

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

"A Form of Language is a Form of Life"

by

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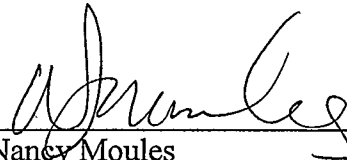
The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "A Form of Language is a Form of Life" submitted by Cristina Constantinescu in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



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Abstract

This hermeneutic inquiry interprets some facets of the phenomenon of first language loss in the context of immigration. It brings together different texts, stories, textures, and voices that speak of the notion of language loss--examples of instances and circumstances found in research, literature, mythology, philosophy, and personal experience.

This study weaves the interpretation of the meaning of language loss to the dynamics of an immigrant family relationship with their child. Drawing upon these sources and constantly allowing and inviting the change of perspectives, this dialogue sets out a fresh look at the translated culture which in turn, shapes and positions concepts like identity, home, and roots.

The inquiry turns then to the centrality of story telling in transmitting culture and the implications of the language loss to this process. The shifting of perspectives has provided a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of first language loss and its implications.

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Last, but not least, my humble and heartfelt thanks go out to my son, Vlad, who has been my inspiration and motivation to go on when I was at a loss for words. With his endless questions, comforting hugs and curious eyes he has reminded me and taught me again the meaning of life in another language.

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Chapter I

An invitation

Immigration is a term which has been more and more used in relation to ethnic identity, linguistic identity, language loss, geography of identity, home, roots and the list could go on. All of them are vocabulary items in the contemporary, specialized lexicon on aspects of immigration. This process is an important aspect of my life, too. By emigrating from my country and culture, I have disrupted the inter-generation link between my child and his grandparents, and started to activate deep layers of taken-for-granted knowledge and upbringing. I have taken on the responsibility of changing my son's life, together with the things that one is born with: a language, an identity, a religion, a culture, a home or roots.

A migrant is one who has crossed a border and settled in a new place in order to start a new life. He / she has to learn the language and the ways of the other culture in order to integrate and, indeed, find a better life. They have to cope not only with the pain of separation and loss, but also with the responsibility of keeping their own culture and language alive through their next generation. I am one of them and I think I am one of the lucky ones.

Immigration has been defined as displacement, migration -- economic or politic -- uprootedness. Distinctions have been made between immigrants -- first, second generation -- refugees, exiles, and cosmopolitans. Identity can be displaced, hybrid or multiple. It can be constituted through community -- family, school, religion, region, and country of residence. I am not complaining about this interest in identity; rather I am

fascinated by it. Since identity is so much connected to a particular home and a place, therefore it is defined through the language of the place and culture. It is usually not questioned from the inside of the culture that has generated it, unless there is an absolute need, and even then, a comparison is drawn: *We are Canadians, not Americans!* a teacher said to me when I asked her to describe what she understood by being Canadian.

Immigration as displacement comes with a need, and usually with a wish to become integrated in the new culture. This process, in the case of visible or non-visible minorities, first or second generation of immigrants, refugees or migrants, brings about the most important aspect of the struggle to maintain their first language and identity -- the learning of the second language. Slowly, but surely, the second language will take the place of their first language, and the shift will produce tormenting and endless questions of redefining oneself within the new dimensions. Researchers have looked at a variety of factors from a number of perspectives, mainly from the dominant culture one.

Taken as a whole, studies to date have correlated a number of variables (such as length of residence, age on arrival, gender, attitude toward the L1, birth order, social class, ethnolinguistic vitality, status) with increased or decreased language loss. They have also established a fairly accurate accounting of the linguistic process of language loss. These studies, however, have not adequately considered the social context, nor have they looked at the effects of language loss, nor have they questioned the effects of becoming monolingual in a bilingual environment. (Kouritzin, 1999, p. 19).

This is not the direction of this study, however. In doing my research, I have started with the conviction that language is more than a linguistic code of communication

between two or more people whom know it. It is more than a collection of vocabulary items, morphology or syntax rules, semantics or linguistics. I wanted to address the larger space where one particular language lives in the middle of "linguistic elements, identity, the construction of reality, culture, history, reality, information, and communication. I wanted to acknowledge the interdependence of language, identity, the construction of reality, and the individual, and, because language is a social phenomenon, I did not want to be bound to spoken forms of discourse nor to the first or second language."

(Kouritzin, 1999, p. 19).

I believe that a language can bring together the past with the future, the tradition with the change, the communication with the information, fiction with life history, the child with the parent. Can it be the warm fabric of parents' memories and at the same time the energetic, constantly in action language of their children? Can it be the marker of identity in your own name? Can it be the allegorical force that drives children as well as adults into reading bedtime stories? Can it be soothing tones of the prayers that we teach our children even when they are so little? Can it be the calming sound of your mother's voice that you hear in the middle of a nightmare? Can it be something that you miss even if you never had it or for not long enough?

This is one of the most terrifying questions that a parent can ask oneself. I do sometimes, and I still don't know if I'll ever be able to answer all these questions.

All she's trying to do is to keep things straight in her head. To keep the weight of her memories evenly distributed. To hold the chapters of her life in order. She feels a new tenderness growing for certain moments: they're like beads on a string, and the string is wearing out. At the same time she knows that what lies

ahead of her must be concluded by the efforts of her imagination and not by the straight-faced recital of a throttled and unlit history. Words are more and more required. And the question arises: what is the story of a life? A chronicle of fact or a skillfully wrought impression? (Carol Shields, 1993, p. 340, cited in Kouritzin, 1999, p. 5).

With the help of my own life story that documents that social, political, and historical individual understanding and recollection of events that had an impact on my family's and my own life, and believing in the centrality of story telling in transmitting culture and language, I will attempt to interpret hermeneutically the shaping and positing of our new family relationships. Since as an individual I am empowered to act in the world, and thus change it by my actions, I feel responsible and creative in taking the initiative and even the risk to make changes and live with their consequences. One of those instances is our immigrating to Canada.

What did I do, she thought, I took her away from her own people and her own language, and now here she comes walking alone, through an alien street in a country named Canada.

As she contemplated the solitary, moving figure, her own solitude rushed over her like a tide. She had drifted away from here at the same distance from her own home as from the homes, which she glimpsed while walking past the sparkling clean windows of the sandblasted houses (Himani Bannerji, 1990, p. 141, cited in Kouritzin, 1999, p. 4).

I live with the consequences and feel the burden of responsibility, too. I also try to make new meaning out of those every day while living with my family in my new country in our new language.

My voice is one of the other immigrant parents who have undergone the same experience. I am one of the mothers who have told a story in either of the languages, first or second, translating back and forth between cultures so we don't lose our children.

I will point to specific points on this tapestry of immigration, language loss, and family dynamics, and I will invite you to follow my direction. I had to impose limitations or boundaries on this research and yet, I believe in the "fecundity of the individual case" (Jardine, 1998, p. 42).

This research is an invitation to open up new discussion.

Chapter II

"Peripheral Visions"

A journey towards understanding

I have moved through linguistic, temporal, and spatial coordinates and aspects of the concept of immigration and language loss in order to bring into discussion and interpretation the importance of the deep level of lived experience.

I have traveled through stories to far away cultures and traditions in order to understand better how alike we all are, and yet how difficult it is to translate the sameness or otherness in and from different cultures. I have not traveled back in space and time to feel sorry or feel the pain, but to bring into play some aspects of the topic of language loss in the context of immigration and the relationship between that and family / generations dynamics.

There are people involved in this study with pasts, as well as presents, and even futures. They are trying to look at things from the outside, yet some of them try really hard to look from the inside, from the back and even from the front, in an attempt to narrate and project.

I have used representations such as the Venn diagram to symbolize the linguistic space where the generations present in this study live.



I included my parents in the first diagram together with my first language -- Romanian -- and in the last one I situated my child, Vlad, and his first language -- English. I placed myself in the one in the middle with my two languages -- Romanian and English -- because that is where I see myself preserving the inter-generational and inter-cultural link.

In this chapter I am a character telling my story about losing my child together with losing my first language. I am focusing on describing how while in the process of learning and trying to master a second language, I win something and I lose something else. I am learning how to get a voice in another language, and I am losing my son's voice in my first language. I am learning the ways of this world, while my son never got to learn the other world's. I am changing and growing together with my son in his language and in his country simply because I cannot afford to lose him.

The emergence of the topic

When I look back on the last few years I have spent living in Canada, going back to school, going into teaching English as a Second Language, still taking care of my son and my family, I realize that the notion of language loss has always been with me in everything I did. I wasn't quite sure that it was my topic until one night while in the middle of a conversation, it chose me. It chose to show me how much I was involved in my topic already without even being aware of it. I realize that not only did I choose the topic of my research, my topic chose me as well.

I had enrolled in a graduate course on research methods at the University of Calgary with a vague idea about conducting research and asking questions. I was excited that my application had been approved and I could take courses and go back to school, that I didn't pay attention to minor aspects such as the type of research, the question, or anything else. For one of the class assignments we were asked to think about the process of writing and the topic: back and forth, emergent, reflexive nature of research, writing beyond mopping up, finding, articulating, and grounding the question, living with the question, mind-mapping the road to finding the question, conversing with the literature. Questions such as: *How do I come to see? How does the actual writing help me to see what I am coming to know? What about external validity and authority in your field?* were asked both in class and on-line discussions. I listened to and participated in the winding digressions of thought trying so hard to travel back and forth between the body of literature and my own questions. Above all, I was traveling between two worlds, two languages, and two cultures. My questions addressed different areas such as curriculum, English as a second language, immigration, and yet they were not talking to me. I was experiencing the transition from being a student and a teacher, to becoming a researcher. I also understood that I had to come to my question not from the outside, but from the inside of the topic.

I was telling the story of myself and my being in that program one night in class, about how and when I moved to this country, and how I was trying so hard to integrate and improve my English skills. I was talking about my passion for studying and doing research, and how much I wanted to be part of that journey with my classmates. And I also mentioned that during that process which was so overwhelmingly exciting for me, I

had to still attend to that part of my life that was my son. He was undergoing the same process of focusing on and learning another language so much that he was forgetting his first language. I did not go into details about why, how fast, what could be done and by whom, but I could not help mentioning that I felt that I was losing my son because he was losing his first language. Everybody turned to me with eyes wide open trying to grasp the meaning of my words and probably trying to shift their own perspective and translate my experience to their individual, personal life where they were parents too. I continued: How can I still be a part of his life and how can I bridge the widening gap between a mother, a parent, and a child when the means of communication is dying with every day that goes by?

Somebody must have said *That is your question!* And I knew that is was true. I also felt that the only way that my topic and my question would be anchored enough to sustain my interest in it, was to be drawn from that desire to know something beyond what I felt and thought. There had to be enough in it that I did not know, so the journey would be relevant, rewarding, and exciting.

I was moving into new territory, still aware that I was carrying with me the familiar and comfortable things that I knew and I loved. I was not to lose sight of them because they were the very nature of the fabric of my question.

I wanted to feel excited, energized, and eager to engage with the literature and my own lived experience at the same time, so I could feel worthwhile about my little contribution toward my area of interest.

While reading and asking questions, I came to the revelation that I wanted to stay inside my research, rather than being someone looking in; I wanted to be part of what I

was researching. As I was becoming more aware of the discussions in the literature, I was trying to remain part of the story so the journey wouldn't lose its relevance to me.

I started with asking my parents a question: What did you feel when I immigrated to Canada? And this is what I got.

My Mother's Letter

Dragul meu copil,
 Mi-e foarte greu să-ți răspund la
 întrebarea ta: ce-am simțit noi, părinții
 când ai plecat tu în Canada. De fapt nu
 există cuvinte care să exprime durerea pă-
 rinților și de aceea îți spunem: dacă vrei
 cu adevărat să știi ce-am simțit, dă-mi-le
 pe Vlăduț nouă, să-l creștem și să nu li-l
 mai dăm înapoi. Fotografii și telefoanele
 nu suplinesc prezența ta.
 La mamă mă gîndesc mereu dacă te dăruie
 cu toate problemele și regret că nu te pot
 ajuta. Uneori mă încurajez singură și ma
 gîndesc că ești o luptătoare și vei învinge!
 Simțim foarte mîndri de tine!
 Subește pămîntul care te-a primit, oamenii
 și obiceiurile lor, căci simțim sigur că nu
 vei uita niciodată locurile de unde ai plecat!
 Te sărutăm cu dragoste,
 mama și tata
 Roman - 27 noiembrie 2000

My dear child,

It is very difficult for me to answer your question: what did we, your parents, feel when you left to Canada? In fact there are no words to express the parents' pain and that is why I was telling you: If you really want to know what we felt, give Vladut to us to raise and never give back to you. The photographs and phone calls are no substitute for your presence.

As a mother I always worry if you can manage with all the problems and I regret that I cannot help you. Sometimes I brace myself with the thought that you are a fighter and you will be a winner!

We are very proud of you!

Love the land that has welcomed you, the people and their customs, (and I say that-my note) because we know that you will never forget the place where you come from!

We kiss you with love,

Mom and Dad

When I started working on my thesis, I spent a lot of time thinking about many things related to intergenerational relationships, family dynamics, and preservation of a tradition. Before moving to Canada, I don't think I had ever questioned this aspect of my relationship with my parents. They had always been my parents and they had lived in a place that I used to call home. I did not feel the need to question anything from inside the

place. Once I stepped outside of it, I actually started to feel the tension of the ties that had been stretched by my leaving.

What we call familiar is built up in layers to a structure known so deeply that it is taken for granted and virtually impossible to observe without the help of contrast. Encountering familiar issues in a strange setting is like returning on a second circuit of a Möbius strip and coming to the experience from the opposite side. Seen from a contrasting point of view or seen suddenly through the eyes of an outsider, one's own familiar patterns can become accessible to choice and criticism. With yet another return, what seemed radically different is revealed as part of a common space (Bateson, 1994, p. 31).

The perspective has changed and the familiar patterns of growth that I once thought I knew or I took for granted have started to shift and regroup. That was the moment when the feelings of alienation and estrangement started to come into play.

I think it all started with my father's refusal to acknowledge my leaving and my trying to talk about it. I encountered a stubborn and ice-cold rejection of the topic ever since I first wanted to talk to him about it. He had never expressed his feelings and had always been very careful about hiding his every little emotion as if it was never appropriate to even have feelings or emotions. On the other hand, my mother has always been the complete opposite of him. She would be the one who would let out every single feeling or emotion and express everything in words. That has helped me understand that feelings are a natural occurrence and they have clothes made of words. However, she would refrain herself when my father was present. Growing up, I would sometimes question their different approach to life, but I would easily and freely give in to my

mother's habit of talking about things and not burying them deep inside where nobody can touch or see.

I wanted to make my father talk, acknowledge my need to communicate, express his feelings, even if only of frustration or anger. I wanted to hear what I could only assume from his silence. I wanted to walk him through the therapy of speaking about how and what he felt. The need of communication was pushing thought into action. His holding in of his wordless stubbornness had created a space of silence that I wanted to cross. The short, almost monologue-like long distance conversations were not satisfactory enough. Of course I knew it was terribly hard and almost surreal to only talk on the phone about 'doing things' without even once asking how I was feeling. So I had to figure out something that was going to break the silence and that is how I got this letter. I wanted to ask him something that would make him talk.

And I asked him: "What did you feel when I left to Canada?"

I intentionally chose such a question that would be devastating, cruel, and direct and I hoped he wouldn't avoid it again. I hoped it would shatter his silence and his wording of his feelings would have brought "the coming to the experience from the other side" (Bateson, 1994, p. 31). I wanted to view my own experience, my moving away, and my leaving through his eyes, the eyes of a parent, and the eyes of a father. I thought my question would finally make him open up and talk or write to me.

But it didn't. He refused to answer it or even acknowledge it. He once again left me with my own assumptions and understanding of the taken for granted.

However, my question didn't remain unanswered or ignored. It made my mother talk and write to me this letter. I kind of expected it and knew what she was going to say.

Maybe not the exact words, but somehow I knew she would be able to find a metaphorical way to describe her feelings. And she did and that scared me. She wrote: "Give Vlad to us to raise and never give back to you"!

My heart stopped for a second. And then I got the epiphany. So that is what they must have felt when I left. Maybe their hearts stopped for a while, too. Maybe they were so scared that they didn't know what to say or do. Maybe they didn't even understand and that is why they couldn't say anything.

The decision to leave home

We had been planing for the moment of emigrating for more than a year and still just the thinking about it would keep me up late at night or wake me up early in the morning. The worries, the fear, the anxiety, the sadness, the melancholy, all those feelings that come with your making a decision. Not any decision, but the Decision to emigrate. In fact, to be honest, it was not my decision, but my husband's. The decision to leave the country was even harder to make or live with.

When we applied at the Canadian Embassy for immigration, I was convinced that our application was going to be turned down, that somehow I was not going to leave my country, my home, my familiar space, and my language. I also knew that I was going to have enough time -- about 2-3 years for the application to be processed -- to sit down and live with the decision. And just to prove me wrong, the large, nice envelope from the Embassy brought with it an invitation to pick up our visas in the record time of two weeks. I found out we had another year to land in Canada or else the visas would expire.

I think I could have never made such a decision on my own. I didn't know how to and what, exactly, it implied. The possibility of my decision-making action to be wrong scared me too much. Even before that, making a decision was not my responsibility. My parents used to decide what friends I should have, what clothes to wear, what books to read, what school to attend, and what I should or should not do. Actually, my mother did not have a say in this or even if she did, the situation wouldn't have changed anyway. Everything used to be under my father's authority, the patriarchal figure that guided my entire existence -- action, thoughts, feelings, and opinions -- for the most part of my life. And somehow I felt that all that part of my life was a miniature reproduction of the political situation of the entire country -- no way out, no escape, no chance for action.

But I do believe that it is in the human condition or nature that we, as human beings, cannot live without making at least a decision a day. This is the action type of activity that moves us forward in connection to past experiences to justify the action in the present. And this is exactly what I had been denied for years.

Action, on the other hand, brings into being a higher freedom in which persons realize and reveal themselves as distinct and indeed unique persons (Dunne, 1997, p. 89).

Does this mean that when as a human being you are denied the access to action you become deprived of the very essence of freedom?

Having been denied the access to initiative and risk taking for too long, I started to look for a solution that would have let me reveal myself as distinct and unique. Since the structure of the society in which I grew up was meant to be one of social 'imprisonment' and my family life seemed to resemble it in a micro structure scale, the

only way out was to choose another authority, a looser one, that of a husband. That was one of my most important decisions at that time.

It was all about the change that it generated in my family's status. We were no longer a family whose boundaries included these four known members: my parents, my sister and myself. I was bringing in a new one, an Other / Outsider and they were not ready for that, I think. This is not only about minor changes in the routine of a family regarding such an event, but mostly as I sensed it, it was about the 'change' that I forced them to undergo -- they have become 'mother-in-law' and 'father-in-law'. They had to change into somebody else too. They had to learn different types of relationships, how to control or express new emotions, feelings, beliefs. Not only that, but the issue of authority had to start to fade away and eventually disappear -- and the issue of total control over my life had to turn loose and eventually disappear, too.

However, it did not disappear or loosen. My getting married re-positioned my family dynamics and brought about more and more issues, such as parental respect: 'you don't respect your parents anymore if you decide to spend the Christmas night with him and his parents and not with us; we have always been together on that day'.

That made me fall apart; break into two parts that would equally try to please everybody. I was the heart of the new, young family that had just started to build its own Christmas tradition, but since we did not have our home, we had to live together with our parents -- his or mine. We had to choose between them and I think this is how it all started, as an attempt to break free from home, though Trinh T. Minh-ha (1994, p. 13) strongly argues that:

“Home is not a jail. It is a place where one is compelled to find stability and happiness.”

Phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) calls 'home' one of the fundamental (essential) structures of the life world-lived space, which you can experience with your mind and body. It is supposed to bring about a lived time and lived human relationships. Somehow your senses will tell you that you are at home. To me, a/my home is still something I am looking for. To me, home is a space that you live in and also own in a language. You cannot make a place yours unless you own it.

The only home that I could feel like home / mine was the tiny room that we had during the university years that we would rent in a students' hostel away from home in another city. That is where we were finally not our parents' children anymore. I was starting to feel, understand, and taste the freedom of being a young woman.

Years went by and the social, political situation started to bring about despair in people's every day lives. I graduated from university; full of enthusiasm I passed exam after exam, and I then I secured myself a tenure full time position in a high school in my native town.

Suddenly I realized the mistake. I came back home to start again my fight from the beginning. But now things were different and changed a little. I was older and not a child anymore. I thought. But not to my parents.

My own change of status

And then my other change of status happened -- one day I got pregnant and everything around me started to spin and turn upside down. While my husband was

thrilled with emotion and happiness at hearing the news, my parents' reaction made me look so immature in my own eyes and think so low about myself. They were right, I would tell myself at night when I just could not sleep. Of course I cannot provide enough for my child, of course the whole country is in ruin and poverty, of course my husband did not make enough money (who did, anyway?), of course I was too young (I was only 25!) and did not know much (when do we get to know enough?), of course I had spent too much time in school and I did not have much of a life experience (wasn't it time I learned?) and I was going to trade the 'book' for a 'diaper'.

Questions and questions, and fighting and worries, and struggle, and doubt and reassurance, and uncertainty and despair and above all -- irreversibility! Having a baby was something that I just could not change afterwards when I might decide that I did not like it anymore.

The overall consequence is an uncertainty, which attaches to action and gives to human affairs their irremediable frailty. This uncertainty which takes the form both of unpredictability and irreversibility, derives from the fact that the person as agent is never the maker of his life, but rather the subject of his life-story; and he is "subject" not in the sense of being author of the story, but rather in the sense of being actor and sufferer in it (Dunne, 1997, p. 91).

So I was confronting the taking of an 'unpredictable and irreversible' decision whose consequence was going to change me ontologically from a daughter and a wife into something much more -- a mother. The irreversibility of my action of my getting involved in the world was to bring about the change of my father into a grandfather and my mother into a grandmother and my sister into an aunt and so on.

My yet unborn child was repositioning all of us into more meaningful relationships. The sense of re-arrangement of the line of life that we had lived so far was so profound that it somehow scared my parents. Their reaction to my telling the news was unforgettable. I was horrified at their brutal intervention, at their constant pushing me in 'thinking more' about it, at their controlling attitude that suggested more than that. It was not only about authority and the loss of it, it was not only about the notion of power inside the family or the issue of conflict between generations of the same family. But I could not name it then.

It was all about the ontological change by repositioning each member of my family by my child, unborn yet, but still so powerful.

This time *my child* was going to change us into parents and grandparents. Were they not ready? Didn't they understand? What was it that they could not see? Or what was it that they were trying to protect me from? Only later did I understand. I came across an example of human perception as we experience and live it in Abram's (1996): "The spell of the sensuous".

The clay bowl resting on the table in front of me meets my eyes with its curved and grainy surface. Yet I can only see one side of that surface- the other side of the bowl is invisible, hidden by the side that faces me. In order to view that other side, I must pick up the bowl and turn it around in my hands, or else walk around the wooden table. Yet, having done so, I can no longer see the first side of the bowl. Surely I know that it still exists; I can even *feel* the presence of that aspect which the bowl now presents to the lamp on the far side of the table. Yet I myself am simply unable to see the whole of this bowl all at once (p. 51).

The metaphor of human perception of "the clay bowl" will explain my own understanding of the relationship with my child. I myself knew very well that I was not ready to become a mother and it was hard to convince myself that I wanted it with my whole heart. The previous events in my life had made me understand that no matter how much I wanted to be fully present as a wife to my husband, I still had to be less of a daughter to my parents. I naively wanted to feel and know how to be or become attentive to more things at the same time. Then in becoming a mother, what was I supposed to give up or not be able to see? What was there to be / become seen and what to be left aside? I did not know the answer because I was still to be / become. I knew it was time to let some other things go in order to become a mother to my child. Why was that so painful? Who was there to suffer again? The others or myself? Tough questions for me to answer, especially because I had nobody to talk to.

My parents chose to become silent. And I chose to become a mother.

Immigration

I have always been fascinated by journeys. But not any kind of journeys, mostly intellectual ones. The journey into knowledge almost always started for me with the conviction that there is always something valuable to find out from somebody else's written or spoken word. The system of education -- or better-said instruction -- has had a great deal of influence on the way I approach a new book / article. Somehow at the back of my head I can still hear the voice of one of my former professors of English Literature

while an undergraduate student at “Al. I. Cuza” University in Romania telling me after handing in a term paper that I was very proud of before listening to his remarks:

“I do not want to hear about your own personal opinion until you have published or you have died... and somebody else has published your work.”

Intellectual journeys are governed by the concepts of authority and voice. I knew what my professor meant to say, but somehow I was disappointed. I wanted to start building my own depth of understanding that comes by setting experiences familiar and exotic, new and old, side by side with the body of fiction, learning to speak to one another. But I was not ready. I needed more time and experience to be able to find the way to do that.

I also wanted to learn how to get a voice. A voice to express the layers of awareness and perspectives that marked my lived experiences. A voice to express my attending and responding to the world around me. Like any other skill, this one would take time and effort to adjust to the others' voices in the choir, to make meaning of your own voice interacting with the others', to be able to continually go back and attune your voice to the way you see the world coming to you.

I have recently learned, and am still learning how to do that. I am turning my eyes to things that did not use to talk to me before, not because I have discovered how to do that, but because I have forgotten how to. I strived in the years of school not to let myself be driven away by things that were not 'important' and from which my formal, rigid education would have had nothing to gain. I have praised the written word and its forms of coming to me. I have complied to rules and regulations at school and at home. In a naïve and childish way I have strongly believed that one day I was going to know

everything, and that knowing something gives you the absolute authority in a field and that you only have to learn and wait humbly until that miracle is going to happen. And then I would have gotten a voice. Or then somebody would have taken the time to listen to it.

And it did not happen as I had planned. My attention to this matter was disrupted again by another instance of becoming which is actually part of the process.

Life decided to interfere and teach me some lessons, more powerful than all the stories that I used to read throughout school or later on. It showed me how rules, terminology, formulas and abstract data do not fit the lived reality most of the time. But not only do they not match, but also they can be harmful if you try to guide your life only by them. I gradually started to find out that things can sometimes be different if I make the effort to look at them from a different perspective, that there is not always a clear-cut distinction between right and wrong. I could re-discover that there is meaning long forgotten behind everyday use of the same phrase, that even the sky can have another color if I looked far enough beyond the clouds that blurred my own perspective. And I became uncomfortable -- because it has always been about black or white in a univocal, clear distinction when it came down to making a choice. I don't recollect the exact moment or time when I realized that:

Each person is calibrated by experience, almost like a measuring instrument for difference, so discomfort is informative and offers a starting point for new understanding (Bateson, 1994, p.42).

That means that I am what my experience has taught and given me, starting with the point in time when I began to feel uncomfortable. Discomfort then can be perceived

as a challenge and a starting point in the respect that it brings about new understanding. And indeed, I found much more appealing / true / valid / important the meanings derived out of my own lived experience, then the protective type of knowledge offered by my parents or the one deducted from the experiences of my favorite heroes in those wonderful but fictional readings that I did. I never denied though that:

We tell stories, participate in rituals, or write history in order to achieve those "concords" which alone enable us to comprehend our experience in the world and to discover its significance (Gunn, 1982, p. 33).

However, I felt that it was time for a new type of learning. It was time for understanding the world, for understanding myself in the world, but not only by projecting myself back and forth in time the way David Carr (1990) argues in the "Narrative as a form of life" and trying to cope with the immediacy of every day life, choosing, making decisions, moving forward.

I could no longer be a character in my own singular story because my story had become a part of others' stories, too. I started to see how I was turning from a spectator of the wonders of life into an actor on the stage of life. The hidden, not-understandable rules that my parents were guiding me by started to make sense to me, too. I was slowly, but firmly turning into an actor of my own life.

Since I became aware of the notions of power and conflict at an early age, maybe only intuitively at the beginning, I have developed a certain tendency to avoid expressing my opinion and avoid certain conflicting issues. Growing up and being educated in a communist society that praised the uniformity, obedience and compliance as well as the leadership of the working class, I do not recollect exactly the moment or age when I

started to realize the discrepancy between what my parents -- a second generation of teachers -- used to value in our home and what we were taught in school. And yet somehow I was aware that I could not have expressed my own point of view (in school, on the playground) without endangering my parents' social position or even the whole family's well being.

The political aspect of the society then positioned the rest of the community, allowing thus for a whole new re-positioning of the smaller structures, such as school and even family. Silence used to be a safe way of living / thinking / hoping / expressing oneself. It was deeper than the "liturgical silence" or "the silence of the To-Be-Said (mystical)" that B. Dauenhauer (1980, p. 20- 25) elaborates on, for he misses a whole direction of thought – the imposing of silence over a whole nation for generations. This modifies deep structures of thought that still look for a form to break out, confronting or avoiding the power that threatens. Culture becomes different, re-shaping itself into a subversive one interweaving deeper meanings behind plain words, hinting always at something else hidden in the text itself. The out-in-the-open speaking out your mind technique was not safe for the writer's or his or her own family's well being. I think the text wouldn't even have been published or would have been censored anyway, but the consequences would have been life risking with either choice. So sometimes, the writers chose the silence or the political exile.

Since then things have changed, including the government, and people, social and political structures, conceptions, beliefs have been trying to find a new adjustment or attunement to history and socio-political reality. I myself have tried to break free from the habits deeply imposed by the system, already assimilated in routines that do not let me

look ahead without looking over my shoulder now and then to make sure it is safe to go on or speak up.

I decided, not without anxiety, "to cast aside familiar habits of understanding and interacting so as to engage more successfully with the unexpected and participate in the diverse world of which surrounds us" (Bateson, 1994, p.27).

But the world has so many faces, it changes every day, and if I am going to 'cast aside the familiar habits of understanding' how am I going to recognize the new ones, accept, internalize and eventually use them? Can I cut off all connections to my past way of knowing / acting in the world /, can I bracket out my conceptions / beliefs / preferences that come with and in me from such a long time ago that they are ... me? I feel like I might not make sense in the world. I make sense in the world by defining myself inside the particularities, the difference.

I am a white, European female who lives in Canada. In the North American culture I know and acknowledge the fact that I am an immigrant and I speak English as a second language. I am also a woman, a mother and a wife, but not a daughter anymore (in the sense of the immediacy of every day life that brings about the direct interaction between the members of a family). I can break down the differences into even finer ones, like different religion (orthodox), different mystical conception, different values in life, but in doing this what am I going to change / achieve / reveal? Does this help me learn more? Does this change my understanding? Or is this going to position me as an Other? How is this positioning by the dominant culture going to influence my relationship to my child and the one with my parents? Is it going to mold the ways of the new world into the

ones of the old one that I carry with me? How is it going to translate not only words, but mainly behavior?

Inside a dominant culture that has got an immigrant ethos, I claim that I do not want to set any cultural boundaries that might prevent my being totally accepted into the new culture. I see the new culture as a context for learning, offering my family and myself opportunities to profoundly and significantly understand our own culture through contact and contrast. And yet, I think I am and will be an Other for the rest of my life.

The other intoxicating thought is that now I have become an Other in my own culture too. I have undergone an ontological change, which would never allow me to be the same, if I attempted to go back home one day. I will always long to be where I am not at that particular time. Displacement as a lived experience brings about the restlessness of not finding oneself at ease in either 'homes', longing constantly / ceaselessly for the other one. Sarup (1994, p. 102) talks about the 'lived space' as one of the essential structures of the life world, in the sense that you know when 'you are at home', you can feel among numberless other feelings the one that tells you that you are at home. And yet while in exile, things become a little more complicated as Trinh T. Minh-ha (1994) argues:

...for these unwanted expatriated, it seems that all attempts at exalting the achievements of exile are but desperate efforts to quell the crippling sorrow of homelessness and estrangement. The process of rehabilitation, which involves the search for a new home, appears to be above all a process by which people stunned, traumatized and mutilated by the shifts of event that have expelled them from their homelands learn to adjust to their sudden state of isolation and uprootedness (p. 12).

The learning of how to adjust is, in fact, what governs their entire existence from now on. It can never become complete, in the way knowing is never complete. It takes time and lived human relationships to make the shift in your understanding of the new lived space, of your new 'home'.

Arriving in a new place, you start from an acknowledgment of strangeness, a disciplined use of discomfort and surprise. Later, as observations accumulate, the awareness of contrast dwindles and must be replaced with a growing understanding of how observations fit together within a system unique to the other culture. Having made as much use as possible of the sense that everything is totally alien, you begin to experience, through increasing familiarity the way in which everything makes sense within a new logic. Eventually an ethnographer will hope to develop a description of a whole way of life that will convey this internal consistency, in which the height and placement of a chair, the adult response to a crying baby and to voices raised in dispute, and the rules about when to relax and the rhythms of the day can be integrated, although never perfectly. The final description should deal with the other culture in its own terms. Yet it is the contrast that makes learning possible (Bateson, 1994, p. 27).

And yet some may argue that things are not that simple, that even when you think you have arrived there you find yourself right at the beginning again:

As you come to love your new home, you will immediately be sent back to your old home (the authorized and pre-marked ethnic, gender or sexual identity) where you are bound to undergo again another form of estrangement (Trinh T. Minh-ha, 1994, p.13).

The change in a new world

I feel that I have changed. I know that I have changed. I know that I have given birth to a second self. Is my change due to the inner two 'selves' that I feel living deep inside of me? One is the old one, the essence of all I had been before, and the second is the new one that has undergone the change -- but yet, they live out in the world as one, that is the Other?

Sameness and difference are a matter of context and point of view, change and continuity often two sides of the same coin. We can only make sense of the relationship between change and constancy by thinking of them in layers, one flowing under or over or within the other, at different levels of abstraction: superficial change within profound continuity, and superficial continuity within profound change. The deepest changes may take generations, with old attitudes concealed beneath efforts to adapt. My mother once commented that, when a woman who was herself breast-fed shifts to bottle feeding, she still holds her infant as she was held, as if the nourishment were coming from her body; but when her daughter bottle-feeds, the echo is lost. Sometimes the descendants of religious families retain their parents' ethical principles for a generation or more after abandoning the doctrines that supported them (Bateson, 1994, p. 89).

The inter-relationship and layering between change and constancy is what marks my being in this world now. It is a constant process that my soul has to undergo, and it is usually fine except for birthdays, anniversaries, holidays or any other "forms of life" (Wittgenstein, 1968, Paragraph 19) translated in another "form of language"

(Wittgenstein, 1968, Paragraph 19), when nothing is the same anymore-people, family, atmosphere, language, and spirit! Nevertheless

local values and linear time determine our attitude to those who 'stay put'. They are over there. We are over here and over there. They are simply being. We are being and becoming (Trinh T. Minh-ha, 1994, p.13).

We engaged deliberately in this change, knowing that there are going to be some changes implied; how relevant, how important or how traumatizing, we did not know and we couldn't even perceive. Changes mean being and becoming. At the same time, being and becoming is forged and patented by change. For people in exile *being* and *becoming* are major coordinates of their cultural wholeness and identity. They try to mold their new becoming into an old traditional being. And yet I do not think that only us -- people in exile -- be and become. I think that the Others whom we socially interact with *Are* and *Become* too.

The only difference that I see is that for the former, everything is happening very fast and it is overwhelming, while for the Others -- the whole process is slower and not relevant enough. And how does that happen? I know for sure that we -- immigrants -- are at the same time the agents that help initiate / pursue / continue / position /re-position their own becoming as well as ours. The inter-relationship of this phenomenon is what keeps it going on. To understand more I have to look back now and then, or to put it metaphorically 'to shoulder check my becoming'.

Nostalgia

I was sitting in the rather uncomfortable, tiny seat on the plane that was flying my child, my husband and me to Canada. My arms were numb because I had been holding my two-year-old at that time, asleep, for a few hours. In fact, my whole body was numb; I couldn't move and I didn't want to, anyway. There was no desire in me to do anything more. My mind was refusing to think. To think, to make plans, to look ahead. Movement and thinking were turned off. Something else was more important. I was desperately trying to block my still hurting memories that from time to time would bring tears in my already swollen, red eyes.

Memories are the comfortable space where the pain is not that strong. Holding on to memories then was an improvised response to that moment of crisis. I was probably drawing on similar crisis situations, trying to cope and not show my emotions.

After a while, I tried to look back and understand why I cried so much that day. I tried to wipe away the steam of painful tears off the screen of my memories, and go back again to view the actual string of moments that marked the day we left. For a long time I could only get to the moment when I stepped into my parents' apartment for the last time and I was getting ready to say 'good-bye'. Almost instantly the tears would brim my eyes, and I had to get busy doing something else just to take my mind off it.

Later on, slowly, I was able to think about what really happened ignoring the swirling pain in my gut. I felt like someone had asked me to jump from the top of a mountain, promising me that a safety net is going to await for me down below, and I shouldn't worry about a thing, just jump. I was supposed to hold my son in my arms and

take him with me too. I was supposed to leave everything behind and not think about anything too much. Things would be waiting for me at the other end, and the promise of a new, prosperous life was to give me wings to fly. And yet I was not ready to jump.

I think that time and place just froze for me at that moment. And I mean time as a linear coordinate that was going to mark my parents' getting old in a familiar place -- their house -- which used to be my home. I was not going to witness the trees in front of my apartment getting older, or the city getting bigger, or new generations of teenagers getting married and having children of their own. I was going to take a frozen mental picture of the space I used to know and call home, and keep it alive in my mind, and maybe populate it with imaginary people and relationships that I assume would happen. The language of this warm woven tapestry was going to freeze for me because I was not going to dwell in it for a while and fill it with my own becoming in that place. The family members that were old or sick at that time were going to pass away soon, and I knew I was going to see them maybe for the last time. People I met or I was about to meet, would change, leave, or even die, and I was cutting myself out of the picture of their lives forever. Life as I knew it and lived in that space was going to go on without me being a part of it. I was leaving and trying desperately to store mental snapshots of what used to be the life I had.

Later on, while reading Eva Hoffman's book: "Lost in Translation" I came across her own description of the day when she immigrated to Canada with her family from Poland.

When the brass band on the shore strikes up the jaunty mazurka rhythms of the Polish anthem, I am pierced by a youthful sorrow so powerful that I suddenly stop

crying and hold still against the pain. I desperately want time to stop, to hold the ship still with the force of my will. I am suffering my first, severe attack of nostalgia, or *tesknota* -- a word that adds to nostalgia the tonalities of sadness and longing. It is a feeling whose shades and degrees I'm destined to know intimately, but at this hovering moment, it comes upon me like a visitation from a whole new geography of emotions, an annunciation of how much an absence can hurt. Or a premonition of an absence, because at this divide, I'm full to the brim with what I'm about to lose... (1989, p. 4).

I was feeling the same despair mixed with nostalgia, a combination of feelings whose bitter taste I still have in my mouth at times. It comes back at times after the rain when the air is filled with the smell of the freshly washed off dust and you can almost feel the Fall around the corner of another week or so, and you can almost touch the passing of time which now comes without the presence of the most beloved people in the world. It comes with the presence of an absence, of a void of warm memories that could have included a fascinating evocation of possible relationships.

The metaphor of "the clay bowl" springs to my mind again. And yet, the clay bowl is static, and the lifeworld is constantly changing. How is it possible to describe the characteristics of immigration and language loss once and for all? Outside the particular, outside the interpretation, outside the familiar patterns, outside of a culture? They are forever changing, growing, and repositioning the lifeworld and its protagonists in relation to the complex social structures.

Moving ahead

The reason why I let myself be talked into this form of self-exile is not relevant for this writing, only its consequences. However, I will explain:

If we don't go now, maybe in 20 years from now our son will immigrate to another country. And you will be sorry that you missed your chance to do something when things could have been different. Give him this chance now when he is little, and give yourself this chance now when you are young. Let's not wait for things to change, let's make them change!

This is what my husband told me and it caused me to make up my mind.

The actual decision to step out of contemplation and into action came to me within the present age seen by many writers as one of exile.

Exile is already in itself a form of dissidence...a way of surviving in the face of the *dead father*... A woman is trapped within the frontiers of her body and even of her species, and consequently always feels exiled both by the general clichés that make up a common consensus and by the very powers of generalization intrinsic to language (Julia Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader*, 1986, p.298, in Trinh T. Minh-ha, 1994).

In order to do that, I felt the need of moving out of the lived space that had been my life and escape the saturated emotions / feelings that no longer could have provided a new perspective of becoming for myself. The surrounding 'home' -- familiar / confining / yet denying for self-attunement to the world -- is about to be changed for the long dreamed of land of freedom. As compared to different kinds of exile, our own exile from

the country was an independent decision based on free choice. Canada was going to become our new, adoptive country. Yet we were trying to look only into the future, and nourish the hope that we will have a better life and a better future for our child.

And there came the moment when I realized what I was attempting to do. The terrifying moment of saying ‘good-bye’: to my parents, to my friends that I grew up with, to the language that I started to make sense of the world in, to the church where I got married, to Christmas carols, to the school where I discovered the wonders of being a teacher, to my students that I had and I would have had for the years to come, to all that I could have become if I hadn’t left that day or any other day.

That was the moment when I understood what it means to move ahead, to move out of the familiar patterns that you know, that for your entire life had given you the feeling of relative stability and belonging to a cultural space.

The de-territorialization in the sense of what I tried to explain so far is in other words the moving out from *here* to *there*. I not only became dispossessed of my material belongings, but also of my social heritage. This is a totally new beginning, but an assumed one, self chosen, not like coming into the world at birth when one does not choose one’s nationality, language, social identity or parents.

The uprootedness is the most terrifying issue for me still because of the major implications of the issues of authority, responsibility, and implicitly of loss. I am the mother and the absent grandmother -- by choice -- of my child. I am ‘The Giver’ of tradition to him, to my child; I am the translator of thought and action at the intersection of two cultures, and I am the ‘Translator’ that helps the continuation of the original culture's life. I am truly the only provider, except for my husband, of our first language

and culture for my child. And the burden of authority and responsibility weighs heavier and heavier on my shoulders. It takes the shape of first language loss and translated communication between our generation. It also molds a hyphenated identity.

My son seems to have forgotten his first language so far. He does not understand his grandparents when they talk on the phone, but yet I think he still makes sense of the bedtime stories that I continue to read or tell him in Romanian. I do believe that telling bedtime stories keeps our relationship alive in one language and also reshapes and repositions our identity inside that culture.

Tale telling is what it takes to expose motherhood in all its ambivalence. The boundaries of identity and difference are continually repositioned in relation to varying points of reference. The meanings of here and there, home and abroad... margin and center keep on being displaced according to how one positions oneself. Where is 'home'? Mother continues to exert her power... (Trinh T. Minh-ha, 1994, p.20.) in finding and defining of the new boundaries of home.

And I know that yet, my son does not make sense of his little prayers that I taught him in my first language (the way my grandparents taught me when I was his age) because that is the only way -- to my mind -- that they speak to God. In time he, my son, will make his own decisions about language, differences, identity, himself. Now it is my turn and I am fully responsible for my own decisions. Except that they include him as well, his destiny, his future, his 'what he could have been'.

In time, he will understand who he is and what he has become. He will ask questions and I hope I can give him answers. We will go back and forth together down this path which is called identity and we'll travel together to the places that bear the

marks of our bi-cultural heritage. Positioning and re-positioning time and again within the new, adoptive space and culture is our way of finding our own identity. Measuring up and against the new adoptive space will be our future and constant endeavor because I believe that:

"Identity is largely constituted through the process of othering" (Trinh T. Minh-ha, 1994, p.18).

The rest of the process constituting identity is mainly 'understanding' through qualitative interpretation, in my opinion. Being subjected to change, like any other process, it is obvious that only time can give us the chance to come to understand it.

I am also aware that if I am to write hermeneutically, I have to face the difficulty of trying to say something worthwhile, given the understanding that what I say will never be complete, final, or certain. I know that I affected my research and that I am affected by it. Which is why, "any study carried on in the name of hermeneutics should provide a report of the researcher's own transformations undergone in the process of inquiry" (Smith, 1991, p. 198). Because my experience of the research process is part of the research, who I am and what I have become needed to be shown in the research.

Thus, I can firmly state that I myself have changed during writing these lines by means of the new meanings that I have re-discovered going back and forth in time through my lived experiences that I have described linguistically and intentionally in my other language -- English. The interpretation of these happenstances of my life is not complete in the sense that layers of time and different angles may and can shape and re-shape possible and future readings of the same records.

The deeper understanding of my journey and myself was yet provided by the constant 'conversation' with the philosophical work of the Western thought. I did not try to see my lived experiences outside the continuum of the others' -- women, immigrants, other voices. On the contrary, I have attempted to see the 'difference-in-sameness' and the 'sameness-in-difference' as a way to finding my own identity. I have also attempted to locate my decisions and acting in the world within the larger context of the contemporary feminist theory. In doing that I have also drawn upon work in contemporary hermeneutics (Smith, 1991; Jardine, 1998) which proposes that

not only does human understanding operate against fragmentation and towards an understanding of a deeply interrelated "whole", but that there is an important sense in which "the whole" is never finally given or fixed. (Jardine, Clifford, Friesen, 2003, p. 39-50).

My yet to become present and future of my life will always bring back my past in its particular incidents intentionally evoked in the form of narratives. The stories that later on I am going to pass on to my child are going to strengthen the connections with the body of culture embedded in my own understanding of the world. Thus, my struggle to find my identity is going to be part of his own too.

I attempted to bring out and interpret powerful instances of my life that aroused and generated "new and fresh understanding" (Jardine, 1998, p. 41) of something that seemed "over and done with" (Jardine, 1998, p. 41). Interpretative research opened up a way for me to understand differently such issues like patriarchy, identity, immigration, voice, male power over female lives, motherhood, change, loss.

Particular, individual incidents of my life speak of the social, historical, political, economic context in which I grew up and also of other women's lives. Women that immigrated, women that have become mothers, women that have strived to find their own identity or voice in the realm of differences. "The personal is political" (Code, 1993, p. 42)-the most famous axiom of feminism comes to support the insights of my story in which I am 'actor', 'subject' and 'interpreter' at the same time.

I intentionally did not strip the social, political, economic context of my life/story because I did not intend to clearly, univocally present themes or hard data. Moreover, I intended to present my own journey toward self-understanding as a different person compared to 'what I was'. I intended to use the "fecundity of the individual case" (Jardine, 1992, p. 42) to invite generative and collaborative instances of interpretation of my topic.

I know '*what I was*' and now I understand '*what I want to be*'. *My story speaks for itself.*

To me, more important than the story is the intellectual journey that I have just started, and the invitation to you to read about it.

The next chapters are an invitation into understanding the experience of parents of immigrant children and how that affects their lives in relation to the process of immigration and language loss. Furthermore, there is also a deep introspective look into the lived experience of an immigrant family for which the process of first language loss is shaping and positioning its relationships and interaction.

In the next two chapters I am a translator, an interpreter, the builder Manole or the mother of the blue frog. I am the voice of other people who tell their stories. I am the

weaver of their stories in a bigger picture of immigrant life and language loss. I am part of their stories and even character in their stories.

Chapter III

The Loss of the Language of the Story

" Sometimes / I want to forget it all/ this curse called identity / I want to be far
out / paint dreams in strange colors / Write crazy poetry / only the chosen can
understand / But it's not simple / I still drink tea / with both hands. "

(Nancy Hom, in Trinh T Minh-ha, 1994, p. 17)

The story of a name in a language that my son does not know

My family is one of immigrants whose first language is a minority one, Romanian, who have lived in an English-speaking dominant culture and have tried to keep the first language alive inside the home. The ways of doing that have not always been the same and not always successful. They have been shaped probably by culture, which is the taken for granted that has given a traditional, meaningful, and usually relevant approach to teaching and learning a language and a culture. The approach is story telling and the results are the learning and acquiring a deeper understanding of a language and culture through the richness and polyvalent voices of the literary text.

The means of telling a story to my son was the Romanian language in the beginning. The easiest and most attractive story that I could think of was the story of choosing his name and what we understand of that.

My son's name is Vlad. This was the name of an important person in Romanian history and culture. It was the name of a famous warlord that played an important part in the troubled history of Romania between 1437-1476. In 1456 he took back his throne of Walachia--a province of today's Romania--and established his capital at Tirgoviste - you can still see the ruins of his palace there. And nearby a statue of Vlad Tepes still stands. He is considered an important figure in the Romanian history because he unified Walachia and resisted the influence of foreigners. We have chosen this name for our son because of a story surrounding this name--our son was to know the story later.

After having listened many times to my son's requests of having his name changed to an English one, I decided to try to encourage him to be proud of his name. So I started telling him about the Prince that once had the same name. Of course I started telling him the story in Romanian. The story goes like:

A fost odata, demult, in Romania acum 600 de ani in urma, un domnitor pe care il chema Vlad Dracula. Era o vreme tulbure si el a incercat sa lupte impotriva turcilor si sa fie un conducator puternic. Este amintit si astazi ca un erou patriotic care s-a ridicat impotriva Turciei si Ungariei. A fost ultimul print Valah care a ramas independent fata de Imperiul Otoman.

A fost atit de dispretuitor fata de alte puteri incit atunci cind doi ambasadori straini au refuzat sa-si scoata turbanele in fata lui, el a poruncit sa le fie batute in cuie in cap. S-a opus bisericilor Ortodoxe si Romano-Catolice fiindca el credea ca strainii, operind prin intermediul bisericii, aveau prea multa putere in Valahia. El a incercat sa-i opreasca pe comerciantii straini sa faca

comert in loc de bastinasi. Daca comerciantii nu respectau legile comertului, erau, desigur, trasi in teapa.

Vlad Tepes a creat un cod moral foarte strict pentru cetatenii Valahiei. Hotii erau trasi in teapa, chiar si cei care spuneau minciuni erau trasi in teapa. Desigur ca nu au fost multe faradelegi in vremea domniei lui.

Ca sa dovedeasca ca legile lui lucrau, Vlad a ordonat ca un pahar de aur sa fie pus intr-o piata publica. Oricine dorea, putea sa bea din pahar, dar nimeni nu ar fi putut sa-l ia din piata. Si intr-adevar nimeni nu l-a luat.

Un negutator strain o data si-a lasat banii afara peste noapte, crezind ca nimic nu se va intimpla datorita legilor stricte ale lui Vlad. Spre surpriza lui, citeva monede au fost furate. S-a plins lui Tepes, care a dat o proclamatie imediat ca banii sa fie inapoiati sau orasul va fi distrus. In noaptea aceea, Tepes a inapoiat banii in secret, dar a adaugat o moneda. A doua zi, negutatorul a numarat banii si a descoperit ca au fost inapoiati. Cind i-a spus lui Vlad a mentionat si moneda in plus. Vlad Tepes a spus ca hotul a fost prins si va fi tras in teapa. Dar daca negutatorul nu ar fi mentionat moneda in plus, el ar fi avut aceeaasi soarta.

Vlad Tepes a fost un conducator important in istoria Romaniei care a unificat Valahia si a resistat influentei strainilor-fie ei cotropitori sau doar facind comert.

I finish the story with: "And this is the story of another man who had the same name as you do."

My son just looks at me without blinking and *without understanding*. I have chosen to tell the story to him and you, the reader, in another language that neither probably understands. My son has lost his first language. Not only has he lost the linguistic code, the language of communication between generations, but also the culture, the richness of background that forms a tradition. This also includes the history, the customs, the fabric of yet-to-become fuzzy memories in a language that belongs to one place and is inherited by people that live in it.

He has lost his grandparents' first language and the stories they could have told him. He has lost his teachers' first language and the stories that they would have told him. He has lost his playmates' first language and the stories that they would have written or made up together. He has lost so much more than I can find words to name the things he missed.

I choose to let the story in Romanian stay with him and with you and avoid the urge of translating.

For a while at least.

Because I know that the questions will come from him and from you.

The language of the story

Most readers have probably just skipped over the story that was so important to my son and myself.

We are feeling like strangers in a country, in a language, in a generation, the exiled, the migrant, the hyphenated, the split self ones, myself one of them. We are trying

to make sense of the new adoptive and adopted space and give names to all our feelings. We have places and things around us every day that remind us of our struggle, but we can't ignore what this gives us in return. A vast array of feelings that spring out of our being and interacting with the world around us, sometimes controlled and pushed down, sometimes controlling and overwhelming, defining and powerful, causing reactions that turn the world inside out. The power of these feelings is so strong sometimes that it defines what we are and where we are in terms of identity, relationships, culture, self and tradition.

These feelings bear though other names now, English names that are sometimes so vaguely resonating with meaning like in my native tongue, and yet so far away. Hoffman (1998) writes about the process in which familiarity with a linguistic code can open up connections and meaning much more deeper, faster, and meaningful as compared with the "translated" emotions:

--the problem is that the signifier has become severed from the signified. The words I learn now don't stand for things in the same unquestioned way they did in my native tongue. "River" in Polish was a vital sound, energized with the essence of riverhood, of my rivers, of my being immersed in the rivers. "River" in English is cold--a word without an aura. It has no accumulated associations for me, and it does not give off the radiating haze of connotations. It does not evoke (p. 106).

Words are and mean so much more than code and communication. Knowing a language brings about more than the possibility of communication between two or more people speaking the same language, but also the ability of transmitting cultural values and

receiving the information at the same time with the paradigm of the plurality of meanings of the same concept in one selected language.

More than that, by moving into a new linguistic space the shifting and translating from one language into another tends to bring about a tension between the two languages and a constant fight for supremacy by means of ranking: first language, second language or maybe third language. Immigrant parents try to keep their first language alive and pass it on to the next generation in an effort to have their old culture preserved. Parents, as well as their children, have an acute sense that there is an ineffable correlation between language and shaping one's identity not only in the sense of putting a nationality label on a person, but in the molding of a multifaceted crystal self that we polish and re-polish with the help of a language inside of a culture. The loss of a language is, therefore, connected to a process of redefining one's self.

It's like losing half the man you are, you know, the man with whom not to lose the language makes me twice the man, so the loss of the language is the loss of the soul I think for an Indian person. It's a loss of the essence of the soul, not to know the language, because you never know how beautiful you are until you know the language. Because you can only be described in a foreign tongue, right? (Kouritzin, 1999, p. 181).

Kouritzin (1999) positioned her understanding of language loss study at "the intersection of linguistic elements, identity, culture, history, reality, information, and communication" (p. 19). This view of language as a social means enables my writing to look from a variety of angles and aspects at the bigger picture of language learning and/or loss and the relationship between immigrant parents and children.

We work with and learn the words, or we transfer or translate their meaning, we infer them for the context or simply guess them. We learn to like or even love some of them and we totally reject or loathe others, we become familiar with some to the point where the new words replace the old, native ones forever or temporarily. And yet, I can not help noticing that at times I analyze the differences between choices of words and phrases, and more than that the delay in starting to feel what was really meant to be said or felt. Hoffman (1998) remembers:

When my friend Penny tells me that she's envious, or happy, or disappointed, I try laboriously to translate not from English to Polish, but from the word back to its source, to the feeling from which it springs. Already, in that moment of strain, spontaneity of response is lost. And anyway, the translation doesn't work. I don't know how Penny feels when she talks about envy. The word hangs in a Platonic stratosphere, a vague prototype of all envy, so large, so all encompassing that it might crush me--as might disappointment or happiness (p. 107).

Sometimes what we feel motivates and pushes us forward in becoming and achieving, uplifts the spirit and revitalizes the body, shelters and nourishes the hopes, to embracing and fostering new points of view. Sometimes the feelings push us to self-destruction, alienation and estrangement, to frustration and despair, to regrets and 'what if', to ranking and positioning, to the margin away from the center, to questioning and doubting our own understanding. These feelings have names like confidence, trust, hope, despair, alienation, frustration, despair, regret, confusion, hurt, and pain.

They are amplified by the sociolinguistic context of being a migrant/stranger/exiled in a different non-familiar space. The familiar place that used to be called 'home' in one language and bear the powerful connotations of the multifaceted concept has now been replaced by a non-resonating English word. The new significant brings together more than simply a new combination of sounds or letters, but also a set of new cultural values or rules that need to find a space to live. Home used to mean a space filled with people, relationships, holidays, traditions, time, and now all of these are interacting and repositioning themselves via a new medium--English--inside another culture--Canadian.

The dominant culture imposes through language and its members, its ways of life and hierarchy, as well as a variety of other power agencies and they represent a constant and pressing change of the minority culture(s). The consequences are not only emotional, but also social, educational, and economic. However, the most visible and irrevocable one is probably the first language loss. It has many facets and variables depending on the individuals' age, first language used at home, length of residence in Canada, literacy, types of schooling and so on.

This is a type of research that has addressed the causes of first language loss (De Bots & Clyne, 1989, 1994; Hakuta & D' Andrea, 1992; Harres, 1989; Jamieson, 1980; Merino, 1983; Okamura- Bichard, 1985; Wong Fillmore, 1991) and finding ways of preventing that by teaching individuals to keep their first language or become bilinguals rather than monolingual speakers of English.

The statistics are relevant because they look at language loss, and the interpretations of the findings are in terms of causes of language loss. But the individuals

who have experienced this process and have to live with the results have not been included in the discussion but will be later. They are also individuals who belong to a family, to a community, to a culture, to distinctive group. However, the direction of this chapter is to focus on the effect of first language loss and how that shifts the paradigm of family relationships. Wong Fillmore notes (1991), that:

What is lost is no less than the means by which parents socialize their children: when parents are unable to talk to their children, they cannot easily convey to them their values, beliefs, understandings or wisdom about how to cope with their experiences. They cannot teach them about the meaning of work, or about personal responsibility, or what it means to be a moral or an ethical person in a world with too many choices and too few guideposts to follow... Talk is a crucial link between parents and children: 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. When parents lose the means for socializing and influencing their children, rifts develop and families lose the intimacy that comes from shared beliefs and understandings (p. 343).

The place of story

The place of story in the study of teaching is best defined by Nel Noddings in "Stories lives tell: Narrative and dialogue in education", (1991, p. 157): "Stories have the power to direct and change our lives." There are stories that tell and stories that teach, that evoke and perpetuate traditions and customs, that we use to teach or to entertain, that

tell of who we are in the world and what the world is to us in a culture. I myself as well as you, the reader, remember powerful, character forming stories that have been told to us a long time ago and have had the power to overcome time and instill particular concepts and values in us.

The stories not only told of a protagonist involved in a situation/plot following a causal or temporal sequence, but also a patterning of events around a theme or figure of significance to a particular culture. Therefore, from a writer's point of view, a story helps project a set of human values upon a sequence of events. Thus, the reader will use a set of literary conventions to break down the meaning of the story and look at the same cultural values from this particular writer's point of view.

In other words, human thought can be directed towards a plurality of understandings of the world and even own lived experiences by embedding concepts in a net of narratives. Symbols and concepts are passed along from generation to generation through stories told by parents, teachers, friends, or the elderly. The holy writings around the world including the Bible give examples of situations and teach the richness and nuances of noble feelings that can shape personalities and model lives. For example, Jesus' ultimate sacrifice is given as an example to follow and it is positioned against Judas's betrayal. This becomes then a religious concept that is so powerful that it transcends the boundaries of a culture or a language, and it is used in literature as a powerful motif.

The duality of this concept of sacrifice for the Christian world takes us further in understanding that a person can sacrifice oneself in order to achieve something of a rare and exceptional value to the humanity. This interpretation of the religious story can lead

to the exploration and expansion of different facets of the concept of sacrifice. A sacrifice implies a loss and an achievement at the same time. The ambivalence is shocking and striking, puzzling and intriguing, enlightening and leading to catharsis. This two-fold interpretation and perpetuation of the concept of sacrifice is present in the Romanian culture and religion as well.

I chose as an example a story that has directed and changed my life, the legend of a great Romanian church builder, Manole.

I have chosen to tell it to my son in Romanian later.

I have chosen to tell it to you now in English so you can read it and understand it. I have not chosen to tell it in Romanian because it will help argument another position: that of the centrality of story telling for transmitting a particular culture from one generation to another, and the importance of doing that inside a family.

An old Romanian story

A long time ago, there was a king who wanted to have the greatest church built for him. The architect was to design a church that would stand through generations and impress the centuries to come. Nothing was to be spared from gold to finest wood, from tradition to ingenuity to innovation. They only had to find the perfect architect to do the job.

The job is given to a fine builder, Manole, who starts by designing the church and laying out the plans. His people start working and they dig the foundation. Every day they start with the foundation and by night they have one

wall up. But at night, every thing falls apart, the walls fall down and nothing stands up till the next morning. Manole gets more and more desperate and can't understand why that is happening. Until one night in his dream he gets his answer: he is to bury his young wife, Ana, alive in the foundation of the church so that his building will stand. The story goes on with the describing of Manole's turmoil and struggle, his despair and disbelief, his work and hope during the day, and his dreaming and heartbreak at night when everything falls apart time and again.

Every day his wife, Ana brings him his lunch and one-day Manole asks her to go inside the foundation as if playing a game. She accepts happily and Manole starts laying the brick around her. Her laughter turns slowly into a smile and then into pleas of setting her free. With his heart torn between the loves of his life - his work and his wife - Manole continues laying the bricks and building the wall that finally covers Ana's body and buries his love. That night as if by a miracle the walls stand up and the next morning Manole can continue his work. But the following night he hears her crying and pleading to be set free. With a broken heart, Manole finishes the wonderful church--a splendor of architecture and a piece of art.

The king is invited to see the church and he looks in astonishment at what Manole has accomplished. The court as well as everybody else present is amazed at the masterpiece, at the splendor and beauty of the church. To their shock and surprise, the king gives the order that all ladders and scaffolding be removed and Manole who was still finishing up the final touches on the roof of the church be

left there to die. The king wanted to have not only the most beautiful church built for him, but also a unique work of art that could never be copied or erected in the same way if the creator was dead.

Some versions of the legend mention that Manole committed suicide by throwing himself off the roof; in part because he had no other choice, in part because of all the guilt he felt from being responsible for Ana's death. Where he fell on the ground, a spring has appeared to mark the union of the two lovers after death and the continuation of life symbolically.

Books, reviews and studies have been written, as well as numberless versions of the same old legend have circulated in the Balkans. They all talk about more or less scary, mythological, unreal characters or plot endings, or bring together interpretations that range from the mystical--religious to ethical and sociological cross culturally embedded symbols. Ultimately, they all talk about the ambivalence of human sacrifice for art and work. Instances and facets of this concept are countless and they appear everywhere human work, determination, achievement, sacrifice, and faith make a difference in the way the world is shaped or transmitted to the next generation.

I know the story and I fully understand its underlying implications and interpretations. I know it has the power to change and direct my life. It has directed my life so far inasmuch as it has given me a mind frame and a set of concepts that I employ subconsciously to make sense of the next situation where hard work, dedication, and sacrifice is involved. It has also given me the set of human values: human sacrifice, hard work, love, passion, determination, thirst for achievement, appreciation of art and many

more which I use to make sense of the next story or lived experience in order to make it meaningful to myself.

In other words, can I read my present life through the lens of this story? Is it me who buried a place, a language, and a familiar space, everything that I left behind when I came to Canada? Or is it my son who buried his not-yet-known first language and grandparents that he cannot remember in order to live in another place in another language? Am I the builder of my church? And whom did I sacrifice or what?

From a different perspective we can look at a story as "a narrative with a certain very specific syntactic structure ('beginning-middle-end' or 'situation-transformation-situation') and with a subject matter which allows for or encourages the projection of human values upon this material"(Scholes, 1981, p. 206).

Scholes (1982) elaborates this definition from both perspectives: of the writer and of the reader. In constructing stories, authors select relevant incidents and details, arranging time and sequence, and employing a variety of literary codes and conventions that exist in a culture or even, most of the time, they can transcend the borders of that particular culture and thus become international work. On the other hand, readers seek coherence and casual connections as they construct for themselves, often retrospectively, the meaning or theme of the story. The story however, becomes a powerful means to understand life when the literary codes and conventions transgress from the literary text to reality. Ultimately, that is the real purpose of story telling that is to transfer fiction skills to everyday life in order to improve functionality in particular similar circumstances and also to transmit cultural values throughout generations.

An old Korean story - The Blue Frog

Another story that talks about story-telling and the language of the stories that I came across and I have fallen in love with while starting my research for this paper, was that of Elaine K. Chang's cited in Trinh T. Minh-ha (p. 19-20). The author is a Korean living in North America who is trying to master the language, culture, and ideology of the white people. She is called a "banana" in her community because of the color of her skin, but she feels white on the inside. She is trying hard to make sense of her own identity, of what she has forgotten or never knew, of what makes her an exile in either world. Uprooted-ness and not belonging to any of the two cultures is accentuated by not being able to express herself in "so many English words or broken Korean words (...) that what I do understand of what they say serves to alienate me..." (p. 19). She strives to make sense of her own identity by trying to rename herself metaphorically and paradigmatically translated. And the model, the figure that comes to her mind is the blue frog from her mother's childhood story--a story that she would ask her mother to tell over and over again.

The blue frog never does what his mother tells him to do; actually he does quite the opposite. Each time the story was told the frog-mother's requests changed and amplified, whereas the blue frog's responses became more outrageous. However, the ending of the story is always the same. Before her death, the frog-mother--knowing her son's contradictory nature--chooses to ask him to bury her in the river, assuming that her son would do exactly the opposite and bury her in the ground. Feeling remorseful for a lifetime of disobedience to

his mother, when the time comes he decides to bury his mother's body in the river respecting her final wish. But ever since, whenever it rains, the blue frog cries thinking that his mother's body is washing away in the river.

Elaine has not heard the story for years, when she asked her mother to remember the blue frog. Because of her mother's initial confusion at the mentioning of the blue frog, the daughter reminds her the plot and the characters, and to her astonishment she finds out that her mother had not mastered the English words for colors at the time she was telling her the story, and in fact, the blue frog was green all along. "Old as I was, I was crushed by this information: it was all along just some ordinary green frog. What has compelled me about this particular frog--this frog whose story quite accurately...resembles the story of my relationship with my mother--was his blueness." (p. 20).

The end of the story, however, brings about the child's desire to change her identity in the eyes of her community. Now she asks if she can choose to switch from 'banana' to 'blue frog' metaphorically and politically. She feels that this story is a perfect rendering of what she feels she is now: a translated identity, a hybrid other that does not belong to either of the two communities, with a skin color that situates her in the Asian community, and a loss of first language that does not provide her access into the same culture.

Elaine Chang uses the metaphor of the blue frog to explain the translated communication and transmission of culture between immigrant parents and their children. The simple Korean folktale with a linear plot and a straightforward moral

principle--children must listen to their parents and not disobey them, or else they will feel sorry for the rest of their lives--is interesting for my study because it brings together the two directions of this chapter: the centrality of story telling in the process of preserving culture and traditions--usually attributed to mothers--and the imperfections of translated communication between immigrant parents and their children.

The story of the blue frog has gained an ineffable and undeniable powerful meaning by means of mistranslation in that which it has been enriched with a unique and strange singularity of the symbol. A normal, ordinary, green, little frog might not have done anything wrong to upset his mother. Only a special character, out of the ordinary, a rebel and a non-conformist would have always found a way to not follow the rules. But a blue frog is a fairy tale character that brings a different coordinate of meaning into play. It could speak of the sadness and alienation that that little girl must have felt at hearing the story. Or it could speak of the not-yet-known land of her mother's ancestors in a language that she did not know. It could speak volumes of a two-way imperfect triangular relationship between mother-child-language. It does speak volumes of the need to communicate between children and parents in the language that is more comfortable to the child leaving aside the mother's struggle to find a new way to get her child in an unfamiliar language. The traveling back and forth between languages and cultures brings about a new paradigm of meaning, a fresh look at the dynamics of relationships between generations in which children learn to live in the equivocation of the translation. Trinh Minh-ha (p. 21) explains that:

The source is never single and the home-and abroad or land and water trajectory is a mutual voyage into self and other. Traveling into what appears to

be opposite directions, the two parties meet only when 'meet' also comes to mean 'lose'--that is, when mother or the story can no longer be returned to as redemptive site. Understanding and consciousness emerge in one case, when the frog realizes it's mistake in carrying out a literal translation of his mother's request after she passed away; and in the other case, when the daughter's natural identification with the blue frog comes to an end to make way for a 'politics of equivocation' in the articulation of hyphenated identity. The ability to assume anew the responsibility of translation thereby opens up to an elsewhere, at once not-yet and too-well-named within the process of cultural and linguistic cross-culturalization.

The loss is two- fold: the mother has lost the influence that comes with being the preserver and transmitter of a culture, and the child does not know what to choose from the mistranslated cultural inheritance. In the end, the child will choose the metaphor--the blue frog--over plot, characters, coding and re-coding due to translation, concepts and values. Since the process of assuming and creating any identity is one of constant comparison and self-positioning by means of linguistic and cultural interpretation, the blue frog metaphor will always remain the best one to name immigrants' children who go back and forth between frontiers and barriers, between cultures and languages, between countries and places, between us and them, here and there, over time, languages and generations in their struggle to find out who they are.

The centrality of story-telling in transmitting culture

All my life I have been attracted by the power of stories, by the fascinating world of fiction that opened up spaces of freedom and gave opportunity to dream, that allowed my spirit to move, flow, and at times fly over time, generations, and languages. I have also been lucky enough to have been taught to read at the age of five by my grandmother; a teacher herself, and then I spent my early childhood years or so between tall, crowded shelves of books in the Public Library where my mother worked. I don't remember missing the company of the other children, who were playing outside all day long, because I was always surrounded by the welcoming, fascinating, and captivating world of books. Centuries, worlds, empires, knights and musketeers, cultures and generations, literary periods and currents passed by page after page, bringing different perspectives to play, pushing their meaning and multi-valences under my eyes wide open in wonder and a mirage of questions was keeping me captive. The books that I have read have set the foundation of my future understanding of the world around me. Or at least that was what I thought at that time.

The stories that I read consisted of happenings, characters, and settings arranged in a temporal sequence implying “both causality and significance” (Martin, 1986) and were subject to interpretation. Texts of this form were not considered relevant to the types of exposition viewed as ideal in educational research so far.

With the interpretative shift in modern approaches to inquiry and the recognition that story represented, in Martin's words (1986), a “mode of explanation necessary for an understanding of life” (p. 7), stories became a way of capturing the complexity,

specificity, and interconnectedness of life itself seen through the experiences of the characters themselves and understood by our own lived experiences as readers. By saying this I want to ground my inquiry in the larger field of educational research that claims the centrality of story in thinking and also provides human understanding with a broader and richer field of inspiration.

I strongly think that story is a mode of knowing that has the power to capture the richness and the nuances of meaning in human affairs and relationships beyond hard data, rigid definitions, abstract rules and regulations that govern our every day life. The fecundity of the literary text provides us, the readers, with worlds of meanings that stand for a special mode of knowledge that is one of the first ways by which we make sense of world/life starting at an early age.

That is why we mothers tell bedtime stories for our children, who listen with their eyes wide open in wonder at the captivating richness of the ‘other world’--that of the narratives and fiction. Once they have stepped in, it is with enchantment that they pursue the threads of the story and later on they start to ask the questions and make the connections with their own life stories.

Thus, they learn how to follow temporality and causality as the main issues that allow us to recognize a narrative pattern. Stories consisting of characters, events and settings arranged in a temporal sequence implying both causality and significance were then structurally broken apart into themes, motifs, and schemes within the traditional approach. And yet, there is always in a story something above categories and distinctions--the richness and nuances of meanings in human affairs. Because of the impossibility of applying a singular interpretation to the literary text the story was denied

a scientific / univocal / clear explanation / knowledge. Later on it was noticed that the type of knowledge emerging from narrative is related to the explication of human intentions in the context of action (Mitchell, 1981; Bruner, 1985). And if we admit that action in situations is subject to different interpretations, then the story offers a multiplicity of possible meanings. And if we also conceive of knowing and intentionally act on transferring the literary perspectives to every day experiences and situations, then stories seem to provide the perfect way of conveying access to this type of knowledge. The stories that we read are the result of the writer's imagination and they tend to provide an inventory of basic knowledge and preset ways of interpretations that people can use in making sense of their lived experiences in the real world. Olson (1990) states that:

Narrative structures provide a format into which experienced events can be cast in the attempt to make them comprehensible, memorable, and shareable. (p. 100-101).

From this perspective, the mind constantly creates models of the 'causal structures of events' in order to make individual sense of the lived experiences on the basis of the tacit knowledge embedded in the human thinking. These models are in the form of personal stories most of the time, and not abstract rules and deductions. The story is then situated at the center of the process of thinking that provides access to knowledge and understanding. It can help us "transform knowledge of content into a form that plays itself out in the time and space of classroom" (Carter, 1993, p.7).

What I would like to inquire is the power of the story in creating a certain type of knowledge that can be seen as an initiatory one in the respect that it provides an encoded

meaning that can transform our understanding, reshaping the previous one and also move further on our situational interpretations inside or outside a specific culture.

I think that a story makes perfect sense inside of a cultural context like a rich layer of semantic substance and cultural heritage. It is only by means of interpretation inside that culture that one can make sense of the richness of meaning embedded in story, in the becoming of the characters and the understanding of turns and interplay of their feelings. This is the case with the story of Manole that I presented previously. The legend of the human sacrifice for art and work is so powerful that it can shape characters and influence personalities and lives.

But at the same time, this type of interpretation also brings about another set of knowledge which I consider of the tacit type that can help readers decode and transcend the boundaries of the cultural-context embedded meanings. This implies a body of knowledge made up mainly of moral and esthetic values that have a two-fold purpose. One is meant to help decode hidden understanding and make new, fresh understanding out of old meaning. The other one is directed toward the reader him/her-self and is intended to produce an ontological mutation, not in the old manner of 'chatarsis'-purification through art, but in what I would like to call 'narrative understanding'.

Stories are a means for interpreting and reinterpreting events by constructing a casual pattern, which integrates that which is known about an event as well as that which is conjectural but relevant an interpretation. In this respect narrative thinking resembles other acts of comprehension and problem solving currently studied by cognitive psychologists (Robinson and Hawpe, 1986, p. 112).

Do you remember the story of Manole, the builder? Or the story of the blue frog?

The way stories are interpreted and understood is another vast area of inquiry.

However, the stories that I have selected for the purpose of this writing are relevant in the sense that they try to bring light over the difficult process of transmitting culture and value to children of immigrant parents. I have also incorporated in the definition of stories the short, heart-felt, painful, concentrated, life-turning episodes that depict moments of realization that everything is different or not the same anymore. The stories of immigrants who talk about their feelings in an alienated world that makes no sense in either language anymore, that are told in a hoarse voice stifling memories of happier days. The stories of immigrant parents who translated stories from a world warm of memories for them, and strange and remote for their children. The bedtime stories that come with a fuzzy cover that blankets an old forgotten world that is so dear to parents and so remote and hard to digest to children. The bedtime stories that make a world out of themselves and bring about a remote world where parent and child would like to travel holding hands in a language almost forgotten by one and not-yet-mastered by the other. A world that will keep forever its enchanted spell and almost forbidden memory of an attractively linguistically denied space.

I try to keep the memories alive. I try to tell stories of family tradition, of an old place that made sense in a language that is not my child's. I tell stories about the pictures of my child's grandparents or family members. I try to keep the tradition alive. I try to do all this in my child's first language, not mine. I try so hard every day.

English names and feelings

The feelings that I have selected to explore cover a large range: from being ashamed in the beginning, to being embarrassed for a while, to being indifferent later on. Feelings occur from the interaction between two or more subjects. In any culture or human community, there is a vast array of different feelings that may occur from social interaction. How are feelings molded, shaped, and modified from the interaction between representatives of the dominant culture and the exiled ones? The main aspect of the interaction between them is probably shaped in the form of linguistic communication that is by using English as a second language for the latter.

Sandra Kouritzin's research subjects (1999, 181), talk about some feelings regarding their names being changed / Anglicized and their feelings about it:

I was really actually ashamed for a long time about being Hungarian, and all I really wanted in life was to have a North American last name. I wanted to be a Smith or a Johnson, or anything. Even today, everyone I've dated pretty much has had a nice Anglo-Saxon name. I'm not doing it on purpose, honest. And even my first name--I just wished it was like Sue 'cause there was a million Sues in my classroom and I just hated my name (Kouritzin, 1999, p.181).

To feel assimilated, even by giving up their own name, was the major goal of many generations of immigrants. The wish to have a North American name was so powerful that it has made people date or even marry outside their own culture just to get the politically correct name. I myself have been tempted to do that and I will tell that story in the next chapter.

It just happened that only changing their names would have been a more acceptable and beneficial choice to follow.

As an example, she told me that he brought home a report card with the name Adam Johnson on it--he had changed his name to a more Anglophile name because 'that was just more acceptable' (Kouritzin, 1998, p. 79).

Most of the immigrants or their children, as many of my own current students whom I encourage to keep their name and rather teach me how to pronounce it, have chosen to change their names in order to make pronunciation easier by teachers and classmates:

Alex remembers beginning school, and he remembers the day when his Polish first name was changed to Alex so that his teachers could more easily pronounce it (Kouritzin, 1999, p. 161).

Usually there are no feelings of frustration, rather of willingness to have a name changed because it implies assimilation and therefore, fitting in with the majority of the people. It is also very common in the beginning of length of residence in Canada that this phenomenon occurs. This is also more predominant in immigrants' children rather than in adults / parents: "it is standard practice for some groups of Hong Kong Chinese to give their children an English as well as an more traditional name" (Kouritzin, 1999, p. 180). Children may be encouraged at their schools to take on Anglicized names so that their teachers and peers can easily pronounce them. There is always the peer pressure to fit in with the rest of the group and that is why more and more children get English names these days in Canada irrespective of cultural background.

For ESL teachers, some frequently given advice is that we should make our classrooms English-speaking places and help our students to choose new English names to go with the new English-speaking identities that we hope they will assume. I have always found it to be an uncomfortable exercise, particularly given that I loathed having my own name mispronounced or changed just to make it easier for others in Japan. Moreover, my husband has a beautiful name in Japanese, but he has been assigned two 'English' names during his first 6 years in Canada, because people have been unwilling to pronounce his real name. The first was 'Sam', which I objected to because that was my nickname. The second was 'Mat', a one syllable, lackluster (matte), boring, and flat (mat) name (Kouritzin, 1999, p. 180).

The name changing deal does come with a vast array of feelings from acceptance and indifference for a while, for the first generation immigrants, to frustration and feelings of loss or missing out on a whole identity linguistically shaped.

Oh, now there is my one little point where I did feel resentful. We were in Grade 3 and the teacher asked us to spell our names. We had written down our whole name and I wrote down Elisabeth with an "s" which is the way it is on my passport and she corrected me. And I wrote down "z" and I felt really angry and I've never forgotten, but I never wrote it with an "s". I thought "okay"--I don't know what I thought. Who knows, but I just never have forgotten that--that's a really sharp memory and at that point, yeah I guess if you were to say at what time do you really feel that you lost your language, I think I'd say at that time,

where they took my name away. That was Elisabeth, the Dutch one, was traded for Elizabeth the Canadian one, or the English one (Kouritzin, 1999, p. 180).

The loss is best defined though by one of Kouritzin's research subjects-Greta-who explains that: "*Your name is your identity*" (Kouritzin, 1999, p.181).

How powerful that wording is! Indeed, you are who your name is. And this is one more story about a name.

I have been working with ESL students for several years now and there was a student whom I asked the first day in class: "Kim! Is this your real name?" And she told me that that was her English name, and I should just go ahead and use it. I insisted on her telling me and teaching me how to pronounce her Vietnamese name--I apparently said it right the first time, and ever since I called her by her old name. She graduated from ESL and continued taking a different program in the same school. Later on another teacher approached me to ask me something about 'Kim'--I had no idea whom she was inquiring about. After some confusion, I figured out whom she was talking about and I gave her the information she needed. A few days later, the same teacher came to me to ask me what touching thing I had done or said to that student since, when back in her class and after mentioning our discussion to Kim, the student said to her emotionally:

"Oh, Cristina, I will never forget her, she gave me back who I didn't know I was.

She gave me back my name."

Chapter IV

The loss of the name

Names

"Your name is your identity." (Kouritzin, 1999, p.181.)

The reason why I chose this motto is that it brings together what I wanted to address in this chapter as a living and alive continuation of the previous one. I had applied for many positions and had met many people, everywhere the same problem: "So, how do you pronounce your last name?" A 14-letter family name, impossible to pronounce for Canadians, except for those who would take the time to try:

Constantinescu. So one day, after a long and trying conversation on the phone when I had to spell my name 3 times, I came up with the idea of changing our family name. How about "Smith"? This would be the most common family name, entirely, genuine, pure English, and yet so hard to pronounce for my husband! The sound of the letters "th" is one of the few that our language does not have and therefore it is very difficult to learn and pronounce for many Romanians. The difficulty that all of us have when we have to utter this sound would probably be the last criterion to choose it for our family name.

I did not think about it until my husband pointed it out. But that would be a lot better, I said, then having to go through the spelling of our name every time we call somewhere and they need it: "C o n s t a n t i n e s c u"! We get a call from the bank and it takes about 5 minutes for them to figure out whom they are talking to. We get a call from somebody to offer us free rewards and they cannot pronounce our name. We go to

Safeway and they say while trying to read the name from my card: " Thank you, Ms. Cons-tan...sorry, I can't say it...Is Cristina okay?" And I say: "Sure!"

There are two aspects to this matter: the fact that the name is difficult to pronounce and the consequences of that. This is why some people opt to have it changed and others to keep it. Some people do not bother to react in any way and others change their whole life around it.

The difficulty of pronouncing a family name is not too far from the difficulty that any person experiences when trying to pronounce a new word in a foreign language. Now if that were the case with a common noun or any other word that someone would learn in any given language and a case of mispronunciation would occur, that would not have any devastating effects on the members of that community whatsoever. We all remember how many times we had to try to say something in a language we did not know or were just learning in order to make it sound right. In other words, mispronunciation is part of the process of learning a language. However, when it comes down to pronouncing somebody's foreign name, things change dramatically.

A name has been considered to be part of one's self and identity (S. Kouritzin, 1999). Parents carefully choose a name for their child according to family traditions, religious influences and life experiences. A name brings with it so many cultural and social aspects that in time it becomes part of the "what goes without saying" of a specific community like a Mohammed for the Muslim community or a Maria for a Christian one. In time people try to live up to their names, to be proud of them and make others acknowledge their effort. Their name becomes a part of their identity that says so much about who they are and where they come from.

My son's name is Vlad Andrei Constantinescu. The family name comes from the name of an Orthodox saint, Constantin who together with Elena were the protectors of Orthodoxism in Europe. The suffix "-escu" is an ancient Romanian particle that means "the son of". That is why very many Romanian family names end in this particle. His first name Vlad comes from the name of a famous Romanian prince, Vlad the Impaler who has become known all over the world by his nickname-Vlad Dracula. What goes without saying is that Vlad the Impaler fought against corruption, stealing, cheating and treachery and for justice and morality. I do not remember if we read anything about this name when we chose it for our son, but I think the choice was influenced by what goes without saying and the hope that somehow he would grow up to be a Vlad. His second name is the name of a saint from the orthodox calendar and it comes from the cultural belief that the saint protects a person whose name he/she was given.

We tried to tell him the story in Romanian. Remember? I told you the story in Romanian and maybe some of you skipped over it. The story included history, tradition, culture, and all of it was in another language--Romanian.

Now I will translate the story in English for you as I did for my son.

A long time ago, in Romania, about 600 years ago, there was a prince whose name was Vlad Dracula. It was a troubled time and yet he tried to fight against the Turks and become a strong leader. He's remembered today as a patriotic hero who stood up to Turkey and Hungary. He was the last Walachian prince to remain independent from the Ottoman Empire. He was so scornful of

other nations that when two foreign ambassadors refused to doff their hats to him, he had their hats nailed to their heads. He was opposed to the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches because he thought foreigners, operating through the churches, had too much power in Walachia. He tried to prevent foreign merchants from taking business away from his citizens. If merchants disobeyed his trade laws, they were, of course, impaled.

Vlad Tepes created a very severe moral code for the citizens of Walachia. You can guess what happened to anyone who broke the code. Thieves were impaled, even liars were impaled. Naturally there wasn't a lot of crime in Walachia during his reign.

To prove how well his laws worked, Vlad Dracula had a gold cup placed in a public square. Anyone who wanted to could drink from the cup, but no one was allowed to take it out of the square. No one did.

A visiting merchant once left his money outside all night, thinking that it would be safe because of Dracula's strict policies. To his surprise, some of his coins were stolen. He complained to Dracula, who promptly issued a proclamation that the money must be returned or the city would be destroyed. That night Dracula secretly had the missing money, plus one extra coin, returned to the merchant. The next morning the merchant counted the money and found it had been returned. He told Dracula about this, and mentioned the extra coin. Dracula replied that the thief had been caught and would be impaled. And if the merchant hadn't mentioned the extra coin, he would have been impaled, too.

Vlad Tepes or Dracula was a very important leader in the history of Romania who unified Walachia and who was opposed to the influence of the foreigners who either wanted to conquer the country or who only wanted to do commerce.

This is the story of my son's name to my husband and I. We have put our hopes, beliefs and dreams in these names. We want him to grow up to know all this. We want him to grow up to become proud of these names and of who he is. We want him to grow up and find out who he really is. Like parents all over the world, we are no different. Like any other parent I react to people saying to me: "Oh, his name is Vlad! Like in Vladimir, right?" I say defensively:

"No, like in Vlad! Vladimir is Russian and we are Romanian! That's all!"

I still don't know if my son understands this story now. Maybe later when he grows up I will tell him the story again. Maybe in Romanian or maybe in English.

Time has passed by and I thought this episode has been forgotten. I did not want to think about it for a while at least.

And then one day, my son comes home from school with another idea:

Mom, you know, we really have to change my name. I want to be James! Because we already have 2 more James in our class and I want to be like them! And plus, nobody can say my name right!

My knees go weak and I sit down with him to talk about it.

"What do they call you?" I ask him.

"They call me: Glad of Blad or whatever...And I am tired of telling them how my name goes! Why can I not have a normal name like the other kids?"

I try to think fast and efficiently because he has tears in his eyes. I push back in my mind the intellectual and reasonable, sensible highly articulate reasons and choose my words carefully:

"You do have a normal name, a special and unique name! How many other kids have a name like yours?"

"Nobody", he says stubbornly.

I can feel his pain and my pain and I choose to deal with his first:

"You see, you are so special for us that we decided to give you a special name that no other kid has! And when you grow up a little bit more I will tell you the story of your name."

That seemed to be enough for that day and about his first name. But then again we talked about it in Grade 1, when he learned how to spell his family name. His teacher was impressed with his ability to do it and she told us about it:

"I myself have problems with it when I write it, but he seems pretty confident and he is doing fine." I mentioned to her the long hours of practice at home, the tears and frustration that he felt every night because *"it's not fair that other kids have a short, easy name."* I do remember my saying to him: *"That is part of learning who you are, too!"*

Both my husband and I have had problems with our names. People don't understand him when he says: *"My name is Tudor",* they say: *"What? Two door? What kind of a name is that?"*

On the other hand my name is easier to pronounce, but I do have to say all the time: *"My name is Cristina without 'h'!"* And yet almost all my papers and documents show that my name is Christina!

I think that in time we will learn how not to have any feelings about it probably or simply ignore everything that is being said. But I know for sure that we will keep our names no matter how difficult it may be for anybody to spell them or pronounce them.

The promise

One day I go back to my suggestion of changing our family name. And my husband just sits down and after staring at me for a while, he starts to tell me this story that I hadn't known.

It was the day we were to leave the country and we were still packing and my parents-in law were helping us. I don't remember very many things that happened that day other than the fact that I would burst into tears whenever somebody would ask me anything. I had gone over the things that I needed to do that day so many times before and yet when the time came, I was devastated and useless. I had said my good-byes to everyone and everything, and yet the actual getting in the car and waving good-bye was harder than anything that I had ever imagined.

But before that, my husband told me, he had a private conversation with his father that I wasn't aware of or better said didn't even know about until later on.

His father had never been against our leaving the country, at least not out in the open, he had always encouraged us, actually he was the only one that ever approved of it,

and yet when the moment came for us to leave he suddenly realized what it meant. So he made his son promise a couple of things: that he or our son, his grandchild, would never change their family name, that he would teach our son to speak Romanian and that he would write a letter from time to time at least for his mother's sake.

His father passed away 8 months after we had immigrated to Canada.

Why is it that when I remember him I only remember his whisper while hugging me good-bye: "*I always loved you like my own daughter, Cristina!*" I shivered and said: "*I know!*", but the cold that froze my heart for a second seemed so strange and irreversible ... Why did he use the past tense and not present? Did he really know that was the last time we would see each other? Was that his own way of saying good-bye? Nobody can answer my question and now I think I am not looking for an answer either.

Now I know that he knew and since he could not see any future for us as family--grandparents, children and grandchildren--he wanted me to know how much he really treasured what we could offer him in the short time we were together.

I know what a promise means, but this has become more than that, it has become a legacy to my husband. So this is what my husband told me about his promise and why this is so important to him.

Another Father- Son Relationship

Tudor:

My relationship with my father, Victor, was a very close and special one. I assume that every little boy in the world believes that his Dad is a hero. Why do I think that about mine? Because my father was a highly educated man, a man of culture and arts. Not only was he a professional in his field, but he also read a lot in all other fields such as literature, philosophy, politics and music. The Romanian language was to him something holy, almost religious; unlike other parents he had dedicated a great part of his life to the education of his son and his own friends in order to raise the language to new standards of use and expression. Teaching me how to speak a proper and correct Romanian language was the law in our household.

His point of view on dialects was they had to be left behind, and each person living in that country should have made a definite effort to learn how to speak a proper and grammatically correct language without an accent. This is practically impossible because it depends on so many variables such as different levels of education, different influences throughout life, job related aspects of language use and so on. Some of his other beliefs related to learning a language were that one should always use the right word or expression that would render the perfect match between thought and linguistic form and that one should not use any linguistic clichés or fillers such as: "you know, you know" etc.

Time passed and I grew up, and then I was a University student and the time we had left to spend together was getting shorter and shorter. He still didn't waste any moment we spent together to continue to correct my mistakes, be it a repetition, a cliché or a regional use of some word. What I want to say here is that our father-son relationship from the point of view of my getting to master a proper language--Romanian--had at times a negative aspect for the people around us, like my mother and later on, my wife. This process had its influence on different and many aspects of our life together. In other words, my father was a perfectionist and he did everything in his power to give me the best of an education, with a stress on teaching me a perfect Romanian language. His high linguistic standards are still vivid in my mind and my conscience since I speak now as his son and as my son's father, too. I know very well what he meant by: "Teach Vlad Romanian, make sure he will never forget his language and his country's traditions and his people's ways!"

I know so well what he meant and that is why it feels like a burden on my shoulders. It weighs heavier and heavier every day that passes by because now my child, my son, Vlad, learns more and more English and French, and he forgets more and more Romanian. It is not entirely about my son, it is more about myself. It is my responsibility and my promise. When I look back now I realize that my father dedicated his life to doing this, but he was also supported by the school system and the culture surrounding us, by the 30 million people speaking the language and by a fairly large family and number of friends, by all the little things that I so much took for granted. How can I be the voice of the magazine

that my son likes to read, the voice of his Gameboy game that he likes to play, the voice of his friends that come for a sleep-over, the voice of his teacher at school for so many hours a day, 5 days a week, the voices of the characters in the cartoons he likes to watch and the list could go on like that? The task seems more and more impossible to me.

On the other hand, how can I teach my son whose first language I think is English, a perfect English? I myself am still a second-language speaker, still a student and still far away from being an expert and probably never going to be one, like my father was in his first language?

Now this is only half of the problem because what scares me the most is what I should do and don't know how to do it with the language: teach him what a father should teach a son, what a parent should teach a child by means of communication in one common language. If this is the case and my son's first language is English, how can I go into the depths of a language that is still not my language and show him what my father showed me--the real, living, pulsating colors of life? My pain and frustration start with the first words that come out of my mouth in Romanian when my son's long, dark eyelashes start batting with confusion and he says:

Dad, speak my language, please, I don't understand!

And then I start to look for words and eventually I find them. But it's not the same. Nothing is the same, as it would have sounded to me in my language. The words and sentences that come out of my mouth are not mine. I don't know how to explain this, but I have no ownership over what I say to my son.

Everything, words, phrases, idioms, sentences are just translations. They refer to some grammar points that I carefully review in my mind or else my son would correct me. I am so careful not to make grammar mistakes or to pronounce the words right that I don't even know where I started and what I wanted to say.

Sometimes it's easier, sometimes it's more difficult. Sometimes I continue in English, sometimes I switch to Romanian. Sometimes my wife helps me, sometimes I help her. We want to say so many things in such a different way that we mix up the two languages or we give up. But then, we always go back and try to say it again in English.

Emotion and feelings run high and mix up together with words to make up a special place where we all meet. It is our family's space. I refuse to acknowledge or understand that it could be any different.

This is one aspect of the loss that we have gone through when we left. There are so many more and still so many of them will not even be named or talked about. The loss that we experienced cannot be described in words. The memory of that night when we hugged and said good-bye had been traumatizing enough to convince us to put it somewhere in the corner of our memory. Somewhere where we couldn't touch it too often for fear we should hurt so much that we could not focus enough on our new life, new becoming. And then the shock came. He died and we had never had a chance to see each other again, nor had the option to go back for the funeral. The loss of a language, a culture, and a country has translated in the loss of his father.

We try to translate the loss of everything else in the loss of a language.

Is that what the blue frog does? Is that what Manole did? Is that what my son does?

Or is it me? The translator and the parent? The mother and the carrier of tradition? The mediator between two spaces and two languages?

Languages

Time flew by and things settled. Things and experiences started to get a name in another language that was trying to take the place of our first language. Still now and then words would sound in my mind in two languages at the same time as if one language had been the echo of the other.

At times the languages would fight and one of them would win and everything that would come out was in one language. Other times they would just flow and interweave giving each other enough room to create something else—a hybrid. In other words, when I talk to English speakers I always speak English without mixing any Romanian words. Yet, when I talk to Romanians I use English words a lot mixed with my Romanian. And if they do not know the words I try to translate or explain to them in Romanian. Yet I don't do it the other way around. I prefer to change/alter/mutilate my first language rather than my second language. I prefer to give birth to a hybrid--“a shameless hybrid” (Trinh T. Minh-ha, 1994, p. 10) and am proud of it rather than preserve what I had. This is the mark of my change that my parents notice when we talk on the phone. Sometimes I use words that I am so sure that are Romanian, but I don't

even realize that actually they are English. Sometimes they ask me to explain or translate, sometimes they don't.

I think I communicate with them all right, yet my son needs my help. I translate on another phone back and forth between grandparents and grandson. And my heart breaks. But I don't complain and go on translating into English to my son and into Romanian to my parents.

Much more lately, after I hang up, I cry... but not as often anymore. I have started to look forward into the future, a future with and for my son.

This proves that English is not a foreign language to me anymore. It is not a second language either. I don't want to rank or classify them anymore. They are my languages. They are my home. They are my new home. They don't mark boundaries anymore, now they open up spaces and meanings.

They tell my story. They don't fight anymore. They love each other now and this helps me a lot because above all my home has always been made of words. I have made sense of one thing only if I brought it home in one language, which used to be Romanian, but now I have got another one and I feel richer. And then step by step, word by word I would make my own home out of words. So that my thoughts would not get scared or feel insecure with a language or in any language.

So that I can grow and also help others grow in and with another or second language--like my son!

Where to begin the story about language loss

Images come to my mind and land in disorder in an effort to make sense of the story. Images are part of the story and they act like the pieces of a puzzle that fly in disorder trying to match the corresponding other piece to make a story. But this is not a complete story like the ones that my mind has been used to processing since childhood.

This is a different story, a disrupted or broken one according to my voluntary decision and will of immigration. I had taken upon myself its weight/responsibility and accordingly its consequences. And now it is time to put things in order. I have changed the story of my life and my son's. It is no longer about what could have been/happened, but about what it means. What the story is now, not what it could have been.

I will "begin, in the middle of a text, a phrase, a word, a syllable, with the smallest bit or piece. That at least will enable me to get started, not at the beginning, which is too much to ask, but wherever I am... *Wherever*: here, now; here I am; *me voici*. In the middle of a text, on the receiving end of a command, in the midst of multiple obligations. I begin from below... under obligation, under a host of obligations, aswarm with them" (Caputo, 1993, p.21).

So this is where I will begin my story. I am in the story. I am here and now and this is my story. The story is about myself and my son. He will represent the next generation. I am the previous generation and yet, the first one here. I am the beginning of a new generation here and the end of another one there. This is a generation, which my father and my mother do not understand. I myself still have questions about it all. I am

learning and understanding. But my parents cannot or maybe will not even try. Maybe my son and his own story will be the answer.

In other words, I am the living past that is struggling to foresee the future geography of identity. In order to do that I tried to map out some directions of thought. What is north and what is south? Where do I come from and where am I headed? What is my language of identity and what is my son's? Am I the keeper or the designer of traditions that establish identity? What is the importance of identity? Does it come from within, is it a promise to our parents, or is it shaped through constant distress or pressure?

My map of identity

North is usually placed on a map at the highest point. It symbolizes the direction where one is headed. It is the second language for myself and the first language for my son. At least for now when I am writing these lines. They are living coordinates of our identity. Because they are alive, they change at the same time as we do. They live with us, defining us at the same time. In other words they are what we are, but they also change as we change. Maybe one day they will become the other way around. I don't know yet. Is it possible that English will become my first language and Romanian--my son's first language? What does that mean? That one can change that much in one lifetime?

What does it mean to a mother--son relationship the fact that they speak two different languages as their first languages? What is lost in between? What is gained? Is

there anything that one of them would want to be different? How is the relationship going to survive? Or gain strength? Or enrich both their lives?

South is at the lower end of a map. I see it as our past, our roots, our tradition, our culture, what it was and what has made us what we are. It is our language, our first language for both my son and I a long time ago. It was our common land, our old home, our same space where the continuum of life made sense in the same language.

The relationship was shaped by the same words my mother used to use. The lullabies were the same as my mother used to sing to me at bedtime. And the bedtime stories were the same. What was taken for granted when I grew up was meant to be passed on to my son. Now it has become the whispers of the same language that I still use to calm down my son at night when he wakes up crying from a bad dream.

West is to the left on the map. It is the place where I used to be “the same” as everybody. That doesn’t mean I was not different in some ways such as my desire to leave and find out what lies beyond the horizon. Maybe I was not like everybody else, but at least then I was part of the group, I was the insider, I was one of them, accepted, integrated and initiated by means of being born and raised there. I knew the rules of the game and the familiarity of the lived space made the recognition and understanding of any new rules easy to me.

There was also no question of or struggle for being accepted. And even if at times I was walking on wire the safety net-my parents’ home--was in place. No matter how bad life treated me I always knew there was a place where I could go and nothing could touch me. My parents would always find a way to make things look not so bad. The comfort and love of your home becomes in time what we long for in times of need.

And yet the sad thing about it is the fact that I am not the same within my culture anymore. Within my own family I am maybe the prodigal daughter, but not what I used to be. I am not at home there anymore.

East is to the right on the map. It is the new place where I am truly different. I am another. I am not the same as my neighbor or my coworker, or the parents from my son's school. My living, physical space is still new to me. The new ways of my adoptive culture threaten the birth culture. By learning the new ways I forget the old ones. Or maybe I didn't even know the old ones completely, fully, like my mother or my grandmother did. And yet I know for sure that this is my son's home. It is his world and his culture. It is his now and here. For him there is no then and there. He has no memories of that space that might haunt his home. This is home to him and consequently for myself. So I am trying to map identities by "narrating the space" (Yaeger, 1996, p. 1-40) surrounding us carefully and attentively.

Yet now and then something happens to remind me that it is not that simple or straightforward. His father is trying to explain something to him in Romanian and by the frustration on my son's little face I can tell that he doesn't get it. And then I hear my son's exasperated remark: *"Dad, this is in your language and I don't understand!"* And that scares me. That means in your language that is Romanian, but which used to be his language too, when he was too little to remember!

I hear the words: *"Dad, speak in my language!"* and I visualize the gap between father and son. It is huge and frightening. It is not normal. It is/exists. It does not remind me of anything and therefore it is not comfortable. It is not comfortable because it doesn't

remind me of anything. I realize then that I have always acted involuntarily in copying our parents in my relationship with my child. Haven't you?

Role models have been presented to us since early childhood. They have become part of the taken for granted in our jobs of becoming/being parents when our turn comes. Or maybe not. We all remember a certain argument that we had with our parents, the frustration we felt when being grounded for something we felt was unjust, and the secret promise to ourselves: "When I am a parent, I will never do that to my child."

But the role model has an ineffable power over us and it provides you with the conceptual frame and the lines to say. This will slowly become what we take for granted in being a parent. Little by little you start to feel comfortable in your new role--that of a parent--and realize that you have been slowly, but surely, initiated into what is a culture in itself-parenthood. However, being a parent as a concept or a role model is also culturally embedded to such an extent that it is very difficult to draw the fine line between an ideal national model and the one provided within your own individual family. Is the mother in the "Blue Frog" the typical Korean parent or is she only a particular instance when the phenomenon of motherhood took place?

Home, roots and identity

Together with the role model of a parent comes the concept of a "home", actually the "home". It is again taken for granted, made in a tradition and connected to a certain place. But most importantly, it allows for a person/family/group of people to establish his/her/their roots which is often called "the ground zero" in a tradition or a culture.

The concept of home in relation to identity was defined and analyzed, shaped and re-shaped, positioned and re-positioned, preserved and changed by Madan Sarup (1994, p. 103). The philosophical positioning of the concept opens up even more questions about home and identity, and the relationship between them.

But the home, as it is repeatedly reminded, is not a jail. It is a place where one is compelled to find stability and happiness. One is made to understand that if one has been temporarily kept within specific boundaries, it is mainly for one's own good" (Trinh T. Minh-ha, 1994, p.13).

My home has formed my personality and defined who I am today. It comes with a language-mother's tongue-, and feelings, and members of the family, and values and rankings, and memories, and things, and smells, and events, and the list could go on and on.

"Home then is as large as one makes it" (Snyder, 1990, p. 23-4). It comes with a sense of space, place and time. Home is in a place that the generation before me chose, but it has become what it is today only in time, over the years we have spent in that place laying layer after layer of Christmas or Easter traditions.

In other words time validates place, and gives birth to a different, new face of the concept of home: the feeling of being home. I build a home in a place, and in time I acquire a feeling. The feeling of being home keeps me going. It makes me move on, because now I know where my "ground zero" is. This feeling is so complex and powerful that it can shape our whole life. I would like to call it a "safety net" feeling. In other words, this means that when the time comes for young members of the family to leave

home and start their new, own homes, they implicitly carry with them the idea, the concept and the feeling of home.

In time, the feeling of the “safety net” that is in place--in case something happens--will help them walk courageously and gracefully on the wire of life. However, it is very rarely that the safety net is used, yet it is there and it provides another space of possible comfort if something unexpected should happen. However, when people immigrate and leave behind material things and human relationships, they also conciecnceously start to walk on the wire of life without a safety net in place. Maybe that is why every new step brings about anxiety and stress. Moving out from home could bring about stress and anxiety when you are young and inexperienced, but moving to another country will take some of your concentration from *where* you are going towards *how* you are going.

With regards to the triangular relationship between home, roots and place, I disregard the external, material aspect of it (Marx) and I stress the importance of the lived experience aspect of it (Heidegger). Only the experiences that someone lives in a place make it become home and allow for the roots to become real and alive. Therefore, if one can make roots in one place, that becomes the foundation of one’s new home. And this allows for the “inexhaustible reservoir” (Trinh T Minh-ha, 1994, p.16) that we call home to revive and expand the movements of life, and thus re-open to the outside, outwards, to the others.

The relationship between these three--home, roots and space--is so strong that it allows for changes that occur in one of them to produce explosive consequences in the other two. In other words, if one changes one’s familiar/traditional dwelling/living space to a new one--as in the case of immigration--the effect on what used to be and mean

home and roots is almost destructive and even alienating. Therefore the inner, urgent need is to find different coordinates that can mark the new place as familiar, non-hostile and comfort giving. In time, this will become the new home. And later on, this will allow for new roots to grow.

I cannot and do not want to separate place from people that live in that place. By living in a place I mean defining it, changing it, keeping it, thinking it, making it. Thus the place is a juxtaposition of place and language. In other words, I use a language to define, change, keep, think, name and make a place. In order for that space to become mine, I use a language to make it mine. To become mine means to decorate it with furniture of my own make. Sometimes the pieces are antique--tradition--, sometimes they are new-change--and sometimes they are a combination of old and new-a hybrid. As long as they live together in harmony without creating tension and disruption, the place--which has become mine now--allows for the spirit to grow roots and slowly becomes my home. If we add the other coordinate--time--to this newly acquired place, we get tradition. Usually, tradition is associated with roots (Wollen, 1994, p.188-189). Are roots and tradition partial synonyms then?

And then again, the question: why the need for a tradition? Why are people so interested in keeping and passing on a tradition? Why are they so proud of it all over the world? Is tradition only the basis for mental health, character formation and successful ego development? Or is it more than that? Then why the actual, promising, tempting, international movement that promotes cosmopolitanism?

Never talk to strangers

This is one of the first rules my son learned at daycare. I was not aware of it until one day when, while shopping and being asked something by a complete stranger, I started talking to that person. My son pulled at my hand and whispered to me:

Mom, you can't talk to him. He is a stranger. And you are never to talk to strangers!

I wanted to say: "But, you know, he needs help!" and then I saw the connection. I am a stranger, too! And I need help, too! And yet people don't talk to me because I am a stranger. By this I mean people I am different from don't make the effort of even trying to talk to me.

The cultural, supposedly well-intended cliché: "Never talk to strangers" has three powerful key-words. First of all, the adverb "never" sets up a temporal dimension that gives no hope of future change of mind of a certain group of people/community. There is no possibility of a different position. The implied negation--never versus ever--suggests that no matter what the situation, under no circumstances, the rule has to be followed and the individual judgment must not change it. Not now, not ever, never!

Your own feelings of a person's being trustworthy have to be first validated by somebody else who is a member of the dominant group, an insider. The insider will take upon the task of getting to know the outsider in order to evaluate the latter's "difference" or "strangeness". In other words, if the difference is perceived/seen/analyzed/labeled as bad, dangerous, inferior-which is in most cases--it will constitute grounds for exclusion sentenced in a stigma applied to the outsider.

Erving Goffman (1968) summarizes his contributions to the topic of immigration and stigma with the idea that the stigma includes the sum of traits that define a person as a stranger: linguistic and cultural traditions, political and religious viewpoints, occupational categories, and even gender categories. If some of them, or even one of them, is considered to be different, threatening, not desirable, or maybe non-understandable, the social norm applies and the final result is social exclusion.

Durkheim (cited in Madan Sarup in "Home and Identity", p.103) asserted that "a social norm is rarely expressed as a firm rule"; it is rather an accumulation of decisions made by a community over a long period of time. Yet, the decisions belong to the inside members of that community which is thus perceived as the dominant one--the one who has the power to make, apply, and maybe change the norm. The social norm is thus not only a means of setting up the boundaries or borders of a cultural group--the dominant one--but also of exercising the power of that particular group. It instates and also regulates, empowers and alienates. It is not questioned on the inside and measured up to on the outside.

Madan Sarup notes (p.103) that: "There is a common assumption that there is only one norm: the dominant norm is the correct one, and the others must adjust." Who are the others and what is the degree of adjustment that falls under the norm for another to be accepted? In other words, does adjust mean change? And if it does, change to what degree? And is it possible? I think I am still adjusting or changing?

Maybe I should look at the action of adjustment in terms of a process. When immigrating to a different country, the process of adjusting to the new culture can also be understood and looked at from different perspectives.

One perspective implies the people's intentionality in the process of becoming adjusted to the new cultural space. In other words, what is the extent to which people are willing to change, what are the things they are willing to sacrifice and what does the change really mean? Yet there are changes that people want to make, such as learning a second language to the best of their knowledge, changing their names, or their socializing habits, their eating habits, their style of life or even more. But how about their skin color or the shape of their face/eyes/mouth, racial features that can never be changed and can forever be a daunting obstacle in their desire to change and integrate/adjust?

"Sometimes/ I want to forget it all/ this curse called identity/ I want to be far out/ paint dreams in strange colors/ write crazy poetry/ only the chosen can understand/ But it's not so simple/ I still drink tea/ with both hands." (Nancy Hom cited in Trinh T. Minh-ha, p.17).

I do think it is "not so simple" and why is it then that the text is so powerful? And yet that seems not to be the case with other people. Or is it only an illusion that they make up for themselves to numb their real feelings? I will tell you yet another story.

My best friend changed a lot and now we are not friends anymore. Not because we had a fight or anything like that, but especially because we respect each other's opinions and choices. A couple of years ago I could not imagine my life without her, and now we haven't talked in long while. She married a Canadian from a totally different religion in which she accepted to be baptized and has changed completely her style of life. Whenever I would visit her in her new home, I could not find the joy and happiness we once shared over a cup of coffee. This happened not because of her new choices, but

because I could not understand why she had to give up every trace of her previous cultural past, religion and life style in exchange for something that is still different to me.

I hear now she has had a baby that I will probably never see. She never calls me anymore, and nor I her. What is there left to be said? I can understand and respect this subjective change or adjustment, and yet I don't know if I could do it if that were my case. Actually it is my case, too, but ... I still drink coffee.

Another perspective of the adjustment to a new culture is the preservation and instatement of the norms of the dominant cultural group in the sense of acknowledging and defining the characteristics of sameness.

And yet within any particular cultural group, there are too many differences that ensure its diversity and variability. But in order for that group to be considered and recognized as a distinct one from another one, it has to have a structure based on similarity, which is stressed and regulated by a norm. The authority of a norm is validated time and again by the judgment of the dominant group, which thus ensures its own control over its own boundaries. Therefore the group uses its own norm not only to create amendments for its own members, but also to regulate the intrusion of possible threatening outsiders. Then is it actually a defense mechanism or a control system?

I think it works both ways. So, in order for an outsider to become an insider, what is there for him/her to do? What are the steps to be taken and the things to be changed for an immigrant to become a citizen, for an outsider to become an insider, for a stranger to become a friend? Is it only about learning the language and the ways of the land? Can it ever be done?

“Never talk to strangers!” comes up again. How do I know when I am not a stranger anymore? When do I not feel like one, but also when am I not perceived/seen/labeled/named as one? How much do I need to change or what is it that I need to change so that I am not a stranger anymore? What will I become/be then? “A shameless hybrid”? What will my son become/be? What is he? I think/feel that he is not a stranger here anymore! Why is that so sad to me when I should feel so happy for him?

And do I still teach him to never talk to strangers? Who are the strangers to him? They are not the monsters or the dragons in the bedtime stories, but they are real people, absent people, people that he knew once and he forgot, people that he can't remember, but people that remember him.

His own grandparents are strangers to him. They are but faces/people in a picture sent from thousands of miles away or voices on the phone on the weekend. They are my memory of them that I recollect at bedtime when trying to mend the broken thread of the generations. I know where my place is. How can I teach his? I don't give up and I go on and on about what grandma did when she was little, about how she sang him lullabies at night in another language, about how she carried him in her comforting arms, about the stories she would tell him and he would listen to, about the laughter and joy that filled the nursery room where they would spend hours on end.

And my son just listens to me. I don't know if he understands me or he is just comforted by the sound of my voice in another language. I can see his dreamy eyes picturing the substitute memories of his early childhood the same way he puts together pieces of a puzzle.

I can also feel his questions lingering. Yet, the questions don't come. But something else comes up. It is in the children's nature to question, but maybe because he has sensed my being at a loss with answers about this, he comes up directly with the solution: "Mom, you know what? Why can't we buy a grandma? We could also buy her a house behind our own and so I could go visit her every day. You could come with me and then you wouldn't miss her anymore, right?" Tears ran down my cheeks and I hugged him at a loss of an answer for then.

I could only say: "A grandma is not a toy, honey!"

If only we could think of the world like a child does!

Chapter V

Conclusions

Leaving aside definitions of language loss in the context of immigration that may need to be re-explored and re-defined, I wanted to focus in this research on the multifaceted aspect of family relationships inside an immigrant family. After presenting its background - past, traditions, culture, beliefs, and socio-economic factors - that has an undeniable and continuous influence on the dynamics of the relationships, I pursued only those facets related to learning a second language by all the members of the family.

I have undergone a hermeneutic change in the process in the sense that I have explored different angles of my lived experience traveling back and forth through cultures, language, and familiar places. I cannot cut out my past, my background, or my first language when I am writing these lines or when I am communicating with my son. Neither can my husband. However, the need and wish to do just that is not as powerful anymore. Rather, how we can accommodate each other and cross the boundaries set by languages in our new life will be our future and constant endeavor.

[support] children in their social and moral development as human beings; [help] grandchildren know the story of their past; [create] circumstances in which their children can succeed without rejecting who they are and where they have come from; [and ensure] that their children will stay connected enough to take with them when they are old. (McKay and Weinstein-Shr, 1993, p. 415 cited in Kouritzin, 1999, p. 210).

During this process, I have become aware that things taken for granted before I use in rearing up my child. Things like stories, myths, legends, and powerful instances of

cultural human behavior that are part of who I am. They are woven into the fabric of the first language that I am trying not to lose and teach my son. They are also translated into the second language that I am still learning and that my son speaks as his first language. We are both working on sustaining points of contact and communication with the hope that we will find our own equilibrium, which will bring about new learning situations.

Children develop through concentric worlds, gradually able to move further from home but always seeing each larger sphere through the lens of the previous stage. As a black student of my husband told him in the sixties, "You have to know where you stand before you can decide who you stand next to." Identity multiculturalism suggests offering multiple tracks at the beginning of education and makes good sense as a place to start, the best place to develop confidence from which to encounter the new or strange, but it should not be exclusive or set up a single axis of contrast--(Bateson, 1994, p. 170).

This research was not initiated to prove what could be done to prevent first language loss, whose fault it is, or what political and social factors have influenced or accelerated the process, but rather to present the deep layers of interaction between a child and his immigrant family. The formative years are marked by exposure to languages, two cultures, and sometimes to translated knowledge.

I invite you to live with these stories for a while, and then select from those lines what is relevant to your own teaching philosophy, life history, or future research.

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