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**Socio-cultural factors affecting the language learning experiences of South
Asian Female Immigrants**

by
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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial
fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts in Second
Language Education

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Abstract

This qualitative case study describes the language learning experiences of four South Asian women from their perspectives and uses tools of ethnographic inquiry such as interviews, participant observations and document analysis. The socio-cultural factors affecting their language learning process and acculturation are analyzed. Key elements of the lived experiences of these South Asian females surfacing in the case study data are isolation and gender inequity. Socio-cultural identity emerges as a very influential factor in the language learning process. I understand this identity as socially constructed, contradictory, and fluid. Peirce's poststructuralist conception of social identity as multiple, a site of struggle, and subject to change is used in the theoretical framework. Her concept of "investment" is employed to describe immigrant women's involvement in the language learning process. An umbrella category termed the "weight of society" is used to explain the influences of socio-cultural norms on the language learning processes of the four research participants. Implications for immigrant language training policies and further research are suggested.

Résumé

Cette étude de cas qualitative sur l'apprentissage des langues utilise les outils de l'éthnographie (entrevues, observations participantes, analyse de documents) pour décrire les expériences de quatre femmes sud-asiatiques. L'auteure adopte la perspective des apprenantes tout en analysant les facteurs socio-culturels d'apprentissage et d'acculturation. Les thèmes principaux du vécu des femmes qui ressortent des données sont l'isolement et l'inégalité des sexes. L'identité socio-culturelle, définie comme une "construction" sociale à la fois fluide et contradictoire, s'avère être un facteur très important de l'apprentissage. Pour le cadre théorique de l'étude, l'auteure adopte une conception post-structuraliste de l'apprentissage inspirée de Peirce. Celle-ci conçoit "l'identité sociale" comme multiple, changeante --un lieu de luttes-- et utilise le terme "d'investissement" pour décrire l'engagement des femmes immigrantes dans leur apprentissage des langues. L'auteure de cette étude ajoute aux concepts de Peirce celui du "poids de la société", expression générique par laquelle elle explique l'influence des normes socio-culturelles sur les processus d'apprentissage des quatre participantes de recherche. En conclusion, l'auteure suggère de nouvelles pistes de recherche tout en considérant la portée de ses résultats sur les programmes, méthodes et mesures en matière d'enseignement de langues pour immigrants.

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The Pain of Non-Communication

Darkness, descending through my blood
Floats over my heart
Like poisonous blue smoke,
Desires, like bare trees, with no pangs of growth
Bow their heads in shame
In the bazaar of non-fulfillment.
Eyes don't see
Ears don't hear
The tongue has lost its taste.
And touch sparks no sensation.
The whole body has turned into a heap of sand.
The fear of what will come shatters the nerves-
When that frail bond will be broken
Under strains of pressures
When objectives of life
Will go down
As useless pursuits
And faith turns skeptic
And meaning loses its sense
Like the leaves of autumn
Broken and scattered by heavy winds.
Then, all those ways of communication
Will be filled
With mangled corpses of thoughts.

Nuzhat Siddiqui (Polyphony 12, 1990)

Chapter One: Setting the Scene

Although I set out to study the particular phenomenon of language learning among South Asian women in Montreal, through the process of teaching them and getting to know them, and the ensuing interviews and four case studies, the narrower issue of language acquisition broadened into a complex, intricate mesh of socio-cultural norms, gender roles, family relationships, and identity construction as illustrated in the following excerpts from interviews with four South Asian women:

So they say "No, no, no. You can't go." Not allowed for me. Yeah, ahh, because they careful for the teenage girls. In my, in my generation. But now it's very changed, but my, my age is same like that. So I grow up that way. Now here is everybody, so a little bit shy everybody. That's the problem! (Kama, Interview #2, 22.02.98)

...here is more freedom, free, and I get more free, when it take long time to live there, I will be uhh, a Canadian, because I move like a Canadian person every day. If I, if I live there more time, I might be a Canadian person. (Rafia, Interview #3, 18.04.98)

They like to know everything, other person what is doing, what is going to do. They are people, the culture is like that, everybody. But here, let's say, I do not bother about it now...(Fatima's husband's translation of her words, Interview #3, 25.04.98)

My husband want to stay like a Indian woman, to, under him command. But uh, my children, they don't like that way. They learn more from India, but still, they don't want to, living like a Indian woman was living. That they don't like it. They say that you Indian woman is never gonna change. But you have to change little bit for yourself. So what that is I did. (Anju, Interview #3, 22.05.98)

Globalization and English as a Second Language

The current movement of globalization, an economic, political, and cultural phenomenon, is fostering a world-wide standardization in several areas including communication. The English language has become a lingua franca of the modern world, monopolizing the powerful domain of computers and computer-related technologies. On the negative side, this monopoly of English over the economic and communication systems of the globe can be seen as a sort of neo-imperialism, carrying the threat of marginalization for vast populations in a center-periphery dynamic typical of earlier forms of imperialism and colonialism. On a more positive note, this universal language of communication could facilitate greater economic and political world-wide co-operation with advantages for all.

A common language opens up opportunities in trade, access to information, and the development of social services systems in which nations could derive mutual advantages. Maybe less developed nations will begin to benefit from the experiences of more developed countries to change the trend of being historically taken advantage of. Maybe more developed nations will even begin to listen and learn something from the powerful grass-roots level social systems in less developed countries where people know how to take care of each other and function co-operatively. Whatever the positive and negative effects of globalization, the universal spread of English is a rolling stone gaining momentum, and is not likely to slow down whether we like it or not. It has been

estimated that there are more people now who speak English as a second language than those who speak it as a first language.

Globalization is making the world feel like a smaller place. The twentieth century has witnessed much international migration. There has been a dramatic explosion of inter-human conflicts and environmental disasters, as well as some positive factors such as increased trade, cross-cultural communication, and travel. Globalization, with all of its negative and positive results, is causing people to move. Technological advancement, which increases exponentially, clearly has a huge impact on international movement. For example, people are forced to flee from their homes due to the disasters caused by inter-human conflicts, which have been tremendously compounded by advanced military technology. In terms of environmental disasters, the production of goods to be consumed, packaging to be discarded, waste produced by this production, and general lifestyle patterns of consumption have changed so rapidly in this century that the ensuing damage to the environment can not even be accurately estimated. These factors have begun to create crises of inhabitability, wherein people can no longer survive in their own communities. The deforestation in Brazil and the desertification in sub-Saharan Africa are two drastic examples. Conversely, these same technological advancements have had significant effects on the more positive aspects of globalization. More accessible methods of communication, travel, and media exposure have opened up the world, facilitating an enriching exchange of cultural information and experiences. Both the positive and negative aspects of

globalization result in an enormous number of individuals and groups who emigrate either by choice or by force. In any case, immigration demands language learning as part of the process of becoming a citizen of a new country, and the language to be learned is often English.

The dangerous tendency toward imperialism and colonialism inherent in the field of Teaching English as a Second Language (hereafter ESL) lead me to enter this area with great caution. Although several areas of applied linguistics fascinate me, I am most drawn to the socio-linguistic aspects of the effects of one's culture and identity on learning a new language. A keen student of foreign languages and cultures, I have lived the experience of being a linguistic and cultural minority. I have felt the frustration of not having the lexical or syntactic tools to express my ideas and desires in a foreign environment. But my sojourns to Africa and South Asia as a minority have always been temporary situations with a clear end in view. I have always had the underlying understanding that I am an Anglo-Canadian, and regardless of where I have lived or worked, I have never begun the process of losing my cultural identity and assimilating into a new culture. It is only through my work in teaching English as a Second Language to immigrants in Canada that I have begun to glimpse the extraordinarily complex web of experiences involved in learning a new language in a new culture, and to view these experiences from the perspective of the learners.

Acculturation/Assimilation

Because of its universal character and power status as an international language, English is often studied as a foreign language all over the world. However, immigrants learning English in their new countries are involved in a process much bigger than language learning. Learning a new language is only part of the experience of migration. The process of acculturation, or assimilation as it has been traditionally understood by nations receiving immigrants, involves a complicated set of challenges and demands on new citizens. Ferdman (1990) states that assimilation “emphasizes the dysfunctionality of differences and the maintenance of the dominant culture” while acculturation, or the “melting pot” view, “maintains that the ideal society takes something from each of its component ethnic groups to create a new culture ultimately shared by all” (Ferdman, 1990, p. 183).

Assimilation is generally understood as the process of assimilating aspects of the new culture to the point of losing aspects of one's original culture. Acculturation is a less stringent term, allowing for the adoption of certain aspects of a new culture without losing anything from one's first culture. Becoming a citizen in a new nation is a spectrum of experiences open to diverse definitions. How do new immigrants become “Canadian”, and what does this process really entail? It seems likely that language learning would be involved because communication is necessary for cultural participation. Although citizens from a dominant language group often assume that the acquisition of this language is a

first priority for new immigrants, the perspectives of these immigrants may be somewhat different. What are the various interpretations of acculturation, and what role does language learning play in this process?

If we assume language learning to be important in the acculturation process of immigrants, how much of a role must the country receiving the immigrants play in that process? For example, is the Canadian government responsible for providing the opportunity of learning the official languages to all those who immigrate? If so, how far must this responsibility go toward ensuring access to language classes? Currently, the services offered seem to be confusing and to lack cohesion among different levels of government and between government and non-government institutions (Burnaby, 1992). It is difficult to get a comprehensive picture of the systems of language classes offered to immigrants due to the sheer numbers of people, varied locations, programs and services. Also, there are differing ideologies and evaluative orientations toward immigrants. The services available obviously depend on the size of the host city and the populations of immigrants they receive. However, physical and logistical considerations are only the beginning of the multitude of factors to be dealt with in the process of providing accessible and effective language training.

Factors related to Language Learning for South Asian Females

Socio-cultural issues such as religion, gender and family roles, perspectives, beliefs, and value systems all have a significant effect on participation in language classes. Other notable considerations are the affective factors involved in interactions with the dominant linguistic and cultural group, and related problems of self-concept, identity, and self-esteem. These socio-cultural issues are intensified among the female immigrant population, often rendering language classes inaccessible to them. Cultural beliefs and roles usually have a more restrictive character for women in the domain of education, as is evident when viewing statistics of comparative gender levels of education and employment. Compared to foreign-born males and Canadian-born women and men, foreign-born women have lower levels of literacy and general education and more restricted employment prospects (Boyd, 1992).

Among female immigrants, some groups appear to be distinctly disadvantaged with respect to knowledge of the official Canadian languages, basic literacy, general education, and employment statistics. According to the 1991 Canadian census, foreign-born females are twice as likely as their male counterparts not to know one or both of the official languages. Boyd's (1992) explanation of this phenomenon is threefold; this includes less opportunity for women to study in their home country, large communities of birthplace groups with which to communicate here in Canada, and the difficulty for women to access language training programs due to gender roles and family responsibilities.

These factors seem to be more intense among South-Asian communities than other immigrant groups. For example, among the populations of immigrants from Finland, Hungary, and Greece, the ratios of women compared to men who have no knowledge of either official Canadian language is about double. However, among South Asian mother tongue groups such as Gujarati, Hindi, and Urdu, the ratio approaches triple. Other groups such as Persian and Arabic speakers have ratios less than double, and that of the Japanese is even lower (Census of Canada, 1991). Statistics for basic reading skills, levels of education, and employment opportunities reveal a similar disparity between South Asian female immigrants and their male counterparts, as well as compared to other immigrant populations and the Canadian-born. Clearly, this subset of female immigrants are in a disadvantaged position to fulfill the strange new expectations of employment which family and society may place upon them after immigration.

Considering the relatively high current levels of unemployment in Canada (8.6% in February, 1998, Statistics Canada), knowledge of one or more of Canada's official languages is practically a necessity in finding a job. Yet in the 1990's, there are more immigrants without a knowledge of either official language than there were in the 1970's (Klassen & Burnaby, 1993). Although Statistics Canada can give information on the percentages of a particular population's knowledge of the official languages, this information does not include the reasons why many are not learning the languages. Nor is the information useful in

providing insight into what needs to change in order to offer more adequate language training to immigrants.

How much responsibility does government have in ensuring the equality of access to language training? While Statistics Canada does indicate enormous gender and ethnic group disparities in the knowledge of the official languages among immigrant groups, the causes of these disparities are open to debate. It may be argued that the reasons for the inequalities between certain groups are not due to inaccessibility of language training, but are caused by socio-cultural situations over which government policy planners and ESL curriculum administrators have no control. Or, it may be asserted that the absence of language knowledge among certain groups is due to lack of motivation to learn. However, much of the current literature indicates that people who do not have language skills are not merely unmotivated, but that the language training programs offered by the government are not appropriate or accessible to all immigrants (Boyd, 1992; Burnaby, 1992; Cumming & Gill, 1992; Norton Peirce, 1993). Assuming that these programs are not always suitable for the target population, the next logical step would be to examine, from the perspective of some immigrants, the reasons why they are inadequate.

Rationale for Ethnographic Research

To provide relevant information on the effectiveness of ESL classes for immigrants, I believe it is necessary to obtain their perspectives. It is only through a clearer understanding of the circumstances and world-views of this target population that policy planners can attempt to meet their specific needs. Rather than speculating from a culturally foreign point of view, why not listen to their opinions and descriptions of their experiences? I believe that qualitative research is required to fill out the sketchy information provided by quantitative studies of literacy rates, knowledge of languages, and employment statistics. Along with Klassen & Burnaby (1993), I see the urgent need for more qualitative research in this field. Ethnographic studies which provide rich descriptions of the experiences and perspectives of particular cultural groups are necessary in order to obtain an understanding of the needs of Canadian immigrants. I want to discover their challenges and experiences in the process of learning English, with a view to improving the quality and accessibility of the language training programs offered. I hope to fill in one tiny corner of the vast mural of language learning experiences of Canadian immigrants by focusing on a selected group of South Asian females. My research aims to obtain authentic descriptions of the personal language learning and acculturation experiences of four South Asian women from their perspectives.

Geographical and Political Context

Canada was the first country in the world to have a multicultural policy, "Bilingualism within a Multicultural Framework", which was introduced by Prime Minister Trudeau in 1971, followed by the "Multiculturalism Act of 1988" (Ghosh, 1996). However, the diverse ethnic groups that constitute Canada do not function as a homogeneous society. Becoming Canadian is a complex process with multiple meanings and various perspectives. Although citizens from the dominant language groups and new Canadians may agree on the importance of language learning, they have differing perspectives on the significance and reality of the acculturation process. As mentioned above, the language training offered by various levels of government and non-government organizations lacks cohesion and consistency between the provinces. Perhaps the greatest challenge lies in ensuring the accessibility of language learning programs to all immigrants, especially those females who have been traditionally marginalized.

Although Canada receives many immigrants, there is little current research available concerning the crucial issues of language learning among these new arrivals. The federal government immigration policies are driven by economic and demographic considerations, yet society at large has not yet realized the importance of immigration for the social and economic fiber of Canada. Barbara Burnaby (1992) reviewed the existing language training for adult immigrants in Canada, and finding the system rather disorganized, suggested principles toward a national policy on the provision of language

learning. Considering the multitude of ethnic groups with their various unique needs and situations, along with the logistical difficulties involved in coordinating all the levels of community, municipal, provincial, and federal government organizations involved, this would be no small task.

Language learning for new immigrants is especially complicated in the primarily French-speaking province of Quebec, as government education programs are under provincial jurisdiction in Canada. In response to the historical marginalization of the French language, Quebec's language legislation has worked to promote the protection and survival of the French language. French is the dominant language in Quebec. Bill 101, passed in 1977, promoted the prominence of the French language by requiring businesses to display signs primarily in French and restricted the access to English schooling for new arrivals to the province. This controversial legislation contradicts the Canadian Charter of Rights and the Official Languages Act which guarantee linguistic rights for both English and French, the two official languages of Canada. Bill 101 also forces all children in Quebec to attend French language public schools, unless one of their parents received their primary school education in English.

For adult immigrants, intensive French language instruction is offered free of charge through centers like COFI (Centre d'Orientation et de Formation des Immigrants). There are very few courses in ESL, accessible only to those with less than twelve years of education in their country of origin. Many immigrants

feel that these language laws force them to learn French although they prefer to learn English which is perceived as a more advantageous international language. In Montreal, a city of almost three million people with an unemployment rate of 10.2% (February, 1998, Statistics Canada), it is necessary to be bilingual in French and English to obtain almost any job. Therefore, adult immigrants in Montreal are in the difficult position of needing to learn both official languages in order to gain employment, yet having extremely limited access to language training in English.

In response to the complicated, unique situation of immigrants learning English in Montreal, I conducted an inquiry into the language learning experiences of a selected group of South Asian women. I provide qualitative, descriptive data to add to the existing general, statistical literature concerning language training for immigrants. By conducting four case studies, I aim to offer rich, detailed descriptions from the perspectives of four South Asian women to fill in a small yet significant piece of the complex, multifaceted mural of the experiences of Canadian immigrants.

A socio-linguistic analysis of the language learning processes of my four case studies involves a myriad of interrelated issues affecting these women's experiences. The challenge of this qualitative inquiry is to view the research participants' daily lived experiences through the lens of their own perspectives. Most recurrent in the interview data were the experiences of isolation, gender

inequity, and vulnerability. Socio-cultural identity emerged as an important factor affecting the language learning process of all of my research participants. I analyze socio-cultural identity as historically and socially constructed, contradictory, and changing over time. Perhaps the most significant issue to permeate the data from my case studies is the influence of socio-cultural norms in South Asian societies, which I call the “weight of society”. The complex interplay of these issues is analyzed in terms of their affects on the language learning processes of the four research participants.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The literature that I have considered relevant delves into three broad categories of research. For the purposes of this study, I examined a small body of work concerning ESL for adult immigrants, studies particularly focusing on female immigrants, and those concerned with female South Asian immigrants in Canada. A common theme running throughout each of these three areas of the literature is a call for more qualitative research in these fields of study. Klassen and Burnaby stress the need for social sciences researchers to focus on the social context of literacy using qualitative approaches:

Statistics Canada will not likely gather data on additional factors that would shed new light on the adult immigrant population in relation to ESL and L1 literacy. More important, however, is that statistics show only such factors as the size of the population, its relationship to other factors, and trends over time. They say very little about the realities and the needs of the individuals themselves...The numbers are silent on why individuals have or have not learned English, the personal experience of barriers, and the individual agendas which affect a range of issues related to effective participation in education, employment and other areas of everyday life. (Klassen and Burnaby, 1993, p. 382).

More specifically, Cumming describes the need to consider data from such ethnographic research in order to provide better language training:

Consideration of various contextual factors is necessary to understand how literacy and language instruction can best serve the interests of adult immigrant learners, particularly those who are often disadvantaged in conventional programs of ESL or literacy training. Choices about the appropriate language of instruction and other curriculum decisions need to be made in reference to local patterns of literate language use, the status of minority and majority languages, gender roles, the felt needs of learners, learners' existing knowledge of literacy and the second language,

their extent of socioeconomic stability, and certain kinds of program supports. (Cumming, 1991, p. 704).

Peirce also stresses the need to consider socio-linguistic factors. She argues that the “lived experiences and social identities of language learners need to be incorporated into the formal second language curriculum” (Peirce, 1995, p. 26). Aside from this fascinating body of socio-linguistic literature, I draw upon the research concerning language acquisition, immigrants, and South Asian females to create the theoretical framework for the analysis of these case studies.

ESL for Adult Immigrants

The second language acquisition (SLA) literature on adult learners is quite sparse compared to that pertaining to children, and the adult studies reported are usually conducted with foreign university students, who are obviously an accessible body of possible research participants. There is a small body of SLA literature, particularly in the domain of socio-linguistics, which pertains to the specific situation of adult immigrants.

Communicative Competence

The concept of communicative competence (Hymes, 1972) is central to my examination of the language learning processes of the four case studies. Several socio-linguists have used the term communicative competence in conjunction with the process of acculturation for immigrants. The term, first

coined by Dell Hymes, includes the sense of the social rules of language use, as opposed to the limited notion of performance in a second language. Hymes (1972) criticized Chomsky for his narrow notion of the ideal hearer-speaker, and argued for a broadening of Chomsky's concept of linguistic competence (Chomsky, 1965), to include the notion of an ability to communicate meaningfully and socially in context in a second language. Hymes emphasizes the importance of social meaning in language, stating: "A general theory of the interaction of language and social life must encompass the multiple relations between linguistic means and social meaning." (Hymes, 1972, p. 39). Gumperz (1971) also speaks of the social significance of language in context, stressing the need for both speaker and audience to agree on the *meaning* of words in order for effective communication to occur. He argues that "just as the meaning of words is always affected by context, social categories must be interpreted in terms of situational constraints." (Gumperz, 1971, p. 224). Definitions of communicative competence pertain to South Asian women who may have been fluent in the English dialect of their countries of origin, yet need to learn "North American English" which differs vastly in terms of pronunciation, lexicon, and grammatical structure. Whether or not a new Canadian already has linguistic competence in English prior to immigration, a significant aspect of their acculturation process is gaining communicative competence in the language of their new community.

Taking this distinction one step further, Skutnabb-Kangas (1985) differentiates between communicative competence and cultural competence.

Adding the concepts of strategic competence (Canale and Swain, 1979), and metacommunicative awareness to the cluster of language-related competencies, she distinguishes these from culture-related competencies including a cognitive knowledge about the relevant culture, an affective/empathetic component, and a behavioral component concerning appropriate ways to act within the cultural group. These distinctions clarify some of the subtle aspects of understanding the cultural context of communication. She provides a helpful list of the possible phases of segregation, functional adaptation and acculturation, which may end in integration, assimilation, or marginality depending on affective factors. (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1985).

Christina Bratt Paulston (1990) speaks of the significance of social meaning in communicative competence, and the importance of this concept for ESL teachers. She believes that North American ESL teachers are hesitant to teach aspects of communicative competence pertaining to behavior, manners, and tact, since it seems condescending to teach adults how to act.

Sociolinguistic rules, it is felt, one should learn as a child, and teaching adults such rules implies that they were not “properly” brought up....it is chauvinistic to correct immigrantlike behavior...native American teachers are embarrassed to correct adults’ improper behavior, that is, behavior with deviant social meaning that we primarily perceive as improper. (Paulston, 1990, p. 292).

I agree with Paulston that this fear reveals an underlying ethnocentrism which assumes that Anglo-American social customs are “correct” rather than merely “different” from those of other cultures. In a similar vein, Ellen Rintell (1990)

researched the degree to which emotions can be linguistically encoded, and wrote of the possibility of teaching linguistic devices and discourse features to help second language learners understand emotional messages embedded in native-speaker discourse.

Literacy and Second Language Acquisition

Another socio-linguistic consideration is the relation of literacy and second language acquisition. Rockhill (1990) looks at the meaning of literacy to her Hispanic research participants, who equate literacy with “going to school”, which conjures up both a threat and a desire.

Contextualizing literacy, breaking it down into literacy and language practices, looking for differences between the experiences of men and women, and seeking to understand how these are related to cultural as well as gender differences, has led me to see three ideas as important to explicating immigrant women’s educational experiences. The first idea is that literacy is women’s work but not women’s right; the second idea is that the acquiring of English is regulated by material, cultural and sexist practices that limit women’s access to the “public”, confining them to the private sphere of the home; the third idea is that literacy is both threat and desire. (Rockhill, 1990, p. 95)

Definitions of what counts as literacy may vary greatly, so ESL teachers must identify ways to encourage communication in culturally appropriate forms which relate to the social realities of students. Street (1983) criticizes the “autonomous model of literacy”, which views literacy as a skill or function. He argues that oral and written languages are not so different from one another, and that literacy is not necessarily related to cognitive development. Rather than

viewing literacy as an individual concern, he emphasizes the social aspect of literacy along with Gee (1996) and McKay (1996). McKay views literacy

as a collaborative practice, as a reflection of community values and traditions about how to approach texts, as a reflection of cultural values and traditions about text and topic development, and as a reflection of social relationships as well as a vehicle for changing the status quo. (McKay, 1996, p. 421)

Gee criticizes the power status associated with

school-based literacy practices that carry with them main-stream, middle-class values of quiescence and placidity, values that will ensure no real demands for significant social change, nor any serious questions about the power and status of the aging elites, such as embarrassing historical questions about how they obtained that power and status. (Gee, 1996, p. 25)

He refers to the “new literacy studies” which replace the autonomous model of literacy, and which share underlying theoretical tenets with critical pedagogy.

Giroux, in his introduction to Freire & Macedo’s 1987 book entitled Literacy: Reading the word and the world, explains critical literacy and insists on a recognition of the social construction of knowledge which encompasses political power relations. He states that

to define literacy in the Freirean sense as a critical reading of the world and the word is to lay the theoretical groundwork for more fully analyzing how knowledge is produced and subjectivities constructed within relations of interaction in which teachers and students attempt to make themselves present as active authors of their own worlds. (Giroux in Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 17)

These literacy theorists emphasize the social, cultural, and political aspects of literacy, which are important considerations for second language learning for immigrants.

Language Training for Immigrants

Barbara Burnaby and Alister Cumming at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education are leading scholars who have published in the field of ESL for adult new Canadians. Their 1992 book Socio-political aspects of ESL contains chapters by prominent researchers in the areas of policy analyses, national surveys, and case studies. In her chapter entitled "Official language training for adult immigrants in Canada: Features and Issues", Burnaby gives an overview of the language learning situation for Canadian immigrants. She describes the system of language training programs as chaotic, and offers suggestions for consolidation and organization.

More study as well as action needs to be undertaken involving areas connected with the provision of ESL services to adult immigrants. They include relations within and between governments, relations between official language and settlement services, relations between issues of official language skills among immigrants and employment....research into the interests and perspectives of the immigrants themselves is rare and scattered in public documentation. In addition to such demographic studies, we need a great deal more qualitative information about their experiences in dealing with official languages in the context of their lives as well as their perceptions about the kinds of training that have helped or would help them accomplish their specific goals. (Burnaby, 1990, p.27, 28)

Burnaby's call for more qualitative information on the language learning experiences of immigrants may find a response in the literature concerning female immigrants.

Female Immigrant Studies

Just as my research expanded from the more specific scope of language learning to the broader realm of socio-cultural identity, gender roles, and family relationships, I discovered that the literature which focuses more specifically on female immigrants also deals with these broader issues.

“Immigrant Women” and Lived Experiences

Initially, the definition of “immigrant” deserves a closer examination, as it carries considerable connotations. Why is it that a Canadian-born visible minority would be more likely referred to as an immigrant than a recently arrived person from New Zealand or England? The term includes the idea of difference from the mainstream. From an Anglo-conformist viewpoint (Helen Ralston, 1992), it connotes an incapacity to assimilate, and immigrants are viewed as inferior rather than simply being different. I would argue, along with Bodnar, that people “become immigrant as a result of definite social processes that stamp them with the identification immigrant, which is synonymous with ‘ethically and racially inferior’” (Bodnar, 1983, cited in Szekely, 1990, p.127). Szekely explains the term immigrant as designating to someone a social position that has been constructed socially by people, actions and policies. She refers to Jean-Paul Sartre’s description of “Jew” as not related to a religion or a homeland, but rather the common situation of a Jew, which means living in a community which sees them as Jews (Sartre, 1946, cited in Szekely, 1990). Similarly, Helen Ralston explains the label “immigrant woman” as referring “not so much to the legal

status as to the processes of social construction in everyday life which describe some women who are visibly 'different' in those same characteristics (skin colour, language, religion, dress custom and so on)" (Ralston, 1992).

Just as the term immigrant is constructed socially by individuals or groups rather than existing as an actual situation or fixed state, so too the socio-cultural identities of immigrant women are constantly being constructed by themselves as they connect with their environments. In my data, I discovered many contradictory, conflicting aspects of their perspectives on their own socio-cultural identities and gender roles. For example, each of the women of my four case studies appreciated the sense of stability and security provided by their ethnic community, yet simultaneously communicated a strong distaste for the restrictive, controlling aspects of this same community. These contradictions make their perspectives hard to understand and categorize. However, the key issue here is not to understand and categorize as if there existed one static, unchanging identity or gender-role conception in the lived experiences of these women.

Szekely (1990) also wants to avoid categorizing and universalizing the experiences of immigrant women, and emphasizes the importance of the interrelationships of employment, class, race/ethnicity, and gender. These categories are the same as those stressed in the work of Ghosh (1984), Roxanna Ng (1989), Das Gupta (1996) and Goldberger (1996). Szekely asks researchers to begin with real embodied subjects, and to look at the real, everyday life of actual

women. Referring to Dorothy Smith, Szekely situates her writing as coming from the standpoint of women, without seeing immigrant women as objects of study or an abstract category. She wants to avoid universalizing a particular experience, or equating *the immigrant woman* with a particular world-view. She calls for an inquiry which “creates a space for an absent subject and absent experiences which is to be filled with presence and spoken experience of actual women speaking of and in the actualities of their everyday worlds” (Smith, 1987, cited in Szekely, 1990).

This concept of lived experiences is a key issue in Helen Ralston’s 1992 study of South Asian immigrant women in Atlantic Canada. Vijay Agnew (1990) also points out the necessity to see the experiences of these women as being continuously created and recreated.

South Asian women acquire their ethnic identity in an environment replete with images of the “traditional”, “unskilled” woman oppressed by her old culture. Interviews with South Asian women, however, cast doubt on such popular and mistaken stereotypes. They suggest that ethnic identity and gender roles for South Asian women do not exist in some fixed and unchanging cultural codes but are constructed and reconstructed in the context of work, family, and social relationships. (Agnew, 1990)

Peirce (1994) is another of these researchers seeking to consider the lived experiences of immigrant women and how these experiences influence their social identities.

Investment

Seeing these women's experiences as actual and individual also implies analyzing them as historical, dynamic, and ever-changing (Szekely, 1990). This concept relates to the framework established by Bonny Norton Peirce in her diary studies with immigrant woman (1994, 1995a). Peirce examined the social structures of five women's opportunities to speak English outside the ESL classroom, and how their actions can be explained in terms of their "investment in English and their changing social identities across time and space" (Peirce, 1995a). She uses the term investment as opposed to Gardner's term motivation, which has been prevalent in second language acquisition literature. From her perspective, this term comes closer to explaining the complex interconnection of power, identity, and language learning in the experiences of immigrant women. Peirce sees these women's relationships to the target language as socially and historically constructed. She refers to Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital, which describes the varying ways of thinking and sets of knowledge and experiences of people from different classes and groups. Her theory rests on the concept of "social identity as multiple, a site of struggle, and subject to change" (Peirce, 1995a, p.9). She draws on the theory of social identity and subjectivity of Weedon (1987), who set out three characteristics of subjectivity as multiple, a site of struggle, and changing over time. Within the paradigm of postmodernism, the individual is seen as diverse, contradictory, dynamic, multiple, and decentered.

Another important aspect of Peirce's theory is the analysis of power relations in social contexts, specifically in terms of the language learning experiences of immigrant women, and more generally in terms of power relations among groups in society.

Despite being highly motivated, there were particular social conditions under which the women in my study were most uncomfortable and unlikely to speak. The data suggest that a language learner's motivation to speak is mediated by investments that may conflict with the desire to speak....An understanding of motivation should therefore be mediated by an understanding of learners' investments in the target language- investments that are closely connected to the ongoing production of a language learner's social identity. (Peirce, 1995, p. 19-20)

The aspect of Peirce's theory that pertains most directly to my case studies is her conception of social identity as contradictory and constructed.

Socio-cultural Identity

Peirce's concept is helpful in framing my understanding of these four women's own perspectives of their socio-cultural identities and gender roles in terms of contradiction and construction. Although all of these women explained perceptions of their individual and ethnic group identities which seemed contradictory to me, the contradictions begin to make sense when viewed as natural effects of the acculturation process on their identities, which are constantly being reconstructed socially. Also, their investment in the language learning process was constantly shifting in response to their perception of their

gender roles and cultural identities in relation to their everyday circumstances, which changed over time.

Weight of Society

Along with the understanding of socio-cultural identity and gender roles as historically and socially constructed, another key issue in this study is what I refer to as the weight of society. Just as perceptions of identity and gender role are constructed and reconstructed by these women in relation to their environments, these same concepts are also constructed and reconstructed within the psyche and world-view of a particular ethnic/cultural group, such as the South Asian community. Although one can not deny the powerful place of traditional, socio-cultural norms in the lives of South Asian females, I underline the importance of viewing these norms as historically and socially constructed and reconstructed within this community. Particularly in the context of immigration, an analysis of the changes that occur among individuals and the community at large reveals the mutable, unfixed nature of these socio-cultural norms which seem so potent and unchangeable back in the home culture. For example, all of my research participants spoke of a freedom from the “eyes of society” in terms of a liberty to dress, move, and negotiate gender roles in housework which would have been unthinkable in their country of origin. The gender-role pressures exerted by the traditional, patriarchal, religious cultures of South Asia did surface as one of the major factors involved in the language learning process of my four case studies.

However, if there is any hope of moving forward and framing the experiences of these women in a positive realm of possibility, it is essential to analyze even this powerful weight of society as a political construct which is mutable and contradictory. To view these influential socio-cultural norms in this light is to open up the realm of possibility in the lives of these women for them to be able to imagine growth and change. Maxine Greene (1998) speaks of the role of the imagination in education, and the ability to imagine our lives to be otherwise. This type of thinking is only possible if one views the weight of society as a situation that is not necessarily permanent and impossible to alter.

Social Networks

Integral to this weight of society are the social networks among immigrant groups, which Gerta Wittebrood and Sharon Robertson (1991) analyze as having both positive and negative effects on immigrant women. Incidentally, for a researcher, these tight networks are integral in allowing or restricting access to participants. The family and ethnic community can be supportive, yet also a cause of stress. For female immigrants who often enter under the Canadian immigration category of “family members” dependent on their husbands (Ng, 1981), the traditional male power roles of their patriarchal society are often magnified in Canada. A dependent female is rendered even more powerless in relation to her male counterpart’s powerful position as wage-earner in the new environment bereft of the traditional protection and respect for women. Whereas

an influential network of older female and male relatives works to preserve the respect of women in traditional societies, immigrant men in a new society void of such a protective network are more free to take out their frustrations on helpless female relatives (Agnew, 1990). Agnew interviewed a community worker who said that “South Asian women’s problems required different approaches than other groups. Immigration removes the protection of the cultural norms of their home communities, leaving them more vulnerable to male oppression within the family” (p. 69).

Although the ethnic community may give a sense of belonging and group identification, and may help to preserve cultural heritage, provide friends, and a safe place from discrimination, this same network can also inhibit individuals. For example, one of my case study participants Rafia explains how she was deterred by her sister and neighbor in pursuing her French language studies: “My neighbor and my sister said it was too hard for me to study both--they insisted--said I was too small. They didn’t want me to grow--I don’t like this. So I had to stop studying French” (Rafia, Interview #1, 04.04.98). These types of restrictions, although well-meaning, may be unhealthy for individuals. Thus, “certain types of social networks among immigrants seem to work against their social mobility and psychological well-being” (Kuo & Tsai, 1986, p. 136, cited in Wittebrood & Robertson, 1991, p. 177). The strong associations within their ethnic community can block immigrants from obtaining new and different information and experiences. The ghettoization of particular ethnic groups in

large Canadian cities can be a visible negative outcome of these social networks. If the network is too dense, it acts as a trap, forcing an individual to behave within the strict limitations and expectations of her ethno-cultural group rather than allowing her to be open to new ways of thinking and behaving. Although most of my research participants did not recognize or directly analyze the effects of their protective social networks, in some ways they did express their feelings that opportunities of personal freedom and growth were restricted by members of their ethno-cultural community.

Self-confidence

Much of the research literature concerning adult female immigrants focuses on issues of self-confidence and self-concept. Eva Hoffman's 1990 novel Lost in translation is a brilliant, erudite self-examination of the role of language in cultural identity and the process of acculturation. In the following excerpts she very articulately explains the frustrations of communication in a new language and culture:

We want to be able to give voice accurately and fully to ourselves and our sense of the world....Linguistic dispossession is a sufficient motive for violence, for it is close to the dispossession of one's self....And if one is perpetually without words, if one exists in the entropy of inarticulateness, that condition itself is bound to be an enraging frustration. (Hoffman, 1990, p. 124)

Because I'm not heard, I feel I'm not seen....The mobility of my face comes from the mobility of the words coming to the surface and the feelings that drive them. Its vividness is sparked by the locking of an answering gaze, by the quickness of understanding. But now I can't feel how my face lights up from inside; I don't receive from others the reflected movement of its expressions, its

living speech. People look past me as we speak. What do I look like, here? Imperceptible, I think; impalpable, neutral, faceless. (Hoffman, 1990, p. 147)

Although her experiences can not be universalized, Hoffman's description of her profound, intimate changes in ways of perceiving and communicating ideas and emotions may well articulate the feelings of frustration other women experience in their process of language learning and acculturation. Although none of my research participants could express their emotions so eloquently in English, their simple descriptions share the sense of some part of their inner being getting lost in translation.

The parts of oneself that are most affected by the acculturation process are intimately linked to self-esteem and confidence. Rockhill (1990) did a study focusing on the role of self-esteem in language learning among Latin American immigrant women in the U.S. She described literacy as a threat yet a desire among Hispanic women, and examined their conflicting desires and fears surrounding language education. While they dream of accessing a desirable world of social and cultural opportunities with more education, they also fear the problems it will create in their relationships with male partners. Gender inequity is at the root of her theoretical framework which highlights women's literacy as "invisible" and recognizes the public/private split in traditional gender roles. In this context she explains literacy as both a threat and a desire for Hispanic women. Although she doesn't apply the conceptual framework of changing,

conflicting, and constructed social identities to her research, I think it is a useful theoretical model for making sense of these women's experiences.

A view of the literature on female immigrants in Canada would not be complete without mentioning the work of Monica Boyd. She discusses the triple disadvantage of being female, foreign-born, and of a different race; the combination of which place immigrant women on the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy (Boyd, 1992). As previously mentioned, she points out that foreign-born females are twice as likely as their male counterparts not to know one or both of the official Canadian languages. Her practical, statistical research is an important contribution to the literature on Canadian immigrant women.

South Asian Women Studies

Turning more specifically to the literature on South Asian female immigrants in Canada, there is a distinct absence of ethnographic research, although this field lends itself to qualitative, ethnographic research. I did not find any in-depth case studies concerning South Asian women in Canada. Much of the work published in this area (Moudgill, 1977; Siddique, 1977; Appathurai, 1980; Ghosh, 1979, 1983; Naidoo, 1980, 1985; Kanungo, 1992; Ralston, 1992; Van Balkom, 1992; Talbani, 1992) deals with women of a higher socio-economic or educational level than that of my case studies. Although the South Asian immigrants of the 1960's and 70's were primarily white collar workers whom

Canada accepted to fill necessary posts, there was a shift toward blue collar skilled workers in the late 1970's. This was in response to Canada's Immigration Act of 1976, which instated a policy of non-discrimination (Das Gupta, 1986) and a matching of existing job needs with immigrant admission (Naidoo, 1980). Much of the earlier literature on South Asian female immigrants in Canada therefore dealt with this community of newcomers, who generally belong to a higher socio-economic strata than that of my research participants.

Norman Buchignani summarizes the research on South Asians in Canada by underlining the three common themes of gross patriarchy, gerontocracy, and the subordination of the individual to the interests of the family (Buchignani, 1987). He stated that the literature of the early 1980's moved into a focus on the issues of self-concept, cross-cultural communication, and psychological adjustment. He made the crucial point that these normative ideologies are "often clothed in religion" (p. 118). Similarly, Naidoo refers to Cormack's (1961) argument that the traditional Indian high esteem of women (as witnessed in the pure and noble ancient rulers and divinities), which posits a view of women as "equal but different", has been corrupted over the centuries with the emphasis on such practices as dowry (bride price) and suttee (widow burning) (Naidoo, 1980). However, Ghosh (1984) describes the traditional status of women in South Asia as a more comprehensive situation, stating that although women's rights are legislated in most areas, social norms are slow to change and values can not be legislated.

Their social consciousness is still influenced by the traditional concept of femininity in ancient society and literature which emphasized women's subservience while simultaneously conferring on the respect and esteem - "at once a goddess and a slave". Hindus, Sikhs, Moslems and Christians are all influenced by this even though there are regional differences. (Ghosh, 1984, p. 147)

The common themes emerging in the literature on South Asian women in general also appear in the following study focusing on language training for this particular population.

ESL for South Asian Women

Alister Cumming and Jaswinder Gill (1992) analyzed a special ESL class offered in Vancouver for Indo-Canadian women, which specifically catered to this community of women with special provisions such as no cost, a Punjabi teacher and child-minder, and a convenient time of day and location. Despite all these adjustments, several women were unable to complete the course. Cumming and Gill attribute this attrition to the persistent problem of control of access for these women as opposed to a lack of motivation. In another report concerning this same community of Indo-Canadian women, Cumming (1992) stressed the need to consider local patterns and levels of literacy, the status of the languages involved, gender roles, the felt needs of the learners, their socio-economic stability, and possible program supports when organizing literacy classes.

Traditional yet Contemporary

Josephine Naidoo is probably the most well-known author in this field, having published several articles and chapters in books from 1980 through 1992. Unfortunately, she has continued to write about her 1978 quantitative survey research for some fifteen years. She does, nonetheless, provide an interesting psychological analysis of the historical and current situation of female South Asians in Canada. She outlined the concepts of Karma (fate, will of God), Varna (rituals, duty according to caste function), and Dharma (socially approved conduct, duty according to religion) as key concepts influencing Hindu women. In her study of the self-identity of middle-class South Asian women, she found that all women within the broad South Asian religious-cultural context held similar dualistic outlooks struggling between traditional and contemporary worldviews.

The South Asian woman...is entrenched in the traditional values of her cultural heritage, but she also exhibits contemporary, future-oriented aspirations. She is deeply committed to her family and home, but she also reveals the potential for high achievement and she possesses high aspirations for herself and her children.
(Naidoo, 1992, p. 81)

She noted that the reactions of Canadian citizens are not generally in line with the Canadian government's cultural pluralism model (Naidoo, 1980, 1992).

Gender Inequity and Oppression

Much current research on South Asian women in Canada focuses on the problems of gender inequity, vulnerability, isolation, and family violence

(Ralston, 1992; Guzder, 1992; Agnew, 1990; Dua, 19992; Thakur, 1992).

Ralston's work looks at South Asian females in the Atlantic provinces in Canada, and she outlines 126 profiles of generally anglicized, highly qualified middle class women. One of her major concerns is dependence and gender-subordination in the home, which she views as a combined result of arranged marriages and the immigration experience which changes the traditional gender division of labour for men but not for women. For example, men still simply work outside the home, while immigrant women remain responsible for housework (which becomes an individual responsibility in Canada where there are no servants or extended family), as well as work outside of the home. As previously mentioned, she interprets this dependent gender status as being socially maintained and reproduced in the daily activities, or lived experiences of home and work. She cited isolation and unemployment as the two other major concerns facing South Asian women in the Eastern Canada. In her study on South Asian women in Toronto, Vijay Agnew (1990) also posits social isolation as the most common problem faced by these women.

Thakur (1992) traces the causes of family violence to the control, power, and authority men exercise among this community. In a report on a 1991 conference on Combatting Family Violence held at the South Asian Women's Community Centre (SAWCC) in Montreal, she states that

The cases which SAWCC had handled in the past decade amply attest to the fact that men's impulse to dominate and their concomitant view of how they should relate to women, and vice versa, are major contributing factors to mental and physical abuse

of women in South Asian families. (Thakur, 1992, p. 30)

Dua (1992) shifts the emphasis from culture and gender onto racism in her interpretation of the oppression of South Asian-Canadian women. Rather than reduce their gender roles to culture and the past, she emphasizes the “present factors such as racism, classism, and the reproduction of gender ideology in the Canadian context” (p. 7). This is the view of South Asian feminists who claim that other feminists stereotype South Asian women as passive victims of oppressive family situations. She describes the home as a place of refuge against racism, and explains the South Asian feminists’ integration of an analysis of culture into this framework. However, it remains unclear to me how racism defines the social construction of gender relationships in the South Asian community. While I do understand gender relations as historically and socially constructed, I agree with Dua that South Asian feminism “fails to adequately explain gender oppression of South Asian women. By emphasizing racism over gender oppression, it fails to identify the relationship between race, gender, and class in the lives of South Asian women in Canada” (Dua, 1992, p. 9).

Perhaps the words of Jaswant Guzder shed light on the powerful role of the weight of society in the interplay of factors influencing identity construction and assimilation among South Asian women: “identity and assimilation issues are framed largely within the Indian familial and cultural matrix in dialogue with hundreds of years of traditional role definitions and cultural taboos” (Guzder, 1992, p. 105). Although the elements of ethnicity, gender, and class all affect

South Asian women, and racism certainly enters into this dialogue, the effects of the socio-cultural norms of the South Asian community, the weight of society, certainly have a significant influence on the changing, conflicting, constructed identities of South Asian women and how these identities affect their language learning process.

Summary

Each of these areas of research literature provided useful concepts for my theoretical framework for this inquiry. Some of the work on language acquisition among adult immigrants calls for a focus on the socio-linguistic aspects of language learning and more qualitative, ethnographic studies to inform second language curriculum and programming. The studies concerned with female immigrants narrow the scope of concentration to socio-cultural identity, gender and power issues. In the research literature on South Asian women, more specific cultural issues such as family relationships, religion, and social networks highlight the importance of the influence of the weight of society on women of this cultural group. In this study I examine the issues of their lived experiences, and the influence of the weight of society, especially in relation to their language learning experiences, from the perspectives of the research participants. Their socio-cultural identities, understood as continually constructed, changing, and sometimes conflicting, are analyzed in terms of the effects on their language learning process. To understand the dynamic, everyday circumstances and

experiences of my research participants is to return to the words of Maxine Greene: "I am what I am--not yet". (Greene, 1998).

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter presents the qualitative methodology I used in this inquiry . I provide a description of the context of South Asian female immigrants in Montreal, focusing on the four case studies of Kama, Rafia, Fatima, and Anju. In addition to these four women, several others began as research participants and were unable to continue due to family restrictions. I also describe the stories and circumstances of these other women, as they shed an illuminating light on the profound impact family relationships and gender roles have on the language learning experiences of South Asian women. Although it seemed so simple at first, and women were eager to participate in this research, the process of gaining long term access to participants turned out to be a painstakingly delicate business. My role as a researcher was entangled with my various roles and positions as former teacher, friend, threatening feminist, and "token Canadian" acquaintance.

In order to shed some light on the complex issues of power and gender roles and cultural identity, it seems most appropriate to work within an ethnographic framework. My research attempts to fill a gap in the literature that presents mostly objective statistics rather than the subjective perspectives of South Asian women. To obtain the type of rich, descriptive, data required in qualitative, ethnographic research, I decided to focus on four South Asian female

immigrants. The case study approach is an appropriate method of capturing the essence of the circumstances, opinions, and actual situations of these women.

Interviews

I designed three interviews to be conducted with each of the research participants. The first one was recorded in field notes, and the second two interviews were audio tape recorded and transcribed. Before beginning the interviews, I already knew all the participants, except Rafia, from my language classes. In the case of Bedana, Beadan, and Mariam, three of the participants who did not continue, I visited their homes several times before conducting any interviews. The first interview was designed to get acquainted with the women on a personal level and obtain background information on their families, childhood, formal education, and process of immigration to Canada, including how their preconceptions of the new country differed from their actual experiences upon arrival. The second interview deals with aspects of their language learning experiences, including affective factors, motivation, communication experiences, and their process of accessing language classes in Montreal. Finally, the third interview delves into the issues of acculturation and cultural identity construction as I attempt to uncover their perceptions of changes they experience in the process of learning a new language in a new culture. In this final interview I also explore with them their values on family issues, and

their perceptions of their relations with Canadians and the government policies regarding immigration.

Participants

In the hopes of a “representative” sampling, I searched for a cross-section of nationalities, ages, family situations, and time spent in Canada. Ideally, all research participants required a sufficient level of communicative competence to answer the questions I wanted to pose to them. I only studied women who had little or no ability to communicate in English before emigrating. The first four Bengali women whom I interviewed were unable to complete the audio tape-recorded interviews due to family restrictions, so were not included in the group of four case studies.

I met the first research participant, Kama, in my ESL class at The Tyndale St. George’s Community Center, a community center in Little Burgundy where I taught ESL to immigrants. She is a 40 year old Sri Lankan woman with three children who has been in Montreal for twelve years. The second case study, Rafia, was not a former student, but was introduced to me by the staff at the South Asian Women’s Community Center (SAWCC). She is a 19-year-old single Bengali woman who has been here for less than a year. The other two research participants were students in my literacy/ESL class at SAWCC . Anju, from India, is in her mid forties, has three grown children, and has been in Canada for

over twenty years. Fatima, in her mid-thirties with three young children, came from Pakistan thirteen years ago.

Research Questions

In this thesis I have attempted to address the following research questions:

1. To what extent are affective factors involved in language learning as a part of the process of acculturation among these female immigrants?
2. What do these women experience during the period of time when they can not communicate with the dominant linguistic and cultural population?
3. What is their real motivation for learning a new language? What are the difficulties and successes they experience in this process?
4. What are some of the emotions they feel and can describe concerning their communication experiences in the new language?
5. What socio-cultural factors impede or enhance their progress?

Context at SAWCC

My main source of contact with this population of female immigrants has been my work at SAWCC. This center, in downtown Montreal since 1982, is a non-profit organization serving various needs of women from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. Their mandate is summarized in their pamphlet as “an organization to help women achieve their full potential in Quebec and Canadian society, and to help them become independent” (SAWCC pamphlet). The idea was conceived by a few women in someone’s kitchen when they were discussing the isolation of South Asian women in Montreal. The staff here, whose ethnic and linguistic origins are rooted in South Asian cultures, perform duties of counseling, translation, and social animation in an attempt to bring together a group of women who are typically extremely isolated in their homes. Some of the services offered are settlement programs, language classes, referral services, interpretation and translation, awareness of individual rights, counseling on family and legal matters, seminars, support network for battered women, and job-search workshops. Although focusing primarily on women, the center serves the needs of the entire family by providing legal counseling and help with resettlement problems. Sections of this study that pertain to SAWCC have been read and approved by their staff.

Due to a series of circumstances which I will examine later in this thesis, many South Asian women are not able to attend the French language classes for immigrants offered by the provincial government through COFI centers. Many of the current SAWCC students were not eligible for COFI classes when they emigrated, as these were not offered to women who entered as dependent class immigrants. Although this restriction was liberalized in 1991, when COFI training was made available to dependent class immigrants and refugees, the restriction was replaced in 1995 as a result of conflict between provincial and federal government over the financial responsibility for refugees. The women who are served by SAWCC do not represent all South Asian women, but are generally those of a lower socio-economic level who have received less formal education. Their traditional upbringing, culturally specific family relationships, and gender roles lead to a particular world-view which minimizes their opportunities to participate in language training. Many of these women have had little or no formal schooling, and even the concept of an actual classroom and school building can be intimidating. The type of education they may have received has been strictly segregated, entrenched in a system of values void of a purpose for girls' education. They have been raised with extremely limited opportunities for communication with anyone outside of their circle of immediate female relatives. Their arrival in Canada is often a brusque immersion into the family of their arranged marriage husband whom they have never met. In these cultures, there are considerable family responsibilities to be met, and the primary role of a new bride is typically to bear and raise children before considering her

own education or employment possibilities. These factors render the possibility of taking advantage of the language training provided by the government a distant option.

There is therefore a considerable role for non-government community organizations to play in filling in the gap of the rather inaccessible government language classes. For most South Asian women, the activities offered at culturally specific community centers are a logical first step into the outside world of their new country. As people entrenched in communal living, South Asian women are accustomed to sharing the domestic responsibilities of an extended family with several female relatives. Immigration to this cold climate of individual family dwellings set in a foreign language and culture is not an easy or natural transition for these women. To quote an atypical male relative of one of my research participants,

These apartments have big walls, and are stuffy and keep you trapped inside. They are not like our homes in Bangladesh. The women have to be able to get out and walk in the streets, do shopping, and talk with people! (Ranjeet, F. N. 26.03.98)

Yet, the constraints of domestic duties, child care, harsh weather, financial limitations, and the fear of an unfamiliar environment in a foreign language all discourage these women from leaving their homes. One of the major goals of the staff at SAWCC is to encourage these women to become more independent and to be able to participate in potluck lunches, guest speakers and activities such as

crafts, sewing, or exercise sessions. The language classes offered at SAWCC are an important part of the services provided for these female immigrants.

The center receives funding for only French language classes from the provincial government. However, they have been able to offer some English classes with teachers provided by the former CECM (Commission des Ecoles Catholiques de Montreal). The Quebec provincial government does not provide funding directly for English classes, although the school board does offer an adult education high school program for those with less than twelve years of scholary in their country of origin. The English classes at SAWCC fall under the category of Basic English provided by the CECM. These classes require a minimum of 22 students who are newly arrived (within three years) landed immigrants or accepted refugees. They can not be Canadian citizens, refugee claimants, or people who are waiting for their court hearing. These restrictions do not include any provisions for immigrants who, while not meeting these criteria, nonetheless are not literate, who do not have a sufficient English proficiency to join the lowest level of classes, or who have not yet received refugee or resident status. According to SAWCC staff, people sometimes wait up to two years for these documents. Except for the rule about the maximum of twelve years of scholary, the same restrictions apply for the French classes as for the English classes.

Due to all of these circumstances, the basic literacy/introductory ESL classes offered at SAWCC meet an important need in the lives of South Asian

women. I have been teaching these classes on a volunteer basis during 1997 and 1998, in cooperation with other volunteer teachers. There are significant challenges, such as absenteeism due to family responsibilities or harsh weather, a lack of committed and consistent volunteer teachers, no funding for resources, and a tremendous variation in oral and written levels among the students. Despite these difficulties, the classes continue to struggle along. A few of the students of these classes have moved on to the first level of French or English classes at SAWCC or other schools, and others have gained enough communicative competence to obtain jobs in factories. In general, the progress of these students seems painstakingly slow. Initially, I was disturbed by what I perceived to be the minuscule, even nonexistent improvement in the linguistic and communicative competence of these South Asian women. It is only through the additional experiences of getting to know several of my students on a personal level, being in their homes, and keeping in touch with them over a longer period of time, that I have begun to unravel the incredibly complicated and profound, weighty aspects of their personal circumstances that seriously restrict their language learning potential and capacity.

Throughout my eighteen months at SAWCC I have seen over thirty students come and go from the basic literacy/ESL class. Although I have a certain rapport with most of these students, their levels of English communicative competence are usually not high enough to carry on in-depth sustained conversations. While I find that many of them seem to make little or no progress

in English oral proficiency, they eventually find jobs, have another baby, or return into a sort of winter hibernation which prohibits their continuation in a class. Discouraging as this may sound from a pragmatic viewpoint, watching the pleasure that these women take in meeting each other at the classes is extraordinary. Seeing their enthusiasm when they begin to connect those foreign English letters with the sounds of familiar words or when they are able to understand or express some meaningful English phrase, I trust that these classes are a worthwhile project. Meeting and working with all of these women has enriched the basic familiarity I already had with South Asian cultures. I spent three months traveling through India, discussing religious and socio-cultural issues with the friendly, hospitable people I met. The special respect I have for this culture is mostly what motivated me to work at SAWCC, which led me directly or indirectly to all but one of the research participants.

Gaining Access: The First Four Participants who did not continue

Bedana and Beadan

During the spring of 1997, there were three young Bengali women in my literacy class who seemed to have a lot of potential for learning English. Bedana and Beadan, who are sisters, and their neighbor Mariam, are only nineteen and twenty years old, considerably younger than the other students in the class. They are unmarried, with no children, and have arrived from Bangladesh within the last year. Because of their age, they had received much more general education in their first country than the older women in the class. They all soon moved on to

the first level of adult education ESL classes offered at a public high school. I kept in contact with these young women, who were always keen to talk on the telephone and invite me to their homes, and they agreed to participate in my research project. In fact, they were so eager to see me and become involved with me that I was surprised at how easy this contact was.

As our relationship developed, I began to question my own motives and assess how much I really wanted to spend time with them as individuals, or whether I just wanted to obtain information for my research. I experienced some guilt concerning my motivations, although I had explained to them clearly from the beginning my intentions and my whole project. After a while I realized that their motives for becoming involved with me also held some personal advantages for them, and that the benefits to be accrued in this relationship were not exclusive to me. Strange though it may sound, it really was a novelty for them to have a "Canadian" guest in their home. Although they have been in Montreal for over a year, their experiences with native-born Canadians has been strictly limited to impersonal contacts with teachers, sales clerks and service industry staff. I was the first non-Bengali person to visit their home, as I record in the following narrative scenario from my field notes.

Being a guest in the apartment of Bedana and Beadan's family was like stepping into another world. I was transported back to the exotic land of generous, colorful people that I enjoyed so much during my travels in South Asia. Their extended family consisting of father, mother, older brother, five sisters, one sister in law, and an elderly aunt all live in two small one-bedroom apartments next door to each other. Since this arrangement is too expensive, they are planning to move into one 3-bedroom apartment. Their

building is situated on a street full of inexpensive apartments in an area just northwest of downtown Montreal. The neighborhood is full of South Asians and other visible minority ethnic groups.

When I arrived, their father, who works in a Greek restaurant, was in the kitchen cooking with his wife. He was wearing an undershirt and a cotton wrap type of skirt typical of men from southern India. He asked me the predictable questions; whether I was married, had any children, and where I was from. Their mother, who always stays at home, wears a sari every day. Judging by the bright red and brown color of her teeth and gums, she chews a lot of beetle nut. Quite an amazing process from an outsider's perspective, this habit consists of combining a potent mixture of spices and herbs with a white paste and wrapping it tightly inside a leaf. This small bundle is then placed in between the gums and the inside of the cheek, and eventually chewed and swallowed. While I was able to impress their mother with my abundance of silver jewelry, she was nonetheless appalled at my lack of husband and children! From the minute I arrived, I was offered copious amounts of Bengali food. Since the end of Ramadan had just been celebrated, there were lots of sugary, milky, coconut desserts and barfi, which is a sweet Indian sort of fudge. There were also savory, deep fried snacks. The hospitality of these women is so persistent that after refusing to eat more, I had things pushed into my mouth by the elderly aunt! I was guided toward their cousin who is looking for a Canadian wife, and told that the religious differences would be no problem, since Christian and Hindu women always convert to the religion of their Muslim husband! When I admired a sari, I was soon coerced into modeling one, an awkward experience in which everyone took great delight. Of course I was literally forced to eat enormous portions of food, although I was already full from the sweets! I did manage to finish the rice pilaf, fish, and egg that was put on my plate, but couldn't even begin to tackle the chicken, meat, and second type of fish that they had set out on separate plates for me. Bedana was offended at how little I ate, and complained to the other woman about it! (F.N. 08.02.98)

There seemed to be a strange sort of political tension between Bedana and the living room full of four older men including her father. At first I thought she was in trouble with them because she was giving me all this food in the kitchen while no one else was eating, or that it was a big faux-pas for me to leave before

everyone ate dinner. Then, I speculated it was because she hadn't introduced me properly to the other older men. When we were in the doorway, I observed that she seemed tense, nervous, and whispering, as if there was some sort of intimidation or respectful aura around this room full of men that we could not approach. Later, it appeared to me that her mother and aunt were admonishing her about something connected with that room of men. I felt in some sense that the daughters' having a Canadian guest might be perceived by the family as a challenge to the authority of their father, as I describe in the following excerpt from my field notes.

During another visit, I began my initial interview with Bedana, asking her questions and writing notes in my book in the girls' bedroom. Shortly after we began, her father entered and asked why I was writing, and I explained my research to him. He asked what I was doing with it- I felt that he was suspicious of my motivation, or my intentions. When I explained it was just for writing my thesis, he seemed satisfied. I asked his permission to ask Bedana questions and write down her answers, and he said "OK, no problem". However, five minutes later he returned and said "You can ask me questions, but no my daughters. I am responsible for them, you can ask the questions to me. Come with me into the other apartment" I felt like a small child being reprimanded- somehow embarrassed, like I had cheated or done something very sneaky. I felt rage at this paternalistic mentality, yet I was compelled to meekly obey out of respect for this older man. After some time in the sitting room observing the father's visitors, Bedana asked me to return. This time I consulted her father once again, and he assured me that it was acceptable to ask her questions and write down the answers! (F.N. 15.02.98)

Mariam

A few times I visited the home of Mariam, who was a neighbor of Bedana and Beadan. Mariam's father wanted to chat with me, and assumed a leadership

role of entertaining "the guest", making me tea and instructing Mariam to set out cake and biscuits, while her mother was cooking up a storm at the stove. She has two brothers here, and another two brothers back in Bangladesh who are too old to come under the immigration category of dependents under age 21. Her father was very polite, friendly, and curious, and didn't seem at all suspicious or unpleasant as he had seemed on the phone.

In our previous telephone conversation, I sensed, as I had with Bedana's father, that it was slightly inappropriate for his daughter to form a relationship with a Canadian woman. Perhaps this is because he is responsible for his daughter, and feels that it is his role to organize her contacts with me and be the official host of my visits. He seemed satisfied with my explanation of the research questions and left me alone with Mariam. She does not speak very much English, partly because of a limited ability, but mostly due to shyness. She told me that at the age of sixteen she finished her strict, all-girls school and stayed home because there were no opportunities for further education. Three years later, in 1997, she immigrated to Canada. Mariam stated that she had no involvement in the decision to emigrate, and although she knows she will study now, she has no idea what subject she wants to study. These are decisions for her father to make.

Mariam often has headaches, and her neighbor says "she is all the time thinking, thinking...". When she was in my class last year I remember her often

complaining of being tired. She explained that she has to stay awake until her father returns home from work at 2:00 AM in order to cook for him, although she gets up at 6:30 every morning to go to school. The next narrative vignette describes the complicated process of inviting Mariam, Bedana, and Beadan to my home.

Over the course of three months, I frequently enjoyed the generous hospitality of these Bengali homes. Whenever I invited these young women to come to my apartment, they promised to come when the weather warmed up. In April, I began in earnest to ask them to visit me. I wanted to repay some of their hospitality, and also provide them with the opportunity of visiting a non-Bengali home. They expressed a desire and excitement at the prospect of coming, yet they always said they would ask their father, and kept inviting me to their homes! Finally, I spoke with Mariam's father on the telephone. He informed me that she would not eat anything at my home, because of religious restrictions, and that he himself would organize the time of the visit with Bedana and Beadan! I was to call him back on the following Friday at 10:00 AM. After obediently following his instructions, I was eventually informed by Beadan on the following Friday night that the girls would be coming to my apartment on Saturday afternoon accompanied by their brothers! However, I was not free on Saturday afternoon, nor did I wish to entertain their brothers. Finally Bedana explained that Mariam was only allowed to come with the brothers, but that her and her sister could come alone to my home on Sunday. Alas, on Sunday morning when I called to reconfirm their arrival, Bedana was unwilling to talk to me and passed me on to her sister. Beadan explained that after all, they were not allowed to come without Mariam and their brothers. When I spoke with their father, he informed me that his daughters could not come that day because HE was busy, and that they would come another day, and then he promptly hung up the phone! Later when I called back to talk to them, their brother told me that they were busy, and they would call me back. I never heard back from them. I became cautious and wary, speculating that trying to phone again may get them into trouble with their father and brother. (F.N. 27.04.98)

That Monday I was supposed to observe the girls in their ESL class at their adult education high school, an appointment which I had scheduled weeks in

advance with their teacher. Bedana and Beadan did not attend school that day, and I was sick with a fear that they might be avoiding me because of their "loss of face" on the weekend. Their teacher informed me that they were not progressing very well and were frequently absent. They were both repeating level one because they had missed the final exam. The reason they missed this exam was because their father suddenly planned a two-week trip to New York for the whole family to visit relatives during the exam period. I eventually learned that this trip was also the initiation of an arranged marriage for Beadan with a Bengali refugee in New York. Rather than risk calling their home again, I called another one of my research participants, Rafia, who is acquainted with Bedana and Beadan. I explained the situation to her, and she promised to call the sisters, offer my apologies, and ask them to call me. I still never heard from them, and resolved that I would never complete their last two interviews because their father would not allow me access. After a few weeks of silence, I dared to call again, and was met with the same old warm reception from Bedana. She had lost my phone number, and explained that they had not returned to school since that day I was to meet them because of their job search. As factory jobs are more abundant in the summer season, Bedana, Beadan, and their sister-in-law have all obtained jobs sewing in a textile factory.

Aida

Aida, another Bengali woman I met at Bedana's apartment, invited me to her home. She wanted to be a research participant, and I was especially pleased

since she is able to express herself very well in English. She chose to hold the initial interview in a public place, because it would give her the chance to get out of the house. Aida seemed somehow resentful of her family situation, unlike all of the other research participants. She made some comments about the limitations which her husband placed on her and her daughters, and complained that she was always too busy taking care of her children and husband to study and practice English and French. This sort of resentment, missed opportunity and difficult lifestyle in Canada were recurrent themes in our interview.

She laughed when I asked what she did after secondary school, as if I should have known better. Aida didn't finish secondary school because she got married at age thirteen. When I reacted "wow!", she replied "No, it's not 'wow', it's very sad for me." I felt as if I had committed an insensitive faux-pas. She explained that she feels sad that she never got to finish her education, and now it makes it so much harder for her here. At the time it wasn't a sad thing, she just thought it was the right thing to do because it's what her parents decided. She said that in Muslim families the girls married very young, but her daughter was quick to point out how much this has changed now! Aida was very negative about her life in Bangladesh, describing rampant theft and political danger. Yet, her grand illusions about this rich and perfect country were soon met with the bitter disappointment of the realities of new immigrants (they came to Canada in 1993). She complained that here women don't have time for anything because they don't have servants. Western women have to shop, cook, clean, and even

work outside of the home! She misses everything about Bangladesh, especially the weather, food, and clothes. She would prefer to return there now, but the decision will be her husband's, and there are still political problems there for him. Aida doesn't like the prevalence of sex, drugs, and AIDS in this culture, and worries that her younger daughter will pick up too much from Canadians and lose their Bengali culture. It seemed that she was very negative about life in both countries.

Although Aida promised to meet me again in her home and mine for the next two interviews, she did not continue in the project. Each time I phoned her, she had an excuse for not seeing me for the next few weeks. She was either sick or too busy all the time, and suggested that I find the information I needed out of books! I was worried about the faux-pas I may have committed in my reaction to her early marriage, and wondered how else I might have offended her. Other South Asian women speculate that her husband didn't approve of her participation in my research, or that she just didn't feel like continuing. Whatever the reason, I can never be sure since she won't tell me directly. Ironically, these four Bengalis were the first women I began establishing rapport with, and none of them were able to complete the interviews. These situations raise a methodological issue about the complexity of conducting this type of research and the role of the researcher.

Gaining Access: The Four Participants who did continue

Kama

I met the first of the four research participants through my ESL class at St. George's Tyndale Community Center. This center, in conjunction with the TESL Center at a Montreal university, offers English and French classes at minimal fees for immigrants, regardless of their educational background or immigration status. These adult students come from every corner of the globe, yet Kama was the only South Asian among my thirty students to date. We got to know each other gradually throughout the course, and Kama wrote journal-type compositions for me each week. These writings allowed me the chance to get acquainted with Kama on a more personal basis. She was willing to participate in my research, partly as an opportunity to improve her English through increased contact with an ESL teacher. Realizing that these women come from cultures which place a high value on respecting teachers, I tried not to take advantage of my position as an ESL teacher by making any of my former students feel obligated to participate in interviews. Kama was keen to invite me to her house, and as I spent time there, playing and talking with her children, and eating with the family, Kama became less shy to speak with me. Despite her timidity, Kama was surprisingly open with me about personal issues which came up in the interviews. While I was impressed with her frankness on some topics, I remain unsure about how much information she actually disclosed in other areas. Her typically generous South Asian hospitality, combined with her eagerness to practice speaking English and

obtain more education, made the whole process of getting to know Kama a particularly delightful experience.

Rafia

Rafia, the next woman to whom I gained access, was the only participant who was not my former student. A SAWCC employee introduced her to me. Her youthful curiosity and keen desire to learn about other cultures made it very easy to get to know Rafia. She is the most recent immigrant of the four case studies, and is the only young, unmarried woman. Because of her higher level of education, superior command of the English language and extroverted personality, she was the most talkative participant. If she had been the only young Bengali woman that I became acquainted with, I would have had the impression that enormous changes have taken place regarding the education and gender roles of South Asian women in the last generation. However, the other young Bengalis have helped to give me a more realistic cross-section of recent female immigrants from Bangladesh. Rafia is exceptionally bright and ambitious, and did not experience a typical childhood in Bangladesh due in part to the early death of her mother. Aside from a few questions from her brother-in-law, and her reluctance to go outside of her apartment, there were no barriers to my relationship with Rafia.

Fatima

My access to the other two participants was established through my volunteer work at SAWCC. Fatima and Anju were both students with higher English oral proficiency than the majority of women in the literacy/introductory ESL class at SAWCC. Fatima was the first to invite me to her home. She is extremely shy to speak English, and it is difficult to discern how much of her communication difficulties are due to shyness and embarrassment. Although she can speak quite a bit in the context of the class work, in comparison with the other women, I realized that she could not communicate as well as I had assumed. Her husband and children were an integral part of the process of getting acquainted with Fatima, and her husband actually translated most of her answers in the interviews. Although this was not my ideal original intention, and the intimacy of a female bond was disrupted, I think that the interviews were successful. It is difficult to predict how much the interpretation of her husband colored her statements, and to what extent he added his own viewpoints. However, it was an interesting bonus to gain some insight into the perspective of a South Asian husband.

Anju

Anju never invited me into her home, and this may have been due to a number of factors including her personal family dynamics. She is a very kind and

generous person, even bringing me chocolates on her second week of attending the classes! She was more than willing to provide answers to my questions, I think mostly out of a desire to help me out. I did not get to know Anju as well as the other participants before conducting the interviews since I had never been in her home. Although she told me a lot about her grown children, and I have a vivid picture of their relationship with their mother in my mind, many of the things she told me about them remain puzzling. Anju told me more about her relationship with her husband and children than any of the other research participants. She was surprisingly quite willing to disclose private family problems to me, and was the only woman who openly verbalized negative statements about her husband. Anju emigrated earlier than the other women, and lived quite different circumstances because of her necessity to work outside the home right from the beginning of her time in Canada. She displayed more self-confidence and ease in communication with me, which was helpful in getting to know her more personally, despite never visiting her home.

Role of Researcher

ESL Teacher

The most significant aspect of my role in relation to the research participants was that of an ESL teacher. As previously mentioned, South Asian cultures tend to hold teachers in high regard, and their traditional formal education system includes rather rigid relationships of respect from student to teacher. I received this automatically assumed respect from my English students

despite any aspect of my personality, interests, or character. Although the relationship between children and their teachers is traditionally very formal, this attitude may have been mitigated a bit considering the adult age of my female students. Still, it was not uncommon for women in the supposedly comfortable, relaxed atmosphere of the SAWCC language class to stand up when responding to a question. Such gestures and behaviors were visible reminders to me of the kind of schooling these women had received in their countries of origin. Even a whole year after being students in my literacy/ESL class, and after half a year of friendly telephone conversations and home visits, the young Bengali women still referred to me as “Teacher” rather than by my name.

Native-born Canadian

The automatic respect inherent in my position as “Teacher” was augmented by the fact of my being a White, born and bred, third generation Canadian. It is difficult to understand the perceptions of South Asian people on their relations with non-Asian Canadians, and perhaps this is a politically difficult terrain to tread. I was repeatedly surprised by statements revealing a mixed respect, envy, and sort of deference to “Canadian” people. Of course, I can not make generalizations about all South Asians, and this deferential type of attitude does not seem to apply to the more educationally, economically and socially elite of their culture. These next excerpts from our interviews illustrate some of their perspectives on Canadians.

But I think Canadians are very strong. Everything is do perfect. That's uh, Canadian woman...They can do everything, uh? Because take care of the, buy house, but I can't, alone. Uh, they can go anyplace, they can do office work, they can do child care. yeah, and very perfect, yeah. (Kama, interview #3, 15/03/98)

The Canadian, you know, the way is difference is only the name of the country, Canada. That means automatically best country in the world, rich country in the world, you feel rich, you know, you feel it different, I mean, you are suited enough to Canada, and you feel, you are different from them. And this Pakistan is a poor country, and uh, you know, we are not, I mean, if you want to be, you are more bigger person, better person, something like that. (Fatima's husband, interview #3, 22/05/98)

There seems to be an almost post-colonial mentality of inferiority, stepping back into the formidable psyche of The colonizer and the colonized, to quote the title of Memmi's (1991) classic book on the subject. A spirit of discovery of the exotic and the unknown was probably present on both sides of the relationships I had with my participants. Although they live among Canadians of similar ethnic and cultural backgrounds as me, they do not have the opportunities to develop more intimate ties with them. Almost all of these women told me that they had no non-Asian friends. As previously mentioned, it seemed like a novel, sort of glamorous occasion to have me visit their homes. Therefore, I sensed that I was viewed as a sort of "token White Canadian" to be discovered and explored.

Western Feminist

This mysterious aura of "White Canadian woman" was accompanied with a subtle undercurrent of the threat of a Western feminist. From the perspectives of the male relatives of my research participants, this threat seemed to be much

more than subtle. The women I met seemed to view me in a mixed light; on the one hand they seemed to admire my independence and freedom, yet on the other hand they seemed to pity my situation of being alone without a husband, children, or close family relationships. They would often make comments of approval when I said that I lived alone, yet they remained amazed and confused about my single state, and were very curious and keen to offer suggestions about how I could find a husband. In general, my research participants seemed to appreciate the freedom and liberty of Canadian culture, as this was one of the most recurrent themes that arose when discussing differences between the two cultures. Yet, they were always also critical of the lack of discipline and respect in Canadian society, especially concerning child rearing. There was a curious balance of approval and disapproval of the liberties of this Western culture. In our personal relationships then, the women combined a certain respect for me with a sort of cautious skepticism. It seemed that no matter how close we became I always remained an "Other", capable of holding astonishing ideas and doing shocking things! I am still very much a "Western woman" in their eyes, and will never be one of them, or "like our people".

Female Bonding

Finally, I noticed a strong sense of "female-bonding" that occurred in my relationships with these women. In my opinion, access to these women to do this type of research would have been nearly impossible for a male researcher. It is difficult to imagine these women discussing such issues as having babies, child-

rearing and gender roles with a male researcher. Although they were timid with me, their segregated and sheltered upbringing would naturally result in even more timidity with a male researcher. The participants definitely identified with me as a “sister”, which went a long way in breaking down barriers of shyness. I found these women surprisingly unhesitant to share intimate information with me. Although most of the research participants were very shy individuals, they were very open in talking about having babies, raising children, and anything in the domain that they considered strictly feminine. My students at SAWCC felt sorry for me because my parents have not arranged my marriage, and were scheming to arrange one for me! Being accustomed to such strongly segregated gender roles, these women have grown up in tight-knit communities of female relatives, and their sense of “sisterhood” is thus extremely profound. As opposed to the relative independence and gender-neutral relationships typical of Western females, these South Asian women have formed more intimate bonds with each other in their relative isolation from the outside world. This female intimacy was an extremely important aspect of the process of gaining access to a research population which is particularly isolated from other mainstream sectors of Canadian society.

Summary

In this chapter I have explained why I used a qualitative, ethnographic approach to my study to try to understand the issues involved in the process of

language learning from the perspectives of four South Asian female immigrants. Although I developed relationships with several women who were not mentioned in this study, I chose to include in this chapter the four initial participants who did not complete the research interviews, because their experiences and situations demonstrate the extent of isolation and gender/power dynamics at play in some South Asian families. I explained the context of my research participants, with some general background information on South Asian women in Montreal. I also provided background on the community center which serves this particular population, as it was the basis of my familiarity and contacts with these women. I also described my experience of the intricate process of gaining and maintaining access, as well as the complexities of my role as researcher in this inquiry.

Chapter 4: The Case Studies

In this chapter, I present the four case studies of Kama, Rafia, Fatima, and Anju, painting a picture of their childhood, formal education, and providing some information on their country of origin. I explain their current family situations, and describe their stories of immigration and the process of learning English. Finally, I discuss some of their perspectives on acculturation and identity construction.

1. Kama

Kama is a forty-year old Sri Lankan woman who has been in Canada for twelve years. Although she speaks very good English, she says it is not good enough to get a “respect” job. She is quite open and friendly, and was pleased to participate in interviews. She lives in Little Burgundy, an area full of immigrants, especially Bengalis and Caribbeans. Kama lives with her husband, who is now studying French full time, and their three children. Her son is eleven years old, and her daughters are aged seven and five. They live in a comfortable three bedroom apartment, with a pet rabbit and computer. The presence of the computer was an indication to me of the strong emphasis placed on education in this family. In fact, they paid for their son to attend a private English school for two years in order to circumvent Quebec’s provincial language laws forcing all immigrant children to attend French public schools. Everyone in this family conveyed a keen interest in education. For example, Kama and her husband are

now attending language classes full time, and they make educational opportunities a priority for their children. Kama was able to express herself well in English, and shared her opinions openly, including her queries and unsure negotiations of difficult cross-cultural values questions and decisions concerning her family relationships and child-rearing.

Background

Kama grew up in a village near Jaffna, which is a separate tiny island at the extreme north of the island of Sri Lanka. Her father had some farmland, and hired workers to cultivate onions. Her parents were both schoolteachers. She says that her area is the richest, most well educated area of Sri Lanka. It is part of the crescent shape in the northeast of Sri Lanka claimed by Tamils, the Hindu minority in Sri Lanka. The Buddhist Sinhalese majority populates the interior, while the Hindu Tamils, who came from Southern India in the thirteenth century, live in the coastal areas. Kama told me that the Tamils are generally more educated than the Sinhalese, because they have always been, in the coastal areas, more accessible to the missions and schools of the colonial invaders: British, Dutch, and Portuguese. Sri Lanka's literacy rate is 90%, and the population was estimated at just over 18 million in 1995, with a population growth rate of only 1.3%. (Vesilind, 1997). Sri Lanka has the highest literacy rate, life expectancy, and human development index rating in South Asia (UNDP Human Development Report Office).

Kama completed her first ten years of school in the village with instruction in Tamil language. The school was very strict, with segregated sexes, and no communication allowed between the two. She reported that they wore white school uniforms, and at age sixteen in her girls' college they wore white saris. She went on to college in a nearby town, and then a technical college for a degree in book-keeping in a bigger city. Although she was not interested in book-keeping, her parents decided that this would be a practical course of study for her. These later years of education were significantly disrupted by the civil war. Beginning in 1975, her education was often interrupted for long periods at a time, and it took three years to complete a one year course.

Immigration

Kama did not chose to come to Canada, but was forced to obey her parents' plans for her arranged marriage. Her older sister saw the marriage as a good opportunity to emigrate to Canada, with the possibilities of higher education, but Kama saw it as a painful rupture from everything she knew and loved. She was scared and nervous about her marriage and immigration to Canada for several reasons. Leaving behind her family and familiar culture to marry a man she had never met who lived in a cold, foreign country was a difficult process. She felt scared, shy, quiet, and "alone inside my own head" (Kama, Interview #1, 13/02/98).

My parents, uh, I don't know my feeling, I don't know my husband. First my sister said, uh, one man is proposed for you, so you go to a foreign country. First I don't accept. I cry. Then my

mother said “No, I live in Sri Lanka”. Then my father said “You have to go. That’s it, finish.” (Kama, Interview #3, 13/03/98).

She did not have any particular dreams and goals about immigration; for her it was just an obligated role to fulfill. She explained that there is no question about parents making the decisions for children in her culture, that’s just the way it is. When Kama immigrated to Canada she was 28 years old, and her husband was already here with his brother and sister.

Before emigrating, Kama had not seen English movies or television, although she had read English books. She had the impression that Canadians would be “cold, unkind, unfriendly, and snobbish”, but instead she found them to be “kind, sociable, and friendly in public places such as schools, banks, and hospitals”. In her country, she believes that people with important positions of power, such as in banks or schools, are not friendly to clients. Thus, she was especially surprised about the pleasant customer service she experienced in Montreal. Although Kama did not discuss her previous expectations of quality of life in Canada, it seems that she is not enjoying a standard of life as high as she would have hoped for. She mentioned difficulties in finding a good job, and emphasized that her ethnic group (the Tamils) are among the richest and most well educated in her country. She values education highly, and is proud to point out that her sister, parents, and grandfather were all teachers, and her husband had been a college teacher in Sri Lanka. Kama continues to study English and French for future job opportunities, as she explains in this excerpt:

I want to take a job, because, a good one job. You know, the, like a good job, easy for the, the respect job. Yeah. Like a clerk, something, receptionist, like, high school level job. Now I can not, I like to study in university but I can not, because my age. Because I am ah, you know the..housewife. I have three children.
(Kama, Interview #2, 22/02/98)

Language learning

Kama's process of learning English has been a long, slow climb up a steep mountain. Although English was part of her formal education in Sri Lanka since the fifth grade, it was not a subject that students, teachers, or parents took seriously. "Yeah, but, the children, all my parents, didn't interested. Because this is not important for the English, in my country" (Kama, Interview #2, 22/02/98).

During the three months when she knew she would be emigrating, she studied English with a Sri Lankan teacher. However, when she first came to Montreal, the only thing she could understand and say was "Hello. How are you? And you?" She could also understand the odd word, and guess the meaning of some sentences from those few vocabulary words. She explains:

Speak is very fast, and different accent...Most of time I am very quiet. Little bit sadly, yeah, because I asked, I want to know about Canada, and Montreal, but I didn't know, but, sometime sadly, sometime little bit cry. (Kama, Interview #2, 22/02/98)

Kama began by studying English at a Sri Lankan Community Center, where she studied the first two months. Unfortunately, the teacher had the same pronunciation problems as she had. Preferring a native English speaking teacher, Kama and her husband went to the Montreal High School. When the government changed the fee schedule making immigrants pay the regular fees, they stopped

studying there since the cost of one course increased from \$30 to \$170. Her husband has been studying English and French intensively, but Kama's studies have been largely interrupted for several years due to the birth of her three children. Her husband could not help her with the house-work or the children when they were small because he was working extremely long hours to provide for the family. Now, however, they stay home with the children and attend classes on alternate evenings. During their first years in Montreal, her sister-in-law, who did not yet have children, went to work in the day time and took care of Kama's baby in the evening leaving her free to attend English classes. During the next ten years, Kama attended the English classes at Montreal High School sporadically due to her child-care responsibilities as she explains in this excerpt:

No, sometime, I have free time, so I go again Montreal High School, I take a class one, two months, then I stopped, stay home, then, if I had a free time, again, and again same level...the years is very fast. Running fast. Then I stay home, all the forget. Then again it's beginning. (Kama, Interview #2, 22/02/98)

When I probed her about why she had to keep stopping, Kama also explained:

If I go to uhh, English class, important, you know the exam time, my baby is very sick, so I stay home, the time is lose. Again, the Montreal High School, you know a big exam. Again studying level three. Then sometimes I bored. Always I go to, but I can not concentrate for the English class. Because the baby is,... You know, in my first time, that time, I leave the daycare, so the, you know the contagious from other kids. All the time my son is sick. Cold, fever, something. I can not concentrate for the English class. And daycare, and, I can, I didn't do the homework, uh, first baby only, so I worried, my son. Now it's OK, I have three children... Yeah. You know the first baby is lots of care about the first baby. Second baby is a little bit, (laughter). It's OK, this is actually every baby like that... If I had uh, me I had a nervous, lots of nervous. Sometimes my son didn't eat food, so I worried that day. Now it's uhh, only one time, so next time, he could eat! But I worried that time. (Kama, Interview #2, 22/02/98)

Now that her children are all older and in school, she has gone back to studying French and English intensively during the days. As mentioned, she wants to be able to get what she considers to be a good job. Although she has a fairly high communicative competence in English now, she is still shy to speak with native English speakers and even with fellow students in an ESL class. From Kama's perspective, the concept of shyness emerged as the biggest hurdle to overcome in her process of language learning in Canada, as revealed in the following conversational exchange.

K:...because usually my country people, women, not men, stay all the, they all the house. And my culture is, if some visitors come my house, for the men or strange people, I always inside, inside part of the house. I can not go out in front of the house. Only men, my father, my brother...sometimes my mother.

M: But even if the visitors are women?

K: Yeah. Women, it's OK a little bit. But strangers, never I, never I didn't come to front door.

M: Really. Even if the visitors, the strangers are only women...They will only see your father and your brothers?

K: Yeah. But, uh, they, they can not allowed for the inside the house. Inside the, you know the, because my country gate and land, then my house. They calling uh, from the gate my father, or my mother, my old ladies. My grandmother, not, when I asked, they said the, you know the advertisement for the soap.

M: OK, if they're selling things.

K: So they say "No, no, no. You can't go." Not allowed for me. Yeah, ahh, because they careful for the teenage girls. In my, in my generation. But now it's very changed, but my, my age is same like that. So I grow up that way. Now here is everybody, so a little bit shy everybody. That's the problem!...Always I stay home. If I go to the school in my Sri Lanka, then I stay home. Not allowed to go to the cinema, or XXX, only stay home. So, that's the problem for my Sri Lankan ladies. (Kama and Marilyn, Interview #2, 22/02/98)

Socio-cultural Identity

I found Kama's insightful perceptions about cultural identity and the differences between her former and present societies to be very thought-provoking. The process of negotiating her own cultural identity is an ongoing, ever-changing and often conflicting combination of values and attitudes. As Peirce emphasizes in the analysis of her diary studies, the subject position is "multiple, contradictory, and a site of struggle" (Peirce, 1995a, p. 16). For Kama, being Canadian means being free, as she explains in this exchange:

K: I think the Canada life is very easy. I think free life. In my country it's very, you know, everything controlled.

M: Controlled?

K: Controlled. Here it's free. I, my, my feeling is, lots of free.

M: Like what kind of things are controlled in your country?

K: Uh, in my country, women always very patient, very shy.

Every, the adult people, most, the women is very, no talk about lots, very quiet. In the house, OK, but outside the house, very quiet. And so, uhh, I can't tell about my opinion, you know, out of house. In the house, OK. Uhh, the clothes is very long, uhh, the hair is very long.

M: So is that like a kind of a control, too?

K: Yeah. I like to learn to ride a bicycle. For my age, now it's OK, but in my feeling, but uh, my father, mother, not allowed. Now, I think, ten years after, now girls riding a bicycle allowed even. But my age is not allowed. So here is, is free, nobody caring, nobody, I do anything, yeah, nobody cared. It's free. I go outside, I talk about any people, nobody uh, care about. But, my, you know, 28 years I lived in Sri Lanka. So, the affected for lots of feeling, yeah? Little bit shy, little bit, because I grow up in very control country. (Kama and Marilyn, Interview #3, 15/03/98)

More than any other South Asian immigrant I have met, Kama has a very perceptive view of her own culture and identity, and how it is changing as she spends more time in her new country. When I asked her about these changes, and how she sees herself as being Sri Lankan and Canadian simultaneously, she said

that she was “somewhere in the middle”. She, like most other Sri Lankans that she observes, has slowly moved from being shy toward being more sociable. She sees this movement as moving from being “more Sri Lankan” toward being “more Canadian”. She explains:

Yeah, lots of people like Canadian culture. The women. Because in my country very control. So, I can not free. Men it's different. They are free in my country. But, woman is always stay home, the control with men. Here, no. (Kama, Interview #3, 15/03/98)

Kama sees herself more like a typical Sri Lankan woman in that she is very respectful of her traditional role in family relationships. Women in her culture are very obedient, and they often take care of elderly or sick relatives, and care for everyone in the extended family unit. She says that she likes being this way, and feels there is security in this type of communal living. However, she also views Sri Lankan women as “very soft”, whereas Canadian women are “very strong”. Kama feels that although she retains the family-centered values of traditional Sri Lankan culture, she is becoming a bit different from her female compatriots like her sister. Take for example, the following conversation about her growing independence:

K: Yeah. Now my mind is a little bit strong. I can live alone, so I won't another people supported. But uh my eldest sister wrote a letter, so always she want, she supported, ah, she supporting, she supporting other people. They can not, not strong. Yeah. They go to the shopping...But not strong. Always, everything she wants to go outside with husband.

M: Right. Yeah, and how do you think that you changed? How did you make that change to become more strong? How did it happen?

K: Oh, because nobody helped me That's uh, uh...

M: You had to.

K: Yeah. I don't have to, nobody. And things I do, I do, uh, my husband went to the work, for fifteen hours, so I stay alone, so I have to go outside, or hospital or something. Shopping. Everything I have to. So, little bit of the, little bit going on, little bit strong. Not strong, very, little bit strong... (Kama and Marilyn, Interview #3, 15/03/98)

The biggest conflicts in her perspective on cultural identity construction seem to involve decisions about raising her children who she perceives are also caught between two cultures. Kama wants to adopt positive aspects from both cultures, to “pick up the Canadian culture...the suitable for the Sri Lankan culture” (Kama, Interview #3, 15/03/98). She wants her daughters to be strong and independent like Canadian women, yet she wants them to retain the family-centered values of the traditional Sri Lankan way of life. She thinks her daughters should be capable of making their own living at a good job and enjoy the power of financial independence, yet at the same time she expects them to accept an arranged marriage:

M: You were saying that you feel Canadian women, they are very strong and independent. Do you feel you want your daughters to be like that?

K: Yeah, I'd like that. Yeah, I like the, uh, I like that, because I have money...I like uh, yeah, something, you know the not the cloth, because my husband allowed. I like the clothes, or I will buy, but I can't buy the car. Only can my husband choose the, you know, big amount of money, only man suitable. Choose. Choice. Man's choice.

M: Right. 'Cause they have that power.

K: Power, power for the, but, uh, my husband asked, talk about the, the advice for me, but the most power is men. But I like the, I have a power, so I want to, I...

M: Right. So you wanted to be more like that, in terms of being strong and independent, and making choices?

K: Yeah. Decision. Decision.

M: Mmmhmm. But what about other things, like uh, if your daughters will be independent, and making decisions, does that also mean they will make their own decisions about, if they will get married, who they will marry...

K: (laughter) That's uh, no. So, my mind is really, you know, it's, I don't know.

M: So it depends on which things.

K: Yeah. My mind, but my children, I don't know. They ask too, after they will ask me, "Why, this is free, this is what you, not free?" I think they ask, they will ask. I can buy car but I can't buy man! (laughter). (Kama and Marilyn, Interview #3, 15/03/98)

Kama's process of change and negotiating the cultural identity of herself and her family is an intricate web of contradictions and evolving values. As with her progress in language learning, it is a complex, often inwardly conflicting series of decisions and value judgements which are heavily influenced by the norms and expectations of her extended family and culture at large. All of the negative factors which combined to affect her language learning process, including the typical gender role responsibilities and the personal "shyness", merge with her strong desire for education and a "respect" job, enabling her to persevere on her path to linguistic and communicative competence.

2. Rafia

Rafia is a nineteen-year-old single woman who came to Montreal from Bangladesh just one year ago. The staff at SAWCC introduced us, and Rafia was very anxious to meet me and practice her English. Although she has been here less time than any of the women I have met, her level of English is more

advanced. She is very bright, curious, and energetic, and is extremely keen to learn languages. Although Rafia seems more free to go out alone, she always preferred to meet me in her home.

She lives in a small two bedroom apartment in the downtown area of Montreal with her older sister, brother-in-law, and their two young children. Although Rafia's sister has been here for several years, she has never gone to any language classes because of her two small children. There are also two older married sisters back in Bangladesh. Rafia is in a very different position than the other young Bengali women I know, partly because of her family circumstances. Her mother died when she was an infant; she was raised by her older sisters and their father, who was quite liberal by Bengali standards. It seems that the restrictions of her girlhood came from her extended family and society at large rather than from within her immediate family. For example, she explained that she had not usually worn a "head-covering", although if she was going out with an older female relative she would wear it out of a sense of respect and propriety. She was never allowed to go out alone, and since she had no brothers she was obligated to always go out with her sisters. By "going out" I mean simply stepping out of the house for shopping or errands, not the sense of "going out" for entertainment as we use the phrase in North America. This obligatory chaperoning was more due to the standards of acceptance in general society than something specifically imposed by her father. Her "freedom to move" was probably the most recurrent theme that emerged in our discussions.

In her current living situation, her brother-in-law is the only male relative here. He appears to have a sort of indirect responsibility for her which is not nearly as stringent as the control that most Bengali fathers and brothers seem to exercise over their women.

This brother-in-law was never at home during the times I was invited to her house. However, he happened to call his wife during one of our interviews. She gave me the telephone while I was interviewing Rafia, saying that her husband wanted to talk to me! He asked what I was doing, and seemed satisfied with the response. He wanted to know if I was asking his wife any questions, and when I replied that I was only interviewing Rafia, he thanked me and said "goodbye". I suppose that whatever queries he would have had about my questions to his wife did not extend to her sister. (F.N. 10.04.98)

Background

Rafia grew up in a small Bengali village where there was only one school. She explained that the fifty-odd Hindus and Muslims in this village went to the same school. Their teacher, who came by foot or by boat from the next village, often could not make it to school because of flooding or other problems. This area is obviously subject to frequent flooding. Rafia reported that the students were supposed to wait until noon on the days their teacher didn't come, so they used to play in the field. Many children in the village never went to school, as they were very poor and needed to stay home and work in the fields. There were more girls than boys in primary school, because a lot of the boys just ran away instead of attending school, although their parents sent them. For secondary school, they went to a village about three kilometers away, by bus or boat, and

many less children went because it was so much trouble to go. It was far, and parents didn't want girls to go because they worried about them and had to pay for everything. Therefore, there were far less girls than boys in secondary school, and it was difficult for poor people to go to secondary school. Rafia complained that the rich kids always got the highest marks because their parents hired tutors for them.

Bangladesh has a population estimated at over 115 million in 1993, with an area of 148.4 thousand square kilometers (Britannica Online). It has the lowest human development index ranking in South Asia. The life expectancy is 56.4 years, and the adult literacy rate is 37.3 %. The combined primary, secondary, and tertiary level education gross enrolment ratio is only 39% (UNDP Human Development Report Office).

Immigration

Rafia, however, did finish secondary school, and her family decided she was coming to Canada shortly thereafter. From her perspective, it was not unusual that she had no personal choice in this matter, since all decisions are made communally in her country. She explained that they often even have a gathering of the whole village to make decisions. Her sister, who had already been in Montreal three years, had sent photos, and Raffia felt eager to come here. When she envisioned life in Canada, she had positive expectations of speaking English and "being free". She especially looked forward to being able to go out

alone, without the constant accompaniment of her sisters. Her cousins in England had explained to her that life is free there and nobody in society talks about you.

Rafia described life in Bangladesh and her preconceptions about life in Canada:

Society is harder, you can't go out alone at night- people will steal from you. Neighbours will gossip if you go out with boys or come home late...Women don't like this, but that's the way it is, especially in the villages. I thought Canadians are more modern, they speak English, and I can learn all about their lives, what they eat, how they speak, and why their lives are different than ours. Now I think I was a foolish girl, and they're just different- it's simple- but at that time I was so curious. Their (Canadians) mind is more easy - they don't mind about anything - they accept people. But in my country we judge everyone - we must respect old people. But now it's changing and getting modern. (Rafia, Interview #1, 04/04/98)

Language Learning

Rafia also thought that she could study sciences here and become a doctor.

Now she realizes that this is more difficult than she expected for several reasons.

She is over eighteen, yet still has to "study everything at first like children".

Now she knows that it takes a long time to catch up. However, she is already in the sixth level of ESL classes in the Adult Education section of a Montreal public high school, whereas her compatriots Bedana, Beadan, and Mariam are still in the first level. Compared to these other young women, Rafia emigrated to Canada with a superior command of the English language. She has also been much freer than Bedana, Beadan, and Mariam to pick up the language outside of her formal school setting.

During her first three months in Canada Rafia studied French at SAWCC, and when they closed for the summer she switched to learning English. Her neighbour had begun studying at Montreal High School, but her husband didn't like that school. At Rafia's insistence the neighbour's husband searched for other schools. He discovered Pius, which provided more hours and was free of charge. Rafia studied English there with her neighbour, and started the next level of French in the afternoons at SAWCC. However, her neighbour kept convincing her sister that she could not do both languages at once. Rafia recalls this woman's statement in the following interview excerpt:

She said: "Does she have two brains?" So they made me stop the French class. They said it was too hard for me and I was too small, but really they don't want me to grow. I don't like this, but I had to stop studying French. (Rafia, Interview #1, 04.04.98)

Rafia explained her feelings about her level of communication in English when she first arrived in Montreal this way:

It's ah, it's too bad, when I came here at first and I went someplace for shopping and I felt I could speak a little bit English, but not as well as Canadian. Umm, but I can't uh, I can speak English for, I can, uh, how much I know I can move, but no good, not, uh, not better. But my feeling was too bad when I can't explain something. For example if I know uh if I want something in the shop and I want to say the lady I can't explain her, because it's first tie uh, sometime my spelling, uh my sound it's not good. And my uh, pronunciation it's not better then, and it's take time for English. But I can't speak French. It's too hard and I feel more, more, uh, I think 'why I don't know anything?' Now I feel why didn't our country have those languages? If our country have it, I can, I can speak here and get easy for me. Why don't I know anything? And sometime I went out with my country's people and uh, because they, they live here long time, and I see they can speak English, sometimes French also, but I can't. And I say, I'm going to be very sad. Why don't I know, when I learn those languages?

And uh, it's hard, I want to know everything these languages, I want to learn it. (Rafia, Interview #2, 04/04/98)

Rafia is very eager and impatient, but her sister counsils her to relax and take her time! After only a few months of studying French at SAWCC, Rafia moved on to a public high school program. She recalls how it was difficult at first because there were many students in the class that spoke Arabic together, but she had no-one with whom to speak in Bengali. Without the possibility of speaking her mother tongue, she was forced into an English immersion experience at school. Obviously this was advantageous for her progress in English, although it was difficult socially. Rafia's goals in learning English are a bit more academic and cosmopolitan than those of my other research participants, who mostly want to be able to communicate in the target language and get a job. She wants to be able to "speak with any people in the world...read everything in English...know more things. Because many biggest novels, they uhh English" (Rafia, Interview #2, 04.04.98). After completing high school, she thinks she will get a job if necessary, although she would prefer to go to college and university and study sciences.

Gender Roles

Since Rafia is young and single, she hasn't experienced the barriers and interruptions in her process of language learning typical of some other married South Asian women with children. However, she had a lot to say about the

problems encountered by other women from her culture, as described in the following excerpt from our second interview.

They (men) don't want to listen them, they don't want to uhh, they say: "We are the princes, what we need, uh, what we told, this is right". Not uh, if you, uh, if I went out or something it's not good, for men it's...They don't respect. But now it's going more, because we have uh, two prime minister in our country - women - and it's going more for women, and it's going more for freedom for women. And uh, I love to know because uh, I like to grow more because I'm a woman. And I see uh, most of time, uh, women are uh, working like a servant for men, and they don't have anything. (Rafia, Interview #2, 04/04/98)

She sees herself as "completely free" compared to other Bengali women.

She explained that it depends on what type of family you come from and the "laws" that your relatives make. Personally, she said there were no strong laws in her family. I then asked why her sister has not studied languages yet, and whether it was a personal choice rather than a restriction placed on her. She explained:

No, because uh, you know, if you get married, uh, in my country if you get married, uh, I don't know it's now, but before if you get married, you have to, you like, uh, you yourself, you give it, you give all of your freedom to the man. If he like to go out now you can go. If he do like anything, you can do. But it's not your choice after married. And uh, the men uh, the woman's husband also have father and mother. It's up to their choice. It's uh, it's not uh, the woman's choice. But in here, uh, it's now change. Most of time it's change. And people, uh, women uh, after get married their studies continue, they're going to be doctor, teacher, and everything. But in here uh, sometime you know, the men, doesn't have work, you know, they stay home, so they like to, uh, their wife also with their children stay home. They have to stay home. (Rafia, Interview #2, 04/04/98)

Speaking specifically of her sister's situation, from her perspective it seems that caring for her children is the main obstacle to her access to language classes.

Yeah, because uh, she has two children, they don't uh, go to school, and if she went outside she have to take care of those two. One is trolley and one walking. If they, if the two are both walking they, maybe it's easy. And it's not near of her house, she have to take the bus or metro to go to the place,...And you know she like, she like it and she want to know it. Because it's a need and uh, everything want to, have to do for her life, for her growing...Because at first she can't take a baby, and uh also, the baby can't get take care without two years. After two years they take baby...It's too hard for her. And she think, this why sometime and she have to come home and do everything in the home, and after she have to go outside and learn something. If, uh, I think it's uh, husband also help the women, they can go outside and do more things. (Rafia, Interview #2, 04/04/98)

Socio-cultural Identity

Rafia offered interesting insights about the process of acculturation. As seen in the following excerpt, she expressed quite bold opinions about the differences between Bengali and Canadian society.

If I live there more more time, long time, I could uh, I have to use this culture and I forgot a little bit my culture and I use more like this country's culture. And uh, I told you here is more freedom, free, and I get more free, when it take long time to live there, I will be uh, a Canadian, because I move like a Canadian person every day. If I, if I live there more time, I might be a Canadian person. (Rafia, Interview #3, 18/04/98)

She spoke at great length about the problems of gossip in her society and very adamantly condemned that characteristic of her Bengali compatriots.

We live in Canada, but we...have everything in our mind in my, in our country, and uh, when we meet people, of course we meet together and we know each other our country same people. And when we do a little bit anything like mistake, like if I move a little bit with Canadian person, and another one sees, saw that, that I

move a little bit Canadian person, and uh, some people bad. That he or she of course told the same person, uh, that I saw the same lady move like XXX and uh that person talk more, more, more, and it is not good for everybody. (Rafia, Interview #3, 18/04/98)

Rafia feels more “Canadian” than “Bengali” in the sense that she is free to come and go alone, which a Bengali girl could never do. She thinks that immigrants have to change in order to fit in to Canadian culture, otherwise they “get trouble everywhere, every time!” For Rafia, the most important part of this change is learning the language. Despite her extremely extroverted personality, Rafia explained that she finds it difficult to get friendly with Canadian people, and to understand them:

Yeah, it’s also another good experience, because I can’t uh, I could talk with those people, uh, it it’s although hard, of course I could a little bit, uh, when I try, uh, some people are happy, because I try to speak their language to be them, uh, a little bit like them, but, uh, some people they laugh at me, and it’s hard me. I feel bad, and sorry, I can’t talk the same way. And I say OK, I will be like you! And uh, try to be like them. (Rafia, Interview #3, 18/04/98)

Rafia was the only one of my research participants who shared any negative comments about the way Canadian citizens treated immigrants. She recounted some stories of other new Canadians in her school, describing the discrimination they have experienced because of being visible minorities. Although she has not personally encountered this type of treatment, she has become aware through the explanations of others that it exists.

Rafia is an interesting case study because of her unique personality and ability to express herself, although considering all of the women I have met, I

would suggest that she is not a typical representative of young Bengali women. Due to her unusual family circumstances and extremely charismatic personality, she has been able to make much faster progress in language learning than the other South Asian women I know. However, Rafia's frustrations surrounding the language learning and acculturation processes paint a familiar picture of feelings of inadequacy and powerlessness in the life of a new citizen. Her frequent mention of freedom and independence are important recurrent themes in these interviews.

3. Fatima

Fatima is a Pakistani woman in her mid-thirties who immigrated to Montreal in 1985. She began attending the basic literacy/ESL class at SAWCC in 1998. Although she was able to speak English in class more than most of the other students, I realized outside of class that she could not express herself in this new language enough to explain her feelings and experiences. Yet somehow I sensed that Fatima was an emotionally sensitive person. I also discovered, through observing her with other South Asian women and listening to her husband's description of her character, that she was a very talkative and expressive woman..

Her husband, Haroon, who has lived in Canada for almost twenty years now, was an integral part of our interviews. He also played a major role in our

informal conversations on cultural issues, such as child-rearing practices, relations between neighbours and relatives, and lifestyle patterns. Haroon offered insightful explanations of Pakistani culture and how it differs from Canadian ways. Although his assistance and perspectives were helpful, I couldn't help but think at the time that Fatima could have expressed herself in English more than she actually did in our interviews, had we been alone. Haroon did not seem to be overbearing or controlling, and in reviewing the interview transcripts I noticed that he never interrupted Fatima's efforts to speak in English, although she did sometimes break in to the conversation while he was speaking. For example:

H: She said she didn't feel pressure, because there was not, not so many French Canadian or English Canadian we was uh, close together/

F: (Urdu)

M: In contact with.

H: Can not speak the language/

F: (Urdu)

H: With the neighbour, and, but if you speak the language, then you get to, you know, friends, in the supermarket you talk to somebody, well, you maybe friend out of it and a neighbour, you know your neighbour/

F: (Urdu)

H: Yeah, neighbour is French or English, and you can speak the language, and you start to go their home, and start to come then you change. But when she came, you know/

F: All the time home! (Haroon, Fatima, and Marilyn, Interview #3, 22.05.98)

I perceived that Haroon was truly interested in the dialogues and wanted to be a part of the interview process, and primarily he wanted to help his wife to answer the questions. The helping role that her husband and children played was certainly a sign of their deep affection and respect for Fatima. At the same time, I

believe that their assistance inhibits her independence and efforts to communicate in English.

Their children were also an integral part of the process of my getting to know and understand Fatima. Her son and daughter are in the sixth and fifth grades respectively, and the youngest girl will begin kindergarten this fall. She does not speak English yet, although she has picked up several words from her older siblings. The older children were very interested in talking with me and enjoyed describing their studies and experiences at school. They go to an English school, which is an expensive privilege gained by paying for two years of private school. As in the case of Kama's family, they have circumvented Quebec's language legislation requiring all children whose parents have not received their primary education in English to attend a French public school. Although there are many Sri Lankan students in their school, it is very much a non-Asian atmosphere. For example, Fatima's daughter would never wear traditional Pakistani dress to school, because when her friend made this attempt she was teased. Fatima's children described the ways in which they find it easiest to explain, or more often avoid explaining, details of their cultural practices to non-Asian students. For example, a friend once came to school with henna on her hands. This is the brown, intricate tattoo designs on the palms of the hands, often done in preparation for attending a wedding. Rather than explain this cultural practice, they just told their classmates that she had drawn on her hands with a felt pen! From my perspective, these children were extremely polite and respectful,

yet curious about me and willing to communicate. Although they never interrupted, or added their opinions to the flow of adult conversation, when I asked them questions they were eager to explain their ideas and experiences.

Living in Montreal

Fatima's family live in a comfortable three-bedroom apartment in a neighbourhood in the east part of Montreal, where South Asians are not heavily represented. Their home has a typical South Asian flavour, with lots of family photographs, artificial flowers and ornaments on display. Their grandfather from Toronto was visiting the family for a few months, but never joined us in the living room or in the kitchen to eat dinner.

When the prayer call was heard over a radio, different family members displayed different reactions to it. The grandfather was actually doing the ritual prayers in another room, while Fatima simply moved her "scarf" over her head during those moments, all the while continuing what she was doing, even laughing. Her husband and children didn't acknowledge the prayer calls, although I perceived a slight decrease in the volume of their speech. (F.N. 26.05.98)

Fatima prepared fabulous meals for my visits, including curried meat and chicken dishes, a wide variety of vegetable and pasta salads, and delicious desserts of rice pudding and mango kulfi (similar to ice-cream). I get the impression that she cooks similarly every day. Her family reported that she makes fresh chapati (warm pancake-shaped bread) twice a day, which is no small task. I found it ironic that when discussing their adjustments to Canadian culture, Fatima said "Now we make pizza instead of chapati", although she still makes

chapati twice a day! This made me wonder how far apart our perceptions of her acculturation process really are. While she perceives that her family has changed toward being more “Canadian” because they now eat pizza, I perceive how “Pakistani” they remain because they continue to eat chapati on a daily basis. I found a similar irony in her husband’s comment that their children are 90% Canadian and 10% Pakistani. While he perceives his children as almost totally “Canadian” in their ways of thinking and behaving, I observed them speaking Urdu, eating Pakistani food, and explaining their customs and religion to me. From my perspective, they were very knowledgeable about their religion and the significance of their cultural practices. While Haroon was keen to discuss cultural and sociological issues with me, Fatima and her children enjoyed sharing their family photographs and talking about more personal things. Fatima is a very warm, generous woman, and felt inclined to give me bracelets from her copious collection. She was also the only one of my research participants who initiated signs of physical affection such as hugs and kisses on my cheek. The ambiance of the family is quite fun-loving and intimate, and I felt a warm welcome here.

Background

Fatima grew up in a village in Pakistan, with five brothers and three sisters. Now one of her brothers is in Canada; another is in Saudi Arabia, and the rest of her family is back in Pakistan. She recalls that when she was a young girl, it was a new idea for girls to go to school in her village, and most of her relatives

did not approve. Although her father was an educated man who agreed to his daughters' education, he was still influenced by his older relatives who could not imagine the purpose of girls' education. These relatives were entrenched in a longstanding, traditional worldview which did not envision the need or desire for women to be educated. Their interpretations of their reality, which are continually reconstructed within the psyche of a community, did not contain space for change toward gender equity. However, Fatima finished primary school and two years of secondary school as well.

Pakistan is a country of almost 800,000 square kilometers, with a population estimated at over 136 million in 1997. The literacy rate for males over age fifteen is 47.3%, while it is only 22.3% for females. 78.9% of the population over age 25 have had no formal schooling, and only 1.9% have received post secondary education (Britannica Online).

Immigration

Immigration was not an easy process for Fatima. She recalls feelings of both fear and happiness to come here. Her husband had been in Montreal for five years when he returned to Pakistan for their arranged marriage. Fatima had no input in the decision to move to Canada, although she did look forward to many aspects of what she imagined life in an industrialized nation to be. She envisioned a sort of paradise where everything was done by machines, and she also had a dream about driving a convertible with her hair blowing in the wind!

What a fitting symbol of the freedom and liberty that this “western” country promises to a Pakistani woman like Fatima. She said she had imagined that in Canada everything would be shining, with polished streets. In an interview, she recalled one of her first reactions as stating: “It’s not shining that much like it did in the movies!”. Fatima came from a “modest” class in Pakistan, which Haroon describes as “a little bit, maybe medium, maybe little bit better than medium” (Interview #3, 22.05.98). She was therefore used to having the household chores such as cleaning, laundry, and some shopping and cooking done by servants. Other domestic tasks were always shared between the multiple women of a large extended family. It was quite a shock to find herself alone in an apartment with all the housework to be done by herself.

This loneliness was definitely the most difficult part of her first years in Canada. Along with the system of communal living in Pakistan, there is a wide network of support among friends and neighbours. Fatima and Haroon explained that especially in times of sadness, sickness, or death, people in the community support you. To help you to keep your mind off your worries, everyone in the neighbourhood comes to visit you, and there are long line-ups of people outside your home in the event of sickness or death. This is extremely different from life in Montreal, where individuals may not know their next-door neighbours even after living for ten years in the neighbourhood! Especially during the first year in Canada before she had a baby, Fatima was terribly lonely and depressed. The following interview excerpt describes the extent of her sadness at this time:

H: Yeah, and loneliness. She used to cry, you know, I don't know, one year, or two years, you used to cry.

F: No, only nine months!

H: Yeah. But when uh, Ranjeet (their son) born she, you know...

F: After busy too much.

H: She start to busy, and uh, but loneliness, you know.

F: Nine months too much crying! Night crying, day crying!

H: Yeah. Our culture our is never, ever, can stay alone. Since you born you always ten, fifteen, twenty people around you. Five, ten, with your house, brothers, sister, father, mother/

F: Sister-in-law, and kids...

H: And first time, you know, she start, you know, the apartment, with only the walls, I go to work, and I work twelve hours...And uh, the most thing, you know, we are, because ours is not a, you know, our marriage, always the marriage is arranged marriage, and the, in the beginning we are not so free, you know. We talk together, but, uh...

M: But you need time to get to know each other.

H: Know each other and to get so much free, you know. Now how much we are free, we don't have at that time, still really, very hard time. I can not talk everything to her, so many, when you are not free, you know. (Haroon, Fatima, and Marilyn, Interview #3, 22.05.98)

I think this isolation was especially difficult for Fatima, because I sense that she is by nature very talkative, expressive, and emotionally sensitive.

Language Learning

Fatima's process of language learning and acculturation has been extremely slow although, according to my experience, this is probably not atypical. After thirteen years in Canada, her language learning process is really just beginning. She feels bad, even angry, at not being able to express herself with English-speakers. "She's still shy too much, embarrassed more than shy. Yeah, and can not talk. Feel angry too" (Haroon, Interview #2, 25.04.98).

Haroon remarked that she does have a bit more courage to try to speak English now than she had ten years ago, although she's still very embarrassed to speak because she doesn't have grammatical knowledge and can not make a complete sentence. She really wants to be able to communicate with more people, as she is naturally very talkative. Although her husband and children speak very good English, she feels that they have not taught her anything because they always communicate in Urdu. She believes that her slow progress in learning English is mainly due to her lack of basic education. Also, the fact that she stayed at home raising children, and did not need or feel forced to go out to work, has not fostered a genuine need to be able to speak English. Now that her children will all be in school this fall, Fatima would like to get out of the house and do something, and hopefully find a job. After thirteen years, she finally has the free time and motivation to go to an English class.

Haroon explained that she was feeling stressed about her friends' problems, and worrying too much about their problems, because she did not have anything to occupy her mind.

She will work uh, person, you know, who's two, three friend and they talk and they tell their problem, and she start to think their problem is her problem, you know, something like that she take too much, and maybe for them is nothing, you know, but when they tell their problem to her, she start to think, and you know, her muscles start to pain, and this and that, and...She says she like to, you know, keep herself busy, you know, always/ (Haroon, Interview #2, 25.04.98).

Her friend, who had already attended classes at SAWCC, suggested she take a class to keep herself busy and learn English at the same time. Now she enjoys the class so much she never wants to miss it! Even after two months of classes, she and her husband agree that her English has improved.

Fatima said that these English classes were convenient for her because she could be home in time for the return of her children from school in the afternoons. She enjoys the feeling of community among the South Asian women, and explained that none of them like it when we have two teachers and split them up into two groups according to levels. They would rather stay together, and help each other with their varied levels of oral and written abilities. This is quite a different mentality than what I have encountered among other ESL students who prefer to be in small group classes of similar levels to maximize learning. When I asked Fatima if she would be able to go to ESL classes where students were of mixed genders and ethnicities, she explained that she feels comfortable in the SAWCC class because she is used to being with South Asian women, and feels “very easy” with them.

Socio-cultural Identity

It was difficult to get at Fatima’s concepts of acculturation and identity construction, possibly because these concepts were a bit too abstract to communicate well, even with the translation help of her husband. The most important concept they explained concerning the difference between Pakistani

and Canadian cultures centered around issues of privacy and independence.

Haroon believed that he has changed a lot due to his proximity with Canadians, observing the way they treat each other. He said that now he can not tolerate many ways in which people act in Pakistan, because it makes him feel mad. For Fatima, the biggest change is a feeling of freedom from the pressures of society. She felt that in Montreal, no-one bothers you or gets too involved in your personal or family matters. Haroon translated her explanation:

Here, you know, nobody will bother you. What are you doing? You know, what, how you live at home, what kind of car you have, what kind of house, this and that. But over there, every people will bother you...people will talk, you know, what kind of clothes she's wearing, why she's you know, so nice car, she can't afford that...everybody will watch how many times you went out, and that kind of thing. Relatives, neighbours, everybody, you know. Yeah, over there, everybody knows each other...Because over there, generation after generation people live same house, same place, same neighbour. (Haroon, Interview #3, 22.05.98)

He also noted that the way of life is beginning to change even in the villages in Pakistan, because people are watching television, and life is getting "very busy over there, same like here".

One of the things that Fatima appreciates most about the Canadian way of living is the lack of competition among people compared to the way she grew up in Pakistan. Here she feels no problem and no pressure, as everyone goes to the same school and wears the same type of clothes. These perspectives are somewhat contradictory since many Canadian students, teachers, and parents would say that there is great pressure on students to dress in a particular way to fit in with peers. However, here Fatima does not feel the same competitiveness as in

her culture, “where everyone is always trying to outdo each other, send their children to a better school, or hire private tutors for their children”. I also found these statements to be ironic, considering that they have paid the tuition for a private school to enable their children to study in English. They feel this gives their children more advantage. Their son even has a private tutor who comes to the home three days a week, which I doubt is a norm among immigrants in Montreal. Yet, I suppose that Fatima feels they are paying for these things out of a desire to give their children the best possible opportunities, rather than in response to a competitive ambiance among neighbours and friends like the situation in Pakistan.

Fatima also enjoys the freedom of feeling that no-one here is watching what she is wearing or where she is going every day. In the words of her husband’s translation:

The change, too much change is because there is no competition here. The most changing is in the clothes, how many times you want to wear, you can wear. The major change, there is no competition. What you want to do in your home, or you want to wear clothes... (Haroon, Interview #3, 22.05.98)

Apart from becoming non-competitive, Fatima feels that she has not changed much because she has always been staying at home. Being busy taking care of her children and doing domestic tasks by herself, she has not had much time to go out, work, or meet many Canadian people.

Some, she say some people we know the more XXX they go out, and they, you know, find a job or something, they work with Canadian people, they change more. But I stay home, and I stay

with the Pakistani people. This why I didn't change as much as the, you know people/ (Haroon, Interview #3, 22.05.98)

She has not felt any pressure or necessity to change things about her ways of thinking or acting, because she has not had much contact with Quebecois or Canadian people. If she could speak sufficient English to meet her neighbours and women in the supermarket, and get to know them, then she believes she would start to change more. Up until now, her community has been her own ethnic group, and her social identity continues to be constructed within the framework of Pakistani people.

Although I felt an emotional attachment to Fatima, and a strong attraction to her warm and fun-loving nature, I regret that I was unable to communicate more personally with her. When her level of communicative competence in English improves, and she begins to have more contact with Canadian people, she probably would have many more ideas to express concerning her own process of acculturation and language learning. Despite having been in Montreal for thirteen years, her family responsibilities, lack of basic education, and embarrassment about her grammatical/linguistic incompetence have seriously restricted her from learning to speak English. Although from her perspective it was impossible to access language training during these thirteen years due to her gender roles of wife and mother, the actual "impossibility" of this option has been constructed in her mind and influenced by her social and cultural education.

Naidoo explains that the psychological characteristics of South Asian women may not be inborn but rather based on cultural habits which have developed into ideologies within their culture (Naidoo, 1980). While assuming the impossibility of access to language classes, Fatima also stated that she had not realized her need to be able to communicate in English while she was busy at home raising her children. Now that she feels free to pursue classes and look for a job, she has realized the importance of language learning for her personal circumstances. Referring to Peirce's concept of "investment", it is clear that Fatima is now prepared to "try investing" in English. Earlier, there seemed to be a mixture of actual restrictions, from her physical circumstances and environment, and constructed restrictions, from within her own mind, which rendered the possibility of studying English "impossible".

4. Anju

Anju is a woman in her mid-fourties who emigrated from India in 1974. She attended the basic literacy/ESL class at SAWCC for a short time in the spring of 1998 while she was laid off from her job at a chocolate factory. Having been here longer than any of the other South Asian women whom I have met, she was able to provide a more substantive, detailed picture of the processes of language learning and acculturation. It was especially interesting to learn about the cultural identity construction of her children, who are already young adults between the ages of 22 and 26. Anju differs from my other research participants in that she

has always worked outside of the home, ever since her second year in Canada, even throughout the birth of her babies. Anju was forced by economic circumstances, and at the same time enabled by the healthy Canadian economic milieu of the early 1970's, to work in factory jobs before she was able to speak either official language.

Although I was never invited to Anju's home, her detailed descriptions of her relationships with her children and husband have given me a vivid picture of their family dynamics. The relationship she enjoys with her adult children sounds extraordinarily intimate and supportive.

Yes, they go to the, at night, but they have a time to come home, and time to go. That's they have ah, always they keep it in the head, whatever they go, where they go, they go like 7:00, 8:00, they come back 9,10, or if they go early, they say OK, I gonna come 10:00. So they come sharp 10:00 at home. And if they late, they call me first. "We have a ride to come home, and can we late about 5 or 10 minutes?" That's they call from there. And they leave me home alone, and they go, they stay about 1 hour, 1 and a half hour, they call. "You OK? You sleeping? What are you doing?" That's they doing, three of them they go together, three of them to come together, and three of them they call me after one hour, one hour, one hour. That's the way they grown up and I train them. (Anju, Interview #3, 22.05.98)

She repeatedly explained how much they have helped her, especially on her path to becoming strong and independent. Anju has suffered a lot due to the behaviour of her alcoholic, abusive husband. When her children became adolescents, they were able to help her to stand up to their father and gain some independence. The father's problem has probably brought the rest of the family

much closer together, and the relationship with her children which Anju describes is one of unusually strong mutual respect and understanding. “That’s why I’m very proud my children. And they proud me too, because they have a good mother, and I have a good children. Because, thanks to God. Very much” (Anju, Interview #3, 22.05.98). It is this supportive relationship which has been the key factor empowering Anju in many senses, including her self-confidence in expressing herself in English.

Background

India’s population was estimated at almost 968 million in 1997, in an area of just over 3 million square kilometers. The life expectancy is 61.3 years, which is just below the world average of 63.2 years. Their human development index is rated at 138 out of the 175 countries listed, which is just next to Pakistan at 139, and extremely far from Canada which is ranked first (UNDP Human Development Report Office). Although the literacy rate for citizens over fifteen years is 52%, it is 65.5% for males and 37.7% for females. Of the population over age 25, 64.8% have received no formal schooling, and only 10.9% have completed primary school (Britannica Online).

Anju grew up in a small village in India, where she completed primary school. Her first language is Gujarathi, and in school they learned Hindi as a second language. Shortly after the seven years of primary school she got married, and her first daughter was born in India. A friend of her husband had

emigrated to Canada, and told him about how nice it was, and that there were employment opportunities for him as a machinist. Anju's father encouraged them to take this opportunity and helped her husband with the money to emigrate. As with my other research participants, Anju was completely uninvolved in this decision.

Immigration

When I asked about her opinions and preconceptions about Canada, she couldn't explain her preconceived ideas, since she didn't really have any. "I wasn't smart then. I just listened to my husband and my father, and I wanted to see what it would be like, a new experience" (Anju, Interview #1, 29.04.98). From an outsider's perspective, Anju's naiveté is difficult to comprehend. She stated that she had not realized that people would speak a different language than her, or that they would be white! Having grown up in a village, Anju had never seen television, movies, or foreigners. She was completely lost in the airport in Paris, dressed in a sari and sandals in the middle of winter. When her baby daughter needed to drink water in the airport, Anju saw people drinking at the fountain but couldn't figure out for herself how to make the water come out. She told me that she was shocked at seeing all the people who "looked like gods or angels with their beautiful white skin" (Anju, Interview #1, 29.04.98). She had honestly not realized that people would look different than herself, and had never seen white people. Before emigrating, she had assumed that everything in Canada would be similar to India, including government systems, health care,

food, and cultural practices. She remembers being impressed with how clean and nice everything was here, and how respectful the people were. Yet at first she wanted to return to India because she was so lonely. Stepping out of her culture and community was a shocking experience for Anju, whose sense of identity was so embedded within the village environment where she had spent her whole life.

The culture shock Anju experienced during her initial time in Montreal was obviously quite intense considering her unfamiliarity with this new culture. She explained that she was miserable at first because she was so terribly lonely and had no one to talk to. "I stay miserable....I don't have nobody, or I can not speak any language other than mine, so it's terrible" (Anju, Interview #2, 22.05.98). Her second two children were born in 1974 and 1975, and she began to work only three months after the birth of her youngest daughter. Anju had to go out to work because her husband wanted to sponsor his family to come to Canada, and at that time Canadian immigration demanded two employment letters from a couple in order for them to be eligible to sponsor relatives. She left her babies with a neighborhood "black lady who do the baby-sitting", and although neither her nor her children liked this situation, they had no choice.

Language Learning

I asked Anju about the difficulties of going to work without being able to speak French or English. My thinking was that it would be hard to obtain a job or

be able to perform the work without any ability to communicate. Anju's response surprised me. She was concerned more with the logistical details of getting to work in a city where she could neither speak nor read the official languages.

So I just stand there, and the bus came, the number, here is the number on the bus. The, Toronto there is no number bus. Yeah, so here is a number, so I can remember which number I have to take the bus. so I take that number bus, and I came all the way to the...And then I go inside, I just uh, punch the card, first time they show me how to do that, so I just punch. And whatever they tell me to put, just I put that. And then they show me what to do, I just sit there, or stand there, and do it. Nothing else (Anju, Interview #2, 22.05.98).

Although Anju has worked in factories quite steadily for over twenty years in Canada, she has never actually needed to be able to speak English to do her jobs. However, she does have a richness of experience in this factory work, which must give her an advantage in the increasingly difficult job market in Montreal. When I asked about her needs and goals in learning English, she spoke of independence.

Because in here it's just English language, around all Montreal or in around all Canada. Everywhere is English, and if you, like I want to go somewhere, or buy something, I can not do that without learning English. Every time, then, if I don't learn English, then I have to take somebody, to go with them, or if I want to do something, I have to ask first them. I can not do myself, what I want to do. So it's like I, if I learn English to speak up and understand, then I can do by myself. (Anju, Interview #2, 22.05.98)

While Anju was able to pick up a lot of English on the job, she tried learning French through formal education. As is the case with other South Asians I have

met, she perceives French to be a much more difficult language to learn and is convinced that she is not capable of learning to speak it. She explains:

Uh, two, three times I try to go school, in the French. But I couldn't do it. It's very, very hard. Because first of all, first I don't understand English pronounce more, so I can not learn French. Because if I understand more English, then easy to maybe, this is, like my thought... This in my head. I don't know it's true, but, uh, in my head...I attended class, I go every day. But what they was telling me, I don't understand one thing. One thing, nothing. I just stand there, and sit and watch, while they was talking. But I could no speak, or I could not say anything. So then I feel like, no good to go there. (Anju, Interview #2, 22.05.98)

Aside from learning to speak English at work and around the city, she described how her children have helped her a lot with English pronunciation.

And uh, when I want to read something, I read it, but all the time I make the mistake. And my children always correct me. Still I'm making mistake and they correct! Yeah! When I say something, and they say "No, that is wrong." Still, if they's cooking and I say something in the English, they say, "Mummy, it's wrong. You should say that. You do the this way, you do the that way." That was telling me, still they was telling me. Still! (laughter). (Anju, Interview #2, 22.05.98)

To return to the notion of evolving "investment", there was a long time when Anju didn't think that she needed to learn English. She did not particularly want to learn English, or perhaps it was just not within her realm of imagination. She did not see it as "the thing to do", as everything had been so far in her life which had been strictly controlled by relatives and societal norms. The question arises as to why she did not take any language courses when she first arrived in Canada. She explains:

Oh, because, uh, when I came first I was in about three month, I came from the India three month and then I was pregnant. First.

And then, I didn't think I want to go. Because, that time is not, uh, Asian women or Asian man, too many people here. It was few. When I came it's a few lady. And they live far, far. So it's like, uh, I don't want to, or I really don't need it. That's I thought. And, but when the people more coming, and move, you go out, then you see how difficult is to speak up...I need to learn English. Now I feel like, if I uh, like from beginning, from my childhood, if really, really think, and go to the school and learn English or any other language, it's better because now I feel if, any, I meet somebody, and they don't speak or they don't understand, I say, well, now it's you, you're young, you should go school, and you learn more English or more thing outside than yourself, or you doing whatever you doing. Because it's uh, work, you can work at six or seven dollars hours. But if you more English learn, or if you go to school and more learn, you have a better job, and better offer. But I still telling my children you go school. (Anju, Interview #2, 22.05.98)

It seems surprising from my perspective that Anju didn't feel a need or desire to learn to speak English during her first two years in Montreal. The following interview excerpt illustrates the extent to which she was dependent on her husband before she could speak any English:

M: Do you remember any situations or problems that you had?

A: Yeah, but I don't speak that time.

M: Yeah? So you just, you just didn't speak at all, with anyone?

A: No, no.

M: And even if you had to go to the store, or the bank/

A: I never go to alone. Never. Not even laundry room, no, never.

M: Wow, your husband did everything?

A: No, I go with him. I do it, but I couldn't, I take him with me.

Grocery, I go with him. Laundry, I go with him. Everything with him. (Marilyn and Anju, Interview #2, 22.05.98)

After about 10 years in Canada, while living in Toronto, she did attend some English language training at a Community Center while she was laid off work. She explained that the class was very hard because of writing and spelling. However, she made friends with an Indian woman who had grown up in Fiji and

attended English schools, and this woman helped her to read by looking at sales flyers. She looked at the pictures and read the words. Although her children kept correcting her pronunciation, she continued trying to read sales flyers. For speaking English, aside from the basic communication skills she gained at work, she learned a lot from watching television.

Socio-cultural Identity

Anju's perceptions of her cultural identity and the process of change it has undergone are intricately meshed with her relationship with her children. As previously mentioned, it was only when her children became teenagers that they were able to encourage her to be strong enough to stand up to her husband and become more independent. She explained how she had to change her ways of thinking as a typical Indian woman:

Well, uh, maybe because uh, my husband want to stay like a Indian woman, to, under him command. But uh, my children, they don't like that way. They learn more from India, but still, they don't want to, living like a Indian woman was living. That they don't like it. They say that you Indian woman is never gonna change. But you have to change little bit for yourself. So what that is I did.
(Anju, Interview #3, 22.05.98)

Anju feels like a different person than she was back in India in the sense that she has freedom herself, and is "standing in my two feet". Her descriptions of her childhood remind me of the socialization processes experienced by Kama and Fatima in Sri Lanka and Pakistan. Anju explained the lack of freedom she experienced back in India, not only as a young girl in her parents' home, but also after her marriage while living with her in-laws.

M: OK, so for two years you were married in India, and you didn't have that kind of freedom.

A: No, if I want to the my Mom house I have to ask first him, and then he say OK, you ask the mother-in-law, then mother-in-law say, "yeah, you can go but you come back in two hour". Then I have to run to the my mother house, come back in two hour. That's the, the rules there.

M: Oh. And if you wanted to go out and get a job there, could you?

A: No. No way, no job. Nothing, that's 1970. Not that time. Now, maybe is work in India, but in '70, no, no freedom. Still here so many Indian women, it's working but it's not like uh, him own choice. In here too, still, in many Indian women has problem. Many, many. But they don't want to spoke, or they don't want to tell anybody. But uh, Indian, all Indian family has problem. (Anju and Marilyn, Interview #3, 22.05.98)

Although she feels more like a "Canadian" in the sense that she is free and independent, she describes how she remains more like an "Indian" person in the way in which she relates with her children.

But, uh, with my children in the house, I stay like Indian ways. We don't have problem with that. Because I talk about more India with my children, and I take them there in India to get married, and they bring home which I like boy for them, they marry...But they, it's like uh, my choice, not like uh, they choice. (Anju, Interview #3, 22.05.98)

I am both fascinated and a little perplexed at her description of her children's negotiation of cultural identity. They are all having arranged marriages with people from India, two of which have already been finalized. Their relationship with their mother could be described as much more typical of Indian families than of North American families, in the sense that these adult children call home every hour or two to check in with their mother during times when they

are out of the house. However, they also have a strong dislike for Indian people in general, as described by Anju in the following interview excerpt:

My children doesn't like Indian people. Everything is OK, but they don't like the, more Indian people. Because, yeah, because they what the Indian people has the problem it's like uh, they eat own thing in own house, but they bring other people's problem in the house. Or if somebody come to your house, maybe be friend, and uh, if Indian people come, if, if you come to my house, and we have a just friendship, and you come to stay, or just few hours, and then other person, Indian person, come to the uh, my house, and they gonna ask me in my language, who she is, where she is, why she come here, what's the problem. And those things is my children doesn't like that way. They don't like that way. That's why they hate Indian. They don't like it. None bit. No. If I want to go somewhere, they say you go. If somebody die and I say I have to go there, and I go, but they say, we stay home, you just go and come back. Or if I want to go to visit somebody, sick people, then they same thing. You go visit them, and come back, we are not coming there. And they never go to Indian people house. Never. (Anju, Interview #3, 22.05.98)

Although it sounds completely contradictory from an outsider's perspective, these adult children seem to have an intolerance for traditional Indian customs and most Indian people, and yet have a notion of themselves as being part of that culture. They are all willing to follow the tradition of arranged marriages with another person from India.

Three years ago, when they were all in their early twenties, and Amba wanted to take them to visit India, they initially refused. They had never been to India and had no desire to go. She stated that they hated India from the first moment, saying everything was dirty, smelly, and too hot. At the relatives' house in the village, they complained about the place they were expected to sleep. However, when Anju took them to a beautiful town with lots of temples and sites,

they loved it. They even agreed to prolong their visit in India. The following year her daughter told her she was interested in a boy she had met in India, her aunt's neighbor, so Anju wrote to India and arranged the marriage. Her children's curious simultaneous rejection and acceptance of their cultural traditions is similar to the process described by all of my research participants of rejecting and accepting certain elements of Canadian culture.

As I already mentioned, Anju chose to keep traditional Indian customs when it comes to raising children. She does not like the way Canadian mothers put their babies in separate rooms, which is very different from the Indian practice of sleeping with your children until they are at least three or four years old. Anju found it difficult to raise her children the way she wanted to, because they were so influenced by other children at school. However, she managed to instill in her children a set of values which is not typically "western", although they may also not be typically "Indian".

The process of identity construction which Anju has experienced has been interwoven with that of her children, both in the ways she has chosen to raise them and in the ways in which they have supported her to become more independent. Her evolving perceptions of her role, position, and capacity have been influenced by the encouragement and help she receives from her children. Although Anju's acculturation experiences differed from most South Asian women I know, in the sense that she worked outside of the home from the

beginning, she still experienced the difficulties of changing from a typically dependent mind set toward one of more independence. Her process of language learning was affected by her lack of basic literacy and her mutating perceptions of her desires and needs to “invest” in learning English.

Summary

After explaining some background information on each case study participant and their country of origin, I described their immigration and acculturation experiences from their perspectives. I provided the participants’ explanations of their language learning experiences, and revealed information from our discussions on their socio-cultural identities. Each of the four case studies add colour and texture to the scene I paint of South Asian women in Montreal.

Chapter 5: Data Analysis and Conclusion

Some people talked about, some people asked for the potta [red dot on the forehead]. So, sometimes I didn't put the potta, because they asked me "What is this? What is the meaning?" So I can not tell about this, so I am afraid, from people look at the face, I am afraid that uh,..(Kama, Interview #1, 22.02.98)

But I feel why don't I know better? Why it's not good? I know why they didn't, didn't uhh, understand me. Why they say it's not good... some people they laugh at me, and it's hard me. I feel bad, and sorry, I can't talk the same way. And I say OK, I will be like you! And uh, try to be like them. (Rafia, Interview #3, 18.04.98)

In this chapter I present an analysis of my qualitative data by revisiting the major themes that surfaced in the interviews and interpreting them in terms of the three relevant concepts of lived experiences, socio-cultural identity, and weight of society as discussed in my theoretical framework. I relate the important themes directly to issues in language learning, and examine the effects of these issues on the process of language learning for each case study participant. In my attempt to look at the major themes from the perspectives of my research participants, the concept of lived experiences emerged as crucial in the analysis of these themes. I began to see the constructed, conflicting, and changing socio-cultural identities of these four women as one of the most important issues affecting their process of language learning. Finally, the effects of the weight of society, particularly in terms of restrictive socio-cultural norms, which are perhaps the most significant factors influencing their language learning, are analyzed in relation to data from these four case studies.

Much of the second language acquisition literature as well as that concerning South Asian women has been written from general perspectives, and does not consider the issues from the perspectives of individual language learners, or South Asian women. By using a case study approach I aimed to delve into the actual experiences of these four South Asian females, recording their interpretations of their language learning and acculturation experiences. Rather than universalizing their experiences, or attempting to make generalizations about all South Asians, I simply listened to their perceptions and lived experiences.

Lived Experiences

Isolation

Isolation and loneliness surfaced as one of the most significant experiences in the first few years after immigration for Kama, Fatima, and Anju. It is difficult to imagine the pain of leaving their close-knit extended family units to come to a lonely apartment building in a cold climate. The following excerpts demonstrate the intensity of loneliness and isolation these women experienced.

When I asked Anju what was the hardest part of immigration, she said:

Because I don't have anybody here, just my husband. And he go work at night time, and he's sleeping daytime. And I don't have nobody to talk, or I can not go out, or, I can not do anything. Just, like a jail thing, to stay inside, all the time 24 hours. You just sleep, wake up...Yeah, but all the time 24 hours you stay in the house day and night, then you get crazy, your mind. Nobody here, and then, I remember always my Mom, and my brother and sister, and was crying, crying, crying, because I can not do go, or I can not do anything. I can not talk, nobody to talk, and if I want to talk, who to talk? Or if my husband angry with me or slap me, where I go to cry? But myself. That time was very hard. I still

sometimes remember and I sometime I feel very sad... (Anju, Interview #3, 22.05.98)

Fatima and her husband also agreed that loneliness was the most difficult problem she experienced during the first years in Canada. She recalls: "Nine months too much crying! Night crying, day crying!" (Fatima, Interview # 3, 22.05.98). For both Fatima and Kama, the intense loneliness began to subside only when they had babies, and were completely occupied with the duties of motherhood that were now added to their previous responsibility of housekeeping. Although Anju already had an infant daughter when she emigrated, she still experienced tremendous isolation and had no-one to talk to. Getting a job outside of her home provided at least a minimal stimulus of social interaction with adults. Despite the overwhelming loneliness these women experienced, they did not take advantage of an organization like SAWCC until several years later, when they felt that they had spare time. For Fatima and Kama, raising three small children was their priority. In Anju's case, working outside the home was added to her responsibilities of child-rearing. Only when their children were all in school, or in Anju's case when she was laid off work, did these women enjoy the "luxury" of attending to their own personal needs for education and adult company. These examples reinforce the frequent "subordination of the individual to the interests of the family" (Buchignani, 1987, p.118), which Buchignani found to be common in South Asian families.

Gender Roles

Although the feelings of loneliness and isolation were what my research participants described and considered to be the most significant of their experiences, my interpretation of these phenomena goes a step beyond their perceptions of their experiences to examine some of the causes of their isolation.

The gender roles assumed by these women within the context of a society that does not espouse similar gender roles seems to me a primary cause of their isolation. If we examine these same female roles in the context of traditional South Asian societies, we clearly see a network of support in the extended family and neighborhood which could possibly eliminate the problem of loneliness. However, this problem manifests itself when a traditional value system is torn out of its stable context and transplanted into a foreign environment. Although people cling to their familiar values and worldviews, they can not help but be eventually affected by the society surrounding them. Also, in a new environment where the traditional social structures no longer exist, change is inevitable. It is in this acculturation process, where traditional gender roles and relationships which seemed so stable in the country of origin begin to change, that we can view these roles as socially constructed and changing over time.

Kama and Fatima did not perceive the gender roles they had assumed since childhood as inequitable. They rather took them in stride in the context of a

comprehensive world-view typical of their traditional cultures. For example

Kama explains:

But, there in the culture, I think. The, you know the ladies, the teenaged, youngest ladies, is problem, yeah? If I go outside, sometimes like men or something dangerous. So the culture, the old men decided that, women stay home, is good for the ladies, the teenagers. Yeah, I think. (Kama, Interview #2, 22.02.98)

None of my four case study participants, or the four other participants who did not continue, had any involvement in the decision to emigrate from their countries.

They all explained that this decision, as well as decisions concerning if and what they would study, and when and who they would marry, were all made by fathers in their respective cultures. As far as I could interpret, all of these women accepted these circumstances unquestionably, as though they were cultural norms which constituted an immutable reality. From a western perspective, this may be described as a sort of fatalism, an acceptance of one's life as being naturally controlled by others.

However, Anju and Rafia have had different experiences since their immigration which have caused them to recognize some of the gender inequity inherent in the world views of their cultures. For Anju, the power inequity she faced for years in her marriage was a constant struggle. It was only with the support of her teen-aged children that she was able to overcome what she described as an oppressive relationship, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

A: But you have to change little bit for yourself. So what that is I did.

M: Mmmhmm, but not until your children got old enough.

A: Old enough, yes, no, before that no. My husband was drinking, and, the same like other women, like a beating, and everything... And after my children was telling me what to do, and how to stand up. (Anju & Marilyn, Interview #3, 22.05.98)

Anju spoke of learning to “stand in my two feet”, the difficult process of becoming independent of her husband. Although she depended on him entirely during her first years in Canada, being forced to work outside of the home gave her the opportunity to become more self-sufficient. She explains that she did not want to leave her children with a baby-sitter and go out to work, but she had no choice economically. Compared to other South Asian women I know, I would assume that much of Anju’s strength and independence are due to her particular circumstances of working outside of the home for almost her whole time in Canada. However, she explained that the ways in which she changed and became stronger and more independent were due completely to the encouragement and support of her children. She feels that without them these changes would not have been possible.

Rafia comes from a younger generation than the other three case study participants and, as I explained earlier, her background was quite non-traditional. To a certain extent, she too accepts some of the gender inequity persistent in her culture as an inevitable fact of life. She was not involved in the decision to emigrate because “in my country, the whole village gets together to make decisions, that’s the way it is” (Rafia, Interview #1, 04.04.98). Yet, when she

explains the circumstances of gender inequity in her culture, she also points out in the next two excerpts that things are changing and becoming more “modern”:

In my country if you get married, uhh, I don't know it's now, but before if you get married, you have to, you like, uh, you yourself, you give it, you give all of your freedom to the man. If he like to go out now you can go. If he do like anything, you can do. But it's not your choice after married. And uh, the men uh, the woman's husband also have father and mother. It's up to their choice. It's uh, it's not uh, the woman's choice. But in here, uh, it's now change... (Rafia, Interview #2, 04.04.98)

They don't respect. But now it's uhh going more, because we have uhh, two prime minister in our country - women - and it's going more for women, and it's going more freedom for women. (Rafia, Interview #2, 04.04.98)

Although Rafia accepted to a certain extent the reality of gender inequity inherent in her culture, she did not assume that this inequity was constant or immutable. She displayed an optimism in the changes occurring in Bangladesh. As the youngest, most recently arrived among my research participants, with the highest level of education, her perceptions of the injustice prevalent in male-female relationships were relatively acute and strongly stated. For example, she states: “...men don't accept women. They use uhh, whatever they want...they don't want to listen to them...they say ‘we are the princes, what we need, uhh, what we told, this is right’” (Rafia, Interview #2, 04.04.98). Perceived and stated to varying degrees, all of the South Asian women I met experienced vulnerability and gender inequity. Although gender inequity and assumed roles were not as overtly described as the phenomenon of loneliness and isolation by my research participants, I did perceive through their descriptions of their experiences that all of these factors contributed significantly to their language learning process.

Socio-cultural Identity

A Social Construction

In my interview data, the issue of socio-cultural identity surfaced as another important factor affecting the process of language learning for these four women. Several of the details of their everyday circumstances which impeded their progress in English can be traced back to my umbrella category of socio-cultural identity. Among these circumstances are gender roles, which I have discussed earlier in relation to their lived experiences, and which I further analyze in the section on the weight of society. Several factors are meshed together in a complex, tightly woven web of beliefs, attitudes, power struggles, economic constraints, and daily circumstances which combine to create the lived experiences of these four women. More specifically, their language learning experiences are closely linked to their process of acculturation, which is inseparable from their socio-cultural identities.

Ferdman emphasizes the link between literacy and cultural identity.

Literacy, I believe,...touches us at our core in that part of ourselves that connects with the social world around us. It provides an important medium through which we interact with the human environment. For this reason, a consideration of the relationship of literacy and culture must be a fundamental component of any analysis of literacy and the individual. (Ferdman, 1990, p. 181)

Especially pertinent to the language learning experiences of my research participants are the effects of culture when this is perceived as an underlying world view. Ferdman argues that:

culture includes both specific behavioral characteristics typifying a group and the underlying views of social reality that guide those behaviors. This latter part is what Triandis (1972) termed “subjective culture...a group’s characteristic way of perceiving its social environment” (p. viii). These definitions of culture suggest that a person’s view of social reality is mediated by collective representations of that reality. (Ferdman, 1990, p. 186)

From this viewpoint, socio-cultural identity is historically and socially constructed. The above-mentioned gender roles, which dictate the predominant importance of child-rearing, are not coincidentally held in common by most South Asian women. This perspective they share on raising children is a universal value among all South Asian women I have met. It results in most of these women prioritizing their role as principal care-giver often to the point of excluding their opportunities for personal fulfillment, further education, and a career. This phenomenon can not merely be a coincidence of individual, personal opinions or choices. Underlying this shared world view is a cultural psyche informed and influenced by an ancient, powerful, intricate, rich depth of historical tradition. Yet, just as this world-view has been historically constructed, so it continues to be socially constructed, to mutate, evolve, and become a hybrid world-view in the minds and spirits of a people who are alive and being constantly affected by their changing worlds.

Changes

The twentieth century, perhaps more than any other, has been a period of globalization and migration, aided by technological growth which is making it increasingly impossible for societies not to be affected by one another. This is why these women may speak not only of the changes occurring in their personal experiences of acculturation, but also within the societies of their countries of origin. For example, in discussing gender inequity, Rafia frequently mentioned the political and cultural changes affecting the status of women in Bangladesh, such as their two female prime ministers. Kama, when explaining the restrictions of her girlhood such as not being allowed to ride a bicycle, or being forced to wear white saris to college, also mentioned that these restrictions have relaxed in Sri Lanka for the next generation. Fatima and Haroon repeatedly emphasized the changing patterns in Pakistani society, and explained the effects of the television and its western influence on traditional Muslim attitudes and ways of life.

But now things are start to change. I find out and I listen and, you know why? Cause of the TV. Yeah, now the people, you know, and the life get very busy over there, same like here. Not exactly here, but people are busy you know. They don't have the time to watch the people, how many times he went out, yeah, and what kind of clothes yesterday he was wearing and today again...Stop to notice now, things are change over there. But when we grow up that was, that time was... (Haroon, Interview #3, 22.05.98)

Anju, who has been in Canada for 24 years, the longest of any of these women, was the only one who did not mention the changes occurring back in India, which indicated indirectly that she was not aware of much change happening in Indian society. For example, in the following excerpt she explains her perceptions of problems in India:

Everybody has problem, yeah. Because there's a very poor thing, very poor. Because one person working, in a one family. But it's not just one family, they have a brother or sister, parents, and their own children. Maybe two or three children own, right? And one guy working, and he has money for the end of month. Not every week...So it is very poor thing there. Very, very poor, OK...Money is the biggest problem in every family in India...India, why they don't divorce, because the women think, women think one way. That's the, what the husband do, it's uh, like a God do. That's they think. This why they have a problem. (Anju, Interview #3, 22.05.98)

Anju came from a rural area, and her return visits to India have been primarily spent in rural areas, where perhaps the changes in gender roles and the status of women have not been as prevalent as in urban areas.

Changes in socio-cultural identity for both men and women are inevitable in any process of acculturation. However in the South Asian community, it is usually the men who experience more changes more quickly than their female counterparts. Since men often immigrate first, and work in Canada for a few years before sponsoring their wife to come, or importing a woman for an arranged marriage, the men are forced to integrate into the work force, learn the language to a certain extent, and generally be much more influenced by Canadian society than the women. Traditional gender roles dictate the role of child-minder and housekeeper for women, making the process of language learning much less accessible and natural for these women. Therefore, it is logical that the process of acculturation for South Asian females is much slower and sometimes minimal compared to their male counterparts.

Fatima's husband explained the way he changed his mentality and attitudes toward people:

When you were little, and you know this people, and you see how they think to, you know, some time you know, they don't bother the people...they don't cheat or somewhere, something like that, you know. That's the way you change. You can not do the things that, maybe if you are there you do. So that means you change. Lot. Specially me, I change a lot... (Haroon, Interview #3, 22.05.98)

For Fatima, changes have been minimal due to her limited contact with Canadian people. She explained, through her husband's translation, that she has only interacted with other people from Pakistan during her thirteen years in Montreal, so she has not been affected or "felt pressure" to change. Up until now, she has been secure in her role as mother, wife, and homemaker. However, now that her children are all in school she feels a bit bored and restless, and has begun studying English in the hopes of getting a job outside the home. If this occurs, I believe she may enter a more intense period of acculturation and changes in her socio-cultural identity. Although this identity has been quite stable thus far, it is clearly not stagnant or immune from being socially constructed and reconstructed.

Kama gave clear examples of how the perceived gender roles of men and women in Sri Lankan society change and develop through the process of immigration to Canada as illustrated in the following monologue:

Different. Because, uh, you know, every man is very good in Sri Lanka. But, uh, they, you know the, here is neighborhood, not pressure for my family. In my country, you know, lots of pressure

other people. Sometimes my father likes uh, my father help his mother cooking, but the neighbors saw, other people not accept for the, this action. Like my husband. Now my husband, uh, now, here helps me for the cooking, or something, uh, clothes washing, uh, while I studying, but here is easy. Nobody watched my family. yeah. Lots of Sri Lankan live there, but they know my husband help me, like that. I know some husband help the, wife...It's OK. Nobody cares. In my country not. Yeah, everybody watch and talk about, you know, that man...Lots of pressure other people. (Kama, Interview #3, 15.03.98)

Kama explained that changes in gender roles which are socially constructed are due to the pressures of society, and that this environment changes with immigration. She also described changes in the traditional vegetarian diet, and surprising behavior of older women who deviate from traditional Sri Lankan norms.

So, some games, you know, my country not allowed, but here, the women, I, I can't believe it, you know the 50 years, 55 years women, running race! So, (laughter), me and my uhh, everybody surprise! (laughter) Everybody, that time everybody talks, oh, you are the free country, you know. (Kama, Interview #3, 15.03.98)

These deviations from traditional gender roles and behavior patterns happen more quickly and easily in the context of the new Canadian culture, free from the restrictions of the values of elders and traditional ways of thinking and behaving espoused in the home country. Although my research participants did point out the changes that were happening in the societies of their original countries, the interview data attests to a significantly increased magnitude of changes occurring within the world-view of their ethnic communities here in Canada. In both situations these attitudes and socio-cultural identities are historically and socially

constructed and reconstructed. However, the change process can occur at a faster rate in the context of a new environment.

Conflicts and contradictions

The socio-cultural identities of my participants also emerged as conflictual and contradictory. Just as their perceptions of their roles and personalities changed over time, contradictions were also evident among their values and desires at the present time. The conflicts and contradictions within these women's attitudes and behaviors may be connected to Peirce's concept of investment in language learning. The mutable, constantly reconstructed aspects of their identities seemed to correspond with their shifting desires, efforts, and access to language learning. By understanding these identity changes as an evolving construction, one can understand the apparent contradictions in their language learning process as a natural part of their complex acculturation experiences.

To take the example of some shared identity constructs of their ethnic communities, several contradictions surfaced in the interview data which were initially confusing from my perspective. There seemed to be a concurrent love and loathing of one's own social network within the ethnic community. While they praised the security and comfort of a tight-knit community, these women complained of the restrictions on personal liberty imposed by this same community. Probably the most striking example of this contradictory attitude was

Anju's explanation of her children's attitudes toward the Indo-Canadian community. Recall in chapter four when describing her adult children's opinions about their own ethnic group, she went so far as to say "they hate Indians" and they refuse to associate with Indo-Canadians. They especially dislike the prevalence of gossip within this community. However, they choose to retain the cultural norms of their society to the extent of having arranged marriages with citizens of India. Although their own concept of cultural identity seems confusing to an outsider, perhaps they have clear priorities and can selectively accept or discard various aspects of their ethno-cultural group. Also, their attitudes changed considerably during their first three month stay in India, ranging from absolute intolerance to the other extreme of accepting a proposed mate for an arranged marriage. Obviously, their personal cultural identities are dynamic and continually reconstructed and confirm that cultural identity is not a static concept.

Fatima despises the competition prevalent in Pakistani society, and repeatedly stated this as the biggest difference between life in Pakistan and Canada. As her husband translated: "The change, too much change is because there is no competition here..." (Haroon, Interview #3, 22.05.98). She explicitly complained of the competitive attitudes among parents regarding the education of their children in Pakistan. If possible, they hire private tutors for their children and send them to more expensive private schools than the neighbors. Here in Canada, she feels that she is free from these pressures. However, as mentioned in

chapter four, she sent her son to a private school and hired a private tutor for him. These circumstances seemed to me to contradict her anti-competitive attitude, but could also be viewed as evidence of the conflicting value decisions to be made in the process of acculturation, and the need to compromise and negotiate.

Kama gave another example of shifting and conflicting value judgments involved in child-rearing in the interview discussing her aspirations for her daughters' futures. Although she wants them to be as strong, independent and capable of making their own decisions as she views Canadian women to be, she also expects them to agree to arranged marriages. Kama wants her children to be able to "fit in" with other Canadians in terms of the food they eat. "So, if, uh, they don't eat uh, most food, they feel, as, you know the separate, uh, the alone feeling...they can not join the happy, little bit, feeling is very different" (Kama, Interview #3, 15.03.98). Although she wants them to be the same as other Canadians, and have "the regular life", she only wants them to "pick up the Canadian culture...suitable for the Sri Lankan culture" (Kama, Interview #3, 15.03.98). In other words, the unacceptable aspects of Canadian culture, such as swimming suits or dating, are not to be incorporated along with the rest. Kama does not seem to be unaware of the difficulties that such selective acculturation expectations might induce. Her dilemma is reflected in this excerpt:

I know, but, uh, I don't know the answer. That time, I think, big trouble. Yeah, it's fighting for the children. So, the children's very poor, they are fighting for me, and they are fighting for the Canadian people. They have lots of, yeah, I don't know, but, lots of questions for me, but I don't have the answer. (Kama, Interview #3, 15.03.98)

Rafia, the only one of my case studies who does not have any children, seemed to exhibit fewer contradictions in her explanations of her self-concept, attitudes, and goals. However, she repeatedly spoke of the “freedom to move” that she experiences as a Canadian as the biggest difference between her life in Bangladesh and here. Although she senses this freedom, she does not exercise it to the extent that other young Canadian women do. For example, she shares a bedroom with her niece and nephew. Also, she was not free to meet me on Sundays which is the only day her brother-in-law has to spend with the family. Rather than accepting invitations to my home or other public places, she always chose to meet me in her apartment. While Rafia considers herself free of the “hard rules” imposed by many Bengali families, in the environment of freedom she finds herself in she continues to follow relatively conservative, traditional patterns of behavior, at least from my perspective. Although she perceives injustices in the gender inequity inherent in traditional Bengali culture, and speaks of things “going more for freedom of women” in Bangladesh, it remains to be seen how much contradiction will enter into her idealism when she “gives all of (her) freedom to the man” (Rafia, Interview #2, 04.04.98) in her inevitable arranged marriage. In any event, while she is young and single Rafia is free to pursue her studies in English and complete a high school diploma. Although Beadan and Bedana are in similar positions in terms of marital status and education, it does not appear that they will have the opportunity to master the English courses required to begin a high school diploma. Already their studies

have been interrupted by working in a factory when jobs are available. After Beadan's marriage, it is doubtful that she will have the opportunity to return to school.

There is a close relation between the contradictory aspects of these women's socio-cultural identities and their language learning experiences. Their conflicting, ever-changing perceptions of their positions and roles have a direct influence on their desires and goals pertaining to language education. For example, their desire to learn English may be overwhelmed by the priorities they feel with respect to child-minding and domestic duties during a particular phase of their lives. When Fatima was busy taking care of three small children, she did not see the appeal or necessity of taking English classes. Only when her children were settled in school did she feel the desire to seek paid employment and realize the necessity of studying English to that end. For Kama, although she always had the desire and motivation to study English, the duties and stress of motherhood took priority over her language classes. In retrospect, she realizes that it would have been possible to place a higher priority on her education, but during that time period she acted on her impulses conditioned by her perception of her position and role. Similarly, Anju now wishes that she had given more priority to her education and language learning as she explains below:

And then, I didn't think I want to go...I don't want to, or I really don't need it. That's I thought. And, but when the people more coming, and move, you go out, then you see how difficult is to speak up...I need to learn English. Now I feel like, if I uh, like from beginning, from my childhood, if really, really think, and go to the school and learn English or any other language, it's better because now I feel if, any, I meet somebody, and they

don't speak or they don't understand, I say, well, now it's you, you're young, you should go school, and you learn more English or more thing outside than yourself, or you doing whatever you doing...But if you more English learn, or if you go to school and more learn, you have a better job, and better offer. (Anju, Interview #2, 22.05.98)

Kama, Fatima, and Anju all explained that they weren't sure if they wanted or needed to learn English at first. They weren't convinced of this desire and need until several years after their immigration. I wonder if at that time in their lives they were capable of visualizing this goal. Was it within the realm of possibility of their psyche, their imagination? Maxine Greene (1998) speaks of imagining our lives to be otherwise, and stresses the importance of the role of the imagination in education. She summarizes the changing, conflicting nature of our individual identity perceptions in her powerful statement "I am who I am not yet". This ever reconstructed socio-cultural identity is strongly affected by the weight of society in the South Asian community.

Weight of Society

The final concept I examine is the weight of society. Perhaps all of the preceding issues could be explained under the umbrella effects of this weight. I use the term weight to describe the heavy, all-encompassing pressures of socio-cultural norms and traditions which exist in ancient, rich, long-established societies and that impinge on people's attitudes and behaviors. I have already explained the effects of this weight of society on individual and community

perceptions of gender roles among South Asians. In particular, the segregation involved in the childhood experiences and education of girls and boys in these cultures has direct effects on the differences between male and female opportunities and capacities to learn languages after emigration.

Background education and socialization

Gender segregation was most clearly described by Kama, who pin-pointed these gender differences in socialization and education as the most serious impediment to language learning for Sri Lankan women. As previously noted, she described her childhood and youth in Sri Lanka to be completely isolated from males and strangers. Kama sees this as the cause for the “shyness of Sri Lankan ladies”, which she believes is their biggest barrier to learning languages in the context of a new country.

...so that's my problem. Talking problem... Yeah. With other people. Always I stay home. If I go to the school in my Sri Lanka, then I stay home. Not allowed to go to the cinema, or XXX, only stay home. So, that's the problem for my Sri Lankan ladies. Yeah, not for (men), Sri Lankan lady like that. (Kama, Interview #2, 22.02.98)

Fatima and her husband also perceived her lack of background education to be the biggest hindrance to her language learning process in Canada. Haroon translated her answer to my question of why it has been difficult to learn English: “She doesn't have a basic education. Even Urdu, she doesn't have much education” (Haroon, Interview #2, 25.04.98). Yet, Fatima's English language skills were relatively high compared with her compatriots at SAWCC.

Teaching basic literacy and ESL at SAWCC for eighteen months has familiarized me with the significant effects of background education on language learning. My teaching experiences with South Asian women have fostered my understanding of literacy as a social event rather than as an individual skill to be acquired.

Relationships

Apart from the effects of gender specific upbringing and educational opportunities, interpersonal relationships emerged as another area of influence of the weight of society. As evidenced in the cases of Beadan, Bedana, and Mariam, male relatives play an integral role in the decision-making and daily course of events in the lives of some women. Although the involvement of their fathers and brothers in every aspect of their lives seemed oppressive from my perspective, these young women accepted these restrictions on their liberty as a natural fact of life. Beadan views her impending arranged marriage as the normal course of events within the context of her family and culture. If I would ask her if or why she wanted to get married, or what impact this might have on her education and future opportunities, I believe that she may perceive these as irrelevant, ridiculous questions. From her perspective, it is assumed that she will accept the marriage arrangement her parents make for her without questioning her personal goals or ideas. In fact, it almost seems as if these young women do not possess individual, personal hopes and plans. In a similar vein, all of the research

participants found it slightly bizarre when I asked them if or why they wanted to come to Canada, because they do not think in the same framework of individual independence as that to which I am accustomed. Rafia was somewhat of an exception, as she was the only South Asian woman that I met, young or old, who described her own ambitions and aspirations. It is important to note that she was also the only one who did not have close ties with any male relatives either here or in Bangladesh. Of course, her father still made major decisions on issues such as her emigration, but she described his role in the restrictions on her upbringing as minimal, reporting that the bulk of the weight of society she experienced “came from older female relatives and neighbors”.

For my other research participants who are married with children, their family relationships play a major role in determining the extent of their freedom to pursue language training. The husbands of Fatima and Kama were both supportive of their wives’ efforts to study English at this point. It is possible that these men would have had the same attitudes ten years ago if their wives had seriously persisted in attempting to study English. Although I am not sure whether these husbands would have taken on more household or baby-sitting responsibilities, I never heard any evidence of them directly blocking access to language training for their wives. Rather than an overt refusal from these men, the socio-cultural norms embedded in the worldviews of both men and women of South Asian origin combined to preclude the possibility of serious language study while these women were raising small children. The pressure and demands of the

traditional maternal role seem to be more strongly enforced by these women themselves than by their husbands.

However, the shifting, continually reconstructed nature of these norms is apparent in the changes in both the male and female perspectives on their gender roles and responsibilities within the family context. For example, Kama reported that she and her husband now share the evening child care duties alternately while each attends language classes, although she explained that such an arrangement would not have been possible in Sri Lanka due to the pressures of neighborhood gossip and the family's reputation in society. Fatima's husband also now looks after their youngest daughter, who does not begin school until this fall, in the afternoons while Fatima attends English classes at SAWCC. Her husband seems very gentle and positive, and I assume that he has not been a direct block to her access to language training. However, as previously mentioned, I perceived that he displayed a protective, sheltering kind of behavior toward Fatima. Although undoubtedly well-intentioned, I believe that this behavior also fostered a sort of dependence upon him rather than an empowerment for her. Again, the embedded values and attitudes in the mindsets of both men and women work together to reinforce traditional gender stereotypes.

In Anju's case, her marital relationship has obviously not been supportive of her education or any other steps toward her independence. She said that her husband wants her to "stay like a Indian woman, to, under him command", and

she was only able to gain independence through the support of her children who “always help me to learn something, or do something about it. Not just stand and sit and asking help, or sorry for yourself” (Anju, Interview #3, 22.05.98). Anju’s sense of personal identity has been strongly affected by the nature of her relationship with her husband. Although I had assumed hers to be an extreme or unusual case, she reported in the following interview excerpt that her situation is not unusual:

A: In here too, still, in many Indian women has problem. Many, many. But they don’t want to spoke, or they don’t want to tell anybody. But uh, Indian, all Indian family has problem. All Indian. Maybe 100 out of, 1 has no problem. But there’s lots of family has a problem, but they don’t want to come out and say I have a problem. Or I need help.

M: Yes. Because it’s kind of like a shame.

A: Yeah. They always think, uh, yeah, shame, and they think always uh, uh, what culture go...society gonna think. That’s in the head.

M: Mmmhmm, you mean problems like...

A: Yeah, problem with the husband, or children, they don’t want to come out and say, “oh, I have a problem, or I need help, or what I do?”. They never open and say something like that. If they do that then they/

M: Even with their own women friends, like from their same culture?

A: Yes.

M: Even then, they don’t want to talk about it.

A: No.

M: That’s very difficult.

A: Yeah. That’s the way, you know, Indian woman is like that. (Anju and Marilyn, Interview #3, 22.05.98)

The prevalence given to the issue of family violence in the literature on South Asian-Canadian women indicates that the problem is quite significant among this community. An employee from SAWCC explained that although the magnitude of family violence is probably not greater in the South Asian

community than in Canadian society at large, South Asian women are more reluctant to discuss the problems or to seek help. Also, I believe that the acculturation stresses experienced by any immigrant populations lead to a increased occurrence of marital problems compared to those in the countries of origin. Because of the inequities involved in immigrating as dependents sponsored under the Family Class category of Canadian immigration policy, "...immigrant women often become dependent on their husbands. Any dependent relationship carries the danger of abuse, and the immigrant husband-wife relationship is no different" (Canadian Task Force, 1988, cited in Wittebrood & Robertson, 1991, p. 177).

Social Networks

The final theme within the general themes of the weight of society which emerged in my case study data was the effects of dense social networks in the South Asian community. All of my research participants experienced both positive and negative effects of a tight-knit ethnic community. They often displayed conflicting attitudes toward their own ethnic community, such as the previously mentioned contradictory attitudes of tolerance and distaste of "Indians" expressed by Anju's children, or Fatima's concurrent distaste and promotion of a competitive attitude concerning her children's education. Kama wants her daughters to have the advantage of being strong and independent like Canadian women, yet is unable to accept the practice of dating or "love-marriages" which accompany the independent status of most Canadian women.

The biggest criticism of Rafia, and in fact all of these women, was the prevalence of gossip and restrictive, judgmental attitudes prevalent in their ethnic communities. Yet the security and comfort found within this same community has been the most important social network for these women. As Wittebrood and Robertson explain:

...a support network in the form of close relatives and friends, an ethnic community, and/or organized support which emphasizes the ethnic identity, is very important in the adaptation process. The ethnic identity provides the security, the belief in oneself to be open to new ideas, to take risks, and to incorporate positive features of the new environment. (Wittebrood & Robertson, 1991, p. 176)

Kama referred to the security and safety found within extended family relationships in a communal way of living. For her, the system of arranged marriages is part of a way of living that provides security and stability for women. Similarly, Beadan had exhibited a sense of security which surprised me when she stated that she would probably get married in one or two years, although she was not in a relationship at that time. This proved to be an accurate foreshadowing of the marriage which was arranged for her only six months later!

Although it has often taken several years in Canada before my literacy/ESL students ventured out to SAWCC to study English, the highlight of these classes for them is the company of fellow South Asian females. In fact, many of them have stated reluctance to attend classes alongside males, especially those of other cultural backgrounds. The socialization aspect of these classes seemed to be an integral part of their language learning. In the minds of these

students, perhaps communication with women from similar cultural backgrounds is a fathomable first step in moving outside of their homes and into society at large. Isolation and loneliness, which emerged as a significant experience among my case studies, was intensified by the fact that these women had been accustomed to extremely close-knit support groups of female relatives and friends. It is evident that most South Asian women crave similar social relationships in their new lives in Canada.

However, Rafia seems to be an exception to this generalization. She communicated a curious, open attitude to people of other ethnic origins, and repeatedly stated an eagerness to learn new ideas and grow as a person. Rafia displayed a desire to distance herself from Bengalis, and criticized her own ethnic community quite extensively. When she spoke of her sister and neighbor's insistence that she could not study French and English simultaneously because "they said I was too small--they didn't want me to grow" (Rafia, Interview #1, 04.04.98), she pinpointed the restrictive aspect of dense social networks in the lives of South Asian women. A supportive, like-minded community can deter women from being open to new ideas and experiences, accepting new challenges, and becoming independent individuals. Although the sense of belonging to an ethnic community may foster a self-confidence in one's sense of identity, and the courage and strength to accept challenges, at the same time the accompanying restrictions may inhibit one's ability to accept changes necessary for personal fulfillment within the context of a new society.

Reflections

To the extent that this is possible, I have analyzed the language learning experiences of my four case study participants from their perspectives. Their lived experiences, socio-cultural identities, and the weight of society emerged as the factors which most seriously affect their language learning processes. As emphasized in some of the research literature on immigrant women, such as the work of Ralston (1992), Szekely (1990), and Agnew (1990), it is important to understand the everyday lives of research participants, and to position research themes in relation to their everyday realities.

Socio-cultural identity construction is integral to the acculturation and language learning processes of immigrants. Drawing from the work of Peirce, I understand identity as a changing, contradictory, constructed phenomenon which continually influences immigrant women's investment in their language learning process. Finally, I used the metaphor of weight of society to explain the strong influence that socio-cultural norms in South Asian communities can have on every aspect of these women's lives.

Implications for Immigrant Language Training

I do not purport to generalize the experiences of these four case studies as

a representative sampling of all immigrant, or even all South Asian immigrant women in Canada. This qualitative study is only meant to provide more qualitative data to the scarce, yet expanding body of research on immigrant communities in Canada. To quote Alister Cumming who reports on his study of an ESL class for Punjabi women in Vancouver, “We do suspect they are like large numbers of immigrants who find formal programs of language and literacy instruction inaccessible or irrelevant because they do not account appropriately for their backgrounds, current situations, or particular intentions” (Cumming, 1991, p. 704).

An analysis of the recurrent themes in my interview data suggests some important concepts for the design and delivery of language training programs for immigrants. First, gender role constraints of women must be taken into account. As witnessed in the lives of my research participants, the socio-cultural norms of their ethnic community dictate the traditional female roles of child-rearing and house-keeping. Their socio-cultural identities are embedded within this historically and socially constructed shared world-view, and are often slow to change in the context of their new environment because of the strong influence of tightly knit social networks within their ethnic community. The practical implications of these gender role restrictions indicate the need for language training classes to be held in convenient locations, with daycare facilities, at times appropriate for women who have either small children or older children returning from school each afternoon.

The second consideration is the background education and socialization of the language learners. Judging from the experiences of the South Asian women who attended basic literacy/ESL classes at SAWCC, there are many immigrant women who have little or no formal education before coming to Canada. The statistics on literacy and education I have quoted for each of these four South Asian nations provides further evidence of the prevalence of a lack of literacy and basic education. People with this lack of formal education will obviously have difficulties entering into the institutional system of language training provided by the government. The situation is intensely magnified for women who have been socialized in a gender segregated milieu void of opportunities to talk to strangers.

Women like Kama, Fatima, and Anju were comfortable studying with fellow South Asian women as a result of the rigid socialization of their youth. The practical implications of this consideration of background education and socialization indicate the desirability of providing initial language training in small, local, non-institutional community centers catering to immigrants of similar cultural backgrounds. Although this is the ideal situation, it may only be feasible in big cities where there are large enough communities of particular ethnic groups. Also, gender segregated classes may be a necessary consideration for women who are accustomed to gender segregation for religious or cultural reasons.

The third, and possibly most difficult consideration, is the lack of awareness of existing programs among immigrant communities. I agree with Burnaby's analysis of the "confusing state" of language training services offered for immigrants in Canada. The situation in Quebec is complicated by the government's rigid language legislation encouraging immigrants to learn French instead of English. When listening to the stories of my case study participants describing their choice of programs and schools, I learned how random and unstructured the path to acquiring language training may be.

The theoretical implications of this situation are that more co-ordination among government and non-government organizations providing resettlement and language training services for immigrants is required. Barbara Burnaby (1992) also stressed this need. If more immigrants had access to information about the programs available, they would be in a better position to take advantage of the language training already offered. In the words of Fatima, translated by her husband, "the most important thing is that too many people don't know...we find out too many people don't know what the government plans are and what they can get it free" (Haroon, Interview #3, 22.05.98).

Implications for Further Research

I add my voice to those of Burnaby (1992), Cumming (1991) and Maguire (1995), who emphasize the need for more ethnographic research describing the actual situations and needs of immigrant women. In order to truly represent their

situations and needs, research must begin with the perspectives of the women being written about. Although an ethnographer may not be able to have a truly emic perspective, researchers could aim to position themselves more as an insider than an outsider.

In my relationships with my research participants, I developed a comfortable rapport within which they were quite open in discussing their experiences and feelings. However, even after several months of this type of contact, I realized how “other” I really was from their perspectives. The statements they made about “white people” or “Canadian women” helped me to see how they regarded me as belonging to those categories of people as opposed to being “one of us”. Despite my relatively easy initial access to the research participants, it was very difficult to sustain any in-depth levels of relationships with these South Asian women. Although they enjoyed sharing their cultural foods and customs with me, and were pleased to engage in discussions and interviews, I felt that they continued to regard me as their “white, educated teacher”. Also, the four initial participants who were not able to continue with our interviews are good examples of the difficulties of gaining access and establishing a more in-depth rapport with culturally diverse groups due to the lack of freedom and independence some women experience. I have learned that conducting research in the ethnographic tradition, especially with women from groups such as these South Asian cultures which espouse protection of females, is a delicate business.

A practical implication for qualitative research which arises out of this study is therefore that it is important to view the issues as much as possible from the perspectives of the research participants. I believe that a researcher must strive to capture the voices of their research participants in order to provide rich, descriptive data. Secondly, the role of the researcher is a complex, multi-dimensional one that is especially complicated when working with cultural communities such as South Asians. It takes much time, patience, and sometimes inside connections to gain access to and sustain relationships with research participants and to ensure that the information collected is “ecologically valid” (Maguire, 1998).

I have listened to the voices of four South Asian women, and tried to capture their words. For these women, linguistic competence is a minor detail overshadowed by the complex web of socio-cultural factors involved in learning a second language. The qualitative data from these case studies demonstrates the effects of their lived experiences on their shifting, constructed identities, and describes how their identities in turn influence their language learning process. In the words of Anju: “So it’s like, uh, I don’t want to, or I really don’t need it. That’s I thought. And, but when the people more coming, and move, you go out, then you see how difficult is to speak up.” (Anju, Interview #2, 22.05.98)

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Appendix A: The Interviews

The interviews are structured around three broadly based themes:

INTERVIEW #1 Establishing Background Information

Talk about your family. Who's here with you? Who's back in your country of origin or immigrated to other countries?

Tell me about your childhood in your country.

Tell me about your formal and informal education in your country.

Why did you immigrate to Canada? Were you involved in the decision? What were your hopes, dreams, goals about immigration?

What were your opinions/assumptions about Canadians? Quebeckers?

Did you come directly to Montreal, or did you spend time elsewhere?

What were some differences between your preconceptions and the reality you experienced when you came to Quebec? (language issue?)

INTERVIEW #2 Language Learning Details

Describe your feelings during the time when you couldn't communicate in French or English with Canadians.

What is your motivation for learning English? What are your language goals? (What level of English do you need? What do you want to be able to do in English?)

What about French? Have you learned as much French? Why?

Are there socio-cultural factors which restrict or enrich your progress in learning English? (religious, cultural, gender roles)

What are some of the feelings and experiences surrounding your communication experiences in English? (recall the time when you were just learning to speak English)

Describe the process of learning the official languages as a new immigrant. What classes were offered? Were they accessible to you in your particular circumstances? (scheduling, childcare, previous education, comfort level/intimidation) Do you know other women with similar or different experiences?

INTERVIEW #3 Identity Construction and Acculturation

What does it mean to be a Canadian?

Do you feel that you have become a Canadian?

In what ways do you identify with aspects of the culture of your country of origin? How do these things differ from Canadian culture? (What do you think Canadian culture is??!)

In what ways do you feel differently now than when you lived in your country?

In what ways are you Canadian? In what ways are you Sri Lankan? (Bengali, Indian...)

Do you believe it is necessary to change part of yourself (ways of thinking or acting) in order to fit into Canadian society?

What are your goals/dreams for your future? Your children's future? What is success?

What were your most difficult experiences as a new immigrant?

Ideally, what changes could the government make in order to facilitate immigrants' transition period?

How do you feel about your relationships/encounters with the Canadian public in general?

Idealistically, what changes would you like to see in the treatment of new immigrants?

Appendix B: A Sample of Field Notes

MARCH 1 FIRST INTERVIEW WITH BEDANA AND BEADAN

I went to their house at 4:00 as promised the day before, but Bedana and Beadan didn't get home until 6:00. Their younger sisters entertained me while I waited. They were at a shop, and were predicted to arrive any minute!! The older brother and youngest sister came home, and everyone watched a video of Indian songs and dances. The clothing and dancing was quite modern and scandalous compared to the traditional dress of South Asian women, and I wondered what their parents would have thought of this video if they had been there. The youngest sister was wearing Levis and a t-shirt, proudly displaying her newly purchased gold coloured bangles. When Bedana and Beadan arrived they were very apologetic, yet they said they hadn't forgotten I was coming. Hmm- I had told them I had to leave at 6:30, so I think they realized that they wouldn't see me for very long. I wonder why they didn't show up- maybe they had to capitalize upon their chance to go out, as their father was at a friend's house and their mother was at a neighbours' home, which was probably a rare occasion. Or maybe they just don't consider punctuality that important, have a less rigid concept of time than I do. Beadan was nonetheless extremely disappointed that I didn't have time to eat before I left!

I tried to interview Bedana, but she isn't that talkative!

Childhood

She went to a mixed school, but now the school is divided into girls in the morning and boys in the afternoon. She liked school. She used to play hide and seek as a child. She finished high school at age 19.

Immigration

She came to Canada because there are problems in Bangladesh. She was happy to come to Canada because "everything is nice" and "I like English". Why do they all love English so much? (and not French? Ranjeev explained it was because they felt forced to learn French against their will, and they rebelled against this kind of government control which was so foreign to them). Bedana wants to get a factory job sewing, for which she needs to speak English and French. The only things she doesn't like about Canada is the cold weather in the winter and that she misses her brother and sister back in Bangladesh. Everything here is the same as she had imagined, except winter is worse. Canada is good because women work. She needs to work because she needs money to buy clothes, visit Bangladesh, and travel. In Bangladesh, there are no jobs and women just stay home and cook, which she doesn't want to do. She will become a citizen after 3 years here, and her father is already a citizen as he has been here 12 years already.

Appendix C: A Sample of Interview Transcripts

A: Yes. So, I say, OK, I gonna try too. So I go there.

M: And at that time all your children were old enough, they were going to school?

A: Oh yes, they go to the high school that time.

M: High school already, right. And you were working?

A: No, I was not working that time.

M: Mmmhmm, so you went to these community classes, and how was that?

A: Well, it's still it's hard for me, because uh, when it's uh the come, I say they, or he come, I say she, and it's very hard. Because c pronounce sometimes c, if, uh, when you write in the c but answer sometime start with a k. And this, I have a problem with t-h-e, t-h-a, I always problem. And it's not even they, not even writing there's not dey, but I always say dey or dare, dare and he to she, she, she. And that my children was

M: So, that class was hard for you.

A: Hard.

M: Mixing all the time. Who were all the other people in the class? Other immigrant people?

A: Chinese, xxx, Black lady, and uh, another Indian people, but it's like Punjabi and Pakistan, and I go, and 2 hour I sit there. And then, I bring the newspaper, and my friend, she came from the Fiji. She came from India, but she grown up in the Fiji. And then she visit here, in Montreal here, and she get married here. She speaks good English, she grown up in the Fiji, she went to school there, so she has very good English. So she always giving me paper, big sale here or there, this paper, you buy this paper, you can see inside flyer and you read them. So, there's lots of thing in the sale. So, she was telling me bring the Wednesday paper, because in Toronto, Wednesday paper you can get all the flyer, sale flyer. Here is separately, but in Toronto there's no separate paper. Always you have to buy the newspaper, and in the Wednesday, then you can get all flyer. So she told me to get that paper. So I go and get that paper, I bring it, and I see the flyer. And then I start to see the picture first, and then I try to read. And, my children told me, when you see the picture, you read, but you still reading wrong. Because I see the picture, but it's the pronounce is my wrong. Because, b, b-a, b-e, I always use a. Sometimes e, I use a. That's my problem. They say "Mommy, you see the picture, but you read the wrong thing." But I tried that way more and more.

M: Right, so that's how you learned.

A: Yeah. To read that way a little bit, and hear too much from the TV.

M: Oh, yeah, you learnt a lot that way too.

A: Lot from the TV, really I learned more from the TV. yeah, my husband say it's the TV is no good for you because the TV is, always make, uh, the house broke. Because I always watch the General Hospital! My husband doesn't like that. He says no good. (laughter) But I say I like, because watching from the, all, not even my younger daughter born, and I watched that show. So still I am watching, and he always telling me "it's no good for you".

M: So you learnt a lot from TV. And after those community classes in Toronto did you take any other classes?

A: No, no.

M: And now you started to come here just now, hmm.

A: Yes. English is here.

M: How did you decide that?