which I knew nothing – and trainees would be visiting for six months out of the year, I promptly set about trying to teach myself their language. This was a true test of my "wilderness survival" skills. No teacher or conversation partner was anywhere to be found. My core text was the Lonely Planet Mongolian phrasebook (Sanders and Bat-Ireedui 1995). You may laugh, but I owe a great deal to this unassuming little volume. It had a very neat summary of the basics of Mongolian grammar, similar enough to Japanese that it was easy to grasp. It had plenty of phrases for daily conversation, and notes on manners, social conventions and forms of address.

I carried this little book around with me, made up mnemonics for new vocabulary words, and tested myself in idle moments. I rehearsed imaginary conversations in my mind. I kept a diary, looking up words as I needed them.

Then the Mongolian trainees arrived, and with them, the moment of truth. I remember my trepidation before greeting them – and my elation at seeing the looks on their faces, not only of comprehension, but of amazement at hearing their language coming from an American mouth. I was not able to call to mind the vocabulary I had so assiduously studied as readily as I had hoped, but listening to conversations among the Mongolians soon helped to "unlock" it, and I was delighted to note that my pronunciation was not too far from theirs. Eventually, I was able to achieve an ACTFL Intermediate-Low proficiency in the language, and even to tutor it years later. Perhaps this was my most successful foray into a language-learning "wilderness".

2.3. German

I started trying to teach myself German when I learned that a German friend, whom I had met in France, was coming to visit the United States. I already had a bit of vocabulary, acquired mostly by singing *lieder* in voice class. My goals were to expand this vocabulary and improve my mastery of grammar, by studying through textbooks and tapes, and trying to read novels that I had already read in English.

In the first of these goals, I succeeded partially. One of the most helpful tools was a book that explained the morphology of German, and also how to recognize the "hidden cognates" between German and English.

My technique of reading translated novels yielded some gleanings, but sporadically. One of the books I found was a German edition of *The Little Prince*, which I enjoyed, but I never had occasion to say *Ich will keinen Elefanten in einer Riesenschlange* 'I do not want an elephant inside a boa constrictor!'.

In the second, I failed. German grammar eluded me, not because of its complexity − I was used to that from Latin − but because of its ambiguity. In Latin, I could see an *-orum* ending and be reasonably sure that I was dealing with a genitive plural, but in German, I could see *der* and not know whether it was masculine nominative singular, or feminine genitive singular, or feminine dative singular, or genitive plural. Compounding the problem, German nouns hide their gender. In Spanish or Italian, although there are a few cross-dressers, you can generally depend on an *-o* ending being masculine and *-a* feminine. In German, although my text provided some hints, it concluded that there was really nothing for it but to memorize the gender of every noun. Navigating the case system was difficult enough without the added confusion of not knowing where to start half the time. On the occasions when I tried to speak German, I tended to mumble my case endings, and leave it to my listener to fill in the blanks.

In addition, the pitfall of acquiring vocabulary through reading stories was the difference between spoken and literary past tenses. I knew this was the case in French and Italian, but failed to realize it in German until I tried to test my knowledge by writing a letter to a classmate from Berlin. She wrote back, *Dein Deutsch sehr steif und altmodisch klingt* 'Your German sounds very stiff and old-fashioned'.

Visiting Germany, and listening to conversations, helped "unlock" what I had learned. I can muddle my way through a German text, and silently follow a conversation. There are many more vault doors to be "unlocked", though, before I will be able to speak with passable Intermediate-Mid proficiency.

2.4. Chinese

Having studied Japanese, I took a Chinese class on a lark, thinking I could acquire it at a discount. Thanks to our gentle teacher, always smiling, always encouraging but never patronizing, we had fun in that class, but our textbook left us ill-prepared for haggling in the night markets of Taipei; our first lesson had us saying "My bed is not hard enough." For that, I had to train myself with books and software. I would supplement

these with subtitled movies, and have an occasional flash of recognition when I heard a sentence I could understand, but in general, the variety of new sounds, the monosyllabic rhythm, and the rising and falling tones (even though my teacher told me I could produce them very well) were difficult for my ear to take in. Now, every time I go back to Taiwan, it seems to take me all my time to scrape the rust off my Chinese; I have hit a Novice-Mid ceiling that it would take much more time, effort, and interaction with the community of speakers to break through.

2.5. Classical Greek

Among students of the classics, I was a rarity for being a Latin lover. I cut a lonely figure in a world where Homer's Greeks trounced Virgil's Trojans, Plautus was a footnote to Aristophanes, and works of art came labeled "Roman copy of the Greek original". Well, blame Palestrina. Nothing in Greek could compare with the Latin poetry and harmonies that had worked their way so directly to my heart, least of all the fictional characters concocted for our textbook in Greek 101. I muddled through to meet my requirement, promptly forgot what I had learned, and have not touched Greek since. Sorry, Homer; it's nothing against you. If someone had set your poems to music, I might have gotten to know you better.

2.6. Esperanto

As I mentioned earlier, the first foreign language ever to capture my interest was a constructed one, so Esperanto would seem like a natural fit for me. Morphology was also my favorite branch of linguistics; I loved observing how morphemes fit together like Lego bricks to form words, and when I did a presentation on the subject for a linguistics class at Monterey, I chose Esperanto as a model. Why, then, have I never been able to develop more than Novice-Mid proficiency in it?

My best guess is that I never found a community of speakers where I felt comfortable. As an Australian Esperanto teacher I once heard pointed out (Vos 2004), Esperanto probably boasts the most diversity of speakers of any language its size, in terms of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and nationality; the Universala Esperanto Asocio (UEA, 2005) claims members in 115 countries. Unfortunately, I didn't have the chance to meet any of them in person. I knew my Esperantistoj only through UEA newsletters or e-mail lists, and they impressed me as very evangelical – intent on teaching the whole world Esperanto, and assuming as a

matter of course that anyone who took an interest in it was of a like mind. I was interested in Esperanto, but not ready to become an "Esperantisto" in that sense, so my studies never progressed very far. I can read it fairly well, as can most people with a background in European languages, but to become able to converse in it, I would need a partner with whom I could have a pleasant chat without plotting to convert the world.

2.7. Polish

When a colleague offered me the opportunity to attend a conference in Kraków, I pounced, partly for the chance to visit the land of my ancestors for the first time, and partly, I hoped, to liberate myself from the perennial embarrassment of having a surname like Kowalski and speaking no Polish.

From my lonely outpost in Japan, without a Polish-speaking ally in sight, I mounted a full-scale assault on Polish with every "wilderness survival" tactic at my command. When walking around campus, I mentally described the scene around me in Polish, starting with simple words like "tree" and "house", then graduating to adjective-noun pairings "beautiful flower" and then simple sentences "The sun is hot", looking up needed words in the pocket dictionary that was my constant companion. I worked through my textbook, and wrote sentences in my notebook using the words and grammar patterns I had learned, anything that came into my head (*Moja żona umie gotować smaczny śniadanie* – 'My wife knows how to make a tasty breakfast.'). I imagined conversations I might have in Poland, and rehearsed them in my mind. I tried a one-man version of Counseling-Learning: I wrote scripts, repeated them until I was ready to read them fairly smoothly into a tape recorder, then listened to my own voice and "shadowed" myself.

It was an even match. I may have been a seasoned veteran, but I stood alone against a formidable foe. My powers of memorization were tested to their limit by the lack of cognates, the jawbreaking consonant clusters, and the way a great difference in meaning might turn on the subtlest variation in sound. *Pokoj* means 'room' while *pokój* means 'peace'; I was puzzled by the profusion of posters in Kraków announcing peace meetings, until I realized that they were actually advertising rooms for rent. I made up mnemonics as though my life depended on it, but it was an uphill battle. And Polish grammar got the better of me. I could get noun cases correct within simple, memorized utterances, but I never learned my way around the system. And while I could manage simple-present

verbs and infinitives, the mutations, reduplications, and irregularities of Polish past tenses defeated me utterly.

To my delight, I found keys to "unlock" much of what I had learned when I arrived in Kraków, by listening to sermons at Mass, or watching a Polish film about the young Karol Wojtyła before he became Pope John Paul II. My stay in Poland, however, was too brief for me to work my way to more than Novice-Mid proficiency. Now, for all my efforts, I still lapse into the old explanation: "Polish? Well, it's true that my grandfather came from Poland, but my father didn't really learn Polish from him, so unfortunately …"

3. Cresting the hill

They have been at a great feast of languages,
and stolen the scraps.

Shakespeare, Love's Labour's Lost V.i.

I have spent most of my adult life at a "great feast of languages". Of some, I was able to partake to the full; with others, I came away from the table with no more than scraps. What made the difference?

I notice that in the languages I have learned to ACTFL Advanced-level proficiency, there is a certain "tipping point" up to which learning is a struggle, and beyond which everything seems to fall into place. This has variously been called "getting inside a language" or "getting into the zone" (Childs 2001). For me, the most suitable term is "cresting the hill". I'm seldom aware of it when it happens, but I know when it has happened.

"Cresting the hill" is the stage where I stop trying to make sense of a language on my terms, and become able to understand how it makes sense on its own terms. In Japanese, I can accept the "topic-comment" structure and not stubbornly insist on having a subject and object. Up to this stage, I fretted, "How can they tell who's doing what to whom when they're so parsimonious with pronouns?" Now, I can see how my students could grow weary of the pronouns that pepper English sentences to the point of tautology: "'MY mother told MY father that SHE was meeting HER brother at HIS house' – enough, already!"

Once I have "crested the hill", I develop a sense for what "sounds right". I stop trying to translate from English, and gradually become able to think in the new language. I may not say exactly what a native speaker

would say under the circumstances, but I can at least judge how close I am.

What do I need in order to "crest the hill" in a new language? Having a good teacher certainly helps, but I could also learn well under poor teachers, fueled by frustration. In some cases, such as Japanese, a teacher started me on my way but I took care of the rest myself. Looking back on my successes and disappointments in language learning, a few essentials suggest themselves:

A multi-directional approach. I find that I learn best through a combination of inductive and deductive reasoning; both a "top-down" and a "bottom-up" approach. If forced to choose, I would rather have comprehensible samples of a language than grammar rules and vocabulary lists, just as I would rather hear a piece of music I wanted to play than see a score, or taste a dish I wanted to make than have a recipe. Ideally, though, I want both. I find that I benefit most from external input when I already have a framework to fit it into. Conversely, learning vocabulary and grammar by rote does me little good until I can "unlock" them by exposure to authentic language.

I am an auditory learner, so I want to hear the language – in a meaningful context, so disembodied voices on a cassette don't do it for me. Music helps. Videos are even better, and best of all is observing interactions between real people. And whenever possible, I want a written backup. I always felt uncomfortable when visual support for my aural learning was missing (as with the "Learn the language without a book!" Pimsleur tapes I used for German) or mismatched (as with my first Japanese textbook; it followed a system of Romanization designed by Japanese bureaucrats who felt that the name of Japan's famous mountain would best be spelled *Huzi*). When I can learn words or grammatical patterns from a book, hear them in a variety of contexts (a movie, a song, a conversation …) and see them in equally varied contexts, magic happens.

Meaningful input and interaction. I need to be able to talk, or at least hear and read, about subjects that matter to me. Even at beginning levels, I got more from chatting about the weekend with my classmates in Spanish or Italian than complaining about overly soft beds in Chinese.

When I'm trying to learn a language on my own, I appreciate extensive input that is comprehensible and enjoyable, but it isn't always easy to find. I enjoy reading translations of my favorite English books, but the vocabulary I glean from them is often of no more use than elephants and boa constrictors. Graded readers, popular among English learners, are

still scarce in other languages, particularly those written in non-Roman alphabets such as Japanese. Learners' magazines that provide glosses for *kanji* and English translations help. Movies, particularly DVDs where one is given the choice of having subtitles, also help.

Memory aids. My Japanese teacher can say what she likes about mnemonic devices, but I would be lost without them, particularly in languages as dissimilar to my own as Japanese and Polish. Once I have "crested the hill", I can usually understand new words on the basis of etymology and morphology, or even guess at words as yet unseen. It was a great moment when I needed the word for 'hemisphere' in Japanese, which I had never learned, and guessed correctly that I could form it by combining the *kanji* for 'half' and 'ball'. In order to learn enough words and morphemes to reach that stage, however, my memory needs help, in the form of images and similar-sounding words in English, like the stories I made up to teach myself *kanji*.

Review and reinforcement. In my classes in Spanish and Latin, I was frustrated with the slow pace, but reviewing things helped cement the language in my brain. In Italian and Japanese, the classes moved faster. I had plenty of reinforcement in Italian through the outside world and my own background knowledge, which helped, but I struggled in Japanese at first. When left to my own devices, my impatience to push on and my pride in myself as a "quick study" were my undoing. I could indeed learn quickly, but then I would forget just as quickly.

A reason for learning. A student of fifteen languages quoted in Naiman et al. (1978: 54) said, "The language has to be the language of somebody … [I have to] know somebody in that language and care for them". This has largely been true of me, too. The "somebody" could be someone I knew (German) or someone I was hoping to meet (Mongolian). It could also be a "somewhere" I was hoping to visit (Italian, French, Japanese, Polish), or even a "sometime" (Latin). In Spanish, the excitement of learning a new language for the first time was enough, but I had no reason to study Classical Greek beyond departmental requirements, or Chinese or Esperanto beyond curiosity. To give me the motivation to start and continue learning a new language, the window needs to open onto something meaningful.

4. America the polyglot

"What do you call someone who speaks three languages?"
"Trilingual."

"Someone who speaks two languages?"
"Bilingual."
"And someone who speaks only one language?"
"American!"

Finally, I return to the question I started from: What makes me so rare among U.S. citizens? The United States is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world. About 47 million people in the U.S. – 18% of the population – speak one of over 380 languages at home, instead of or in addition to English (U.S. Census Bureau 2000). A variety of languages are offered at public schools, and teachers, if mine are any example, know what they are about. Any native English-speaking U.S. citizen who wants to learn another language should have no trouble finding either a good teacher or a community of speakers. And yet, few avail themselves of the opportunity. While 44% of U.S. high school students study a foreign language, only 8% of university undergraduates do (U.S. Department of Education 2006), presumably leaving the rest in the category of "don't know much about the French I took." Why does the joke continue to be on us?

Since English is spoken throughout the world, native speakers can perhaps be forgiven for thinking, "Wherever I go, there will be someone who speaks my language" or "Any information I need will have been translated." This may be true, but why let someone else determine the size of the window through which you see the world?

When a country has as much political, economic and military influence on the rest of the world as the United States, its citizens cannot afford to be ignorant of other languages and cultures. At best, we will be seen as foolishly arrogant, and at worst, we court danger as we meddle cluelessly in the affairs of alien countries. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the U.S. government was crying out for translators of Arabic even as heritage language programs in schools with many Arab-descended students struggled against opposition by advocates of "English-only" education, according to Nunberg (2001: 12), who comments: "If September 11 has taught us anything, it's that [language] skills are too important to be sacrificed in the name of cultural uniformity." Today, the government is expanding public-school programs in Arabic, Chinese, Japanese and other languages designated as "critical-need" by the Departments of State and Defense (U.S. Department of Education 2006). We are beginning to get the message: monolingualism is a luxury we can no longer afford.

A classmate at Monterey once asked me how many languages I spoke. Seeing his surprise at my answer (prefaced with my usual hedge of "It depends on where you set the bar"), another classmate said proudly, "He's one of the new breed of Americans."

I hope time will prove her right. I hope that we are seeing a new generation of Americans who take full advantage of the rich linguistic resources within our borders, and open for themselves many windows through which to touch, and be touched by, the world in which we are such a powerful presence. I look forward to the day when a story like mine will be met with, "You speak all those languages? Well, no wonder − you're American!"

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Reflective questions and points for exploration

1. The author of this narrative makes the following comment on his mastery of multiple languages: "In much of the world, if I were asked how many languages I can speak fluently, my reply of 'four' might earn me a response of 'Is that all?' If I lived in Luxembourg, I would have 42% of the population for company, while the monoglots would languish in the lonely 1% minority." Are most people in your surroundings mono- or multilinguals? If the latter, what are the languages involved? Can you discern any emerging patterns? Where do you see the main reasons for people knowing and using more than one language?

2. Using a "language as a window" metaphor, the author comments that learning a new language is like adding a new window to our house that allows us to look out in a new direction. New windows, he adds, give better views inward as well. Has your knowledge of additional languages helped you develop a deeper understand of your L1? If yes, what were some of your most interesting and powerful insights? Also, have any aspects of your L1 been influenced by your additional languages? What aspects in particular – lexicon, grammar, pronunciation, pragmatics, body language?

3. Why do you think some people never experience the joy captured in the following narrative excerpt, and also shared by most contributors to this volume: "These Spanish classes awakened me to the fun of speaking another language. Like many boys that age, I loved games with complex rules, and learning the vocabulary and grammar of a new language was like learning a new game. When I met someone else who spoke the same language, I was delighted: "You know this game, too! Let's play!"

4. Consider the following quote from this narrative: "Living and working in Japan, particularly in a small village where I was one of two native

speakers of English, pushed my Japanese along at a great pace. I acquired the language quickly through the conversations around me, with host family, co-workers, or girlfriend. I continued my study of kanji as well, because unlike in Europe, the samples of written language around me were no help. Kanji rarely offer clues to their pronunciation, so a Westerner cannot really acquire Japanese through the eye, only through the ear." Have you had similar experiences with any of your foreign languages where a particular type of input was more (or less) helpful than other types?

5. Summing up his various learning experiences, the author wrote: "I have spent most of my adult life at a 'great feast of languages'. Of some, I was able to partake to the full; with others, I came away from the table with no more than scraps. What made the difference? I notice that in the languages I have learned to ACTFL Advanced-level proficiency, there is a certain 'tipping point' up to which learning is a struggle, and beyond which everything seems to fall into place. This has variously been called 'getting inside a language' or 'getting into the zone'. For me, the most suitable term is 'cresting the hill'; I'm seldom aware of it when it happens, but I know when it has happened. 'Cresting the hill' is the stage where I stop trying to make sense of a language on my terms, and become able to understand how it makes sense on its own terms. In Japanese, I can accept the 'topic-comment' structure and not stubbornly insist on having a subject and object. Up to this stage, I fretted, 'How can they tell who's doing what to whom when they're so parsimonious with pronouns?' What is your *default* approach to learning a new language? Do you tap into your prior linguistic knowledge and use as much positive transfer as possible, trying out different language hypotheses or do you start with the assumption that, more often than not, languages never show a complete one-to-one correspondence and thus you are better off if you try and pay attention to contextual and other clues that can help you understand your target language on its own terms?

6. The author identifies several key factors that determine the extent to which he can have a successful learning experience: a reason for learning, review and reinforcement, memory aids in the form of various mnemonic devices, meaningful input and interaction, multiple modalities and approaches that reinforce one another, e.g. inductive/deductive, top-down/bottom-up, etc. What are some factors that you consider most instrumental for your learning? Do they vary with your different languages?

Chapter 10

Where art and nature meet

Humphrey Tonkin

Languages Explored: Esperanto, Latin, English, French, German, Italian, Dutch

As I look around my study, my eye lights on texts in English, Esperanto, French and Italian. The first two dominate: my bookshelves bulge with English texts, but a fair percentage of the books around me are in Esperanto, and a few in other languages. When my phone rings, there's a good chance that the caller will speak Esperanto, and a good chance that I will reply in that language with little sense that I am speaking a different language. When I check my e-mail, at least half of my messages will be in that language. It was not always so. I grew up in a monolingual English home, and my introduction to language study was conventional enough. But later I acquired Esperanto and, over the years, have shaped a life in which both languages play major roles. By any definition, I am bilingual in these two languages. But it is perhaps a different kind of bilingualism from that of most writers in this book, since it came to pass during my adolescence, under circumstances that were highly self-conscious and deliberate.

From the beginning I was interested in things linguistic. Always excelling in my English classes at school, I ended up studying English language and literature at university and have spent a large part of my life as an English professor. In graduate school I worked in comparative literature as well as English. Thus my acquaintance with language goes beyond the merely practical, the mere process of getting through the day. I don't just use languages, but study language and literature as phenomena.

At the beginning of the course in Language and Society that I teach for our Modern Languages Department from time to time, I ask my students to write a brief language autobiography. At first, many claim they have no experience of foreign languages outside the classroom, but as they begin writing, most discover that they have quite complex multi-

lingual roots. Even so-called monolinguals live with many registers, many codes, governed by complex rules that they are often startled to discover in themselves. And most of us have foreign languages in our background somewhere. Now it is my turn to write a language autobiography. Although much about it will be quite conventional, it will raise a fundamental question, perhaps rather different from the questions raised by my fellow-authors: What does it mean to become bilingual not in two ethnic languages but in an ethnic language and a so-called artificial language?

Though I have lived most of my adult life in the United States, I was born in Britain, into, as I have pointed out, an entirely monolingual family. Perhaps my ancestors spoke Cornish, since I come from Cornwall; but all indications of such an attribute disappeared before the earliest traces of the family that we have discovered, in the sixteenth century. By that time, Cornish was in steep decline; though an eighteenth-century family member, Thomas Tonkin, historian, evidently took an antiquarian interest in the language. As for the traceable family tree, my brother, the family genealogist, has found not a single instance of a foreign language on either side, over three or four centuries, though other branches of the family have scattered across the English-speaking world. My father, who died when I was very young, used his schoolboy French on at least one pre-war trip to France as part of his oyster business, and my brother used it in Switzerland as an engineering trainee. My sister learned French in school but never used it, and my mother, who left school at the age of twelve during World War I, had no foreign languages. As for me, I exchanged one form of English for another when I moved from Britain to the United States to earn a Ph.D. in English literature, but I did acquire some other languages along the way.

At my all-male boarding school, at seven, I began French, and then at nine started Latin. The class was taught by a cheerful Welsh lady, the first of an almost unbroken line of female French teachers, just as my Latin teachers were exclusively male; as men choose the trumpet and women choose the flute, there were marked gender biases in language study in those days, and perhaps still are today. My French textbook was populated by an irritatingly banal nuclear family consisting of a father, a mother, a teenager named Babette, a small boy named Toto, and, of course, a dog. They went shopping, rode the bus, visited the theater, went on vacation, and did all the things that most textbook families do, of course doing them only once. They had no crazy aunts, no brushes with the law, no problems with their credit, no unwanted pregnancies.

In Latin, by contrast, there were only wars and conquests, ambushes and hostages. There were no female characters at all, not even a Calpur-

nia weeping at home while her husband laid waste to Gaul. The ingenious writer of the textbook, evidently desperate to avoid allusion to the other half of the human race, even managed to find a male general, Cotta, whose name obeyed the rules of the first declension, customarily reserved for feminine nouns.

While French was enjoyable, Latin was a chore, taught more like a rather troublesome code than a once living language. I first met Latin before I started learning it. At Christmas we were taught to sing "O Come All Ye Faithful" in Latin, but, not knowing that *Adeste fideles, laete triumfantes* 'Come faithful ones, happily triumphant' was in fact Latin, I assumed that someone called Umphantes, a name not so different from my own, was being asked to light a Christmas tree: "Light a tree, Umphantes". Such are the mysteries of the adult world to the believing child. Ultimately, I came to appreciate Latin, but little of that was due to my early teachers. What the legacy of Latin did for me above all was to lay the groundwork for my later language learning. Still, when I am in doubt, for example, about the gender of a particular word in French or Italian, I seek the Latin equivalent and read its gender back into the language I am using.

German, which I began at twelve in preparation for O-Levels, the public exams that British students at that time took at about the age of fourteen, was, sadly, more like Latin than like French: there were two teachers of German at school, both male. While I was willing to draw maps of the Paris Métro and imagine strolls down the Champs-Elysées, I drew a rebellious line at copying, as dictated by our out-of-date textbooks, similar maps of a pre-war U-Bahn and taking strolls down a long since gutted Unter den Linden. Perhaps for me the wishful thinking of my German class began the stirrings of politicization as I realized the gap between the essentially fictional environment of German language learning and the reality on the ground. Relations with my German teacher deteriorated rapidly as he and I fought, Roman-style, over who was going to control the German class: he insisted on order, I subverted his authority whenever I could.

Of course, my German teacher won, and probably deservedly. There comes a certain point, as Caesar tells us, when negotiating with Vercingetorix becomes a losing proposition and it is better simply to take him out. That is what my teacher did to me. He declared me unteachable, clearly unable to learn any language, least of all German. He must not have checked on my record in French. Banished from the German classroom, I carried my injured pride to the school library, where I resolved

to continue learning German on my own; or at least enough of it to pass his miserable O-Level exam. I also decided, to prove my teacher wrong, to learn another language.

What could I learn on my own? I had heard about an international language, Esperanto, that was supposedly easier to learn than other languages. Hedging my bets, I decided to find out about Esperanto and learn it. The library had a small Esperanto textbook, and I soon found the address of the British Esperanto Association in Holland Park Avenue in London. I wrote for information. Soon I enrolled in a correspondence course, and more or less immediately began putting Esperanto to practical use.

The year was 1954 and I was 14. I was an average language-learner by British standards, capable of expressing myself in simple terms at least in French, but by no means on fire with language competence. The British practice of sending its sons to boarding school at an early age, a custom reinforced in my widowed mother's case by the need to run a family business following the death of my father, had made me a resilient if somewhat solitary child. I enjoyed the challenge of learning Esperanto on my own and for my own purposes, even if in fact I had little idea how the language might be useful. The simplicity of Esperanto's structure, with its word roots to which affixes were added to mark parts of speech and morphological variants, made Esperanto easy to commit to memory and helped the learner master a large vocabulary by internalizing the rules of word formation. Self-monitoring, at least in written texts, was also easy. In an environment of no exceptions, it was not hard to check whether one's adjectives agreed with one's nouns. In fact, only a few hours of study were needed to memorize the basic grammar and the rest was essentially a matter of learning lexical elements, along, of course, with the use of prepositions and conjunctions, whose use in Esperanto is often conventional and not readily determined by prior language experience. If my motivation was base – showing up my despised German teacher – it was also compelling: I learned rapidly, for myself.

Not only did the Esperanto association send me information about courses but they also enclosed an old issue of the biweekly journal *Heroldo de Esperanto*, published in the Netherlands. It included personal ads. Once I could figure out how to do it, I placed an ad calling for penpals: there was a section in the journal for this purpose. I received forty-two responses. I remember the number because I replied to every single letter. I started with a standard reply, written in simple Esperanto, describing myself, my school, my family: the kind of letter that so many of

us wrote in so many foreign-language classrooms, but at a much later stage in our acquisition of these languages, and under the watchful eye of a grammar-obsessed teacher. Not, of course, in Latin: there were no pining Calpurnias out there, not even a Cotta: *iam seges est ubi Troia fuit* 'Now there are fields of grain where Troy once was'. When thirty-nine of my would-be correspondents wrote back, from countries as diverse as Poland, Yugoslavia, Morocco, Mexico, and Japan, as well as Germany, France and Spain, I was forced to write individual replies. I kept outlines of my letters in a little pink notebook so that I could remember what I had written to whom.

When we travel alone, we remember more about the places visited than when we travel with others. The shock of discovery of faraway places is more forceful, and hence more memorable, when it is less mediated. The journey that I took into Esperanto was an essentially solitary journey. There was no class to accompany me, no assignments to be carried out by a given date, no penalties (beyond lack of comprehension) for mistakes. Unlike the pen-friends doled out to us by English-based French teachers, these young people whom I had discovered through Esperanto were *my* friends, whom I had found and who had found me. For a solitary child in a regimented boarding school, this virtual community, separated entirely from the normal diurnal round, was of great value. Many solitary children create daydream worlds, imaginary places. I had discovered a real world, yet a world removed from the one I normally inhabited. I devoted a large part of my free time to letter writing. Though over the months and years my correspondence with the original thirty-nine penpals dropped off, as our lives went their various ways, in the meantime I was learning rapidly to read and write the language, pushing my knowledge in new directions as my various postal conversations diverged and branched. Meanwhile, several of the connections blossomed into sustained friendships. We exchanged photographs of course, but also other images and objects that illustrated our respective lives. And I fell in love with more than one attractive female correspondent in more than one unattainable part of the world.

I cannot vouch for the accuracy of my Esperanto during this early period, but comprehensibility rather than grammatical accuracy was my goal, and I soon learned to recognize and avoid the errors of others. My vocabulary grew, along with my ability to generate new morphological forms, following Esperanto's simple rules of word-formation. These rules were complete. They went beyond the partially productive Latin-based morphology of English to permit any kind of rule-based variant, and

hence I could create words for which no equivalent existed in English, and I could do so in part without the aid of a dictionary; Esperanto has its quirks of usage too, but they are less constricting than those in English. It is primarily this quality that allows the user of the language to cross the threshold of usability very early in the learning process and begin applying the language to practical situations: a strong argument, as I later discovered, for the use of the language as an introduction to language study. While Esperanto has its norms, and, as in other languages, norms of usage constrain simple productivity, as a beginner I was less aware of these norms and quite willing to experiment. So rapid is the process of learning in the early stages of Esperanto that, arguably, the road to full competency is as much a process of elimination as it is of acquisition.

I subscribed to *Heroldo de Esperanto* and read it regularly. Soon I was acquiring and reading other Esperanto texts as well, so that the errors of my own writing were gradually erased by my reading and I grew better able to recognize errors in others. I might add that, given the range of the native languages of my correspondents, their errors themselves followed no clear pattern, and I had no particular reason to acquire their bad habits, nor they mine. During vacations from school, I listened to radio programs, my first source of spoken Esperanto.

I had begun learning Esperanto in the fall of 1954. In the spring of 1955 I had my first conversation in the language. The occasion was a brief first visit to France in the company of an uncle and aunt. We stayed in a hotel of somewhat primitive plumbing, so that my first spontaneously generated sentence of the trip was the French equivalent of "My wash-basin has fallen off the wall." Although the trip was intended to improve my French, and was moderately successful in that regard, I made a bee-line for the Paris Esperanto Society, which in those days met weekly in a lecture hall in the Sorbonne. I have little recollection of the substance of the meeting, but I well remember the friendly conversation that followed in a local café. I struggled to understand those around me and had to work to form sentences, but my new-found friends encouraged me, ignoring my mistakes and working to make themselves understood. This was a linguistic community to which entry was particularly easy, both because it welcomed newcomers and because we were all on an equal footing, talking in a language in one sense not our own but in another sense very much our communal possession. This air of equality and inclusiveness impressed me particularly and led to further adventures with the language, particularly my first international Esperanto congress in 1956 and my first Esperanto youth congress in 1958.

The 1956 congress was in Copenhagen. Such international meetings had been going on in Esperanto since 1905, when the first congress gathered in Boulogne-sur-mer in the presence of Esperanto's founder, Lazar Ludvik Zamenhof (1859–1917) and several hundred other Esperantists. The congresses still go on today. With their business meetings and lectures, their artistic events and banquets, they may be rich in linguistic experiences, but they offer relatively little to the average sixteen-year-old, even one as determined to participate as I was. That is why young Esperanto speakers have their own meetings, separate from the annual congresses. I enjoyed the congress week, not least because my conversational Esperanto improved steadily, but I was not at home in this unrelievedly grown-up world. I was to discover a quite different world when I went to my first youth congress in 1958.

Meanwhile my Esperanto activities continued, as did my study of other languages. I continued French and Latin, though I dropped German. With my marginal O-Level pass, today I can puzzle out a German text but cannot sustain a conversation of any complexity, though German has helped me acquire a rudimentary reading knowledge of Dutch, which I sometimes have occasion to use. I organized an Esperanto club in my school and began to teach the language to others. We acquired a small library of Esperanto books, which circulated in the group and which I read avidly. By this time, I was well able to speak and write the language with reasonable accuracy. With my newly-gained knowledge of the world, gathered from my correspondents and my reading in Esperanto, I carried off the school prize in General Knowledge, based on a test administered to all students in a certain grade each year, and brought all kinds of obscure information, especially about the lesser-known cultures of Europe, to the classroom. Translated Esperanto literature was notable for its anthologies of the literature of individual peoples, Hungarian, Estonian, Japanese, and so on. As a result, my interest in English literature was soon paralleled by a knowledge of the work of other writers in other languages, some of them quite out of the mainstream.

Some of my contemporaries and several of my teachers regarded my sudden interest in Esperanto skeptically. The language was not then, nor is it now, held in particularly high regard. Some saw it as an impoverished language, without historical roots or without a culture of its own; some regarded it as "artificial", as opposed to the "natural", ethnic languages. In fact, all languages are made by art, and "natural" is a slippery and misleading term. I was beginning to learn that, far from impoverishment, the language allowed for a flexibility of expression that seemed infinitely

productive. And if Esperanto was unusual in its creation, in that it was the product of a single individual, a hundred years of usage had taken it far beyond its creator to make it the language of a community of users, whose communication was as "natural" as that in any other language.

The next significant jump in my own knowledge, confirming this sense of the "naturalness" of communication in Esperanto, came in 1958, at the annual congress of TEJO, the world Esperanto youth organization. The week long meeting was quite small, with a little over a hundred young people crammed into a youth hostel in Germany, but its smallness made it a family affair, in which friendships were rapidly formed and in which we all tried to pack as much into the week as we could. Since TEJO was an organization both to bring young Esperanto-speakers together and to promote the language among young people, we had a sense of common purpose as well. The experience confirmed my commitment to Esperanto by involving me in what can best be described as an instant international community of young people from a dozen or more countries. It was a community in which I felt myself an equal and in which I could share my thoughts, feelings and emotions in an environment essentially cut off from my everyday life, both linguistically and geographically. In short, the penalties for spontaneity were extremely low. Friendships were immediate because of their very ephemeral nature; understanding came quickly because of the desire for it. Furthermore, in such an environment it became possible to remake oneself – to form a personality in the new language and with new acquaintances, different from the constricted personality of one's native language and the continuity of one's normal surroundings and acquaintances. Irving Goffman calls this process "footing": one shifts from one affective construct to another. For me, this process was particularly liberating, and in many respects I was to repeat it, but in a modified monolingual environment, when as a graduate student I made the transition from Britain to the United States.

This sense of linguistic community was total. The language we used among ourselves for the week was only Esperanto. In fact, quite early on, I lost a clear sense of who belonged to what nationalities, who spoke what native languages. Though the congress had its formal program, most interaction was informal. We lived together, we ate together, we played together, we talked together. My German, such as it was, came in handy in town, but in the group we used only Esperanto. This was before the period of generalized English-language study in the schools of Europe, and Esperanto was the only language that we all, or even most of us, had in common. The week made a fundamental difference to my

spoken language, teaching me a range of conversational expressions and phraseologies, some of which were a part of the written literature of Esperanto but many of which were largely confined to spoken Esperanto and some of which were used only by the TEJO subculture. Because of its structure, Esperanto is particularly rich in opportunities for wordplay: puns, cross-formations in which roots normally used in one grammatical context can be adapted to others, various uses of back-formations. Our conversation sparkled with such extravagances. Years ago, in a brief study of an Esperanto-speaking children's meeting, the psychologist Victor Sadler observed a process of social stratification based on language proficiency. In our exuberant exploitation of the quirkiness of Esperanto, we were surely engaged in a similar competition to excel linguistically because such excellence was the main marker of power.

What I had assumed to be a written language turned out to be very much a spoken language as well, and what I had assumed to be conventional and rule-bound turned out to have cross-cutting verbal conventions that, while not denying the rules, turned them to unexpected ends. Perhaps the biggest surprise for many learners of Esperanto is the discovery that the language is rich in allusion, poetic, offering constant new possibilities for self-expression. I should add that I have chosen, in this essay, to ignore the common criticisms of Esperanto: the curious reader can find them addressed elsewhere, for example by Timothy Reagan (2005).

And it was here in the TEJO meeting that I became committed to what might be called the cultural ideology of Esperanto. It was a language that I and others identified with equality of communication, with an effort to understand one another, with respect and tolerance. These are sentiments that we may also pursue through the medium of our own language and by learning other languages, but they are sentiments that to an impressionable youngster seemed built into the very verb forms, the very vocabulary, of Esperanto. I was, of course, only partially right. The language has been used over the years for many purposes, not all of them honorable: the German High Command in World War I, apologists for various atrocities in China. Even in the Esperanto community itself there are many different views on the importance or lack of importance of proselytizing and the desirability or lack of desirability of having Esperanto become an all-purpose international language. We must be careful about not seeing the Esperanto-speaking community as ideologically monolithic.

Nor can it be described as semantically monolithic. We look for a congruence of semantic understanding in any language, and Esperanto

is no exception. It began as a language whose lexicon was constructed out of the common semantic legacy of European languages. The roots that Zamenhof found for his language were roots in both a linguistic and a semantic sense, since as an *a posteriori* language Esperanto's word roots were historically derived. Esperanto therefore had a history and an etymology from the very beginning. We could call it a kind of instant past.

But, despite Zamenhof's codification of these meanings in his early dictionaries, from the beginning Esperanto was a testing-ground for the competing semantics of its speakers. Given that Zamenhof himself invented only a fraction of the word roots now in use in the language, this process of semantic negotiation has continued, to the enrichment of Esperanto, ever since. In this sense, Esperanto is no code, but a rich *dialogistic* medium of communication, to use Bakhtin's term. That is why I describe it as allusive and poetic, rather than mechanical and excessively rule-bound (see Tonkin 1993, 2002).

I will not detail the process whereby my ease with the language gradually blossomed into fluency, or recount in full the chronology of my engagement. As an undergraduate I became active in the larger Esperanto movement, launching a youth organization in Britain in 1959–60 and joining the board of the international association TEJO in 1961. At Cambridge I found a lively Esperanto society already in place and was soon giving speeches about the language in our outreach efforts (and learning how to defend it against its critics). As a member of the Cambridge Union and a debater for many years, I found my skills were easily transferred also to my new language. Indeed in some respects they were enhanced, since I learned to enjoy the rhetorical flexibility afforded by Esperanto's open word order and word-forming capacity. When TEJO decided to launch its own international magazine, I was chosen as editor, and writing for publication became a significant part of my activities.

At Cambridge, I added a further language to my repertoire. In order to read Dante and Ariosto, over six months I learned a modicum of Italian, with the assistance of tutors both at Cambridge and in Cornwall during university vacations, but for the most part I was self-taught. Learning was made easier by my prior knowledge of the Latin-based Esperanto and its kindred phonology, but the language was more easily forgotten because of the very speed with which I learned it. I have gone in and out of Italian ever since, just recently devoting part of a summer to bringing it back again. Relative mastery of the phonology paradoxically allowed me to read the language with considerable ease, and also, under the right circumstances, to speak it. Undoubtedly the main influence in

this process was Esperanto. I learned my Italian above all through this previous linguistic experience. It is important to note, however, that Italian came, and went, easily. It did so primarily because of my cumulative experience of learning languages: the art of language learning may lie not in the acquisition of an individual language but in mastery of the learning process itself.

During this period I was also making active use of my French, since Baudelaire and the Symbolists were also on my university reading list. As I moved to graduate school, my knowledge of French and Italian, and, in some measure, Latin, helped me in my study of comparative literature.

The skeptic among my readers may ask, legitimately, what it means to speak Esperanto fluently. How can one *measure* fluency, how can one compare Esperanto with other more conventional languages dominated by native speakers? Esperanto does in fact have its native speakers: young people meet through Esperanto and choose to make their lives together; thus Esperanto becomes a family language. However, they are a small minority and have little direct influence on the evolution of the language. So who is the ideal Esperanto speaker against whom to measure oneself? The accomplished user tends to follow the norms established by those who are widely regarded as models of style and pronunciation. In my own case, my Cambridge contemporary John Wells taught me to work at eliminating those aspects of speech and style that could be described as identifiably British: English turns of phrase, a bias toward Esperanto words derived from English, the extensive use of plosives and diphthongs. The goal was to pass as something else – to obscure one's language origins in one's language use. Another model readily available was Ivo Lapenna, an international lawyer of Croatian origin and resident in London, where he taught at the London School of Economics. Lapenna was general secretary of the international Esperanto association UEA and was known as a superb orator. He offered a model of usage sharply different from the British accents of many of the other Esperantists of my acquaintance. And my Esperanto activities in an international context brought me into frequent contact with a range of Esperanto speakers of differing linguistic backgrounds. This desire very specifically to *obliterate* evidence of one's language origins is in my view one of the principal determining factors in the achievement of fluency in Esperanto: one must learn to rely on the language itself, not on the languages around it. When one's Esperanto speech floats free of its prior linguistic moorings, one ceases to translate and begins, as it were, to speak in the original.

My active use of the language was supplemented by my reading, as a student of literature I became deeply interested in the literature of Esperanto. As a graduate student in 1963, I took my tape-recorder to Budapest to interview the then greatest living poet in Esperanto, Kálmán Kalocsay, and I made the acquaintance of many of those who contributed in various ways to Esperanto literature – the publisher Juan Régulo, the poets William Auld and Marjorie Boulton. My reading included not only western writers but writers from Japan and China, both original and translated. I also listened to radio broadcasts, many of them brief contributions in the world services of various national radios. It often took fourteen minutes of frantic turning of the dial to find fifteen-minute programs in Esperanto, so that one might say that I became skilled in leave-taking without advancing my ability to say hello ….

These experiences deepened all aspects of my linguistic knowledge, though within certain limits. I soon became very active in UEA, the international Esperanto association based in Rotterdam. I represented TEJO in the association's executive committee and later became an executive committee member myself. By this time I was a graduate student at Harvard, where we also had a very active Esperanto club. I traveled back and forth across the Atlantic several times a year, and tended to TEJO and UEA business in much of my free time. I spent a good deal of time translating English and occasionally French texts into Esperanto, in order to circulate them among our members and activists; an interest in translation has remained high among my scholarly occupations. Work in international NGOs leads to a high degree of competence in administrative terminology: I could talk for hours about topics ranging from the structure of the United Nations to the management of investments or the conduct of audits. But it does relatively little to enhance everyday vocabulary; a visit to the supermarket or an afternoon of babysitting can still tax one's linguistic ingenuity. Of course, reading can help, since Esperanto, as I have suggested, has a large literature, including novels and plays that deal with everyday situations and use everyday vocabulary. Yet reading is not the same as experience. Furthermore, everyday experiences and operations, such as cleaning the bathroom or cooking dinner, often result in nonce solutions, which may not gain general recognition even if they work for an individual family. Today, we Esperantists are better at standardizing such language than we were even a generation ago (see, for example, Lindstedt's dictionary of "home" Esperanto, 1999), but the normalization of conversational spontaneity remains challenging for a language whose origins were primarily written rather than spoken.

By the same token, Esperanto is weak in extralinguistic and paralinguistic norms, such as conversational distance, gesture, and some aspects of intonation. I well remember my first visit to Bulgaria in 1963, where I found myself in the company of plenty of competent Esperanto speakers, some of whom had never had a conversation with a foreigner. Forced to adapt, I found I had great difficulty in working out how to position myself at a comfortable conversational distance without retreating across the room. Negotiating one's way through interactions in which the various parties *think* they understand the pragmatics of everyday communication but are in fact importing norms from their own cultures, can be difficult. Paradoxically, the very conversational power of the *language* Esperanto is enhanced by the sheer vehemence of Esperantist disagreement: this is a peace-loving community that is quick to quarrel, quick to take offense. Some of this sensitivity may come from the likelihood that many speakers of the language seek it out because they are uncomfortable in their own societies and also have inflated expectations of their adopted language, but the lack of standardized extralinguistic and paralinguistic behaviors is, I am convinced, a factor. I have experienced such difficulties on many occasions myself. The Universal Esperanto Association meets once a year at its World Congresses. Its main governing body, the Committee, or Council, consists of representatives of Esperanto organizations all around the world. Since these individuals have little time to learn one another's norms and to accommodate them, and since no clearly established *international* norms exist, I have on many occasions fallen back on my own English-language-based paralinguistic behavior, only to cause offense where it was not intended. When the offense is obvious, it can be atoned for; when it is not, it can linger and poison relationships. The problem of affect is always with us in multilingual situations.

Early on in my Esperanto apprenticeship I discovered the centrality of *performance* in Esperanto. As an activity defined by a commitment to a language, Esperanto puts a premium on the ability to manipulate and apply the language and accords status and prestige to those who do these things well, despite occasional bouts of egalitarian remorse as we discover that we are engaging in the same kind of unequal linguistic stratification as occurs in other languages. Over the years, I have certainly found myself in such ideological binds. This, along with the construction of an alternative personality that is perhaps typified by my own efforts to make my language as unlike English as possible, helps account for the relatively high level of competence even among casual users of the language.

My subsequent experience in the Esperanto movement, particularly in organizational roles, taught me a particular kind of patience and sensitivity in the cross-cultural environment first of the Esperanto youth movement and then of the Universal Esperanto Association, whose president I became from 1974 to 1980 and again from 1986 to 1989. They were experiences that I was readily able to transfer to my career as a university administrator. When the University of Pennsylvania was ripped apart by the Vietnam-era troubles of the early 1970s, the administration turned to me, a newly tenured associate professor, to head the university-wide reform of undergraduate education. I believe that my experience in the often fractious Esperanto movement and in a different linguistic setting helped me understand some of the cross-currents of that turbulent period in an American context, and it certainly gave me specific skills I might not otherwise have had. From then on, the two worlds of English-based higher education and Esperanto-based NGO leadership constantly reinforced one another, often in unexpected ways.

The Esperanto experience also animated my scholarly life, deepening my studies in language policy and planning, which became an interest that paralleled my more immediate training in sixteenth-century English and which has played a major part in my scholarly development. Today, as editor of the multilingual journal *Language Problems and Language Planning* (*LPLP*), I work in all of my languages to some degree, and I preside over a journal that also includes languages I do not know.

Still more importantly, the Esperanto experience shaped my internationalist impulses. When, during my time at the University of Pennsylvania, I steered the institution toward international engagement, I did so not as an American with a conviction that such engagement was a necessity, but as an internationalist looking for ways of creating such internationalism in the context of American higher education. Underlying these beliefs was a sense of the importance of communicative diversity – a need to accept and acknowledge the fact that the peoples of this planet lead their lives in different ways and according to differing codes, and that it is important to know more about these codes in order properly to acknowledge their existence. We can hear these different codes as mere cacophony, suggests Doris Sommer in her study of bilingual aesthetics, or we can go beyond cacophony to hear them as counterpoint (Sommer 2004: 54). A similar conviction about the benefits of linguistic diversity made me a strong advocate of language learning in general. Later, I used the bully pulpit of two college presidencies to promote an internationalist vision. I joined the boards of various international exchange and interna-

tional education organizations – the Council for International Exchange of Scholars, the Canadian Fulbright Commission, the International Partnership for Service-Learning, the American Forum for Global Education, World Learning, the Center for Applied Linguistics. None of these engagements can be wholly separated from the formative experience of Esperanto; each constituted an adaptation of my own ideological convictions to fit the particular needs and aspirations of kindred ideals and to promote the belief that we are all equal partners in determining the destiny of our fellow human beings, wherever, and in whatever condition, they may be.

My travels immerse me in Esperanto for perhaps two or three weeks a year and the telephone and e-mail intrude daily. This is complemented by my reading in Esperanto and my listening to radio programs on the Internet. Thus I can assert that not a day passes that is not lived in part through the medium of the language. But in some respects there is a clear separation between my Esperanto-speaking and my English-speaking lives, even if occasionally my wife and I use Esperanto as a secret language in the presence of English speakers, and even if, talking with one another in English about Esperanto events, we switch codes for Esperanto words we cannot easily translate.

Today, I read extensively, as a part of my scholarly work, in English, and on occasion in French and Italian; but I also read widely in Esperanto. I suspect that my rate of understanding an English text is faster and more complete than my rate of understanding an Esperanto text, even after all these years, but I read both languages rapidly and easily. French takes longer, and Italian longer still. As for spoken language, there is really very little difference between my English and Esperanto skills, though obviously in each language I am stronger in some domains than in others. Whether I am more aware of English linguistic forms when speaking Esperanto than I am of Esperanto linguistic forms when speaking English, I cannot say, but it is not unusual for me to find myself wrestling in English for the equivalent of an Esperanto expression that describes some sentiment or idea.

Of course, inevitably I yearn for the flexibility of Esperanto when I speak English, and for the nuanced richness of English vocabulary when I speak Esperanto. But this is surely characteristic of all people who know more than one language: we are irritated, for example, by the fact that French words as varied as *trajet, sympathique* and *chantier* have no equivalent in English, especially when they intrude, as they often do, into the mental search mechanisms that we use to choose the right word in a

different linguistic discourse. One might call this *mental interference*: the intrusion, when one is searching to express oneself in a given language, of a word or expression from another language.

But if, *linguistically,* my two languages are mostly compartmentalized, they are not so separated cognitively or ideologically: my circle of Esperanto friends and acquaintances, and indeed the Esperanto community in general, have a broad if incalculable effect on my knowledge and views of the world. Regardless of linguistic opinion or public skepticism, which suggests that Esperanto is not a real language, or will not work, or is mere utopianism, Esperanto has shaped my life, expanded my linguistic skills, left me richer in experience, and, I would hope, made me politically more aware than would ever have happened otherwise. To see the world through the prism of another language, especially one that takes the entire world as its domain, is to be richer in experience and more aware of the relativity of one's own perceptions. We live in a world of constantly competing discourses – a world perhaps best understood when that contest is explicitly present in our own linguistic universe, and difference in the larger world is simply a reflection of difference in ourselves.

And, as they say on TV, I owe it all to my high-school German teacher.

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Reflective questions and points for exploration

1. If you have studied or if you speak more than one language, what has been your primary motivation for acquiring an additional language? Did your motivation change over time? Was your original motivation internal, external, or both? What were some of the factors that influenced your motivation – what triggered, sustained, or decreased it?

2. The author of this narrative wrote that he exchanged one form of English for another when he moved from Britain to the United States to earn a Ph.D. in English literature. Do you consider such a move as giving up part of one's identity? Are you a supporter of language diversity or a pragmatist who see such a "blending in" as necessary, desirable and useful?

3. Have a look at the following quote from this narrative: "What the legacy of Latin did for me above all was to lay the groundwork for my later language learning. When I am in doubt, for example, about the gender of a particular word in French or Italian, I seek the Latin equivalent and read its gender back into the language I am using." What is your experience with cross-linguistic influence? Do you agree with researchers who have claimed that certain dimensions of language are less susceptible to such influences?

4. Describing his experience with positioning himself in the world of Esperanto, Humphrey Tonkin made the following comment: "This was a linguistic community to which entry was particularly easy, both because it welcomed newcomers and because we were all on an equal footing, talking in a language in one sense not our own but in another sense very much our communal possession. This air of equality and inclusiveness impressed me particularly and led to further adventures with the language." Do you find evaluating oneself against native speakers' norms, and almost invariably falling short in some areas, demotivating? Some have critically referred to the use of native speakers' norms to judge bi- and multilingual learners and users as the "monolinguistic bias" of SLA. Do you find this criticism reasonable?

5. The author of the narrative describes the positive effect of his Esperanto and Latin on his new language, Italian, and goes on to say: "It is important to note, however, that Italian came (and went) easily primarily because of my cumulative experience of learning languages: the art of language learning may lie not in the acquisition of an individual language

but in mastery of the learning process itself." Try and deconstruct this latter concept. Make a mind map or use any other device that can allow you to reflect more deeply on the possible dimensions of the processes of language learning.

6. This narrative offers a fascinating example of the complexities of choosing one's target, particularly with a language like Esperanto, with its lack of native speakers in the traditional sense of the word. It also describes how the author, and others, determined what it means to be close to "an ideal model". How do you choose between targets when learning languages, e.g. choosing between British or American English, or English as an international language?

7. Can you think of examples from your personal experiences with language that confirm and illustrate the following statement from this narrative: "To see the world through the prism of another language is to be richer in experience and more aware of the relativity of one's own perceptions."

Chapter 11

A multilingual journey from East to West

Haiyan Hu

Languages Explored: Mandarin Chinese, Huihui dialect, Yunnan dialect, Cantonese, English, Japanese, Spanish, Afrikaans

1. Introduction

This is the story of my learning experiences with seven different languages: Huihui dialect, Yunnan dialect, Mandarin Chinese, Cantonese, English, Japanese and Spanish. Until I was nineteen years old, I could speak only the Huihui and Yunnan dialects. Then, simultaneously, I started to learn Japanese, Mandarin Chinese and Cantonese. Four years later, I became a teacher of Japanese at Sun Yet-san University in southern China.

At the advanced age of thirty-four I began to learn to speak English – a task many people considered impossible. On hearing that I was taking an oral English class, an English professor of mine in China told me he was sure I would not stick with it. I told him that I would and in the last six years I have not only learned how to speak, read and write in English, but I have also earned a Master's degree in Teaching English as Second Language. In this narrative I share my personal journey of language acquisition and learning.

2. My current profile as a multilingual speaker

As a Chinese native speaker, I speak Mandarin Chinese, Cantonese, Huihui dialect, a common language among the Hui people in Yunnan province, and Yunnan dialect, a common language among the Han people in Yunnan province. I have taught Japanese, Mandarin Chinese and English in China, Japan, the United States and Mexico. I majored in Japanese language and literature, minored in English as an undergraduate at Sun Yet-san University in China, and earned my Master's degree in Teaching

English as a Second Language at the School for International Training (SIT) in Brattleboro, Vermont, where I also had the opportunity to study Afrikaans and Spanish.

The table below charts the order in which I learned these languages and dialects, and my current level of proficiency in each. There is no writing system of Huihui dialect, Yunnan dialect, or Cantonese.

Table 1. My current proficiency in seven languages and dialects (According to the Interagency Language Roundtable scale)

No.	Name of the language	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
1	Huihui dialect	5	5	N/A	N/A
2	Yunnan dialect	5	5	N/A	H/A
3	English	5	5	5	5
4	Mandarin Chinese	5	5	5	5
5	Japanese	5	5	5	5
6	Cantonese	5	5	N/A	N/A
7	Afrikaans	0	1	0	0
8	Spanish	1	1	1	1

0 = No ability
1 = Able to satisfy basic survival needs and courtesy requirements
2 = Able to satisfy routine social demands and limited work needs
3 = Able to use the language with sufficient accuracy and vocabulary
4 = Able to use it with accuracy in most informal and formal contexts
5 = Able to use the language like an educated native speaker

3. My first two dialects: Huihui dialect and Yunnan dialect

I was born in Huihuideng, a Muslim village in south-western China in 1966. My father (Hui minority) and my mother (Han majority) spoke two different dialects: Huihui dialect and Yunnan dialect. Huihui is a common language among local Muslim ethnic people. It is a combination of Mongolian, Arabic and a local Chinese dialect. Its history can be traced back to the Yuan Dynasty (1279−1368 A.D.) when Kublai Khan, Genghis Khan's grandson, and the emperor and founder of the Yuan Dynasty, conquered Dali country in south-western China.

Kublai Khan left his troops, made up of Mongols, Arabs and Persians, to rule the Dali area. Their language and culture continues to influence the local Huihui people who adapted and developed the Huihui dialect as the common language of that area. This dialect has been changing over time with the interaction between the Han and the Hui people, but

there are still significant differences between the Huihui dialect and the Han dialects in south-western China. For example, I call my father *ada* 'dad' in Huihui dialect while local Han children call their fathers *boaboa*. Phonetically, the sound of *ada* is quite different from Mandarin Chinese, while *boaboa* is closer to Mandarin Chinese *baba* 'dad'.

As a child I spoke Huihui dialect when I talked to my father, and switched to Yunnan dialect when I spoke to my mother. In my daily life, I say *nawei* (thank you in Huihui dialect) to my father, and *xiexie* (thank you in Yunnan dialect) to my mother. Even now I switch between dialects when I talk to my parents on the phone.

My ability to learn languages as an adult has been considerably facilitated by the input of these two dialects from my earliest childhood. Analyzing differences regarding how questions are formed in the two dialects lead me to new understanding of my own language learning abilities. In Huihui dialect, the question maker *lai* is used at the end of both yes-no questions and wh-questions. However, in Yunnan dialect, the question maker *ge* is inset, put before the verb only for forming yes-no questions. Question formation of Huihui dialect follows the same rules as those in Japanese, while question formation in the Yunnan dialect is similar to the English insertion of *do*. I believe that these similarities partly explain why I have been able to acquire additional languages faster than most monolingual language learners.

4. Learning languages in China

Beginning in the early 1980's, the Chinese government began to open up the country to the rest of the world. The Education Department required schools to teach English so that students would be able to learn Western advanced science and technology, and English became a mandatory subject in middle school, high school and at the university level. While this policy got Chinese students studying English from an early age, the teaching of any language in China was dominated by a teacher-centered, book-centered, grammar-translation method, with emphasis on rote memorization.

The target language was viewed as a structured system of grammatical patterns. Sentence grammar was emphasized over sentence content in language textbooks. There was a keen interest in understanding the exact meaning of every word, a low tolerance for ambiguity, and a focus on discrete grammar points and specific syntactical constructions.

Translation was used as a teaching and learning strategy in all courses designed for Chinese English learners at various levels. Students were required to translate either from English to Chinese or from Chinese to English. Language was also seen as a unified entity with fixed grammatical patterns and a core of basic words. Language variability was neither accepted, nor seen as determined by the character of particular communicative contexts. Occasionally, a learner might ask questions to clarify language points, but this communication is strictly between the teacher and the learners rather than among the learners themselves.

Finally, classes tended to be teacher-centered. In almost all Chinese classrooms, the teacher was the center of classroom activities. The teacher was considered the subject-matter authority, and it was assumed that learners learn best by listening to and talking to the teacher. The lecture method was the most obvious example of teacher-centered instruction with the teacher telling learners what he thought they should know. Teachers spent much classroom time explaining language points and the Chinese meanings of words, with all the learners busy listening and taking notes. Occasionally students might ask questions, but communication was strictly between the teacher and the learner rather than among the learners in the class. Any argument or negotiation with the teacher in class was considered absolutely rude and disrespectful. Teachers feared losing face before their learners if learners were given time to raise questions to which the teacher might have no immediate answer.

Clearly language teaching in China provided input, but no output. Little attention was paid to developing communicative competence. Students memorized grammar structures, and made direct translations, but seldom knew when, how, or with whom they might put their learning to use.

My own experience of learning Japanese and English reflects language teaching in China. While language study in China gave me a basic knowledge of these languages, acquiring fluency in both languages happened later.

5. My first encounter with a foreign language: Learning to sing the Alphabet Song

In the early 1970's I knew little about the country named *Meiguo* 'America', but by the time I was eleven years old I had learned about American imperialism, Japanese Imperialism and British Imperialism. All these

countries were our enemies, but to implement the new policy that all students must learn English, teachers were forced to teach English even though they had never learned any English themselves. In elementary school my English teacher was my music teacher, and it was like learning English in the dark. Every day we began our lesson by singing the ABC's, the English alphabet song. I studied English twice a week for one semester, but all I remembered was that simple song.

In middle school, my English teacher was Mr. Zhang, a Russian language teacher. All former Russian language teachers were required to learn English on their own using a tape and a tape recorder, and then to begin teaching English.

The first sentence Mr. Zhang taught us was "I love my motherland". With his deep love of our motherland, he explained and analyzed English grammar in each class.

I learned subject, predicate and object. I leaned about countable nouns and uncountable nouns. I learned about transitive verbs and intransitive verbs. From middle school to high school, I took an English class twice a week for six years and became very good at taking English exams, because I only needed to choose the right answer on multiple-choice tests. On my college entrance test I received the highest English score among candidates in the State of Dali. Unfortunately, I knew I could not speak English at all.

6. Learning three languages simultaneously: Mandarin Chinese, Japanese and Cantonese

In 1985 I passed the national university entrance exam and enrolled in the most prestigious university in southern China, Sun Yet-san University. At age nineteen, I left my hometown and went to a completely new place, the city of Guangzhou, where the local people speak Cantonese. Until this time I had only spoken the Huihui and Yunnan dialects, but now I had to learn Mandarin for all of my classes. Most professors could not speak standard Mandarin. As a result, during my first three months, I had to ask, "What did the teacher say?" in order to figure out what my professors were saying in their different dialects.

Because of my interest in different cultures, and the influence of a Japanese pen-pal, I chose Japanese as my major, with English as my minor. I spent at least ten hours every day working on my major, reading and reciting all the texts in my Japanese textbook. At the beginning of

every class, we were required to stand up and recite the whole text we had learned the day before. The teacher would use his watch to keep the time. If we could not finish reciting during the time he required, we would have two texts or more to recite the following day. After so much drilling, recitation and grammar study, I had learned a lot about the language. However, I had a huge shock two years later when I had the chance to speak to some Japanese people. I discovered I was still unable to converse in Japanese. After this unpleasant surprise I began to focus on more practicing and producing.

Since I was living in a Cantonese-speaking area, I felt a strong desire to communicate with the local people. Every morning, I studied Cantonese by myself by listening to news broadcast on the radio. From 6:30 to 7:00 am, the news was broadcast in Mandarin Chinese. From 7:00 to 7:30 am, the same news was broadcast in Cantonese.

I spent one hour listening to the news every day. Three months later, I found that I could guess what Cantonese people were talking about. I had learned quickly because the input in Cantonese was meaningful and met my needs. At this point, however, my English proficiency in listening comprehension and speaking was still "0", and my writing was still at sentence level.

7. From fear of speaking to Americans to learning to speak English

Yunnan province in south-western China, where I grew up, is close to Vietnam. During the Vietnam War, all Chinese people were taught to hate Americans. Whenever we saw an airplane in the sky, we ran to an underground shelter. My grandparents often warned my three sisters and me, "Never ever pick up any candies from the ground! American soldiers drop those candies! They are poisonous! American soldiers are coming to kill all Chinese children!" At that time I was just an elementary school kid, but this fear was deeply rooted in my mind. As a result, I never even said hello to a westerner until I was thirty-four years old.

As a visiting scholar at Kobe University in Japan in 1999 and 2000, I had a chance to meet scholars from all over the world. I lived in an international residence where the common language was English instead of Japanese. I remember that on the train on my way to the university an American student asked me if I was doing my Ph.D. here at Kobe University. I could not answer his question because I did not know what

Ph.D. meant. That night, I looked it up in my dictionary and found out the meaning.

I was shocked that my English was so poor, having studied English for eight years. That day I made up my mind to start focusing on my English again.

In the spring of 2002, I started taking conversation classes in English with an American teacher who was sent by the School for International Training (SIT). In April that year, my English teacher sent me an email that there was a job opening at Marlboro College in the U.S. A Chinese native speaker was required to teach Chinese and Japanese. I applied for the position and it was the first time I wrote my resume and an application letter in English. Within a week I learned I had gotten the job, and I was soon on my way to America.

Teaching both Japanese and Chinese at Marlboro College provided me with a great opportunity to develop my English in all four skills. The first word I looked up in my dictionary was "syllabus" because I had to submit two syllabi, but could not exactly understand what "syllabus" meant. I logged on to a website, found syllabi written by other teachers, and then made my own. I was the only Chinese person on campus, and lived with two international housemates, Emily, from England and Iuliana, from Romania. Right away I was speaking English both on campus and at home.

The first three months were like a nightmare for me. I was totally exhausted. Then suddenly, as I was walking from my house to campus, I realized for the first time that I was thinking in English. That was a good sign. It meant that I had started to think in English without any translation. My English had reached a new, higher, level.

8. Switching between three languages: Chinese, Japanese and English

During my three years at Marlboro College, switching between three languages became part of my daily life. Before I walked into each classroom, I had to remind myself: this is a Chinese class, or this is a Japanese class. Before writing on the blackboard, I had to figure out which version of Chinese characters I had to use, since some students were learning a simplified version and some students were learning the traditional version of Chinese characters. Usually I switched between three languages during meals in the dining hall. I became rather good at this because at the same table were my housemates, who spoke English, and my students who were studying Japanese and Chinese.

9. Beginning Spanish and Afrikaans

My graduate internship teaching English at a language school in Pachuca, Mexico, was a strong motivation for me to learn Spanish. I took a weeklong intensive Spanish class before I went to Mexico, and during my seven-week internship there, I was able to use my knowledge of English to increase my Spanish vocabulary. One strategy I used was to go through the *Vocabulario Final* of my Spanish textbook and mark words that appeared similar to words in English. In this way I was able to discover patterns of Spanish word formation. For example, English words ending in *tion* correspond to *ción* in Spanish. This discovery helped me to master many Spanish words efficiently.

I quickly learned Spanish words such as *conjunción, interjección, preposición, introducción, interpretación, notificación and revoluión*. In this way, positive transfer from English to Spanish expedited my language acquisition.

While studying at the School for International Training, I learned some Afrikaans for two weeks. The name of the course was Shock Language and its purpose was to help us gain a better understanding of the feelings of new language learners. In the first class, I could not tell when the teacher was speaking English and when Afrikaans because the two languages seemed so similar. Afrikaans uses the same alphabet as English, except the letter ê, and some of its expressions sound very close to expressions I know in English. For instance, "Hello" in Afrikaans is "*Hallo*". "No" in Afrikaans is "*Nee*", and "Yes" in Afrikaans is "*Ja*". I was not shocked at all in this shock language class because the similarity between English and Afrikaans helped me feel that Afrikaans was an easy language and I could make connections to remember words, phrases and expressions. However, the similarity sometimes also caused confusion in my listening. I also found the grammar of Afrikaans much easier than that of English. Take the use of the verb "is" in Afrikaans as an example. It has no inflected forms. "I am" in Afrikaans is "*ek is*"; "you are" in Afrikaans is "*jy/u is*"; "we are" is "*ones is*"; "they are" is "*hulle is*". This usage is the same as that in Chinese. In general, my previous language learning experiences and knowledge helped me build my confidence while learning this new language. I did not experience any anxiety during my two weeks of learning Afrikaans. Now four years later, I still remember a number of very common expressions.

10. Uncontrolled influence of Japanese upon English

Japanese influenced my English in both sentence structure and vocabulary. As I began to learn English, I noticed my tendency to add a Japanese particle *-wa* after the subject. When I wanted to say "I am Haiyan", in my mind it was *I wa am Haiyan*. This strong urge was triggered by the sentence structure in the Japanese language.

At times the similarity between Japanese borrowed words and words in English still interferes with my ability to pronounce words correctly in English. There are many borrowed words from English, such as *chokoleto* 'chocolate', *shinpojiumu* 'symposium', *rejidensu* 'residence' and others. Having learned these words first in Japanese, I find I cannot pronounce them correctly in English. I am confused by their similarities.

Words that I have in my Japanese lexicon but not in my English lexicon can also cause language interference. When I speak English related to Japan or the Japanese language, and need to express complex ideas, very often Japanese vocabulary comes to mind first. For example, I read books related to Japanese history and culture in Japanese. If someone asks me questions about Japanese history and culture, I cannot answer in English. It seems that because the "input" is in Japanese, output in English remains impossible.

My grammar, reading and writing in Japanese are much stronger than these skills in my English because Japanese was my major at the university. I learned all four language skills in a formal setting. I taught Japanese grammar as an undergraduate course at university level. I have also done some professional translation, including a history book, research papers and business contracts. All of these have served to strengthen my reading and writing in Japanese.

In addition, the relationship between Chinese and Japanese writing helps my writing in Japanese. Writing in Japanese, I use as many Chinese characters as possible. The more Chinese characters I use, the higher the level of writing I demonstrate. All I need to do is to think in Chinese and use my Chinese-Japanese dictionary to make sure that the same word is used in both languages. Most abstract words in Japanese, such as words related to philosophy, are of Chinese origin.

When I was in Japan, many Japanese people told me that I spoke beautiful Japanese. I was aware, however, that my Japanese was too formal because I learned my Japanese from textbooks and in a formal business setting. I worked as a part-time interpreter during my junior year at

university. Because of the formal setting, I learned to speak Japanese in a very polite way. I tend to use complete sentences and the polite forms of verbs.

11. Thinking in other languages

I now use all of my languages directly, that is, without having to mentally translate to another language. While in Japan, I kept all my notes and my diaries in Japanese, even when I was upset. It took me three months to start thinking in English when I was teaching at Marlboro College, but now I think in English when functioning in English. I do, however, often still find I must mentally translate numbers, as the Chinese and English number systems are very different from one another.

12. Language, culture, worldview and behavior

It wasn't until one of my Chinese friends asked me "Don't you get tired of bowing when speaking to your Japanese professors?" that I realized that learning a new language might actually affect my behavior. After that, I became aware that I use different body language depending on whether I am speaking Chinese or Japanese. I bow and nod all the time when I speak Japanese.

I later discovered that my thinking and behavior underwent yet another change after I had learned English and been living in the United States. I remember attending the first meeting of the new faculty and staff orientation at Marlboro College in the fall of 2002, and struggling to figure out my rank among the whole group of people in order to decide where to sit down. The next summer I returned to China for a holiday and sat down in the front row at the US Consulate in Guangzhou, China. A staff member came to me and reminded me that the first two rows were reserved seats and I could only sit from the third row back. I was shocked at how my behavior had changed. After nine months I had forgotten the seating rules in China!

Certainly language and cultural upbringing are interconnected and play crucial roles in determining our views regarding the world around us. An assignment for a graduate course called "Intercultural Communication and Language Teaching" called my attention to this again. For the assignment, I was required to prepare and present a "culture box". I

collected my Yin Yang map and dragon phoenix cloth from the wall, and gathered my tea set and a traditional Chinese music CD. I put all the items I gathered into a round box as visual aids with which I could begin to explain my culture to the professor and my colleagues. Reflecting later on the different "culture box" presentations, I realized that my understanding of culture was quite different from that of my peers. When I heard the term culture box, I interpreted culture as Chinese culture. For me, my culture box meant "our" Chinese culture as a whole, culture as a "we" identity. In contrast, my American peers presented much more personal "I" identity through their culture boxes.

Chinese collective culture is also reflected in my English writing. This is not surprising, since according to Fan Shen (Shen 1989), one's sociocultural background shapes not only one's thinking, but also the organization and expression of thoughts in one's writing. Shen contrasts the use of "I" and "we" in Chinese and English writing. In Chinese the word "I" has often been identified with another "bad" word, individualism, which has become a synonym for selfishness in China. "In English, on the other hand, words like 'I' and 'self' are not only acceptable, but even glorious" (Shen 1989: 125). I have become very conscious, in my own writing, of my tendency to think in terms of the collective "we", and when communicating in a western context, I make an effort to change to I-statements, which are generally much more common and appropriate.

13. Conclusion

Background, schooling, politics and personal motivation have enabled me to become a multilingual speaker. My background as a speaker of two first languages, the dialects Huihui and Yunnan, helped me develop an inventory of sounds and an innate awareness of different sentence structures, which I believe has facilitated my learning English, Japanese, Mandarin Chinese, Cantonese and Spanish as an adult.

I have always had a strong desire to understand and communicate with people from other countries and language backgrounds. My motivation was further enhanced by the social factor of China's new open policy and English as a mandatory school subject.

I have used various strategies to assist me in learning languages. The most powerful of these has been interacting extensively with native speakers of the target languages. My language learning became useful and meaningful with that first interaction, exchanging letters in English with

my Japanese pen pal. As a teacher in the United States I have continually improved my English in the four skill areas through interacting with American professors and students. One of my goals in attending graduate school was to improve my academic English reading and writing. During my one-year study, not only did I develop my language teaching skills, but also greatly improved my English through reading and writing assignments.

Another strategy is positive transfer. For example, I transfer from Mandarin Chinese to increase my Japanese vocabulary and improve my Japanese writing. Since I am Chinese, it is possible for me to use Chinese characters to learn Japanese vocabulary and writing. Working with the Japanese kanji lists on the last two pages of most dictionaries, I made my own list for those with different writing strokes and different meanings. Since 95% of the Japanese words have the same meaning as those in Chinese, I was then able to shorten the list and speed up my learning of Japanese kanji. I only needed to memorize the 5% with different meanings. Once I mastered those 5% percent, I was able to use many Chinese characters in my Japanese writing. Therefore, the more kanji I used, the higher level I demonstrated. As I mentioned earlier, I also used English vocabulary to learn Spanish by exploring common patterns.

I brought my son to the U.S. when he was eleven in 2003 and helped him to become a trilingual person who can speak Mandarin Chinese, English and Cantonese fluently. Currently he is a high school student at an international baccalaureate school in China. The diploma program will allow him to apply for most universities in the world.

As a language teacher, I am qualified to teach Mandarin Chinese, Japanese and English. This gives me career options that allow me to apply and accept positions according to demand. In so many ways, multilingualism has enriched my life.

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Reflective questions and points for exploration

1. The author of this narrative makes the following age-related comment: "At the advanced age of thirty-four I began to learn to speak English – a task many people considered impossible. On hearing that I was taking an oral English class, an English professor of mine in China told me he was sure I would not stick with it. I told him that I would and in the last six years I have not only learned how to speak, read, and write in English, but I have also earned a Master's degree in Teaching English as Second Language (at an American university, comment added by editors)". What are some aspects of the above statement that you would like to clarify and explore further if you were doing research or writing a thesis on the effects of age on language acquisition? If you have more than one additional language in your language learning repertoire, did you learn your languages at different ages? If yes, did you notice any age effects on your learning outcomes? In your opinion, were there any other factors that compounded the effect of the age factor?

2. A speaker of Mandarin Chinese, Huihui dialect, Yunnan dialect, Cantonese, English and Japanese as well as a learner of Spanish and Afrikaans, the author has also taught Japanese, Mandarin Chinese and English in China, Japan, the United States and Mexico. Do you believe in the Asian saying that to teach a language is to learn it twice? Can you try and deconstruct this saying a little? Also, reflect on the distinction between native and non-native speakers of a language, on the one hand, and between mono- and multilinguals, on the other, and think about the type of language teacher you would like to have for optimal learning?

3. Reflecting on her experiences in her language classes in China, the author comments on the reductionist conceptualization of language that defined the dominant teaching practices at the time when she was a student. What is your conceptualization of language (e.g. a system of rules, a fundamental tool for meaning making and identity negotiation, etc)? Also, what does it mean, for instance, to know a word? Try to peel as many layers as possible (e.g. knowing a word means knowing its spelling, pronunciation, collocations, antonyms, connotations, etc).

Chapter 12

Roots, branches and seeds

Neil O'Flaherty

Languages Explored: English, Irish, Latin, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic

1. Introduction

Language learning and teaching have been central to my life. Engagement with language is a core component of how I see myself and of how my worldview has been formed. Language attaches me strongly to where I come from. Learning and teaching languages have enabled me to grow and develop and have given me opportunities to explore new and unexpected aspects of life and to confront challenges I would not otherwise have experienced.

For as long as I can remember, learning languages has been a constant feature of my life, a daily activity. I attribute this ongoing interest in languages to the excitement I derived from my first encounters with two languages as a child and to the rich rewards which this pursuit has given me over the years.

In this narrative I attempt to give an account of my experience of learning languages of which I have a good working knowledge and others which I have learned or acquired to a lesser extent. I also enjoy dabbling in other languages for fun, like being able to decipher Korean signs and menus during a trip to that country or finding a Quechua teacher to teach my partner and me some basics during our stay in Ecuador.

2. First languages

"My first language was English and my second was Irish"[1]. This tends to be how I summarize my initial linguistic exposure, for those who ask about it. However, in many ways, it was much more complex than this.

1. Term used in Ireland to refer to the language. Elsewhere the term Gaelic is more commonly used. In the remainder of this narrative the language will be called Gaelic.

The linguistic situation into which I was born was complex, though I was much older and had studied languages for years before I realized the extent of that complexity. The transition from Gaelic to English as vernacular in my part of Ireland is ongoing. With the passage of time the distance between the English spoken in my town and in countless other communities in Ireland, and standard English speech continues to reduce. Linguists will account for this shift in several ways. It seems to me that the obvious factors like exposure to media, disappearance of Gaelic English bilingualism as a norm and the normalizing influence of higher levels of education all contribute to this process. It might also be argued that a more self-confident Irish form of English is also emerging much as Indian English and Singapore English have emerged from not entirely dissimilar contexts.

It is best to leave any further analysis of this language change to the experts, so I will confine myself to my own experience of learning to deal with language in mid-20th century Ireland, where language seems to have been on a continuum between English and Gaelic, with English features becoming more dominant and Gaelic influences waning.

In my early years, my mother played a far greater role in my upbringing than did my father, and it was to her speech that I was most exposed. She had been raised speaking English, by an English speaking father and a bilingual mother. In the domestic environment, her own English speech was enriched by relying heavily on Gaelic syntax and idiom and her vocabulary was rich in Gaelic borrowings. She had no recall of ever having been spoken to in any language other than English by my grandmother, but she did recall Gaelic being used in the house when certain family members came to visit and when the topic didn't appear to my grandmother to be appropriate for children's ears! Outside the home her use of English was much closer to the standard in terms of lexis. Her language changed depending on the context, the topic, the interlocutor, and as I vividly recall, it varied also depending on the importance she attributed to asserting her view.

I absorbed this form of English as a first language, and like her, I developed an early mastery of the social dimensions of diglossic behavior. At school my English was thought to be of a high standard and my composition showed no evidence of any interference from Gaelic syntax, idiom or lexicon.

I read constantly as a child and before I could read, I was read to. This ensured my early exposure to standard British English, as all the children's literature in Ireland at that time came from Britain. Additional

exposure to British English came through the visits of family and friends from England, who would spend their vacations in Ireland and whose speech we, as children, found both amusing and yet somehow superior to our own. This reflected the love-hate relationship that we Irish had with England in those years.

Looking back on my childhood I think it was probably this constant interplay of language varieties and the complex patterns of social relationships which they evidenced that gave me some of the more valuable understandings which served me well in my later language learning. This interplay taught me the enormous importance of what I later discovered was pragmatics. It also exposed me to language as a complex game of social and interpersonal interactions and self-revealing or self- protective postures, depending on the safety of the context. This diglossia experience also gave me a sense of the magic of the spoken, non-standard varieties of language to which I have remained attracted and attached throughout my life and in all of my language learning experiences.

This was to manifest itself later in many ways. For instance, when I lived in the north of France I derived great pleasure from learning local dialect words and phrases and from hearing speakers of what were quite disparagingly called the *patois* of the Nord and Pas de Calais.

When I started school I was already able to read and write in English and while I recall not being adept at forming the letters in the Gaelic script, I certainly was able to read them with no difficulty at that point. I now assume that I could read the Gaelic script both because many of the letters were not markedly different from the alphabet used in English, but also because they would have been familiar sights on signs, storefronts and official notices around the town. I had never been read to in Gaelic.

The language of the schoolroom was Gaelic from the outset, though curiously religion was taught in English! The charts, maps, images and other decorative items were all written in Gaelic and all classroom commands and instructions were also given in Gaelic. Questions were only to be asked in Gaelic, and when the question related to wanting to go to the bathroom or to winning a prize, for instance, this certainly provided the four year old learner with adequate relevance to encourage him to communicate in a second language.

In these respects, I suppose it would be true to say that some of the thinking about language input and exposure was quite enlightened. However, in other respects the classroom was far from the communicative one advocated today. There were daily charts of Gaelic irregular verb tenses:

Monday was the present indicative, Tuesday was the simple past and so on, so that by Friday one had learned by rote the same verb in five forms. This pattern reproduced itself every week during that first couple of years of school. Vocabulary lists were also learned by rote and sentences were analyzed and parts of speech identified on a daily basis.

I loved this work. I thought nothing could be better fun than learning the forms of verbs and seeing the wonderful shifts in form like adding an F to the ending of the imperfect which made the meaning change utterly and become a conditional. I loved it and therefore I excelled at it. Now, however, as a language teacher I cringe at the thought of the suffering endured by those of my classmates who couldn't grasp this material and who risked being physically punished if they failed to learn.

Beyond rote learning, I cannot recall what we were actually required to do with the language. I cannot remember if we were required to practice or use it in any meaningful ways. That said, one of my constant learning strategies, which I seem to use with whatever language I am working on, is to talk to myself in the target language (TL). Silently, of course! This is often quite unconscious as I suddenly find myself thinking/talking to myself in Gaelic or Spanish as I am driving, working at home or walking the dog. However, at other times, it is decidedly conscious, particularly at the early stages of learning a new language. It is a mental activity, not unlike grammatical drills, where I practice newly acquired grammatical rules by making up sentences about what I am doing, seeing, etc. using the new linguistic items. I suspect this behavior may have begun when, as a child, I wanted to invent things to say in Gaelic using the newly encountered paradigms. I certainly remember having this kind of conversations with myself in Gaelic from a very early stage.

In hindsight, I suspect that my engagement with Gaelic cannot be attributed solely to my enthusiasm for grammar and form. A certain emotional engagement with this language and its identity implications was fostered in school and in the wider community. This language was part of who we were and we were to be proud of it. I don't think this cut much ice with the relatively more unsuccessful learners in my class but it certainly gave an additional affective impetus to my learning.

The teaching of English grammar was dealt with in much the same way, though the eradication of local idiosyncrasies of form and idiom was a central concern. 'Over right'[2] was unacceptable, one had to say

2. Literal translation of the Gaelic *os comhair* meaning opposite.

'Opposite'. 'I seen' had to be 'I saw', 'I am after doing it'[3], was rarely tolerated even though the "correct" version – 'I have done it' was rarely heard. I never used any of these unacceptable forms because to me they were unacceptable too. This was the interface of language and perceived social class. Only the kids from the poorer neighborhoods used these expressions or, as I saw it, made those mistakes. Now I can see the absurdity of my disapproval of how they spoke. They also used Gaelic structure and idiom throughout their English speech, just as I did and just as my family did, but two features distinguished their speech from mine. They seemed to use only one form and didn't have a home version and a public version. They used Gaelic idiom in places where it had no richer or more nuanced meaning than the English alternative; they used it indiscriminately, a factor that didn't enhance their speech in any way but simply showed it up as diverging from the standard in some essential elements. This is exactly why we laughed at those kids, and today I am embarrassed as I recall my reaction. We were all at various stages of language transition as it played itself out in our community, but we had managed to use features of this transitional speech to categorize speech and speaker in terms of social status.

As the years went by, I continued to enjoy learning Gaelic and while the school curriculum lacked imagination and focused excessively on formal registers, it nonetheless provided me with enjoyable challenges all through primary and secondary school. I later decided to take this language as one of two majors in my Bachelor's degree.

3. Learning French and Latin

As I look back on my early encounters with these languages I am struck by the importance of whetting a learner's appetite for what he is going to be taught. I began these languages at age eleven, in my first year at secondary school, but I had been excited all summer at the prospect.

I had always wanted to learn French. My mother loved to recite fables of La Fontaine, which she had learned in school, and I suspect that the first French I had even heard was about a crow with cheese in his beak!

3. Gaelic does not possess a perfect tense and this literal translation of the Gaelic *táim tar éis é a dhéanamh* persists in Hiberno English. Confusion regarding meaning/usage between simple past and perfect forms remains common among speakers of the dialect.

I had found a beginners French book in the house some time previously and had learned some vocabulary from it – enough to count and tell the days of the week. I had also discovered that my father's sister had spent time living in Cannes, and I thought this was wonderfully exotic and I couldn't wait to be able to do so myself.

These connections to the language made me feel excited at the prospect of learning it, but I suspect my earlier success in Gaelic must also have contributed to making me feel comfortable about beginning a new language. I felt not the slightest anxiety or misgiving at the prospect.

I had also been exposed to Latin at a much younger age, when I had to learn the prayers of the Mass in order to be an altar server. Comprehension had not been a concern in that context because over time one discovered what it all meant. I had assumed that when I would finally begin to study Latin, the subject matter of any texts would be of greater interest than the language of the Mass had been. However, I was greatly disappointed that no topic other than battles and wars was ever on the agenda. I couldn't have cared less how many parts Gaul was divided into or if the elephants ever made it across the Alps.

Fortunately, there was pleasure to be derived from other aspects of Latin. What could have been better than the principal parts of challenging verbs? *Fero, ferre, tuli, latum*! And where was the fourth part of *Sum, esse, fui*? These were the joys of language, just as verb tense charts had been seven years earlier. Unfortunately, the enjoyment I derived from the grammatical forms was not enough to maintain my interest in Latin. Nothing would have made me endure the content of the prescribed texts. As a teacher I am always conscious of the need for learners to be able to engage at a personal level with at least some of the materials I select. Does this awareness date back to my experience learning Latin? I suspect it may.

By this time, I think I can see that certain patterns were forming in relation to what I liked in languages and how I liked to learn them and these seem to have been very much fixed. Years later when I needed to learn Spanish quickly, I paced my dorm room in Salamanca and learned irregular verbs night after night at the rate of one verb per night in every form, from present tense to pluperfect subjunctive.

But back to French! I was fortunate that my French teacher in first year at secondary school was an excellent communicator, and an energetic and dedicated teacher. He was up to speed on the thinking of the time as to methodology, which meant that he taught French using a mainly audio-lingual approach. Not wishing to give too many hostages

to fortune, he hedged his bets somewhat and we had a course book which was based on a grammar-translation approach. I can't remember exactly how he juggled these two approaches but I certainly remember that French was fun most of the time and that the learning environment was dynamic but stress-free. Fear of failure, or punishment for failure did not arise.

Sadly, this man moved on to other things and left our school before I went into my second year. He later published a number of school books which were quite widely used and when by coincidence I later taught French to his son, I too used an eclectic range of materials and activities, but by then the approach was decidedly communicative. We had moved with the times.

Even though I must acknowledge that I enjoyed the audio-lingual approach of that first year of French, I can't ever imagine using it myself as a basis for teaching any language. It is probably the only approach which I would instinctively disregard when it comes to borrowing from past trends in order to design a course.

My later years of French at school were very grammar-translation based, with little concern being devoted to ensuring that our utterances could ever be understood by anyone other than an Irish teacher of French. This suited me fine as I had no opportunity to visit a French-speaking country while at school, and the examination at the end of secondary school was entirely a written one. My exposure to the audio-lingual materials in first year had ensured that I had developed sufficient accuracy in accent, intonation and pronunciation to see me through, and to be able to read the novels and short stories which were required in the senior grades in a way which made the texts comprehensible to me.

By the time I had finished school and was ready for college, my decision to study languages was an easy one. The university which I attended required undergraduates to take four subjects in their first year and two thereafter. I chose French, English and Gaelic among my four and went on to take a Bachelor's degree with a double major in Gaelic and French.

4. Language development at university

At my college all teaching in both the French and Gaelic departments was carried out in the TLs. I assume this policy was in force in the Gaelic Department since undergraduates had all been exposed to the language for 13 years at school and were generally capable of dealing with instruc-

tion in that medium. Where the French Department is concerned, I assume that the rationale behind this policy was that since the vast majority of graduates were likely to become teachers of French and since only a minority were likely to spend any time in France during their undergraduate years, it was felt that this exposure to the language was likely to be all they received.

In conversations with a later generation of Irish academics I saw that they treated this policy with, at best, mild derision. Many of them were firmly of the view that to teach through the TL was to deprive students of opportunities to engage fully with the literary content of the curriculum. There was much to agree with in this attitude and undoubtedly it seems hard to expect students at that level to engage satisfactorily with literature and criticism with the same degree of comfort in L2 as they might in L1.

However, mine was the first generation to receive mass secondary education in Ireland and the need for teachers of languages was enormous, whereas the need for literary critics was rather more limited! This later struck me as a great example of the curriculum and teaching approach being dictated wisely by the socio-economic context.

Learning through the target language was an extremely positive experience, which I believe enabled me to develop, among other things, very high level aural skills. Equally important for my language learning was the requirement that all written work be submitted in the target language. This required me to think in the TL and, since I wanted good grades, there was clear motivation to develop accuracy of expression.

During my college years I went to France each summer and worked as a volunteer in vacation homes for seniors. These vacationers were from all walks of life and all social groups. It was in this environment that I truly learned how to communicate fluently in French in day to day contexts.

The learning which took place for me here was facilitated by a number of factors. Firstly, it was a context of total immersion and was not confined to one linguistic domain, as the context was broad and unpredictable enough to require one to deal with a huge range of contexts through the TL. This was a vacation so the guests were brought to visit museums, abbeys and historical chateaux. They were old and infirm and therefore medical matters were high on the agenda. There were daily domestic concerns to attend to, with the result that culinary French, vegetable gardening and shopping were part of the routine. In the course of conversations there were no limits on the subject matter. Therefore in the course

of a month my lexical development was enormous. There was never a need to memorize vocabulary items as they were recycled on a daily, or sometimes hourly, basis.

This context also enabled me to develop aural and oral skills in conversations with older and younger French native speakers, with speakers of bourgeois French and with speakers of popular Parisian French, with its particular accent, slang and turn of phrase. One of the great benefits was the opportunity to listen to people tell their stories over and over again. Seniors very often appreciate a listening ear and I was more than willing to provide it. It was part of the job but it was also an opportunity to listen and understand in a low-stakes context, where if one didn't grasp every detail no real harm was done. As time went on, I grasped more and more and communicated more fully.

As a graduate student I lived for two years in France and I brought with me to that phase of my learning a strong interest in popular French speech, which I had developed during my volunteering days and which I have retained.

Since then, my contact with French has been constant, through visits to France and as a teacher of French. I now have family in France which makes French not just a work language, but also a family language for me.

My emotional connections with French have been very different at various times in my life. For instance, during the early 1990's I had occasion to spend several months in France each year, for both work and personal reasons. At that time my French was probably at its best in terms of fluency and accuracy. Emotionally, my reaction to this was very strong – I came to the conclusion that my accuracy and fluency, while I was very proud of them, came at a cost. The cost seemed to me to be the extent to which the persona which was communicating itself through this language may not have consistently been the same one which communicated itself when I spoke English. The more I considered this, the less willing I became to sacrifice genuine communication of what I had determined was really "me", for the benefit of flawless linguistic performance. This did not lead to any dramatic change in my language, but it gave rise to a progressive increase in the extent to which dimensions of my own cultural background and understandings communicated themselves. I feel this awareness is significant in that it represented an arrival at a level of comfort with my own use of the language which was more satisfying and more complete than simply perfect fluency and consistent grammatical accuracy. I could finally be myself in French.

5. Speaking Gaelic in Dublin

While my knowledge of Gaelic was at an advanced level and while I had contact with that language throughout my life in one way or another, the only period during which it was my primary language was while I lived in Dublin and taught at a Gaelic Language Secondary School. During this period of four years, I worked all day in a Gaelic-speaking environment and my social life was with native speakers of Gaelic and revolved around entertainment and cultural venues where Gaelic was spoken. I also worked during the summer vacations in a Gaelic-speaking region and taught on Gaelic language intensive programs for secondary school students.

While I felt at ease in this language context from the outset, I quickly saw that my language use was changing and that my comfort with the language was reaching a level I had not experienced before. As I observed this process, I noticed that the overwhelming difference was that now I constantly used one variety of Gaelic only. And while I was exposed on a daily basis to a variety of dialect forms and also to the speech of a range of non-native speakers who ranged from the highly competent to the profoundly inaccurate, I chose to identify with and frequent the speakers of one dialect only.

This was not as conscious a decision as it may appear, neither was it a strategic decision on my part to further my language learning. Rather, this situation came about due to friendships I made at the school where I taught, and particularly to one particular friend whom I made there and in whose company and circle I spent an enormous amount of time. This dialect community in which I found myself was the one which spoke the Gaelic of *Corca Dhuibhne*, in the south of Ireland.

As a student I had spent some vacation time in this area to improve my language. The language of this area had, for me, the advantage of being very similar to that of the area where I had grown up, but the native-speaking community was much larger than the one in my own region and therefore was a more attractive option for me as a learner. This situation, combined with my good fortune in having made such good friendships in the community, was immensely valuable to my language learning.

This set of circumstances provided me with a stable framework in which to learn in that it determined for me which dialect I would concentrate on and which others I would attend to only in terms of comprehension. With the benefit of hindsight I can see that the consequences of this

situation were wide ranging. I was now in a position to focus my lexis and idiom development on one dialect rather than dissipate my efforts on trying to acquire two or more versions of the language. I was able to concentrate on achieving phonetic accuracy within one dialect and was able to strive towards a goal which was primary for me at that time, that of achieving native speaker competence.

While the pleasure of *passing* for a native speaker is no longer of any importance to me in my language learning, I constantly confront both as a learner and a teacher the difficulties associated with variation of dialect. This issue arises with my EFL students, who are rarely able to say with any certainty which version of the language it is in their best interests to acquire. As a learner of Spanish, and more recently of Arabic, focusing my efforts on a single form of the target language has proven to be impossible. Because of this I have undoubtedly devoted time to acquiring lexical and phonetic items in a variety of dialects which I might have better spent focusing on one single version.

By the time I came to learn some Portuguese, I was guided by my experience in Gaelic, and limited my exposure to the language to reading almost exclusively Brazilian authors and online materials and to learning from Brazilian textbooks. I liked to spend time traveling in Brazil and this made the choice of dialect more logical, as I got to practice the language in context.

As I write this narrative I am in Algeria and am encountering yet again the frustrations of knowing reasonably well how to say certain uncomplicated things in Arabic, yet finding that nobody around me seems to say them in a way which even remotely resembles what I know.

6. Italian, Spanish and Arabic

The next language I attempted to learn was Italian. I had become attracted to this language for a variety of reasons, including the fact that its proximity to French would make the learning experience relatively easy. In some ways this was true, and structurally, lexically and grammatically there was little difficulty in the early stages.

I took my first steps towards learning Italian by attending classes in Dublin in the 1980's. If the language itself didn't present any immediate obstacles, the classes certainly did! Part of the difficulty was that I arrived at these classes exhausted after a long day's teaching and an hour in traffic, not the ideal preparation for learning! The teaching style left me

cold too and I found it impossible to engage as I would have needed to in order to learn successfully. Through this experience I came to realize how important the arrangement of classroom environment was for me as a learner. I always seemed to be seated at the back of the Italian classroom, in the last row of seats and there was only limited opportunity for interaction. The teacher was the center, he was the only focus, and he almost never engaged me or engaged with me or with anyone else beyond the first row of seats. Even though I started out as a motivated student and had paid upfront for the semester, I soon found myself skipping classes, ignoring homework assignments, and finally abandoning the process.

I put my disappointment with the Italian classes down to experience and didn't abandon the idea of learning the language. Some years later I again attended classes, which were somewhat more engaging, and in the interim I had worked on reading and on developing my knowledge of grammar and vocabulary and became capable of reading newspaper articles with relative ease. I have never had much occasion to speak the language outside of the limited contexts one encounters as a tourist. However, when I have occasion to use my limited Italian, I feel comfortable with my ability and with my relative success in communicating. I am entirely unconcerned with how I sound or with my lack of accuracy and fluency.

My affective filter is at its lowest in Italian. I think this is because of how little of my energies I have committed to the language and to becoming proficient in it and also because of the feeling that however limited my abilities to communicate may be, they nevertheless serve a useful purpose during my visits to Italy or when I need to communicate with Italian speakers. While I can manage to say almost as much in German as in Italian, I never have that same feeling of comfort using German. I attribute this to my realization that my interlocutor is likely to be far more competent in English than I am in German and that to some extent I am wasting my time. I have no genuine need to use the language to communicate.

In the early 1990's I began my adventure with Spanish. Strangely, I had no particular personal interest in learning the language when I began to work on it. My motivation was work-related. I worked at a college in Ireland at the time and I felt we needed to diversify our languages department away from its focus on French and German. I therefore decided to establish a student exchange program with colleges in Spain as a first step towards negotiating the funding to begin to offer Spanish to undergraduates.

I realized I needed to learn some basic Spanish even if only to negotiate my way past the switchboard operators in Spanish colleges so that I could talk with potential exchange partners! I committed in my mind at that point to what I thought would be a realistic project: to acquire about four or five hundred words of active vocabulary and maybe a thousand or so more which I could deal with passively. I had no plan to talk much and did not intend to read much beyond curriculum documents. I began this work on my own and spent a vacation with friends in Spain, which also helped.

I soon visited Spain again and made my initial contacts with suitable schools, which were enthusiastic about my plans and we signed agreements. Then my language learning plan went pear-shaped! The exchange visits continued and I found myself falling hopelessly in love with all things Spanish. I was in the grip of a feverish desire to discover all I could about Spain and Spanish. I read Spanish history. I read about politics and current affairs and found myself wanting to be able to read all this in Spanish.

For two summers I attended language courses in Salamanca University, and the first of those courses was my luckiest break ever in terms of language learning. The placement test was entirely grammar based and, as I had studied Latin in school and since I knew how Latin-based languages worked, I scored high enough on the test to be placed in an advanced class. I explained to the teacher what had happened but he was willing to take a chance on me if I was willing to work hard and so I stayed. It was a month of blood, sweat and tears. I spent every waking moment working at the language.

Each day I spent time in the morning and the evening learning a verb a day in every possible tense and mood, starting with the regular conjugations and working my way through to the irregular ones. As an elective I chose Business Spanish as it would give me a context in which to read articles in the daily newspaper – foreign trade, economic articles etc, all of which interested me. Otherwise reading the newspaper would have had to be limited to the short news items, which I was already able to do more or less successfully. I consulted my dictionary as I read or I asked the barista at my favorite café what words meant. I watched *telenovelas* – even though they were excruciating – and listened to Spanish radio news having first listened to the BBC, so that I would know what to expect the Spanish news to be about. I went to the movies three times a week and while I understood very little at the start, by the end of that first month I was getting more than the gist and at times was grasping quite

a bit of the dialogue. During the day I only spoke Spanish. I was fortunate that most of the classmates I befriended did not speak much English and those who did were enthusiastic to use their newly acquired Spanish instead.

Each of these strategies worked well for me. They were an eclectic mix of grammar-focused and immersion-type processes with a great deal of determination added to the mix. I was willing to compromise on some things – like watching telenovelas – and yet be true to myself in other ways, by keeping up with news and current affairs and politics.

I was not ashamed to speak, however haltingly, and was willing to be adventurous in my use of avoidance strategies. For instance, in the early stages of my learning, when I needed to speak about the past, I disregarded the rules and used only the perfect – which was much easier for me, because it was cognate with French. When I felt ready, I corrected this and began to use the two tenses appropriately. Although I was learning a verb a day by rote, I don't believe I began to use them in the past simple immediately. I think a certain critical mass must have built up before I took that step.

This strategy also links to another aspect of my Spanish learning approach. That is to say that my fallback language was French, rather than English, during this period. Just as I had decided to use the perfect in Spanish in an over-generalized way, I also found myself looking to French for lexical cognates, reverting to French structures when in doubt as to the correct Spanish form, and also taking many of my class notes in French rather than in English when my Spanish wasn't adequate.

I have noticed over time that interference has occurred in the opposite direction mainly and that while I only rarely find myself using a French word in Spanish, by mistake, Spanish terms interfere in my spoken French more often that I would like. In recent weeks I have noticed myself say a couple of things like "Je vais *plancher* cette chemise avant de sortir." I find it difficult to speculate as to what may cause this, as my French is still at a considerably higher level than my Spanish.

My continued learning adventure with Spanish was assured when I later met my partner, whose family is Cuban-American and who is an inveterate traveler and lover of all things Latin American. I now use Spanish on a very regular basis and keep up to date with Spanish and South American literature in so far as time allows. As has been my experience with all languages, I have some days when I am extremely comfortable using the language and other days when I feel as though I am just not getting it right. I have never found a satisfactory explanation for this,

beyond the obvious ones like tiredness, or stress but I somehow feel this is a part of how we learn, not unlike the situation where one can be away from a language for a period of time and yet suddenly speak it better than before, despite the lack of contact or practice. This seems counterintuitive but relates to my experience on more than one occasion.

My current language learning project, and undoubtedly the most difficult one to date, is Arabic. I took Arabic classes during my time at graduate school in Vermont and found it extremely challenging but fascinating from the start. Here again, I should say that like in the case of my first attempt to learn Italian, I feel that I did not devote adequate time to working on the language between classes and that I therefore did not keep up with the class. I worked hard but not hard enough!

However, the main obstacle was not a lack of hard work. It was simply that I found the writing system to be a particular challenge for me. This challenge went beyond the difficulty of recognizing and forming the letters. It went to the core of how I tend to learn languages. My inadequate mastery of the writing system and therefore my effective state of illiteracy made it impossible for me to learn autonomously as I would have wished. I could not work outside the classroom, as I normally would, and I felt lost. I could not use the dictionary. I couldn't read anything or find my own way through the prescribed textbook. I bought several other books for learners of Arabic and found something in them all, but my efforts were not producing the results I needed. My teacher was very understanding and agreed not to force me to contribute in class unless I felt ready to do so. This greatly eased the pressure and was of great benefit to me.

During the classes, I took great delight in the structural aspects of the language such as root letters, vowel templates and sentences without the verb *to be*. I also found myself reading a lot about the language and how it worked. I decided at some point that if I wasn't going to give it adequate time right then, I was certainly going to continue with this language until I achieved some level of mastery.

The opportunity to continue my learning came earlier than expected, by way of a work contract in Algeria, where I am at present and where my Arabic learning is continuing apace. Algeria is a strange place to learn Arabic because it provides opportunity without necessity. It is reassuring to know that almost anything I want to do can be done in French, yet Arabic is so strongly present that one cannot be here without wanting to come to grips with it to some extent.

My first linguistic goal on arriving here was to get to grips with the alphabet and begin to read simple texts in Arabic. By texts I mean any-

thing written – road signs, store names and notices on office walls. Even in these texts there was a gradation of difficulty. The road signs are also in French, for instance, allowing immediate checking for accuracy of interpretation, whereas not all restrooms have an image of a man or a woman on the door and not all notices are translated.

I have now reached the point where I can read these texts slowly but reasonably accurately. I can read static text but not subtitles! When I listen to the radio, which I do constantly, I can recognize the words I know. I am beginning to test very short utterances on non-threatening interlocutors and, most satisfactorily of all, I am guessing accurately the modification patterns necessary to pluralize or feminize certain words, which should enable me to avoid having to learn *every* example by rote from now on.

As a learner, my experience of Arabic to date has moved me far outside my comfort zone. As a teacher I have, for the first time in my life, been able to have some sense of the effects of illiteracy on the learning process. The inhibiting effect which my inability to deal with the writing system had up to now on my learning process where Arabic is concerned has been a humbling experience. I am reminded of the challenges faced by the vast majority of the world's second or multiple language learners, who need to learn from economic necessity and are obliged to do so without the support of the book or the pen much less that of the computer.

7. What's next?

I intend to continue my language learning by improving my levels in the languages of which I already have some knowledge, by developing strategies to help me learn Arabic more effectively and by beginning to work on some new languages. Should Swahili be next?

Reflective questions and points for exploration

1. Describing how he grew up with English and Gaelic, the author of this narrative wrote the following: "In my early years my mother played a far greater role in my upbringing than did my father, and it was to her speech that I was most exposed as a small child. She had been raised speaking English, by an English-speaking father from another part of the

country and a bilingual mother from the area. In the domestic environment, her own English speech was enriched by relying heavily on Gaelic syntax and idiom and her vocabulary was rich in Gaelic borrowings. She had no recall of ever having been spoken to in any language other than English by my grandmother, but she did recall Gaelic being used in the house when certain family members came to visit and when the topic didn't appear to my grandmother to be appropriate for children's ears! Outside the home her use of English was much closer to the standard in terms of lexis. Her language changed depending on the context, the topic, the interlocutor, and as I vividly recall, it varied also depending on the importance she attributed to asserting her view." What do descriptions like this one tell us about the notion of "target language", a fundamental concept in the language acquisition literature? What has been your sense of this concept based on what you have been reading about it in the literature? Any mismatches between the emic and etic descriptions?

2. Some research done on first and second language acquisition has indicated that exposure to heterogeneous input slows us down but also ultimately leads to more sophisticated language development. Neil O'Flaherty, the author of this narrative, offers the following observation, based on personal experience: "Looking back on my childhood, I think it was probably this constant interplay of language varieties and the complex patterns of social relationships which they evidenced that gave me some of the more valuable understandings which served me well in my later language learning." What is your personal experience in this respect? Do you also have any relevant observations on other people's experiences with highly homogeneous or highly heterogeneous input? Is your experience different from theirs?

3. Talking about what motivated him with regard to Gaelic, the author wrote: "With hindsight, I suspect that my engagement with learning Gaelic cannot be attributed solely to my enthusiasm for grammatical paradigms. A certain emotional engagement with this language and its identity implications was fostered both in school and in the wider community. This language was part of who we were and we were to be proud of it. I don't think this cut much ice with the relatively more unsuccessful learners in my class but it certainly gave me an additional affective impetus to my learning." If you have more than one language in your language repertoire, do you feel a greater emotional attachment to one (or more) of your languages, compared to the rest of them? If yes, what exactly determines your greater emotional attachment and what has been the

effect of that attachment on the way you have been using and have mastered the language?

4. Reflect on the following comment from the narrative: "I never used any of these unacceptable forms because to me they were unacceptable too. This was the interface of language and social class. Only the kids from the poor neighborhoods used these expressions or, as I saw it, made those mistakes. Now I can see the absurdity of my disapproval of how they spoke. They also used Gaelic structure and idiom throughout their English speech, just as I did and just as my family did, but two features distinguished their speech from mine: firstly, they only used one form and didn't have a home version and a public context version and secondly, they used Gaelic idiom in places where it had no richer or more nuanced a meaning then the English alternative, they instead used it indiscriminately, a factor that didn't enhance their speech in any way but simply showed it up as diverging from the standard in some essential elements. This is exactly why we laughed at those kids, and today I am also embarrassed by my reaction. We were all at various stages of language transition as it played itself out in our community but we had managed to use features of this transitional speech to categorize speech and speaker in terms of social status." What insights do you get from this description as a student of language? Any parts of this description that you agree, disagree, or can relate to?

5. In recent years we have witnessed various complex dynamic systems models of language development in which the latter is seen as shaped by a multitude of factors, all part of an intricate web of interconnectedness (cf. e.g. Larsen-Freeman and Cameron 2008; Herdina and Jessner 2002). How many interacting factors can you tease away in the following quote from this narrative: "My affective filter is at its lowest in Italian. I think this is because of how little of my energies I have committed to the language and to becoming proficient in it and also because of the feeling that however limited my abilities to communicate may be, they nevertheless serve a useful purpose during my visits to Italy or when I need to communicate with Italian speakers. While I can manage to say as much in German as in Italian, I never have that same feeling of comfort using German. I attribute this to my realization that my interlocutor is likely to be far more competent in English than I am in German and that to some extent I am wasting my time. I have no genuine need to use the language to communicate."

6. Complex systems language models have offered critical exploration of many dichotomies that have been axiomatic in Applied Linguistics and language acquisition theory, such as competence and performance, cognitive and social, stability and variability, acquisition and use, learning a language as a second vs. as a foreign language. Examine the latter quite common opposition in light of the following quote from this narrative: "Algeria is a strange place to learn Arabic because it provides opportunity without necessity. It is reassuring to know that almost anything I want to do can be done in French, yet Arabic is so strongly present that one cannot be here without wanting to come to grips with it to some extent." How is Neil's experience different from that of, let's say, a hypothetical monolingual speaker of Korean or Russian, who is interested in learning Arabic while in Algeria?

References in the reflective questions

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Chapter 13

Expanding languages, expanding worlds

Alvino E. Fantini

Languages Explored: Italian (+Molise and Abruzzo dialects), English, Spanish, Latin, Portuguese, Russian, German, French, Greek, Esperanto, Aymara, Japanese

At 70, I am preparing to leave for Japan in just one month. There, I will face a new challenge – two years immersed in Japanese language and culture. Past experiences with other languages and cultures, however, bolster my confidence. In fact, I feel enthusiastic about this new experience and I anticipate some degree of success. This is an account of how I got to this point.

1. Early diglossia and early bilingualism

1.1. Italian and diglossia

I was born in 1936 in "South" Philadelphia, an area of ethnic neighborhoods – Blacks, Greeks, Italians, Jews and others. I don't know about the other groups, but Italians spoke in many ways, according to their places of origin in Italy (a country with 600+ dialects). Yet, everyone seemed able to accommodate to the multiple varieties used.

In my family, two dialects predominated (my parents came from different provinces – Molise and Abruzzo). The Molisano dialect prevailed, however, since wives customarily adapted to husbands in both language and cuisine. My father's mother and sister who also lived with us further reinforced Molisano. Most of my relatives spoke English as their second tongue, learned imperfectly, without formal instruction, and with varying degrees of non-native features; or, no English at all – like my grandmother who, after 36 years in the U.S., spoke only three words of English: *ye-a, no-a* and *a-maybe* = yes, no and maybe.

Although I can't remember my earliest years, I know our Italian dialects were dominant in both the family and the neighborhood. I don't remember anything specific about speaking Italian (or English, for that matter), but I know Italian was used as needed, otherwise English. It was the only way to communicate with my grandmother and several other adult relatives as well. I vividly remember my grandmother sitting in her favorite chair in the corner with the Italian radio broadcast blurting out news, soap operas, popular songs, and classical music, which may account for the great pleasure I still derive from the latter.

Today, when walking alone in the woods of Vermont where I live, I sometimes recall their voices and I can still hear my grandmother speaking in her special way: *Juni, un do ŝta lu sisì? Dov'è lo hai mis? Un gop, o lu baŝ? Beh, vai giocar. Vai fora, a pazziar'*. [Junior, where's the scissors? Where did you put them? Upstairs or downstairs? Well, go outside and play.] I also remember protesting her use of Italian when she came to call me, in the presence of playmates, dressed in black from head to toe, hair in a bun and a shawl over her shoulders: *Juni, vieni qua, subito, a casa! A magnar'*. [Junior, come here. Quickly, come home. To eat.] I felt embarrassed in front of friends and wished at those moments that she would speak English … but of course, she couldn't.

Speaking Italian at home was fine, but in public it felt awkward, uncomfortable. I had a private and a public life, defined by language use. I loved my family, my grandmothers, my home, and the good times we enjoyed together. At home, I felt happy, gregarious, secure, a big talker (nicknamed *chiacchiarone* = chatterbox). But, in public, I tended to be shy, timid, quiet, reserved, very polite. Like my brothers − I'm one of six − I wondered, although it was my older brother who eventually asked one day: Ma, what's a guinee? Am I one? Do I have to say I'm Italian? Early indicators of subtle prejudice abounded.

By age 5, we moved from the Italian neighborhood to a near suburb of Philadelphia. One other Italian family lived on our block, but they spoke "high class" Italian. I learned they were from Malta so they really weren't Italian at all, not like us − immigrants from the South. My sensitivity was heightened. I wondered why my mother never attended school PTA meetings like other moms. Clearly, she was uncomfortable and, perhaps, deep inside, I was relieved she didn't, although I didn't think much about it at the time.

In summary, the language patterns of my childhood home were not mandated, simply modeled. My parents expressed no expectations about using Italian. After my grandmothers died, there was no apparent con-

cern regarding language loss and, in fact, my younger brothers never spoke Italian at all. Language was a pragmatic affair. No one thought about language purity or exclusive language use; they simply switched and mixed languages or dialects according to need, mood, or whim. Other immigrants I knew did the same, resulting in language diminution and loss, often within a single generation.

1.2. Italian and English

English spoken in my new neighborhood differed from the imperfect English of South Philly. When I grew older, I realized my father's speech also differed. He was unable to pronounce certain sounds, especially "th", a non-existent phoneme in Italian. He said: "two beh tree" for a "two by three" board, "Telma" for "Thelma", and he made up words like "chippies" (for girls) and "mittens" (for mints). Although fluent, he didn't have it quite right. After all, he attended school for only three years in Italy, leaving when his father took ill (yet, to his credit, he won first prize in Latin during one of those early years!).

While developing suburban English from my new peers, I retained certain vowels characteristic of South Philly (e.g., /leygs/ for "legs", /eygs/ for "eggs"), and some syntactic and pragmatic interference from Italian, which I learned of only later in college (e.g., who John? pass the vacuum cleaner, shut the light, etc.). These were common give-aways for most Italian-Americans, I discovered, even those speaking English natively. But it was not until my 30's that I became aware of more dramatic differences in para- and extra-linguistic aspects of my behavior (more on this later), aspects that drove Anglo-Americans wild.

After both grandmothers passed away (the first when I was eleven and the second when I was thirteen), Italian was used mainly with certain relatives and *cumpari* and typically involved dialects, seldom standard Italian. My exposure to dialects increased when younger brothers were born and I stayed periodically with our favorite relative: Zi-zì, an uneducated, illiterate *contadina*. Such a model for the family – generous, kind, hospitable, loving and funny! Nearly 100 years old, she could dance an Italian jig while balancing a fruit bowl on her head. On holidays, her tiny matchbox-sized home was Mecca for the extended family, with a makeshift table extending from the entranceway nearly to the back door. We loved going there and found it hilarious to try communicating with her in her obscure Pianella dialect.

During these early years, I was intrigued to find an Italian grammar book one day, belonging to a cousin who actually had studied Italian at school. Up to that point, I knew no one who spoke educated, standard Italian. I recall my unusual interest (for a thirteen-year old) in deciphering the language and my fascination when comparing it to the way we spoke, sometimes making aha-type associations, sometimes not – *egli, essa, Lei* vs. *tu, voi;* and *il, la, lo*, *i, le, gli*, instead of the uninflected *lu, la* + nouns (*lu tav, la ghela, fagiul*, etc.) for table, girl, and beans.

This sparked my awareness of how our speech code contrasted with "real" Italian, which I rather liked. I liked knowing the language of which our speech was a variant and being able to read Italian (after all, my grandmother had a Bible, prayer books, cards with images of saints, and occasionally *Il Progresso*, the Italian newspaper). Yet, I paid no attention to written Italian until my father made his first trip back to Italy in 1952, a real turning point.

My interest in Italy suddenly flourished. All I had known previously of "the old country" was a place of poverty, difficult times, the war years. But the postcards and 8mm films my father brought back revealed new and wonderful places – *Il Vaticano, Villa d'Este, Lago di Como, Firenze, Venezia*. "*Che bello, tutto!*" "How beautiful", I thought. I was mesmerized by my father's stories. I discovered an Italy rich in culture, history and tradition. Is that where we're from?

1.3. Latin

Then, I took Latin at school and, surprise of surprises – this experience turned me completely around. My teacher, of Irish heritage, was enamored of Italy and made it come alive through stories, pictures and slides. I was transfixed during the two years spent in her classes. But, even more surprising – I had not expected this – was to discover Italian through Latin, not in all words of course (*puer*, *puella*) but in many others (*amare, portare, canus, lupus, agricola*, etc.). I saw direct connections with Italian – obvious, simple, clear. My struggling classmates looked at me in amazement, saying: "Oh, sure. It's all so easy for you!"

Latin was now also my heritage, I realized – the source of languages I knew and even the basis for many English words. I developed fair reading ability and made connections with prayers I knew by heart – *Domine, non sum dignus ut intres sub tectum meum, sed tantum dic verbo* … etc. I now understood exactly what this meant and I followed mass in Latin with deeper appreciation; that is, until the mass was "popularized"

after the 1968 Vatican II Council and English took over. Perhaps I was the only one disappointed. I loved Latin – it fascinated me to see our origins in this ancient language. I loved the sound of it and I often read it aloud for sheer pleasure.

2. Emergence of a new language

When I was fourteen, we moved once again, now from a near Philadelphia suburb to a far suburb. Although I was unaware of this at the time, our new home, located on the "main line", was socially many notches higher. There I was (re)exposed to another language, Spanish, with which I also had associations. My father's family had lived in Buenos Aires for 10+ years (and three siblings were born there) while maternal relatives had emigrated to Brazil. Stories I had heard about South America took on new meaning, as well as Spanish words, proverbs and songs, such as this lullaby: *Este niño lindo que no se quiere dormir, que le lleve la hada madrina* … etc. I recalled my grandmother speaking Spanish with a relative who had also lived in Argentina. And Spanish was no more distant from Italian than Latin; in fact, it was much closer.

Then I had contact with Spanish at "the farm" in New Jersey where I eagerly roamed across the road to the farmhand's shack that housed Puerto Rican laborers. I always enjoyed being with them, talking in my adapted Italian-Spanish (a technique I developed), and playing my accordion for them (I knew a few Latin American songs and several tangos).

These experiences favorably disposed me toward Spanish, which I then studied in school at age fourteen. Spanish seemed effortless – I was an unassuming straight "A" student. Word got out and classmates tried moving desks closer to mine, especially during exams. When the teacher saw this, she said one day: "OK, Al, if you're so smart, you come up here and teach", whereupon she handed me the chalk. I accepted, being too polite to refuse, and I taught. I found I could explain Spanish to my classmates, and they enjoyed it and applauded, probably contributing to my later interest in teaching.

By twelfth grade, I was increasingly comfortable with (standard) Italian, Latin and Spanish. And then it happened: A classmate, Ginny, came in one day and announced she was headed for France that summer. When she explained how, I applied to the same student exchange organization, received a partial scholarship, and went to Mexico after graduating in 1954 at age seventeen. A student teacher at my high school from the

University of Pennsylvania who impressed me with her Spanish and her singing, was a group leader, and I ended up not only going to Mexico but, upon return, to Penn as well.

That summer was another turning point. I felt entirely at home in Mexico. First of all, I fell in love with an Indian girl during orientation in Morelia. And then, upon arrival in Xalapa, my homestay community, I learned to my disbelief that my family chose me because I was Italian! I never imagined this could be an asset. They loved Italians and swooned at the sound of the language. Never before had I experienced such interest in *my* heritage.

I loved Xalapa, spoke Spanish fluently by the end of the summer, and returned with my 12-year old Mexican brother on the five-day train trip back to Philadelphia. I returned to Mexico again and again over the next 50+ years, spending two semesters at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. If I had lived an earlier life, I was surely born Mexican.

What I did not realize then was how Mexican the Spanish I spoke was – in intonation, grammar, vocabulary and idiom. This changed somewhat as my experiences expanded within the Spanish-speaking world – to Spain, Colombia, and eventually every Spanish-speaking country, except Paraguay. And so, too, my knowledge of Spanish expanded as I gained familiarity with words and speech styles from each area. But the greatest impact came from Bolivia when I met, fell in love with, and married my wife of 40+ years, a woman from La Paz (we met in 1962 and married in 1966). From then on, Bolivia became the center of my Spanish-speaking universe and we traveled to Bolivia every year, raised our children in Spanish, and directed exchange programs in Mexico for 16 summers over a period of 19 years.

Today, Spanish and English constitute our primary family languages with Italian as an occasional third. Although Spanish was not my childhood language, it became the language of my children. Ever since, I feel inclined to speak to all small children, anywhere, in Spanish. In addition to Bolivia, the children traveled to Italy on many occasions and our daughter acquired near perfect Florentine pronunciation after a year of study there.

In contrast with the undirected language patterns of my parents' home, my wife and I used Spanish exclusively – at home and wherever we were together as a family. The principal determinant was interlocutor, not context. This pattern was so ingrained in the children that they would immediately chide me if I spoke English. Although I sometimes protested, I knew the importance of maintaining Spanish. We actively sought to

maintain our languages and heritages in contrast to my own childhood experience in which both were taken for granted, until too late. In cases like this, grandchildren, sadly, often can no longer communicate with their grandparents.

3. Four languages and another on the way

It is well known that no multilingual has identical command over his or her various languages and that equalingualism does not exist. So at this point, it may help to describe my relative proficiency in each of my languages. For this purpose, I use the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) scale (see http://www.govtilr.org)

1 − Elementary proficiency
2 − Limited working proficiency
3 − Professional working proficiency
4 − Full professional proficiency
5 − Native or bilingual proficiency

In ILR terms, then, my ratings are as follows: Italian − 4; i.e., I use Italian with sufficient accuracy and vocabulary in all skill areas, but I have not been educated through Italian. English − 5; i.e., I am an educated native speaker in all skill areas. Spanish − 4+; i.e., I can use Spanish in informal and formal contexts and in all skill areas and I comprehend all varieties of Spanish, especially Mexican, Bolivian and Castilian varieties.

My fourth language, Portuguese, came about quite unexpectedly. At college, I decided to study Italian formally. I was quite excited, especially since the professor was a renowned scholar from Northern Italy. This was short-lived when I realized he was intolerant of my brand of "Italian". Although the only student in class who actually spoke Italian, I simply did not know how to put aside what I already knew while learning to speak in this new way. Discouraged and embarrassed by an insensitive instructor, I dropped the course and took Portuguese instead.

My Yugoslavian-Brazilian teacher was a dynamo. I enjoyed and learned to speak Portuguese with extreme ease. This was lucky for me because several years later, I secured work with the Peace Corps. Over seven years, I hired, trained and supervised Brazilian language instructors and used Portuguese throughout this time, except at home, where my wife discouraged use of this "odd-sounding version of Spanish". I also

obtained valuable field experience traveling to several Portuguese-speaking areas (Portugal, the Azores and Macao, in addition to Brazil). The result was: Brazilian Portuguese – 3+, i.e. I use the language with sufficient accuracy and vocabulary in all skill areas plus I comprehend Luso-Portuguese.

4. Expanding interest to other artificial and natural communication possibilities

From this base, I was launched. My strong languages were now English, Spanish, Italian and Portuguese, and in this order. I used all of them in my work at various times – teaching English in Colombia, Bolivia, and elsewhere; as well as Spanish, Italian and Portuguese at various times and at all levels. I furthered my knowledge by studying linguistics, which I later taught in undergraduate and graduate courses (general, applied, contrastive, anthropological, cultural, psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics). My understanding and appreciation of languages – both these and others – expanded and grew tremendously.

Looking back, I was fortunate to work at an international organization and with so many languages and cultures, sixteen at first and then still others – Farsi, Marathi, Hindi, Turkish, etc. Together, with native-speakers, we developed over 30 language courses with taped recordings – from Arabic to Wolof. This experience extended my grasp of the human language experience and I felt dissatisfied having only four ways of communicating from among the 5–6,000 possibilities that exist in the world.

4.1. Esperanto

Then, in 1968, my wife and I attended an Esperanto conference. I was intrigued. What kind of language was this? How did it sound? Could it really be spoken? I came away fascinated with the possibility of linking up with a new network of people around the world. I studied Esperanto alone, quite easy to do, given its lexicon rooted in five European tongues (three of which I already knew) and given only sixteen simple grammatical rules. No exceptions, no irregularities! For some time thereafter, my wife and I often used road trips as opportunities to converse in Esperanto.

Later, I developed a home study course in Esperanto with audio components. Esperantic Studies Foundation grants enabled me to conduct

research on "Esperanto as an intercultural movement" and, over the years, I taught numerous Esperanto courses and workshops.

My proficiency in Esperanto fluctuates since I do not use it regularly – a good example of language development and dissolution – but it is never forgotten. I read Esperanto easily and after only a short while in the presence of other speakers, fluency returns. I rate my wavering proficiency as follows: Esperanto – 3; i.e., I use the language with sufficient accuracy and vocabulary in all skill areas.

These experiences opened my mind and attitude to all sorts of possibilities. I realized that *any* language is learnable, given disposition, motivation, time and circumstances. I wished to convey this to others, especially those who say: "I'm not a good language learner." Nonsense! My primary teaching objective became to help learners recognize that they too can learn, it is fun, and they can communicate. But, their learning experience must demonstrate this – from the very beginning, within the first thirty minutes of class, the first three hours, the first days, and beyond.

4.2. Russian

After high school, I studied Russian at night. I was intrigued with its alphabet. Some letters were similar, others seemed reversed but recognizable. Although I don't remember much Russian today, that experience proved of great help: first, when learning Greek and, later, when supervising languages with different scripts (Marathi, Farsi, Korean, etc.) for Peace Corps trainees. I devised a simple system to teach alphabetic and syllabic scripts in only a few hours.

4.3. German

Later, in the military, I studied German on my own. I can't remember why, perhaps because of German-speaking friends or a German speaker I met in the military. Or, perhaps because I sang Bach cantatas while a member of the Marlboro Chorus. A "reason" to learn language became unimportant; I was just curious.

Again, I figured out a lot, ample cognates to boot! Case endings seemed unnecessarily complex, but then I was acquainted with this device in Latin. This aside, I can still say a lot despite incorrect endings. Visits to German-speaking countries over the years boosted interest and use of the language. Today, I rate myself as follows: German – 1, i.e. I can

satisfy basic survival needs, and courtesy requirements, in comprehension, speaking and reading; I have some ability in writing as well. My level is constrained mostly by poor knowledge of grammatical endings.

4.4. French

Graduate school required French to enable reading research. This was fine because I felt awkward pronouncing French (previous languages had presented no pronunciation problems). Again, I applied insights about cognates and grammatical systems to advantage, drawing on similarities with other Romance languages. I comprehend and read to a high degree. When visiting French-speaking countries, I can make myself understood despite bad pronunciation, even discussing advanced topics. I wonder, however, just how terrible I sound to French-speaking natives. Despite my ability to carry on high-level conversations, I rate my level low mainly because of my lack of grammar control: French − 1+, i.e. I can satisfy routine social demands and limited work needs in comprehension, speaking and reading; I have some ability in writing as well.

4.5. Greek

Greek came about as quite a surprise. Unexpectedly, I was asked to take a summer exchange group to Greece (I was slated for Brazil). So I studied Greek feverishly before departure, finding it similar to Spanish in pronunciation and thus easy in this area. During the fourteen-day shipboard crossing, I enlisted a Greek-American on board to teach us. Again I was fascinated to discover innumerable cognates with English and Italian. These provided hooks on which to anchor expressions. My group mimicked me every time I said: Of course, *porta*, just like Italian; or *micró*, just like … and so on.

I was surprised to hear Greeks say upon discovering my Italian origin: *neh, mia fatsa, mia ratza* (Italian: *sì, una faccia, una razza*), meaning: "yes, same face, same race", acknowledging similarities between Greek and Italian cultures. Certainly I was aware of classical connections, but contemporary associations made me feel even more at home. I began seeing a pattern − being a "hyphenated" American yielded advantages over just "American".

Later, I benefited from informal instruction and chats with a Greek-American sister-in-law and friends, plus return visits to Greece. I loved Greece, its culture, the language, and most of all, its music and dance,

all of which heightened interest. And, I felt especially rewarded one night at a restaurant with my wife where free desserts were offered to decipher the phrase: *dekatriaparaskeviphobia.* I was delighted to be able to tell the waiter: "Fear of Friday the 13th", and to enjoy the free dessert as well.

In reality, my Greek is only at a basic level, constrained by inadequate knowledge of grammatical endings. I have excellent pronunciation which, however, presents problems on the phone since people assume I know more than I do and speak rapidly: Greek − 1, i.e. I can satisfy basic survival needs and courtesy requirements in comprehension and speaking although my reading and writing ability in cursive script is limited.

4.6. Aymara and other languages

My most challenging experience was to study Aymara, an indigenous tongue of Bolivia, while on sabbatical one year − challenging because it was the most different linguistic construction encountered thus far and because my traditional teacher insisted on starting with alphabet and grammar. I wanted to learn to speak − with the washwoman at my mother-in-law's house, with vendors in the market, and others. But, I discovered their general reluctance to use Aymara with non "Cholos". For this, they spoke Spanish. I developed no fluency beyond basic greetings, words and expressions. However, I did learn a lot about how the language works and how differently its speakers conceptualize the world as compared to European and other tongues.

Later, as faculty member of a Master's Program in Language Teaching over many years, I welcomed opportunities to teach Contrastive Linguistics to students with a variety of language backgrounds (Polish, Japanese, Chinese, Arabic, etc.). Students analyzed these languages following models I provided in phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and para- and extra-linguistic dimensions. Each language revealed novel insights and the challenges, possibilities, and pleasures of other linguacultures. I also grasped more fully the notion of linguistic universals underlying all human languages.

5. External factors affecting language development and use

Reflecting on external factors, I identified several that influenced my early languages development. While not severe, I encountered prejudice (remember, these were World War II years), reflected through comments,

jokes, movies and, later on, television, then in its early days. Mexico changed all this and, returning home, my interest in Italian flourished.

Ironically, languages taught in academia were viewed differently. There, they were "subject matter", often prestigious, yet they stirred none of the passionate feelings associated with my home language. A friend, upon returning from France, was interviewed by a reporter who wrote: "that she could now even speak French". I had never seen ethnic children commended for being bilingual. So, coming to terms with my heritage was important, allowing me to go on to appreciate others as well.

Other external factors affecting language development were opportunity, contact, functionality and prestige. My summers in Mexico provided all of these. At the university, my newfound Spanish fluency was admired and valued. I placed into advance sections, classmates sought my assistance, and I was inducted into (and became president of) Sigma Delta Pi, the Spanish Honorary Society. Imagine!

Later, when drafted into the military, my language abilities were utilized again. I skipped most basic training because the captain needed me to interpret for Puerto Rican recruits. Everyone envied me in boot camp. And still later, Portuguese obtained for me a position as Peace Corps Language Coordinator, while Spanish and Italian enabled me to take student groups to various countries over many years. My language abilities became integral to my professional life and served a real purpose! I used them to advantage in graduate school, in the military, in my career, and of course in my personal life.

6. Strategies devised for language development

External and internal factors, of course, are both closely related. My perception regarding my identity, based on the external climate, influenced the direction of my pursuits. But it was a developing confidence in my own identity that allowed me to grow and move on.

I don't recall any "conscious" learning strategies from childhood. Like children everywhere, all I ever needed was exposure and contact. Finding an Italian grammar book later helped me refine what I had acquired naturally. English, of course, was consolidated through play and school. Spanish I learned by bits and phrases, and interest in Puerto Ricans generated the motivation to communicate by adapting Italian. "Conversion" and "adaptation" of a related tongue seemed to be early strategies.

Studying Spanish in high school was important, but my Mexico experience gave me fluency. There again I converted and adapted Italian. I discovered patterns for doing this in phonology and vocabulary: e.g., f > h as in *fame* > *hambre*, vowels > diphthongs as in *sempre* > *siempre*, noun endings such as *zione* > *ción* as in *nazione* > *nación,* and so forth. This principle worked for grammatical patterns as well.

Portuguese proceeded similarly. I studied it formally but its similarity to Spanish (less so to Italian) facilitated the task. Similarities existed in vocabulary, grammar and writing, and differences mostly in phonology. Again, a primary strategy was converting Spanish into Portuguese: changing certain sounds (*son* > *são*, *ciudad* > *cidade*), pronouns (*ellos* > *êles*), endings (*cantan* > *cantam*), and avoiding the pitfalls of false cognates (*exquisito* meaning "exquisite" in Spanish but "disgusting" in Portuguese). Work and travels in Brazil consolidated what I learned, promoted fluency, and helped me bypass potential confusion between the two languages.

Once I actually encountered Esperanto-speakers, I was sufficiently intrigued and motivated to learn what I could almost already comprehend. A text revealed Esperanto as simple enough. I spoke with my wife and with myself *sottovoce*. Lacking contact with Esperantists, I experienced periods of decline, which I overcame each time I had another opportunity to speak. And, of course, reading forestalled total dissolution during interim periods.

Other languages I learned in classroom settings or through self-study. In all cases, I had occasional opportunities to interact with speakers of these languages in the U.S. or abroad.

While thinking about specific strategies that transcend these diverse experiences, I made this summary: To external factors (opportunity, contact, functionality and prestige), I added motivation, interest and need as internal factors that jumpstart the process. To sustain the process, I added "the three C's" – contact, consistency and continuity – notions I derived from observing my children's language development (Fantini 1985). Contact is self-explanatory, but by consistency I mean sustained use of language patterns in any combinations; and by continuity, I refer to sustainability over time.

Having identified these factors, I then listed specific acquisitional and learning strategies I employed. These included:

- discipline to maintain languages separate when appropriate
- forcing myself to express higher thoughts even when difficult

- learning to learn even with teachers who were not so good
- learning from good models, including both native and non-native speakers
- capitalizing on the pleasures speaking another language gave me
- taking language courses
- self-study
- seeking situations where I would have contact with speakers
- responding to need, social ties and intellectual interests
- seeking patterns that helped me to adapt and convert Italian to Spanish, Spanish to Portuguese
- seeking cognates and other linguistic patterns
- talking to myself aloud (or in my head)
- using flash cards, visuals, posters
- learning from music, songs, prayers, poems, games
- performing repetitive acts as a sort of pattern practice
- memorizing
- using multiple resources (dictionary, grammar reference books, course texts, audio components)
- finding a language partner
- seeking contacts afar through email, skype
- reading and deciphering tram stop and other signs (for Japanese)
- watching television, listening to songs and following the script at the bottom of the screen (for Japanese)
- practicing script (Japanese)

Strategies aside, the knowledge, skills and awareness I developed were even more important in furthering the task, and especially the *attitude* that I could learn any language. All languages are systematic, learnable codes; all are challenging, all are fun. My greatest liability was overzealousness; i.e. overwhelming the very people I was trying to learn from. In Greece, for example, aside from jotting down words, phrases, rules, I constantly queried others with incessant language questions. I had to moderate this behavior so that my language objectives did not overtake maintaining good relations.

7. Code-switching patterns, language development and loss

The field of sociolinguistics elucidates linguistic factors and social variants affecting language choice and code-mixing. In my childhood home, code-switching between Italian and English related entirely to interlocu-

tor. This pattern prevailed until Italian diminished and English became dominant.

When relatives visited, we sometimes played a language game: sitting around the table, we burned cork from a wine bottle, used to blacken the face of anyone who spoke English. Ironically, recently arrived relatives from Italy were often the first to end up with blackened faces, given their newly acquired habit of saying "OK". Generally, code-mixing was common among Italian-Americans regardless of their proficiency across languages. They incorporated words from their American experience: e.g.: baca-ausa 'backhouse or outside toilet', l'asciuranza 'insurance', ai-sabocsa 'icebox', naisaboia 'nice boy', etc. Lexical interference occurred even among native English-speaking Italian-Americans, unaware of translations or "calques" from Italian.

Years later, Spanish became the established language in my home. My wife and I met in Spanish, used Spanish into our marriage, and raised our children through Spanish. Our patterns of language use were based on interlocutors and context. In most cases, however, interlocutor superseded context, unless we chose to speak in a "marked" way (e.g. in order to create private space in a public place we might shift to Spanish, a marked language).

My wife and I were entirely clear about our desire to impart the benefits and richness of multiple heritages to our children. So, unlike my own family in my childhood, we were extremely disciplined about speaking Spanish exclusively. We maintained our languages separate and kept interference to a minimum. However, we used transfer as an enriching device to express things that occurred in a source language, always acknowledging this with "verbal quotes".

The children were so disciplined in this respect that they chided me if I spoke English. If I said so much as "hi" upon arriving home, they would retort: "*en español, papá*". This pattern changed only in the presence of non-Spanish speakers, otherwise Spanish prevailed – inside and outside the house. While code mixing was minimal during their early years, switching and mixing increased as they entered their teens and were now fully bilingual. My wife was usually the first to draw us back into Spanish.

Other languages we used in accordance with interlocutor, context and need; and normally when no other linguistic option existed. However, when interlocutors spoke English, English prevailed if their fluency was superior to ours in their tongue. Esperanto was an exception since Esperanto-speakers usually maintain conversations in Esperanto despite low fluency, seizing every opportunity to practice.

Since language development and loss depend on use, language choice, code-switching and code-mixing patterns affect both. Simply put, the more we use a language, the more it develops; and the less we use it, the more it dissipates. My mother-in-law's visits from Bolivia provided examples. Her presence stimulated us to (re)incorporate words and expressions in our conversations often not used for some time. Language maintenance is difficult when not supported by other sources and resources − music, media, or other speakers.

Disuse obviously engenders language loss. My grandmother's death rendered Italian unnecessary; hence, its diminution. Isolation from other speakers also contributes to language diminution, if not loss. Today, I am removed in distance and use from my childhood dialects. The same is true given the limited development and eventual loss of my other languages. Portuguese, for some reason, rebounds most easily. Perhaps because I keep it alive, remembering, thinking thoughts, and speaking aloud for the sheer pleasure. To limited degrees, the same applies to Esperanto and Greek. In all, it always gives me great pleasure to encounter speakers of any of these languages. They are like old friends who bring fond memories of times spent among their speakers.

8. Communicative components and variations within systems

I now realize that while developing later communication systems, I focused primarily on "language" or linguistic components, and I was unaware of the para-, extra-, and socio-linguistic aspects of these systems. Most probably, I couched later languages within the communicative patterns of my original systems. Today, I understand that my non-linguistic behavioral components − a sort of sub-stratum − were probably all quite Italian (i.e., in tone, pitch, volume, speed, expressiveness, polychronism, etc.)

This may be true of other "sequential" bilinguals as well. Despite "speaking" like natives, we employ non-linguistic features from our ethnic source communication system (an aspect of interference not usually identified by linguists). This causes problems. If one *sounds* American, obviously one is expected to *behave* like other Americans (read: Anglo-Americans). The study of linguistics illumined me about the multiple components of communication systems. Knowing this, of course, does not immediately or easily translate into behavioral changes; however, I

now comprehended the cause of problems arising during interactions with others.

Another potential source of interference across systems occurs across variations in styles. Each system prescribes styles appropriate for use according to topic, setting, interlocutors, and so forth. But styles are culturally determined; hence they vary from language to language. I possess variable speech styles in Italian, English, Spanish and Portuguese. I speak each with adequate fluency and contextual experience to be aware of prescribed styles, so I am capable of producing them as needed.

Esperanto, conversely, requires no stylistic shifts. Titles aside, it uses no other distinctions of direct address. In fact, Esperanto eschews social distinctions (although speakers may unconsciously use their native patterns). My ability with other languages, however, is too basic to have the range of linguistic features needed to express style variations, except for the *tu*/*vous* or *du*/*Sie* distinctions of French and German, which are manageable.

9. Language, culture and worldview

Minorities living within a dominant cultural group, like myself, are accustomed to making accommodations in language and behavior. Participating in "discussion groups" as a young adult, for example, I learned to interact, adjust volume, mitigate expressiveness, not interject when others spoke (what *they* called "interrupting"), control expansive gestures, etc. I often discussed experiences in the dominant group with other "sympathetic" bilinguals.

Later, studies in linguistics and intercultural communication helped me to understand the multiple components of communicative competence – para-, extra-, and sociolinguistic, in addition to the linguistic. Success in the linguistic alone was inadequate and dangerous. "Sounding" native raises expectations that one shares all aspects, which is often not the case. Successful relationships in an Anglo-English environment, however, entailed learning to adjust in all areas. When components were at odds, *how one behaved* was judged more severely than *what one said*.

Most importantly, I learned about the concept of "worldview" and how exposure to multiple languages and cultures provides alternative views of the world. Yet, despite expanding, transcending and transforming beyond my original view, I discovered parallel processes also occurred, ones I had not expected: Through exposure to alternatives, I

also gradually clarified what were my deepest values. In other words, ethnorelativity may be a myth, an impossibility. While surface cultural aspects may be more flexible, deeper values may be less negotiable, at least in my case. With the expansion of worldviews, there also seems to be a selective reformulation of one's original view of things, as one experiences, compares, matures and chooses among options.

10. Summary

To summarize, I describe my multilingualism in this way: I am a "simultaneous" but not "balanced" bilingual, in Italian and English. Spanish, initially a passive tongue, overcame Italian and today is dominant in my life; hence, an "alternating" phase as Italian diminished and Spanish increased. At moments, Portuguese also assumed notable importance when work related.

I am "coordinate" in Italian and English and, over time transitioned from "compound" to "coordinate" in Spanish. In other tongues, I fall somewhere along the continuum between "compound-coordinate" functioning. Although learned initially in instructional contexts, these languages were furthered through field experiences. I do not "think" in my native tongues to render thoughts in another but go directly from thought to speech. Occasionally, however, I consciously reflect on particular expressions, structures, or phrases, accustomed as I am to an analytical approach to languages.

As an early diglossic and bilingual, and then multilingual most of my life, I find it difficult to imagine existing in only one language, one culture. This seems shallow, impoverished, ethno-lingua-centric. Multiple languages-cultures allow me to know more and differently. I have multiple ways of transcending my native linguacultural paradigm(s) – and multiple ways of conceptualizing, thinking, expressing, articulating and interacting.

I also know that I have something else as a multilingual – not only can I participate in the multiple groups to which I belong, I can also access the multiple perspectives that ensue, and grasp the reasons why. This is not a possibility for monolinguals – perhaps intellectually, but never experientially nor affectively. Anthropological linguistic studies reinforce conceptually what I have undergone experientially, knowing and understanding through both intellect *and* experience, something not all academics can claim.

In today's world, multiple languages-cultures and intercultural communicative competence are essential for global participation. Otherwise, one resides in a cocoon (despite travels and seeing the world) … constrained to comprehend the entire universe from a single perspective – one's own.

11. Epilogue

I have been in Japan for nearly two years since writing the original draft of this narrative. Before I left for Japan, my daughter said: "*Ahora, papá, te toca a tí experimentar de nuevo*". [Now, papá, it's your turn for a new experience.] She was right and Japan was the best place to do just that.

No multilingual can rest on his or her laurels. In a new situation, like Japan, it is back to feeling childlike, humbled, ignorant. But, perhaps the starting point is not the same as for a monolingual; past experiences and strategies help, coupled with motivation, interest and need. I also found something unexpected in Japan – people who are incredibly polite, patient and accommodating. This, coupled with a secure, safe environment, makes the task easier.

I am not proud of the basic level of Japanese acquired, but I am willing to continue. With my *kore-wa* and *kudasai* and sundry other polite phrases, I have survived. But I want more than survival, yet I will probably never attain the levels I desire, given the time remaining. For the moment, this is my assessment: Japanese – 1; i.e., I know basic courtesy phrases, I can perform survival functions, and I have some understanding of how Japanese functions in spoken and written forms. I can read *hiragana* and recognize a few common *kanji* – perhaps another 30 years will help! Lacking that, I still take great pleasure in my day-to-day interactions with friends and colleagues here in Matsuyama, Japan. *Arigato gozaimasu*!

Reference

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Reflective questions and points for exploration

1. Do you use a different language(s) with different members of your extended family? What determines your choice of language if that is the case? Do you switch between languages with members of different speech communities you find yourself in contact with? What are some of the considerations that trigger code-switching in your interactions?

2. Do you code-switch when with people who share some of your languages? Do you typically do it deliberately or out of necessity because you are lacking particular words or because you want to be better understood and relate better to your interlocutor(s)?

3. The author of this narrative, about to embark on a new, quite different language adventure, learning Japanese, writes: "Reflecting on my past experiences with other languages and cultures gives me confidence. I feel enthusiastic, even at my age, about entering another new language-culture and I anticipate some degree of success." What are some of the ways in which your knowledge of more than one language impacts your learning, your worldview, interaction with others, etc?

4. Fantini's narrative reveals a rich dialectal variety with regard to some of the languages that are part of his repertoire. When naturally exposed to a new language, where you are part of a speech community with its particular dialect variety of your target language, where do you invest your energy first − focusing on the standard or the local variety of your target language, or both? What are some of the factors determining your investment choices?

5. The author comments on the delicate interaction between language status perception and personality: "Speaking Italian at home was fine, but in public it felt awkward, uncomfortable. I had a private and a public life, defined by language use. I loved my family, my grandmothers, my home, and the good times we enjoyed together. At home, I felt happy, gregarious, secure, a big talker (nicknamed chiacchiarone or "chatterbox"). But, in public, I tended to be shy, timid, quiet, reserved, very polite." Have you had a similar experience with any of your languages? Do you believe these issues are explored with the depth they deserve in the research literature and at the various institutions of education you are familiar with?

6. Fantini states: "The language patterns of my childhood home were not imposed, simply modeled. My parents expressed no expectations

about using Italian. After my grandmothers died, there was no apparent concern about language loss and, in fact, my younger brothers never spoke Italian". Have you ever experienced any language loss? If yes, what were the reasons? Was the loss partial or total? Have you witnessed language loss in other people you know? What are the underlying reasons for their language loss?

7. Consider the following quote from this narrative: "Minorities living within a dominant cultural group, like myself, are accustomed to making accommodations in language and behavior. Participating in 'discussion groups' as a young adult, for example, I learned to interact, adjust volume, mitigate expressiveness, not interject when others spoke (what they called 'interrupting'), control expansive gestures, etc. I often discussed reactions and experiences with the dominant group with other 'sympathetic' bilinguals". Do you believe things are somewhat different these days with the existence of quite sizable minorities in many cultures, such as, for instance, the huge Spanish-speaking population in the United States or the significant number of Panjabi speakers in the UK, and given the current greater linguistic diversity in most countries?

Chapter 14

The well and the bucket: The emic and etic perspectives combined

Jasone Cenoz and Elka Todeva

The narratives in the preceding chapters detail the learning paths of individuals who have developed multilingual competence in a great variety of languages. They also reveal a considerable diversity in the processes of acquiring different languages, as well as diversity in the use of these languages in the family and close social networks, the broader community and the schools. The languages learned by the multilingual narrators are very diverse but English is present in all the language repertoires described. It is the L1 of some of the narrators and their exclusive early language of communication; for others it is the L1 shared with other languages from an early age; and it is a second or an additional language learned in instructional settings in five cases. Ten out of the twelve contributors, on the other hand, have experience with Latin, a language only studied in formal contexts. Some languages, such as Irish, Slovene, Bulgarian, Macedonian and Norwegian, are spoken by a relatively small number of people as compared to languages such as Spanish, Arabic and Portuguese, spoken by millions of people on different continents. The presence of Esperanto in several of the narratives also adds an interesting dimension to the introspections; it has triggered reflections on language learnability and on the meaning of the term "native speaker of a language". Many of the languages described in the narratives use the Roman script, but many others, such as Japanese, Hebrew, Chinese, Russian and Arabic, use other scripts. Some languages are tonal, others like Zulu, Chingoni and Xhoza use clicks. Furthermore, every single language combination explored contains both cognate and non-cognate languages as well as various dialects.

The narratives show an equally great diversity with regard to the age of acquisition of the different languages, the motivation to acquire them, the degree of natural exposure to the target language, and the type and intensity of instruction. Some of the languages are restricted to use at home by and between different members of the family while in some

other cases exposure to certain languages takes place outside these close social networks and mainly at school. Another source of variation is the level of competence achieved by the narrators in their different languages. The narratives reveal highly successful language learning but they also contain multiple examples of difficulties and offer reflections on the reasons for which with some languages the learners' goals were not accomplished. Below is an example of broad diversity where contributors refer to the early stages of their multilingualism (14.1).

14.1. Examples of language diversity in the narrative data

My father is Tonga by tribe and he has always spoken to me in Chitonga, Chitumbuka and English, with a bit of Chichewa sometimes. My mother is Sena by tribe, but she has always spoken to me in Chitumbuka, Chichewa and English, with a bit of Chitonga at times. As a result, I acquired Chitonga, Chitumbuka and Chichewa as mother tongues simultaneously, and English as a second language. (Chimwemwe, chapter 6)

As a child I spoke Huihui dialect when I talked to my father and switched to Yunnan dialect when I spoke to my mother. … Then at nineteen, simultaneously, I started to learn Japanese, Mandarin Chinese and Cantonese. (Hu, chapter 11)

"My first language was English and my second was Irish." This tends to be how I summarize my initial linguistic exposure, for those who ask about it. In truth, however, in many ways, it was much more complex than this. (O'Flaherty, chapter 12)

I started with English early, when I was 5 years old, added Russian at the age of 9, and commenced with other languages mainly in my teenage years. (Popovic, chapter 2)

At school [in Bulgaria], English was my primary language of instruction with Russian and French also part of the curriculum. (Todeva, chapter 3)

At home we spoke Standard German because my mother was from Berlin. However, my father's family was from the area so, at family meetings and visits, we spoke Moselle Franconian. (Tappe, chapter 4)

The narratives discuss a wide range of factors and processes that shape the development of multiple languages in a single individual. As already indicated in Chapter One and as will become clear below, they show that multiple language acquisition is both quantitatively and qualitatively different from second language acquisition (see also De Angelis 2007).

It was also pointed out earlier that our collection of narratives aims at redressing the imbalance between *emic* and *etic* studies by giving greater

prominence to the perspectives of multilingual individuals who have had the experience of developing and maintaining multiple languages with varying levels of proficiency. These voices can be of great interest to researchers working on multilingualism because they can provide additional evidence to confirm or disprove trends reported in more *etic* studies. Furthermore, they suggest new paths in the study of multilingualism by offering insights into aspects of learning that have not yet been identified as objects of research. In what follows we offer a brief examination of some of the narrative data against the backdrop of findings from some of the main areas of multilingualism research that were analyzed in greater detail in the opening chapter of this volume. We will conclude the chapter with a summary of notions and research questions in need of further exploration.

Complexity theory and dynamic ecological models

We will start the juxtaposition of *emic* and *etic* perspectives with observations from the narratives that address ideas from Complexity Theory, dynamic and ecological models of multilingualism, and sociocultural approaches to multiple language development. One key observation from Complexity Theory is that language learning is a *holistic, non-linear experience* where an effect is often disproportionate to its cause. In fact, this is how non-linearity is defined as a mathematical term, "a change that is not proportional to input" (Larsen-Freeman and Cameron 2008: 31; also Larsen-Freeman 1997; De Bot 2008). The narratives provide many examples showing that non-linearity is indeed a characteristic feature of multilingual development (see, for instance, examples one and five in 14.2 below). Our narrative data also indicate that Complexity Theory is correct in insisting that factors shaping learning typically *work in tandem rather than in isolation*. The last example in 14.2 below, for instance, reveals the complex interplay between high motivation and lack of opportunity determined by one's ethnicity and social status, possibly gender as well. Gender is a factor often impacting adversely on one's opportunity for genuine interaction in a language, despite a learner's being out-going, motivated, risk-taking and possessing good communication skills (for more data on all these factors see, e.g. chapter 3 and chapter 5). For published sources on the way gender and ethnicity mediate one's learning experiences, see Schumann (1980), Ogulnick (1998) and Pavlenko et al. (2001).

14.2. Examples of non-linearity and complex collective variables

Once I gained awareness about the impermissibility of devoicing with regard to two pairs, namely g / k and b / p, I realized that I had to apply this new rule across the board to cover d / t, z / s, and v / f as well, cf. rib ≠ rip and kid ≠ kit. One can say, in other words, that I achieved quick understanding (in the sense of Schmidt's definition) covering a vast pronunciation territory. (Todeva, chapter 3)

I notice that in the languages I have learned to Level 3 or higher proficiency, there is a certain "tipping point" up to which learning is a struggle, and beyond which everything seems to fall into place. This has variously been called "getting inside a language" or "getting into the zone". For me, the most suitable term is "cresting the hill"; I'm seldom aware of it when it happens, but I know when it has happened. (Kowalski, chapter 9)

I have some days when I am extremely comfortable using the language and other days when I feel as though I am just not getting it right. I have never found a satisfactory explanation for this, beyond the obvious ones like tiredness, or stress but I somehow feel this is a part of how we learn, not unlike the situation where one can be away from a language for a period of time and yet suddenly speak it better than before, despite the lack of contact or practice. (O'Flaherty, chapter 12)

Despite my relatively spotty attendance and poor work ethic, I did pretty well. Italian after all was a Romance language, and all those years of Latin and French came to my rescue. Within weeks I had perfected the phrases I needed to procure myriad canal-side snacks. … Back in those heady early days, my learning curve was incredibly steep. (Henshaw, chapter 8)

While learning Spanish, a monolingual English speaker may notice, for example, that Hispanics often drop sentential subjects. In a natural acquisition setting, it will take perhaps some substantial exposure before this monolingual person truly understands the implications of this initial noticing. If a bi- or multilingual learner of Spanish is already familiar with the pro-drop phenomenon, it will take far fewer examples for him or her to realize that Spanish is a pro-drop language like many others, e.g. Russian, Bulgarian, Japanese, Romanian and Italian. As a linguist, I needed even less data since the heavy marking of the verb in Spanish, in my mind, qualified it as a classic pro-drop language. (Todeva, chapter 3)

My most challenging experience was to study Aymara, an indigenous tongue of Bolivia. I wanted to learn to speak − with the washwoman at my mother-in-law's house, with vendors in the market and others. But, I discovered their general reluctance to use Aymara with non-"Cholos". For this, they spoke Spanish. (Fantini, chapter13)

Another aspect of complexity transpires in the multidimensionality of the concept of *communicative competence*, which has been defined in various

ways and with varying levels of detail by different authors (Canale and Swain 1980; Bachman 1990; Celce-Murcia et al. 1995; Savignon 1997; Council of Europe 2001). If we look at the data in terms of only the four core components of communicative competence, namely the grammatical, sociolinguistic, strategic and discourse, mastery along these four dimensions varies considerably inside and across the various languages in one's multilingual repertoire. Some of this variability is related to one's level of proficiency resulting from one's amount of instruction and/or exposure; in other cases development in a particular area of language plateaus despite the learner's opportunities and efforts.

14.3. Examples of different dimensions of communicative competence in the areas of phonology, lexicon, morphology, pragmatics and discourse

Sometimes it is very hard to believe that rough, accented sounds jarring on my ears actually come from my mouth. (Popovic, chapter 2)

Polish grammar got the better of me. I could get noun cases correct within simple, memorized utterances (earning praise for saying 'jestem profesorem' rather than 'jestem profesor'), but I never learned my way around the system. And while I could manage simple-present verbs and infinitives, the mutations, reduplications, and irregularities of Polish past tenses defeated me utterly. (Kowalski, chapter 9)

Although I had become aware of morphology when learning Afrikaans, especially the inflections for past tense ..., my focus was more on learning utterances and phrases with communicative intent rather than on the formal features of the language itself. (Wildsmith-Cromarty, chapter 5)

Today, I rate myself as follows: German − 1, i.e. I can satisfy basic survival needs, and courtesy requirements, in comprehension, speaking and reading; I have some ability in writing as well. My level is constrained mostly by poor knowledge of grammatical endings. (Fantini, chapter 13)

I have always loved exploring the grammar and lexicon of languages. Pronunciation, however, has never been center stage for me with any of my languages. … With all my languages I make an effort to have the phonemic features right, i.e. those features that are meaning distinctive. … I typically disregard most phonetic features, however. The latter give me a foreign accent, my unaspirated initial "p"s and "t"s for instance, but seldom interfere with communication. (Todeva, chapter 3)

As is known, written Arabic flows from right to left and uses a totally different writing system from the Roman alphabet shared by all my other languages. It

> *was a humbling experience to be basically illiterate after so many years of intensive reading and writing. … After endless hours of practice, my writing has started to look somewhat neat. (Tappe, chapter 4)*

> *When I was in Japan, many Japanese people told me that I spoke beautiful Japanese. I was aware, however, that my Japanese was too formal because I learned my Japanese from textbooks and in a formal business setting. (Hu, chapter 11)*

These quotes reveal that when several languages are involved, the concept of *communicative competence* becomes even more complex because we witness differences in the speaker's level of proficiency in the different language skills, not infrequently the result of either positive or negative cross-linguistic influences. An interesting example is the way Chimwemwe (chapter 6) assesses his own proficiency in four skills in 23 languages and language varieties. As can be seen, his literacy skills are at least as high, and in some cases higher than his oral skills. Radmila Popovic (chapter 2), on the other hand, is reasonably fluent in Russian with regard to oral skills while her writing is considerably less developed. When evaluating her current proficiency, Haiyan Hu (chapter 11) reports high proficiency in oral skills in some Chinese dialects that do not have a written system, so her proficiency is only oral in this case. Alvino Fantini's proficiency in the dialects of Italian he could hear at home in his childhood was also oral (chapter 13).

The narratives provide quite strong evidence supporting Complexity Theory (CT) and its stance on the *role of context* and how we learn and use languages. Larsen-Freeman (1997) and Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008), for instance, have argued repeatedly that if one embraces a CT perspective, language should not be seen as an entity but instead as a space in which an infinite number of possible trajectories may be realized. Larsen-Freeman and Freeman (2008: 161) state that, "None of these trajectories comes into being until language is used in a specific context. Context, in this sense, does not mean just the physical space; it includes the intentional or inter-subjective space between users." Larsen-Freeman and Freeman also point out that "in a dynamic view, there is no such thing as a uniform, homogeneous, static entity that can be called "Spanish", "Urdu", or "Japanese" […]. Language users "soft-assemble" their language resources in the moment to deal with the communicative exigencies at hand; by so doing, they not only adapt their resources to those of their interlocutor, but also, the communicative partners together transform the language system they are using" (Larsen-Freeman and Freeman

2008: 161). Consider, for instance, Todeva's experience (chapter 3, section 2) when she first came to the United States and reduced her English to a subset of what she had already learned and had been using for years; or Freedman's challenges with Hebrew and German, where despite her high grades in these two languages and her being an accomplished language learner, she was unable to communicate with her interlocutors and went through some ego-jarring traumatic experiences before abandoning these two languages altogether (chapter 7). See also chapter 5 where Wildsmith-Cromarty's experience with learning Zulu was significantly affected by the fact that she had some of her own students as members of her learning community. For her this created dynamics that adversely affected her learning despite her high metalinguistic awareness and some natural exposure to the language, which should have facilitated her learning. Talking about his experience with Arabic in Algeria, O'Flaherty, like Wildsmith-Cromarty with regard to her Afrikaans and Zulu in South Africa, shared how certain contexts which offer opportunity but not necessity may determine only modest learning outcomes despite the presence of factors which generally facilitate learning (see chapters 12 and 5, respectively).

Dynamic models of multilingualism look at the *maintenance and loss* of different languages in one's linguistic repertoire. Herdina and Jessner (2002), and also Jessner (2008), argue that learners have limited time and energy for the learning and maintenance of the different languages in their repertoire and that the maintenance of particular languages depends on the communicative need multilinguals feel for them. Other factors that can be influential are the number of languages involved, the age when the language was learned or the level of proficiency achieved. According to Jessner (2008), in the case of multiple languages, attrition tends to occur more.

14.4. Examples showing the dynamic nature of multilingualism

As with Japanese, I achieved a passable level of conversational Nepali while in the country, but the language quickly slipped through my fingers, making an occasional cameo when I was trying to pad my résumé. (Henshaw, chapter 8)

I see language loss and diminution at work even with regard to the languages I have recently learnt and I am currently learning. My knowledge of these languages keeps on coming and going. (Chimwemwe, chapter 6)

My knowledge of Afrikaans syntax is fairly accurate, perhaps because I learned it over a period of ten years. However, my knowledge of the lexicon

> *has diminished considerably through lack of exposure and use. (Wildsmith-Cromarty, chapter 5)*
>
> *As can be seen from this account, my English has definitely improved throughout my adult life, but the knowledge of other languages (Russian, French, Greek) has deteriorated, while German and Italian have shrivelled out of disuse. (Popovic, chapter 2)*

One more important point to make here is that Complexity Theory invites the field of Applied Linguistics to reconsider some deeply-entrenched dichotomies, such as *use* vs. *acquisition* or *competence* vs. *performance*, and to start thinking instead in terms of *co-adaptation* and *soft-assembly* (Thelen and Smith 1994). The latter two notions recognize the fact that language learning and use are "a real-time process, taking into account options and constraints, the intrinsic dynamics of the speaker, the individual's language-using history, the affordances of the context, and the communicative pressures at hand" (Larsen-Freeman and Cameron 2008: 84). The narrative data confirm the necessity for such a reconsideration (see, for instance, Todeva's experiences and her comment on acquisition and use in chapter 3, section 3). O'Flaherty's narrative, on the other hand, reveals that dichotomous terms such as *second language acquisition* vs. *foreign language learning* (Gass and Selinker 2008: 7) can also be problematic if researchers do not probe more deeply into the rich contextual variations covered by each. For his learning of Arabic in Algeria, as O'Flaherty put it, his stay in the country turned his learning into an opportunity but not a necessity, due to his near-native command of French. Someone else's experience in the very same context will no doubt be quite different, necessitating much more negotiation of meaning and perhaps resulting in a different amount of time allotted to the target language, Arabic, in the absence of French in that learner's repertoire. Examples like this last one reiterate the importance of another principle of Complexity Theory – the need to always study carefully *initial conditions* for any plausible multilingual research (Larsen-Freeman 1997: 144; Larsen-Freeman and Cameron 2008: 230).

Like O'Flaherty's narrative, other chapters also reveal contextual variability rarely described and taken into account in most existing studies on language development. Fantini (chapter 13) was born and grew up in an English-speaking country, the United States, but his childhood exposure to language was much more to Italian than English. Wildsmith-Cromarty, born in the UK, describes her experience with Afrikaans in the following way, "My first encounter with instructed second language

acquisition was learning Afrikaans as a compulsory subject at primary school. Although this would be defined as a second language because it was one of the official South African languages, it was not necessarily a language that I had access to as a native English speaker in the community. Living spaces in South Africa were clearly demarcated for the various language groupings at the time (which still holds true for parts of South Africa today), and my family lived in an area where English was the dominant language." (chapter 5, section 2)

The influence of multilingualism on subsequent language learning

The narratives in this volume provide data on all of the areas that have received some attention in the study of multilingualism. One of these areas, the object of much exploration, concerns *the advantages* that have been associated with bi- and multilingualism for the subsequent acquisition of additional languages (see Cenoz 2003, 2009, and De Angelis 2007 for a review). Such advantages have been acknowledged in all the narratives, and yet the emerging picture of multilingual development is quite nuanced at the same time, with some of the introspective data revealing downsides as well.

14.5. Examples referring to the advantages of multilingualism

I think my ability to recognize similar patterns in different languages is enhanced by an early exposure to more than one language system or two varieties of one language. (Tappe, chapter 4)

I can say that learning languages has become easier with every language that I have added to my repertoire. The more languages I know, the more linguistic information I have as a resource to additional languages. (Chimwemwe, chapter 6)

The art of language learning may lie not in the acquisition of an individual language but in mastery of the learning process itself. (Tonkin, chapter 10)

My background as a speaker of two first languages, the dialects Huihui and Yunnan, helped me develop an inventory of sounds and an almost innate awareness of different sentence structures, which I believe has facilitated my learning of English, Japanese, Mandarin Chinese, Cantonese and Spanish as an adult. (Hu, chapter 11)

I quickly recognized how much knowing Latin would improve my English vocabulary, and my French vocabulary as well. I intuitively came to use all three

languages to make meaning across linguistic boundaries. (Freedman, chapter 7)

At 70, I am preparing to leave for Japan in just one month. There, I face a new challenge – two years immersed in Japanese language and culture. I am also reflecting on my past experiences with other languages and cultures. This gives me confidence. I feel enthusiastic, even at my age, about entering another new language-culture and I anticipate some degree of success. (Fantini, chapter 13)

These examples, and many more available in the narrative data, clearly show that, at least for the multilingual contributors to this volume, the process of acquiring a new language is facilitated by prior linguistic knowledge. These multilingual speakers seem to have developed a high level of metalinguistic awareness which helps them make more and faster progress in their subsequent target languages. It is interesting to point out that even knowing a language with a minimal level of proficiency sometimes can prove instrumental for a substantial boost in the development of a later target language or languages. Such a phenomenon is reported by Fantini in chapter 13 and Todeva in chapter 3 (for etic findings to the same effect see De Angelis 2007). At the same time, as is clear in Wildsmith-Cromarty's and Todeva's narratives, it is precisely because of their high metalinguistic awareness that these two learners seemed unable to pay close attention to some of the formal aspects of some of their target languages, which considerably slowed down their language development in those areas. Furthermore, as indicated in narratives 5 and 6, multilingualism can trigger confusion on the semantic level and pose challenges with control and retrieval.

14.6. Examples of multilingualism as a liability

Not surprisingly, my rich language learning experience assists me tremendously in breaking the code of new languages, particularly if they belong to a language family from which I already know one or more languages. Things are quite different on the productive plane, however, at least as far as accuracy is concerned. It is often exactly my ability to make good use of contextual clues and my ability to resort to massive positive transfer that prevent me from achieving accuracy. (Todeva, chapter 3)

I also think that the more languages I have learned, the more difficult it has become for me to store, maintain and keep apart information about them. … Because of my multilingualism, my lexicon is a very complicated entity. I believe that I have one lexicon that is made up of different sub-lexicons. … When a lexeme in one language is activated, other lexemes in other languages

that are similar to it (phonologically or semantically), also get activated. I actually have to make a deliberate effort to keep some lexemes from articulation sometimes. This conscious effort tends to slow me down in my endeavours to speak the languages in which I am not yet very competent. (Chimwemwe, chapter 6)

Although I had, to some extent, achieved mastery in Italian and French at one time, I currently experience only sporadic exposure to Italian, French, Afrikaans and Zulu, mostly in my professional environment. This mixing of languages on a fairly regular basis causes some confusion, as words from all the other languages pop up in a totally unpredictable manner whenever I attempt to retrieve words from my mental lexicon. (Wildsmith-Cromarty, chapter 5)

It is important to note, however, that Italian came (and went) easily primarily because of my cumulative experience of learning languages. (Tonkin, chapter 10)

Also worthy of mention, prior knowledge decidedly helps, but learners may still experience challenges in the affective domain. Every new language learning experience seems to offer its own dynamics and possible frustrations that no amount of successful prior experience fully offsets.

14.7. Examples of varied effects of multilingualism

No multilingual can rest on his or her laurels. In a new situation, like Japan, it is back to feeling childlike, humbled, ignorant. But, perhaps the starting point is not the same as for a monolingual; past experiences and strategies help, coupled with motivation, interest and need. (Fantini, chapter 13)

[with regard to German] I felt humiliated. I became even more resistant to speaking any foreign language I didn't know as well as English and French. … [with regard to Hebrew] I never became fluent. When I left at the end of the year, I went away with a profound sense of failure, even though I had completed my courses successfully and been accepted in a PhD program at the University of Pennsylvania. (Freedman, chapter 7)

[with regard to Zulu] As there were about sixty students in the class with a number of my own first year students among them, I found this experience quite intimidating. The teachers would move around the class asking questions and I would count the number of sentences before it was my turn so as to be prepared with an answer in order not to lose face. Trying to speak the language in front of sixty other students was enough to inhibit my acquisition of the language at the time. There were other aspects of the teaching approach that made learning Zulu in an instructed setting a somewhat frustrating experience for me. (Wildsmith-Cromarty, chapter 5)

Interestingly, ten out of the twelve contributors commented on the pivotal role of Latin among all their other languages. Contrary to some literary sources (Twain 1869) and many language learners' real stories and tall tales, these authors describe their experience with Latin not only as intellectually and aesthetically satisfying, but as extremely beneficial was well.

14.8. Examples of the influence of Latin

I credit much of my academic and linguistic success to these years of Latin study. … I trace my knowledge of English grammar, large portions of my French and English lexicon, and even my initial attraction to Islam to my training in Latin. (Henshaw, chapter 8)

Through Latin I got an in-depth understanding of grammar. Latin examples with their rich morphology made the case system, verbal inflections, the tenses, modals and quantifiers easily accessible. The intensive study of grammatical dependencies and of derivational morphology had a positive influence on my writing both in German and English. I began to conceptualize language as a discrete combinatorial system and to explore its possibilities in my other languages. I spent a lot of time inventing new words by exploring derivational morphology. I started to "play" with language structures, i.e. creating word puns and syntactically ambiguous sentences. I had always been an avid reader but prior to my second year of Latin I was primarily interested in the plot of what I read. Now I was beginning to savour the beauty of the language as well. … Latin also helped me figure out the Romance languages. While in the process of acquiring French later on, I could understand a fair amount of Italian and Spanish without ever having learnt these languages. (Tappe, chapter 6)

Latin was now also my heritage, I realized, the source of languages I knew and also the basis for many English words. … I loved Latin − it fascinated me to see our origins in this ancient language, I loved the sound of it and I often read it aloud. (Fantini, chapter 13)

Latin, on the other hand, was an analytical challenge, which probably laid the foundation for all my future learning of languages, both cognate, such as Italian, French and Spanish, and non-cognate, such as Zulu. (Wildsmith-Cromarty, chapter 5)

Why the emphasis on this particular language? According to the authors of the narratives, Latin is perceived as a strong language learning enabler and as more useful than other languages for developing metalinguistic awareness because of two main reasons. First, compared to some other languages, the grammatical structure of Latin is relatively rich, and sec-

ond, the fact that with Latin the focus is typically on translation rather than oral skills somehow offers opportunities for a deeper understanding of how languages work. Moreover, the authors state that Latin vocabulary is useful not only for the study of Romance languages but also for the study of many other languages that have borrowed many words from it. Significantly, four narratives describe the positive influence of Latin grammar on the acquisition of non-cognate, typologically distant languages – Zulu, German, and, to some extent, Russian (see chapters 4, 5, 9, 13).

Cross-linguistic influence

The very last examples from the previous section are a good segue to another area that has received attention in the study of multilingualism, namely *cross-linguistic influence*. As indicated in De Angelis (2007), many have written about the transfer of prior linguistic knowledge and prior learning experience as a strong force in human cognition. The question today is no longer whether linguistic information from different languages is integrated or not, but to what extent it is integrated and how this integration affects the processes of production and comprehension. Factors that have been shown to trigger or hinder cross-linguistic influence are language distance, target language proficiency, source language proficiency, recency of use, length of residence and exposure to a non-native language environment, order of acquisition and formality of context (De Angelis 2007: 7–17; Jarvis and Pavlenko 2008).

The narratives in this volume indicate that cross-linguistic influence from the different languages in the authors' multilingual repertoires is very common. In many cases, typological distance plays a role, with closer languages typically being very helpful in the acquisition of additional languages. This is in harmony with findings reported in Cenoz, Hufeisen and Jessner (2001, 2003), De Angelis (2007), Ringbom (2007), and Jarvis and Pavlenko (2008).

14.9. Examples of influence from typologically close languages

> *Once I was there, however, the language practically fell into my lap. For one thing, with Spanish and Latin already down, Italian fell in its turn like a domino. (Kowalski, chapter 9)*

> *In addition, the relationship between Chinese and Japanese writing helps my writing in Japanese. Writing in Japanese, I use as many Chinese characters as*

possible. The more Chinese characters I use, the higher the level of writing I demonstrate. (Hu, chapter 11)

Portuguese proceeded similarly. I studied it formally but its similarity to Spanish (less so to Italian) facilitated the task. Similarities existed in vocabulary, grammar and writing, and differences mostly in phonology. (Fantini, chapter 13)

These examples show that multilinguals get many "free rides" when learning additional languages as their prior linguistic knowledge helps on all levels of language − grammar, pragmatics, lexicon, pronunciation and orthography. When learning a language that is not typologically related, the positive influence of other languages is not so evident, particularly if compared to languages that are close, but it can still be there (see, for instance, chapters 3, 4, and 13). Section 14.10. offers some examples that illustrate how typological distance can play out differently depending on the languages and language subsystems involved (e.g. lexicon, grammar, orthography) and depending on the cumulative prior knowledge of the learner.

14.10. Examples of the varying effects of typologically distant languages

Whereas my English and Latin background had helped speed my acquisition of French and Italian lexis, every new Arabic word had to be laboriously committed to memory. The grammar, too, bore little resemblance to any linguistic system I had previously been exposed to. (Henshaw, chapter 8)

The lack of cognates [in Japanese] was a difficulty at first, used as I was to being able to improvise on even highly abstract topics in Romance languages using Latinate cognates. … Mongolian grammar, similar enough to Japanese, was easy to grasp. … I may have been a seasoned veteran, but I stood alone against a formidable foe [Polish]. My powers of memorization were tested to their limit by the lack of cognates, the jawbreaking consonant clusters, and the way a great difference in meaning might turn on the subtlest variation in sound. (Kowalski, chapter 9)

So I studied Greek feverishly before departure, finding it similar to Spanish in pronunciation and thus easy in this area. During the fourteen-day shipboard crossing, I enlisted a Greek-American on board to teach us. Again I was fascinated to discover innumerable cognates with English and Italian. These provided hooks on which to anchor expressions. (Fantini, chapter 13)

Zulu grammar does not in itself pose a problem even though it is extremely complicated and rich. I got the impression that the fact that I am a trained

linguist helps. Moreover, the learning process seems to be enhanced by the fact that my mother tongue is German. German has a fairly rich morphology and shares with Zulu the feature that it demands subject-verb agreement throughout. … also Zulu grammar resembles Latin grammar. Interestingly, my colleague and I outperformed the body of students in our Zulu classes who have another Nguni language as their mother tongue, Xhosa, closely related to Zulu. (Tappe, chapter 4)

Japanese influenced my English in both sentence structure and vocabulary. … At times the similarity between Japanese borrowed words and words in English still interferes with my ability to pronounce words correctly in English. (Hu, chapter 11)

One aspect of cross-linguistic influence that has not received much attention in research studies on multilingualism is that of cases where cross-linguistic influence is associated with problems. Some of the examples in 14.11 show how learning closely related languages has not only advantages, but disadvantages as well.

14.11. Examples of problematic cross-linguistic influence

In some cases the similarities help in my endeavours to speak French or Esperanto, while in other cases they become a source of confusion. (Chimwemwe, chapter 6)

It is often exactly my ability to make good use of contextual clues and my ability to resort to massive positive transfer that prevent me from achieving accuracy. My learning of Spanish is a case in point. Assisted by English, Italian, French, Latin and Bulgarian, I have very high listening and reading comprehension, ranging from 50−99% depending on the topic. My productive skills, however, have been a source of frustration for quite a few years now. (Todeva, chapter 3)

Despite its relative similarity to Arabic, I never mastered the script of Urdu. (Henshaw, chapter 8)

The first two examples above demonstrate that facilitating cross-linguistic influence can also have a negative side, at least for some abilities. The last example, on the other hand, indicates that, though expectations are often high when languages are related, the acquisition is not always successful.

The narratives shed some interesting light on the *directionality* of cross-linguistic influence as well (see Cook 2003; Jarvis and Pavlenko 2008: 20) − forward, reverse, lateral, and bi- or multi-directional. The data from the narratives contain multiple examples covering every single one of these.

14.12. Examples of different directionality of cross-linguistic influence

My speech demonstrates all kinds of cross-linguistic influence: influence from one mother tongue to another; from a mother tongue to a second language; from a mother tongue to a third language; from a second language to a mother tongue; and from a second language to a third language. … In general, apart from influencing one another, my mother tongues influence all the other languages that I have learnt and am learning to different extents. They also influence different aspects of my different languages. That is, for example, while one language is mainly influenced at the syntactic level, another one is mainly influenced at the morphological level. For instance, my mother tongues mainly influence my English at the syntactic level, yet they influence my competence in Zulu and other South African languages mainly at the morphological, phonological and semantic levels. (Chimwemwe, chapter 6)

In terms of lexicon and intonation contours, my Standard German was, however, highly influenced by the dialect [Moselle Franconian]. This resulted in some challenges when I moved to northern Germany because people would not understand me, even though I used Standard German grammar. (Tappe, chapter 4]

This was my first experience of different syntactic patterning to my L1 and I often transferred the English patterns to an Afrikaans utterance. (Wildsmith-Cromarty, chapter 5)

English was a main source for German, my French benefited from Latin and English, Old English was not difficult at all because I could make use of Latin, English and German, whenever in trouble. … With regard to interaction across my languages, interference certainly occurs, and English influence on Russian is most obvious at the moment. What is less evident and more covert is transfer from English into Serbian. This is something I keep detecting in my writing. Serbian is a language with a very flexible word order, and under the influence of English I seem to have forgotten to make use of its full potential. (Popovic, chapter 2)

Another interesting insight from the narratives concerns the role of *code-switching*. In Chapter One we briefly discussed the term *symbolic competence*, which refers to multilinguals' ability to navigate between languages and dialects to ensure emotional connectedness and successful transactions (Kramsch 2006; Kramsch and Whiteside 2008). The following examples show how learners code-switch and use their languages as a resource.

14.13. Examples of code-switching as a resource

I have noticed that I sometimes switch into my mother tongue when I talk to my good friends who live in Britain or the USA, when we are in the company

of native speakers and converse in English. That bit of Serbian is invested with a special role – solidarity building, bonding, or evoking something from our shared past. (Popovic, chapter 2)

Some of this switching is conscious, some unconscious. Chichewa or the Chichewa version of Chibrazi and English tend to get most "air time". ... I choose these dialects or accents depending on the context of communication, especially with regard to participants, topic and place. … I usually switch to my idiolect as a way of "teasing" the people I am speaking with, excluding others, or just to get them to speak in the "idiolect mode". For me, the idiolect makes communication much easier than when I stick to conventions since it allows all the languages that I know to intermingle freely and grammatical constraints are minimal. (Chimwemwe, chapter 6)

No one thought about language purity or exclusive language use; they simply switched and mixed languages or dialects according to need, mood, or whim. (Fantini, chapter 13)

During my three years at Marlboro College, switching between three languages became part of my daily life. …Usually I switched between three languages during meals in the dining hall. I became rather good at this because at the same table were my housemates, who spoke English, and my students, who were studying Japanese and Chinese. (Hu, chapter 11)

Another way in which code-switching acts as a resource is when it is used as part of one's *strategic competence* (Canale and Swain 1980). Sometimes speakers have problems expressing certain ideas or finding a word in the language they are speaking at the moment, and being multilingual, they have the possibility of looking for the items they need in one of the other languages they speak. Strategic competence, in other words, involves a conscious use of the resources multilinguals have in order to compensate for the problems they may have with some of the other dimensions of communicative competence (Celce-Murcia el al. 1995). Deliberate and non-deliberate code-switching can also be a vehicle for hypothesis testing, which makes it a very important language learning tool.

14.14. Examples of code-switching as strategic competence

Also, I switch language when I cannot find proper words. (Popovic, chapter 2)

… talking with one another in English about Esperanto events, we switch codes for Esperanto words we cannot easily translate. (Tonkin, chapter 10)

The narratives show different attitudes towards code-mixing and code-switching. On the one hand mixing languages is seen as creating some

difficulties and problems for the learner but it is also acknowledged as a major multi-faceted asset for anyone with knowledge of multiple languages.

14.15. Examples of different attitudes towards code-switching and language mixing

This mixing of languages on a fairly regular basis causes some confusion, as words from all the other languages pop up in a totally unpredictable manner whenever I attempt to retrieve words from my mental lexicon. … A further example of this type [purposeful code-switching] occurs with my Italian colleague, where utterances such as the following are not infrequent: Che cosa facciamo allora? Do we approach the topic from a structuralist perspective or from a postmodern one? The problem with such purposeful transfer is that it does not "push" my acquisition of the language to a higher level. Rather, it invites fossilization as comprehensible output becomes compromised. (Wildsmith-Cromarty, chapter 5)

On the other hand, I code-switch as a result of lack of competence. … I find code-switching to be advantageous because it enables me to communicate effectively and efficiently. However, I also find it to be disadvantageous in that it limits the development of some of my additional languages and it "kills" some of those that I already know. (Chimwemwe, chapter 6)

The various examples in 14.13−14.15 reveal the interplay between emotional, cognitive and contextual factors in the use of code-switching. This is an area of research that certainly needs more attention as it has important implications for language teaching and successful communication.

Emotions and attitude

As indicated in the overview of the research on multilingualism in Chapter One, the study of *emotions* has been another area that has demonstrated a significant development in recent years (see Pavlenko and Dewaele 2004, and Pavlenko 2005 for a review). The narratives in this volume illuminate to a varying degree all three subareas in this field of study, namely the *emotional experiences* of multilinguals, their *preferred language of emotions* and the way various languages *segment the semantic field of emotions* (for more detail see Pavlenko 2006). We will start by offering a few examples capturing the role of emotions in both language development and language use.

14.16. Examples of the role of emotions for language learning outcomes

Overwhelmed and discouraged, I developed such negative emotions about modern Hebrew that I was unable to learn it and abandoned the attempt, in spite of the fact that I was interested in it, needed it and had extensive knowledge of the grammar. … At least for some personalities – such as mine – the emotional context of learning a language can be a make-or-break issue. (Freedman, chapter 7)

With hindsight, I suspect that my engagement with learning Gaelic cannot be attributed solely to my enthusiasm for grammatical paradigms. A certain emotional engagement with this language and its identity implications was fostered both in school and in the wider community. (O'Flaherty, chapter 12)

The problem of affect is always with us in multilingual situations. (Tonkin, chapter 10)

The narrative data shed particularly interesting light on *anxiety*. As is well known, affect has been a topic widely written about ever since claims were made that language anxiety is the best single correlate for foreign language achievement (e.g., Gardner and MacIntyre 1993). As demonstrated in some of the *emic* data in this volume (see in particular chapter 7), while anxiety may hinder optimal learning and impede acquisition, as argued most notably by Krashen (1987), it does not necessarily preclude successful language learning.

It would be presumptuous to claim that the narratives in this volume reflect the experience of all multilinguals. Twelve contributors is a limited number but, at least for these twelve individuals, Dewaele's (2002) finding that learners show higher levels of anxiety when learning a second language than when learning additional languages seems to hold true. The narratives abound in very strongly positive terms describing the narrators' experiences with their various languages. As indicated earlier, however, one's experience with a particular language can be adversely affected by an intricate web of contextual factors. This is richly described in chapters 5 and 7.

14.17. Examples of the relationship between learning and affect

… learning the vocabulary and grammar of a new language was like learning a new game. When I met someone else who spoke the same language, my reaction was delight: "You know this game, too! Let's play!" (Kowalski, chapter 9)

> *I enjoyed and learned to speak Portuguese with extreme ease.* [With regard to his other languages, like many of the contributors, Fantini uses words and expressions such as *intrigued, fascinated, felt at home with the language; intrigued and motivated; I take great pleasure; I loved Latin*]. *(Fantini, chapter 13)*
>
> *Now I was beginning to savour the beauty of the language as well. … it was fun to actually see how the new language [Zulu] expressed things in different and new ways. This experience reminded me strikingly of the fascination I had felt earlier in my life when I studied Latin. (Tappe, chapter 4)*
>
> *I like rules, I like tangibility, I like structure. Latin provided all this and more. (Henshaw, chapter 8)*
>
> *I did not experience any anxiety during my two weeks of learning Afrikaans. Now four years later, I still remember a number of very common expressions. (Hu, chapter 11)*

In a series of publications drawing on the work of neuroscience and cognitive psychology, John Schumann has recently offered a re-conceptualization of *affect* by looking at language learning as an experience of stimulus appraisal along five dimensions: novelty, intrinsic pleasantness, goal or need significance, coping potential, and compatibility with self- and social image (cf. in particular Schumann 1997, Schumann et al. 2004). According to his model, positive appraisals along these five dimensions enhance language learning while negative ones inhibit and interfere with learning. Pavlenko (2005) critiques Schumann's approach as reductionist, arguing that by focusing on internal states and processes only, the model ignores the relational nature of emotions and cognition, which always take place in a social context, influenced by social, political, economic and historical circumstances.

As is already apparent from many of the quotes offered in this chapter, the narratives show that all the contributors feel passionate about language learning and share an excitement about language on aesthetic and cognitive grounds; they see grammar as a fascinating puzzle of a sort; reassured by their prior linguistic experience they typically approach their new languages with a certain degree of confidence; they are excited about discovering new ways of expressing things and of viewing the world, and they consider a knowledge of languages as a necessity and an integral part of being educated. According to Schumann's five stimulus dimensions, all of these attributes qualify them as successful language learners. The descriptions of the struggles the contributors have had with some of their languages, however, emphasize the importance of studying further

the relative weight of each of these dimensions for particular learning outcomes. Studying multilinguals with their various languages is a wonderful "natural laboratory" where one can see how an entire constellation of linguistic, psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic factors actually shapes particular (self)appraisals and learning outcomes.

The narratives offer evidence, supporting Pavlenko (2005), that appraisals and attitudes can be enhanced or negatively affected by social attitudes and views. Fantini's introspection (chapter 13), for instance, reveals his very different attitude to his L1, Italian, when he felt appreciated in Mexico and Greece, as opposed to feeling ashamed in Philadelphia as an immigrant of Italian descent. Chimwemwe (chapter 6), Todeva (chapter 3) and Popovic (chapter 2), on the other hand, show a steadier personal attitude to their target languages but emphasize that they felt that their proficiency and skills were perceived differently depending on the environment where they were using their languages. In Todeva's case, this triggered atypical behavior in the sense that she started deliberately modifying her language and using only a subset of what she was able to produce (see chapter 3, section 2).

Five authors describe how they were positively influenced by societal attitudes toward multilingualism as an asset and an accomplishment within everyone's reach. Two, on the other hand, went on to become accomplished multilinguals growing up surrounded by an imposed atmosphere of monolingualism, which brings up the importance of learner *agency*, a phenomenon still not fully researched and recognized (see Breen 2001 as a notable exception). On page after page, the narratives from this anthology reveal the learners as agents who take initiative, look for additional sources, experiment with learning strategies, change instructional practices, recognize contextual affordances, influence learning communities, and navigate their way through both friendly and challenging encounters and interactions (see, for instance, Tappe's and Wildsmith-Cromarty's experiences in South Africa and Europe in chapters 4 and 5, or Popovic, Freedman, and Henshaw in chapters 2, 7, and 8). All the multilinguals in the book are very much in charge of their learning rather than being passive recipients of knowledge and receptacles of input. Some describe how they initially relied on teachers and on what the language courses they attended had to offer but then took initiative and started looking for experiences and materials that better served their learning.

Another aspect of emotions illuminated by the contributors' introspections is how different languages segment the *terrain of emotions* and how

this difference in segmentation influences one's navigation through one's feelings. The narratives furthermore reveal the use of both the L1 and some strong additional languages as equally important vehicles for expressing one's emotions. They describe a complex interplay between contextual factors and one's *preferred language of expression*, a complexity very much in line with observations found in Pavlenko (2005) which differ from some earlier *etic* studies indicating the L1 as the primary language of emotions.

14.18. Examples of preferred language(s) of expression and varying density of segmentation

I need a pile of words to express the physical and emotional wellness of being encapsulated in the Japanese giant of a mini word, 'genki'. (Todeva, chapter 3)

I never stopped to consider what their English equivalents might have been, and even to this day an English translation of such phrases would seem awkward, and would certainly not carry the full connotation of the French or Italian. (Wildsmith-Cromarty, chapter 5)

It is not unusual for me to find myself wrestling in English for the equivalent of an Esperanto expression that describes some sentiment or idea. (Tonkin, chapter 10)

Speaking Italian at home was fine, but in public it felt awkward, uncomfortable. I had a private and a public life, defined by language use. … At home, I felt happy, gregarious, secure, a big talker (nicknamed chiacchiarone or "chatterbox"). But, in public, I tended to be shy, timid, quiet, reserved, very polite. (Fantini, chapter 13)

English has been the main language of my daily communication for close to twenty years now; I live, love and dream in it. … Emotionally at least, my mother tongue still feels safe and honored, but now as an alternative means of expression and a handy secret language, which gives me a soul-saving vent for all sorts of unmentionables. (Todeva, chapter 3)

Repositioning and identity negotiation

Before we conclude this chapter we would like to mention the evidence available in the narratives related to issues around multilingualism and *repositioning and identity negotiation*, a topic of intense interest in the *etic* literature in recent years (cf. e.g., Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004; Block 2006; Niño-Murcia and Rothman 2008, to mention just a few). As Niño-Murcia and Rothman (2008) point out, language is a conduit for con-

structing identity and when multilinguals choose to learn and use a particular language in specific contexts, they are building their own multiple, complex identities. O'Flaherty (chapter 12) discusses the identity implications of learning Irish in a context in which English is also used. Other narratives describe how people see language learning as an opportunity to create a new identity and show how multiple identities can co-exist.

14.19. Examples of identity (re)negotiation

I believe that one of the reasons why I was so motivated to learn Italian was that I was seeking an alter ego after having experienced a sense of alienation and isolation in the two communities where I had grown up. In South Africa, I was regarded as an outsider because of my British accent, and when I returned to England at the age of twenty, supposedly my home country, I was asked where I came from! This caused an identity crisis, which I subsequently resolved by moving to Europe where I clearly did not belong initially, but to which I gradually assimilated through my proficiency in the two languages.

... I avoided using English whilst I was living in Europe and kept within my group of Italian (and later, French) friends with whom I did not speak English. It was as if I chose a "third space" within which to build a new identity – one of my own choosing and in which I felt comfortable (Wildsmith-Cromarty, chapter 5)

Moreover, the late sixties and early seventies brought Rock 'n Roll and the Hippie movement to Germany. Both were celebrated to a great extent by the post-Nazi generations, who felt the need to redefine themselves and to move away from what had been identified as "German under Hitler". Thus, my motivation to learn the 'in' language was very high. (Tappe, chapter 4)

I have become very conscious, in my own writing, of my tendency to think in terms of the collective "we", and when communicating in a western context, I make an effort to change to I-statements, which are generally much more common and appropriate. (Hu, chapter 11)

Learning new languages gives me a sense of enrichment. I do not see myself as losing my identity because of learning new languages. Rather, I see myself as being able to embrace as many identities as possible. However, I find myself "torn" among the cultures of the different languages that I know, especially those of my mother tongues. (Chimwemwe, chapter 6)

New research agendas

Space constraints preclude the possibility of a more detailed analysis of all the relevant data from the narratives that shed light on various theo-

retical issues explored in the existing *etic* studies on multilingualism. The examples in this chapter simply give one a taste of what the interested reader, researcher, and student of language can find in the individual narratives. These rich *emic* data invite us to revisit and explore further a number of notions in the study of language and multilingualism such as the elusiveness and complexity of the very concept of target language; the non-straightforward role of affect; the concept of input and the place of prior knowledge in it; the socially mediated nature of interaction and learning in general; the power of pattern recognition; the idea of system vs. item learning; the learner as intentional agent, metalinguistically aware, savvy of learning strategies, and capable of delicate and sometimes difficult identity (re)negotiation; the notion of symbolic competence and its growing importance in our world of globalization, outsourcing, and large scale cultural and linguistic border-crossings; the non-dichotomous nature of language learning and use; motivation, self-esteem and anxiety as both shaping and being shaped by learning outcomes; the nexus of language and emotions; cross-linguistic influences between cognate and non-cognate languages; the role of limited knowledge of an additional language in the shaping of one's overall multicompetence system; pragmatic norms and norm-flouting and the perception of ownership of language; cross-linguistic influence and how it plays out in the various dimensions of language – lexicon, pragmatics, discourse, morphology, syntax, orthography and pronunciation.

The above list illustrates only a small part of what *emic* insights put on our research agendas for deeper exploration. Personal narratives reveal intricate complexity, some considerable variability, and almost overwhelming webs of learning factors and all sorts of other interconnectivities. As Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008) rightly point out, however, to really advance our research efforts we need to embrace this "messiness" and make what was earlier considered "noise" in the data the center of our explorations.

A careful reading of the narratives in this volume fully supports newer theoretical models which argue that we need to: honor complexity and avoid reductionism; rethink our units of analysis and move from individual to collective variables; examine carefully initial conditions; try not to isolate single causes for complex events; embrace ecologically valid descriptions and approaches; see learners and their context as coupled and favor neither the cognitive nor the social to the exclusion of the other; abandon the goal of predictability and focus instead on tendencies, patterns and contingencies (Larsen-Freeman and Cameron 2008, chap. 8;

De Bot et al. 2005; Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004; Kramsch 2002; Larsen-Freeman 1997). Such a shift in the way we approach the study of language development and multilingualism is challenging but it also holds much promise and truly exciting possibilities.

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1. The Language Index reflects the designations used by the authors of the individual narratives. Some, for instance, talk about their experience with learning Chinese without specifying which variety exactly; others talk about having Mandarin Chinese and Cantonese as part of their language repertoire. The same goes for Greek and its subdivision into Modern vs. Classical Greek.

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