

Language Losing and Language Keeping in Spanish-speaking Families in Ontario:
The Mothers' Perspectives

By

Helen Baergen

A Thesis Submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate Studies
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Education

Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba

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“Thus the women have always kept the stories in clay or reeds, in wool or cotton, in grass or paint or words to songs. Somewhere they began to keep them in ink and paper.”

-Green, R. (Ed.), 1984, p. 3.

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Abstract

Utilizing a life history approach, this thesis explores the familial effects and consequences of mother tongue loss in an immigrant situation of contact with a dominant language. The focus is on the experience of Spanish-speaking, female-headed families who came to Canada in the late 80s and early 90s. Working from the personal narrative perspectives of the mothers of these families and weaving in comments from other immigrant people as well as findings from previous research is a way of acknowledging those narrative perspectives as valid research knowledge and responding to an expressed need for more research into the specifically family experience of first language loss and first language maintenance. The women's narratives highlight the complexities and dilemmas inherent in the immigrant language learning/language losing/language keeping experience. They also draw attention to the most vital and essential *raison d'être* of the mother tongue: family communication and family relationships have the most to lose from loss of the mother tongue. Arguments for first language maintenance need to pay as much attention to the benefits within the family as they do to the social, economic, and cognitive benefits of bi- and multi-lingualism for an individual and for the society.

Preamble:***textere-textile-text-******textere meaning to weave***

Follow the path down a steep Guatemalan mountainside, between rows of 12 foot tall corn, down into a narrow valley and there beside a small adobe brick house you will find a woman weaving. Anchored to her loom by a heavy band of cloth around her waist, she kneels on a woven mat while she works, rhythmically leaning forward, then pulling back to regulate tension, insert threads, and tighten the design. A piece of cloth more colourful than anything you've ever laid eyes on is being created while chickens scratch in the dirt around her and a barefoot child peers shyly from the corner of the house. On a clothesline strung between two trees hang other multi-coloured, intricately-patterned tablecloths, *servilletas* to hold warm tortillas, *huipiles* for women to wear. Weaving is an act of storytelling for women in this community; it is healing from torture; it is keeping alive their own culture; it is resisting the military that seeks to quash indigenous practices and languages (Weaving the Heavens).

Those of us who can only watch, fascinated, as the weavers work their magic and a piece of extraordinary beauty unfolds, use the metaphor of weaving to describe processes of bringing together dissimilar elements, bringing meaning [beauty] out of disparate parts, understanding out of crosscurrent tensions. Weaving, backstrap weaving in particular, is also an apt metaphor for the complex process of creating a new life and a new identity in a new country: adapting, giving in, resisting, holding back, working the threads to

create a new pattern. The focus of this research project is the perspective that Latin American immigrant women bring to the experience of first language loss and maintenance in families. The women telling their stories here have struggled long and hard to weave the threads from their former life and those of their new life in this country into a pleasing, satisfying whole.

Engaging in qualitative research which is “interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and sometimes counterdisciplinary, which crosscuts, embracing two tensions—the broad, interpretive, critical, and the positivist, humanistic, naturalistic—at the same time, and is multiparadigmatic in focus” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 11) is akin to engaging in a weaving. “The qualitative researcher is like a quilt maker [or a weaver] who . . . puts together slices of reality” (Denzin & Lincoln, p. 5), using the tools and strategies at hand, blending together images and interpretations to create new understandings of a particular topic through the use of a variety of interpretive practices [colours, yarns], and techniques.

The writing of this thesis is also an act of weaving, as is any writing of text (‘text’ and ‘textile’ both derive from *texere* which means ‘to weave’). This thesis is the loom on which I will interlace the colours and threads of the life histories of women who live the language loss experience along with the scholarly strands of research exploring this experience along with threads from my own life experience of language learning and loss, to create for the reader a tapestry highlighting patterns and issues in first language losing and first language keeping. Just as the art of weaving utilizes different colours and types of threads and yarns, so I intend to use a variety of writing genre--poetry, story, academic discourse and vignette--to present this tapestry to the reader. As these various strands

meet and intertwine, my hope is that the emergent designs will create fuller understandings and deeper convictions about the immigrant experience of first language losing and first language keeping.

The academic terms are language *loss* and language *maintenance*. I prefer to use *losing* and *keeping*, however, because these sound less academic, more earthy and more poetic. They are also more in the moment--at a particular moment in time this is what is happening, and continuous--this occurrence is continuing on for the duration of the moment; completion is beyond its scope; it may or may not ever be completed. This is fitting for the topic of loss of the mother tongue.

Weaver woman weaving: a poem

Latina woman

weaving

brilliant yarn

blessing

wise fingers

blending

identity,

belonging,

deep brown earth,

tall corn,

ancestral graves,

barefoot children

drenched in

mangojuice, coconutmilk, sunlitjoy,

weaving

dancing bougainvillea sounds

warm night vowels

lulling consonants

embraces . . .

immigrant woman

weaving

blood red yarn

staining

stiff hands

constraining

transmogrifying,

grafting,

re-membering

Nike children

gorging themselves

on harsh, plastic sounds,

unnatural rhythms,

unwieldy attire,

threading new ways

holding home,

weaving

asymmetrical

acquiescence . . .

(Note the stiffness of the immigrant woman's weaving, the harsh-sounding, complicated terminology she has for tools as compared to the graceful movements of the Latina woman's weaving, the sensuous, warm-sounding, colourful terminology she has for her tools.)

Chapter One

Introduction

Anchoring the weaving

“ . . . tie the top rod to the anchor [which] can be a tree or a post, . . . a strong enough support to withstand the tension of the weaving” (Ziek de Rodriguez & Ziek, 1978, p. 16).

The movement of humans and therefore of languages and cultures from one physical environment to another has been going on as long as there have been humans on this earth. The last several decades, however, have seen not only unprecedented movement across borders but also extraordinarily high levels of cross-cultural movement within borders, precipitated by natural disasters as well as wars and other powerful social, economic, and cultural factors. Canada has been host to streams of immigrants ever since the early fur-traders decided its resources were theirs for the taking and it continues to shape and be shaped by individuals and family groups who come from nearly every culture, religion, and language imaginable to make their home within its borders. The challenge for Canada is not so much how to contain this flow, because it will not be contained, but rather how to capitalize on and incorporate the changes that inevitably come to both immigrant and host society (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001).

Emigrating from one country and immigrating to another is hard, stressful work. Transformations, contradictions, tensions, fears, anxieties, ambivalent and disorienting feelings, all are part of the “complex psychosocial process” of immigration (Watkins-Goffman, 2001, p. 1). The props on which one’s foundation has been built--relationships with significant others, the predictability and familiarity of cultural norms and ways of doing things, a sense of belonging to a social group--no longer hold. It is hard to recover

from such a blow to one's identity in the little time most immigrants have or allow for processing any psychological upheavals. In addition to economic and health problems (Dyck, 1993), many experience a variety of emotional and psychological problems that are new to them, from posttraumatic stress disorder to bouts of anger to severe depression to a perpetual state of melancholy (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001, also personal communication with a refugee advocate worker and personal experience). Of the 221,000 people, on average, (Duffy, 2004) who come to Canada every year, many have escaped war and conflict in their countries of origin and have spent time, sometimes years, living in refugee camps in their own or in another country. Others have left families and loved ones because the economic situation in their countries did not offer them the future and security they needed and desired. No matter how they come or what their reason for coming, the process of leaving and starting anew is usually harder than anyone thought it would be. Living the fabled "American, or Canadian, dream" often becomes an illusory and hollow figment of a previous imagination.

"We had a good life there you know, we had everything, but my husband, he studied abroad and he said, we have to go to Canada, we will have a better future in Canada. Now we are here, 6 years we are here and still no jobs for us, well, not the jobs we thought we'd have. I think he thought he would finally be somebody in Canada." (Personal communication at Metropolis Conf, Mar. 2007)

In addition to the few tangible, personal belongings that refugees and immigrants are able to carry in their suitcases, they bring identities, cultures, traditions, memories, a lifetime of being 'someone' and, with all that, "the syllables and significances enclosed in the language they grew up with, the language that contains the seeds of their most inti-

mate identity” (Dorfman, 2002, p. 89). Of course they want to learn the dominant language of their new home (English or French). Of course they need to. But most will find as they make their way in Canada that it is not simply a matter of “adding another set of sounds and symbols on top of what [they] already know” (Baergen, 2006); it’s not simply “broadening one’s horizons” (Tannenbaum, 2005, p. 230) and finding another way of saying the same thing one has always said. Most will find that they are torn between the language they need to learn to survive here and that other set of words and meanings that makes them feel like the persons they used to be. In a real sense they have to “re-invent themselves” (Ilieva, 2001, p. 11). Even if one thinks of assimilation or acculturation in kinder terms than “cultural domination and white supremacy” (Macedo, 2000, p. xii), the pressures of reinventing oneself and reworking one’s identity in a new and strange culture are powerful:

Here, and this has to be emphasized, it is not a case of learning a foreign language at home, with a teacher and with . . . all those in one’s own town who, at all hours of the day, talk the same way one’s always been used to: but it’s far more a matter of being abandoned to the clutches of the foreign language on its own territory where everyone else is on its side, not on yours, and where they all gang up with every appearance of being in the right . . . and continually beat you up with their words. It is also a matter of knowing that you are here to stay, that you’re not going back, not in a few weeks, not in a few months, not in years . . . and that is . . . the most difficult thing of all.

(Elias Canetti [1981 Nobel Laureate for Literature], 1976/1979, p. 143)

The lived experience of being constantly “beat up with their words,” along with the

losses that are incurred in that process--of self-esteem, self-confidence, identity--and the struggle for a re-worked identity in this new cultural context, all of this is part of the language experience of many people who carry the label 'immigrants'.

Immigrant voices:

(Unless otherwise stated, the following anecdotes all come from my journal entries of encounters with immigrants mostly in ESL classrooms between 1991 and 2001. Listen to the spaces between the words as well as to the words.)

“Sometimes I feel like a baby,” writes a 40-something ESL student. “But a baby has someone to look after it. I have no one. I think I’m becoming a boring old man. An old man who feels like a baby. How can I help somebody here? How can I help my children if I don’t have a job? How can I teach them if they listen only in English?”

“I thought I knew English, but here people look at me like they don’t know what I’m saying. I’m not used to not being understood.”

“I have a doctorate degree but I don’t know how to ask for the bathroom.”

“Can you come and speak for me? Nobody understands me.”

“I have nothing to give to my children. They know the language here better than I, they know everything better than I; they have to help me. I cannot guide them like a father in my culture should. I cannot tell them the way that they should go or shouldn’t go. I am a useless old man.”

“No, I will not speak English in my home. I already feel so stupid everywhere I go. I don’t want to feel that way in my home too. This is the only place where I can still be me.”

“For thirty-some years, my mother did not learn the English language, not because she was not smart enough, not because she was too old to learn . . . but because she feared that learning English would change her Chinese soul.” (Engkent, 1993, p. 148)

The process of immigrating is a complex one, as these words attest, and one of the complicating factors has to do with the changes in language needs that are part of that experience. This is the recognition that anchors this thesis in the language experience of immigrant people. It is the foundational ‘support’ this weaving is tied to. The other understanding that will hold this research project in tension is the understanding that as immigrants learn the new target language, their first language or mother tongue is at risk of being eroded, forgotten, lost, and that this carries with it negative consequences and effects for the families. This, the ‘down-side’ of the language experience, is called, in weavers’ terms, the backstrap support. It is the end of the loom to which the weaver is attached.

Immigrants and language losing/language keeping: Forming the backstrap

“You have a wide choice in what you use to make your backstrap [as long as it is] strong enough to stand a good deal of tension and . . . comfortable enough to be worn for an extended period of time . . . with strings or cords to fasten you to the loom” (Ziek de Rodriguez & Ziek, 1978, p. 18).

Terminology: towards a sustainable, invitational understanding of *language*:

Language: “a body of words and the systems for their use common to a people . . . the system of linguistic signs or symbols . . . used in a more or less uniform fashion . . .”

(Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000, p. 149).

“Words” . . . and a “system”

Lexus . . . memoriz-able . . .

Systems . . . learn-able. Complicated, perhaps, but do-able.

Unproblematic. An add-on. Period.

But. Who creates the system?

Who sounds the words? Who bestows significance?

People . . . communicating with people, human beings, not machines, in progress be-ings,

identiti-ed, language-d, emot-ing, feel-ing beings

with options-choices-egos-histories-life experiences

it's never as clear as it looks

Language and languages are an essential aspect—maybe the most essential
aspect---of being human.

(Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000, p. 6)

The limits of my language are the limits of my mind.

All I know is what I have words for.

(L. Wittgenstein, in Lederer, 1991, p. 3)

If a person has a low estimation of my native tongue, she also has a low estimation of me.

Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity – I am my language. Until I can take
pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself.

(Anzaldúa, 1991, p. 207)

People who lose their language, their culture, lose their very souls.

(Singh, 1994, p. 96)

A language, a mother tongue, is the most important inheritance of human beings.

(Vuolab, 2000, p. 14)

Fundamental to this research project is the holistic notion (note: not an antiseptic
definition) that language is the incarnation or embodiment of all we know and are, “a

constantly metamorphosing intersection between linguistic elements, identity, culture, history, reality, information and communication” (Kouritzin, 1997, p. 35), a medium for exploring, expressing, and defining selfhood (Bhela, 2003), a social tool as well as a social-ized tool for communicating, making meaning, negotiating meaning, a tool for human-making. One has only to sit with an 80-year-old stroke victim whose brain is scrambled and whose lips refuse to intelligible-ize any efforts at meaning making to realize the part language plays in making us into whole human beings.

Mother tongue, first language, primary language, home language:

Mother tongue is a richly descriptive, sensuous term. Raised on a dairy farm as I was, I can see (and smell) the mother cow turning to eye the slippery, bug-eyed creature newly emerged from her insides, and going to work with her long, thick, slathery tongue, licking the little one to wakefulness, to awareness, to life, to identity. *First language* and *primary language* are more sanitized, antiseptic research terms that lack the warm, earthy intimate sounds and smells of *mother tongue*. I will be using *mother tongue* interchangeably with the terms *first language*, *primary language*, *home language* because they all represent to me the first system of sounds, symbols and meanings a child hears and learns to communicate in.

Language loss:

Most of the immigrants and refugees that Canada receives every year come speaking a mother tongue other than English or French. While it is commonly assumed that a mother tongue, because it refers to the words of one’s childhood, cannot be lost or unlearned, unfortunately immigrant children can and do lose the ability to converse in their first language very quickly (Cummins, 2000; Kouritzin, 1999; Wong Fillmore,

2000; Zentella, 1997). Where the loss of the first language in immigrant families used to be noted as an erosion or a shift over the course of two or more generations (Kouritzin, 1999; Schrauf, 1999), English is now very quickly “displacing and replacing the primary language among young first generation immigrants” (Wong Fillmore, 2000, p. 204) to the extent that young children often lose the ability to speak in their mother tongue after only 2 or 3 years in school in Canada (Cummins, online). Sometimes even sooner.

“*Cómo pasó eso tan rápido? Tenemos apenas 12 meses de estar aquí!* (How did this happen so quickly? We’ve only been here 12 months!) My 10- and 12-year-old daughters can still speak in Spanish to us but the 5-year-old is forgetting it. She says she can’t think of the words in Spanish anymore. *No tiene el vocabulario en español. No lo entiendo.* (She doesn’t have the vocabulary anymore in Spanish. I don’t understand it).” (Personal conversation with newcomer parents in Winnipeg, April 2007.)

This is what this research project calls *first language losing*. Along with trends towards “linguistic homogenization” (Garcia, 2003), the rapid expansion of English as *lingua franca* in our globalizing world, there is a greater and faster loss of languages than ever before (Bradley & Bradley, 2002; Kouritzin, 1999; Nettle & Romaine, 2000; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Wong Fillmore, 2000). In fact, more than half of the world’s 5000-6700 languages will become extinct in the next century (Nettle and Romaine, 2000; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000).

Aiding and abetting those losses is the language loss that Van Els (1986, cited in De Bots, Gommans & Rossing, 1991, p. 87) classified as belonging to one of four types:

1. Loss of the first language (L1) in a first language environment, e.g., elderly

people losing their first language;

2. Loss of the first language (L1) in an environment of another dominant or target (L2) language, e.g., immigrants losing their native language;

3. Loss of the L2 in an L1 environment, e.g., losing a foreign language; or

4. Loss of the L2 in an L2 environment, e.g., elderly migrants losing their second language.

The focus of this investigation is on the second situation, when immigrants in a new place of residence lose their native or first language because of the impact of the dominant language in their new home. This 'losing' is seldom a sudden nor a once and for all change; it should be seen, in fact, as a continuum with total loss of the mother tongue at one end and total maintenance, meaning fully proficient bilingualism, at the other (Guardado, 2002). All immigrant families who learn an L2 when they arrive in Canada are somewhere along that continuum, some retaining more of their first language even as they are learning English, others retaining less and less of it. The members of each family may also be at different places along that continuum; for some, language loss may mean arrested development in their L1 (as in the above example); for others it may mean loss of previous language ability (see Orellana's 1994 study of two Spanish-speaking children who at 5 and 6 years of age had less Spanish vocabulary than they did at 2 and 3 years of age; see also my own story in the next section). All struggle with the dilemma of whether to make the titanic effort to maintain their first language, and if so, how, and to what extent, to embrace the dominant language and live with the social, psychological, and emotional consequences of broken communication and expression as different family members learn the dominant language to varying degrees and at varying

rates (Guardado, 2002; Kouritzin, 1997, 1999; Wong Fillmore, 1991, 2000).

Language shift, language attrition, and subtractive bilingualism are often used synonymously with *language loss* (Garcia, 2003; Hansen, 2001; Kouritzin, 1999; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Stoessel, 2002). *Shift-ings* are certainly part of the process of ‘*losing*’ a language, as are attrition, regression, erosion. *Subtractive bilingualism* has the added burden, it seems to me, of referring also to the reduced language mastery of both languages that children often experience. *Loss* brings into focus the feeling of the individual who is experiencing this phenomenon—the language actually feels lost (Hansen, 2001; Kouritzin, 1999). Whether that ability could be regained is not the point; the point is that to the individual it feels lost: “It seems I had to give up my native language in order to be fluent in English” (Ngo, 1993, p. 218).

Immigrants who leave their countries of origin to come to Canada know about *loss*. They may not understand *shift* or *attrition* but they understand *loss*. It is an appropriate term for this project. And while they may not be cognizant of this at first because of all the other demands on their time and energy—finding and setting up a new home, finding employment, obtaining health care, coping with the weather--the mother tongue receives short shrift (Bhela, 2003; Cummins, 1997, 2000; Guardado, 2002, 2006; Kouritzin, 1999; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Tannenbaum, 2003). The home language, the sounds and symbols and “significances” (Dorfman, 2002) by which a family previously communicated, nurtured, and embodied its sense of being family, falls into disuse as certain members of the family use it less and less while other members struggle to learn enough of the new language while still maintaining the mother tongue as the primary language in the home. If learning a second or additional language in the context of a domi-

nant language is a process of “reinventing ourselves” (Ilieva, 2001, p. 11), how is a family to reinvent itself as family in such a situation? That there are consequences should not come as a surprise to anyone.

Immigrant voices:

(As in the previous section, these anecdotes, unless otherwise noted, come from my personal journal and experiences.)

“My three sons have all been—how you say? Yeah—suspended, can’t go to school anymore. But they don’t listen to me. Only speak English. I can’t speak English. They laugh when I speak.”

“My children learn English so fast, so fast, now only speak English, never speak my language, what I can do?”

A proud and respected leader within the Canadian Spanish-speaking community died suddenly. He had been a quiet, reserved man, at least in public places where English dominated. In Spanish-speaking settings, however, he portrayed confidence, authority, and a lively interest in people. At his funeral, a 17-year-old grandson gave a tribute to him, in English. “They hardly speak any Spanish at all,” the man’s wife said, adding with a slight shrug, “That’s just the way it is, no?” (Personal conversation, May 2, 2006)

An 8-year-old boy from Burundi, in a Canadian school where “white, Caucasian” means minority, is playing a game with two other children in which they are asked to say a word in their first language. The other two respond but this boy immediately slouches down, nearly disappearing under the table, and refuses to answer. “I don’t like those words,” he says. “They make me feel embarrassed [*sic*]. Sometimes I dream I am saying them in my class and all the kids are laughing at me and I wake up sweating. I wish my mother wouldn’t talk like that to me” (Personal communication, May, 2006).

“We (my mother and I) hardly talk because I have trouble expressing myself. . . . Talking with her reminds me of the anger and frustration I felt the first year in Canada when I tried to talk English. Now I hardly ever start a conversation with her” (Ngo, 1993, p. 218).

“It’s like having Australian kids in my home. . . . Sometimes I get cross, say, ‘Speak to me in Cantonese please’ but no use, they will not do this” (Bhela, 2003).

In the space between these two supports—between the recognition that immigrating is a complex process, with language needs as a complicating factor in that process, and the conviction that learning the dominant language often means losing the mother tongue as a useful tool for communication within the families and that this often comes with negative consequences—this thesis will weave its designs. It will explore the first language loss phenomenon from the perspectives of Spanish-speaking women who came to Canada with their families in the late 80s and early 90s and who have experienced and continue

to live the dilemma of language loss and language maintenance. Through the use of life history narrative, this thesis will examine what this experience has meant and continues to mean for them personally and for their families.

It is often assumed that when families come to Canada and begin learning the dominant language here, they simply add this language to their repertoire, keeping their mother tongue intact. Although one would think that the positive aspects of bilingualism and biculturalism would be well recognized in our multicultural society, true bilingualism is rare in North America (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2001; Wong Fillmore, 2000). The assimilative pressures in our society are such that “few immigrant children become bilinguals today by learning English” (Wong Fillmore, 2000, p. 204); instead, immigrant children are urged to trust not only their educational development but also their psychological and emotional well-being into the ideology called ‘English’ (Wong Fillmore, 2000).

Not everyone would agree that losing the ability to converse in the mother tongue as the second or other language is taking over is essentially a negative thing. Thousands of Canadians have lived this experience and give little more than a backward glance at that other language. This research will argue that losing the ability to carry out some activity successfully in the first language is bad when it impinges on basic human rights and negatively affects family relationships. It is particularly needling in an atmosphere where foreign language teaching is proliferating (Kouritzin, 2006), where countries that receive immigrants reiterate the importance of language maintenance (Tannenbaum & Berkovich, 2005), and where research is clear on the advantages of bi- or multi-lingualism (Cook, 2003; Cummins, 1997, 2000; Wong Fillmore, 2005; Wu, 2004/05).

At the intersection of studies into multiculturalism, immigrants and schooling, nation state and ethnic identity, this research, by arguing for the importance of paying attention to the phenomenon of language loss within families, will potentially inform English and Heritage language teaching practices, curriculum, and policies, as well as teacher education practices. More than that, it will illuminate the experiences of these women and validate the experiences of many other women like them who struggle to maintain

familyandlanguage,

familyandculture,

familyandtradition,

familyandfuture,

all in one.

Locating myself: Tying the backstrap around my back

“Remember, the strap is made for you . . . you will be sitting in this kneeling position for long periods of time . . . with cords fastening yourself to the loom . . .” (Ziek de Rodriguez & Ziek, 1978, p. 18).

I will tie myself to this weaving with three cords: my life in a mother tongue other than English, my life as an adult language learner in a foreign country, and my life as an English Second Language teacher.

My first language is Low German, ja, well, okay some say it's not even a language, just a dialect, you don't never see anywhere books what in that language have been written, nah, the Bible now, but not books, that is a language just to talk, that's all. But you can speak yourself out so good in that language, you can say things what you never would say in English, but really, if you want to get somewhere, nah, then you have to learn English and you must learn to speak it the way the English people do, not with that flat prairie accent, that doesn't help nothing.

Skutnabb-Kangas says a language is “a dialect promoted by the elite, a dialect with an army” (2000, p. 15). When I was growing up in rural Saskatchewan, Low German was not a written language. My people were and are pacifists. This dialect certainly had no army; perhaps that is why it is being lost, at least in Saskatchewan where there is not the same in-migration of speakers of that language from South America that southern Manitoba has. I am becoming more aware as my mother anticipates her 93rd birthday that when she is gone I will lose that language for good, as she is the only one I converse with in that language; even with her, I feel I am losing the language because I often can't recall the word I want in Low German; I find myself slipping in words in English or in Spanish.

More than just lacking numbers of speakers, Low German is being lost due to

what Skutnabb-Kangas calls “the colonization of the mind” (1999, p. 44). When my first-grade friend tattled on me for having said some words in Low German out on the playground and the teacher of our one-room country school gently but firmly told me that that language was not to be spoken in school, only at home or in church, the map of my world became a little clearer. My mother tongue would do me no good in the world of school. And I loved school. I had dreamed of being a teacher long before I even started walking the mile to school with my village companions; of course, I complied and never spoke that language at school again. And of course, my siblings and I started using English more and more at home, with my parents’ blessing.

Many from that Mennonite community had earlier moved away to Mexico or Belize where they would be able to continue schooling their children in German in their own schools, with children usually leaving school at age 13 or 14 to work on the farms. My father had, however, decided to stay in Canada expressly because he wanted his children to “get an education.” If ‘getting an education’ meant building our lives in English, then so be it. We had become socialized into believing along with the majority culture that there was no room for Low German, perhaps not even the standard, academic German which we used in church, on the corporate ladder of success. The language of the school changed how we identified ourselves, how we interacted with each other; it changed our views of the world and our place in that world. It became our serious language, our useful language to get ahead, to become colonizers instead of the colonized. We began to see our cultural ways as interesting, at best, strange and shameful at worst. We saw ourselves as backwards people, with nothing to offer the world. For us, our mother tongue became relegated to jokes and curious expressions.

I did not teach that language to my children. Why would I? My parents had pushed us into the English world, encouraged us to get a high school and then a university education. We had all assumed that one needed English to do those things and so English became our functional mother tongue (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000, draws a distinction between mother tongue of function and mother tongue of origin or identification). Now I am a grandmother. I would like my beautiful granddaughters to know that theirs is a unique heritage, but I'm beginning to wonder whether they will sense this in English. My sons at least knew there was another language that spoke to our uniqueness even if it was only their mother and grandmother that spoke it. I am glad my grandchildren and I speak the same language to nurture our relating but the "treasure" (Vuolab, 2000) of a unique mother tongue that defines us as part of a unique community is a bond I cannot pass on to them.

The second cord that secures me to this weaving comes from my life as an adult learner and non-native speaker of another language: Spanish. I was nearly 40 years old when I went to Costa Rica to spend a year studying Spanish in preparation for working in Bolivia as a Seminary Music and English instructor. The only Spanish word my husband and I knew before we left Canada was *Gracias* (Thank you). Learning to speak another language in a place where your most basic needs can only be met through those sounds is terrifying. The term "seismic mental shift" (Hoffman, 1989, p. 105) describes that experience well. I remember feeling enveloped in a sense of inner disequilibrium (Tannenbaum, 2005), an uneasy sense that perhaps this new system of words and meanings would never be able to replace the system by which we had lived and known ourselves and our world until that point.

Early in our studies, I was directed by my language teacher to go to the Central Plaza in the city, find someone sitting on a park bench and greet that person, telling her/him my name, where I was from, and that I was trying to learn their language. That was the extent of my 'homework'. It sounded simple enough but I remember arriving home, a humiliatingly short time later, distraught and frazzled to the core. Asking the bus driver if this bus would take me to the Plaza had been terrifying enough but then to overcome my North American rigidity and approach a total stranger, greet her and introduce myself in syllables that sounded completely foreign to my ears was enough to send me running.

Shopping for clothing was another scary experience. In Canada, I would have gone to any department store, picked out what I wanted, and paid for it with no more than a mumbled 'thank you' at the end of the transaction. Not so where we lived in Costa Rica. The merchandise was all behind the counter; I needed language just to see it and then further language to ask for a particular size, to say that, no, I couldn't possibly wear something that pink or that frilly. "There's nothing left of the old me," I lamented to my husband one day, "even my most intimate self has to be given over to this language."

Worse than not understanding was the fact that suddenly we were not understood; someone thought we had come to buy eggs when what we wanted was to pay the rent without a translator helping us. I thought I knew what kinds of sounds I ought to be making but my tongue wouldn't make them and people smiled in pity. It seemed that we had lost control of ourselves; we had become incompetent people. Since we needed to be able to work in that language, the stress of trying to learn it quickly and well enough was tremendous. I remember the deep sense of loss of identity, the nostalgia for the person I had

been. My husband had just graduated with a Ph D for which he had learned to read and do research in four languages but bringing this new language to his lips and ears left him mystified, embarrassed, and disconcerted. As other researchers and language learners have noted (Tannenbaum, 2003; Vitanova, 2004), our struggles with our tongues also affected the way we behaved toward each other and toward our children. We felt excluded (Tannenbaum & Berkovitch, 2005), jealous of others' language abilities, sometimes angry at this culture that seemed so impenetrable because of its language. But Latin Americans must surely be some of the most gracious people in the world and we were forgiven time and again for massacring their expressions, encouraged over and over again to get the tenses right; in short, we were loved into the language and now own that, albeit still imperfectly, as part of our multilingual identities.

Much as learning to navigate our lives in another language was unsettling, embarrassing and scary, perhaps precisely because it was that, it is an experience that "everyone should have" (Taylor-Mendez, 2004)! Such an experience can give one a broader, deeper understanding of the world and its peoples; it can help one to see congruencies, to become more flexible with ideas and ways of knowing (Cummins, online), more open to "finding in a polychromatic world of diversity the means to rediscover and celebrate the enchantment of being human" (Davis, 2007, p. xi). It also can lead to deeper understandings about who one really is, about what really matters and what really doesn't matter, about choosing on which 'hat' to hang one's identity. It was, for each of us in our family, an invaluable experience. It stretched us where we didn't know we had any elasticity. On the other hand, it also bonded us with each other in ways we are still, 17 years later, discovering and comprehending.

The third cord with which I tie myself to this loom comes from my life as an ESL teacher. I started teaching English as a Second Language some 27 years ago when I took a leave from teaching elementary school to be a stay-at-home mom and some of the first Vietnamese ‘boat people’ arrived in our small town in Saskatchewan. I have since taught English as a Second Language to adults in Winnipeg and in southern Ontario, and English as a Foreign Language in Bolivia and Colombia, South America. There are some noteworthy differences between these two endeavours: teachers of English to adult newcomers to Canada are the doorway into Canadian culture and society as well as into the language. As such it must surely rank as one of the most gratifying and enriching experiences around. Not only is our encouragement and acceptance of their first attempts at the language valued and appreciated, but we also get to travel to unknown places simply by listening. We are in daily contact with some of the world’s most courageous and strongest people and we can learn much from them.

Teachers of English in a foreign setting carry “ambassador” baggage, it seems to me, imperialist, world wide *lingua franca*, baggage. From my old one-room school to nearly every corner of the world, the English language is seen as the way out of submission, oppression and misery, and into power, economic prosperity and good times. My discomfort with teaching English in a foreign context resulted from carrying this baggage which was much too heavy for me; I felt I was a walking advertisement for the good things that come with knowing the English language when I, myself, felt very uncomfortable being a representative of all the ‘good’ that Western, colonial, imperialist, oppressive forces have brought to Latin America. (This would be another thesis in itself.) I was troubled by the way people were willing, no, eager, to lose their own language, to leave

behind their culture and indeed their identity, just for the 'key' I carried in my hand. Yes, their existence often was desperate, but I doubt that a monolingual world (English) will bring more peace and put more food on people's tables. On the other hand, who was I to withhold this key from them? I often felt selfish if I resisted teaching English 24 hours a day.

Immigrant ESL students in Canada also are reaching for the 'key' to a better life, often also in desperation, but in working with them I felt less like an ambassador and more like a mother or older sibling. Perhaps the bubble had burst just a bit by the time adult immigrants came to school. Perhaps they were already beginning to see that this country has its jaded sides. At any rate, they were far from home, and looking for another home. In that, I could and felt privileged to lend my assistance. My experience as an adult language learner in a situation of contact with a dominant language gave me an abundance of compassion for my immigrant students and I worked hard to make the language learning experience a little less daunting for them. I learned the language of communicative competence, ensured that I engaged them with comprehensible input, and worked toward lowering their affective filters. When my students commiserated that no one understood them, that communication even with their own children was becoming difficult, I sympathized and worked harder yet to try to help them fit into the world their children seemed to be entering so effortlessly.

I did not question the direction their children were taking: assimilating, speaking English more and more and the language of home less and less. It was what was expected. It was what our education system wanted to see. ESL or EAL (English as an Additional Language) teachers are the enablers, the ones charged with the task of making

English speakers out of non-English-speakers. Taxpayers and governments want immigrants to learn enough English to be employable, and that in the shortest time possible. To that end, we encourage them to use English at home, thinking that more exposure equals greater proficiency (Cummins, 1997; Kouritzin, 1999, 2000; Wu, 2004/05). The focus of our language learning programs is on adding another 'commodity' to the immigrant's capital; it is not on what is being given in exchange, what is sacrificed, for this new commodity. The 'gift' that we extend in our gracious hands, refusal of which, of course, is not an option, blinds us to the reality that we may also be, if not accomplices, then surely participants in "the present racist assault on immigrants at the level of language" (Macedo, 2000, p. xi). We also give short shrift to the mother tongue, blessing people as they lose it.

In Canada as well as in Latin America, I have taught English to men and women who were wise beyond anything I could attain to, who often already spoke three or four languages and were more knowledgeable about a lot of things than I was, wonderfully capable people who simply happened to speak languages other than English. In teaching them I learned the true colour of my skin: the colour of privilege; in listening to them I learned the true sound of my language: the tongue of the powerful.

Most of my students, I believe, blamed themselves for not being quick enough with the language and the culture. Knowing how we see ourselves through others' eyes, I wonder whether I could have done things differently in our classes so that they wouldn't have been reminded so often about their inabilities, so that they would instead have seen themselves as the strong people they were. I wonder why I worked so hard to try to make them fit into the English-only world instead of demanding that this world be made to fit

THEM a little more often.

I was born in Canada and thus to privilege. My years of living in Latin America and learning Spanish were as close as I got to understanding the immigrant experience. Although I also struggled with learning the language as an adult, I did not really have to stay; I could always come back and my country would be hard-pressed to deny me entrance. Moreover, I had no fear of returning; there were no death squads waiting in hiding for me or my family. I even felt fairly sure that my husband and I could be meaningfully and gainfully employed in our home country. Our going to South America was not viewed by our community as a step up, as attaining the golden egg, nor were we expected to send money to our families back home in Canada. Furthermore, we had jobs there, waiting for us once we learned the language well enough to teach in it, and we did not need to lie about our work there, to say we were working in our careers when in fact we were cleaning bathrooms. We did not need to present a false front to anyone about our life there although we often felt we were falsely placed on pedestals because of the colour of our skin, the sounds of our language, or the dollar signs in our eyes.

My life has been enriched, both by the humiliation of language learning and by the multi-identities I can now claim. Is 'enriched' an adjective my immigrant students use to describe their lives in this language I'm teaching them? Perhaps this thesis is also my penance for my role in the pain that overly zealous North American assimilative attempts at cultural and linguistic hegemony have caused not only my Latin American friends but all of my immigrant and refugee students. In the end, I am caught in the quandary of wanting to use my Latin American connections to identify and explore issues of first language loss and maintenance while also apologizing for my role in "language-based ra-

cism [that] has had the effect of licensing institutional discrimination, whereby . . . immigrants . . . experience the loss of their dignity, the denial of their humanity, and in many cases, outright violence” (Macedo, 2000, p. xi). In a posture of deep gratitude for all that I have received, and submission to the patterns that will emerge in this *textere*, I situate myself on my knees, firmly attached to this loom and ready to begin the weaving.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Fastening the warp ends to top and bottom supports

“The lengthwise or vertical threads . . . are called the warp ends . . . made taut to form the structure into which the filling or the weft is woven crosswise” (Thorpe & Larsen, 1967, p. 2).

With English taking up much of the *lingua franca* space in our globalizing world and with so many of the ‘up-rooted’ people of our time ending up in English speaking countries, much of the cross-linguistic concern in research has focused on the agenda of teaching English as a second or additional language. There is, however, a growing interest in research into language loss and maintenance as it pertains to the minority languages brought by immigrant people into a contact situation with English as the dominant or target language (Garcia, 2003). That research, by and large, focuses on two main concerns: the language itself and the ethnic community as a language group (Kouritzin, 1999). With regards to the language itself, in the same way as ‘development’ or ‘acquisition’ measures which features of the new language are being learned or acquired, the language loss research pertaining to the language as a system measures how much or which features of the system are being lost, forgotten, ‘attrited’ (De Bot, Gommans, & Rossing, 1991; de Bot & Weltens, 1991; Garcia, 2003; Pan & Berko-Gleason, 1986; Seliger & Vago, 1991; Silva-Corvalán, 1991). The concern is for the language itself and not for the speakers of the language. The focus is on explanation and measurement of what is observed to be happening to the system, not on the social context within which that system is being used, nor on the individuals living within that social context.

The second concern, that of the ethnolinguistic community, looks at demographic

elements such as gender, age of arrival, settlement patterns, size of the minority group and vitality of its religious or cultural expression to correlate and predict which language succeeding generations will use, or what characteristics (of a language minority group) lead to quicker loss or stronger maintenance (Alba, 2002; Chow, 2004; Driedger, 1989; Garcia, 2003; Isajiw, 1993; Schrauf, 1999; Tannenbaum & Berkovitch, 2005). Methodology has generally coincided with the discipline of the investigator and most often has consisted of statistical analyses of quantitative data gathered through large-scale surveys such as government censuses and surveys.

The data of both of these areas of research are seen to be objective and scientific, and the results are utilized by policy makers, especially those dealing with Heritage Language and English as a Second Language classes, and other refugee and immigrant concerns at various levels of government (García, 2003; Isajiw, 1993). These analyses contribute to the field of language loss and maintenance by exploring and documenting the linguistic process of language loss, measuring the vitality of a language and its potential for loss or maintenance, and predicting language loss based on demographic or other factors (García, 2003; Kouritzin, 1999). They do not, however, consider the people for whom losing a language constitutes a lived experience with consequences and effects.

The strands of research that I believe will best 'hold' the methodology and emerging designs of this investigation are those focusing the concern for the family and viewing its members as persons who live the experience of the loss or maintenance of their first language and whose understandings are worth exploring. Deeply committed to approaching language loss from the perspective of the people experiencing this phenomenon, researchers such as Wong Fillmore (1991, 2000), Kouritzin (1997, 1999), Cummins

(1991, 1996, 2000) and Guardado (2002, 2006) are looking to more holistic non-traditional methodologies and theoretical approaches to explore what happens to a person's sense of self when her/his first language is deemed unimportant or useless; what happens when children "los[e] the means with which to maintain relationships with their parents, their families, and their cultures" (Kouritzin, 1999, p. 11), what personal, familial, and social effects or consequences are produced by first language loss? Drawing from critical theory, feminist poststructuralist paradigms, narrative inquiry, life history, and other methodologies and approaches that "shift perspective from the collective to the marginal" (Kouritzin, p. 20), the focus of this research is on the people for whom language loss and maintenance is a real lived issue and on letting their revelations and stories inform our further learning about this phenomenon. On the strands of such research and on a sturdy justice-promoting theoretical underpinning, I believe it is possible to weave the perspectives of some Latin American women with regards to their families' experiences of language losing and language keeping. On such strands it is also possible to explore the designs that emerge as these perspectives interconnect with the understandings from research.

The following outline will guide this review of pertinent literature:

- 1) Theoretical framework: sociocultural theory and feminist poststructuralism;
- 2) First language losing and immigrant families;
- 3) First language losing and immigrant women;
- 4) First language losing and Hispanics;
- 5) First language losing and the Spanish-speaking community in Canada;
- 6) A note on Language Memoirs.

Theoretical Framework: Sociocultural theory and feminist poststructuralism

The theoretical framework informing this research stems from an understanding of the deep and profound personal up-rooting and re-rooting that comprise the immigrant experience of dominant or target language learning and too-oft concomitant primary language loss. Research that seeks to understand the familial experienced effects of the loss of a first language is by nature research that hinges on an understanding that, implicit in the acts and behaviours of people, there are meanings, understandings, and interpretations garnered from and impinging on the individual's historical, social, contextual life. Conceptualized as sociocultural theory, informed by interpretive action research methodology and feminist poststructuralist perspectives, such an understanding forms the basis for the theoretical underpinnings of this study. Sociocultural theory and feminist poststructuralism are given credence among language *learning* theories, but their conceptualizing of the phenomenon of human activity relates also to an investigation into the effects of language *losing*. What sociocultural theory and feminist poststructuralism bring to this research is a rationale from which to view the issues and concerns of mother tongue loss and maintenance. The understandings derived from these perspectives provide impetus for the exploration of the personal lived experience of first language loss.

Sociocultural theory

Sociocultural theory is based on the Vygotskian notion that human activities are situated in historical, social contexts which must be understood to understand the activity. This notion that the social and cultural context factor into human activity in more than mere peripheral ways helps to conceptualise language as an emergent, sense-making sys-

tem and mediator in these activities instead of as a “culturally and affectively neutral bearer of propositional content” (Ohta, 1995, p. 95). Where psycholinguistic theories of language learning emphasize a dichotomy between the person and the social context, the sociocultural poststructuralist perspective views the individual as a social being and language as a socially constructed entity whose use is created, borrowed, interpreted for and by both the person and the context. The boundaries between language learning and language using become blurred. Language is seen as a tool that not only assists in but is interwoven into the development of communicative and cognitive functions.

Learning a language thus happens not simply in the head or the mind, in “the learner’s ‘black box’ with ‘external factors’ seen [as] at best affecting the type and amount of input that goes into the box” (Pavlenko, 2002, p. 277). Language learning, and thus also language losing, happens within the daily “dialogic interactions between socially constructed individuals engaged in activities that are co-constructed with other individuals” (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 1995, p. 110). Sociocultural theory helps us to take account of the varying but real roles that comprise the lived experience of language learners faced with needing to accommodate to a new life in a new place. Acknowledging the socially-constructed-ness of individuals, families, *and* their language helps us to locate the lived effects of mother tongue loss in its in-the-world experiential dimension. It helps us to see that feelings of anxiety and self-esteem are not individual, they do not originate nor are they restricted to the individual; they originate in the dialogic interplay, in the interactions and shared processes between interlocutors (Vitanova, 2004).

Feminist poststructuralist perspective

The approaches of poststructuralism, postmodernism, and critical inquiry, within which sociocultural theory finds its place, highlight the socially derived and dynamic nature of language use and language learning. The notion of language as symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991) which can become social and economic capital to the benefit of the learner (the instrumental motivation) is important in linking the individual with the social milieu but also in pointing out the values assigned in our society to socioeconomic factors and to minority and non-native speaker discourse. Individual investment, subject positions, and power relations of gender, race and class are shaped by and shape (and re-shape) individuals within contexts. Poststructuralist approaches signalling the diversity and multiplicity of cultures encourage researchers to see second language users as legitimate speakers in their own right rather than as failed native-speakers (Pavlenko, 2002, p. 295). In the same vein, poststructuralist approaches refute the claim that in order to learn a second language and acculturate to the culture of that language, it is necessary to “abandon” the mother tongue (p. 279). These approaches recognize, instead, that individuals may seek multiple memberships in a variety of coexisting language communities, in which different identities, different investment, and different position-ings may be called for.

Learner identity has recently emerged as a major research issue in applied linguistics (Marx, 2002; Norton, 2000) and feminist poststructuralism frames language as a place where identity is constructed and expressed (Norton, 2000). Identity is not a once-and-for-all stable, set in stone entity; it is always shifting as it is being formed and shaped by contextual, social factors and the process of learning a new language is one of those

places of identity shift and reconstruction. The identity of the L2 learner, or the L2 family, is seen in more complex terms than simply that of an 'L1 or target language (TL) speaker'. "In any given actual situation, at any given actual moment, people . . . are actively involved in constructing their social identities rather than passively living out some cultural prescription for social identity" (Zentella, 1997, p. 3). This building of the new 'persona,' the new social identity, deemed necessary for assimilation, may cut sharply into what their previous identity and social position entailed and may cause "severe resistance or discomfort" (Pavlenko, 2002, p. 285). This is what Pavlenko calls "identity politics," the conflict second language learners may feel between how they saw themselves previously, their previous 'subject position' and how they see themselves or feel others are seeing them now. This is particularly true of adult newcomers who came to Canada as competent people and may now be in positions where they experience only incompetence (see anecdotes in the previous section). Each individual member of the family is affected by such a situation and in turn, their language learning, language use and language losing are also differentially influenced.

Just as the sociocultural theory and feminist poststructuralist perspective broaden and clarify the understandings of *why* and *how* people learn a new language or assimilate to a new culture, this perspective also informs the exploration of the *effects* of the loss of a language. A recognition that each person is a socially and contextually "identity-ed and language-d someone" (Baergen, 2006a), and therefore with a story worth investigating, forms the basis for natural observation studies which take seriously the exploration of the personal lived effects of language loss. The current "sociocultural turn" (Norton, 2000, p. xiv) in SLA research intersects with the messy, "be[ing] beat[en] up with their words"

lived experiences of people who, intentionally or not, are in a position of needing to “re-invent” themselves using words, sounds and symbols that are foreign to them. Just as the focus of language learning must be this ‘person-in-the-world’ (Marx, 2002), so the focus of explorations into the effects of language loss must be this social being, this person-in-the-family-in-the-world. This “sociocultural turn” is fundamental to understanding the lived experience of language loss in families.

Foundational to critical sociocultural theory and poststructuralist thought is a basic belief in human rights: that everyone has an undeniable right to a language for meaningful communication, and for preservation of culture and transmission to one’s children. Already in 1951, participants at a UNESCO conference, concerned about the language medium for the world’s school children, stated, “We take it as axiomatic that the best medium for educating a child is his mother tongue” (cited in Toohey, 1992, p. 89). Brown (1979) in a perceptive study of immigrant children in an elementary school asserts that a child entering the doorway of the school only to discover that the language which she has used to communicate her wants, needs and feelings from the time she was held in her mother’s arms is suddenly obsolete has an integral part of her life stripped away. It is an injustice to the most vulnerable in our society to arrest their own natural language development in midstream, plop them into a completely foreign system of sounds and symbols, to say nothing of the strange environment, and not provide them with at least a verbal outlet for their emotions and anxieties at the beginning of their foray into this school system (Brown, 1979; Tannenbaum & Berkovich, 2005; Wong Fillmore, 2000). The dominant language of course must be learned and will be learned but consideration for the rights of the child would have us do better than assume that we can

render useless and obsolete a child's language in one fell swoop and not reap some negative consequences and effects. When we say, by our actions if not in words, that the only way to live in this society is to deny that other language, to relegate it to festive, community occasions, we do an injustice to a basic human right. A feminist poststructuralist approach forces us to ask these questions, to challenge these assumptions, to declare that maintaining the mother tongue of the family is not a bad thing; that it is, in fact, a basic human right of these families to be able to interact in their primary language.

The sociocultural poststructuralist perspective also problematizes the power relations that shape language practices within family structures and between the family and the school or other outside institution. A critical awareness, says Lindberg (2003), is needed for learners "to understand how power acts on and through social interaction" (p. 161), how language is used to produce and enact power, how language can also be used to change the way one is being positioned. The dominant structures of society, including those of educational institutions, play a powerful role in shaping and determining language behaviours (Norton, 2000). The cultural capital of the students, their knowledge, skills and abilities, may be valued or devalued, with consequent differential effects on the students, the family, and the community. Seemingly innocuous practices such as expecting parents to attend and to ask questions at formal parent/teacher meetings, or even simply to assume that parents will speak to teachers when they have a concern about their child(ren) carry a power coefficient that can devalue family relationships and family unity (Rodriguez, 1982), in turn leading to shame and silence and apathy. Teachers' attitudes and behaviour towards a particular group may unwittingly

contribute to how children and youth in that group perceive themselves, their parents and their group. The end result can be disastrous--disengagement, drop-out, and loss of the mother tongue--as children strive to "belong" to the "in" group, to be accepted by the new culture, to be part of the "club" (Bhela, 2003). Another result is less vitality and lack of cohesiveness in the group as families try to conceal their problems at school even from those within their group (Bernhard & Freire, 1999).

A sociocultural understanding that includes notions of the "cultural capital" that L2 language skills represent, of "investment" and "position-ing" of learners in their varied identities as learners, employees, parents, and new citizens, of "power relations" and "social networks" of language use, says that it is never simply a matter of *language* only, of words and sounds; it is always about language *and* identity, language *and* power relations, language *and* social networks, language *and* emotions (Pastor, 2005, p. 150). The poststructuralist approach to research values these understandings and declares that the understandings of the people who live the experience will further inform our understandings of the phenomenon of language learning and language losing and need to be heard.

First language losing and families

The ultimate test of language loss or maintenance, according to research (Guardado, 2006; Hakuta & D'Andrea, 1992; Kouritzin, 1999; Tannenbaum, 2003; Wong Fillmore, 1991, 2000), is in the parent-child relationship. A language is viable, still part of a person's active repertoire, if it can still be used for meaningful communication between herself and her parent(s). While most immigrant families come to North America seeking safety, better economic opportunities, and a better future for their

children, what they would like in that future is also to keep their first language viable, to maintain ties with culture and extended family, and to pass on their heritage to their children (Osterling, 2001; Tannenbaum & Berkovich, 2005). What they are often left with, however, is a sense that they are losing their children (Guardado, 2002; Kouritzin, 1999; Wong Fillmore, 1991, 2000) along with their language, their culture and their values. Tannenbaum and Berkovich (2005) note that, given the “psychological importance ascribed to the mother tongue” (p. 291) and the importance given to family background and context by educators, it is “surprising” that there isn’t more exploration of the psychological-familial factors in language maintenance. This section will present some of the research that has focused on family as nexus of language losing and language keeping.

In a seminal nation-wide study, on which most further research in this area has drawn, Wong Fillmore (1991) examined the effects of L1 loss for language-minority children in the United States, both for their educational needs as well as for the effects within their families. “Talk is a crucial link between parents and children,” she said, “It is how parents impart their cultures to their children and enable them to become the kind of men and women they want them to be” (Wong Fillmore, 1991, p. 343). The effects, when the younger members of families do not continue to use their mother tongue or when they perhaps don’t learn it well enough to use it before being immersed in the dominant language of the new culture, can be “very costly” and tragic (Wong Fillmore, 1991, 2000). According to Wong Fillmore, the younger the children are when they come into contact with the second language, the greater the impact of that language on their first language. Children often give up their native language “long before they have

mastered English” (p. 345), before they are even able to express their thoughts in English.

Cummins (1991, 1997, 2000, 2001), arguing prolifically for bi- and multi-lingualism and diversity as assets on a personal as well as school and society level, maintained that language-minority students have to find their identity within the power relations in the wider society that are often coercive and restrictive and that are played out in the everyday interactions between teachers and students. Problematizing the marginalization of minority students, who, in fact, are in many cases the visible majority, he advanced studies showing how bilingual children have a greater metalinguistic awareness and cognitive flexibility than monolingual children. In fact, he said, children who become proficient in first language literacy before learning English actually have a better chance at succeeding in English language literacy (Cummins, 1991, 2000, 2001; Lu, 1998), a claim that has been verified in other studies as well (Roessingh, Kover, & Watt, 2005; Wu, 2004/05).

Using a narrative, life-history approach, in which she interviewed 21 adults who had lost their first language, Kouritzin (1997, 1999) posed the question, “What does it mean to an individual to have lost a language?” The analyses of the ensuing narratives examined the short and long term effects for family relationships, academic achievement and relationships in school, and effects on self-image when the first language has been lost. This study describes how and why and what happens in first language loss from the point of view of the persons who have experienced it. This holistic concept of the subjects as persons whose very personal point of view counts in the research community is particularly noteworthy in this study as it demonstrates a new perspective in language loss research. It takes their accounts of their lives and their experiences seriously rather

than simply as “illustrations of [her] own agenda” (Kouritzin, 1997, p. 274). Kouritzin concluded that first language loss had a significant negative impact on many aspects of the lives of these people. Following Kouritzin’s methodology and drawing on socio-cultural and activity theory, Sakamoto (2001), investigated societal support as experienced by speakers of Japanese, particularly factors such as family bonding and classroom teacher support for the L1 in order for maintenance of the first language to be viable.

A smaller study by Kouritzin (2000b) but one equally pertinent for this project and in a way closer to its heart because of the people it foregrounds, examines the accessibility to ESL classes afforded to immigrant women with children. In the article reporting on her interviews with these women, Kouritzin turns the notion of accessibility on its perfunctory head by declaring that accessibility is much more than time, place, availability and provision of childcare; it is also the learner’s perceived need and utility of the dominant language. Highlighting as contradictory the roles that immigrant mothers need to enact, she explains how mothers are caught in a “Catch 22” quandary, expected by both their first and this society to be the “keepers” (p. 15) or maintainers of the first culture and first language, which can only be passed on to the next generation through the use of the mother tongue, and to be the negotiators or way-makers of the new life in the new culture for their family—meeting teachers, doctors, social service workers, all situations which require that they know the new language and understand the new culture. If they learn too much of the new language they will not be able to maintain the old ways and the old language; if they only maintain the first language they will be no good at satisfying the needs of their families in this society. This, she says, is what

accessibility is all about.

This study, as well as her reflections on her own experience of mothering in a language that is not her mother tongue (Kouritzin, 2000a), not only draws attention to mothers and their dilemmas and ambivalences in learning and using a new language, not only validates the experiences of immigrant mothers and honours their ambivalences, but also gives much-needed attention to the very complex personal struggles and implications of learning and using language. In a voice that is intentionally subjective and transparent, “not intellectual” (2000a, p. 322), Kouritzin speaks for everyone that has ever tried to keep alive a mother tongue and struggled with the slippery slope of acculturation and integrating and new language learning.

Two studies that will be examined in greater detail in the section on language loss and Hispanics deserve to be mentioned here as well. One of them is a study of language loss and maintenance in Hispanic families in Vancouver as seen from the perspective of the parents of young children (Guardado, 2002, 2006). The other is an extensive study by Schechter and Bayley (2002) addressing the relationship between family language socialization practices and identity and the language practices of the children of Mexican-descent families in California and Texas. Both of these studies are highly informative and relevant to research on language loss and maintenance.

In a study of adolescents in families that had immigrated to Israel from the former USSR, Tannenbaum and Berkovich (2005), explored the contribution of language maintenance to harmonious family relations and thereby to the well-being of immigrants. The loss of an “internal sense of harmony” (p. 290) that is so much part of the immigrant experience is only one of the reasons why family factors must be viewed as central to the

whole language keeping and language losing experience, they say. While other research also has focused on the experience and perceptions within the family (Guardado, 2002; Kouritzin, 1999; for example), this study singles out family relations as *the* reason for the promotion of language maintenance, beyond the benefits of bilingualism such as the academic and cognitive advantages (Cummins, 2001). The common thread among all of these researchers is the affirmation that the person or the family unit living the language losing or language maintaining experience is more than a statistic or 'subject' and that an in-depth examination of the felt effects of the phenomenon of language loss and maintenance within the family can inform policies in education and the wider societal arena alike.

“The term ‘first language loss’ describes the loss of something too deep for words . . .” (Kouritzin, 1997, p. 273).

As Wong Fillmore has said (1991, 2000) and others have reiterated (Schechter & Bayley, 2002; Tannenbaum & Berkovich, 2005; Thomas & Cao, 1999; Zentella, 2005), the cost, when children drop or lose their mother tongue while learning another dominant language, can be “tragic”. Linguistic stress can be a source of conflict between immigrant parents and their children. Where children do not speak or understand the language the parents are most comfortable in, communication is limited to basic necessities; the values, the wisdom, the world-view, the broad perspectives that parents want and need to transmit to their children are left for peers, society, and local culture to transmit (Wong Fillmore, 1991). The “alienation of children from parents” (Cummins, 2000, p. 6) is verified not only in research literature (Guardado, 2002; Kouritzin, 1999; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2001; Sakamoto, 2001; Schechter et al., 1996) but also in ESL classroom

stories and settlement and social workers' office sharing, wherever immigrants and refugees are present (personal experience, experiences of colleagues).

“The shift in status, the manner in which my mother relinquished motherhood, occurred not just in the world but in the safety of our home as well, and it became most obvious when we entered the realm of language” (Cao, 1997 p. 35).

“These people are coming to us and asking us to *please* teach the faith to their children because their children are losing their first language and the parents don't speak English well enough to communicate their faith to them!” (Astonished Canadian church go-er about a non-English-speaking religious group that meets in their church building and that has asked the Canadian church for help in passing on their faith to their children. Personal communication, March, 2007)

Children are more adept at many things than adults and learning a second language is no different. The same parents who bemoan the lack of communication between themselves and their children due to language difficulties also speak proudly of their children's abilities in English. A comment frequently heard from people who are involved with families that are new to Canada is, “Look how well the children are speaking English!” So why do we speak about this as a cost? What is so tragic about children learning the language of their new home?

“Children learn quickly that in order to be accepted they have to learn English; the other children won't learn their language” (Bhela, 2003). They will do what they need to do to belong and find acceptance. If that means dropping a language and assuming an-

other one, that's what they'll do (Bhela, 2003; Schecter & Bayley, 2002; Wong Fillmore, 2000). For children, language is the thing that makes it possible for them to belong; language is a tool for social connections. For parents, however, and perhaps teachers, language is the thing that makes or breaks their children's academic success and they will often encourage dropping the first language even while wishing to keep it alive in their family.

“We stopped speaking our first language because I was afraid it would hurt her chances in school” (Personal conversation with a newcomer family, March, 2007).

“What can I do? I explain to her that [our mother tongue] is important for our family but she cry and say ‘I want to be like my friends and I want my friends to like me.’ It's so difficult for us” (Bhela, 2003).

“Using the mother tongue may represent such insecurity for children [because it is not what they hear in the world around them to which they want to belong] that they will refuse to use it” (Brown, 1979, p. 35). In this they receive, if not spoken then tacit, endorsement and blessing from members of the dominant society including ESL teachers so that they feel rewarded for using their mother tongue less and less and English more and more.

Learning English is not the problem. Acquiring technical skills and work habits that will prepare them for employment in Canada is not the problem either. All immigrant parents want their children to acquire these skills (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001) and will do everything possible to ensure their children attain them.

“I stopped reading to her in our language because it seemed to me she was getting

mixed up and I don't want her to have problems in school so I try to read to her in English, but she doesn't like that, my pronunciation is not good, she says" (Personal communication with newcomer family, April 2007).

The problem is that it is very difficult to maintain two languages as one of them, the dominant language of the new society and the important one for living in Canada, is being learned. Inevitably, especially with children in the family, one language will supersede the other in practice (Brown, 1979; Wong Fillmore, 2000).

Immigrant parents recognize, rightly, that school and society cannot do everything for a child's emotional, cognitive, conceptual, development. They recognize their role in inculcating the children to "the curriculum of the home" (Wong Fillmore, 2000, p. 206), a curriculum which is crucial for a child's development and which only the family can impart: a sense of belonging, knowing where you come from and being connected to important others and to events, knowing that there are others with whom you reciprocate responsibilities, a curriculum that teaches culture, beliefs, understandings, values, and that requires common understandings of language, words, and nuance. Immigrant families usually do not need to be told that this is their 'curriculum' but parents often are unable to 'teach' this curriculum to their children because of the great language divide (Kouritzin, 1999; Thomas & Cao, 1999; Wong Fillmore, 2000). "It is not uncommon to overhear discussions in which parents and children switch back and forth between languages and completely miss one another's intent" (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001, p. 72).

Parents may do their best to learn the new language but for a variety of reasons they are usually not as quick to pick it up as their children are. Grounding their children

in “the net of meaning” (Hoffman, 1989, p. 151) which is this curriculum of the home is better done in the mother tongue because it is the language that has nurtured the culture, beliefs, and values and because parents communicate more effectively in their first language. Unfortunately, as the language divide between them becomes an “emotional chasm” (Cummins, 2001), immigrant parents are not only unable to teach the curriculum but also often unable to stem the intense assimilation of their children with the new culture. Their ambivalence with the expressive aspects of North American culture, the attitudes and behaviours which seem to be part and parcel of the linguistic acculturation of their children, only add tension to the language socialization in the home. In the process of finding it more and more difficult to talk deeply with their children, many immigrant parents feel they are losing their children, their reason for having come to Canada in the first place (Kouritzin, 1999; Roessingh, Kover, & Watt, 2005; Wong Fillmore, 1991, 2000): “*Hemos perdido todo lo que traíamos.*” We have lost everything we brought with us. (One of the participants of this research project.)

Immigration and the consequent language shifts that occur often cause changes in family structures. Families will usually find that, in the absence of extended family relationships, in the absence of friends even, they are forced to rely on each other’s support more than ever before. Although they learn the basics of English more quickly, usually, than the adults in the family (and thus may develop bonds with each other to the exclusion of the parent/s), children also experience disorientation and anxiety. In fact the role reversal that often happens in immigrant families as children are given the tasks of translators and authority figures in situations previously assigned to parental authority can be extremely disconcerting for children (Igoa, 1995; Thomas and Cao, 1999). The

“props” that gave them security, parents fulfilling their roles, for one, are gone. At the same time they may be disconcerted by the different-ness of their parents: “I think they [my friends] are laughing because she [my mother] speaks funny and they don’t understand her” (Bhela, 2003).

The self-doubt and lowering of morale a parent feels as he or she struggles to rebuild an identity in a new place can also have profound effects on the morale of the children (Rodriguez, 1982; Thomas & Cao, 1999). They have to find their security in different places, and some find it in gangs or other undesirable places. With the loss of their first language comes the loss of security in knowing that they belong to a unique unit along with the loss of security that earlier views of parental authority gave them. Their “social cohesion is weakened” (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001, p. 160) and the results sometimes are tragic.

The interplay between the need for individual identity formation, family identity formation, and the need for family unity and group cohesiveness in the face of the uprootedness of immigration leads to identity conflicts “far greater than those in families that have not experienced immigration” (Tannenbaum & Berkovich, 2005, p. 292). New “regulatory behaviours” within the family must be accommodated and incorporated, involving practical as well as psychological changes even as different family members are in varying phases of constructing or re-constructing their identities (Tannenbaum & Berkovich, 2005; Wong Fillmore, 2000).

Immigrant parents often, at least at the beginning, feel that they are better off than they were in the home country. “We came here to go forward, not backward,” says an immigrant mother (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001, p. 16). While children may

be led along on this momentum, this energy, and this faith for a while, they eventually begin to compare themselves, not to the peers they left behind back 'home' but to their dominant language counterparts who appear not to be struggling with language or customs, and they begin to see themselves as 'less-than,' as 'not-equal', on the margins looking in (Bhela, 2003; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Wong Fillmore, 2000). The discomfort and ambivalence of that feeling may cause children to alternately accept or resist the passing on of their cultural and familial identity.

The strain on the families of maintaining their family cohesiveness in their mother tongue while also beginning to identify with the dominant culture is only exacerbated by well-intentioned teachers who encourage parents to speak more English at home, thinking that this will smooth the transition to English in school (Chow, 2004; Guardado, 2002; Kouritzin, 1997, 1999, 2000; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2001; Sakamoto, 2001; Schecter et al., 1996; Toohey, 1992). Although the social, economical, and political pressures to assimilate to the target language are irresistible in most areas of daily life, these assimilation pressures are often felt the strongest in schools. Schools are where families are often most acutely aware that host countries, usually, seek to force a choice—either learn the language and assimilate or keep your own language and remain apart. The ambivalence that children of minority language families feel toward their own first language under the subtle and not-so-subtle messages that the minority language is a problem rather than an asset, not to mention the pressure from peers, and the ambivalence they feel from their own parents about learning English quickly while still keeping their own language, can lead to a sense of alienation and exclusion and often shame (Klassen, 1992; Kouritzin, 1999; Menard-Warwick, 2004; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2001; Toohey, 1992;

Vitanova, 2004; Zentella, 2005).

Immigrant children generally arrive in their new home with very positive attitudes to education (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001) and many of them excel in amazing ways. But many also fail, falling between the cracks of a well-meaning system that is overwhelmed and underfunded. "Schools cannot save languages on their own but they can kill them more or less alone," says Skutnabb-Kangas (2000, p. 6, also Fishman 1998). When the language of school is not the language of home you can be sure children will drop the language of home very quickly (Brown, 1979; Cummins, 2000, 2001; Wong Fillmore, 1991, 2000).

Brown (1979) talks about the importance of paying attention to the 'flow' of language between the home and the school. "Children 'pigeonhole' language," she says (p. 32), giving the example of a child saying she 'thinks' in English to do sums "because we don't do sums in Italian"; if a child learns that there is no connection between the words he uses at school and those he uses at home, a rift develops between the child and the parent(s). "How will a child tell her mother about the school outing to pick bluebells when she has no word in the mother tongue for bluebells?" she asks (p. 38). Parents need to be brought to the school to share the experiences of the child so that the parent can enrich the child's vocabulary in the mother tongue by speaking about those experiences and thus "play an essential and rightful role in the child's language development" (p. 38).

That children learn a second language better if they have a thorough knowledge of their first language has been demonstrated in a number of significant studies (Brown, 1979; Cummins, 1991, 2000, 2001; Wong Fillmore, 2000). In fact, there is a correlation between the loss of the first language, which frequently occurs before children have

mastered English to any extent, and the academic difficulties faced by many immigrant children (Cummins, 2000, 2001; Duffy, 2004; Roessing, Kover & Watt, 2005; Wong Fillmore, 1991, 2000). The communication between parents and children and thus the education of the home, is undermined “when all that schools offer to the multilingual child is a monolingual education” (Cummins, 2001, p. 18). It’s as though we are saying that we fear children will not be able to identify with the larger society in Canada if they speak other languages. Or it may be saying that we simply do not care about the minority-language person. “Whether we do it intentionally or unintentionally, when we destroy children’s language and rupture their relationship with parents and grandparents, we are contradicting the very essence of education” (Cummins, 2001, p. 16).

The cost of immigrant children not being able to communicate in their first language is not just that these children are more at risk of failure and falling through the cracks in school, not just that their families have lost their most precious commodity, that of being able to communicate with ease. The cost is also a cost for our society. The potential is there for at least some of these languages to play a significant role in Canada’s development as a world leader at a time of growing global awareness and global concerns. “Today there are clear and unequivocal advantages to being able to operate in multiple cultural codes . . . immigrant children are poised to maximize that unique advantage” (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001, p. 81). The cost of families losing their ability to communicate in their mother tongue and thus the complete loss of that language for the children and future generations is particularly tragic because it wouldn’t have to be this way. Canada has the tools and resources to do something about it.

In a first-person reflection on the appropriation of accent in second language learning, Marx uses Hoffman's (1989, p. 105) earth-moving image "seismic mental shift" to describe the loss of linguistic identity, the loss of a frame of reference for understanding the world, the loss of a connection to one's inner world and to meanings and significance found there, that occurs in second language learning. Marx suggests that the L1 inner voice by which an adult constructs and denotes meaning becomes unsure, leaving "a type of linguistic and semantic vacuum" (Marx, 2002); the individual can no longer label or accurately form concepts in the unfamiliar environment, and the learner's understanding and interpretation of the world is strongly, negatively impacted. This is happening to both adults and children in families as they, each in their own way, construct and re-create identities and life in their new sociocultural context. Is it any wonder that there are clashes?

First language losing and women

The FactSheet on Women and Poverty (2004) states that 1 in 5 women in Canada live in poverty, that over 90% of the lone-parent families living on social assistance are headed by women, and that recent immigrants are 2.5 times as likely to live in poverty as other Canadians. It adds that immigrant women, even those with university degrees still earn \$14,000 less than Canadian women, and that even these women tend to work in low-paying, low-skilled, full-time jobs.

Perhaps because of the bleak picture painted by such statistics, perhaps because women are more willing to take the time to be interviewed and to work at policy changes, perhaps also because many of the researchers are women, at any rate, it is very common to find women as subjects in SLA and other research (Iqbal, 2005; Kouritzin, 2000b;

Lykes, 1989; Menard-Warwick, 2004, 2005; Norton, 2000; Rockhill, 1993; Rose et al., 1998; Vitanova, 2004; Wang, 1999; Warriner, 2004; Woloshin et al., 1997, among others). Some of these studies (Dyck, 1993; Woloshin et al., 1997), and surely many others in the healthcare field, call attention to the difficulties of immigrant women in accessing appropriate healthcare. “Women whose main language was not English were less likely to receive [appropriate care] In spite of adjusting for socioeconomic factors, communication barriers were the main problem and even interpreters weren’t enough” (Woloshin et al., 1997).

In SLA research, the feminist-voiced ideas of gender as social practice in community, of gender as a mediator in the language learner’s relationship to the world, of gender in position-ing, negotiation, and investment, are common. What is reiterated in these studies is the complex and often contradictory lived experience of immigrant women: “within family units it is usually the women who do most of the arduous work of adapting and negotiating in the settlement process” (Rose et al., 1998), while language programs remain less accessible to women than to men. Mothers are the caretakers not only of the family but also of the culture and the mother tongue even while they are also expected to function in the dominant language of the new culture with enough expertise to navigate doctor, teacher, social service, and other appointments (Iqbal, 2005; Kouritzin, 2000b; Menard-Warwick, 2004). Gender identities are key factors in women pursuing or not pursuing English language competence and even though they may do the lion’s share of the English-language literacy work in the home, they are often frustrated in their desire to access English classes and higher education (Menard-Warwick, 2004; Wang, 1999). Their need for access to networks of English speakers to learn more

English is frustrated by their lack of sufficient English to gain such access (Norton, 2000; Vitanova, 2004; Wang, 1999). Links with target language speakers are highly desired (Wang, 1999) but nearly impossible to access.

In a longitudinal qualitative inquiry examining the discursive language practices of four immigrant couples who had come to the US at about the same time, Vitanova (2004) singles out the emotions and feelings of immigrant women in a way that not many researchers have done. She notes that the women in her study tended to take on the responsibility for understanding and being understood (Vitanova, 2004), and blamed themselves when they were not understood. Although better in English than the men, these women spoke of their feelings of inadequacy and shame while the men appeared confident and blamed the interlocutors when understanding was not achieved. In spite of this display of confidence, the men deferred to the women's linguistic expertise and saw language as the woman's domain; in fact, the women's position as care-takers of their families was also mediated through language in that correcting their husbands' linguistic errors was as much part of that identity as washing their clothes.

Although these studies focus on the immigrant woman's need to *learn* the language, they are instructive also in exploring the lived experience of these women in first language loss. They conceptualize and problematize the social marginalization and the paradoxical bind of the immigrant woman's position. Immigrant women, says Norton (2000), do not arrive here feeling inferior; they are often position-ed as inferior, unskilled and uneducated.

These studies also problematize our society's conceptualization of 'individual', in terms of individually constructed learning, individual accessing of healthcare, individual

vs. networking. Dyck's (1993) study of access to healthcare among immigrant women cites the intertwined generational networks that are more common in the lives of immigrant women, and that need to be factored into potential solutions to healthcare and other problems. Understanding the immigrant woman's lived experience of first language loss is dependent on understanding her experience as a woman, a mother, and an immigrant in all the social, contextual, cultural baggage that is her life.

In the study Tannenbaum and Berkovich (2005) carried out in Israel, as mentioned above, they list family type among family factors for language maintenance or loss and question what effect mothers as lone parents might have on the maintenance of the mother tongue in the second generation. Although the results in this regard are seen as inconclusive, the researchers note that while the presence of only one parent might lessen the exposure to the mother tongue that children experience, the females in the study, daughters and mothers, in lone-parent as well as two-parent households were the ones more likely to display first language maintenance. They suggest that further studies are needed on the impact of the mother as single parent in maintenance or loss of the mother tongue.

While this is interesting and, for this project, very pertinent, one hesitates to make too much of this because the methodology of that study relied solely on written questionnaires; no one actually spoke to the adolescents being studied, nor to their parents. What also needs to be noted, I believe, was the reference to two-parent families as "intact" families, pejoratively inferring that one-parent families are not intact, as though that might make the lived experience of language loss less real, less true, less problematic, less worthy of exploration.

In a different study on parent-child communication in Australia, Tannenbaum (2003) found that children tended to use their L1 more with their mothers than with their fathers and suggests that this might be because they perceive their mothers as being less skilled in English. It may also be because they view their mothers, as indeed many cultures do, as being the carriers of tradition, the cultural interpreters, the maintainers of the first language (Kouritzin, 1999; Menard-Warwick, 2005; Tannenbaum, 2003).

Certainly research indicates that maintaining a first language cannot be done without a strong commitment on the part of the parents (Fishman, 1991; Schecter et al., 1996). Children will learn the dominant language in school whether or not their parents speak that language at home, argue Hakuta and D'Andrea (1992); however, the mother tongue will **not** be maintained if the parents do not advocate for it and commit themselves to the teaching of it (Garcia & Cuevas, 1995; Tannenbaum & Berkovich, 2005).

First language losing and Hispanics

It needs to be noted at the outset that Spanish as a language is not at risk of being lost or being without speakers, not even within North America. Simplistically stated, the reason for this is the Rio Grande river, in other words, the relative ease with which the flow of immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries into the United States can continue and with which the home culture and transnational identities through back-and-forth travel can be maintained (Silva-Corvalán, 2004; Zentella, 2004). Over 35 million people in the US are Spanish-speakers or come from a country that is (Guardado, 2005; Osterling, 2001; Zentella, 2004). The US Bureau of the Census suggests that the Latino population will grow from 11% of the nation's population in 1996 to 25% in 2050. It is

also the youngest population group in the country with half of its population under 26 years of age in 1995. More people speak Spanish than any other language except English in the US. It is the most popular foreign language studied in American secondary schools (Zentella, 2004). Spanish is, however, fast approaching a two-generation shift in that it is being used progressively less by second generation or North American-born Latinos (as compared to the three generation model typical of immigrant groups in the past) and without the replenishing effects of 'in-migration' it is doubtful that it would be viable over the long term (Hudson, Chávez, & Bills, 1995; Silva-Corvalán, 2004; Zentella, 2004, 2005).

In the 1990 census in the United States, 73 percent of those who identified themselves as Spanish speakers at home also claimed they spoke English well (Silva-Corvalán, 2004). Zentella cites an "epidemic of anglicization" (1997, p. 264) which is evident in that, increasingly, the second generation cannot speak Spanish and two-thirds of the first generation also shifts to English within fifteen years of arrival (in the US). This, in spite of Spanish television, radio, daily newspapers, pop culture divas, movie personalities, and a wide array of 'Spanish' foods that have become popular in North America.

Many studies have examined the state of the Spanish language and its speakers in the United States: studies on country-specific 'enclaves'—the Puerto Rican community in New York and the northeastern US (Zentella, 1997, 2004, 2005), the mostly Mexican community in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and the southwestern US (Hudson et al., 1995; Silva-Corvalán, 1995, 2004)—and investigations into how the syntax, phonology, and morphology of the language is changing (metamorphosing) within these large

concentrations of Spanish speakers. Numerous studies address classroom situations, bilingual or otherwise (Gonzalez, 2005; Hakuta & D'Andrea, 1992), and examine language policies in educational systems, particularly in California (Brunn, 1999; Orellana, 1999). While much of this research, as that in language maintenance and loss in general, is based on survey and questionnaire data, and is interested in the language per se more than in its speakers, other studies are also looking at the individual and familial experience of Spanish language maintenance and loss as English is being learned (Menard-Warwick, 2004; Schechter et al., 1996).

One particularly insightful study is reported on in the book "Language as Cultural Practice: Mexicanos en el Norte," by Schechter and Bayley (2002). Responding to the largely negative press that portrays Hispanics as "unwilling or unable to learn English" (p. x), this study focuses on language as cultural practice and argues for understanding the home, school and community contexts in which people learn and use, and lose, languages. "If we judge our proficiency in either of our languages against an unrealistic monolingual norm, inevitably we find ourselves wanting" says Zentella in the foreword to the book. "For many members of ethnolinguistic minorities (in the US) whose ability to speak two languages may be the only advantage they enjoy over English monolinguals, debilitating feelings of linguistic insecurity can affect the development of the home language and of English, as well as the academic progress of the children" (p. xi).

This book is based on a study of the L1 and L2 language socialization of children of Mexican-descent families in Texas and California and documents wide diversity in language practices and skills often in the same family. Linking language maintenance and loss to home, school, and community contexts, the authors examine the symbolic and

“ideological values” (p. 26) family members attach to their differing language practices, noting how children and adults in the same family attach different values to language practices depending on their different social needs and networks. Agreeing with other research that “successful intergenerational transmission of a minority language requires extensive use of the language in the home” (p. 108), Schecter and Bayley conclude that the decision of maintain a mother tongue “must be constantly renewed in the face of direct and indirect countervailing pressures to switch to English” (p. 110).

Looking at the children’s academic achievements, they discovered that mere exposure to oral Spanish does not necessarily lead to the child being able to read and write in the language, but that writing skills in one language **do** transfer to writing skills in the other language (p. 138; see also Cummins, 1996). Those children who did well in Spanish writing also did well in English writing, in fact, equal to those who knew no Spanish. In other words, the knowledge of Spanish did not hinder their English skills at all.

This is a tremendously encouraging study, honouring in a very positive way the decisions and attitudes of immigrant parents towards the loss and maintenance a first language. “We were struck by the broad range of strategies adopted by language minority parents as they attempt to resolve the contradictions arising from their desire to preserve linguistic and cultural continuity while preparing their children to succeed in a school system that often evaluates children solely on the basis of their academic performance in English” (Schecter & Bayley, 2002, p. 141). Through positive, encouraging listening to the voices of these family members they advocate for minority language maintenance to also become the responsibility of schools and society rather than leaving it solely for the home to work through.

Zentella (1997), reflecting on the language of the children in the New York Puerto Rican community, seems to lay the blame for language loss on parenting styles, citing the high number of female-headed households, the overburdened mother with too many children and no father at the dinner table, the lack of literacy habits being practised in the homes with fathers “more adept at changing the channels on the television” than at reading with their children (p. 267), and the common assumptions among Latin American men that the women in the home are responsible for language maintenance. Citing the Latin American emphasis on raising “respectful children, [who will] stay out of the adults’ way” (p. 244), she says most caretakers focus maintenance of Spanish on behaviour of children; the children simply need to understand enough Spanish to understand reprimands and discipline from the parents.

Confirming that children and young people “are less preoccupied with growing up bilingual than with growing up, surviving” (p. 1), Zentella noted that many children who stopped speaking Spanish severed important links to their families and culture. Even in the working class neighbourhoods where children are less isolated than children of the affluent, where there are more complex and multiple networks which ought to help for maintenance, even there children were not maintaining the first language to any great extent. She connects this lack of maintenance with the fact that many immigrant families live in extended families and, while the parents are out working, the grandmothers are given the responsibility of ensuring maintenance of the mother tongue (Zentella, 2004).

Contrary to what English-only advocates (Crawford, 1992; Huntington, 2004) would have us believe, Latin American parents in North America want their children to learn English and to learn it well (Brunn, 1999; Gonzalez, 1991; Guardado, 2002;

Menard-Warwick, 2004; Orellana, 1999; Osterling, 2001; Schechter et al., 1996); in fact, they consider English a prerequisite to educational and economic success for their children. Parents often adopt the view (Rodriguez, 1982) that the right to full participation in this society demands paying the price of giving up the language of the home (Zentella, 1997).

First language losing and the Spanish-speaking community in Canada

Although Canada is at a greater distance from Spanish-speaking countries, the Spanish language community is one of the fastest growing groups in Canada (Bernhard et al., 1997; Veronis, 2006). Almost 250,000 people claim Spanish as the mother tongue, or .83% of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2001) (Another Statistics Canada site [2002] suggests the number may be closer to 520,000, citing under-enumeration due to the way the question was posed on the census form.) Over two percent of the population of Ontario and Manitoba is Spanish-speaking and 4 out of 5 of these are first generation immigrants to Canada (Hispano American Business Leadership Agency, 2005). Spanish rates as fifth in languages used at the workplace in Manitoba and in Ontario (Statistics Canada, 2002) and is the mother tongue of the fifth largest group of immigrants to come to Manitoba in 2004, after Tagalog, German, English, and Korean. (Manitoba Labour and Immigration, Winnipeg Free Press, March 12, 2006, p. B7). In the Heritage and International Language Programs offered by Manitoba Education and Youth (Statistics Manitoba, 2002), only Spanish programs have increased dramatically in the last few years, from 293 programs in 1994 to 1577 in 2001.

Aside from the fact that these numbers warrant investigation into the retention, shift, changes, and loss of the Spanish language in Canada, research interest in the Span-

ish-speaking population has also been sparked by disquieting evidence, noted in several studies in Toronto, that Latin American children present disproportionately low academic achievement in school and that the drop-out rate for Latin American youth is disproportionately high, with the reported result that only 65% graduate from high school and only 10% from university (Ornstein, 1997, cited in Guardado, 2005). Several studies under the umbrella of one extensive investigation were carried out to try to address various angles of this situation: 1) to seek an alternative form of Latin American parental participation in schools in Toronto (Bernhard, Freire, Pacini-Ketchabaw & Villanueva, 1998); 2) to examine perspectives of parents, teachers, and children on cultural identity and academic achievement (Bernhard, Freire, Torres, & Nirdosh, 1997); 3) to investigate culturally contested issues between mainstream teachers and Latin American parents in Toronto schools (Bernhard & Freire, 1999); and 4) to look at home language practices and at how schools' institutional processes influenced these practices (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Bernhard, & Freire, 2001).

In findings that reflected those of other studies, (Klassen, 1992; Menard-Warwick, 2004, 2005; Orellana, 1999), the 2001 study by Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. found that Latin American parents struggle with their own English skills and with understanding school contexts and interpreting those to their children. Parents and teachers often had very disparate understandings of what ought to happen in a school, what constitutes parental role, teacher's role, and how authority is enacted. Although very interested and invested in their children's education, Latin American parents often reported feeling silenced in the face of "institutionalized discourse norms" (Ng, 1993, cited in Bernhard et al., 1999). They often seemed unable to understand or fully appreciate the communica-

tion from the schools and were then labelled “passive” (Bernhard et al., 1997, 1998; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2001) or uninterested in their children’s efforts. They distinguished major and minor infractions in a different way than the teachers did: “They don’t care about the student as a person . . . they are only following rules, how can they be so rigid?” (a parent quoted in Bernhard et al., 2004, p. 56), or also: “. . . from then on there was a distance between them [the school] and us” (a parent cited in Bernhard et al., 2004, p. 58).

These studies which centre on the education of Latin American children give us several important clues to understanding the familial lived experience of language loss: 1) parents felt strong assimilative pressures, although they believed in the importance of maintaining the mother tongue for family unity, group identity, and better employment possibilities; 2) the strong assimilative pressures caused great inner turmoil as parents doubted their decision to speak Spanish at home; 3) parents, particularly mothers, had to overcome their culturally conditioned views of teachers as authority figures to be able to summon the courage (see Norton, 2000 for “investment”) to speak up for their children; and 4) parents wanted very much to help their children to function in English but felt that their good intentions were often not recognized. Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. (2001) conclude with a strong remonstrance to educators that “the psychological and educational price paid by minority students” is too high, even if the desired result is assimilation (p. 25).

Similar findings were reported in a study conducted by Carrillos and Simmons (1999) which focused on Latino youth in Toronto and their “identity politics.” In response to the Safe Schools Act (Ontario, 2000) which includes Zero Tolerance legislation, a further exploratory study looked at Latino parents’ views and understandings of

disciplinary practices in schools, at their perceptions of the connection between home and school discipline, and at their perception of behaviour identified as 'non-tolerable' (Bernhard, Freire, Bascunan, Arenas, Verga & Gana, 2004).

Using a variety of methodologies and approaches—ethnography, case histories, participant observation, action research, interviews—these studies sought to analyse parent-school interactions and understandings and identify and clarify institutional processes and outcomes that “occur despite the goodwill of all involved” (Bernhard et al., 1997). The main focus of all of these studies centres on the educational experience of children. The findings point to the disadvantage of immigrant parents and the need for educators to find ways of lessening the assimilative structures and building on the cultural capital these children and youth bring to their educational experience.

One researcher spearheading studies in Canada that examine Spanish language loss and maintenance from a personal, narrative perspective (Kouritzin, 1997) is Martin Guardado, himself an immigrant and a Spanish speaker. As part of his Master of Education work (2002), Guardado conducted research into parental perceptions on the causes of and the factors that facilitate maintenance of Spanish among their own children. This study, in which he interviewed four Hispanic families in Vancouver, is the first one in Canada that has centred on Hispanic families and the loss and maintenance of the mother tongue. What parents reported was that emotional (if not physical) attachment to Latin American culture was crucial for maintenance of the language as was parental encouragement for the children to speak the language. All maintained that the ability to speak the Spanish language was beneficial for family relations as well as for educational and employment opportunities in the future. Only those families that actually were maintain-

ing the language saw the benefits as also accruing to the children's social, mental and moral development (Guardado, 2005).

Diverging from other studies which concluded that education is the "main engine" (Hudson, Chávez and Bills, 1995, p. 182) of assimilation into mainstream society and thus of intergenerational language loss (Silva-Corvalán, 2004; Zentella, 2004), and that the children of more highly educated parents lose their L1 faster, Guardado's study found L1 maintenance to be strongest in the families where parents had a higher education. These were also the families that had lived in Canada the longest and were in a higher socioeconomic range and where, with one child per family, the children were involved in more outside activities and spent less time watching television. As Guardado notes, these last two points need further study: What difference is there in the loss or maintenance of the language if there are several children in the family as compared with one-child families? What influence does watching English television have on language loss and maintenance? (See also Orellana, 1994 for a discussion on "Superhuman forces" related to language loss.) Might it be that providing community sports and music activities would do as much for language maintenance as the present Heritage Language classes on Saturdays?

Guardado (2002, 2005) suggests that the way in which parents persuade their children to use the L1 can promote either a positive or a negative attitude in the children and lead to either loss or maintenance of the first language. For his doctoral work (incomplete as of this writing), Guardado broadened the scope of his investigation of Hispanic families to look at language loss and maintenance from "a language socialization" and "funds of knowledge" perspective in which the L1 is seen as a site of knowledge and

schools therefore support and contribute to the development of the L1 (Guardado, 2005, p. 14). In this more extensive study, the children's reflections about their language use are included along with their parents' reflections.

Using Schechter and Bayley's (2002) study of language socialization among children of Mexican-descent families as a model, Guardado (2005) reports in an initial analysis that "it is already quite evident that the issues of cultural awareness, identity and familism [family bond] have been pervasive in the families' various articulations of their beliefs and attitudes about first language maintenance" (Guardado, 2005, p. 20). A finding that resonates with other research findings (Kouritzin, 1997 and Wong Fillmore, 1991, 2000, for example) is that the children's language practices often go contrary to the parents' language goals. Conflicts are generated because of children wanting to use one language while parents want to instil and develop the other. The "ongoing battle" as parents try to raise bilingual children appears to be a reality among Spanish-speaking families as it is across many language groups.

Using the 'battle' terminology, Guardado speaks about the "home language practices unfolding in the trenches" (2005, p. 39) that ultimately have the greatest effect on children's maintenance of a language. In the trenches, at home, in the daily interactions between parents and their children, is also where the effects of the loss of a language are lived and experienced. The colours and threads of this weaving, my research project, will add another image of this 'in the trenches' work to those from research already hung out on the clothesline, an image whose designs are infused with the perspectives of the mothers, the people most affected by the inability of the children or grandchildren to communicate in the mother tongue.

A note on Language memoirs

Significant insight into the effects of language change and loss can be gained from the “fashionable genre” (Kramersch, 2005) of language memoirs: autobiographies and other accounts of cross-linguistic experiences of exiles (voluntary or involuntary), expatriates, immigrants, and minority populations. Examples of such literature are *Hunger of Memory* by Mexican American Richard Rodriguez, *Looking North, Heading South* by Chilean American Ariel Dorfman, *Lost in Translation* by Polish (Jewish) Canadian Eva Hoffman, and other compiled works such as the Canadian-published anthology of short stories and poetry *Home and Homeland* edited by Peter Fanning and Maggie Goh. Although often seen as mere anecdotal reference points, language memoirs provide more than anecdote for the discussion on language learning and language losing in that this genre brings to the public mind the poetic and imaginative dimension of language, as compared to the knowledge of the facts and of the performance of language that second language acquisition (SLA) theory generally focuses on. In telling their stories, these narrators model living in their own diversity: “resisting the (communicative) pressures” of the dominant society as well as the “(cultural) seduction” of assimilation, refusing to disappear behind the learning task, refusing also to disappear behind the nation (Kramersch, 2005). Such literature highlights the individual living the experience and informs the language loss and maintenance research by “recover[ing] the subjective dimensions of language study” (Kramersch, 2005). What language memoirs do is reflect on the same questions that are usually asked of interviewees in life history studies. Their stories, because they are able to reflect at length, are as telling, as relevant,

as informative of our explorations into language learning and language losing as reflections in interviews and need to be taken seriously. Besides providing enjoyable reading, they are also instructive for understanding the emotions, the feelings, the inner turmoil of the people experiencing the language shift or loss.

A note on terminology: *Hispanic*, *Spanish-speaker*, *Latin Americans*, *Latinos/Latinas*: *Hispanic* is the customary US government designation for speakers of Spanish (Zentella, 2004; Silva-Corvalán, 2004), and *Latinos/Latinas* is preferred among many, though not all, people of that language community. The terms *Latin Americans* and *Spanish-speakers* are most often used in Canadian documents (Bernhard et al., 1997; Klassen, 1992; Statistics Canada, 2002). I prefer those two because of their inclusivity and objectivity as opposed to *Latinos/Latinas*, but I will respectfully use all of them interchangeably.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Theoretical Framework - Shaping the shuttle stick(s)

“Only one more step remains . . . you must have a shuttle . . . for throwing the weft thread . . . as you can see, you need the thread to reel off the shuttle stick easily and without effort . . . smooth and rhythmic. . .” (Ziek de Rodriguez & Ziek, 1978, p. 36)

“In the first decade of the 21st century there is a pressing demand to show how the practices of critical, interpretive qualitative research can help to change the world in positive ways” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2002, p. xii). Rather than viewing data collection as a neutral activity done by an anonymous someone on the will of another anonymous someone with results that please and inform the rest of the population, qualitative research situates itself among that research that speaks from the margins, works with real people, in real situations, and looks for alternate ways of understanding the experiences and lives of those who have often been disadvantaged by the “dominant conceptual framework” (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000, p. xxix). The results may speak to many but need not, as the validity of this type of research does not hinge on generalizability and predictability. Under the umbrella of qualitative methodology, this study seeks to explore the lived experience of people affected by the loss of the first language in their families and to understand that experience from their telling of it, not only from what scholars have said about their experience of it. This is one small step to changing the world in positive ways.

Qualitative research is “for those for whom the lived experience of their ‘subjects’ does not let go,” say Denzin and Lincoln (2002, p. xiii), meaning, I think, that

the researcher sees in that experience wisdom and understandings which in the sharing also become the stuff of other people's knowing. 'Subjects' lose their subject position and take on instead a position of equal participant, equal knowledge sharer. For me the experiences of adult immigrant students as lived and shared in ESL classes do not "let go." Neither does the urgency of highly skilled professionals in Bogotá, Colombia, who study English in desperation, willing to give up language and culture just to get out of their war-crazed country, while at the same time acknowledging their ambivalence at leaving a country that desperately needs exactly their gifts and talents. Just as those stories won't let go and I chose qualitative research as the way to understand in very human terms the process of language losing that most of those people know by heart but that is usually described only in academic terms, so the life history approach (Bertaux, 1981; Cole & Knowles, 2001) pulls me:

A story from lived experience marks the boundaries of that experience.

Every story, by virtue of being a story is implicitly a narrative of survival.

Whatever was experienced can now be told with coherence and perspective . . .

It is possible now to look back, having got through.

Stories humanize fate . . . Stories need to be told because if those who have "been there" have a story to tell, listeners can hope that they too, if faced with the same, would emerge with voice and meaning intact. (Greenspan, 1998, p. 145)

The notion that stories "humanize fate" brings to mind what might be termed a *fatalistic* worldview, although it probably is just a more *realistic* worldview than 'affluence-d' North Americans can abide, which is given assent in some of the cultural groups I'm familiar with in Latin America. I can hear the women I know in the Bolivian

highlands gently “humanizing fate” as they gather around the one water faucet in the community to wash their family’s clothes and commiserate about the latest misfortune that fate has handed them, a *paro* (strike) meaning they will be without cooking fuel for a week or more and prices on other essentials will sky-rocket. I can hear women in a southern Ontario community “humanizing fate” as they gather at break-time in an English class to talk about husbands who can’t find jobs that pay enough to live on or teenage sons who are in trouble with the law or landlords who won’t fix broken appliances or get rid of rodents. “Humanizing fate” is done in community, in story; it is not done in questionnaires or surveys or tightly structured interviews.

The term “life history” appealed to me for a variety of reasons, not least of which is the fact of my own age and substantial ‘life history’, my growing curiosity with autobiographical writers in a ‘kinship’ sort of way, and my fascination with and belief in personal storytelling. “Statistics and experiments convince institutions, policy-makers, and governments; stories convince individuals” (Kouritzin, 2006). “Life history” also appealed to me because the people I would work with in this research are people who carry in each of their lives multiple life histories and who, as most Latin American women that I know, have a yen for storytelling, for humanizing fate. In looking for a methodology that would be understood by as well as understanding of people who have undergone huge changes in their lives, and have made difficult decisions about language use in their homes and lived the effects, I thought life history would be a good fit. It is an approach that “resembles everyday activities” (Gestaldo, 2004, p. ii), and, to me, appears grounded, rooted in the ordinary lives of ordinary people living complex, difficult circumstances. It seemed accessible. I thought “life history” and “humanizing fate”

would understand each other.

Autobiography, life story, personal documents, case history – all of these have at times been used interchangeably with *life history* in the fields of sociology and anthropology from whence this term came to be viewed as a valid research approach (Bertaux, 1981). In sociological research, life history has been seen as an approach “not to produce ‘scientific results’ . . . but to acquire knowledge about social processes” (Bertaux, 1981, p. 32) recognizing that social processes, infused as they are with power relations and ideologies, form part of the human condition. In addition to providing a better understanding of cultures through the stories and case studies of individuals, the life history approach as used in Latin America, has allowed for the emergence of a deeper sense of self-awareness and identity in ‘colonial-ised’ nations (Camargo, da Rocha Lima, & Hippolito, 1985).

Life history is more than a collection of oral and written documents telling a story; it is more than a journalistic technique; it “focuses on individuals’ understanding and recollection of events that have had a substantial impact on their development” (Kouritzin, 2000, p. 4). It is that understanding of the events that is of utmost importance in life history, more so than the events themselves. Understood in this way, it really is what happens when village women gather around a local water hole and share stories: they understand the context, the impact, the triangulation as different versions and different angles of the same story are told. And they leave with deeper and fuller understandings of the same event. Only they don’t call it research.

The life history perspective insists on a relationship between the researcher and the participant that challenges the “objectivity” or otherness of the researcher. “People

are studying people” (Cole and Knowles, 2001, p. 10); the researcher is part of the human experience and cannot be simply an objective, neutral observer. As in other forms of qualitative research, the life history researcher represents the viewing lens, the instrument through which the lives of the participants are seen and her or his own situatedness influences and nuances the interpretation of the project. The researcher must be aware that although there is a power differential inherent in this relationship, she must “challenge the hierarchical practices” (Cole & Knowles, p. 27) that normally define relationships of research-er and research-ed. She must recognize that the final rendering of any situation does not belong to her alone but instead to both researcher and researched and to the process.

The emergent design principle of qualitative research methodology lends itself well to the life history approach. Rather than looking for ‘truth’ and verifiability, life history can be seen as a process of soul-searching and meaning-making, both for the teller and for the listener. Life history represents human experience in such a way that ‘viewers’ are invited into the interpretive process to make their own meaning, form their own judgments based on their reading or viewing of the “text,” not so different from what art sets out to do, allowing the viewer to interpret, form judgments, do her own meaning-making.

Life history is an appropriate approach to use within a poststructuralist sociocultural framework in that it also recognizes the person-in-the-world: the intertwining, interweaving of the personal, temporal, and social context. Furthermore, it honours the complexity and individuality of human experience and presents the individual as the one who possesses the ‘answers’, the understanding, the wisdom. It

works from the perspective that a person's life experience is always more than just that which meets the eye and it is that 'more' that makes life history so interesting and so vital to our understanding of the language loss phenomenon. Life stories help us to understand the complexity of a situation, to see the dynamics involved in decision-making, in actions.

Life history storytelling is painting a picture, sculpting a piece of art, creating a weaving. In the telling we sort out what we want to highlight, what needs to go on the canvas, what is best left off, what that experience has meant to us. Telling stories allows us to reclaim our past, to evaluate, integrate, interpret, even to shape a past experience. The "storying and re-storying of experiences leads to understanding ourselves and each other" (Clandinin. & Connelly, 2000, p. 259) as we see patterns and designs emerging, blending, sitting in juxtaposition. It is a little like backstrap weaving—the patterns emerge, distinct, clear, then blend, nearly disappear as another colour or design takes prominence, then emerge again, until we see the design of the whole.

One form of life history, the *testimonio*, is in fact a form that developed within the Latin American context. Tierney (2003) describes it as more than simple story telling in that it bears witness to a social urgency. It is the voice of the silenced, the marginalised, the excluded. It differs from other life history accounts in that it does not presuppose that the struggles have been overcome: it is not purely reminiscence; it is also a call to join in the struggle. In a *testimonio*, the narrator is not simply relating or making sense of an experience in the retelling; she is "using the writer" (Tierney, 2003, p. 321) to make her cause known to the public. Latin American women know about *testimonios*: Consider their story-ing of political events such as the 'disappearances' of thousands of people in

Argentina between 1976 and 1983 (*las Madres*, the mothers, *de la Plaza de Mayo*, of the 'May Plaza' in Buenos Aires who have marched since 1977 and continue to march around the plaza to call for justice) and Guatemalan women who chose to continue weaving their designs in defiance of military threats and massacres (during the civil war 1960-96) that sought to stamp out their Indigenous languages and cultural traditions. Latin American women know the power of *testimonios*. They know that life stories and *testimonios* can alert others to situations of injustice and encourage people to join in the struggle, even the struggle to keep a mother tongue alive in a country where they all must learn a different dominant language.

The autobiographical and the relational, vertical and horizontal, warp and weft, these poles of life history pull me. Much of my adult life has been infused with the Spanish language: learning it as an adult, working as an advocate and support for mainly Central American immigrants and refugees in a Canadian city, teaching English in various places to immigrants and refugees as well as in the home country of learners, making music together with Central and South American people. The strands of language loss are also part of my family's weaving. I am an 'attriter' and a purposeful language lose-r in that I did not pass my mother tongue on to my children and, having lived far away from speakers of that language for most of my adult life, I am also losing it. This inquiry is my inquiry (autobiographical, warp) as it is also the inquiry of people with whom I have a long standing relationship (relational, weft). It is the autobiographical inquiry of women reflecting on their own lived experience of language losing as it is also the relational inquiry into the melding of their stories with those of others who have lived this experience and whose stories have been explored in other research.

Participants - Choosing the colours and the yarns

“ . . . even on this the simplest of looms, with designs of much complexity, in wild colour combinations . . . you are limited only by your imagination . . . ” (Ziek de Rodriguez & Ziek, 1978, p. xi)

The Toronto-Hamilton-Kitchener area was a preferred destination for Central Americans during the late 80s and early 90s, and has in the last number of years been welcoming large numbers of Colombians. The 1996 census figures reported 6000 Spanish speakers living in one particular city of about 140,000 in southern Ontario, the majority of those from Central America, Chile and Peru (Fernandez, 2000). The Latin American group in southern Ontario is a diverse group, having come at different times and from different places and maintaining a variety of political allegiances and views. They speak slightly different varieties of Spanish and enjoy different customs and traditions. My experience with the Spanish-speaking community in that area from 1990 to 2001 as well as in Latin America from 1986 to 1990 and again from 2001 to 2004, and now new connections to the Spanish-speaking community in Winnipeg, has given me ‘insider’ status of a certain kind. I am able to work in their language and I know from previous conversations with members of that group that interest in this topic is keen. Because my ‘insider’ status is most real in southern Ontario, that became the site for my data gathering.

I have had the great privilege of getting to know some of this world’s strongest and finest people through my work as an English teacher with immigrants to Canada. If we are to be truly proud of the multicultural and ethnic diversity of our nation, I believe we must become more knowledgeable about the people who come to this country and who make up this diverse and interesting nation. And that means hearing their stories. Who is more deserving of a chance to tell their stories, to self-reflect and re-construct

through storytelling, than people whose lives have been anything but constructive! I wish that all of my former students could have a chance to tell their stories, the men as well as the women. Since I needed to choose, I chose to work with Spanish-speaking women who had come to Canada in the 80s and early 90s. “Within the nuclear family, it is usually the women who do most of the arduous work of adapting and negotiating in the settlement process” (Rose et al.). This, I believe, is true of most of the Latin American women I got to know in different places. This certainly was the perception in the crowded community centres where I worked as an ESL instructor and where free childcare meant that the majority of our students were women--mothers and grandmothers.

In response to what Tannenbaum and Berkovich (2005) suggest about there being less loss of the first language among the female members of families and less also when there was no male adult in the household, I further wanted to limit my participant choice to Spanish-speaking women who had come as lone parent immigrants with children. It was their colours and threads that would create the designs of this weaving on the lived experience of mother tongue losing and keeping.

Method (proposed) - Shaping the beater

“ . . .the bottom edge of the beater must be straight, the web will follow the shape of the beater so that an uneven line in the beater will result in an uneven line in the [finished product], the points must be gently rounded and not dangerously sharp . . .” (Ziek de Rodriguez & Ziek, p. 16)

The purpose of this investigation is to explore the familial lived experience of the consequences and effects of mother tongue losing among Spanish-speaking immigrants to Canada as seen from the perspectives of the mothers and grandmothers in the families.

My purpose was not to measure with any objective linguistic measuring stick, whether or not the family actually was maintaining their first language and so I did not try to observe the family in conversation nor did I try to engage the other family members in conversation about their supposed language loss or maintenance. This did not mean that I didn't have my preconceived notions about who in their families was still speaking Spanish and who was not; I had occasionally interacted with some of these families when I lived in Ontario and my sense was that most of the children preferred English to Spanish. But I also knew this might have had more to do with their English being better than my Spanish or simply that with a white Canadian they automatically switched to the dominant language. At any rate, I was not out to prove anyone right or wrong. I wanted simply to listen to the women as they reflected on their experience in Canada from a linguistic standpoint.

I wanted to get the perspectives of women who had lived in Canada with their families for a fairly long time so that they would be able to reflect from the vantage point of the wisdom and learnings they had gained through the experience. The experience is not over for them, but most of them are not in the thick of it as they were when their children were younger. Most of them are grandmothers. I knew this would mean that their reflections would be different from those of younger Latina women. But I believed these women had valid and worthwhile perspectives to add to the weavings already on the clothesline of language loss and language maintenance.

My proposal was to engage them in this conversation using open-ended, semi-structured interviews guided by the following research questions:

- 1) What happens within Spanish-language-dominant, female-headed families

when children or grandchildren, while learning the dominant language(s) of Canada, lose the ability to speak in the mother tongue? What is the experience of that loss for the lone parent women and for their families?

2) [Why] is it important for us (native English speaking Canadians of the dominant culture) to pay attention to the phenomenon of language loss within newcomer families, that is, what do the families want us to know?

3) What do the families feel might be some useful strategies for maintaining the first language?

My intent was to ask each woman to tell me her family's story of immigrating to and settling in Canada in linguistic terms and to do that in the way she felt most comfortable doing it (Kouritzin, 1997, 1999). The above questions would serve as an overall guide and the questions in Appendix A could be used as prompters should that be necessary.

Method (realized) - Starting the weaving: A Story

“...using the shutter stick, throw the thread . . . under and over and over and under.....you won't see the design emerging for a while.” (Ziek de Rodriguez & Ziek, 1978, p. 18)

How Elena became a researcher

Once there was a woman named Elena (if we're going to change the participants' names, perhaps the researcher's name ought also to be changed) who thought she wanted to be a researcher. She was a mother and a grandmother; she was losing the language she had spoken when she was a child and she knew lots of people who were worried that their children were not going to keep on speaking their first language. She wondered how it might feel to be a mother and come to Canada with your children, some pictures and things, and your language, your words, your mother tongue, and then to have those words get lost in Canada: How would it feel and what happens in such a family? That's what she wanted to know.

So, because she spoke Spanish and had many friends who spoke Spanish, she started by calling some of those friends. Since she was wondering what difference it would make for losing or keeping a language if the mother was the only parent in the household, she wanted to call only women who had come to Canada alone, with their kids, without the support of husbands or other family members. But when she started calling her friends she discovered that of the Spanish-speaking women she knew who had come to this part of Canada alone with their children, several had moved away so there were only four that she could call. She knew many other women who had come alone with their children or whose husbands had left them almost as soon as they got to Canada but those women didn't speak Spanish and she wanted to hear the stories from Spanish

speakers. So she called these four women and then she called also two other women who had come with partners but who also had talked to her often about exactly this topic in the years between 1990 and 2001 when she lived in the area. She called Fanny and Maria and Yoanna and Aleyda and Delmis and Elsa. And she said to them, "Do you remember talking to me about your kids and your mother tongue and how your kids were starting to lose the words and they couldn't remember sometimes even the simplest words and how sad that made you feel?" And her friends said "*Sí pués*, yes, of course, we remember." Then she said, "I'm a student at a university now and I have to write a story and the story is going to be about how it feels, what you experience in the family, when the words from your mother tongue start getting lost. Would you be willing to talk to me a little more about that? Could I make my story about your experience with your language in Canada?" And the friends said, "*Sí pués*, [yes, of course]," and "*Con mucho gusto*, [with pleasure]," and "*Como no*, [of course, of course]. *Cuándo?* [When do we start?]" And Elena said, "How about next week?" (This was in October.)

Then Elena got on a plane and flew to the city where her friends live and she called them all and arranged for a meeting. But on the day of the meeting they couldn't all come, only three could come; the others had to work at their jobs. Elena discovered that it was very hard to get these women together because they were so busy; two of them still worked two full-time jobs each to pay back the money they owed the government for bringing them to Canada. So Elena told the three who came that she would like them to talk about their experience of coming to Canada and how their children, and they, had to learn English and what happened to their mother tongue as they were learning English and did they manage to keep speaking their mother tongue with their families or did their

children switch to English and how did that affect their family relationships. She said she wasn't asking about their employment or healthcare experiences although that would also be very interesting and would be a long story and they could talk about any of that if they wished, but what she was interested in was knowing about their immigrant experience, thinking mainly about the language part of that or how language learning and language losing and language keeping played itself out in their immigrant experience. Then she told them why she wanted to do this, and that she was going to have to record their voices on a tape recorder so she could listen to it all later and write some of it down. And they said, "Of course, of course" and wanted to get started immediately. "We want to tell about our mother tongue! We love our mother tongue; there is no other tongue like it," they said. "We don't want our words to get lost."

But Elena said, "First you have to sign a paper. A paper that means it's okay for me to talk to you because I'm a researcher now. I'm your friend but in this case I'm also a researcher. If you sign the paper that means it's okay for me to record your words and to write your words down." And Fanny and Maria and Yoanna laughed and pushed the paper back across the table to Elena and they looked at Elena as if to say, "Don't you know that what we say is true? Are you making us sign a paper because you don't really trust us? Signing papers is what you do when you go to the immigration department, to the government, when you try to get a visa, when you try to bring your family to Canada. Signed papers mean you're really not trusted. You've got to be crazy to think we'll sign a paper for you." Well, they didn't say all of that, but that's what Elena felt. What they said was, "Elena, we **love** talking about our language; we love telling you our stories. We feel honoured to have you write something about us; we're women just like you, as old as you

and older; signing papers is not what women in conversation do; no, we won't sign but we'll talk." Then they smiled and pushed the paper back across the table to Elena.

So now Elena was not sure how she would ever get to be a researcher and when she told them that she would have to change their names for confidentiality, the women said, "Change our names? Why? We'd be proud to have our names appear on something like this." Then they said, "You do whatever you need to do. Can we start talking now?" So Elena went to their homes, their apartments, and they gave her *pupusas* and *olla de carne* with *yucca* and she said it had been such a long time since she had eaten these wonderful foods and then they started to talk about their experiences. And they talked for a long time about how it was to come to this country with their children and their language and Elena recorded their words on a tape recorder and later she wrote it all down, first in Spanish, then in English.

Then Elena called the other women who couldn't be at the meeting and she said, "Are you still willing to talk to me about this?" and they said, "*Sí pués, como no,*" and Elena made arrangements to meet them in their homes. In the meantime, however, she had to go back to her home in Winnipeg where she thought and thought about how she would get to be a researcher if the women didn't behave like 'subjects' and sign the consent form! Then she discovered that someone else had done research with women of the same mother tongue, women who also wouldn't sign the paper (Lykes, 1989), so Elena decided it was more important to trust her friends' words and feelings and if that meant not having their names on a piece of paper then that's the way it would have to be.

After a while (in November) Elena got on the plane again and went back to Ontario and this time she met with the other women but only one at a time because they

were all so busy they couldn't meet at the same time. So Elena told each of them that she was now a student at a university and that she had to write a thesis for the university and it was going to be about how it feels when a mother tongue gets lost. And again the women said, "*Si pués, como no,*" and they started to talk, and again Elena said that at the university if you wanted to be a researcher you had to get people to sign their names on a paper and again, just like before, they smiled and pushed the paper back to her, only one signed the paper, and she laughed while she did it and said, "I hope I'm not signing my life away." And Elena felt bad for even having suggested that they sign the paper, she felt like she was a *patron* (master, boss) telling the slaves what to do, and like the women were secretly laughing at her need to be a researcher.

Four times Elena got on a plane to go to Ontario. Each time she recorded what Fanny and Maria and Yoanna and Aleyda and Delmis and Elsa told her. Each time she reminded them of what they had said the time before but most of the time they said they didn't need to be reminded, if she was worried they would repeat themselves, then that was her problem; they were simply happy to have a chance to talk about their language and their families and what they had said, well, that was their story.

And some of the women said they were so glad Elena was doing this, that it gave them a chance to talk about their lives and that they hoped other people would also get a chance to talk about their language experiences. Then Elena realized that this story was not her story at all but the story of all immigrant women and that she was simply the instigator of the story-telling and the writer of the told stories. And she remembered how in their countries people have been telling stories for hundreds, thousands of years, how stories have been as much a part of their cultures as *pupusas* and *tortillas*, how told stories

(oral history) for these women are more true than written stories, how it was the *conquistadores*, the conquerors, who tried to get people to stop telling stories in cloth or yarn or words and how these women, and all of us, really, learn to make sense of our lives and to understand our place in the world through telling stories, weaving narrative, as some have called it (Menard-Warwick, 2005). So Elena began to see her 'research' part of this whole exercise as a rather small 'get-yourself-out-of-the-way-and-let-the-storying-happen' part and she wondered if maybe the women should have given *her* a paper to sign. She learned that the important thing was to listen well to their stories, to treat their stories as a sacred and powerful space in which they for thousands of years have made meaning of (analyzed) their world and their places in it. She learned that being a researcher means to make yourself small enough to fit into the space where these stories are heard and gentle enough with the keyboard to trust that the stories coming out are the ones they told. And that is how Elena learned from the women how to be a researcher after all, even with only one signed paper.

Chapter Four

Data Collecting

Weaving the Stories

“The crosswise element is called the weft, composed of many strands of yarn, this is what makes the pattern . . . the weaving is the interlacing of the weft with the warp.” (Larsen & Thorpe, 1967, p. 3)

The two firm convictions 1) that the process of immigration is complex with a complicating factor being the language losing-language keeping conundrum and 2) that the mother tongue is in danger of becoming lost in that process with often far-reaching negative effects and consequences for the families are the two supports to which this loom is tied. A review of the pertinent research on first language loss in immigrant families in Canada connects those supports to each other by means of lengthwise threads which form the basis of the loom or the thesis, and on which new designs can be interlaced and woven. The section on methodology has focused the theoretical framework and ethical considerations: how will we handle this particular research project (the shuttle stick); it explains who the participants are whose input will shape the outcome (the colours of the thread), and describes the specific procedures for data collection (the beater that pushes it all together into a tight weave). Now we turn to the actual work of weaving, letting the data intertwine, back and forth, across the lengthwise threads to form designs and patterns. These crosswise strands are the voices of the participants. Let's listen as they tell their stories.

All of the interviews were done in Spanish. With the consent of the women, I have chosen to tell each woman's story in the first person which means that I have translated their voices into English. To give more resonance and authenticity to their voices, and to remind the reader that these are Spanish voices speaking, I have inserted bits and

pieces of their actual Spanish comments in italics and followed them immediately with the English translation in parentheses. I have tried to translate as accurately as possible, opting for a meaningful English translation rather than an exact word for word translation. I believe these stories stand by themselves without editorial comment. I chose to limit my data to these first-person narratives because the temptation to add other details about these women's lives, details that I was aware of as our paths intersected between 1990 and 2001, would be unfair to them as well as to the research process. I did not ask if I could divulge other details of their lives; to be true to our friendship I wanted to tell what they told me, nothing more. These are their perspectives on language losing and language keeping. This is what they wanted to say. Names have been changed as has some identifying information.

Maria's story:

I came to Canada in the spring of 1990, with 1 son, a daughter-in-law, and a grandson. My husband had died many years earlier in Colombia. I was the head of our family. I had a daughter and a son already in Canada. They were the ones who brought us here. The biggest challenge for me was the language. I was already 59 years old. Everywhere I went I heard English, on the radio, the television, everything. *El impacto para mí fue algo impresionante.* (The impact, for me, was [impressive] tremendous.) I would go shopping and it seemed the prices were much higher than in my country; I got so confused with the money.

The best thing for us was to start going to school, my one son had been here earlier so he already spoke English a little so he went to work. For my grandson the school was very difficult the first 4 months. He was 7 years old. *Siempre llegaba descontento, diciendo que no quería volver a la escuela porque los compañeros se burlaban y se reían de él.* (He always came home unhappy, saying he didn't want to go back to school the next day because his classmates laughed at him and made fun of him.) *Lloró mucho.* (He cried a lot.) Of course, he didn't understand what was going on. Then it was vacation time and there were special classes for children of immigrants to learn English during the summer. That was the best thing that ever happened to him. He went every day and the kids were all like him, nobody knew any more than the others so they felt good being together and he learned quickly. By the end of the summer he spoke perfectly and was very happy. When school started again, he was eager to go. I was amazed at how quickly he made friends now and how easy the language was for him. Children adapt so quickly, don't they?

We adults have a harder time, especially me being older. The pronunciation for me was the greatest challenge, also to understand what people were saying to me or were asking me. *Fue un desafío de bastante trascendencia.* (That was a huge challenge.) When you try to learn a language that isn't written the way it's pronounced, that's very hard. Almost impossible. But this country is beautiful and the people are so nice, they treated me very well even at the beginning; I found a church to go to where there were some people who spoke my language; that felt very good. Slowly I accommodated myself to the customs of this country and this drastic change that I had to undergo helped me to value what earlier residents and citizens had done here. *Vale la pena.* (It's worth it) to

work hard, it's worth it to put effort into doing the best we can for our families and for our future.

Now my children speak mainly English; that's because at their work they practice English all day. I, because I couldn't go to school much due to the work in the home for my family, and of course, due to my age, I didn't learn English like I wish I would have. But for the most part I can understand what people are saying and I can make myself understood, *más o menos* (more or less). Now I don't have to take my son or my daughter with me to the doctor. My daughter can't believe it. She still wants to go with me and I tell her, I'm fine, I can manage.

In my home we speak only Spanish; why not? That's my language. No way will I allow anyone to speak English in my home! I always remind them that their mother tongue is sacred *y de gran valor* (and of great value). Spanish is a beautiful language. Whenever I get a chance, I teach my grandchildren (four) my language; I don't allow them to speak to me in English. I have to be very clear with them and very insistent. I have to force them to speak to me in Spanish and I tell them that a person who speaks two languages is better prepared for the world and besides, such a person will have a marvellous future with travelling and opportunities and I'm glad when my grandchildren listen to me. I tell them that they can learn English in school with teachers who are prepared and examined by the government to teach them the language so that they learn it quickly; they don't need any English influence from the home, but our language on the other hand will remain alive only as we use it, *si ponemos una gran parte de nuestro esfuerzo*, (if we put a lot of our effort into it). And if we love our countries of origin, so that we never need to be ashamed of speaking Spanish. It is a beautiful language.

The truth is, though, my grandchildren, all four, speak hardly any Spanish at all, and I have 3 great-grandchildren now and they, well, they know nothing at all of Spanish. *Me la paso bravo!* (I get mad!) I ask my daughter why they don't speak Spanish to their children at home, they could, you know. But she says she doesn't want her children to experience what she experienced when she first came to Canada, *que se sentía tan inútil* (that she felt so useless) because she couldn't speak the language. She doesn't want that for her children. I tell her it's a beautiful language and she says she knows that but it takes so much effort. *Se vuelven perezosos*, (they get lazy), too lazy to put the effort into speaking Spanish in their families. *El ambiente les vuelve perezosos*, (the ambiance or the environment makes them lazy), it's too easy to do everything in English. The fact that there are problems among the Spanish youth and they don't want those problems in their homes, that's one reason why none of my children speak to their children in Spanish. It's so much easier in English. *Me da pesar*, (I feel really bad about that). *Pero ¿qué puedo hacer?* (But what can I do?) *Lo más importante es tener una relación con los nietos*. (The most important thing is to maintain a relationship with the grandchildren) so I call them up and I talk to them in Spanish but they answer me in English so . . . we don't talk very much on the phone. It's too complicated. One granddaughter calls me sometimes and says she wants to learn Spanish now, she's almost 20, so I try to teach her but it's very poor (her Spanish). So I ask her, "Why don't you practice? You're young, why don't you ask your mom to help you learn?" and she says, "Well, really, I don't like the language much."

But you know, Helen, this country is marvellous. It is so wonderful what they do here for the people. I have another daughter (not mentioned until this point), she's—how

do you say it in English--handicapped. She was about 14 when we came. I tried to put her in school but she couldn't handle it. I put her in English classes for adults. That worked for a while. Now she goes to a Workshop every day. They have work for her to do there, and she's happy. Content. It's her favourite place. She lives with me but she goes every day to work with the others and they have wonderful people to take care of them. *Di-chosa soy*. (I am blessed). I am very lucky to be here and to have all of this for my daughter. She learned English at the workshop. Even with her, when I speak to her in Spanish she answers in English. I guess that's what happens. I don't go out much anymore; I never did since I came to Canada. I go to church. There we have a Spanish group; we talk to each other about our problems and the Canadian people are very nice. There I feel good. But otherwise I don't go out; *el frío me mata*; (the cold [nearly] kills me), and anyway, where would I go? In the springtime I like to walk around and look at all the beautiful flowers, but when I first came I thought the cold would kill me, I thought I couldn't handle the cold. But Canada is a peaceful country, with a good education system, good programs for everyone. I love Canada and live in gratitude to God.

Fanny's story:

I came to Canada in the middle of winter, 1988 . . . my son was already here, had come two years earlier, sent by Amnesty International . . . I lost two sons to the war in El Salvador . . . this son was in prison, tortured, then Amnesty International found him and brought him out, fast . . . he wanted to stay but it wasn't safe for him . . . he had no time to even bring his wife and child. They came later and then he sent for me. I felt *bravo*,

(angry), that they allowed him to bring his wife and child but not his mother, but then I came too. I lived with them for 6 or 7 years. Me? I speak only Spanish with my children, my grandchildren, we all speak Spanish . . . because of, you know, the situation in my country, my son didn't really want to learn English, it's the language of the imperialists, you know . . . but he learned . . . I don't speak English very well, hardly any . . . I was only allowed to go to school two nights a week as a refugee claimant . . . what are you going to learn in two nights? You forget it in between. I feel embarrassed about that . . . a person wants to converse with people . . . but I can't. I told my grandchildren I wanted to learn English from them but they laughed at me, they spoke Spanish with me for a little while but then they switched to English . . . well, I think it was the racism . . . there are people, you know, who think we Hispanics . . . when they were small all the kids in the neighbourhood laughed at them, at both of them, the boy and the girl but the girl was stronger, she fought back, but the boy . . . well, one time I hid in the trees to see if this was true what they were saying, I saw the other boys throw stones at him and that day because his father had told him he should fight back, he said, "*Nunca más!*" (never again), and he fought back and they never did it again . . . I don't know why this happened . . . my son had been interviewed by the local paper and his picture had appeared in the paper because he was a political prisoner and he said that was why the other kids, because they were not only Canadian kids, they were other Hispanics as well, that was why they were beating up his children . . . I imagine it happened to a lot of children . . . I lived with them for nearly 7 years but in the end I had to move out, the situation between me and the kids was bad, they were supposed to teach me English but they laughed at me, they said I was not their grandmother, it was very hard, they did things to me, treated me badly, I

moved out . . . it was very hard living with them in a small apartment and the winter so long and you can't go out and you can't do what you're used to doing . . . very hard . . . at 17 the girl *se interesaba nuevamente por el español* (she became interested again in Spanish) because she had some Spanish-speaking friends so she learned a few words in Spanish but she can't write it at all, or read it, and my grandson, he used to speak more Spanish with his parents but now it's the odd word, *se intercalan*, (they code switch), half in English then a word in Spanish and then in English again, he tries sometimes to speak in Spanish but they are definitely more *pegados a la cultura de aquí* ('glued to,' closer to the culture here), the culture demands it, to become a citizen you have to speak English, they need to give more English classes to us older people, not just two nights a week; . . . *me da colera*, (it infuriates me) when I see young people who don't speak our language . . . we're in a democratic country, look at the other immigrant groups, they keep their languages, you hear them speaking their languages on the buses, everywhere, why are we letting our young people get away with losing theirs? . . . My grandchildren tell me, "Abuela, (grandmother), you're in Canada now, you have to speak English."

Parents simply have to insist on speaking Spanish in the home, if parents don't insist on it, who will do it? These young people, they want a 'Che' T-shirt because it's cool or something like that, but they can't speak a word of Spanish; they have no idea what Che Guevarra fought for, they have no idea who he was. *Es una vergüenza!* (It's a disgrace!) I don't really care so much whether the kids speak Spanish; I want them to know about our countries and what the situation is there, the hunger, the poverty, why we came, *la lucha*, (the struggle [for justice]). I tell them, what are you here for if not to learn so you can help in the struggle in your country? What will happen to our country if all we

do here is *hacernos ricos* (make ourselves rich)? Our people think it's okay to get rich here, *si se puede comprar una casa más grande, pués, porqué no? ¡Eso me da coraje!* (People think if they can afford to buy a bigger house, well, why not? That makes me furious!) What use are riches if the people in our country suffer? I'm old you know but I try to get those kids together to watch a movie about the war in El Salvador, but very few are interested . . . sometimes people are bothered by us speaking Spanish on the buses or elsewhere, but I don't care, I say we are all immigrants and we should all speak our languages . . . Sometimes our own people tell us we have to forget where we came from, we have to forget what's going on in our countries . . . How can you forget? Impossible. When you've lost two sons to the war, when you had to hide because they came searching for your third son and . . . and why should we forget our *pupusas*, (a special food), even Canadians like them!

Gracias a Dios (Thank God), I've never gotten very sick here. I know of many others who have suffered a lot with depression, that's the biggest thing, depression, but other things too, but I've been well. I have my little apartment; I have my job (now 72 years old and still doing childcare every day for a family that wants their children to learn Spanish from her); now my granddaughter says she wants to learn Spanish, she's 17, so I try to teach her. She has Spanish friends and it's the music, that's why they want to learn Spanish . . . the music and the dancing . . . two of my grandchildren finished high school . . . not many Hispanics go to college; I know that . . . but even those who come here prepared to work in good jobs don't get the good jobs so why spend all that money on studies? My son, his whole family, everybody has a job.

La vida del inmigrante no es solo aquí en Canadá, nuestra vida sigue allá en

nuestro país. (The life of the immigrant is not only in Canada, our life continues over there in our countries), we are never only here . . . we know what's going on there, sometimes we long to be back, at least the older ones . . . you sacrifice a lot to be here . . . it's all so rush, rush, rush here. I guess that's why we don't keep up with our language . . . you need time to learn it . . . in a rush you can't do it. And families are never together here, one of them is always working; how will you keep your *cultura* (culture) if you're never together? You know, there's the tv program called Dora . . . why, even Canadians are learning Spanish and they love it! So why are we ourselves losing it, why can't we keep it up?

Yoanna's story:

I came to Canada in the fall of 1986 with my husband who was already 66 at that time and who was sick until the day he died in 2001. I was 49 and in many ways I was the head of the family. I came with two of my six children, my daughter and my 11-year-old son. Two adult daughters already were living in Canada with their children. I had been an elementary school teacher in Guatemala. I had been sent by the diocese to start an elementary school in another region there. That school has been named after me. My husband was a business man. He helped me a lot with that school.

When I came to Canada I wanted to learn English quickly and well. Unfortunately, as refugee claimants we were not allowed to go to school full time, only at night, and we couldn't go to college or university either, that was hard. We, my daughter and I,

were enthused about learning the language but we were in what they called the 'backlog' and they couldn't do anything for us. That was very frustrating. My young son needed us to be able to speak English in his school with his teachers and we couldn't. And with the doctor because of my husband's problems. And of course, in finding a job. The dictionary became our most useful tool. We used it every day. My husband never did learn the language. My daughter learned it quickly; she had already been a bilingual secretary in Guatemala so she knew some English already. I learned enough to get by, the necessary parts. My English teachers were marvellous women and I remember them with much love.

I wanted to *integrarme*, (to become integrated) into Canadian society immediately so since I couldn't work because of being in the 'backlog,' I volunteered at an English school, in the daycare. I did this without any authorization from anyone because I didn't speak any English but I just wanted to be involved. At one meeting with the immigration official, I was asked who had given me permission to work and I said, "No one," and that I wasn't receiving any money for the work I did, it was voluntary, and he said, "Well, here's your letter of permission, now you can go and work for pay, anywhere in Canada, you can go to the Yukon if you like!" I always have felt very positive about living in Canada.

My young son never complained about school but then we got a note from the teacher to come and see her and she said he was too quiet, he never spoke up, so she was wondering if the work was too hard and she was planning to put him in a class for learning disabled children. My daughter was with me, we were very upset, I said, no way, he's very intelligent; he doesn't need a special class. So I asked my son what was the matter,

why didn't he speak at school. He said he had heard the kids laughing at other kids who couldn't speak English very well and there was no way they were going to laugh at him so he wasn't going to speak until he could speak it right. After a month or so, he came home and said, "Mamá, I raised my hand today and I answered a question." He was very proud of himself. But then he started speaking only English, even at home until my husband, as sick as he was, said to him, "On this side of the door, we speak Spanish. On the other side you speak whatever is easier." So from then on he spoke Spanish with us at home. Later in his teen years he became friends with other Spanish-speaking young people and that was a bad influence. They would tell him that being in school was a waste of time, that it was better to find a job and make money to be able to buy whatever he felt like buying. For a while things were very difficult with him. These friends were no good for him.

This same thing happened to my daughter's sons. As they grew up they became friends with other Hispanic kids who had a very negative influence on them. So my daughter and her husband forbade their sons to speak Spanish outside of the home. And then, of course, they gave up speaking Spanish in the home too. The problem was that a lot of the Hispanics who came to Canada and especially to Toronto in the 80s were not literate in their own language (other studies have verified this, eg., Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2001). For some of them, Spanish was already their second language, they spoke Indigenous languages, (such as the Kek'chi language in Guatemala) and that creates bigger problems for the young people. They start to rebel because they get no help at home. But the parents can't help them because they don't understand what the rules of the school are and they don't understand the homework and they would rather not help a child at all

than help a child with their homework and have it done all wrong. They lose their dignity if it is found out that they were responsible for their child getting it all wrong.

In my family all of us, except my husband, felt very enthused about learning English and facing the challenge of integrating into this society. But keeping the mother tongue is also very important for me. My children speak Spanish with me, we enjoy speaking Spanish, but the grandchildren, well, I must say they hardly speak it at all. Only a few of them speak it at all. One of my daughters married someone from another language and so they don't speak any Spanish at all in their home. My daughter learned his language instead.

I am a member of several Spanish-language Associations which promote maintenance of the language. These groups started with immigrants from Spain but now we are mainly people from Latin America. Most of us are retired. We meet regularly to read Spanish periodicals (and she shows me three or four periodicals published in Canada by different Spanish-speaking groups), share our cultural foods and activities, and speak Spanish with each other. It's wonderful. I wouldn't miss it for anything. One of these groups has only women in it. I have some very good friends now from a variety of other Latin American countries. We need to support each other like this. If there is no promotion of the language, it will get lost. We have to do everything we can.

El punto crucial, (the crucial point) in keeping a language is with the grandchildren. Some of my grandchildren speak it and write it, some only speak a little of it, and others, most of them, don't know any Spanish. It is sad but then I'm only a grandmother; what can I say to my children? It's not up to me anymore to tell the grandchildren what to do. If they come here and tell me, *Hola abuela*, (Hi, grandma) and they like my food, and

they know it is part of their culture, what else can I expect? I wish their parents would do things differently but . . .

Me encanta mi idioma. Amo mi idioma porque es parte de mi identidad. Me siento muy orgulloso de hablar español. Yo sé que el español es una de las lenguas más bellas en el mundo. Sé que está expandida por todas partes del mundo y que cada día se expande más por el libre comercio. Pero los hijos no lo van a aprender sin que los padres ponen su parte. Es la responsabilidad de cada padre o madre preocuparse por que los hijos mantengan el idioma. Es fácil y es difícil. Fácil porque lo saben. Es su idioma. Difícil por la influencia fuera de la casa y por el estereotipo.

(I am enchanted with my language. I love my language because it's part of my identity. I feel a lot of pride in speaking Spanish. I know that Spanish is one of the most beautiful languages in the world. And it is growing all over the world, every day it is extending further in different parts of the world especially with free trade. But the children won't learn it without the parents doing their part. It's the responsibility of each father and mother to see to it that their children keep their first language. It is easy and hard. Easy because they know it; it's their language. Hard because of the influences from outside the home, and the stereotype.) [She adds that she really doesn't want to say this but it's true that in some places there are negative stereotypes of Hispanics.]

One of my granddaughters was in high school, just last year, and when she was talking to the guidance counsellor about what she would like to do after high school and she said she'd like to go into medicine, the guidance counsellor said she wasn't sure that she (the granddaughter) would be able to do it and that perhaps she should go into secretarial work instead. *Me dió rabia.* (It made me furious). This is what they tell our young

people. And they are bright, they are intelligent. But then they believe it. They start to doubt themselves. Their abilities.

I know it's important to keep the language. The youth who can speak Spanish have better job opportunities. I think some strategies to ensure that parents work on this would be to 1) prepare material for the parents in which you give information about the academic benefits of being bilingual, not only in speaking but also in reading and writing the language; 2) support the Heritage Language and other foreign language programs and support the parents who send their children to those; and 3) bring in Spanish academic materials from Latin America so that all children learn about the cultures there, not only the Latino children.

I would like to tell the Canadian society that we say we are a multicultural society and that's good, *pero una sociedad multicultural real que promueva sus idiomas de origen es una sociedad más culta, más próspera, más feliz* (but a real multicultural society that promotes its languages of origin is a more cultured, more prosperous and happier society). That's what we need to tell people.

En general, a los hijos les molesta que se les presione en hablar el español. Creo que es el método el que falla y la otra cosa es la falta del real interés de los padres porque sus hijos cuenten con otra lengua además del inglés. Tenemos q' empezar con los padres, creo, para que aprendan la importancia de mantener la lengua materna.

(In general, children are annoyed when they are being pressured to speak Spanish. I believe it is the method that is failing [this approach doesn't work] and the other thing that is lacking is the real concern of the parents that their children be able to count on another language besides English. I think we have to start with the parents, so that they

learn [understand] the importance of keeping their first language.)

Para mi, el número uno es el idioma español, animarlo hablar con mis hijos, sería ideal para mi que todos mis nietos hablasen español, no hay problema en la familia porque nos comunicamos en inglés, muy a mi pesar, yo me comunico con ellos en inglés. Pues yo soy abuela, el plano mio ya es de abuela de cualquier país. Vienen acá, comen acá, pero no soy madre; creo q' sienten q' su 'background' es español pero es como todos los canadienses después de dos generaciones ya se olvidan de dónde son, así es, no?

(For me, number one is the Spanish language, encouraging my children to speak it. It would be ideal for me if all of my grandchildren would speak Spanish; we have no problems in my family because we communicate in English; much to my dismay, I communicate with them in English. You see, I am a grandmother; my point of reference is that of a grandmother from whatever country. They come here, eat here, but I'm not their mother; I think they feel that their 'background' is Spanish but it's like all other Canadians, after one or two generations they forget where they came from. That's the way it is, no?)

Delmis' story:

I arrived in Canada at night, in the fall of 1989. There was no one there to help us when we arrived, no one who could translate for us. I had my three children with me, the oldest one was 17; the youngest was 5. My husband had died years earlier in Guatemala. My older son knew what the official was asking but he couldn't respond, he didn't know

how to tell the official that there was no father with us, that he was dead. It was the worst experience for me and my son. You feel so stupid. Then they put us in a hotel and we had no food so my son asked for pizza, it was the only word he knew how to say in English so for three days we ate nothing but pizza. My son said, "*Esta vergüenza tengo que pasar!*" (I have to get beyond this shame or disgrace!) He took a dictionary and he worked day and night with that and the television and walking up and down the street to learn names of things and in three months when I went to the eye doctor with him, the doctor asked him how long he had been learning English and he said to me that I had a very intelligent son to have learned it so quickly. My son felt totally responsible for the rest of the family. Without him I don't know what we would have done.

We speak Spanish in my home, all of us. My children are adults now; the older two, they speak it very well; I think they speak English and Spanish equally well. My younger son speaks it too but not as well, he has to hunt for the words a little more. But the one I had trouble with was my daughter, she was 15 when we came and she used to come home from school, angry, furious, and she would tear up all her papers from school and say she didn't understand a thing anyone was saying to her and she felt so stupid and she wasn't going to go back to school ever again! But then my son would sit down with her and he would patiently explain what everything meant and tell her she had to keep going. But after 4 months she said she couldn't do this anymore and she wanted to go back home. So then we had a crisis and my son and I decided we would promise her a trip back after one year if, and only if, she learned enough English to get through school. She started doing better and then she did go back and that was it; she went back to her country and saw that the friends she had had there had gone on to other things and that

she fit in better here and so she came back to Canada and started working harder and soon she could speak English and she started having friends. *Pero fue duro.* (But it was very hard).

Me? I didn't learn English very easily. I only went to school for six months because I had to find work. I didn't want to be a burden to anyone. I learned enough to go to the doctor but that was because I was so determined; I forced myself to go places alone, I didn't want my son to have to help me all the time. But he really was my teacher. He would sit down with me in the evenings and tell me which words I needed to know to go to the doctor or to look for a job and then he told me how to twist my tongue to say those words. *Nunca me reprocharon.* (My children never reproached me) for my bad English, the way I hear from some people that their children felt embarrassed with them. My children have always been very good to me. I think I am very lucky.

Hay que ser un poco rígido. (You have to be a little rigid) so that they will know that this is not just a small thing, that they will lose, but it's a language, it is their language; they were born into this language; their ancestors grew up with this language. *Pero eso quizás es suerte . . . a que le escuchan a uno, o será que Dios le da eso a uno porque uno está sola. No sé; yo digo que suerte, no sé.* (But maybe it's pure luck . . . that my children listen to me, or maybe it is that God has given me this because I am alone. I don't know; I call it luck, I don't know.).

My youngest son learned English very, very quickly. He was five when we came, he had had five years of Spanish and here after three months he said English was easier for him than Spanish and he stopped speaking Spanish at home. There were times when he wouldn't speak to me in Spanish. Why do they forget their language so fast? They

learn English so fast, but why forget their mother tongue? He said he didn't know the words anymore. So then the rest of us ganged up on him and forced him to speak Spanish with us at home. We told him that outside the door he could speak English, but in the house he had to speak Spanish. We just wouldn't respond to him if he spoke English. If he asked for a glass of milk and half his words were in English we forced him to think of the Spanish words before we opened the fridge. I also got books from the library and movies and things in Spanish and then I read to him in the evenings or my other kids read to him or we would watch a movie in Spanish. But his friends are all Canadian, English-speaking. He has had the same friends since grade one. He doesn't want to associate with Hispanics. He doesn't even want to go to Hispanic fiestas, parties, or anything Spanish. He says sometimes they turn violent. We've gone back to our country and we've also travelled to Cuba, to Mexico and he does just fine in the language there, *es aquí q' se enreda*, (it's here that he gets all mixed up). *Se amoldó*, (he moulded himself, [adapted himself]) to the Canadian way and that's fine with him.

My older two have very good jobs and they got them because they could speak two languages. I know it's important to have another language in Canada and Spanish is a good language to have, it helps you for job opportunities. That's why I insisted on my kids maintaining their Spanish. But the younger one, who is 23 now, cannot read or write in Spanish. His written Spanish is very mixed up with English and his spelling is awful. He leaves me notes, telephone messages, and it's half Spanish, half English. The other two laugh at his writing. He feels more comfortable in English. But he speaks Spanish well. In our family gatherings, when we get together, we all speak Spanish and he speaks well but . . .

As a family we didn't go out much, I almost never went out. Except to church sometimes or to visit a friend. We just stayed home a lot. I think we are a very united family. We feel close to each other. *Gracias a Dios* (thank God), we have never had the problems some people have with their children.

Yo veo raro cuando los padres hispanos están hablando inglés con sus hijos. Pienso que los están quitando lo mejor. No están tomando en serio su trabajo de padre. Eso no me gusta. Y los hijos hablando inglés con sus padres. Y tal vez los padres en la luna, y que los papás no los reprochan. Eso no entiendo

(It looks odd to me when Hispanic parents are speaking English to their kids. I think they are taking away the best [what is most important] from them [the children]. They aren't taking their role as parents seriously. I don't like it. And then the children speaking English to their parents, and the parents perhaps 'in the moon' [not understanding anything] and that the parents don't reproach the kids, that's what I don't understand.)

Yo a veces invitaba a otros amigos de mis hijos a la casa, una vez al mes, y les tenía videos en español, o les leo libros en español, y se sorprenden porque son jóvenes que no saben nada, nada del español, y les trato de explicar que es su idioma, el idioma de sus padres, pero no les interesa.

(I sometimes invited other friends to our house, once a month, and I would have videos for them or I'd read books in Spanish to them and they were surprised, because they were young people who knew nothing, nothing about Spanish, and I tried to explain to them that this is their language, the language of their parents, but they weren't interested.)

Uno mantiene sus valores en el idioma, porque los tiene de raíz y en eso se ha criado y uno sabe quién es de verdad; es la lengua materna. Lo que el niño pierde [cuando pierde

esa lengua], pues es bastante, pierde su familia, cuando se reúne con su familia no sabe decir nada, se queda en la luna y si va de regreso a nuestro país se siente como cuando uno vino aquí, que no entiende nada, apenado, pierde mucho.

(One retains one's values in the language, because one has them from the root [one's roots are formed in them], and it is in that system that one had grown up and that is where one knows exactly who one is; this is the mother language. What the child loses when he/she loses the mother tongue is, well, it is a lot; the child loses his family, and when he/she gets together with the family they won't have anything to say, stays 'in the moon', and if he goes back to his country of origin he will feel there the same way we felt when we came to Canada and didn't understand anything, ashamed, embarrassed. A lot is lost.)

Some say you learn English from your children, but I knew I couldn't keep up with them in English and I knew they'd learn it quickly enough in school. They didn't need any help from me in that but they needed me to be their parent, to keep them in our culture. Maybe I was too rigid in this, I don't know. School was always very important for me and I insisted that my children finish high school and get a university education. I was willing to overlook a lot of other things if they would show me a good report card. *Eso fue mi método. Que estudien y que saquen buenas notas.* (That was my method, that they study and that they get good grades.) Homework was always more important than anything else. I was 42 when I came in '89, but I am still strong and working two jobs. I don't want to be a burden for anyone. Life is good here. The children got student loans and scholarships to go to university. They could not have done that in my country.

It would have been good if the teachers had understood a little of our language. When my younger son started school and he didn't know a word of English and the

teachers didn't know a single word of his language, it would have been helpful if they had been able to say just one or two words to him in his language. He learned quickly enough but the beginning was hard and he felt very alone. But his teachers were very kind and gentle towards him and he made friends very quickly. When he had been in school only a month, there was one day when he didn't come home. I was frantic. So I ran down the street all the way to the school, he always had to go on a school bus because we lived quite far from the school. I ran all the way to the school and there he was. There had been a new girl in school that day and she spoke only Spanish and she was lost, she didn't know what bus to get on and so he was trying to help her but even then he knew only a word or two, how could he help her? But he already felt sorry for anyone who was new, he knew how she felt and he thought he could help her. But he never complained about school. I guess he saw how hard his two older siblings were working and he knew he had to do it too.

Uno sufre (a person suffers), when you can't converse in the language of the people. I didn't want that for my children. Now I have a grandson, six years old. I speak only Spanish to him and he responds to me in Spanish. His mother is Canadian, she doesn't speak Spanish, but she can't believe how he responds to me in Spanish. The other day I said to him that he should be drinking more water and he said, "*Yo trato*" (I try). He's very intelligent. He understands what I say. My son wants to take him back to our country to learn more Spanish.

Our Hispanic community here is losing Spanish. It's because the mothers speak only English to their children. *Hijos de papás hispanos, y solo hablan inglés.* (Children of Hispanic parents, and all they speak is English.) And there are classes on Saturdays, what

do you call them, Heritage Language classes. They could learn. But my kids never went to those. The older two because they already spoke Spanish well and the younger one because he just didn't want to. He went once and then he said it was too boring, he just didn't want to go. So I thought he would learn enough at home.

(At our first meeting Delmis suggested I talk to her daughter, whom I had known as an unhappy 15-year-old when she first came to Canada and attended the same high school as my sons. Although I wanted only the perspectives of the mothers of these families, I wondered what the daughter's perspectives might add to this discussion. I didn't realize how very much her words would add until after I had called her and enjoyed a lovely conversation with her. I then asked if she would be willing to be interviewed and have parts of that included and she, a University graduate and having done her own kinds of research in sociology, consented, quite eagerly, I thought. This is from the conversation with the daughter which was all in English.)

Teresa: This is a very interesting topic for me because I've been married for three years now, to someone from my own country and we want to have children and we really believe we will speak to our children in Spanish. It's very important for us to keep that language and the culture and traditions. When we talk to each other we use half English and half Spanish; I would say English is for the lazy moments; we know those words so well and they come so easily. Spanish is more like our security blanket, like when we want to say something that carries emotion, or that identifies us as being who we are, like if we're cooking Latin food, our conversation then would be in Spanish; we would never talk about that in English, that would feel wrong, or talking about children and our moral values. It would feel funny to do that in English, unless of course, if we were with someone

who didn't speak Spanish but I mean when my husband and I are talking to each other.

You know, I think we have an amazing family, an amazing mother, really. She was so strict with us; we had to speak Spanish at home; we had to do well in school; in fact, we could get almost anything we wanted as long as we kept our grades up in school and brought good report cards home. And we saw how hard she had to work. She made a lot of sacrifices for us. My younger brother doesn't know about those sacrifices, we shielded him from that, so he thinks like most Canadian young people think, that everything is easy and you don't have to work hard for what you want in life. But us two older ones, we saw the sacrifices she made and it had a strong influence on us.

At the beginning it was all very hard for all of us. I was mad that we had to come to a different country. I wanted to show my mom that I was not agreeing with this so I decided I was not going to like it here and I was not going to learn English. I blocked it all out. I refused. I was in my own little world. Other kids in school laughed at me and I turned a cold shoulder, as if I really didn't care. But I think seeing how my mom was suffering, and then my older brother was constantly getting after me to do better, and I finally, well, after my trip back to my country, then I finally decided it was okay to be here and I dug in and started learning English and doing better in school. We, my older brother and I, became best of friends to each other; we had only each other to rely on. I know that sounds weird but it's true; he still is my very best friend. And I think my mother had a lot to do with that. She wouldn't let us go out in the evening. We had to do our studies. And she didn't go out either. We were very private. We kept to ourselves but we also had good times in our family, laughing at ourselves and our mistakes, watching movies in Spanish.

In our school teachers kept telling us we would never get to study in a university, that we would be better off taking a trade or something; they told my brother that he should learn mechanics. That part was bad. I don't know why they thought that just because we didn't have the words in English that meant we didn't understand anything. Anyway, my mother wouldn't hear of it. She said we came here so that you could get a university education. And then my brother got a big scholarship to go to the university and later I got one and so we went and did well and now we have such good jobs, better than a lot of our Canadian classmates. It's about empowering people. Those teachers who said that, they didn't empower us. My mother had to do that.

You know, coming to Canada was in a way easy for her. In our country she was always nervous about our safety, about her sons being drafted into the military. Here, the stress was on where the next meal would come from, especially at the beginning, but here we could look forward to an education and a future if we worked for it. We became a more cohesive family, working together and learning not to sweat the small stuff. Things like people still sometimes say I have an accent, well, yes, I do, and I just admit that and go on. Like it's no skin off my back. It's minor. We just knew we had to get ahead and so that was what we worked for. We were more focused than a lot of people are, I think.

But one interesting thing was that my younger brother didn't learn to read until he was in grade 4 or 5, something like that. The rest of us were so busy doing our own thing, trying so hard to get ahead that we didn't notice he wasn't learning and it was only after we started to feel more comfortable with where we were that we realized what was going on and then we were shocked, like how could they just pass him on from one grade to the other and him not able to read. So then we sat down with him and got books from the li-

brary and worked hard with him and he learned quickly. But he is really more Canadian than the rest of us, his friends are all Canadian and that's fine but he doesn't always see things like we do. And yeah, his Spanish is not good. My mom has probably told you he speaks Spanish and he does but we are always correcting him; it's so bad, his Spanish. But you know, I think for my mom it's so important that we stay together as a family that she doesn't notice that his Spanish isn't so good, she's just glad he feels good in our family and that's where he wants to be. And it's the same with the grandson, my nephew, he speaks really no Spanish at all, but my mom thinks he does because, you know, it's funny, he can say one word in Spanish, like "abuela" and she immediately has had a complete conversation in her head with him because she's so pleased he loves her and he calls her "abuela." That's enough for her.

Elsa's story:

Hemos perdido todo lo que traíamos (but we have lost everything we came with). When my husband and I left El Salvador, we left two of our three children with my mother. Fleeing with all of them would have been too dangerous. We thought we could manage the little one; she was only two when we crossed into the States, but we could not have done it with the older two. We came to Canada in 1987 after having been in the States for several years. But we were illegal in the US; we couldn't stay there; we finally came to Canada via the 'underground' network of churches and organizations like Amnesty. Then

in Canada we had to start working on the papers to bring our other children here. It took a long time. That was very hard.

My youngest was almost 5 when we came to Canada and she had to start going to school. In grade one, she already started losing her Spanish. I said I didn't understand her if she spoke to me in English and she would get mad and go and grab whatever she wanted herself and I would stop her and tell her she had to speak to me in Spanish and so we would fight and eventually we both gave in a little because she would say a few words in Spanish and I would be tired from fighting with her and I would give her what she wanted even if she hadn't said everything in Spanish. *¿Qué se va hacer?* (What are you going to do?) She was stubborn and I had to work too so I didn't have all day just to teach her Spanish.

The biggest difficulty came when the other two came to join us in Canada and they knew nothing in English and the smallest one already spoke English well and she had forgotten about them and she'd say things like, "They are not my brother and sister! I don't want them in my house!" *Fue muy duro*. It was very hard. But they were older, they were adolescents and they really wanted to be here and they worked very hard in school and learned English very quickly. But they also kept their Spanish better than the younger one. We always insisted on Spanish in the home and with the older two it worked, they were glad to speak in Spanish because they knew it better than English but the younger one forgot her Spanish so quickly and English became much easier for her and so we were always struggling with her. Even when we brought books from El Salvador and tried reading to her in Spanish.

We always told the children we had brought them here because they were going

to have a better life here. My husband couldn't work in what he was trained for; I couldn't either. We just had to get jobs quickly in whatever. We didn't want the children to have that experience. We wanted them to have good enough English to get good jobs.

Es difícil la incorporación de una familia en este país. Es difícil mantener su cultura y sus costumbres cuando uno quiere todo lo mejor para los hijos. Aquí a sus 15 o 16 años ya se sienten con alas. Y ¿por qué? ¿Por qué no estudian?

(Keeping the family together is difficult in this country. It's difficult to maintain your culture and your customs when you want to do the best you can for your children. Here, when young people are 15 or 16 years old, they 'sprout wings', they feel like they've got wings. [They can do whatever they wish.] And why? Why not study?)

My children studied and got good jobs, and their Spanish helped them get those jobs. But I don't know if they ever use Spanish at the jobs anymore . . . so I tell my grandchildren, I have three, you need to keep your Spanish so you can also get good jobs. But they aren't keeping their Spanish. Even though they are being babysat after school every day by the other grandmother who speaks only Spanish. The first grandson spoke Spanish until he went to school but now it's actually quite funny to listen to him speaking in Spanish. He gets it all so mixed up. He tries to participate with us in a conversation but it doesn't make sense what he says.

Yo les hablo en español, empiezo en español, pero ni me entienden para nada entonces termino hablándoles en mi mal inglés para que por lo menos me entiendan, y así hablamos pero ellos solo me responden en inglés. Y si no me entienden, me preguntan en inglés y tratan de ayudarme.

(I speak Spanish to them, I start in Spanish, but they don't understand me, for

nothin', so then I speak in my bad English so that they will at least understand what I'm saying and that's the way we communicate but if they don't understand me then they will ask in English and they try to help me [say what I want to say]). *Imagínate. Yo la abuela hablándoles en inglés solo para que me entiendan.* (Imagine. Me, the grandmother having to talk to them in English just so that they will understand me.) *Es que la nueva generación es así, es más fácil para ellos en inglés.* (It's that [the thing is] the new generation is like that; English is just easier for them.)

I tell my daughter and her husband, "You should speak to your children in Spanish. You shouldn't let them lose it like this. The more languages they know the better it will be for their future." But my daughter says it takes too much time, she's too busy, the children are too involved in different things; it's just too easy to talk to them in English. Sometimes I feel bad. My English is so bad. And when we go out somewhere my younger daughter says to me, "Mom, don't talk. I'll do the talking." But I say, "Then how will I ever learn if I always depend on you? Let me talk in my poor English." And she says, "But they may not understand you and they may make fun of you." And I tell her, "It's okay with me if they make fun of me, I need the practice." So then she lets me talk.

Sometimes I hear parents say they never go out with their children because they don't want their children to feel embarrassed with them. But I don't think that is any way to be a family. I think you just have to go. I tell my children we are here for them, they'd better appreciate that this country has opportunities they wouldn't have in our own country; we came here so they would have opportunities. I want them to take advantage of those opportunities . . . but, you know, they may not; other people's children have not always taken advantage of those opportunities.

My husband and I were equally involved with the children, we both read to them and talked to them in Spanish, we both told them about our roots, about our traditions, our ancestors; we still keep our customs, especially at Christmas. I know one single mother who did everything possible to ensure that her children would speak Spanish and would get a good education and it was very difficult for her, she had to be very hard on her children but in the end the children at least speak Spanish and the family is very close. In our case, we sent the youngest daughter back to El Salvador for a few months, she's been back there several times and now her Spanish is as good as ours but her writing is awful. She lets me read her 'chat-tings' on the Net sometimes and her writing is not good.

En el lenguaje son nuestros raíces. Sin el lenguaje, ¿cómo se va a mantener los raíces? (Our roots are in our language, how are you going to maintain your roots if you don't keep your language?) A lot of people are ashamed of their customs and traditions. It shouldn't be that way. Our traditions are just as good as anybody's here. They are who we are. We should be proud of that. I have my husband to support me in this. He was always very firm that the children had to speak Spanish at home. I have a friend. She doesn't speak any English, hardly at all, and her children have lost all of their Spanish. *Es duro Es una tragedia.* (That is very hard. It's a tragedy).

Se pierde la familia acá. Y ¿sabe por qué? La misma sociedad, el materialismo, el mismo afán, eso es lo que pasa con las familias hispanas. La envidia---hay gente, mis amigos---a quién el mejor carro, a quién la más grande casa, ¿ve? La competencia. La envidia. Aquí si uno trabaja, puede comprar a su gusto todo lo que uno quiera. Y los mismos hispanos sufren de eso. Lo lleva a uno a ser menos moralmente. Lo hace que sea

uno más egoísta, sin corazón. Tenemos un dicho que dice “me lo voy a llevar entre los pies”. Y en estos afanes se pierde el idioma también. (You lose the family here, and do you know why? The society itself, the materialism, the push to get ahead, that is what is happening in the Hispanic families. Envy—there are people, my friends—whoever has the best car, the largest house, you see? Competition. Envy. Here if you work you can buy whatever you feel like buying. And Hispanics suffer from this. It leads you to become morally less [than you were]. It makes one more egotistical, heartless, selfish. We have a saying, “I will take it with me between my feet” which means being totally selfish and not concerned about others at all. And that push is what makes us lose our language as well.) And after that, the traditions, the customs, and then the family. In my view, the mother tongue is what teaches doing good for your neighbour, it is with that language that one can teach one’s children how to live with good morals and if the children learn that in the mother tongue, they will also keep it to share with the future generations, I think. Here it is only work, work, work. The family isn’t given much thought. If we thought more about our families and our children’s futures, we would insist on teaching them our traditions and customs and we would have a stronger society.)

In my family what has helped us to keep the language has been getting together as a family, maintaining our traditions, our foods. The children and the grandkids like to come home and eat together, eat what they can’t eat anywhere else. They’ll get my food here. And that’s special and that keeps us together. We Hispanics used to have strong families. Some of us still do but many of us are losing our strong families. If we kept them strong, maybe you and the rest of Canadian society would learn from us and see how good it could be for the whole society. *Pero no es así.* (But it isn’t like that).

There are too many people here who look at you funny if you speak your language. I have had people on the bus and at work, especially at work, telling me I should not be speaking in my language, even if it's to a newcomer who doesn't know much English. They seem to think I'm talking about them when I'm not. I tell them, "I'm not talking about you, let me just explain something to this person in my language," but they still look at me funny. I don't understand that. We should be glad to hear all these languages being used in this country. It adds something, a richness to the country.

Aleyda's story:

"Mami, tienes q' aprender el inglés!" (Mommy, you have to learn English.) That's what my 6-year-old daughter said to me when we first came to Canada. We came in 1987. She made me speak English. She forced me to. She wanted my English to advance along with hers. She was very concerned about me and my ability to speak the language. Every night she would sit down with me and she'd say, "Mommy, this is how you have to say this word, not like that, like this." And then she'd make me practice. I think I would say that she was really my first teacher. But you know what happened? Then she forgot Spanish. Very soon she couldn't find the words to say things in Spanish anymore. *Por interesarse en mí se olvidó de hablar español y yo estaba tan preocupada en aprenderlo junto con ella q' no notaba q' ella se estaba olvidando de su lengua materna.* (Because she was so concerned about me and how I was doing [with the language] she forgot

how to speak Spanish and I was so concerned about learning it alongside of her that I didn't notice she was forgetting her mother tongue.)

When we came there was no one to interpret for us or translate for us, *era por necesidad porque ella estaba tan enfocada en aprenderlo el inglés* (it was pure necessity that made her so focused [on learning the language]). I had to learn the language for the good of my family (and I had some sisters here that I was responsible for as well so it was for all of us). *No me puse en pensar en el daño q' yo estaba causando en mi hija.* (I didn't stop to think of the damage that I was causing for my daughter.)

I think a lot of children are like my daughter; they encourage their mothers to assimilate because they are themselves assimilating and they think that's the way it has to be. And we don't even stop to think about the damage because we're in such a hurry to get jobs and get ourselves settled. I have three children now, I'm married now and I have three different stories about what has happened to our mother tongue in our family. Three different reasons for why they are not speaking Spanish.

My daughter, well, I already told you that. My first son went to a Spanish-speaking woman for child-care for the first two years so he heard only Spanish. Then the second son was born and I put both of them into an English daycare. So my older son understands everything perfectly but as soon as he started going to school he forgot all the Spanish he knew. And the younger son doesn't know any Spanish, well, maybe a word here or there but that's about it. A few years ago I went back to Central America, not to my country but to a different one where we, with a youth group, helped an aid organization construct homes for people who had lost theirs in a hurricane and I took my older son with me. That was the greatest experience for him. He got to see how people

live over there, to see where we came from, what his origins are. It was amazing. And that's when I realized my children could still learn Spanish, even as young adults. My son's Spanish got much, much better during those three weeks we were there. Now that we are back, *hemos cambiado la política en nuestra casa*, (we have changed things in our home). We cut cable tv, and we decided to speak 100% Spanish at home. It has helped all of us a lot. Including the younger son. We speak only Spanish to him now and he is forced to learn. *Estoy esperando q' eso nos dé un buen resultado*. (I'm hoping this will produce positive results for us.) *Es una riqueza que los niños crezcan con dos idiomas. No beneficia solamente a la persona sino que tener personas así da al país, a Canadá, una riqueza, un avance en el mercaderio mundial*. (It is a [situation of] wealth when children grow up with two languages. Not only does this benefit the person, but having people like that gives the country, Canada, a kind of wealth, a position of advance [power] in the global market.) My daughter got her job because she has two languages. Even though she speaks a kind of mixed up Spanglish! *Canadá está perdiendo esa riqueza* (Canada is losing this wealth) by not taking advantage of the immigrant population and their languages.

Una de las cosas que siempre he tenido bastante duda es q' aquí en Canadá hay dos lenguas oficiales pero uno encuentra muchas persona q' no hablan dos idiomas, hablan solo uno, no hay énfasis en aprender los dos como debería ser y yo miro personas de la Africa o Europa que hablan perfectamente dos o tres o aún cuatro idiomas. Pueden mejor comunicarse con el mundo, no?

(One of the things that I've often wondered about is how, although in Canada there are two official languages, you find many people who don't speak both of them;

they speak only one of those two. There is not a lot of emphasis on learning both, as there ought to be and I see people from Africa or Europe who speak two or three or even four languages perfectly well. They can communicate better with the rest of the world, no?)

I realize that coming to Canada one has to assimilate but assimilation shouldn't mean leaving behind something that is as valuable as our first language. *Mantener la lengua es mantener la identidad.* (Maintaining the language is maintaining one's identity.) Before my older son had gone back to Central America, when people would say to him, "You're Spanish, aren't you? Say something in your language," he wouldn't be able to and he didn't want to have anything to do with that language. Now he realizes it's his heritage, it's part of where he comes from, now he's proud of it.

But do you know how my daughter was introduced to English? It was the worst way possible. She came home from school one day and there was a bit of blood on her lip and she said the teacher hit her because she had said some words in Spanish! Can you imagine? We came here from a place of violence to escape the violence and here it was in the education system itself that our children were to suffer violence. We came from a place where we were afraid to talk about our rights, that's what brought a lot of us into trouble there. How could I demand our rights here in a country that had so graciously opened its doors to us! I couldn't believe it. *Me dió rabia.* I was furious! I called up some other people from my country and found out that it had happened to their children too. I got support from someone who worked with refugees and she talked to all the parents and wrote a letter, but you know what? No one was willing to sign the letter. We were so afraid that we might be sent back to our countries.

Hemos perdido la riqueza q' es nuestra lengua, y no fue realmente nuestra culpa.

(We have lost the wealth that is our language, and it really wasn't our fault.) *La idea q' la profesora puso en la cabeza de mi hija fue que su primer idioma era erroneo, que no era aceptable, y q' el enfasis de ahora en adelante tenía que ser inglés, nada más q' el inglés.*

(The idea that teacher put into my daughter's head was that her first language was erroneous, that it was not acceptable and that the emphasis from now on had to be on English, nothing but English.) No wonder my daughter would sit down in front of me, facing me, and would watch my lips when I said words in English and correct my pronunciation. She was my teacher.

I know other people, other families where the mothers don't speak any English hardly at all and the children only speak English and the communication in the family is lost, totally *perdida* (lost), *es una pena*, (it's a tragedy). I learned because my daughter forced me to learn. I am indebted to her for that, *pero la defraudé*, (but I cheated her) without knowing what I was doing. *Ahora yo me siento defraudada yo misma*. (Now I feel cheated myself.) I am not able to communicate what I want to say to my children in my language. *¡Que fracaso q' no hice enfasis en mantener la lengua!* (What a failure I was that I didn't emphasize maintaining our language!) It's like giving my children dehydrated water. I try to give them the whole essence of what it means to be Hispanic. They have the skin colour of a Hispanic, they have the brown eyes, they are Hispanic but yet they aren't. They're only half this and half that. I want my children to know my story. I want them to know what it felt like when I was only 12 and I came running home from school because it was my brother's 23rd birthday and I was going to surprise him and tease him and I got home and he wasn't there; he never came home. And the silence in our house, the fear, the anxiety, the desire for vengeance, the hope that was never

realized. My brother was one of the first to be 'taken' by the military. How can my children be Hispanic if they understand nothing about how it feels to lose someone like that? I can't explain adequately the magnitude of what it means to lose your first language. I think we only realize this as our children grow older and we see that they are not the children we thought we had raised. They are someone else's children, almost. There is so much you want to give to your children but you can't if they don't speak your language.

As adults our ability in English will never be what theirs is. And we want our children to do well in school and everything here so we leave the mother tongue and all of that world. And I think it is definitely harder for single parents whether they are mother or father. When there are two, then one of them can insist on keeping the language. I know one family where the father was ill and at home all the time and he was the one to insist that in the home they speak only Spanish and it worked. In our whole Hispanic community in the church the daughter in this family is the only one with perfect Spanish. The other kids hardly speak it at all. A single parent has so many other responsibilities, especially when you first come to Canada. It's too much to be thinking about the language as well as putting a roof over our heads and food for our bodies. It's too much. *No se da cuenta de lo q' está pasando con la lengua.* (You don't realize what is happening to the language). *Y uno se siente de menos, siente q' no cumplió su responsabilidad como padre.* (And you feel bad; you feel that you didn't fulfill your responsibility as a parent.) As a parent it's your job to maintain the culture, the customs, the language. You know, in the Hispanic community, because it's quite large here, you hear a lot of critical comments. People say, 'Did you know that so-and-so's children

don't speak any Spanish? *¡Que descuido! ¡Que vergüenza! Parece que no se sienten orgullosos de nuestra cultura.* (What negligence! What an embarrassment! It seems like those parents don't feel proud of our culture.' That's what the people say. And such commentaries affect the family. They affect how you feel about yourself as a parent and about your children. Canadians aren't aware that these things are going on. They don't understand the struggles within ourselves.

La misma situación y la necesidad de integrarse nos prohíbe mantener nuestra lengua materna. Es como una presión invisible que no se nota pero existe. Aquí solo hay futuro si yo aprendo el nuevo idioma y me asimilo. Si no asimilamos, no encontramos empleo, no tenemos oportunidades. (It is the situation [of being an immigrant] and the necessity of integrating that prohibits us from maintaining our mother tongue. It's like an invisible pressure which you don't notice but it exists. Here, there is a future only if you learn the new language and assimilate. If we don't assimilate we won't find work, we won't have opportunities.)

La sociedad no está educada a q' los dos idiomas son importantes. Esta énfasis no existe. Incluso para muchas persona canadienses. Hubiéramos podido expandir más oportunidades para el país si la gente manejara más q' un solo idioma. (The society is not educated, trained to understand that it is important to have two or more languages. This emphasis doesn't exist. Not even for Canadians themselves. We could have expanded the opportunities for the country if more people would know more than just one language.) . I think most teachers are unaware of what is happening to the children in their classes. Their goal is to teach them English, and there is no flexibility to allow for another language, or to think that a child may need another language as well in her life.

One problem is the people. They say, “English please!” I have found this at work especially. When I speak to someone, a newcomer at work who doesn’t know a lot of English yet and I’m trying to explain things to her, and I talk to her in Spanish, then others say, “English please!” It’s like our language is offensive to them. I know the first responsibility for keeping the language is in the family but the society also has a role in it. Parents can’t do it alone if the society keeps saying “Don’t”. Young people want to belong. They don’t want to feel alone or left out; so the society has to give some importance to keeping the mother tongue, whatever it is.

Porque la lengua materna es la identidad de la persona; en esa lengua es su cultura, su . . . todo, todo, todo . . . es su identidad, si lo pierde, no sabe ni de donde es ni de su herencia. Quizas es por ser del ‘tercer mundo’. Las familias quieren pertenecer a algo bueno. (Because the mother tongue is the identity of the person; in this language is his/her culture, his/her . . . everything, everything . . . it is their identity, and if they lose it, they won’t know where they come from nor anything about their heritage. Maybe it is because of being from the ‘third world’; families want to belong to something good.) And not all of us have the same capacity to insist on Spanish in the family. I was alone and my daughter was treated badly in school; she wanted only to leave that language behind, to learn English. So I tried my best to accommodate her, to learn it along with her. I was young and it wasn’t that hard for me. But it was only later that I realized what I had done. Now I wish I could do it over. I think it’s especially hard for mothers who are so close to their children, who follow their development with care; it’s especially hard for them to insist on something in the home that maybe isn’t easy for the kids. I think many of us feel cheated. We feel like we were doing the best for our families and it’s not turning out to

be the best for us. We see our children are not the children of our culture. One time, I came to my son's school at recess and I saw him pushing a little girl. I was horrified. I called him over and told him that in our culture you don't push girls; you may push a boy but never a girl. In our culture, little girls are protected. I was so embarrassed by what he did. He didn't know anything about this. But it's things like that, like from our culture, that we want to pass on to our children. We want to be able to take what is good from this culture and also what is good from our culture. It shouldn't be that you have to choose either one or the other but it seems to be that way, that you can't teach your children the values from our culture while they're learning the values of this culture.

I understand English very well but I can't express myself entirely in it. I don't understand the sense of humour and I want my children to understand our sense of humour but they don't. They can't laugh at my jokes. They can't even appreciate the music of our culture. To do that you need to have the language. Music is the language of a culture; if you don't have the words for the music you can't really understand it or appreciate it and you can't understand the culture behind it.

Language is the first connection with the culture; if you lose that connection, you are handicapped. I feel like a disabled person trying to connect my children to my culture, to the moral values of my culture, to their *antepasados* (forebears). What do my children know of *antepasados*? Nothing. I lose so much of the connection with them because I can't teach them what I want them to learn; I can't connect in English. I feel handicapped. I feel like I'm giving them only a part of who I am, of who they are.

Chapter Five

Discussion

Emerging patterns and designs

“Ethnic design is often labelled primitive . . . that is a misnomer . . . the designs are neither simple, uncomplicated nor crude . . . there’s endless enchantment in seeing the patterns emerge from their background.”
(Ziek de Rodriguez & Ziek, 1978, p. xii)

From the passionate life history narratives of Spanish-speaking immigrant women interlaced with significant and salient understandings from previous research into mother tongue loss and maintenance, and interwoven with comments and *testimonios* of other immigrant language learners, we see an image emerging, a weaving presenting us with particular designs, particular knowings. For some readers, the work in progress, the way the threads have intertwined or moved in juxtaposition or even countered each other, may have been as pleasing to the senses and as valuable as any emergent design. For some, threads of knowledge or resonances from personal experience of first language loss may shape the slant from which to interpret the designs in this weaving. Others may hear echoes of previous understandings which lead them to listen more closely to the immigrant and language loss experience. What are the new perspectives that the viewing of this weaving leaves us with?

One of the things I have appreciated most about the Latin American people who graciously call me their friend has been their celebration of life: in all its imperfections, its sordid realities, its profound beauty, life is meant to be celebrated. This celebratory stance toward life and indeed toward their language was what I heard first in nearly all the interviews. Life is good because life is. At my thesis proposal defence one of the

committee members commented that in asking women to talk about mother tongue loss and how that has affected their family life, I might be listening to a lot of grief. I thought so too. But I should have remembered that these women know how to celebrate. These are the women that I remember gathering together to celebrate birthdays, bringing each other lavish gifts along with plenty of Latin American hugs and kisses, because they understood the need to feel special and to be celebrated even in tight economic circumstances. These are the women who would get together to shower a young teenage mother and her new baby with gifts and love, not simply because family is of greatest importance to them, which it is, but because they knew instinctively that here was a young life that needed celebrating and supporting, and that's what they were good at, leaving the Canadians to do the pessimistic wondering about what the future might hold for this child. I should have remembered that Latin American women are not only the caretakers of their family's language, culture, and destiny (Kouritzin, 2000b), but also the celebrators of family, language, culture, and destiny. A sense of 'joie de vivre' was what I saw coming through first in the interviews: 'joie de vivre' coupled with a very strong emotional connection to their cultural and linguistic identity, coupled with deep gratitude for the place they and their families have found in Canada, coupled with a profound desire to be able to communicate deeply with their children and grandchildren.

In an article reflecting on a study that examined the accessibility of ESL classes for adults, Kouritzin (2000b) zeroes in on one point or "node" of access where "the first language/culture and the second language/culture collide" (p. 15): where a woman is expected to be a "keeper" of one culture and language while, at the same time, expected to get to know the new culture and language in order to negotiate and guide her family's

way into that culture and language. On the one hand, women are required to reject the English language as they care for the family's emotional and cultural well-being, while on the other hand they need to know the target language of the new culture to be able to "maximise the social resources available to their families" (p. 15). This, says Kouritizin, represents contradictory roles, assigned to immigrant women by our society's as well as their culture's ideology of family.

As I was reading the women's stories looking for emergent themes and wondering how to explain what I perceived to be nearly contradictory statements about language use in their homes along with a good amount of air time taken up with espousing the beauty of the Spanish language and how it is growing, and needs to grow, I began to see that what these women were echoing were those contradictory roles. I asked them to tell me their immigrant story in linguistic terms, to tell me what was happening to their mother tongue in their families and what had happened since they had arrived in an English-speaking environment, and their story immediately embraced the first part of this contradictory role: the provider of emotional sustenance for their families. Most of them no longer need to go to schools to meet with teachers, they no longer need to take children to the doctor; even the concern for job opportunities for their children is for the most part resolved. Their "point of reference" as Yoanna so eloquently said, "is as a grandmother of whatever culture." In wonderful Latin American fashion, they are still the ones who look after the emotional well-being of the family, who keep the family together, and not only together but together as a Spanish-speaking family, who look after the family 'jewels' of language and heritage. In fact, the longer their families are in Canada, and the more the younger members of the families move in English circles, the more responsible

these women feel to be the “keepers” of their culture for their families as it becomes more and more obvious that no one else will do this. And keeping the first culture, as Kouritzin argues (2000b), is “impossible through the language of another culture” (p. 27).

It is no wonder that the three older women in the group spoke at length about their love for and the beauty of Spanish, about what they saw as its increasing use in the world and the need to raise its status in Canada. As two of them said, “You’ve given us a chance to talk about our language, our beautiful language.” It is no wonder that four of the women announced very early on in their story-telling that everyone in their families speaks Spanish and that they insist on Spanish in their homes. That is what you do to maintain a language and a culture! That is one part of “the contradictions they are living” (Kouritzin, 2000b, p. 30). That is the ideal they strive for!

Only two of the six women, Aleyda and Elsa, would admit to being able “to maximize [to any extent] the social resources available to their families” (ibid., p. 15). These two were the youngest in the group and, except for Elsa who came with her husband, neither had teenage or adult children when they arrived to whom that responsibility could be deferred. Aleyda came with only one child; the two younger sons who were born here in a later marriage still require that she be able to access social resources for her family. Elsa also came with a small child but she was able, several years later, to bring the two adolescents that had stayed behind in their country. Her accessing of resources was an acute need when those two arrived in Canada without the language yet needing to fit into a family that had already made significant forward strides in language learning and integrating into this society. They essentially had to jump through multiple hoops all at one time, hoops which their parents and younger sister had already jumped

through consecutively. Elsa and Aleyda were forced to assume the role of “resource-access-er” for their children and thus, it seems to me, were living the language losing-language keeping dilemma in a more immediate way even within themselves. Aleyda, in particular, saw herself as being very much to blame for the loss of the first language in her home but recognized also that it was her need to negotiate the world outside the home for her daughter that had prompted her to act as she did.

The other women had adult children, or near adult as in the case of Delmis, who were much more able than their mothers to access the social world around them. Delmis, Fanny, and Yoanna needed to access that world for employment for themselves and found that frustrating and hard; “*uno sufre*” (one suffers), “*se siente apenada*” (you feel embarrassed [when you can’t speak freely to people]) was their common evaluation of their efforts to access the English world. But there were some things they did not have to do alone; they had older children who already spoke some English or were extremely motivated to learn it quickly and who then helped with interpreting the younger children’s school concerns and with accessing other social and medical needs. Learning the dominant language was certainly part of that accessing (Guardado, 2002; Schecter & Bayley, 2002) and in some cases home language practices were also altered, especially in families where these adult children lived in their own homes and not with their mothers. With the children accessing the social world around them for themselves and for younger siblings, the mothers (grandmothers) were freer to maintain their role of emotional sustenance provider for the family. And freer then to expound the virtues of their beloved language, freer to hold their cultural values up as *the* norms, freer to believe, for a while anyway, that the children and grandchildren might yet speak the language and really did still be-

long to their Hispanic culture. Where Aleyda and Elsa began their narratives with statements like “We’ve lost everything we brought with us” and “I cheated my daughter and now I feel cheated too,” the other four women began their stories with “How wonderful to be able to talk about my beautiful language! In my family we all speak Spanish. Why wouldn’t we speak Spanish—it’s such a beautiful language!”

All the women except Aleyda lamented their poor English, and blamed their age or time constraints or the immigration system that didn’t allow them to study more when they first came; one (Fanny) even accused me of being at fault for her lack of English because of my moving away to Colombia in 2001. (She had often expressed the desire to come to my ESL classes which were in her area of the city but her work schedule did not allow it.) One could question whether some of these women might have actually erred on the side of rejecting English in order to continue to care for their families as Latinas. They would not say they had chosen this, and I’m quite sure they did not make a conscious decision to *not* learn English, but, on the other hand, to ensure their ‘care-taking’ of their families, even now as grandmothers--providing emotional support, preserving the cultural values and traditions, teaching the children and grandchildren about their heritage--they need an energetic, active identification with their mother tongue. Learning English and integrating into the new social systems was, for several of them, quite simply less of a priority than trying to ensure that the family would maintain the mother culture along with the mother tongue.

Although I did not ask these women to participate *because* I felt they had a strong identification with and awareness of their first language culture, I was struck in the interviews by the near-ferocity with which they defended their connection to their cultural and

linguistic heritage. “Why wouldn’t we speak Spanish in our families, it’s such a beautiful language!” “Spanish is growing all over the world and we need to be part of that growth.” “We’re in a democratic country, why not speak Spanish?” “It’s the only way to remain connected to the on-going struggle in our countries.” Such refrains echo their identification with and their love for their language and their deep desire to pass this love for the language on to the next generation. Such refrains also carry the sense of the *testimonio*, the call to become involved in something greater than one’s puny life here in Canada (Fanny’s sentiment, especially) where things are relatively easy. The personal identification with their culture included a continuing awareness of the struggle for life and for justice in their places of origin and, for most of them, a continuing desire to identify with that struggle and to bring it to the attention of the larger society here. It was what had given meaning to their lives before; they, particularly Fanny and Yoanna, and, in a renewed sense, Aleyda, needed to continue to find meaning in that. It was only after these initial statements identifying themselves as strong and passionate cultural and linguistic maintainers that they started to talk about the struggle to keep the language alive in their families, about the disappointment of children and grandchildren who refuse to, or cannot, respond to them in Spanish, about the chagrin at having to use “*mi mal inglés*” (my bad English) to speak to the grandchildren.

One could be excused for wondering whether by keeping their families together, within the traditions of their culture, the families then would take the responsibility of caring for their mothers as they age. So far only Maria is living with some of her children. That was the arrangement when she arrived in 1990 and it continues--she will cook and do the housework and they will provide her a place to live. I don’t know whether the

others are assuming that eventually they will move in with their children: Delmis twice expressed her desire that she not become a burden to anyone, which is why she is working two full-time jobs; Fanny suggested that living with family is very difficult and told me many times how happy she is in her little apartment, able to make a bit of money to send back to her country for development projects and do her own things; and Yoanna seemed relieved to have the burden of direct mothering off her shoulders and obviously was gaining a lot satisfaction from her numerous group involvements in her retirement. Aleyda and Elsa are further from retirement than the others. Elsa, in the interview as well as in previous conversations, spoke passionately about the closeness of Hispanic families as compared to the coldness of most Canadian families and how I (directly?) and the larger Canadian society could benefit from their example. Other Hispanic friends at other times have questioned and criticized the Canadian practice of institutionalizing our elderly. Such comments lead me to believe that part of the “keeper-of-the-culture” role these women enact is exactly that unconscious assumption that passing on their first culture to their children will ensure they will be taken care of by their children in their old age.

Beyond this strong sense of embracing one side of the contradictory roles that are forced onto immigrant mothers and grandmothers, there are 6 themes or designs that I see emerging:

1) A deep sense of gratitude to this country:

I thought there would be a lot more lamenting about how things were going in their families but the overarching feeling was one of gratitude expressed particularly eloquently by Maria and Delmis, but reiterated by Fanny and Yoanna. The feeling was one of gratitude that their children and grandchildren were employed, even though for some

that employment was not in their chosen field, and that life essentially was better for the children than it had been for the parents themselves. There was also the recognition that not everything was great here but, along with impassioned words about the beauty of their language, came words of appreciation for Canada, for having been able to immigrate and give their children better opportunities. While at first blush, one may feel gratified as a Canadian that people who come here are deeply grateful for the relative peace and quiet they find in our country, one needs to also ask whether it isn't exactly that posture of deep gratitude that allows for and encourages loss of mother tongue and mother culture, blinding the immigrant family to what is happening to the mother tongue until it is too late. It may be that sometimes our very ingratiating 'bending over their wounds and needs' also silences their individual needs to maintain culture and religion and language. White missionaries still continue to hand out bags of sweets ahead of the armies that go in and destroy. We need to ensure that immigrant languages and cultures find a way to remain intact and viable even while they become integrated into a culture they find amenable because of its relative non-violence, peace and prosperity.

2) The symbolic meaning attached to the use of Spanish:

The opposite side of the 'gratitude to Canada' coin is the frustration these women felt with their children and their community (and also with the larger Canadian society, but that will be addressed in #4) for seemingly disparaging the mother tongue and allowing it to slip from use, at times even encouraging its slip from use. Their 'joie de vivre' was contrasted with an equally energetic sense of anger and frustration at this depreciatory attitude toward their mother tongue from within their own families and community. The mother tongue, these women declared, is more than simply a commodity we identify

with, more than something we have at our side to utilize in expressing ourselves. *La madre lengua es mi identidad*. (The mother tongue is my identity). *Es la lengua materna que enseña*. (It is the mother tongue that teaches [the morals and values]). This sense of personifying the mother tongue, humanizing it, was more than “I find my identity in my mother tongue,” although they said that, too. It was that the mother tongue incarnates, embodies that identity. Without Spanish, these women said, there can be no identity as a Hispanic person. The very act of speaking and being spoken to in Spanish is what teaches values and morals and a way of being that is Hispanic. Whether one is explicitly being taught or not, one is inculcated to the values and mores of a certain culture through the sounds and the sounding of a particular language (see also Rodriguez, 1982, for his own humanizing of the sounds of his language and the story of his loss of identity when those sounds disappeared).

Perhaps it is just such a strong identification with the mother tongue that sometimes leads immigrant students to wander out of our ESL classes for, as it appears to us, no good reason. It may be that the sounds of the language they are learning are so at odds with their very identity, that they are so afraid of losing their identity along with their values and cultural mores in those sounds, they simply cannot continue in classes to force themselves into new sounds and the new persona those sounds signify.

All of the women except for Delmis, who said she was very lucky that her children still continued to speak Spanish with her, expressed deep frustration over the lack of mother tongue use among their children in particular. The grandchildren could be excused, it seemed, but it was their own, now adult, children who were either too involved in the materialism of this culture, too preoccupied with work and their own busy lives, or

too nonchalant and accepting of the status quo, to bother with trying to keep the mother tongue, and this these grandmothers found frustrating and disappointing. (Aleyda was disappointed that her children didn't speak Spanish but blamed herself for that loss, not them.) Fanny, Maria, and Elsa, in particular, expressed near outrage that their children were not passing on the language to the grandchildren and said they often got after their children for this but to no avail. Excuses from the children such as that they didn't want *their* children to suffer the way they had when they first came to Canada and couldn't understand anything were accepted by the women--they also didn't want their families to suffer; however, at the same time, they found it difficult to understand the changing of the identity, the metamorphosis happening in their families which left them with, in effect, non-Hispanics in Hispanic families. They found it hard to identify with the new persona that their children were taking on in English.

Elsa talked about the frustration of needing to speak to her own grandsons in her '*mal inglés*', her poor English, resulting in conversations that were less authentic, less genuine than what she desired. Maria and Fanny talked about a lessening of communication, fewer phone calls and greater difficulty in understanding their grandchildren, and vice versa, because of the language barrier. Yoanna contented herself with being "just a grandmother" now but commented sadly that her communication with the grandchildren was also less than what she would wish for. Delmis, while glad for the maintenance of the language in her family, nevertheless also wondered whether her grandson would actually keep the language.

In a later interview with Aleyda, I asked her about the humanizing of the mother tongue that I had heard in several of the interviews, and she said it was hard to explain

but that yes, definitely “*La madre lengua es mi identidad.*” (The mother tongue is my identity). It’s not just the words of the language, she said, but the way of speaking, the way of using the words, the language, to teach morals and values, the way of coming close to a person, the way of joking as well. This was why she wanted to take her son back to Central America as a teenager so that he would hear those sounds, hear the words being spoken, see the gestures that go with the words, to learn that he was from somewhere, that he had a past and a connection to a place that was not Canada. She wanted her son to see the situation (of poverty and injustice) that continues in Central America and to connect his mother tongue with that situation and not only with the popular music and movies he is able to access in Canada. Aleyda, who had been the negotiator of the new culture for her family, has in the last few years become more aware of what is happening with the first language and the first culture in her family, and sees herself becoming a much stronger promoter and keeper of her culture and language for her children. Even with her new-found understanding, however, and with all her efforts at language keeping (cutting off Cable TV, speaking only Spanish in the home) she was more passionate in her last interview than in the previous ones about the very real difficulties of inculcating Hispanic values, identity, and a sense of belonging to that heritage in her children.

3) A sense of ambivalence about their role as grandmother in L1 loss in the family:

The three women who have grown grandchildren and the one who has adolescent grandchildren all said that it is difficult to communicate on any topic in depth with the grandchildren. One woman, after conceding that her grandchildren hardly spoke any Spanish at all, said, “But then it’s not my role anymore to have long conversations with them. That’s their parents’ role; I’m just a grandmother.” (This sentiment echoes the find-

ings of Wang's [1999] study of immigrant women's perceptions of their role.) The role of the grandmother, these women seemed to say, is to be positive about and towards the grandchildren, find joy even in difficult circumstances, be grateful that children and grandchildren are doing well in this country. In fact, if speaking the mother tongue is going to involve the young people in questionable social behaviour, then the greater concern for the well-being of the youth and the family must take precedence (see similar perceptions of the parents in Schechter and Bayley's [2002] study).

At the same time, these women were deeply desirous of close relationships with their children and grandchildren. They wanted their children and grandchildren to know who they, the grandmothers, are, to know where they have come from, what their own past history was like. Aleyda wanted her children to understand what it felt like to have a brother taken by the military and never returned. That impacted who she turned out to be, who she still is today, and she would like her children to understand that and yet, she said, without the language it was very hard to make them understand. The largest part of every interview with Fanny involved talking about the need to make the next generation aware of what happened in her country of origin, to not become so concerned with getting rich here that you forget *la lucha*, the struggle for justice. Maria talked about calling up her grandchildren and the sadness she felt when they didn't return her calls or when they only spoke English on the phone. She said she gave up calling them. Yoanna seemed to have the most outside interests to keep her occupied and perhaps because of that seemed more resigned to simply having the grandchildren "come and eat here and tell me they like the food, but that's all."

These women have a deep desire for communication with their family members

and lamented that this is not easy when grandchildren and children use the dominant language as their preferred language. Although several, it seemed, would have put a fair amount of pressure on the children and grandchildren to keep their mother tongue, Yoanna said explicitly that putting pressure on children to speak a mother tongue can have consequences that are negative for all concerned. She said children should be encouraged, and seeing the L1 and the first culture in a positive light in the society would help in the encouragement, but that undo pressure should not be used as it could result in even more loss (see also Guardado's suggestion (2005) that parental pressure can have negative consequences for the maintenance of the language). Several of the women commented that their children or grandchildren seemed to want to return to their L1 in their later teens, mainly because of widely popular Spanish music and movies. The women were hopeful that this would bring a renewed sense of belonging to the Hispanic culture.

4) Concerns about racism in Canadian society:

Although these women defended their culture and language as beautiful and growing and expanding into all parts of the world, they also felt the devaluing of their culture and language by the dominant language and society. Yoanna said she didn't really want to dwell on this but that it was true that the larger society viewed Hispanics with negative stereotypes. She also said teachers don't have the same high expectations in academics of Hispanics that they have of other students. It infuriated her when her granddaughter wanted to go into medicine and the school guidance counsellor suggested she might not be able to succeed in those rigorous studies, in spite of good grades. Fanny also said teachers sometimes think Hispanic kids are not as capable as others. She said it

would be good for Hispanics to have more doctors and highly educated people working in their respective professions in Canada to encourage young people to believe they could also succeed at those professions. She said young people want to model themselves after someone out there and if the only Hispanics they see in the public eye are the movie stars, they will assume they can't do anything else.

Most of them talked about being chastised by Canadians for speaking Spanish in public. The larger society, they said, was not 'educated' to understand the wealth that having people proficient in more languages can bring to a country and instead saw only the burdensome aspects of having immigrants come. They said they felt devalued by the dominant society when they were told to speak English at the job or on the bus (Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco, 2001, as well as Macedo, 2000, reiterate that this is a common feeling among immigrants living in the US). Aleyda, Yoanna, Fanny, Maria, and Elsa expressed a strong desire that they be viewed as a positive addition to the multiculturalism in Canada. They were also quick to point out that multiculturalism in Canada is in name only and that Canadian culture would be richer, *más culta*, (more cultured) if there were a better understanding of what real multiculturalism can do for a country. The different immigrant cultures should be given much more positive attention, they said.

Along with wishing their culture could be seen in a more positive light and its values recognized in Canadian society, they also conceded that problems exist in the Latino community, particularly among the youth. Two of the women commented that their teenage children or grandchildren did not mix with other Latin youth and several mentioned the "bad reputation" that Latin youth supposedly have. Delmis said her younger son had never had Latino friends and, although he spoke Spanish with her at home, he

would not use it with friends and she was very supportive of that. Yoanna said her daughter and son-in-law were discouraging their sons from speaking Spanish at all in an effort to keep them away from the bad influences of Hispanic gangs. She also said her younger son, when he was a teenager, was negatively influenced by other Hispanic teens. While the women were deeply desirous of maintaining their mother tongue with their grandchildren they opted for language loss if that would keep their grandchildren from engaging in socially reprehensible behaviour.

5) Schools as places of L1 loss:

Yoanna, Maria, and Fanny told about their children or grandchildren being the target of taunts in school because of their difficulties with English and about the different ways they dealt with this: Yoanna's son refused to put up his hand or speak until he was sure he could speak correctly so as not to be taunted the way other L2 children in his class were, (even though this nearly caused him to be placed in a class for learning disabled children); Maria's grandson went to school under much duress; and Fanny's grandchildren fought back. Delmis said her youngest son had kind, understanding teachers but her 15-year-old daughter had a very difficult time, although she blamed that on her daughter's temperament and anger at being in this new country. The daughter later reiterated this view. Aleyda, being also much closer to her children's experiences because of her younger age, expressed a lot of anger and resentment toward the school for imposing its language in a violent, thoughtless way. Her early experience with her daughter being slapped across the mouth for speaking a few words in Spanish coloured her feeling toward the education system in Canada, she said. She had a hard time trusting teachers (and principals) after this. (At our final meeting time, she brought an original copy of the letter

she and several other parents had had translated and sent to the school. The response from the principal, she said, was that two signatures on a letter was not enough evidence to warrant any kind of investigation and so nothing was ever done.) Aleyda's sense was that she and her daughter had been told in no uncertain terms that their first language would be useless to them in this country and that English was the only language that counted here. She compared this imposition to that of the military oppressors who destroyed so much of her country. Aleyda, with a strong sense of social justice and equality, was also the one who spoke most urgently about the need for ESL teachers, both adult and children's, to be more open to and more knowledgeable of different cultures and to realize that maintaining a first language does not mean the family is not desiring to learn the dominant language. Several others voiced this same concern though not as forcefully as Aleyda did.

The concern about the school not valuing the language their children and grandchildren came with echoes what Latin American parents in Toronto reported in studies by Bernhard et al. (1997, 1998), and Bernhard and Freire (1999), as well as the study by Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. (2001). Schecter and Bayley (2002) likewise found that schools are generally not interested in exploring parental involvement in the education of their children, not even to remedy a situation or to acknowledge differing understandings of a situation. These women understood and recognized that their children would learn English in school, but they also understood that they couldn't rely on the school to encourage them to keep their first language. Keeping the mother tongue, they realized, would be hard and lonely, and often thankless, work. What they wished for, as did the parents in the Toronto studies, was that the schools could have taken a few steps to meet them in

their dilemma. They would have appreciated feeling a sense of support from the school for the maintenance of their mother tongue, just a sense that the children's first language was also important. As Delmis and Fanny said, it would have helped to have had even one teacher who could speak just a few words in the children's first language. Yoanna, although she didn't fault the school for her son's early difficulties, was sharply critical of the school for its attitude toward Hispanics, as mentioned earlier.

6) Concern about the materialistic influence of the dominant society:

Elsa's words, "*Hemos perdido todo lo que traíamos*" (We have lost everything we came with), reflect the deep sense of loss not only of the language but also of relationships, values, customs, ways of being family, ways of expressing and viewing life, that these women feel their families are losing. Elsa's three children have done very well, all obtaining very good jobs, and getting those jobs *because* of their abilities in Spanish. And yet, she said she felt she had lost her children to the materialism of the North American society. Her daughter and son-in-law were too busy and too preoccupied with their work to teach their children any Spanish. Teaching the children Spanish, said the daughter, took too much time. Elsa, I think, longed for the closeness she had with her extended family back in her home country. She said losing your children to materialism is worse than them not speaking Spanish. At the same time, she said she was very proud and lucky that her children had done so well.

Several of the women said they wished it were possible to take what they saw as good in this culture and discard what they perceived as negative, but that they often felt overwhelmed by the negative values and expectations of this culture. This is similar to what has been found in many other studies (Bhela, 2003; Kouritzin, 1999; Pacini-

Ketchawbaw, 2001; Tannenbaum & Berkovich, 2005). Their fears were primarily that their children and grandchildren are picking up the ways of the new culture too readily and then dropping their first culture ways and values equally quickly. In spite of these fears, there was also an honest appraisal of what happens in a contact situation with a dominant language and culture and an open recognition that without some very hard work, immigrants' children and grandchildren will adopt English as their functional mother tongue and lose their heritage along with their first and real mother tongue.

As these stories demonstrate, the urge to assimilate in language as well as in customs is strong for new immigrants. In order for their families to find their place in this society and get ahead economically and educationally, the dominant language must be learned. That English inevitably replaces the use of the first language even within the family is a fact these women intermittently rail against, try to prevent, then try to understand, cope with and accept as a lesser of two evils, the larger evil being socially unacceptable behaviour from their grandchildren. What these women implore Canadian society to do is to recognize the wealth that they bring with them as immigrants with another language and another way of understanding, to recognize that keeping one's mother tongue does not mean a lack of desire to learn the new language and that instead they represent a resource for the country with their abilities in another world language. All of the women reiterated at the end of the interview times that if this project could help teachers and educators become more cognizant of the struggles of immigrant children and families, of the sacrifice immigrant families make in order to learn English, and of the richness immigrant children and families bring to the classroom and the society, then they would feel totally rewarded for their time. What they wish to see is that Canadians in

general gain a greater appreciation of the richness that is added to Canada's mosaic through the maintenance of many different mother tongue languages rather than pushing for monolingual hegemony.

There is a tremendously powerful urge to let go of one's own language in order for the family members to find their places in the new society. There is an equally powerful urge to keep the mother tongue alive, an urge that perhaps is not even so apparent during the first 'settling' years of immigration but that becomes more apparent as the children grow up and it becomes obvious to the parent/grandparent that "these are not the children I thought I had raised" (Aleyda; see also Bhela, 2003). Immigrating is a complex and chaotic process in which various priorities vie for top position. The keeping of the mother tongue is one of those priorities but it often requires more perseverance than parents are able to produce, given their other responsibilities and tasks. Losing the mother tongue, as these women note, is, on the one hand, something to be resisted with all the energy one can muster because the Spanish language is beautiful and worth keeping, because families are not the same without it, and because children can only really identify themselves as being part of a family, a community, and a heritage if they speak the language of that family, that community, and that heritage. On the other hand, the loss of the mother tongue is also something to be faced with the same "*ni modo*" fatalistic, accepting, viewpoint with which they face their other dilemmas. These women will continue to celebrate life and family in whatever way they can, with or without the language.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

Taking the weaving from the loom

“ . . . to remove the weaving you must decide where, at what length, to cut the fringe . . . when all the warp ends have been knotted, smooth out the fringe and cut it to the length you desire” (Thorpe & Larsen, 1967, p. 35).

The Spanish word *inquietud* contains within its perfunctory translation of “restlessness or uneasiness” a healthy sense of something niggling or rumbling beneath the surface, a question waiting to be formed. My goal for this research project was to explore how Spanish-speaking families experience the loss of their mother tongue when they immigrate to Canada and learn English. That question emerged from my growing *inquietud* as I began to read, in the Master’s program, about the other side of second language learning, the side I as a teacher of English had paid scant attention to but which my adult students were living every day: the losing of the mother tongue within their families. This growing *inquietud* was spurred on by questions such as “not *how* do we, but *should* we take English and get it inside kids’ heads; what are the consequences?” (Kouritzin, 1999, p. 10). It led me to listen again to the stories of former ESL students, then to ponder my own experience of language loss in my family, and finally, because I had heard such *inquietudes* among my Spanish-speaking friends, to allow the question to grow into a research project looking at the perspective that some Spanish-speaking immigrant mothers bring to the experience of mother tongue losing and keeping.

I have used the metaphor of weaving for the process of creating this thesis while employing the metaphor of backstrap weaving to describe the process of creating a new identity and life in Canada that the participants in this project are engaged in, utilizing threads and colours and sounds from their previous life and interlacing them with those

from their new home. This thesis weaving is nearing completion. I get up from the mat, undo the backstrap cords that have held me intimately attached to this weaving, and relinquish the kneeling position that has been my niche from which I have both watched and instigated the intertwining and interlacing of the colours and threads of previous research, immigrant voices, and participant story-telling. Next, I untie the cords that have held this weaving to its supports: the complex process that immigration is, and the real lived dilemma within immigrant families that has to do with mother tongue and the language of the host country. The last step in removing this weaving and hanging it on the clothesline with all the other weavings on first language loss and first language maintenance is to cut the fringe. To make a fairly generous fringe I want to recognize the *inquietudes*--the nudgings, the unease, the questions—that formed much of the work of the weaving, that are evident in its designs, and that the weaving calls us to acknowledge.

Summary:

This research project has utilized the personal, narrative perspective of women who are mothers and grandmothers to explore the phenomenon of first language loss in a situation of contact with a dominant language. The women invited to participate in the project have lived in Canada long enough to experience the dilemmas inherent in immigrant language learning and language losing in their immediate as well as extended families.

Working from the purely personal narrative perspectives of these women was a way of acknowledging their stories and their perspectives as ‘co-construct-ors’ of research knowledge. Weaving their stories and perspectives in with earlier comments from other immigrant people and other findings from previous research highlighted the knowledge to be gained from listening carefully to such narratives.

The effects of mother tongue loss as felt by individuals and families and the challenges of language maintenance have only recently begun to receive research attention in Canada (Guardado, 2002; Kouritzin, 2000). In response to the expressed need for more research into the family experience of language loss and maintenance (Schechter & Bailey, 2002; Tannenbaum & Berkovich, 2005), this research project explored specifically how mothers view their family's experience of language learning and language losing/language keeping in a new country. This project also added to current research by focusing the question of language loss and maintenance on a language group that has so far been under-researched in Canada (Guardado, 2005). Lastly, it added to current research by focusing on a group of people (older women) not often given credence in academic research.

Reflection:

It became apparent to me even as I was contemplating this project that loss of the first language is an experience many people have and want to talk about. Wondering whether what appeared relevant to me would also appear so to others, I talked to friends and acquaintances about this project and was surprised and strongly encouraged by the interest and immediate engagement of people in this issue. Mother tongue loss is indeed a powerful, complex, and complicated experience. The affirmation that I received from family, friends, fellow ESL teachers, and acquaintances who are recent newcomers to Canada who considered this issue interesting, research-worthy and necessary, to say nothing of the affirmation from Spanish-speaking friends in Ontario, carried this project along from beginning to end. Some of the most ardent affirmation came from an ESL teacher who works with English-second-language elementary school children and who eagerly read

and shared with the classroom teachers in her school any readings I pointed her to and suggested that a booklet for classroom teachers be printed based on the findings of language loss research. Other equally zealous interest came from a recent newcomer parent who was dismayed to see her small daughter, after barely 12 months of living in Canada, forgetting the words of her first language.

One of the most interesting affirmations came from an acquaintance who works in Burkina Faso in Africa doing literacy work with the Siamou people. She has discovered in teaching people to read and write in their own, previously unwritten, mother tongue that those who start school in the official language of the country, a language most people also speak, although not as well as their mother tongue, take around seven months to learn to read, while those who, likewise, have never learned to read in any language but are now learning to read in their mother tongue do so in about two months.

Questions and Implications:

Research into first language loss is slowly creeping onto the map of recognized second language acquisition research (Guardado, 2005, 2006; Kouritzin, 1999, 2006). The issues have been scrutinized, pertinent questions have been raised, the complexities unearthed. This research project has added particular colours and threads to those already displayed: 1) Delmis described herself as being fairly rigid in her child rearing practices; Aleyda, on the other hand, talked about it being difficult to be rigid with children when they are your only family here and you do not want to isolate them or yourself. How do different child rearing practices impact the language loss or maintenance (asked also by Guardado, 2002) and how does immigration to a new country impact parenting practices? Which comes first, language loss in the family because their practices have changed, or changed

practices because of accommodation to the change in language use in the home? Are parents aware of changing parenting practices as a result of immigration?

“Parents are often at a loss to know how to maintain” their home language (Bhela, 2003) under the onslaught of English and with all the other demands on their time and energy. At least their children are safe here, they often reason; at least they have opportunities (Elsa), even if they don’t take those opportunities. What kind of encouragement would be beneficial for parents to work at language maintenance? And is encouragement for parents the same as encouragement for children and youth? What about the other parent: How do fathers perceive the change in language patterns in their homes? On which side of the culture keeper / culture negotiator dichotomy would fathers take a stand, if they were asked?

2) Guardado (2005) suggests that size of first language community in the city or area has a positive influence on first language maintenance. The Hispanic community in southern Ontario is quite large; the families, children as well as adults, in this project have ample opportunity to speak Spanish. But it appears that this may produce as many negatives as positives for language maintenance: people downplaying what is happening in their countries of origin in an effort to forget the past and bind themselves more closely to the new culture, young people involved in problematic behaviours. Hence, it appears that the presence of a large community does not necessarily encourage greater maintenance of a language. How do Hispanics who are not as close to some of the major multicultural centres in Canada—Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal—fare in language losing and keeping? Exploring that question would provide a clearer picture of how size of community impacts language loss and maintenance.

3) From her study of language loss and language maintenance within a Sikh community, Tigchelaar (2003) concludes that shared spirituality, religious expression and ritual, is a positive factor in maintenance of a first language. The Hispanic community in southern Ontario does not belong to one particular religious denomination, and the affiliations they have are not unique to them in the way that Sikhism is. The same can be said of their religious affiliations in Spanish-speaking countries; they have by and large not changed affiliations upon coming to Canada. There are, however, several religious groups in southern Ontario where Spanish is used exclusively and others where it is used to lesser degrees and it would be interesting to ask the question whether the simple fact of 'doing church' together in their first language leads to greater maintenance of the language.

The comment quoted earlier in this thesis about a church group where the parents are asking the English congregation to please pass on their (the parents') faith to their children *for* them because the children speak mainly English suggests that 'doing church' together in the first language is not easy, nor does it necessarily lead to greater maintenance of the language. Nevertheless, such a study could assist well-meaning Canadian religious groups in encouraging minority language groups to keep the mother tongue rather than simply allowing the place where a family's faith is expressed and passed on to also become a place of assimilation and Canadian-ization.

4) "Immigration is a greater vector of change in our society than we have counted on," said a workshop organizer at the Metropolis Conference in Toronto last March. Most immigrants are likely not aware that they are also changing the face of Canadian society, at least not at first. They are only aware that their lives are experiencing upheaval and

being changed. It would be extremely useful, as all the different members of families are trying to make sense of the upheavals they are experiencing, to give them academic, thoughtful places within the larger society where their reflections on their experiences would be heard and addressed. What does the process of immigration do to a family? What does it do to the ambiguities felt by young people who need to identify with and belong to a culture, a language, a family, but are forced to “choose either/or, not both/and” (Cummins, 1995, p. 164). Children and young people, who often internalize and/or act out perceptions in unhealthy ways, might be particularly well served by being asked to reflect on where they find their affirmation and guidance as youth if their parents cannot speak the language with which they are identifying. Educators, policy makers, and others who work with youth could gain much from such research.

I met with Maria, Fanny, Yoanna, Elsa, Delmis, and Aleyda over a period of 7 months, from October, 2006 until May, 2007, first to inform them of the purpose for the project and invite them to participate, and then to hear their stories, told individually. Narrative or story-telling is a way of entering into a phenomenon, both for the person who does the telling and for those whose hear or read the stories later. I came away from listening to these women with a greater appreciation of the “irreconcilable choices” (Schechter & Bayley, 2002, p. xvi) that they, along with my own parents, along with my many immigrant students, made in choosing to live in an English-speaking world. Language losing and language keeping, I realize now, is more complex and “less amenable to solution than has sometimes been thought” (Kouritzin, 2000b, p. 14). The internal and external forces which children and families have to deal with are complicated, perplexingly entangled, and disconcerting.

Beyond this greater appreciation for the magnitude of the dilemma, I came away from these stories wanting to change school systems and teacher education programs and societies. Wanting to make things right for immigrant families. Wanting to carry banners and become political.

After all, “when we destroy children’s language and rupture their relationship with parents and grandparents, we are contradicting the very essence of education” (Cummins, 2001, p.16). Just as children’s talents and abilities need to be encouraged and fostered in school, so should their knowledge and the experience they bring to the classroom be promoted as a building block, rather than being undermined. Intentionally or not, schools are places of assimilation, when instead they need to be places where multilingual and multicultural resources are “advantaged” and encouraged. Research is clear that children who come to school literate in their first language will develop stronger literacy abilities in the school language. In fact, “the level of development of children’s mother tongue is a strong predictor of their second language development” (p. 17).

After all, continues Cummins, “the destruction of language and culture in schools is also highly counterproductive for the host society itself” (Cummins, 2001, p. 16). A society that inspires its citizens to speak more than one language is a society that is more able to meet the challenges of today’s changing and globalizing world. Just as children gain greater cognitive flexibility, a more wholesome sense of self-esteem, and indeed higher target language proficiency and literacy when they maintain their mother tongue in a viable way, so those same benefits accrue for the society as a whole (Cummins, 1995; Wong Fillmore, 2000; Wu, 2004/2005).

After all, declare Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001), “immigrant children

and young people able to operate in multiple cultural codes, able to traverse cultural and linguistic spaces are poised on the edge of social, economic, and cognitive advantages (p. 160). If their assets can be maximized and put to good use for the society as a whole, these children “will become important contributors to the future well-being of our country” (p. 156). “Canada cannot afford to squander the potential of its immigrants” asserts Duffy in a study detailing the state of Canada’s immigrant children in the school system (Duffy, 2004). Support for language maintenance requires more than passive acceptance of the languages and cultures that immigrants bring to Canada.

After all and after all, yes. Unfortunately, the above points are by and large the only arguments that educators and policy makers in our society will pay any heed to in the debate over encouraging first language maintenance or forcing dominant language use, concede Schecter and Bailey (2002). These arguments highlight the benefits of society and assert that in the end these children will be better in English because they have kept their mother tongue. This is unfortunate because once again it is really only the English proficiency and assimilation of the child that matters. Such arguments sideline the most vital and essential *raison d’être* of the mother tongue: it is family communication and family relationships that have the most to lose from loss of the mother tongue and that need to be elevated in the arguments for encouraging maintenance of the mother tongue.

Our main platform, argue Schecter and Bailey (2002) in the final pages of their book, should be on the basis of what is important for the families. For linguistic minority families “mother tongue maintenance represents a theoretically coherent and historically situated means for the expression and affirmation of lived experience” (p. 200). It’s as

simple as that. The “emancipatory and empowering effects” (p. 200) that mastering two or more languages can have for a person and for a society are indeed real but instead of beginning our arguments with the need to prepare children for better assimilation into society, we need to argue unapologetically that families should be able to continue being family in their mother tongue.

After all, finally, the Canadian Multiculturalism Act of 1971, ratified as part of the 1988 Constitution, promises linguistic minorities acceptance, equality, and official and societal support for the maintenance of heritage languages and cultures (Guardado, 2005). It becomes a question of justice: is it fair to expect children and families to learn the skills and behaviours necessary for making a living and contributing to our society while ignoring their need to be family in the only language available to them for that purpose? Is it fair that, in a country where multiculturalism is celebrated, immigrant families are losing that which makes them unique even while we say we celebrate their uniqueness?

Language keeping, to be sure, is not always at the top of the priority list for families who need employment, health care and housing. The commitment to language keeping needs to be revisited often as family situations and needs change. Hence, the affirmation and support also needs to be re-affirmed and re-ignited. Rather than leaving the commitment to language keeping solely in the hands of parents and families, it should become part of the emphasis on multilingualism for the public domain. The ability to speak two or more languages instead of only one should be seen as a ‘cool’ thing for children and young people to be able to do, a thing for everyone to aspire to.

Epilogue:

The narratives of the women had it all. They were raising banners and clamouring at the gates of policy makers. They were galvanizing the population. They understood that true multilingualism can only be good for a society, and they hankered to be part of occasioning such an understanding in Canadian society. They also recognized to their sadness and dismay that loss of the mother tongue is going to happen. When immigrant families settle in Canada and the children begin to speak the dominant language more and more and their mother tongue less and less, family relationships change, personal identity becomes unhinged, cultural values become difficult to inculcate, and mothers worry that their children are no longer children of their culture.

What I heard from these women was a recognition of the complexities and entanglements of the dilemma. What I heard was passion for the Spanish language, surely one of the most beautiful in the world, passion for their cultural values and cultural ways, and a deeply passionate belief that the language that makes families Hispanic should not be allowed to be lost in any family. What I also heard was pride in their children and grandchildren for having made it in this English society and the hope that future generations would yet come back to the language and the culture.

Each one of these women is creating a weaving more colourful than anything you've ever laid eyes on, while policies and systems scratch in the dirt around her and researchers and interested others peer from the corners of the house. So I leave them, six Latina immigrant women, at their looms, weaving . . .

weaving,

holding families on their shoulders,
bearing jewels of language and culture,
interlacing mother tongue hopes
with foreign feel realities;
leaning forward
to allow grandsons to forget their language because it is safer for them this way,
pulling back
to insist on mother tongue because you can't have identity without it,
keeping alive, resisting
negotiating, giving in,
weaving
homeandfamily,
cultureandfamily,
pastandfamily,
future . . . and . . . family
weaving
hope amid disappointment,
celebration amid chaos
weaving

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APPENDIX

Sample questions: These are simply sample questions that may serve as a guide in telling the story, in linguistic terms, of your family's settlement in Canada.

1) What happens within Spanish-language-dominant, female-headed families when children or grandchildren, while learning the dominant language(s) of Canada, lose the ability to speak in the mother tongue?

a) Can you describe the process of your family's immigration to Canada and your settlement in Canada?

b) How did you and your family experience language learning during the first years of your life in Canada?

c) Did you encourage your children to learn English quickly? Did you insist on speaking only Spanish at home? How did your children respond?

d) Can you describe what you feel has happened to the Spanish in your family since coming to Canada?

2) [Why] is it important for native English speaking Canadians to pay attention to the phenomenon of language loss within newcomer families?

a) Can you tell me about any difficulties that you or your children had in Canada because you spoke Spanish?

b) Can you remember being encouraged to speak only English in your family?

c) Can you remember being encouraged to keep your first language in your home?

d) Please describe how you as the mother in your family felt with regards to language during the first years of your life in Canada.

- e) Please describe how you feel now with regards to your family's language learning and language maintaining.
 - f) What would you like the rest of Canadian society to know about the experience of immigrant families and language learning?
- 3) What do the families feel might be some useful strategies for maintenance of the first language?
- a) Do you get together with other Spanish speaking families regularly?
 - b) Does that kind of a gathering encourage children to keep their first language?
 - c) Who encouraged your children and grandchildren to keep their first language—did you, or did someone else, or no one?
 - d) How have your efforts to maintain your first language in your family affected your relationships with your children and grandchildren?
 - e) What kinds of things have helped you and your family to keep your first language?
 - f) What would you like to tell Canadian society or other immigrant families about maintaining a first language?

Apéndice

Preguntas de Guía. (Estas preguntas son de guía, nada más. Algunas son muy parecidas a otras.)

1 – ¿Qué pasa con las familias de habla hispana cuando los hijos(as) o nietos(as), mientras aprenden la segunda lengua o lenguas dominantes de Canadá, pierden la habilidad de conversar profundamente y con sentido con la lengua materna?

- a) ¿Cómo fue el proceso de inmigración a Canadá de su familia—cómo llegaron, cuándo llegaron, con cuántos miembros llegaron, dónde se ubicaron, cómo fue el proceso de buscar empleo, escuela, apartamento, etc, dónde encontraron amistades?
- b) ¿Cómo experimentaron el aprendizaje del idioma (la lengua) en los primeros años de su vida en Canadá?
- c) ¿Animó usted a sus hijos(as) a aprender el inglés rápido? ¿Por qué quería que lo hablaran rápido? ¿Le corrigieron a Ud en el inglés de vez en cuando?
- d) ¿Insistió usted en hablar solamente español en la casa? ¿Se sentía sola en el trabajo de mantener el español dentro de la familia?
- e) ¿Qué ha pasado con el español en su familia desde que vino a Canadá? ¿Son realmente bilingües sus hijos(as) ó cómo es el español de ellos(as)? ¿Siente Ud. que haya más tensión dentro de la familia cuando los hijos(hijas) no hablan el primer idioma?
- f) ¿Piensa usted que es importante para su familia que continúen hablando español aunque los hijos(as) y nietos(as) vayan a escuelas de habla inglés y aunque hablan inglés en sus trabajos?

2- ¿Es importante, y por qué, que los canadienses de habla inglés presten atención al fenómeno de la pérdida del lenguaje materno dentro de las familias que están llegando a Canadá?

- a) ¿Han tenido algunas dificultades, usted o sus hijos, en Canadá por el español?
- b) ¿Recuerda usted haber sido animada a hablar solo inglés en su familia?
- c) ¿Recuerda usted haber sido animada a mantener su primera lengua en casa?
- d) ¿En que situación se sintió o siente animada a usar el español con sus hijos? ¿En que situación se sintió o se siente desanimada de usar español con sus hijos?
- e) ¿Cómo se sintió, siendo la madre de la familia, en relación al lenguaje durante

los primeros años de su vida en Canadá?

f) ¿Cómo se siente ahora, siendo madre o abuela, en relación al mantenimiento de su lengua y el aprendizaje de ella en su familia? Si hay hombre en su casa, ¿son diferentes sus sentimientos a los de él acerca del uso del lenguaje en casa?

g) ¿Qué le gustaría a usted que el resto de la sociedad canadiense sepa o reconozca acerca de la experiencia de las familias inmigrantes y el aprendizaje de un nuevo lenguaje?

3- ¿Cuales, en su opinión, podrían ser algunas estrategias útiles para mantener la primera lengua?

a) ¿Se reúne usted regularmente con familias que hablan español?

b) ¿Esa clase de reunión anima a los hijos a mantener su primera lengua?

c) ¿Quién anima a sus hijos y nietos a mantener su primera lengua en su familia?

d) Sus esfuerzos de mantener la lengua materna dentro de su familia, ¿cómo ha afectado eso a sus relaciones con sus hijos y nietos?

e) ¿Qué clase de cosas le ha ayudado a usted y a su familia a mantener su primera lengua?

f) ¿Qué le gustaría decirle a la sociedad canadiense ó a otras familias inmigrantes acerca del mantenimiento de la lengua materna?