

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDY OF THE ROLE OF  
TRAUMA AND EARLY HOST-FOREIGN LANGUAGE IMMERSIONS  
IN SIGNIFICANT LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TRANSLINGUAL  
IDENTITY FORMATIONS

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## ABSTRACT

Through the reading of various self-narratives that focus on adults looking back at their memories of host/foreign language learning during the periods of childhood and adolescence, this interdisciplinary dissertation studies language as a collective and individual transformational phenomenon. Drawing from my own experiences as a foreign language learner and second language educator, and from discussions of psychoanalytic views on migration and language learning, my thesis looks at language beginnings as influencing the initial and ongoing development of the speaking subject.

I research the manner in which translingual narratives, as literary discursive constructs, testify to writers' attempts at symbolizing their realities within the continuum of constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed identities. By examining writers' primary processes through descriptions of dreams, narrated breaks in language, slips of pen and excesses in discourse, my work studies the ego's attachment to language and focuses on the manner in which host-foreign language immersions, as socio-emotional occurrences may interact with and respond to individuals' known and seemingly forgotten experiences.

Aside from paying close attention to the affective and social authority that resides within all internalized languages, my work zeros in on the concept of early forced versus chosen socio-cultural and linguistic relocations. I look at how host/foreign immersions and significant language learning equate to emotional trauma, and into the manner in which such trauma often becomes synthesized as a benign occurrence, enabling

individuals to transform and redefine their lives within the natural dynamics of aggression that exist within subjects' third space.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The fact that I  
am writing to you  
in English  
already falsifies what I  
wanted to tell you.  
My subject:  
How to explain to you that I  
don't belong to English  
though I belong nowhere else.

-Gustavo Pérez Firmat, "Dedication"

My interest in child and adolescent host-foreign language immersions, host language acquisition, memory, and in the constructions of translingual<sup>1</sup> identities, stems from my own experiences as a recurrent migrant, a fragmentary language learner and a postsecondary foreign language educator. Throughout my life I have migrated twice during my childhood years and once as an adolescent<sup>2</sup>. Although my moves were limited to Ontario, Canada and Buenos Aires, Argentina, with all three migrations I was re-submitted to an "infantile stage of language learning" (Stengel 1939, 471-473): upon each resettlement, I found myself unable to communicate in the host language(s) spoken in my countries of migrations. Whether I was back in Canada, or in Argentina, each journey had me, at least initially, "at a loss for words and grammar" (Kristeva 2000, 165).

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<sup>1</sup> According to Paola Bohórquez, 'translingualism' is defined as a psycho-emotional and linguistic condition of living in transition between two or more symbolic codes. A translingual subject is an individual who experiences an imbalance between languages (2). For this research, translingual literature refers to narratives written by first, 1.5 and/or second generation migrants and host-foreign language students who live or have lived through the abovementioned inner state of transition.

<sup>2</sup> My family and I migrated from Argentina to Canada when I was two years old, from Canada back to Argentina when I was ten and finally from Argentina back to Canada when I was seventeen years old.

From an early age, the languages I have been exposed to are Spanish, Italian and English. My relationships with these symbolic codes differ significantly. Italian, for example, is my grandparents' tongue. It is the language that awakes within my being feelings of both, warmth and comfort. Italian is the symbolic code I have always understood, but was never forced to speak<sup>3</sup>. Spanish, on the other hand, is the linguistic code spoken in my country of birth. It is the one contained within my early childhood songs and my current grammatical obsessions. It is the mother tongue that belongs to my earliest experiences, to my life before –and shortly after- my first migration to Canada when I was two-years of age. Had my family and I remained in Canada, at present, Spanish would probably be recognized as a loved –and perhaps even idealized-heritage tongue. Instead, Spanish became the symbolic code reborn through a remembered emotional trauma. It is the language imprinted by an untimely return to Buenos Aires when I was a ten year-old English-dominant child. Since my family and I returned to Argentina during the prelude, event and aftershocks of the Falkland War, my Spanish became the language I re-learned through inner and social conflicts and inconsolable tears. It is one that, through the twists and turns of my early migrant life, became internalized and, every so often, felt as mine.

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<sup>3</sup> My paternal grandparents had a fluent understanding of Spanish. They were Italian migrants who had moved to Buenos Aires, Argentina at the end of World War II –when my father, the eldest of six children, was only eight years-old-. At all times, my siblings, cousins and I spoke to our grandparents in Spanish, where as my grandparents, regardless of their knowledge of Spanish, always answered and proudly addressed us in their Southern Italian dialect. My mother's parents, on the other hand, were second and third generation migrants whose families moved to Argentina -from the north of Italy and the South of France. Even though my mother's parents were aware of their European heritage and my grandmother understood 'some' Italian, my maternal grandparents were Spanish-dominant. They were well assimilated within the Argentine culture and enjoyed the middle-class lifestyle they had achieved in their country of birth.

While reflecting on my life between languages, I can now say that aside from my repeated migrations, the event over the Falkland Islands marked the telos of my comfort within my two most dominant languages. Following our migration back to Argentina- to a land torn by years of ongoing oppressive military governments-, English, the language I used to live and breathe as a child, developed into the symbolic code of the British enemy, the one linked to poorly understood politics, to neighbours' unwelcomed comments and to the playful violence of school-yard bullying. During those times, my English, the language that was embedded in my accent and in my speech, became the subject of an internal hate, the tongue that eventually became abandoned, replaced and blocked during my late childhood years in Buenos Aires, Argentina. English was the tongue that had remained perceptually forgotten until I was seventeen, until the moment of my unwelcomed migration and permanent return to Toronto, Canada.<sup>4</sup>

In my view, the most interesting aspect of my translingualism is that, in time, my troubled English, the language that I, as a child, swore to never speak again, turned into the language through which, as an adult, I chose to love: it is the symbolic code of my present life and preferred lifestyle, the one that belongs to my children's nursery songs and bedtime stories. It is the language spoken by my friends and spouse. Where as Spanish, the tongue I learned to master during my later childhood, is the one that became socially demoted years following my return to Canada. It is the language that nevertheless remains within me, the one that was never completely exiled from my life. Spanish is the foreign language that I presently teach. It is the language I often use with

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<sup>4</sup> After three years I relearned English in Canadian ESL classrooms. I eventually lost my Spanish accent when speaking English five years following my return to Canada.

my students, with my colleagues and my parents. It is the tongue I only sometimes speak with my siblings and with two of my closest bilingual friends.

My life and heritage turned me into a multilingual being, into a subject who is often torn between symbolic codes of meanings, attitudes and behaviours, between tongues that at times allow me to hide, to transform and to hope, while at other times make me feel conflicted, confused, perceptually alone and guilt stricken within realities I never chose, nor dreamed of desiring. As an adult, since I easily switch between my two most dominant tongues, it is not uncommon for individuals to give voice to the positive side of my translingualism. Many highlight my fortune for being able to construct a career as a foreign language pedagogue and for being able to easily pass amongst cultures and linguistic communities that embrace my two dominant tongues. Yet what many may not seem to notice is that regardless of my perceived assimilations and of the indisputable benefits that may stem from this bi- or multilingualism of mine, my geographic and affective moves, along with my linguistic shifts, have imposed in the short and long run, socio-emotional challenges that, until now, have been difficult for me to verbalize and thus, to understand.

I am aware that regardless of my perceived adaptations, I feel that I do not completely and comfortably fit within all social groups. Whether I interact in English or Spanish-speaking gatherings, I commonly perceive the hybridity and difference in my cultural and historical constructions, and in the formations and transformations of my translingual self. I do not always experience a sense of genuine comfort or 'at homeness' with a tongue. Despite my ability to sound native in both English and Spanish, when I am under stress I often fall speechless and feel emptied, as part of an



urn that was never filled, as a subject caught within the blinding silence and confounding space created by my life between incompatible tongues and cultures.

As a doctoral student I learned that our affective associations with particular symbolic codes do not only stem from our conscious experiences, but are also rooted in early, unconscious occurrences (Felman 1987, 104-105). My exposure to language-related memoirs, along with psychoanalytic, language socialization, semiotic, philosophical and pedagogical theories, introduced me to a different view of perceptions, behaviours and transformations that, until now, I understood as completely conscious, unique and solely mine. My history within language became the driving force behind this dissertation's main focus, which is a look into our affective tie to internalized languages, and the relevance of linguistically induced –benign and historical – traumas in relation to forced and chosen childhood and adolescent host/foreign language acquisition(s).

As a translingual subject, I have been repeatedly taken by a language's capability to carve an affective space in our minds and thus become a reservoir of remembered and seemingly forgotten emotions. As an adult, I am drawn to the manner in which the sound of a language can uproot incomprehensible and often inarticulate emotions. With the passing of time, I understand that just as the sound and lyrics of an old, almost forgotten song is able to emotionally bring us back in time, so can the sound of a dormant<sup>5</sup> language. Relevant to this assertion, Jacques Derrida (1996) explains that we live, dwell and exist within language and language exists within us. He emphasizes that a symbolic code is part of us and thus, becomes an essential

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<sup>5</sup> In this specific context, 'earlier language' and 'old language' refer to a symbolic code an individual no longer speaks and/or no longer understands.

component of our identification (1, 23). Derrida suggests that language is linked to our feelings and sense of belonging or not belonging within a culture (8, 28, 30, 40, 51). Throughout his text this writer overlays his experiences with theory and leads his readers to appreciate that symbolic codes are able to conceal and yet at times uncover positive and negative emotions that relate to subjects' conscious and unconscious histories of remembered and imagined occurrences: to truths perceived while interacting –or intending to interact- in a particular tongue.

With Derrida's orientation I assume that the libidinal attachment and the corresponding affect one experiences towards a symbolic code often becomes unperceived by a monolingual speaker. For bilingual or multilingual speakers, however, the tug of an earlier language may be felt after subjects have distanced themselves from the -formally lived- tongue and consciously and/or unconsciously allowed for a different language to enter the self and become part of their inner and outer tongue of instrumental function. Then, when a symbolic code is no longer taken for granted, when it ceases to be perceived as a central part of speakers' conscious life, the affective tie becomes unveiled by the distinctive sound of the old language's words, by the uniqueness of its intonations, or by the fluidity and ease of its speakers' interactions.

I find that my assumptions and interests in language coincide with discussions and even literature that describe migrations and overall linguistic occurrences. The link between language and affect, for example, becomes a focus for Heller-Roazen (2005) in the chapter "Hubda". This chapter testifies to this interrelation between language and emotions, a connection that, in agreement with the author, has the capability of outliving all conscious memories, including the conscious memory of a dormant language. In

“Hubda”, Heller-Roazen describes how Elias Canetti, a fluent German speaker, was moved while visiting Prague, by the sound of the Czech language. It is explained that for Canetti, Czech became the ‘echo’ of the Bulgarian language his caregivers -and not his mother- spoke when he was a young child. For this German speaker, even though Bulgarian became a language he believed to have consciously forgotten as a child, it proved to nevertheless be a Slavic tongue that had remained hidden in his unconscious memory in the form of emotions:

...something in those Prague days brought me back to things that had played themselves out in separate periods of my life. I took in Slavic sounds as part of a language that, in an inexplicable way, affected me deeply. (quoted by Heller-Roazen 2005,174-175)

Since our language becomes an active part of our third space and thus the common ground that “links the self to the social” (Granger 2004, 35), in this dissertation I assume that a symbolic code becomes unconsciously affected by circumstances and by the feelings we have towards those who relate or who have related to us by means of that very language. For Canetti, the sound of the Slavic language had awoken his affect and hence, the primitive emotions that engulfed the experiences he perceived while being cared for –and probably loved by- his caregivers. For Canetti, the incomprehensible emotions were brought to the surface through the sound of one of his primary tongues can be understood, at least in part, with theories posed by Melanie Klein (1964). Klein suggests that individuals’ conscious actions and feelings of love, guilt and even hate are governed by unconscious responses to occurrences, conceptions and processes that

relate to their unconscious, infantile history: a history rooted in sexual desires, object relations, conflicts and, imagined phantasies.

With Canetti's quote I take into account the unconscious law of relationality. Throughout my study I propose that infants' feelings and sexual desires toward their first object of affection become transferred to the language with which the infant's mother – or caregiver- interacts. Subjects' primary language or mother tongue becomes unconsciously linked to the desires and emotions that relate to early, primary instincts and processes. This concept explains how Canetti's testimony bears witness to the manner in which memory is linked to affect. The echo of the sounds of one of Canetti's childhood languages may have allowed for the re-emergence of the inarticulate emotions, desires and phantasies he experienced as a young child, feelings that became symbolized or unconsciously attached to a seemingly forgotten childhood language.

Throughout her work Melanie Klein suggests that our affective history often relates to occurrences that are not, at least in its entirety, based on conscious lived experiences. Klein's assumption is not foreign to psychoanalysis and correspondingly, André Green (2004) states that:

...for the psyche, the historical [a subject's conscious and unconscious history] could be defined as a combination of: what has happened, what has not happened, what could have happened, what has happened to someone else but not to me, what could not have happened, and finally –to summarize all these alternatives about what has happened- a statement that one would not have even dreamed of as a representation of what really happened. (2-3)

Similar to Klein, Green observes that affect often rests on the ego's constructions; on felt, witnessed, or imagined circumstantial analogies and unconscious processes that become perceived, within the psyche, as part of the subject's history of lived occurrences. Green's and Klein's claim raise significant dilemmas for memory since their notion of the history of the psyche is always tied to the subject's desire, disappointments and wishes. It is tied to perceived and imagined occurrences that become incorporated by the ego as an essential part of its inner reality. While remaining with Klein's theory, this dissertation assumes that infants' earliest developments are connected to his or her primary language(s). The subjects' lived and perceived history of object relations become linked to the tongue with which the infant conceptualized as hers or his perceived reality, as part of the matrix that held, highlighted and therefore exposed her or his known and unknown interactions with the influential worlds of others.

Heller-Roazen's link between memory and affect is not limited to "Hubda". In the chapter "Schitzophonetics", he describes the case of Louis-Wolfson: a mentally ill young man who openly chose to turn against English, his mother tongue, while still residing in New York City. From the very beginning of the chapter, it becomes clear that Wolfson's unusual response to his mother tongue related to his history of conscious and/or unconscious occurrences. These, moreover, correlated with emotions and processes that became annexed to his mother and, by extension, to the English speaking community that surrounded them:

It was after 'fleeing' one of the psychiatric hospitals to whose control his mother had delivered him, Wolfson recounted that "he decided more or less definitely to perfect his competences" in the two foreign languages he had studied...the

mentally ill young man “systematically sought not to listen to his mother tongue.  
(180)

As narrated by Heller-Roazen, when Wolfson’s mother addressed him in English, Wolfson sensed “as if [she] decided to strike her son simultaneously with the tongue of her mouth and of the English people every time she spoke to him.” (182) As a conscious response to his feelings towards his mother and towards the language that symbolized her, Wolfson would either translate or decompose the words he would articulate when being addressed in English. For the latter, he would change the terms’ phonemes, so that the words of which he spoke had a foreign, non-English resonance (181-185).

It is reasonable to claim that since Wolfson lived in New York, he could not completely shut out the “bloody language” that was spoken all around him. Thus, even though he refused to address individuals in English, his ability to understand his ‘detested’ mother tongue has likely never been affected. Nevertheless, it is of worth to question what would be left of his English language if this young man would have been capable to physically leave the compounds that embraced the English tongue: if he could depart from New York and migrate to a place where its inhabitants would speak a symbolic code other than his primary language. How proficient in English would he still be many years later, after severing all contact with the mother tongue he openly rejected?

The description provided in “Schizophonetics” opens questions in relation to the ways in which affective histories shape subjects’ emotions, as well as language related attitudes and behaviours. When focusing on perceived experiences undergone by host-

foreign language learners, I question the extent to which their responses to language immersions and subjects' ability or inability to inhabit a host symbolic code relate to consciously remembered and concealed affective histories. Ever since the birth of linguistics, much has been studied about second language acquisition, the instrumental reasons for primary language attrition and the constructions, deconstructions and reconstructions of translingual identities. Yet for this dissertation, while never disregarding that we do not belong to a homogeneous group, that gender, religion, education, and ethnic background, just to name a few signifiers, influence our ongoing understandings within the fluidity of the hegemonic relations that surround, classify and therefore affect our self-other perceptions within language, this study is a look into our affective nature, into our inner conflicts, desires and dilemmas that relate to while shaping our subjectivity.

Furthermore, knowing that "our actions are governed by an interplay of conscious and unconscious responses to experiences" (Britzman 2006, 44), my research inquires if the learning, unlearning and use of a language and if subjects' comfort, attachment to and identification with acquired languages are not simply consequent to social occurrences and influences, but are also bi-products of unconscious responses that may be unknown to the subject. My work is an exploration of the ways in which lived, researched and imagined language-related experiences become juxtaposed with writers' identifications, introjections, symbolizations and search for loss objects.

Through theory and a careful analysis of translingual memoirs, I compare subjects' described experiences of foreign language immersions to subjects' early beginnings and ask if similarities in occurrence become grounds for the disclosure

through repetition of subjects' consciously forgotten pasts. Equally important, I examine benign and historical traumas within language and look into how the experience of language-related crises influence the fluidity of subjects' identity constructions while shaping the relations they hold with others. Language and trauma are studied in relation to our human nature and "universal need for identifications, love, sense of belonging and of temporal continuity" (Akhtar 2012). I thus analyse what occurs to subjects when such needs are interrupted through a fragmentation within language. During the later part of this study I also conceptualize the trauma that stems from significant language learning and ask how the eventual synthesis of this cognitive-emotional experience relates to our nature and development within and outside of language,

### **Problematics**

My experiences along with descriptions from translingual narratives led me to this dissertation's first problematic, which relates to the otherness that resides within language. Through my work I ask: how can our singular experiences within language uproot the universality that informs all speech? How is it possible for some individuals to be fluent and identify with one or more symbolic codes and yet experience that no language embodies a genuine representation of the speaking self? What is there to discover from this phenomenon that exists within and yet outside of us, from this vehicle that enables and fuels our desired and undesired social interactions, from this collective and yet individual trait that always exceeds the meanings we try to upturn through slips, through our own verbalizations and confounding words? How does our symbolic code define us, tap into our emotions, liberate and challenge us, while exposing our very nature and unresolved conflicts?



By taking an interdisciplinary approach and drawing from psychoanalytic, semiotic, pedagogic and contemporary philosophical theories of language, my research looks into the phenomenology of a lived language. I study the short and long term effects of foreign-host linguistic immersions during childhood and adolescence. I examine speakers' conscious and unconscious relation to internalized symbolic code(s) and the theoretical overlap that exists between early host-foreign linguistic immersions and trauma. My focus on language and its relation to memory and affect is realized through the analysis of translingual memoirs and essays. The study of the validity, use and understanding of adults' reconstructions -of child and/or adolescent host-foreign language immersions- becomes this dissertation's second problematic. Through self-reflexive narratives I look into the nature of idealizations of individuals' primary language and remembered past. I also study traumatic memory and the manner in which experienced and imagined recollections redefine subjects' identity constructions while knowingly and unknowingly exposing subjects' conscious and unconscious realities.

With pedagogic and psychoanalytic discussions on learning and not learning, and while accounting for the vicissitudes of our human nature, my research also examines the connexion that exists between crisis and significant host-foreign language learning. Since learning is about thinking and making relations, my work observes a third problematic by looking into the manner in which a foreign language student learns through traumatic experiences that do not fit within his or her schemata. I ask: how does learning occur through experiences that destabilize individuals, through events that are foreign, that evoke a crisis by not being secured by meaning? My dissertation reflects on how the trauma that stems from an unprecedented experience becomes linked to a

learner's history and asks how subjects' cumulative crisis and perceived social and psychic disruptions constitute a continuity within individuals' past, present and future experiences.

## **Methodology**

My dissertation focuses on the nature, constructions and meanings of migrants' descriptions of language-related experiences. With the study of reflexive literature written by translingual subjects, I examine the significance of adults' memories in the construction and understanding of their childhood and adolescent realities. My work addresses four interrelated concerns that come into play through individuals' subjective and social worlds: 1) the ego's relation to language; 2) the manner in which experiences that stem from foreign linguistic and cultural immersions theoretically overlap with those of emotional traumas; 3) memory and the relationship that exists between crisis and the conscious and unconscious acts of learning a language; and, 4) the aggression that exists within significant language learning.

I analyse subjects' linguistic and cultural experiences by looking into how affective histories become annexed with perceptual events of past occurrences, and look into the ways in which such recollections become a significant constituent in the construction and interpretation of translingual subjects' identities. Since my work is centered in the emotional and developmental meaning of language, I focus on subject reality and thus on the manner in which experiences are perceived and therefore interpreted by writers. Yet, understanding that subject reality is interconnected with life and text reality (Pavlenko 2007, 165), my study also accounts for the significance of

writers' choice of language and the relevance of ideologies or theoretical constructs that influenced writers' descriptions and/or perception of lived experiences.<sup>6</sup>

By considering the explanations provided by Herbert Spiegelberg (1975), I propose that an approach that studies the nature, construction and meanings of interrelated experiences, or that looks into internal and external factors to understand writers' perceptions and interpretations of lived and constructed occurrences, is phenomenological by definition. In *Doing Phenomenology: Essays on and in Phenomenology*, Spiegelberg illustrates the phenomenological method as "...a cognitive approach that aims at achieving systematic and shared inter-subjective knowledge. With this method, what is intuited or subjectively experienced by writers is studied as a system of constructs that knowingly and unknowingly affect subjects' interpretation of their worlds (112).

I assume that translingual writings offer a view into writers' personal conceptions, perceptions, reflections, ideologies and understandings of migration and of lived and imagined incidents of language learning, maintenance and use. My research considers how such writings offer an entrance to writer's private worlds (Pavlenko 2007, 164), into memories that reflect narrators' conscious and unconscious constructions. Narratives written by translingual subjects are used as case studies for the manner in which they "provide subjective information that is free from researchers' influence and elicitation procedures" (165). Relevant to a phenomenological study, the occurrences described

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<sup>6</sup> As explained by Pavlenko (2007) literary analysis draws from three interconnected types of information: subject reality, life reality and text reality. Subject reality is a look into how things or events were experienced by the narrator; life reality is a study of how things are and were, at the factors that influenced and still influence writers' ideologies and perceptions of events; and text reality is an examination of how occurrences are narrated by writers (165).

on self-reflective narratives are not examined as facts, but as writers' "system of meanings and interpretation" (168).

Through an in-depth literary analysis I seek to investigate the origins of affective qualities of linguistic dislocation, loss, instability and alienation. As part of my analysis of subject reality, I look into tensions between individuals' social and inner realities – essences and their relations- and study the manner in which felt occurrences relate, impact and become pre and post-consequent to writers' socio-emotional and psychic worlds. I thus discuss the ego's relation to language and how the early loss in instrumental function of subjects' mother tongue –during childhood and adolescence- impact the self.

Aside from working with language socialization, philosophical, literary and pedagogical theories to interpret the socio-emotional significance of first-person literary accounts, my research takes a psychoanalytic approach to the textual understanding of narratives. I suggest that looking into how authors juxtapose reflections with descriptions of interactions and dreams allow for a view into their subjective realities. I also pay close attention to writers' slips of pen, to excess of discourse, to "the affective traces words leave" (Pitt 2014, 45), and look into places within narratives where language breaks.

I study how constructed representations enable a view into writers' unconscious worlds, desires, symbolisms and discourse of otherness (Felman 1987, 20-22). I therefore ask how imagined and non-imagined representations of experiences directly and indirectly reflect writers' desires, defenses, identifications and transferences. My work analyses the short and long term psycho-social impact of migrants' sense of

trauma and rupture. I also look into the manner in which written expressions offer a study of learning and provide insights on how translingual subjects symbolize and work through their anxieties, sense of loss and trauma. As part of my focus on text and life realities, I analyse how ideologies have an effect on writers' inclusion, exclusion and perceptions of specific childhood and adolescent experiences. I examine literature for its symbolic significance in its exposure to truths that retrospectively shape and define the narrating subject.

Narratives are analysed as creative instruments that sublimate while exposing writers' subjective and social realities that, through the process of articulation, disclose and further impact subjects' identity formations. Following, once again, Pavlenko's (2007) analysis of published, reflexive literature, I also examine the ways in which socio-historical and cultural influences knowingly and unknowingly shape writers' present conceptions of their pasts (166-167), as well as their self-definition(s) and language-related choices.

I study Oscar Hijuelos', Eva Hoffman's, Alice Kaplan's and Richard Rodriguez' memoirs along with an insightful self-reflexive essay on second language acquisition written by Alice Pitt. My work is a focus on adults' feelings, attitudes, struggles and thought processes that concern perceived recollections of lived occurrences between languages and cultures. I look closely at how these narratives capture the manner in which writers overlay their present assumptions, beliefs and overall ideologies over explanations of perceived and constructed histories and analyse writers' conscious and unconscious narrated logic for having lost, or maintained their heritage tongue; for having rejected or embraced its external –and possibly- internal replacement.

For the most part my study's theoretical framework draws from theories posed by Mikhail Bakhtin, Jacques Derrida and Julia Kristeva. As a literary system of interpretation, my research takes into account the manner in which Derrida examines migration and identity in relation to language and the way in which Kristeva discusses subjects' subjective positioning as language migrants. Under the assumption that the inner and social conflicts interrelate in the production of translingual attitudes and language-related behaviours, this trans-disciplinary study analyses narratives by applying Shoshana Felman's explanations of Lacan's insights and system of literary interpretations. My work's narrative study follows Pavlenko's framework for studying life narratives within the area of applied linguistics. I bring into play language socialization theories provided by David Block, H. Douglas Brown, Alexander Guiora, Wallace Lambert, and Claire Kramsch, along with psychoanalytic and pedagogical discussions offered by Deborah Britzman and Alice Pitt, and psychoanalytic theories provided by Sigmund Freud, Melanie Klein, D.W. Winnicott, Salman Akhtar, and André Green.

### **Dissertation's Outline**

Chapter one, "Introduction", describes this dissertation's methodology and structure, as well as its problematics and interrelated themes. Chapter two, titled "Understanding the Landscape of Language", works under the assumption that "language communicates more than literal meaning" (Lerner 1998, 276). It looks closely into the nature of a lived language under a psychoanalytic, semiotic and philosophical lens. This chapter begins with a look into the manner in which a lived symbolic code aids in the development of the ego while bridging the subject's internal world with her external, shared reality. It is a focus of discussions centered in the understanding of the

emergence of our subjective core, and of an inner structure driven by dialogic interactions that take place within subjects' third space. Chapter two also examines the manner in which the dynamics within our unconscious reality become imprinted within and through language and how such dynamics seep into its speakers' subjectivity: within subjects' ongoing perceptions, interpretations, actions and responses to the other.

Chapter two addresses this dissertation's first concern and studies speakers' conscious understanding and unconscious affectual relation to their primary language(s). It considers the ontology of language and concentrates on socio-political, cultural and literary discussions that trace back to the development of the subject within language. This theoretical chapter provides a foundation for the understanding of what occurs to individuals when their primary language of identification, meaning and expression loses its instrumental function, and introduces the dissertation's main problematic in relation to the otherness that resides within all lived languages.

Chapter three, "Crisis of the Translingual Subject: Testifying to Fragmentary, Unlost Experiences within Languages through the analysis of Oscar Hijuelos' *Thoughts without Cigarettes*", takes a psychoanalytic approach to the study of descriptions provided by a 1.5-generation Cuban-American migrant. This translingual memoir is analysed for the manner in which it offers illustrations of the short and long-term psycho-emotional and social effects of having one's language of identification lose its socio-cultural currency during childhood. Descriptions of foreign-host language immersions are examined, as well the writer's libidinal attachment to language. I look into the manner in which Hijuelos unveils occurrences that inadvertently epitomize his

human nature within language(s), and how the description of his life exposes a history of object-relations, introjections, projections, transferences, repetitions and need for reparation.

This chapter studies the writer's descriptions of a vibrant past that traces back to his parents, his English language and to the paradox that embraces the affective relation he holds with his mother tongue. With this chapter I continue with the study of the progressive influence of language(s) and their interference with speakers' realities. I thus focus on the way in which Hijuelos pronounces life-long uncertainties that stem from an early linguistic and emotional rupture and look into how, through a presumable claimed English tongue, this writer is able to share with his readers the perceptions of early and later experiences that were born from the complexity of his history and, by way of relation, from living between competing languages and cultures.

In chapter four, "A Psychoanalytic Look into the Effects of Childhood and Adolescent Migration in Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation*", I study Hoffman's descriptions of early host-foreign immersions and emotional trauma in relation to discussions presented in my previous chapters and provided by this author in her essay "New Nomads". This chapter considers language learning [and language loss] as socially *and emotionally* situated activities (Block 2007, 48, 59). It continues with the exploration of the otherness that resides within language and the validity of subjects' reconstructions of their remembered and imagined past. In this chapter I pay close attention to a language migrant's initial sense of crisis, to the short and long-term language-related behaviours that follow migration and to the formation of attitudes and



perceptions that contribute to subjects' affiliations, identifications and to the conceptualizations within and outside of language(s).

Chapter four looks into descriptions that depict inscriptions of emotional and transformative experiences within language and questions what it may mean for the ego to identify with and reconstruct its identity within a host-foreign language. The concept of forced migrations for children and adolescents is also examined in relation to the crises and to the defenses that such sensed lack of choice evokes. Understanding the interrelation between life and subject reality, I examine how host views of a primary language and heritage culture have a social, emotional and psychic effect on subjects' sense of self and behaviours –especially during childhood and adolescence-. Within this context, I study young migrants' conscious and unconscious adherence or resistance to the host culture and language.

Chapter five, "Learning and Aggression: The Telos of Language Learning through an exploration of Alice Kaplan's *French Lessons*, Alice Pitt's "Language on Loan" and Richard Rodriguez' *Hunger of Memory*", studies the connection of significant language learning to trauma, and examines the concept of matricide in relation to pedagogical theories of learning. I discuss primary and secondary language learning and resistance in relation to primitive relations and ego defenses. Concepts such as introjections and subjects' ability to "inhabit the other" through the acquisition of the host language (Block 2007, 52) are debated through the examination of: Richard Rodriguez' *Hunger of Memory*, Alice Kaplan's *French Lessons*, along with Alice Pitt's discussions on love and language in the article "Language on Loan".

Chapter five continues with the study of descriptions of language immersions, yet it takes a different focus: one that is centered on learning for both immigrants and foreign language students alike. This chapter discusses the effects of introjections and asks: how this unconscious defense affects subjects' self-perceptions, social and psychic positioning, language related choices, and personal affiliations? The theorization of intra-psychic relations, unconscious histories, anxieties and their overall relation to the translingual experience -built from previous chapters- gives way to this chapter's consideration of my third problematic in relation to the pedagogical connection between translingual trauma and host language learning.

Chapter six, "Conclusion" returns to the four interrelated themes explored throughout this interdisciplinary dissertation: 1) the ego's relation to language; 2) the manner in which experiences that stem from foreign linguistic and cultural immersions theoretically overlap with those of emotional traumas; 3) memory and the relationship that exists between crisis and the conscious and unconscious acts of learning a language; and, 4) the aggression that exists within significant language learning. I discuss what has been learned after taking each chosen narrative through a subject, life and textual analysis. I look into how the inquiry into the aforementioned themes provided answers to my dissertation's problematics: the otherness that exists within language, the validity of reconstruction of the past, and how the problem of traumatic disruptions within the language learning context may become incorporated as part of subjects' historical continuity.

## CHAPTER II: UNDERSTANDING THE LANDSCAPE OF LANGUAGE

To read is to listen, to interpret and to develop an insight.

-Shoshana Felman, *Jacques Lacan and the Adventure of Insight*

At the end of my first year as a doctoral student, I wrote a theoretical essay on language. Inspired by the German-American political theorist and philosopher Hannah Arendt, by the manner in which she titled two chapters in *Between Past and Future*, I called my paper: “What is Language?”<sup>7</sup> Even though my essay was never published, it became memorable. Its significant aspect was not based so much on the fact that it created a space for me to think, speak, write and therefore learn about the many approaches to and theories that correspond to the study of language. As a language learner and educator, I assume that my work within academia would have inevitably led me in that direction. It was not my struggle with my paper’s style and/or clarity either. In fact, its memorable aspect has very little to do with what or how I wrote the paper. Instead, it concerns a comment written by my professor and supervisor in response to its title. For in the first sentence of her observations, Britzman (2009) wrote: “In a way, to ask what is language is comparable to asking ‘what is life’...” Today, that articulated thought, a comment that I read, presumably understood and then left behind, returns as I attempt to engage in a cohesive argument worthy of an opening for this dissertation’s first chapter, one that studies our conscious and unconscious understanding of and relation to our lived language.

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<sup>7</sup> My essay’s full title was: “What is Language? An Introduction to the Social, Emotional and Psychological Impact of Language and Diaspora”.

Much has been written about language, about this “omnipresent” trait (Derrida 1996, 11) that “connects the self to the social” (Granger 2004, 35). Hence, attempting to untangle the web of extensive thoughts that cover this wide-ranging topic poses a particular challenge. I will, nonetheless, begin with the obvious and define this symbolic system of meanings and affect as a human essence that forms and informs subjects through their interactions with the other. Based on my experiences as a migrant, I am pressed to mention that language is a transformative phenomenon that defines us geographically, socially and historically. Whether it is signed, written or spoken, it is an everyday singularity that is nonetheless intricate and, at times, is difficult to conceptualize. As explained in a graduate lecture by Britzman (2010): “language is a paradox, in which the symbolic code itself describes while embodying a process”<sup>8</sup>. In other words, it is a personal and shared system that promotes the growth of ongoing ideas, emotions and ensuing responses, while representing them directly and indirectly through the use of its words.

While discussing the inner and social meaning of language, this chapter provides a groundwork from which this dissertation’s later sections evolve, and asks: How is our emotional world made from the world of others, and what is our language’s core implication with such relation? In which ways do our earliest histories interact with the emergence, development and use of our primary tongue, and how may our primary language promote our subjectivity? What does a mother tongue represent for the subject? In which ways does the global authority that exists within a culture’s language encroach upon the individual? While focusing on this dissertation’s first concern, that of the ego’s relation to language, this chapter also touches upon aspects of my study’s

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<sup>8</sup> Comment expressed while lecturing in “A Seminar in Psychoanalytic Theory and Pedagogy” (Fall 2010).

main problematic by beginning to address why and how a lived symbolic code, and not just a foreign language, may cause within its speakers the alienating and often inexplicable feeling of otherness.

### **A Preliminary Account of the Layered Significance of a Lived Tongue**

In her chapter titled “The Crisis of Culture” Hannah Arendt (2006) argues that thinking, which is formed and mediated through our language, “cannot function in strict isolation and solitude; it needs the presence of others in whose place it must think, whose perspective it must take into consideration, and without whom it never has the opportunity to operate at all...logic to be sound depends on the presence of others” (217). By analysing this brief quote we could deduce that the core of Arendt’s argument is grounded on the idea that our private way of thinking does not occur in a vacuum; by means of our language, we think in place of and in relation to those who surround us. Knowing that our thoughts frequently govern our behaviours, we assume that language, which habitually encodes and conveys our thoughts, impacts the manner in which we perceive occurrences, identify our realities and conduct ourselves.

This notion of language’s conveyance of personal and social meanings is also central to Mario Valdés’ (1998) discussion on literary criticism and hermeneutics. In *Hermeneutic of Poetic Sense*, Valdés explains that the difficulty of literary meaning relates to “the more general problem of language as a collectively generated, individually realized mode of living. ....the meaning of meaning lies in the relationship between individual discourse and the community of speakers” (4). Here my former University of Toronto graduate professor taps into the socio-cognitive and sequential aspect of language by highlighting the way in which it affects personal and shared

meanings and resulting conceptualizations within a “culture”, which quoting from the Italian semiotician, philosopher and literary critic, Umberto Eco (2004), is “a chain of influences” (119). Valdés discusses the manner in which such a linguistically transmitted chain or succession holds its authority over all thinking subjects, by affecting the way in which they interpret others’ works and realities in direct and indirect relation to their own.

Judith Butler (2010) also addresses the influential significance of language, yet she does so from an emotive, socio-political perspective. In *Frames of War: When is Life Grieveable?* this American philosopher and gender theorist explains how interpretative frameworks regulate individuals’ emotions and moral responsiveness towards specific social acts. She claims that the way we see and respond to our world is intimately linked to influential discourses and interactions that involve [and may therefore transform] us as subjects (41). Even though her discourse does not make a direct reference to ‘language’ per se, Butler’s argument leads us to assume that the linguistic web that shapes while containing thinkers’ interactive worlds becomes the impetus that structures and propagates subjects’ interpretations of morality and responses toward perceived social occurrences.

From a different yet interwoven perspective, in *The Stuff of Thought: Language as a Window to Human Nature* Steven Pinker (2008) explains how words are permeated by the way we represent ideas in our heads. When defining semantics, Pinker, a Canadian linguist, cognitive scientist and professor of experimental psychology at Harvard University suggests:

Semantics is about the relation of words to thoughts...to other human concerns.

Semantics is about the relation of words to reality –the way that speakers commit themselves to a shared understanding of the truth, and the way their thoughts are anchored to things and situations in the world. It is about the relationship of words to a community –how a new word, which arises in the act of creation by a single speaker, comes to evoke the same idea in the rest of a population, so people can understand one another when they use it. It is about the relation of words to emotions: the way in which words don't just point to things but are saturated with feelings, which can endow the words with a sense of magic, taboo, and sin. And it is about words and social relations –how people use language not just to transfer ideas from head to head but to negotiate the kind of relationship they wish to have with their conversational partner. (3)

While agreeing with discussions on the conscious understanding of language and thus on the manner in which language and society influence the thinking, interpreting subject and how language or 'words' are entrenched by emotions, in this chapter I take a holistic approach to the multi-directional significance of language. I acknowledge that there is much more to our dialogical responses, introjections, emotions and cognitive-developmental relation to our symbolic code than what rests at the conscious level. In recognizing that our perceptual world is allegedly influenced by our unconscious (Akhtar 2009, 220; Felman 1987, 114) and by the other's unconscious, I assert that we cannot claim to embark on a comprehensive study that defines the ontology and influence of any symbolic system of meanings if we limit our discussion to the tangible and therefore conscious realm. Hence, this chapter is a focus on theories that discuss the interrelation

of our conscious and unconscious realities within language and the manner in which such constant interaction represents while affecting the way speakers live and perceive their shared and individual –affective- worlds.

### **Thinking in the Space of Language, Subjectivity and Identification**

In the *Comprehensive Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, Salman Akhtar (2009) explains that primary and secondary processes are the two forms of mentation outlined by Sigmund Freud (1895d). Primary processes, which, as described by this psychoanalytic clinician, writer and theorist, develop earlier and involve defenses within the unconscious. They are governed by our pleasure and unpleasure principle and, as such, seek immediate gratification. Secondary processes, on the other hand, form part of our conscious mentation. These develop later and are subservient to the reality principle. They have verbal representations and involve a more conscious level of thinking and reasoning. An important aspect one must bear in mind, especially for our study of language, is that, in actuality, both, primary and secondary processes, exist in varying degrees of admixture in all forms of mental activity (220).

The significance of Akhtar's description rests in the way in which it enables us to understand that our thoughts, actions, emotions and attitudes are influenced by internal and external forces that relate to perceived and seemingly forgotten histories. The complexity of our social interactions, our knowledge, perceptions and behaviours, moreover, is not limited to isolated layers of conscious, preconscious and unconscious dynamics, but on the interaction of the subject's split worlds within the area known as the third space. Returning to Britzman (2006), this third space is an area in which self-other interactions become governed by an unconsciously shared "give and take"; it is a



terrain through which we unknowingly respond to others' psychic histories and resulting affect as much as others respond to our own history of affect (42-44 and 49). Britzman's definition is of significant value to my study of language. Since our symbolic code of meanings becomes an interactive, propelling and encoding register, we cannot disregard our tongue's inevitable implication within this space, especially after accounting for the way in which language holds together our known and unknown histories, perceptions and experiences that mark our responses towards and interpretations of others, and of ourselves in relation to others.

The internal and social function of language, in connection to our self-other perceptions are central to Claire Kramsch's (2009) discussions of the subjective functions and meanings of language and to Donald Winnicott's (2005) psychoanalytic work on language as part of an interactive phenomenon that fosters children's creative development. In *The Multilingual Subject*, Kramsch offers her definition of the term subject and subjectivity by stating that: "we become subjects and thus learn who we are and who we could be through our interactions with our environment; by means of the discourse and response of the other" (18). In her text, this applied linguist and Berkley professor who focuses on second language acquisition and on the social, cultural and stylistic approaches to the study of language, highlights the developmental worth of one's conscious and unconscious relations with the other by drawing attention to the importance of having others respond to our address. Parallel to Kramsch's argument, in *Playing and Reality* Winnicott states that: "if you know someone is there, someone that can give you back what happened, then the details become part of you" (82). Here Winnicott suggests that if the experience is shared with another and mirrored back

through either rejection or embrace, the dialogical occurrence becomes incorporated as part of the subject's organized personality. This psycho-social orientation highlights the substantial function our language plays in the development and understanding of subjects' realities<sup>9</sup>, which in turn defines the sense of who we are and even, returning to Kramersch, "who we could be" (18).

With the use of Bakhtin's theory Kramersch expands her discussion on language and subjectivity by quoting that as subjects we have "a responsibility to signify, that is to use and interpret signs, to respond and 'reaccentuate' signs, to pass judgement and to make moral decisions" (Bakhtin 1981, 87, cited in Kramersch 2009, 18). In Kramersch's original source, *The Dialogic Imagination*, Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) argues that each of us has a language<sup>10</sup> or belief system, which signifies and propagates an individualized conceptual point of view (5). For this Russian philosopher and highly influential academic within the area of semiotics, the essence of our subjectivity lies in our discursive interactions. Bakhtin focuses on how individuals modify others' signs or belief systems and incorporate such modifications –re-accentuations- into their own discourse system. Without such re-signification, claims Bakhtin, internal or external dialogue between two people, or between someone's earlier and later self, is not possible (9, 43).

My understanding of subjectivity under Bakhtin's terms encompasses a dialogue that is rooted in the social and affective representations of realities we seemingly perceive as conscious. Relevant to Kramersch's discussion, to be free and come-to-

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<sup>9</sup> In this dissertation, the subject is defined through his or her ego boundaries, through the developmental differentiation of the self and the other, which, according to Britzman (2006), is an ongoing distinction that originates during infancy and continues, through an ongoing establishment, within the subject's third space (49-50).

<sup>10</sup> For Bakhtin (1981) a 'language' or a sign is not a tongue – for example English, Spanish, German, etc. Instead it is an individualized conceptual view that, by way of influence, precedes from the discourse of others.

consciousness<sup>11</sup>, argues Bakhtin, implies a rejection of canonized discourse<sup>12</sup>, for such ‘mere repetitions’ infringe upon individuals’ subjectivities (5, 385-386). Along Bakhtin’s lines, Kramsch states that our subjectivity is in part linked to the modified- introjection and projection of a culture’s dominant thoughts, a process that, returning to Arendt, Valdés and Butler, and in agreement with Bakhtin, is achieved through our verbalized interactions. It is through the shared and yet particularly personal medium or vehicle we know as our language<sup>13</sup>. According to Bahktin, by understanding a given discourse through our experiences and points of view, we reaccentuate that which is introjected and assimilated into our system of meanings. This assimilation implies a simultaneous appropriation and transmission. Such resignifications or reaccentuations, continues Bakhtin, embody a process that frees the self from the persuasive authority that exists within the globalized or societal scale (341-342).

Jacques Derrida’s (1982) discourse on language and iterability relates to Bakhtin’s theory on subjects’ coming-to-consciousness. Derrida, a French-speaking, Algerian-born philosopher stresses that when we speak we do not necessarily repeat the words of others: we appropriate the authority transcended through language by giving language our own meanings or accents. In other words, we adapt others’ significations to our own situation, intention and style (309-310, 312, 315-316). The notion of the cultural discourse being part of an authority of individual and social

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<sup>11</sup> According to Bakhtin, coming-to-consciousness refers to subjects’ assimilation into their own system of meanings and the simultaneous liberation of their own words from the authoritative discourse that surrounds them (344).

<sup>12</sup> Within this discourse, the word canonization is used to describe subjects’ mere repetitions of alien (others’) utterances. Such speech acts resist change or modification which, by lacking the freedom of subjects’ re-accentuation, deters speakers’ coming-to-consciousness (385-386, 417).

<sup>13</sup> Please note that in this context the term language does not borrow from Bakhtin’s theory.

influence, is also a topic taken up by the critical thinker of the subject and culture, Julia Kristeva (2000), when she addresses her readers in “Bulgaria my Suffering”:

I am not sure, not at all sure, that in your place I would have been able to seek out an authority, a community, a person, and hence a taste. But I would have tried to avoid the words that do not emanate from the authority of a group or the charisma of a person who is polite enough to get recognized by others concerned with the same politeness. Without this politeness words remain alien neologisms stuck in dead sand...change the rhythm; don't drone through the old elementary stuff, but also don't ape the tricks of those who, unlike you, come from a boudoir or a baroque of which you have no idea. Don't stick to the other...he is a changeable as you...I am not at war with neologisms if they are the result of an attempt to think anew.... (174-175)

In a way Kristeva touches upon the concept of authority versus Bakhtin's idea of otherness<sup>14</sup>, as she explains that a discourse should have authority if it considerably reflects, at least in part, the needs, interests and therefore tastes of its receptors, that otherwise remains other. She also highlights the temporal significance of authority and the significance of finding a balance; of not canonizing by taking others' discourse as part of our un-accentuated conceptual frame, and of not censoring and therefore undermining the differences in accentuations from those of diverging experiences, different modalities, backgrounds and ways of thought.

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<sup>14</sup> For Bakhtin, something other or alien is the opposite of one's own language – system of meanings-. It does not signify estrangement, instead it is a discourse, opinion, etc., that belongs to someone else; that someone, an outsider, considers as his or her own (423, 430).

These concepts move my previous claim on language and subjectivity to an epistemological level. They disclose ways in which, through the use of a lived tongue, subjects construct, alter and/or deconstruct the webbed reality that influences their inner and social existence. By reading closely into Kristeva's address as an example we hear the echo of conceptual frames or horizons that have an unavoidable influence on how those affected by it incorporate, modify and even reject given beliefs. Once again, conceptual frames affect how individuals interpret their personal and communal realities, perceive themselves and therefore come-to-consciousness and feel within the dynamics of linguistically constructed socio-cultural authorities.

From a psychoanalytic perspective we are able to analyse the way in which this vehicle of language enables subjects' introjection of their surroundings and to understand how individuals conceptualize themselves through identifications while projecting their desired and undesired emotions. Through a psychoanalytic and semiotic approach, moreover, we can view how such introjections also influence subjects' self-other interpretations that result from internal reaccentuations of the authority imposed by their social environment. In her chapter "Identification with the Aggressor" Britzman (2007) discusses the ways in which the external world is of utmost relevance to the development, change and/or preservation of the individual's subjectivity. She describes how an infant's situation is understood as part of a paradox, one that is defined by the infant's helplessness and fear of losing the love and nurturance of the first object, in juxtaposition with her need to break away from that oppressive love, and thus to grow and become independent<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> This evident contradiction offers us a glimpse of the 'unconscious logic of emotion'. As explained by Britzman, the unconscious is a world that knows no time and tolerates contraction. Thus we see how the

Britzman, following Freud, describes how young children's initial fear of loss triggers anxieties<sup>16</sup> within the ego, which become symbolized as part of the subject's affective prototype. She argues that the early affect experienced by the subject does not remain completely unaltered; it changes with each and every new socio-emotional interaction the subject has with another object. Yet regardless of the way in which individuals' first symbolization becomes slightly altered through ongoing interactions with the other, the underlying feelings of dependence, helplessness, and fear of loss of the object remains etched within the unconscious (41).

For the ego, the fear that rises from its affective prototype creates a complex defense or mechanism known as Identification with the Aggressor. This mechanism, which was first introduced by the Hungarian psychoanalyst Sandor Ferenczi, aims at refracting anxiety by distorting danger (Britzman 2006, 49). Identification with the Aggressor is an unconscious act of incorporation with the purpose of destroying anyone or anything that is felt to limit the individual's pleasure, and/or make her feel passive or persecuted. This mechanism reflects a psychic representation of oral impulses that entail defeat through the incorporation parts of the other into the self (45). Thus the ego incorporates or introjects concepts, ideas, and impressions to fulfil an unconscious phantasy of devouring or absorbing parts of the other. It is a defense mechanism that stems from an individual's wish for autonomy and desire to end the oppressive love and become independent from such oppression (52, 54-55).

An essential aspect of the ego's defense to my study of language is founded on the way in which a lived symbolic code enables while libidinally imprinting the process of

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ego tries to protect itself by attempting to break away from dependence and helplessness while trying to hold on to the love of the object – which leads to emotional dependence and vulnerability- (49).

<sup>16</sup> Britzman explains that anxiety is a fear of repetition of an earlier scene of helplessness (176).

connecting the subject, by way of introjection, to the external world. As argued by Britzman, the act of taking-in aspects of an object into the inner world is a libidinal process and hence an identification with an object that contributes to the child's emotional tie to the external world (49-51). Identification thus becomes a process that enables the ego to attach to others and to organize its boundaries (49) by creating a space for the individual to distinguish him or herself from others. This mechanism, moreover, is rooted in an unconscious desire to have the quality of others or even the self of others. The ego may wish for others to be different than they are and this wish to transform what is absent is taken in/introjected (51). Identification, writes Britzman, is an ego defense and its first means of becoming. The young ego, by taking in parts of parents' criticism and overall attitudes, splits itself into good and bad. The result from this division, moreover, is the development of the superego (50), which is, once again, the division of the ego that either –returning to Bakhtin- canonizes or re-accentuates the authority that influences the on-going development of all subjects.

In relation to this chapter's earlier discussion, 'Identification with the aggressor' is an unconscious mechanism that continues beyond subjects' early years. Anna Freud argues that it is a defense initiated during childhood and present in all interactions individuals have throughout their lives (Britzman 2006, 54-55). This psychoanalytic theory of the ego's functions allows for a deeper understanding of the continuous interaction of our conscious and unconscious realities. This argument creates a space for a more complete interpretation of Akhtar's and Freud's assertion regarding the way in which primary and secondary processes "exist in varying degrees of admixture in all forms of mental activity" (220).

## **Language and the Ego: A Concurrent, Interrelated Development**

A theoretical focus of language's undisputed relevance in the early development of the split subject or the subject governed by conscious and unconscious realities, can be seen in Shoshana Felman's (1987) interpretation of Lacan's work. For Felman the subject's development of language relies on her positioning within a structure that is formed from within an aspect of cultural authority introjected from the infant's emotional world and his or her first objects of affection.

Felman looks into the epistemological significance of language when explaining that an infant's speech develops through his or her understanding of, and affective involvement within, the Oedipus Structure (113). Drawing from psychoanalytic theory, we understand that the infant's first narcissistic attachment is formed with the mother (Klein 1975, 49-50), which in Felman's interpretation of Lacan's theory she calls "the imaginary" (113). Felman states that ensuing the establishment of the emotional attachment with the imaginary, the infant's awareness of his or her father's authority and, in many cases, of the manner in which he is a primary competitor for the mother's love and affection, places the child within 'the symbolic', a realm that involves the father, the law of incestual prohibition and language, the first 'no' articulated through the linguistic system.

Felman writes that for Lacan "desire and ability to symbolize" drive the child to use and situate himself within language. Speech, she asserts, occurs through the infant's need in the form of desire: his or her desire to call, to address and to be addressed and to be positioned within the Oedipus structure (113). Through this desire, continues Felman, the child is motivated to introject and project human discourse (118).



Equally important, this emergence of language is annexed with the development of the divided subject and thus of his or her unconscious and social self. In Felman's interpretations of Lacan's work, we see how language is symbolic to the child's psychic development; within this transition between the imaginary and the symbolic the child's superego develops through "the first introjection of the father's name" (115). As for his or her social admission into what eventually constitutes the conscious-unconscious realm, by seeking a response from the other, even if it constitutes rejection, the child becomes recognized by the other and thus becomes a subject (118).

Through a rich and dense text Felman discusses how, from a Lacanian view, the act of speech functions through a pre-established symbolic system (118). Throughout her narrative she consistently highlights that there is much more to our emotions, perceptions and words than what remains at the conscious, superficial reach. By stating that "all human relationships occur at the unconscious level" she reminds us that our ongoing conscious actions and emotional attachments are by-products of the dynamics of our unconscious realities (114, 116, 128-129).

### **Our Primary Language and its Link to Our Remembered and Seemingly Forgotten Sense of Feeling and of Belonging**

Remaining within the topic of the early stages of ego development, Melanie Klein (1964) offers an earlier story, one that is also founded in the concurrence of the initial stages of language with the earliest and later emotional world of the ego. Her theory is embedded in the lasting consequences of the relation that infants hold with their primary caregivers. "Love, guilt and reparation" suggests that individuals' actions and feelings of love, guilt and even hate are governed by unconscious responses to occurrences,

conceptions and processes that relate to a misrecognized infantile history: a history rooted in sexual desires, object relations, conflicts and imagined phantasies.

As suggested by Klein, for the infant, the mother's breast becomes an object that when present is linked to satisfaction and love, for it nourishes and thus alleviates the infant's feeling of hunger while giving him or her the sensual pleasure experienced through sucking on the breast (58). When absent, nonetheless, a mother's breast becomes paradoxically linked to feelings of anger and hate. As hate and anger erupt, moreover, infants become dominated by destructive impulses that in phantasy are targeted to the person who represents the object: the child's mother or primary caregiver (60).

Klein asserts that when the breast or bottle returns and the infant's preservative needs and sensual desires are addressed, the baby feels once again a sense of love, satisfaction and gratitude and the child's anger becomes replaced by unconscious guilt (58-59) that stems from the perception of having harmed in phantasy the object of affection (67-68). She suggests that the individual's ability or inability to unconsciously work through their primitive feelings of hate, guilt and fear of loss impact their later relationships (65-66). Most essential to this topic is that the anxieties, conflicts and unconscious processes that derive from early impulses become part of subjects' master affect, which is the underpinning force that influences all of his or her past, present and future relationships.

Britzman stresses that this master affect, grounded in anxieties, is the foundation that becomes the socio-emotional groundwork that influences all relationships the individual holds with his or her mother, father, sibling(s), friend(s) and partner(s). It is the

prototype that impacts individuals' ongoing capability of loving and of feeling loved (Klein 1964, 59). Klein's theory fits into a broader pattern of conflicts that seep into our everyday interactions with others. In "Origins of Transference" Klein (1975) explains that in situations that become reminiscent of an individual's earliest situation of dependence, love and, paradoxically, need for independence, a subject's earliest anxieties become aroused and thus, the feelings and responses that were targeted to his or her primary caregiver become transferred to the individual who unknowingly has awakened his or her emotional past and thus has set anxiety in motion. In short, the circumstantial resonance of the subject's past makes the individual unknowingly repeat, with blurring alterations, his or her earlier behaviours and perceptions; it triggers an unconscious re-enactment of the past known as transference. Even though our behaviours towards specific individuals are mere repetitions for the way in which they bear all traces of our seemingly forgotten past, our doings are commonly felt as unique, singular acts that are solely connected to our present (48-50).

What matters most to my discussion is that subjects' object relations and transferences influence the feelings they unknowingly hold with their primary language. This is an argument previously introduced when I briefly analysed Elias Canetti's quote and the case of Louis Wolfson. Since language is such a fertile medium through which we learn, interact with and love or hate the other, it should come as no surprise that it is the element that becomes unconsciously marked by our early and later history and as such, it is the internal and yet external part of us that is always linked to our earliest emotions.

Understanding the extent to which a language becomes implicated with subjects' affective life explains why when subjects migrate as adults, regardless of their eventual acquisition of the foreign language spoken in the country of migration, their primary language is still commonly described as the language of emotions, as the one that highlights their need for continuity and, as a result, as the one used by speakers in their attempts to resist inner change. An example of such a view can be found in *Switching Languages* where Stephen Kellman (2003) presents the case of the Czeslaw Milosz, a Polish poet who moved to the United States at the age of forty nine and, after living in California for over fifty years, chose to keep his mother tongue as his medium for writing poetry and prose. In his memoir Milosz openly rationalizes the root of his refusal to use English, his second language, when he states:

In my rejection of imposing a profound change on myself by going over to writing in a different language, I perceive a fear of losing my identity, because it is certain that when we switch languages we become someone else. (qtd. by Kellman xiv)

For this translingual writer, his resistance to switching languages is tied to his need to honour and uphold the mother language that is associated to his memory of wholeness and unquestioned identity. Understanding the link that exists between language, identity, memory and affect gives us a clue as to why many subjects who have migrated as late adolescents or as adults are unwilling or simply unable to fully introject a second tongue.

While focusing on individuals perceived inability to switch and fully identify themselves with a foreign language, David Block (2007) explains that age and ego

development play an enormous role in subjects' ego permeability (51-52). This claim may also be linked to that of Akhtar (2012), who, in a psychoanalytic conference offered in Toronto<sup>17</sup> explained that when individuals migrate as adults, since their ego boundaries have been, for the most part, solidified, subjects are less likely to undertake drastic linguistic changes.

It also seems commonsensical to suggest that for many translingual subjects, the inability to translate themselves and thus switch internal languages also relate to their emotional attachment to their mother tongue. In fact, the affective significance of a mother tongue is not new to anyone who has experienced linguistic shifts. It is therefore a common theme among writers who describe their experiences within and between languages. If we look into Marjorie Agosín's writing, we can see that her memoir "Words: A Basket of Love", Agosín openly supports the emotional meaning of her primary language when she testifies:

Language defined my past... I never stopped writing in Spanish because I could not abandon my essence, the fragile, divine core of my being. It would have meant becoming someone else, frequenting sadness, losing my soul and all the butterflies. I always spoke Spanish. Even in my solemn dreams. I did not want to translate myself (cited by Kellman 2003, 324).

Agosín migrated from Chile to the United States when she was nineteen years old and enjoyed a high level of acquired bilingualism from her years living in the States. Still, her Spanish language remains as the creative tongue of her genuine literary expression. Similar to Milosz, for Agosín the significance of her primary language is founded on the

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<sup>17</sup> The 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Day of Applied Linguistics Conference titled: "Strange Lands: Location and Dislocation: the Immigrant Experience". University of Toronto, September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

perception of this tongue as the only language that defines her history rendering it the only suitable medium of emotions.

However, we also know that remaining true to one's mother tongue in the face of socio-geographic change is not a reality embraced by all translingual subjects. There are many individuals who migrate as young adults and who due to financial obligations and social needs, acquire and eventually master a host language. With such individuals, explains Lambert, the host-foreign linguistic code "becomes something more than a reference group" and a reference language. Their linguistic shift not only bears its effects on their linguistic comfort within the acquired tongue, but it also influences the relationship they hold with their primary symbolic code.

For Lambert, "the more proficient a person becomes in a second language, the more [she] may find that [her] place in [her] original membership group is modified". As a result, explains Lambert, the subject may "experience feelings of chagrin or regret as [she] loses ties with [*her original*] group". (cited by Block 2007, 48) The feelings of chagrin and regret that are linked to the subject's sudden change in linguistic and social behaviour, relate to the concept of anomie, which, according to Block, is defined by experiences of internal conflicts and feelings of "moral chaos" (48-50). Switching languages at a later age results in the guilt that stems from replacing one's emotional language and from the conscious and unconscious occurrence of an inner clash between the foreign and the known, a theme discussed in more detail in chapter four.

As explained by Eva Karpinski (2012), giving up of one's language's instrumental function involves becoming transformed or remade within the flow of the foreign other (1-2). This loss, she argues, concerns linguistic displacements that relate to individuals'

dislocation within language and within the self (3). As stressed by Karpinski, the radical change in subjectivity when translating, or attempting to translate, oneself within a host language involves a disorienting conscious and/or unconscious crisis that rises from a primary language's significance within the development and understanding of subject's inner being and subjective core.

While continuing with Kellman's attention to translingual memoirs, if we also look at another example, in Gerda Lerner's work we note that even though this writer eventually found refuge in the English language after escaping Nazi Germany and moving to America at eighteen years-of-age, she still feels that her primary tongue is the only language capable of holding the earliest moments of her emotional life. This becomes clear when she explains that: "Deep memories, resonances, sounds of childhood come through the mother's tongue, when these are missing the brain cuts off the connections" (cited by Kellman 2003, 276).

For this translingual subject, regardless of the foster relationship she holds with the English language, the fact that she married an English language speaker from America and raised her children as monolingual English speakers, her German language holds an affective significance. Through Lerner's comments we become exposed to the way in which a primary tongue, whether it is spoken or perceptually ignored, remains etched in conscious and unconscious memories. A mother tongue remains within a subject's known and seemingly forgotten histories of social and internal developments: developments that took place while the child learned, felt, related to and interacted with his or her first object(s) of affection.

## **Winnicott and the Transitional Phenomenon: A Primary Language's Subjective Significance**

When examining Donald Winnicott's (2005) psychoanalytic theory on the transitional phenomenon, we note that his discussions serve as another example of 1) the juxtaposition of the ego's development in relation to the development of language, and of 2) the relation between the first object of affection, her language and the subject's establishment of all present and future relations he or she holds. In *Playing and Reality* Winnicott describes the transitional phenomenon as the intermediate area of experiencing and reality testing (2,5). It is an area that exists between the baby's inability and his or her growing ability to recognize and accept a reality that is outside of the self (3).

According to Winnicott, a mother's or primary caregiver's presence and his or her parenting behaviour influences the child's subjective development during the first year of life. Winnicott asserts that during the child's first six months of age, a 'good enough mother' is one that fully adapts to her infant's nourishing needs. This adaptation, continues Winnicott, is essential for the child's initial development, as it allows for the child to construct an illusion of omnipotence by believing that the mother is a part of an external reality that corresponds to his or her capacity to create (14-16). After the child is six months old, the mother's task is to wean<sup>18</sup> the infant by a natural process of gradual disillusionment. Through weaning, the child is eventually able to tolerate frustration, understand that objects are real that is both hated and loved and are not an illusion and, correspondingly, perceive the reality outside of the self (14-15).

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<sup>18</sup> For this theory, 'to-wean' does not correspond to breastfeeding. By weaning Winnicott refers to the mother's task of gradually disillusioning the infant, thus making him understand that there is a reality outside of the self and that the child's external reality is not under his omnipotent control (13).



A child's transition, continues Winnicott, from the magical to the real, achieved between the ages of six to twelve months, is marked by a phase in which she becomes attached to an external object: a tangible article that becomes a defense against anxiety by aiding in her adaptation towards a degree of independence from his or her mother (5). This object, known as the transitional object, reflects the continuity of the child's experience (5); it is never considered by the child as part of her body, yet it is not fully recognized by the infant as part of her external world (2-3). A transitional object is the original 'not me' possession that exists within the subjective and what is objectively perceived (4-6,12).

Winnicott explains that the object's symbolism and significance rests in the manner in which it stands for the breast or mother (8), in how it is perceived as more important than the mother and thus with the way in which it becomes an almost inseparable part of the infant (9). Concisely, this first observable possession that is "never under magical control" (13), "becomes an active part of the child's journey towards experiencing" (8). It aids in positioning the infant within an introjected, subjective reality and facilitates the infant's healthy transition into becoming a subject by promoting the development of the child's ego boundaries and, as briefly mentioned, allowing for the child to accept, relate to, and form a conception of an external, shared reality (3,14).

What is essential for us to conceptualize from this developmental theory is that the object itself is not the transition. Instead, it represents and enables the transition from the feeling of being merged with the mother to a state of being in relation with the mother, now as something outside and separate (19-20). Moreover, this object is not an

internal mental object, nor an external object (12-13); it is a possession that creates a neutral area of experience, and part of a phenomenon that, according to this psychoanalyst, allows the infant to develop from the pleasure principal to the reality principal (13). Its intrinsic and developmental significance explains why Winnicott argues that it represents part of a phenomenon that “should not be challenged” (14,17).

Winnicott’s discussion of a subject’s transition towards experiencing has much relevance to my study of language. Presented with our previous discussions on the subjective meaning and developmental function of a lived primary code we are able to extend Winnicott’s theory of the transitional phenomenon to our concept and understanding of a primary language. Let us begin by noting that a mother tongue represents the transition from being merged with the mother to being in relation with the mother as something outside and separate. A primary language is a phenomenon that the child internalizes through its connection with his or her first object of affection. Such language is felt as part of the subject and thus a possession that eventually forms part of our intermediate area of experiencing. Moreover, it is separate from the speaking subject while not entirely being part of her external reality. For a child a mother tongue exists between what is subjectively perceived and objectively observed. It embodies the area between the individual’s inner reality and his or her shared reality, a reality composed by a world that contains the subject’s third space and the interchangeable authority that such space holds.

In addition, in *The Beast in the Nursery* Adam Phillips (1998) also explores the psychoanalytic meaning and function of a primary language by arguing that language is linked to the child’s introduction to the greater community of competent speakers and to

the renunciation of the perception of her mother's undivided love and attention (43). As highlighted by Alice Pitt (2013) a mother tongue is part of a loss associated with the child's realization that for the mother there is a world of objects and desires that exists separate from the child (41). Such recognition marks the inevitable transition gives way to the child's development as a subject, as one that is paradoxically linked and yet separate from her first object (Phillips 1998, 43-45).

Although somewhat different: my argument of language, under Winnicott's terms as a transitional object, and Phillips' and Pitt's of language as a phenomenon that aids in the development of the subject who transitions, within language, away from her mother and towards the greater community of competent speakers, interrelate. Thus, we cannot overlook how a symbolic system of meanings supports our subjective development and, as I discussed earlier, leaves traces within our ego boundaries. Returning to Felman, Winnicott, Phillips, and Pitt our lived tongue plays an active role in our transition from the pleasure principal to the reality principal, and just as an observable transitional object, promotes our development as subjects. A lived language is a human essence that develops during our early stages of childhood but that is nonetheless relevant to the psychological, socio-emotional and cognitive growth that corresponds to subjects' later years. By positioning language within Klein's theory of Object Relations, moreover, and within Lacan's and Felman's insightful thoughts, we can assert that language and its developmental relation within our affective history bears effects in all past, present and future attachments subjects hold with the social. It is the constituting core where all hybrid processes interact, repeat and transform while becoming transformed through the use of its words.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I looked into the manner in which our language forms part of our amplified biography and at how it lies at the very core of our system of conscious and unconscious meanings and emotional world. I discussed how aside from becoming a “container of self/other relations” (Britzman 2006, 46), our symbolic code shapes our subjective history that is introjected and therefore connects us with the outside world while propagating, defining and projecting our understandings, feelings, insights, assertions and conflicts. I have highlighted the manner in which our language is a vehicle that shapes and reshapes our ego within the authority of a highly enigmatic third space that echoes while connecting to our system of highly internalized social and personal histories.

When looking into psychoanalytic theories I noticed a slight variability in thoughts and/or approaches to the socio-emotional formative and transformative phenomenon we know as language. Nevertheless, regardless of researchers’ psychoanalytic trainings, experiences and therefore assumptions, there is a consistent thought that supports the concurrence of language with the development of the ego. Regardless of theoretical differences, the various views presented in this chapter intersect and complement each other when applied to occurrences that epitomize our language’s influence on us as split subjects.

This chapter’s brief discussion of the ontology of a first language is intended to aid in a deeper conceptualization of this dissertation’s key issues, which involve the social and personal effects of host-foreign language immersions and the understanding of the inevitable aggression and trauma that stems from learning a second language.

With this focus, my succeeding chapters will continue with the analysis and discussion of the intimate relation between language and subjectivity and question what occurs to the inner self when a young subject's primary language loses, at least in part, its emotive function. By using translingual memoirs as case studies my dissertation asks: what does it mean for children and adolescents to have their internalized tongue devoid of meaning and replaced by the language of the Other? How may foreign language learners rebuild their sense of self through a second tongue? What becomes uprooted through the trauma incurred by host-foreign linguistic immersions? How can individuals conceptualize their social and psychic continuity within a lacerated tongue? And later, how do subjects' translingual writing and voiced memory of a first and second language aid in individuals' need for psycho-social and linguistic continuity?

After having established a foundational understanding of the subjective implications of this phenomenon we know as language, in the following chapter I will turn my readers' attention to the analysis of Oscar Hijuelos' memoir, *Thoughts without Cigarettes*. With a careful examination of this writer's life-narrative, I address the short and long-term implications of experiencing a sensed linguistic and affective dislocation and examine language through the writer's haunting consequences of feeling linguistically isolated and emotionally abandoned by his mother at a young age.

### CHAPTER III:

## CRISIS OF THE TRANSLINGUAL SUBJECT: TESTIFYING TO FRAGMENTARY, UNLOST EXPERIENCES WITHIN LANGUAGES IN OSCAR HIJUELOS' *THOUGHTS* *WITHOUT CIGARETTES*

In *Thought without Cigarettes* Oscar Hijuelos narrates his life-experiences between his Spanish and English languages. In this memoir Hijuelos provides an interesting testimony of linguistic imbalance, emotional trauma, loss, linguistic replacements and search for love. Through stories of his early experiences between Cuba and the United States, this American-born writer, of first generation Cuban migrants, describes how, as a young child, Spanish was his life. While sharing charming anecdotes with his readers it becomes clear that this language was the symbolic code inherited from his parents, and the mother tongue he shared with his older brother and extended family. Spanish was the symbolic code of meaning that became intimately linked to his primary identity and to his conscious and unconscious memories as an emerging subject:

I do recall playing in a small park nearby, El Parque Infantil, where there were swings, and that I'd go with my cousin Miriam...; we also slept side by side sometimes... Along the street stood a pepper tree which I often picked... even when I was told not to, to the point that my lips burned so much that my cousin had to coat them with honey – I was just that way, and if I take satisfaction in saying so, it's because such a detail reminds me of the fact that, once upon a time I was Cuban. (36)

Early in his memoir, Hijuelos' narrative is interrupted by an incident that resulted to the fixation of his childhood trauma which, borrowing from Freud (1893), amounted to the meaning of his obsessive act (139)<sup>19</sup>. As described by Hijuelos, at the age of five while visiting his family in Cuba with his mother and older brother, the writer contracted nephritis, a virus that in those days inflicted a serious, life-threatening risk in children (45). Upon their forced return to the United States, and following doctors' advice, Hijuelos was immediately separated from his mother and loved ones while hospitalized in English-speaking institutions for a one-year period of time (46).

As recalled by the author, in a brief six-month-span, he replaced his mother tongue with that of the English language. The most striking aspect of his linguistic occurrence is that the sudden acquisition of the host symbolic system was concurrent with the immediate loss, in social function, of his primary language:

The partition between my mother and me became the story of our lives, I had absorbed English from the nurses, doctors, and children of my acquaintance with some kind of desperate ease. English in, Spanish out, or at least deeply submerged inside me – from my childhood onward, I have long complicated dreams in which only Spanish is spoken. (8)

Knowing that generally “everything that takes place in the life of the psyche survives” (Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* 7-8), we may suppose that Spanish, the language that enabled his ego development and became intimately linked with his affective prototype, was the one lived symbolic code that remained etched within his

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<sup>19</sup> As explained by Freud and published by Phillips (c2006) in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle”, individuals who become victims of distressing events demonstrate a fixation to the moment of the traumatic occurrence. Being unable to release themselves from the moment of the traumatic experience makes them feel constantly alienated from their present and from their future. These subjects may produce the traumatic situation in their dreams and/or may have the need to repeatedly describe their traumatic obsession in hopes of understanding and/or releasing themselves from their trauma (139).

unconscious, regardless of Hijuelos' conscious memory. Under this assumption and concurrent with this dissertation's previous chapter, we understand the logic behind the later part of Hijuelos' quote in which he explains that Spanish, repressed as it may be, is the symbolic code that often becomes exposed in his "long complicated dreams". Even though English became the most prominent tongue of social function, Spanish was the language that remained within the complexity of his unconscious, entangled with his affective prototype as part of a 'confounding dream'.

At the conscious level, nonetheless, Hijuelos reasons that the act of becoming emotionally and linguistically distanced from this primary tongue stemmed from having become ill in Cuba:

For a long time all I would know was that I had gotten sick in Cuba, from Cuban *microbios*, that the illness had blossomed in the land of my forebears, the country where I had once been loved and whose language fell as music to my ears ... what I would hear for years afterward from my mother was that something Cuban had nearly killed me and, in the process of my healing, would turn my own "Cubanness" into air. (45)

When exposed to a traumatic experience, trying to find a reason and a projected blame for the presumably unfair experience is a natural occurrence. As a child, Hijuelos attributed his sickness, physical weakness and life-long restrictions to his early trip and by extension, to its hosting country, language and culture. Nonetheless, knowing that "all forms of mentation occur in concurrence to one another" (Akhtar 2009, 220), we cannot overlook the unconscious underpinnings to his linguistic attrition and cultural distancing. What becomes most meaningful to this chapter's discussion is that Hijuelos'



incident offers a glimpse into what occurs when a basic human need and its essence are interrupted at a young age.

For Hijuelos, the interruption of his mother's love, along with the cessation of the Spanish tongue created an emotional rupture that had long lasting consequences. Since the interruption of the emotional nourishment he likely enjoyed occurred when he was only five years of age, he was –most likely- too young to conceptualize his circumstances, and the pain inflicted by his mother's involuntary absence. The response to his linguistic and emotional trauma was not only manifested through the celerity in which Hijuelos replaced Spanish with the English language, but also in the manner in which the loss in socio-emotive function of his primary tongue coincided with the act of emotionally drifting apart from his mother:

Of course, she was my mother, I knew that – she kept telling me so – “*¡Soy tu mamá!*” But she also seemed a stranger, and all the more so whenever she started to speak Spanish, a language which, as time went by, sounded familiar and oddly strange to me...I remember nodding at her words; I remember understanding my mother when she said... *¿Sabes que eres mi hijo?* (“Do you know you are my son?”). (6)

There is much we can extract from this critical occurrence, but let us begin by returning to Klein (1975) and to my earlier assumptions by stating, once again, that the feelings one has towards one's first object of affection become transferred onto the language she or he speaks, onto the system of meanings that links us verbally and emotionally to our primary caregivers. As a five-year-old child, immersed within a foreign language, Hijuelos could not have understood the reason for his mother's

absence. It is not unreasonable to assume that he was afraid, lost, lonely and that he felt angry at his mother for seemingly abandoning him. Grounded in these circumstances I suggest that the confounding emotions he experienced towards his mother were transferred onto his feelings and sense of worth he experienced towards Spanish. His Spanish language became part of a complicated dream, one that relates to his emotional life and earliest moments, to his need for love, nourishment and paradoxically to his earliest anxieties and times of anger, confusion and hate.

Yet as I try to grasp Hijuelos' response to his trauma, we can also revisit the previously discussed idea of language as part of the transitional phenomenon and consider that his mother's absence exposes a developmental relevance to Winnicott's theory. An aspect of Winnicott's (c2005) theory that is of most relevance to Hijuelos' descriptions is that a transitional object, the one that helps the infant transition from dependence to independence and thus to develop as a subject, can only be employed when the internal object, the magically introjected breast- is alive, real and not too persecutory (13,19), after the 'good enough mother' provided the infant with enough opportunity for illusion and, later, gradual disillusionment (15,17). According to Winnicott, if the mother's efforts fail to meet the needs of the child and thus, the external object's behaviour, or the mother, is inadequate, then the internal object fails to have meaning to the infant, which results in the meaninglessness of the transitional object as well (13).

This theory discloses the difficulty perceived by subjects who experienced a sense of emotional discontinuity during their foundational stages of development. It speaks of the challenges undergone by those who have been raised by a caregiver or

by caregivers who, for a number of possible reasons, were incapable of providing a good enough environment that nourished a healthy developmental growth. Winnicott exposes the possible consequences of such deviance by providing two key examples. He begins by noting the case of an older brother who was difficult to wean, had not been able to become attached to a transitional object and was fully dependent on his mother's presence and corresponding affection. Winnicott explains that as an adult, this subject appears to have no significant emotional attachment with anyone other than his mother. Consequent to this isolating attachment, this individual moved apart from his mother by finding employment away from his hometown (9-10).

Winnicott supports his theory regarding the significance of the transitional object by also offering –in more detail- the case of a woman who as a child was separated for an extensive period of time from her mother. According to Winnicott, this separation left her with a sense of internal disconnection. With the use of vignettes Winnicott highlights that the issue that haunted the patient throughout her young and adult life was the feeling that developed from her mother's absence. The emotional dislocation from her past haunted her in dreams and day-to-day perceptions. It led her to feel that the only thing real was the consistency of her nostalgia, the ongoing sense of absence, or amnesia (30, 32).

Both of these case studies provided by Winnicott support a theory grounded in the long-term implications of either a) not being efficiently weaned, and/or b) not having the opportunity for illusionment. As described with case studies, for the child not having had the opportunity for illusionment and disillusionment renders a first possession developmentally meaningless and thus unfit to aid in the child's necessary transition into

becoming a healthy subject. As a result subjects eventually feel that their personality is not well integrated: they sense that “something is wrong” and tend to be unhappy with themselves. As described by Winnicott, such developmental deviation inevitably trickles onto the subjects’ self-other relations (89-90) and correspondingly into their interactions within their third space.

Now returning to Hijuelos’ memoir, even though Winnicott’s assertions are grounded on infantile developments, they may nonetheless be, at least in part, applicable to Hijuelos’ childhood experience. Similar to Winnicott’s female patient, for Hijuelos, having an external object absent and felt as non-nurturing may have made the internal object lose its developmental relevance, which, consistent with Winnicott, rendered the transitional object, or Hijuelos’ possession of the Spanish language, as socially and intrinsically unfitting and, borrowing from Winnicott, meaningless.

### **Identifying Dislocations in the Developmental (Dis)Continuum of an Early Migrants’ Language and Subjectivity**

Reading Hijuelos’ memoir allows me to conceptualize the manner in which this writer’s childhood trauma has infringed upon his realities, upon the relations he holds with others, the way in which he senses a dislocation within his personality and even upon the manner in which he conceives to be perceived by others, as seen in the proceeding quote when referring to his mother and father:

...when it came to something as important as restoring that which was taken from me, a sense of just who I was, I doubt that, as with my mother, it occurred to him [his father] that something inside of me was missing, an element of personality in need of repair. (67)

Similar to Winnicott's patient, Hijuelos is dissatisfied with himself and senses that a part of him is "in need of repair". By having had a linguistic disruption at a young age, the author perceives an inner void, which, as I will discuss further in the section "Interpreting the Unconscious Through Personal Narratives", impacts his ongoing socio-emotional realities.

Hijuelos' text exposes subjective experiences that complement our theories on language by highlighting their relevance with the ego's socio-emotional and cognitive developments. In my own case, as a subject who has experienced migration and the sense of being in-between languages from an early age, I understand that the way we sound, and not just what we say, influences the manner in which we are perceived by those who surround us, and thus on how such perception influences the way in which we understand our own projected selves in relation to others. This is an aspect of our speech that is clearly stated in Hijuelos' text when he recounts his feelings towards his mother and her 'broken' English (74). A related aspect of this writer's narrative -- an aspect that brings me back to my own experiences as a translingual subject-- is that the author's early perception of his parents' speech affected, by way of relation, his own self-perception:

I lived in dread of being called on, and lacking self-confidence, I always felt that I had to play catch-up when it came to reading and writing, over which I agonized, all the while thinking that I was not very smart. And not just because I was often too distracted by my own anxieties to concentrate well, but out of some sense that my mother and father's limitations, when it came to English, had become my own: Just attempting to read --anything really- I'd feel as if I had to swim a long

distance through murky water to fathom the meaning, and, at the same time, though I eventually improved, shell-shocked though I was, I always had the sense that the language was verboten to me...No matter how hard I tried, or how well I did on the tests, I secretly believed that my mind was essentially second-rate- all the other kids just seemed brighter than me. (75)

What makes this passage thought provoking is that it serves as an example of how for Hijuelos, his parents' peripheral or marginal linguistic membership assumed a social weight on him as a child, on his self-perceptions, own awareness, feelings and imagined aptness within the host language. We may suggest that since our primary identification as children tends to be intimately connected to our parents or primary caregivers, at least until we develop our own set of conscious histories and experiences as separate subjects, we may reflect their image onto ourselves. For Hijuelos, perceiving his parents' apparent ineptness with the dominant tongue and within the host community, made him internalize, as a child, such view onto himself.

Understanding that language aids in encoding, processing, retrieving and expressing information, we can also say that Hijuelos' sense of difference, during his early school years, also rests in his initial lack of exposure to the English language. Following his one-year-long hospitalization, Hijuelos describes being homeschooled for a year, by his non-English speaking mother (73). Concurrent with his homeschooling, his poor health condition limited his outdoor playtime with English speaking children: "I felt, from the start with my mother by my side, tremendously self-conscious and uncomfortable, not just because I've been apart from other children for so long, but because of the way I'd come to believe that something is wrong with me" (74). As

described by the author, when he was finally registered in grade one he felt othered. Not having the linguistic tools that enabled critical learning, moreover, made him feel academically challenged during his primary years.

While returning to the topic of language and identification, we cannot disregard the authority that stems from the dominant culture and how, in Hijuelos' case, it may have infringed upon his subjectivity: "...in New York...there were always people to stare resentfully if they overheard someone speaking Spanish on the street..."(26). Once at school, this child began to see the world and himself through the dominant culture that surrounded him. The internalization of authority -of the attitudes and beliefs that become part of his superego- becomes evident through his writing, in the ways in which he disapproves of his mother's linguistic struggles, for example, and even in the manner in which he attempted to break away from his parents and their culture:

My idols ... were those icons of the British Invasion, from the Beatles to the Rolling Stones... Since I really had little identity of my own – except as this “son of *cubanos*’ - who had once been sick and didn't identify with Latin culture in general, for when I heard Spanish songs, they always sounded passé and locked in some perpetual, unchanging past, and I didn't even consider my Spanish anything I should try to improve upon- I spent those (teenage) years trying to become anything else but what I should have been, Oscar Hijuelos. (155)

As a migrant, he viewed the host culture as a desired goal even if, at least in its entirety, it was never an all-embracing culture that he genuinely considered his own. Another example of the narrator's desire to be and sound North American is provided when he

expresses his longing to belong and, correspondingly, to have a name that does not disclose his Spanish origins:

I recall feeling envious over a cowboy's name Rawhide...Years later, when I first thought I might publish somewhere, I seriously considered adopting the nom du plum Oliver Wells, and to jump even farther ahead, during the kind of journey I could never have imagined as a child, I signed my name on the guest registry of the archeological museum Ankara, Turkey, as Alexander Nevsky, the kind of thing I'd do from time to time.

(76-77)

Hijuelos' actual name rooted his image and corresponding foreign reality. It reflected a language that "grounded his social existence" (Bohórquez 2008, 49), an existence that he, as a young subject, openly rejected. The memoir provides instances in which dominant attitudes are internalized by the writing subject, and projected in the form of embarrassment towards his parents, his roots and the Spanish tongue.

I mentioned during the defense of my oral comprehensive exam that I believed that this writer's dissociation with the Spanish language is evident through his poor use of grammar. Whether Hijuelos' grammatical mistakes reflect, as explained by Britzman, his life-long personal troubles or, as suggested by Alice Pitt, depict a combination of linguistic attrition and cessation in language learning, his poor use of grammar hints at a subjective relation he holds with his mother tongue. Considering that Spanish is a language he understood but barely spoke as an adult and knowing that Hijuelos was in a position of finding a Spanish-speaking editor for his memoir and yet refused to do so, it makes sense to assume that by means of this 'personal' use of language Hijuelos



expresses a developmental detachment with his primary language and a conforming attachment to the English tongue often claimed as his own.

As a translingual subject living within the space created between languages, it is impossible to study Hijuelos' relation with his symbolic codes without contrasting his descriptions with my own experiences. My focus on Hijuelos' Spanish grammar is not limited to my work as a Spanish language educator. In fact, my attention to his Spanish utterances relates to my own fixation with the correctness of others' Spanish; it points to an obsession that, paraphrasing from Britzman, is implicated in an innermost desire to "put language right". I find it fitting to add that we often respond differently to that which makes us anxious. In retrospect, unlike Hijuelos, who comfortably allows himself to make mistakes within a language he seems to openly reject, I sternly project my primary language's authority with the grammatical prescriptions I introjected as a child. Such projection signals a possible attempt to tame the deep seeded insecurities that emanate from my history within my own emotional trauma: a history that resulted in a linguistic laceration and in the inbetweenness I sense within my two most dominant languages.

### **Interpreting the Unconscious through the Act of Reading**

As discussed in the first chapter of my current work, an interesting aspect of our language is that, as once mentioned in passing by Britzman (2011), it "describes while embodying a process" that accounts for the juxtaposition of the inner self with the social. Through the study and application of theory, we learn that language is embedded in desire and such desire accounts for our actions, our attitudes and behaviours, which shape and reshape us as split and highly complex subjects. An important aspect of Hijuelos' narrative is that by means of his accounts, we are able to trace language's

influence on this writing subject. With this writer's descriptions we appreciate language as a process that embeds itself in the subject's affective history while exposing unconscious mechanisms that slip through the use of his own words.

Beginning with transference, with a careful reading of Hijuelos' memoir and while focusing on the writer's relationship with his parents, we can deduce that Hijuelos has transferred the affection he felt towards his first love-object –his loving, yet perceptually absent mother- to his father who, regardless of narrated idealizations, is repeatedly described as an absent figure:

I can only recall his kindness...I got so attached to him that I came to re-write my history in the hospital...Fabricating his presence in memory ...(66) ...I just found something comforting about him, even if I would never get to know what he was really about. (67)

Instances of his father's absence are narrated throughout the beginning and middle of his text. On that same page, moreover, this writer states that his father "never taught me anything at all" (67). Later, knowing that the author's illness inflicted a lifetime of physical examinations, he mentions that unlike his mother, his father "never once accompanied me to the doctor's..."(77).

His father's distance was inevitably heightened –by way of response- when the writer was a teenager. This becomes evident when Hijuelos recounts their last exchange:

A month or so short of my eighteenth birthday, I was so self-involved that on the day I left for Miami, and my father, sitting on our stoop, wanted to embrace me just before I got a lift down to Penn Station in a neighbor's car, I sort of flinched

and waved him off...feeling slightly put-upon seeing him smiling –perhaps sadly- at me as he settled on that stoop again and reached for a cigarette. I can recall wondering if I'd been a little cold...Of course now I wish I'd been more receptive to him in those moments, but the truth is, I didn't know it would be the last time I'd see him alive.... (167)

His father's identity was linked to being Spanish and Latin: "he possessed an abundance of down-home Cuban warmth" (66). Prior to his father's death, Spanish was linked to an inner subjective element and a language with which the author could not connect, process or incorporate as his own: "...I simply tuned out... when it came to Spanish, some busy emotions in my head preventing, as it were, my momentary concentration" (151). As explained by Hijuelos, it was part of a language and culture that when he was a child, a teenager and later, a young adult, was not perceived as his own:

One of those what-on-earth-are-you-doing-with-your-life evenings. I was in the kind of mood where just to hear *español* spoken on the street irritated me...(So maybe I was a white motherfucker after all)....(293)

In his memoir Oscar Hijuelos makes repeated reference to his light skin and thus to his apparent distinction from the stereotypical Hispanic looks. Time and again he describes feeling disconnected with the language and culture that perceptually made him visually and linguistically feel as an outsider. Yet there is perhaps more to this quote than what readers may perceive in passing. With Hijuelos, understanding the Oedipus relation, in contrast with the sense of abandonment, of the anger and disconnect he experienced while hospitalized as a child, brings me to highlight how the extent to which his words,

specifically his use of the term 'motherfucker', depict the mixed feelings he experiences towards his mother and, by extension, towards her Spanish language and culture. In other words, the bracketed sentence offers yet another instance of how our feelings towards and comfort within a language and its corresponding culture relate to the disclosed and hidden emotions we feel towards those who speak and therefore represent it.

Hijuelos' memoir offers behaviours that seem shaped and defined by life changes. An event that is of much interest to my study relates to the writer's attitudinal change towards the Spanish language and culture following his father's death. As Hijuelos layers his present emotions and assumptions into the memory of his past, we notice that Pascual's irreversible absence becomes a pivoting point in Hijuelos' career and his desire to learn about his migrant culture. Grounded in the theory presented in our previous chapter, we may suggest that such change can be linked to both Felman's and Winnicott's assumptions. Beginning with Felman (1987), the relationship between his father and his language and culture brings us back to the discussion of the 'symbolic' and thus the relationship between the father, language and law, formed from cultural introjections. Since, according to Lacan, the individual is initiated through language by means of the father's first no, aside from linking his primary language to his first object of affection, language and its development and inner value also becomes attached to the father within the authority that engulfs the reality of the Oedipus structure.

Similar to Winnicott's (2005) female patient, the only thing real for this writer may be the gap, the irreducible void, the emptiness and absentness that echoes his

childhood and adolescent experiences. With Hijuelos' descriptions we observe a paradox in the way in which his father's emotional presence, the author's idealizations when describing his father Pascual, and his connection with him only began after Pascual's death: " I felt my father's presence all around me...I felt his absence ... anything I wrote eventually, however veiled, in some mystical way led back to my pop ...I was haunted by his memory...." (264). Based on such quote, I propose that the author's reconnection with his roots is linked to his seemingly forgotten past, one that engulfs him while exposing his history.

His father's presence after his death, moreover, impacted the writing and title of Hijuelos' memoir. In most accounts narrated about his father Pascual, the writer makes mention of Pascual's smoking. Although the writer also describes himself as a smoker, it is through references to his father that we could deduce that in the memoir's title, *Thoughts without Cigarettes*, cigarettes are an irreducible metaphor that represents his father.

The void created by his father's death coincided with the author's reconnection with his Latino culture and heritage language. Following Pascual's death, the author begins to feel attached to his Cuban identity, he experiences a newfound interest in Hispanic music and begins to find meanings in the literature produced by Latin-American writers that preceded him:

I read everything I could get my hands on, without any overriding design, a kind of madness – or book lust- coming over me...I dove more deeply into the sea of Latin American letters and found those waters increasingly warm. (219)

Concurrently, under the guidance of his professor Bathelme, Hijuelos finds transference through his writing: "I began wanting to write more and more about Cuba. It simply possessed me. Reawakened memories..." (219). Also relevant to our discussion, during this time, Hijuelos writes his first immigrant novel, which reflects his father's life experiences:

...my novel, *The Mambo Kings*, was my way of...holding a conversation with him, though he had long since been dead. His spirit, for better or for worse, in its kindness and gentleness, in its melancholy and, alternately, exuberance, his love for life, fear of death, his passions and vices –down to the thousand drinks he had consumed and cigarettes he smoked were all transformed, in that book. Or to put it differently, he was alive again, if only as a momentary illusion.... (367)

Aside from the transference that influences his relationship with his deceased father, when describing both of his parents, there seems to be evidence of idealizations and possibly of splitting. However, before pointing at such mechanisms and looking into the manner in which these shape the writer's discourse, I must turn our attention, once again, to Melanie Klein's theory for a deeper understanding of Hijuelos' text.

Klein (1975) explains that an infant's existence is governed by anxieties, phantasies and defenses that initiate and influence primary and later object-relations (48-54). From the onset of postnatal life, anxieties and a split between hate and love, hunger and gratitude governs infants' feelings (49). During the first three to four months of life the child experiences persecutory anxieties<sup>20</sup>. He or she develops a relation with

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<sup>20</sup> Klein (1975) asserts that following the experience of birth the death instinct works against the organism and gives rise to fear of annihilation (48). This fear of annihilation becomes heightened when the child fears retaliation from the impulses and feelings experienced during the first quarter of the first year of a child's life (49).

aspects of his or her mother's breast. The breast is perceived as good when it satiates the infants' hunger and is perceived to be bad when the child feels hungry.

Klein (1964) also explains that while hungry and the child's anger and hate erupt, he or she projects onto the bad breast feelings that, in phantasy, are destructive. Such negative feelings dissipate when the infant's primary needs are satiated through feeding. While being fed he or she takes in, or introjects, the –good- loving breast (58-59). However, after being nourished and feeling loved the infant is overcome by guilt and fears retaliation from the bad breast. As a defense against that 'retaliative' bad breast, the infant turns the good object -breast- into an ideal one as a protection against what is perceived to be a dangerous and persecuting object. As Klein proposes, these processes of splitting and idealization that stem from the very early stage of persecutory anxiety, influence object relations (49).

For Hijuelos, this splitting between good and bad, desirable and undesirable is seen throughout the text. Specifically, it is legible in how he perceives his parents on the basis of their language. Through retrospective manoeuvres of memory, the author often recalls his father's charm, while highlighting his ability to speak English and learn other languages: "...well liked and affable, working around not only other Cubans like himself but immigrants from Italy, Greece, and Poland (whose languages he began to absorb)". (26)

At times, however, the author has the opposing sentiment concerning his mother whose English he openly criticizes:

I can only recall his kindness [the author's father's], and with the bias I eventually developed toward my mother because of language, I got so attached to him that I

came to re-write my history in the hospital...Fabricating his presence in memory ... (66) ...He'd speak to me in English, not always, but when he did, it was with a quiet authority and without my mother's befuddlement and confusion.... (67)

Aside from transferences, idealizations and splitting, the writer's unconscious is also brought to the surface through the description of a hallucination and of one of his most prominent dreams. Following the death of his father and after obsessing with his ghostly presence:

At night, I'd worry about falling asleep and seeing his ghost. ..I'd...awaken, my heart beating wildly, from an impression that my pop was just outside in the hall waiting for me, as if he wanted to take me with him. One night I walked into the darkness of the living room, where I saw my father, or the shadow of him: he spoke to me, in Spanish, of course, saying: *Soy ciego* – "I'm blind". And then he said: "*Por favor, abra la luz*" –Please turn on the light. When I did, he told me "Thank you" and simultaneously vanished. I swear this happened, dream or not, that's what I heard....(265)

Since hallucinations, according to Winnicott (2005), are dream material (31), I will treat this scene as a dream by applying Freudian theory to a possible interpretation. The author's acknowledgement that his father never took much time to connect with, and pay much attention to him, brings me to link the father's blindness to the son's conscious and unconscious interpretation of his father's unawareness of, or blindness.

In addition, in Hijuelos' narrative we can discern condensations stemming from traces of the ongoing guilt and obsessions that haunt him in his waking hours. The



stress that erupted from him writing about his father and becoming emotionally consumed over his memory had expressed itself in his somatic reactions:

In my self-mortifying Catholicism, I eventually came down with the worst case of eczema...My arms, chest, back, and neck were raw and dry; high-strung and feeling guilty, I lived with a *picazón* –an itching- that drove me crazy and intensified every time I'd sit down to write. (266)

As described by Hijuelos, his bodily reaction to such stress, however, subsided after having a pleasant dream that involved his father and the act of forgiveness:

Walking in a meadow, maybe in a place like Cuba, in the distance I beheld a river, and in the river there stood a man. As I approached, I could see it was my pop, Pascual, awaiting me. There he told me, shaking his head: –“Por que te moritifiques?” – “Why are you torturing yourself so?” And with the kindest of expressions on his face, he, reaching into that water...washed over my arms, my face, my back... I do remember feeling a sense of relief, and, though a dream it may have been, in the morning when I awakened, my skin had cleared of its soreness. (266)

This dream depicts the writer's desire for reparation. As mentioned, his distance from his father, specifically during the last awkward moments they spent together -when Hijuelos was leaving for Miami- and his father attempted to embrace him, combined with their ongoing emotional distance, retrospectively triggered pain and guilt. Thus in his dream we see the true meaning of wish-fulfillment<sup>21</sup>, especially since the author, by way of his dream, felt absolved and cleansed by both the water and his father's loving arms.

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<sup>21</sup> This is a concept described by Freud in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” when he explains the nature of –non-accident-induced-dreams- are to “conjure up pictures [imagined and unimagined events/memories]

Another significant aspect that takes us into the unconscious relates to Hijuelos' repetition of the event of his trauma. When relating to others, the writer's emotional disconnection is palpable, for example, when he downplays the experiences and memory that led to his failed marriage: "...I finally did get married to my girlfriend of some three years, Carol, think it was 1975...." (225). The details of their marriage are barely narrated. Pages after focusing on his unsuccessful attempts to find himself as a writer he resurrects his former wife, Carol, by disclosing the eventual end of their relationship.

Not having been tuned to her concerns, Hijuelos describes feeling shocked one evening when, after returning home from work, he found that his wife had emptied their apartment of her possessions. He then explains that her reason for leaving him, her logic, was written in a note she posted on the fridge. Aside from her apology, nevertheless, the content and emotional relevance of her letter is never shared, even minimally, with his readers (247-248). Moreover, in his memoir, the apparent relevance of such disclosure –the ending of his marriage- does not seem to rest for the writer upon its emotional worth. Instead, it appears to relate to the manner in which such occurrence incited Hijuelos to continue with his writing and eventually, to flourish as a novelist:

Oddly enough, suddenly freed up, after an increasingly fallow period of writing, and without much of anything better to do with myself, and after hearing for so long the opinion that the last thing in the world I could ever be was a writer, I started finding my feet in that regard again (248).

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from the time when the patient was healthy, or else pictures of the return of health that is hoped for in the future" (139).

Another indicator of his ongoing emotional disconnection is clear towards the end of his memoir when he mentions, in passing, that he was emotionally involved with a female friend. It is essential to note that while reminiscing about his emotional affairs all acknowledged attachments are mentioned by name. This, however, is not the case when he acknowledges his most recent girlfriend, who, within the text, remains nameless. The significance of such oversight brings us once again back to Winnicott's theory and the case of his female patient. Grounded in Winnicott's thoughts, I find it commonsensical to suggest that her presence in Hijuelos' life would only become tangibly restored through the passing construction of a layered memory, by means of the possible absence incurred by a conceivable breakup. In other words, her presence, just as that of his father, will only be felt real and thus noteworthy of recognition following the event of a sensed absence.

As for language, Hijuelos' response to his mother tongue parallels that to his father and his past emotional partners. As described by this author, growing apart from his primary tongue increased his attrition rate and, over time, his ability to sound and feel Spanish. Yet regardless of such disconnection, during his adult years his Spanish became noteworthy of regard; it became 'his' only after he experienced its sensed loss. Such occurrence supports one of my initial arguments founded on the manner in which subjects' relationship to their primary tongue interrelates with their foundational history of affect, tied to loss of love. This writer's response to the Spanish language supports my discussion of language as a transitional object, as one that, in this particular case, could only be sensed as real following its apparent absence. For this late writer, his history became a list of repetitions initiated by the absence of his mother and followed

by that of his father and primary language. As seen in his memoir published only two years before Hijuelos' own sudden death, except for his living mother, his loved ones were not openly acknowledged unless there was an interruption or cessation of their physical presence.

Returning to my focus on language, this writer's unknown affective attachment to Spanish is exposed –at least to the reader- when he describes being in Rome and falling in love with the Italian language:

...the bel canto of the Italian language itself, which for some reason I felt far more at ease navigating than even my ancestral espanol. In fact, I'd use the Spanish I more or less improved upon during my recent travels to help me get along with Italians (down in Naples, the Italian almost sounds like Castilian sometimes).

They understood me completely, and, because I had no emotional turf to defend, I eventually flourished. (300)

Similar to Elias Canetti's feelings when taken back by the sounds of the Slavic tongue (cited by Heller-Roazen 2005, 174-175), for Hijuelos, Italian represented the 'echo' of his primary language. It became the language that awoke his affect by unknowingly bringing back the warmth and love he experienced as an infant. Since, this romance tongue was 'not' directly linked to his childhood trauma, the author, without "having an emotional turf to defend" was allowed to become engulfed by its words and sounds which together unearthed the emotions that could only stem from a language that resembled his very own.

## **Conclusion**

For those of us who have experienced linguistic disruptions, in an attempt to conceptualize its inner meaning and its tie to our subjectivity, we often try to understand the depths of our perceptions, attitudes and behaviours within language(s) through the use of our, and often most prominently, lived symbolic code. Some of us turn to theories in search for meaning, while others write autobiographical testimonies in an attempt to symbolize experiences and thus integrate the internal and external “I” that will always exist within language (Derrida 1996, 28-29). Conceptualizing our inner need to grasp our experiences is key to the understanding of Hijuelos’ symbolic motive. It is also important, I suppose, to the meaning of my own choice of study, a choice that inevitably leads to the sharing of a not so recent memorable event and its corresponding afterthought. It takes me back to my second year as a PhD student, when my supervisor asked me why we obsess with our beginnings? Such question left me thinking and later reminded me of a statement taken from Friedrich Nietzsche (c1980)... that “the tree is always in love with its roots” (20).

Of course there is much we can extract from this decontextualized metaphor. I will nevertheless take the liberty of linking it to this chapter and of focusing my discussion on the following consideration: Since love often leads to a range of obsessions, perhaps out of our need for love, we obsess with our beginnings: with the way our parents were and may still be, with the manner in which we relate and related to them and with the conscious and unconscious feelings that resulted from the early and even later tensions that stemmed from their authority. This well-known obsession, which forms the base of psychoanalytic discourse, rests in our human need and innermost desire to understand our inner and social self.

Hence, we often try to learn and to recognize the buried drives that form and impact our attitudes, inhibitions and our overall actions: the hidden forces that shape the enigmatic subjects we are today. We strive to understand our feelings and decisions, along with our behaviours and socio-emotional relationships, simply because these aspects of our lives define our existence and our place within our shared world: a world that changes while often remaining the same, a shared and personal world that is mostly mediated, understood, misunderstood and always felt through and within the use of our inescapable language.

As I demonstrated in the analysis of Hijuelos' memoir, this endless search offers within its description a process that takes us directly and indirectly to our affective histories, histories that develop from within, and are understood through, this paradoxical phenomenon we call language. In this chapter I have established how the feelings one experiences towards the first object becomes incorporated as part of the ego's affective prototype and how such emotions become transferred onto subjects' preceding relationships. I discussed the importance of a primary language and how, along with, or aside from, the first object it also becomes part of subjects' affect, by posing as "a representation of a representation"(Winnicott 2005, 54; Derrida 1982, 312).

Hijuelos response to his two prominent languages is presented directly and indirectly in his text. By reading his memoir we learned that throughout his life he was torn between the tug of his primary language, which represented the language of his parents and of his childhood trauma, and that of the English language, the tongue that became linked to introjections from the host culture. Yet, regardless of the conscious and social significance of his claimed English tongue, Spanish, the language he

attributes to migrants, the tongue that became almost forgotten and socially downgraded during his many years in the United States, is still the language that engulfs his affective history. It is the tongue that represents his infancy, and thus his early moments of nurturance, love and dependence. Equally important, it is the language that preceded, while paradoxically becoming part of the 'meaning of his obsessive act'.

Discussions provided in my past two chapters lead to the analysis of Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation* and thus to the examination of the concept of migration and trauma. The next chapter asks, what does it mean to speak the language of the other, and 'inhabit' the other through the use of a first and/or second language? How may Winnicott's notion of benign trauma apply to migration and language? And how does the understanding of matricide define the immigrant's social and language-related experiences?

**CHAPTER IV: A PSYCHOANALYTIC LOOK INTO THE EFFECTS OF CHILDHOOD  
AND ADOLESCENT MIGRATION IN EVA HOFFMAN'S *LOST IN TRANSLATION***

I cannot walk through the suburbs in the solitude of the night without thinking that the night pleases us because it suppresses idle details, just like our memory does...I cannot lament the loss of a love or a friendship without meditating that one loses only what one *has* never had...

-Jorge Luis Borges, "A Refutation of Time"

When reading language related accounts written by migrants, I am often left with the assumption that no matter how different symbolic codes may be, or how dissimilar circumstances that infringe upon each subject and language are, within varying perceptual degrees, all lived symbolic codes are universal in their dichotomized effects upon their users. As observed in our previous chapter through the analysis of Oscar Hijuelos' memoir, language has both the intrinsic ability to release a sense of liberation (Hijuelos 2011, 367), and expose an inexplicable trace of otherness within the self.

In a round-table discussion published in *The Ear of the Other*, Claude Lévesque addresses Jacques Derrida (1985) when describing his attachment to Quebecois, his primary tongue, as one that is impossible to appropriate. By reading the claims posed by this speaker, one can deduce that his connection with his mother tongue is affected by the gap that exists between the ideal and real perceptions he holds with regards to a primary language. Lévesque begins to construct his argument by giving voice to projected idealizations and corresponding beliefs. According to this speaker, a mother tongue should represent:

...a dream of fusion with the mother, with a tongue that is like the mother, that is nearest at hand, nourishing, and reassuring. It is a dream to be at last joined in



body with the mother tongue, to recognize himself in her who would recognize him, with the transparency, spontaneity, and truth of origins, without any risk, contamination, or domination. (143)

This speaker describes his libidinized conception of a primary language as the object that should evoke the wholeness, safety and nurturance of a caring mother. We may suggest that through this illustration Lévesque offers a model of a mother tongue, which, as asserted by Akhtar (1995), “is a link to the earliest maternal imago” (1069). Even though we understand that a primary tongue is an element that traces back to our origins, to our early beginnings and thus to times of dependency, need for love and fear of loss, we notice that Lévesque’s dream of being as one with a highly romanticized object, creates a tension. For this speaker, the fantasized image of his mother tongue leads to a dichotomy or splitting that takes his claim to opposing grounds: from the comfort of love, reassurance, recognition and belonging, and to the clash of disappointment and alienation.

In his address Lévesque speaks to the incompatibility that exists between a desired image and the politics that shapes his colonized mother tongue. According to this speaker, in actuality, Quebecois is a tongue that is felt as “incomplete”, as a “translation language”, as a symbolic code that is “not purely French”, “an irreducible other” (143). What matters most to this chapter’s discussion is that through a discourse that describes the particularities that embrace his tongue, this speaker taps into a universal aspect of language by addressing a singularity that informs all speech, regardless of socio-political and/or personal circumstances. Lévesque epitomizes the perception of a natural, and yet impossible illusion and an ongoing human need that

together give way to a sensed otherness. The incompatibility of his idealizations, inevitably yield to perceptions of incompleteness and inner estrangement, to insights that knowingly and/or unknowingly dwell within all tongues.

While chapter two accounts for the relation between language and the unconscious, one may suggest that Lévesque's utterance, at least in part, embodies the anxieties that stem from an unfulfilled, deep-rooted desire. Lévesque both addresses and testifies to an emotion that can be easily annexed to what Freud (2002) called an "oceanic feeling": "a feeling of something limitless, unbounded...a purely subjective fact...a feeling ...of being indissolubly bond up with and belonging to a world outside of oneself" (3-4). The oceanic feeling is a perception that Freud linked to religion and to subjects' universal need to belong, to feel protected and loved. It appears that Lévesque's words pronounce this very dream; they express an inner need that rests within the illusion of being adjoined to a transitional language that relates to, while signifying, a libidinal world that is part and yet outside of the self.

In view of Lévesque's argument, Derrida replies by stating that although the Quebecois language's political circumstance is singular,

...not one of us is like a fish in water in the language he or she is speaking...it would be amusing to analyze the complexity, the internal translation to which our bodies are continuously submitting here, at this moment. (146)

In his response Derrida refers to the otherness that erupts through our use of language and through the hopeless attempts to translate and therefore make sense of the poorly understood feelings that become symbolized and entrenched within the essence of a

symbolic code. Through his brief response, Derrida highlights the conscious limitations of language and the inner estrangement that taints while highlighting speakers' irreducible perceptions. He denotes an impossible attempt to translate by signifying that language is marked by misrecognized anxieties, masked and unmasked desires, conflicts, defenses, imprints and, correspondingly, repetitions.

As seen with Lévesque and Derrida, the otherness that rises through language often gestures to a sense of strangeness within the self, to an inescapable feeling that erupts through subjects' "distinctive accents" (Bakhtin 1981, 5), such a feeling may come to the conscious surface by means of words and symbolizations that are carried through a lived tongue and, in agreement with Felman (1987), born from within a poorly understood unconscious (105). What becomes, in my opinion, puzzling about such a perceptual definition of language is its sharp contrast to many migrants' memories of their primary tongue. If language uproots while exposing the otherness within the self, why do migrants' memory of their primary language offer its subjects a returned sense of wholeness? Why do individuals experience melancholia from a primary language's instrumental loss? Why may a sense of guilt rise in place of its replacement? Finally, how can the memory of a primary tongue, of a language that can no longer offer its speaker a subject position within the wider, host speaking community, shed light on an immigrant's post-traumatic reality?

I have argued in previous chapters that language dwells within and becomes ingrained as an intricate part of subjects' conscious and unconscious realities. Migrants' descriptions of their affective relation to their primary and even second languages, as well as their corresponding linguistic proficiencies, may thus be best elucidated through

an analysis of the perceived, personal changes that result from immersions within a host-foreign language and culture. Accordingly, through the analysis of Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* this chapter looks into the ways in which the psychological becomes integrated with language learning. I study the way in which the shock, crises, defenses and overall dilemmas associated with early migrations become part of subjects' transformational experiences within –and outside of- language.

### **Analyzing Salient Socio-Linguistic Patterns within Monolingual Newcomers in Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation***

In this classic immigrant memoir, Hoffman offers her readers a glimpse of perceptual experiences of a life that, since the age of 13, has been lived between languages. Her text can be defined as a proclamation of a migrant's struggles, a need to belong, to translate and to grasp a sense of social and psychic integration. It is a testimony of linguistic cleavage, loss, internal and social dislocation, of culture and language shock and need for mourning. Hoffman's themes typify the early experiences that are often conveyed by monolingual newcomers. Towards the end of her memoir, moreover, Hoffman's narrative focuses on occurrences perceived twenty years following her socio-geographic and linguistic relocation. She transitions into a statement of long-term change, creativity, dialogic acceptance and ensuing personal rebirth.

In a memoir written at least thirty years following her emigration from Poland<sup>22</sup>, Hoffman separates her avid recollections into three sections that highlight the psychosocial and linguistic stages of her journey. Against the text's structural format, and for reasons I will eventually address, I first examine the retrospective core of Hoffman's

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<sup>22</sup> *Lost in Translation* was first published in 1989. As explained under "Paradise", she departed from Gdynia, Poland to British Columbia, Canada in 1959 (3).

perceived experiences, and then move onto the two remaining parts of her memoir. I thus begin with an analysis of her second section entitled “Exile”, continue with section one, “Lost Paradise”, and then examine the descriptions provided under “New Life”, which is the last segment of Hoffman’s self-narrative.

### **The Vicissitudes of Migration: Identity and Relations of Power within Language in Eva Hoffman’s “Exile”**

I have no map of experience before me, not even the usual adolescent kind... I don’t know what one can love here, what one can take into oneself as home – and later, when the dams of envy burst open again, I am most jealous of those who, in America, have had a sense of place. (159)

In a conference titled “Strange Lands: Location and Dislocation: The Immigrant Experience”, Salman Akhtar (2012) shared his notion of migration by drawing upon psychoanalytic theory, his clinical work and his personal experiences and understandings as a migrant and analysand. His discussion focused on the subjective aspects of relocations and on the effects and complexity of the psycho-social processes that are inherent to migration. A significant observation shared by this speaker involved the correlation between migration and emotional crisis. Specifically, this psychoanalyst and psychiatrist stated that: “no matter how smooth the transition from one country and culture to another may seem, all migration infringes upon subjects a cumulative trauma.”

Interrelated with this assertion, Akhtar explained that: “despite skin colour, subjects’ differences are not so different at all when we focus on our human needs and problems.” Regardless of demographics, personal and shared histories, and juxtaposed

push and pull factors that may have resulted in subjects' short or long-term socio-geographical move, all subjects are equal in their basic requirement for safety, identifications, love and temporal continuity. Akhtar suggested that the interruption of these needs poses a threat to the migrated subject, resulting in an array of anxieties and, correspondingly, in the ego's development of defenses or psychical responses, which, at least initially, destabilize the subject's inner and social worlds.

When studying current migrations to Canada and to the United States, we may consider physical safety to be part of the one universal need that is uncompromised upon migrants' socio-geographic relocation to either host country. However, as I will soon address, by becoming immersed within a host-foreign language and culture, migrants' identifications become challenged and significant libidinal relations and sense of temporal continuity become interrupted. Thus, even though physical safety is either unhampered or, in some cases, improved, during the initial stages of immersion monolingual emigrants undergo successive crises and resulting anxieties that inevitably threaten their wellbeing and sense of psycho-emotional safety.

With Hoffman's memoir, we notice recurrent themes that parallel those described in other phenomenological self-narratives on immigration. If we commence with migration's implication for language, for example, we see its congruent effect on the self. Here we must recount, from previous chapters, how a lived symbolic code is conditioned by, and representative of, individuals' socio-affective histories. It is the vehicle that connects the self to a third space: to a conscious-unconscious area of experiencing, in which subjects' inner and social historical worlds collide. Our language thus becomes a space driven by object relations, unknown, dialectical and opposing

desires, needs, transferences, it is a fertile ground for ongoing and often unwanted repetitions. Similarly, and as explained by Britzman (2006), our third space, which is for the most part governed by language, is an area of inevitable introjections and projections, where subjects knowingly and unknowingly respond to others as others respond to them (42-44, 49).

With Britzman's conceptualization of the third space we can comfortably say that our third space is an area in which subjects' "I" becomes ontologically formed, where individuals experience, borrowing from Lacan (1977), the deceptiveness of language<sup>23</sup>, the estrangement that often becomes unveiled through self-other relations and through the understanding and misunderstandings rooted from within the complexity of our divided selves. Through the interpersonal 'give, respond and take', the imago of the individual's reality-evoking subjectivity emerges, a subjectivity that is directly and indirectly built and contained within one's language.

Understanding the "omnipresence of language" (Derrida 1996, xx) and its significance to self-other relations and to the formation and representation of the self leads us to ask what occurs to the ego when one's mother tongue becomes lacerated? How do individuals respond to the loss of its social and epistemological function? How do monolingual newcomers react when faced with an abrupt shift in their socio-cognitive reality, social positioning and resulting sense of self?

In *Lost in Translation*, Hoffman recollects her formal socialization during her initial moments within the public Canadian school system and how, through her interactions with classmates and teachers, she felt that her heritage culture was incompatible with

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<sup>23</sup> This description of language is taken from Claire Kramsch, who quotes Lacan's essay: "The Mirror Stage as Formation of the I" (Kramsch 2009, 94-95).

that of the host community. As her previous notions of herself and others became challenged, she recalls feeling overcome by uncertainty and inhibition. Under “Exile” she writes:

Since in Poland I was considered a pretty young girl, this requires a basic revision of my self-image. But there’s no doubt about it; after the passage across the Atlantic, I’ve emerged as less attractive, less graceful, less desirable. (109)

From a post-structural perspective we can argue that all identities are fluid, multiple, constantly moving, changing and often conflicting, yet the sudden change in identity experienced by migrants within all -or most- aspects of their lives makes them feel disoriented. In addition, newcomers feel othered by the lack of understanding of the language and of the cultural rules that govern their newly imposed reality. Their sensed crisis relates to the fact that the continuity of their subjectivity, of their relation to their maternal imago, which is tied to their heritage language and culture, become challenged, demoted and perceptually lost within an unattainable past.

Hoffman’s memoir links descriptions of recalled emotional despair with existing theories in applied linguistic and psychoanalysis. Her illustrated occurrences, for example, are concurrent with Brown’s second stage of culture shock<sup>24</sup> in which, as quoted by Block (2007) in *Second Language Identities*, “the individual feels the intrusion of cultural differences into his or her image and security” (cited by Block 60). In *Lost in Translation*, Hoffman not only gives voice to the crises that rise from experiencing a sense of not belonging within a newly imposed environment, she also expresses the

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<sup>24</sup> Brown’s first stage, that of “elation or euphoria over the newness of her surroundings” (132), is not described by Hoffman through her illustrations. Instead, Hoffman’s emphasis is on the pain and loss that stemmed from having been forced to migrate. I assume that the lack of association with this initial stage provided by Brown may relate to the writer’s anticipatory/ depressive feelings of exile, which permeated her recollections related to her arrival.



manner in which the sudden introduction to an unwelcomed reality triggers an alienating sense of self-estrangement.

In addition, the recollections of the preliminary stage of her host-foreign immersion substantiate the relationship that exists between language, thought and our bodies. She recounts how being a non-proficient host-language speaker –and therefore feeling as an outsider- affected how she saw herself and interpreted other’s response to her presence:

Because I am not heard, I feel I’m not seen. My words often seem to baffle others. They are inappropriate, or forced, or just plain incomprehensible. People look at me with puzzlement...the matte look in their eyes as they listen to me cancels my face, flattens my features... I can’t feel how my face lights up from inside; I don’t feel 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, 147)

In agreement with Kramsch (2009), trying to embody another language alters the learner’s reflexive view of self (5). This quote also attests to how subject’s language, the manner in which she sounds and how she is able to express herself “grounds the subject’s social existence” (Bohórquez 2008, 49). For Hoffman, not only is the language or her emotional make-up inadequate as a form of expression within her newfound reality, but her attempts at translating herself within a foreign tongue triggers her sense of being in a state of cumulative crises, making her feel that her new language and reality suddenly estranges her from her past known self.

Furthermore, Hoffman's description marks a discernible association between language and Winnicott's (2005) psychoanalytic theory on the development of an organized personality, as well as, quoting from Hoffman's autobiography: "language as a class signifier" (123). Winnicott argues that individuals are affected by dynamic interactions with the other. As proposed in *Playing and Reality*, the existence of the self is postulated by having details reflected back (82-83). For Hoffman, the sensed inappropriateness of her speech, her lack in host linguistic proficiency and resulting lack in spontaneity became etiological factors that fed into the phenomenology of her physical and psycho-emotional perceptions<sup>25</sup>. Evidently, the vicissitudes imposed by Hoffman's recalled reality became internalized. Such an internalization, moreover, came into conflict with her pre-migrational introjections and, consequently, with her subjective disorientation.

Hoffman's memoir also describes how language, knowingly and unknowingly, classifies the speaker. In her text, the retrospective rationalization of her reality reads as follows:

Sociolinguists might say that I receive these language messages as class signals, that I associate the sound of correctness with the social status of the speaker. In part, this is undoubtedly true...I know that language will be a

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<sup>25</sup> The emphasis on the emotionality of second language learning is evident in well-known articles on language socialization. It is read, for example in the works of Guiora (1972), Brown (1980) and, most recently, Block (2007). These researchers highlight that for young migrants there is a relation between language acquisition, native-like pronunciation and speakers' transformation within the second language (Guiora 1972, 421-422; Brown 1980, 53-54; Block 2009, 51-52). This stage of language acquisition, however, is one that follows subjects' preliminary –natural- resistance and rejection of their new reality within a new language. As seen here with Hoffman, prior to the acquisition and internalization of the host language, learners sense an internal void and disconnection with the host-foreign language. Under a psychoanalytic lens, this rejection is salient until the host-foreign language is introjected and thus internalized: Until synthesis occurs and the challenges undergone by migrants are resolved, the ego perceives the host language as a foreign, translation language that bares no relation or connection to the self.

crucial instrument, that I can overcome the stigma of my marginality, the weight of presumption against me, only if the reassuring right sounds come out of my mouth...Yes, speech is a class signifier. (123)

With Hoffman's words we cannot overlook Foucault's post-structural view on language and power. As a young migrant, Hoffman is caught within an invisible framework that is communicatively produced: one that gives native speakers an upper-hand, while diminishing subjects with lower language proficiencies. Following the newcomer's initial rejection of the language and culture that places her at a disadvantage, a common response is the host-language learner's aggression and desire to absorb and even master the language that is directly linked to her subjectivization. This is a topic I discussed with Hijuelos and is one I will return to in the next chapter.

### **Migration and the Epistemological Internalization of Language**

Based on my own memories as a new migrant, what adds to a newcomer's cumulative trauma is the emigrant's eventual realization of the emptiness caused by her primary language's loss of internal meaning. During the initial stages of host-language exposure, the emigrant's primary language, aside from losing its emotive function, becomes disconnected from the migrant's new social reality, an interruption that creates an unquestionable sense of internal void. As discussed by Hoffman, when an individual's first language no longer corresponds to her social reality, the consistency of its inner significance also becomes lost. This is a period that marks a subject's psycho-emotional linguistic laceration, which is described by Hoffman as one of language's "loss of a living connection":

...the worst losses come at night... I wait for the spontaneous flow of inner language, which used to be my nighttime talk with myself, my way of informing the ego where the id had been. Nothing comes. Polish, in a short time, has atrophied, shrivelled from sheer uselessness. Its words don't apply to my new experiences; they are not coeval with any of objects, or faces, or the very air I breathe in the daytime. In English, words have not penetrated to those layers of my psyche from which a private conversation could proceed...Now, this picture-and-word show is gone; the thread has been snapped. I have no interior language, and without it, interior images – those images through which we assimilate the interior world, through which we take it in, love it, make it our own – become blurred too. (107-108)

The highly affective description of Hoffman's nightly disconnection with Polish, her still dominant language depicts a tumble of linguistic meaninglessness and the subject's resulting perception of emotional crisis. Through this passage the writer describes her mourning for the living connection of the language to her affectual make-up. Through her narrative Hoffman bears witness to the way in which a linguistic dislocation leaves a deeply rooted void, silencing the self. A host-language learner's anxiety escalates when words of one's internalized language are replaced by the emptiness of a foreign tongue.

In his article "On Learning a New Language" Erwin Stengel (1939), an adult migrant and psychoanalyst, argues that when there is a change in objects' appellations from one language to the other, or from the familiar to the unfamiliar, a language learner's relation to the object in question becomes altered (474). This is a topic

touched upon by Hoffman. While describing her exposure to the sensed emptiness and strangeness perceived through her introduction to English words, Hoffman states:

...the signifier has become severed from the signified. The words that I learn now don't stand for the same things in the same unquestioned way they did in my native tongue. "River" in Polish was a vital sound, energized by the essence of riverhood, of my rivers, of my being immersed in rivers. "River in English is cold –a word without an aura. It has no accumulated associations for me...it remains a thing, absolutely other, absolutely unbending to the grasp of my mind. (106)

It is of no surprise to note that in *The Multilingual Subject*, Claire Kramersch (2009), who is also a migrant, chose to analyse Hoffman's *Lost in Translation* when discussing migrants' second language acquisition. While building on Antonio Damasio's theory on emotions and the somatic relations of body and mind, Kramersch explains that as a newcomer, Hoffman's English language "was reduced to its referential meanings without the symbolic aura that gave the subjective meaning and relevance" (67). During the initial stages of foreign language immersion, Hoffman's English words could not transfer to her Polish river. For Hoffman English nouns had no experiential reference and accordingly, no affective trace. Stengel explains this occurrence when arguing that the resistance to the sounds and words of a new language is strongest with objects that are nearest to the subject's feelings (474). Accordingly, when recalling the Anglicization of her sister's and her own name, Hoffman writes:

We've been brought to this school [referring to herself and her sister]...we've acquired new names... Mine 'Ewa' is easy to change to its nearest equivalent in

English, 'Eva'. My sister's name - 'Alina' - poses more of a problem, but after a moment's thought, Mr. Rosenberg and the teacher decide that 'Elaine' is close enough. My sister and I hang our heads wordlessly under this careless baptism...a small seismic mental shift... The twist in our names takes them a tiny distance from us – but it's a gap into which the infinite hobgoblin of abstraction enters. Our Polish names didn't refer to us; they were as surely us as our eyes or hands. These new appellations, which we ourselves can't even pronounce, are not us. They are identification tags...names that make us strangers to ourselves.

(105)

The rejection of her new name speaks of the way in which the host language further estranged her, by way of appellations, from the perception of her childhood self.

Hoffman's description, moreover, gives voice to the inevitable relationship that exists between language and identity, as well as language and sometimes guilt. As interpreted by Hoffman, to receive new names in a language they can barely pronounce further highlights the initial sense of self-estrangement. Her new appellation implied a loss of her old subjectivity and the consequent guilt that comes in place of the subject's disconnection with the constructed self and the language that connects to her maternal imago.

### **Childhood and Adolescent Exile**

Following our study of the universality of the social, emotional and psychological dimensions that correspond to the transformative phenomenon we know as migration, we must account for the relevance that age and degree of choice have on the subject's initial and later adjustments to the host language and culture. Hoffman's "Exile"

exemplifies a migrant's loss, nostalgia, need for mourning and desire to make sense of the memory of a preconscious rupture. Hoffman's descriptions of an emotional geography of the social and inner tensions undergone by migrants, brings me to analyse how the self experiences a heightened sense of loss when feeling inconsolably expatriated from her primary language and homeland.

Even though Hoffman's parents were marginally<sup>26</sup> free to exercise their will when migrating with their two daughters from Poland to Canada, the title "Exile" speaks to the way the author felt after having to renounce her childhood linguistic, social and affective continuity. Consistent with this writer's perceptions, Akhtar explains that all minors are exiled, regardless of migratory circumstances. In "A Third Individuation" Akhtar (1995) quotes Grinberg and Grinberg who state that: "Parents may be voluntary or involuntary emigrants, but children are always 'exiled'; they are not the ones who decide to leave and they cannot return at will" (cited in 1054). Adults often choose to move away from their homeland in hopes for a better life for themselves and, if applicable, for their immediate family. This long-standing decision is commonly linked with hope, a hope that allows for the subject to better adjust to the adversities of their new life.

Based on my own recollections as a migrating child and, later as a migrating adolescent, young emigrants' initial distress and anger often follow their need to adjust after venturing outside of their known and retrospectively cherished way of life. Their negative feelings as newcomers also relate to their genuine lack of choice in migrating and in returning to their homeland at will. The sentiment that results from being choiceless is examined by Freud who in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" explains that

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<sup>26</sup> Hoffman's family left Poland a few years following World War II. Anti-Semitism drove her parents' diasporic 'choice'. Under "Paradise" Hoffman describes their departure as one that was neither entirely chosen, nor entirely forced (83).

being unwillingly passive intensifies the individual's unpleasure<sup>27</sup> (141-142) and resulting deployment of defenses that are meant to counteract the sensed helplessness.

At the end of "Lost Paradise", after recounting the comfort of her perceived past, and the anxieties that evolved in anticipation of her journey to Canada, Hoffman pronounces her emotional upheaval and resistance towards the language that correspond to an imposed, but helplessly rejected reality. When hearing others practice English on the ship, she recalls thinking: "I can't concentrate; I don't want to let the sounds in. I don't think I like English" (90). For Hoffman, feeling forced into becoming a migrant affected her negative attitude toward the English language. Hoffman's response toward her perceived deterritorialization coincides with Kim Butler's explanation of the socio-emotional and psychological effects of exile. In "Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse" Butler (2001) explains that an exilic position "creates its own ethos of migration" by influencing subjects' sensed hardship and their initial aptness to embrace their new reality (201). For Hoffman, becoming tossed into a perceptually unfair, life-changing situation increased her sensed emotional trauma.

For migrating minors, their sensed crisis is also heightened by the element of shock that accompanies their sudden linguistic and geographic change and by their sense of feeling lost within a reality that defies their parents' authority. This is an emotion that may be better understood by reading Hoffman's descriptions of post-migrational family dynamics, specifically when she writes:

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<sup>27</sup> Children's shock relates with Freud's description of surprise in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*: the occurrence of being plunged into danger without being prepared for such an experience. Such unpreparedness, argues Freud, taxes the ego's ability to adapt, which in turn increases the individual's sense of displeasure (138).



I adjure my sister to treat my parents well; I don't want her to challenge my mother's authority, because it is so easily challenged. It is they who seem more defenseless to me than Alinka, and I want her to protect them. Alinka fights me like a forest animal in danger of being trapped; she too wants to roam through the thickness and the meadows. She too wants to be free. (146)

As a former adolescent migrant, I feel torn by Hoffman's words. The sudden demotion of my parents' authority and the switch in roles that such demotion entailed was, at least for me, extremely difficult to negotiate. I remember, for example, becoming a young translator for my parents during doctor appointments: the one who showed my mother where to sign school-related permission slips and report cards without her questioning what she was signing; being the one who felt embarrassed by my parents' low levels of linguistic proficiencies; and, the one who, despite of my rebelliousness, was regrettably forced to fend for myself, take extended time away from school and grow up too fast.

The resentfulness and later guilt that stem from the sudden demotion of our parents' authority can be hard to conceptualize when feelings are entrenched within the fabric of our own lives. As read with Hoffman, some children feel the dire need to protect their parents from the vulnerability that migration evokes, while others, like Alinka, rebel while trying to free themselves from the dynamics of a situation perceived to be unjustly imposed. Seeing our parents' struggle within a language and culture they barely understand affects our view of them. They are after all our first love and as such we do bestow upon them our highest regard. The disillusionment adds to children's and adolescents' crisis, one that is imposed by the clash with pre-migrational introjections

and with children's and adolescents' unspoken, yet sensed, right to feel nourished, reassured and protected as someone's child.

### **Migration and Trauma**

One of the most interesting aspects of Hoffman's text lies in the vividness in her descriptions that may conceal the writer's trauma and corresponding "inability to integrate the magnitude of perceived loss" (Van der Kolk and Van der Hart 1995, 162). Indeed, with migrational narratives, just as with the memoirs of any trauma, we note that through the act of writing individuals are able to grasp and express their emotional knowledge. In the preface of *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of the Self*, Susan Brison writes that "piecing together a shattered self requires a process of remembering and working through in which speech and affect converge in a trauma narrative" (x). Brison sheds light onto the isolating character of trauma and the manner in which literature allows for subjects to remake themselves and to connect with others by giving voice to and making sense of past, dislocated occurrences. While making reference to her own history within a violent, horrifying experience, she explains that:

Saying something about the memory *does* something to it. The communicative act of bearing witness to traumatic events transforms traumatic memories into narrative that can then be interpreted into the survivor's sense of self...it reintegrates the survivor into a community.... (x-xi)

Through self-reflective narratives, writers are able to name occurrences that were shock-evoking and life changing: experiences that do not fit into their pre-existing schemas. A writer's narrative becomes a belated attempt to reconstruct and integrate a dissociated, emotionally charged reality: a reality that uprooted the subject's need to

feel accepted, understood and reconnected with the world that, at least in part, rests outside of the self.

Likewise, Hoffman's narrative embodies an attempt to make sense of the extent of her original sense of loss, helplessness, guilt and of the many voices and juxtaposed histories that exist within the complexity of her being (Kramsch 2009, 275). Hoffman's testimony reveals a need to mourn and heal. One can also say that her memoir is a developmental process that gives way to, while explicating her eventual hybridity.

In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* Cathy Caruth (1996) argues that a traumatic event is an unpleasant occurrence that tends not to be fully grasped as it occurs. Caruth states that:

...beyond the psychological dimension of suffering it involves, suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing of a violent event as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness. The repetitions of the traumatic event –which remains unavailable to consciousness but intrude repeatedly on sight – thus suggest a larger relation to the event that extends beyond what can simply be known, and is inextricably tied up with the belatedness and incomprehensibility that remain at the heart of this repetitive seeing. (91-92)

As seen in Hoffman's memoir, the intrusion of unpleasant, inexplicable and belated emotions trigger the need to understand –by way of reconstruction- the events that may still influence the writer's present.

Theories that point to Hoffman's trauma are also found in definitions of memory. In "The Intrusive Past", for example, Van der Kolk and Van der Hart (1995) propose that

unlike traumatic memory, ordinary memory is an aspect of life that is adaptive and thus easily integrated to other experiences. It is a variable social act, easily retrieved and shared. They explain that traumatic memory, on the other hand, is rooted in a frightening and novel experience that does not make sense and, in its anxiety-evoking uniqueness, resists integration (160, 163). However, a key feature of psychoanalytic theory is that traumatic memory can vary. It is either a 1) non-social act: not addressed to anyone or a solitary, invariable and inflexible activity that becomes automatically triggered under conditions or situations evocative of the original, traumatic experience, or, as explained to me by my supervisor, 2) a non-integrated experience: invariable and thus repeated with particular vividness (Britzman 2012).

These theories of trauma and memory conform to Akhtar's (2012) psychoanalytic discussions. In "Strange Lands: Location and Dislocation: The Immigrant Experience" Akhtar highlighted migrants' failure to formulate the extent of many past, transformative experiences. He explains that emigrants' traumas are preconscious and therefore 'never' forgotten. As such, immigrants' dissociations, he adds, are evident, for example, when individuals describe living in a temporary haze or a cloud. Akhtar's suggestion is brings me to highlight Hoffman's recalled reality, specifically when she writes that while on the ship she felt as if she was "living in a fog" (90). Her disorientation and incapacity to negotiate a reality that in its subjective singularity was perceived as unreal is illustrated further: "The journey....makes me feel I am not quite myself and temporarily existing in a denser, more artificial medium than what I've known as ordinary life" (91).

Analysing Hoffman's memoir leads us to conceptualize how her writing composes narrative memories. The experiences that are linked with the raw emotions

described in “Exile” and in certain recollections offered under “Lost Paradise” embody aspects of traumatic or unformulated memories. However, when looking into most scenes described under “Paradise” and, to a lesser extent, in “New World”, the idealizations exposed through Hoffman’s writing suggest that her text also offers reconstructions of implicit memories, or narrative truths, that are genuine in their perceptual and seemingly remembered disclosure. Her recollections give us an insight into the struggle to probe meaning in a new language and into how her writing performs a working through of these meanings. Thus with Hoffman we see how the literary then becomes a symbolic frame to hold her disparate parts.

Another interesting aspect of Hoffman’s narrative that denotes underlying trauma is grounded in the writer’s descriptions of intra-subjective splits, which, according to Freud as well as Van der Kolk and Van der Hart, is a common phenomenological response to subjects’ deep-rooted crisis (Freud c2006, 137-139; Van der Kolk and Van der Hart 1995, 175-176). As defined by Bohórquez (2008), these occurrences are the “here and there, now and then that disrupts the subject’s sense of continuity” (13). Feeling disoriented by the profound discontinuity of experience comprises a migrant’s present and this in turn impacts the subject’s ability to envision a cohesive future. This feeling, annexed with individuals’ radical dislocation from their past, evokes a sense of being fixed in a never-ending present.

Not surprisingly, Hoffman’s notion of temporal rupture is illustrated across the first two sections of her memoir. Under “Exile”, for example, she writes: “I can’t afford to look back and I don’t know how to look forward (116). In “Lost Paradise”, moreover, she discloses the affective and cognitive consequences of her initial inability to cope when

describing that “...everything is [was] happening out of time and out of space” (91).

Following her eventual migration to Canada, Hoffman is explicit in describing the break in continuity when, with the use of metaphors, she says, for example, that “ the tram wheels of Vancouver...cut like scissors through my life” (100) and most specifically, when she describes feeling doomed by her instability to imagine a possible future:

I come across an enormous, cold blankness – a darkening, an erasure, of the imagination, as if a camera eye has snapped shut, or as if a heavy curtain has been pulled over the future. (4)

A recurrent theme in migrants’ recollections is the perception of a newly encountered alienation: a sense of homelessness within their new homes, and a recurrent desire to return in order to reverse their indisputable rupture. In a later essay entitled “New Nomads”, Hoffman universalizes her story when she observes that for migrants, the story of their pasts “becomes radically different from their present...the lost homeland becomes sequestered in the imagination as a mythic, static realm. That realm can be idealized or demonized... [becoming] a space of projections and fantasies...” (52). To migrate is to have one’s psychic positioning, the way one situates oneself in the world, shattered. A migrant’s present is correspondingly overcome by nostalgia and a sense of instability, outsideness (45) and, as previously described, linguistic incompleteness<sup>28</sup>.

In Hoffman’s “Paradise” we see the memory of her primary language, one that signals to her need for psychic continuity:

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<sup>28</sup> In “Representational Practices and Multi-modal Communication in US High Schools: Implications for Adolescent Immigrants” Harklau (2003) discusses how first generation migrants, grown into adulthood while living in the United States often idealize their primary culture. This idealization, argues Harklau, relates to “their distance in place and time” (90). Returning to this chapter’s discussion, similar to my argument with language, recent language migrants feel overcome by the sensed incompleteness imposed by their new reality. This feeling, in retrospect, alters their recollection of their past, which becomes ‘glorified’ for representing a lost time of ‘fitting-in’ as members of a linguistic and cultural majority.

...I grew up in a lumpen apartment in Cracow, squeezed into three rudimentary rooms with four other people, surrounded by squabbles, dark political rumblings, memories of wartime suffering, and daily struggles for existence. And yet, when it came time to leave, I...felt I was being pushed out of the happy, safe enclosures of Eden. (5)

As suggested in this chapter, since our reality is perceived through language, migrants' memory of continuity and belonging becomes transferred to their first tongue. For migrants, a primary language, at least in memory, represents a depth and a sense of wholeness that an acquired tongue is unable to duplicate. Following migration, a mother tongue becomes the subject of an internalized and highly romanticized geography, of a paradise and childhood innocence that, according to translingual subjects, became perceptually lost through exile. This phenomenon supporting Derrida's (1996) assertion when, in *Monolingualism of the Other*, he suggests that a mother tongue, or at least the illusion that such tongue encompasses, "can only exist in contrast with another language" (36). For newcomers, the otherness that naturally inhabits 'all' languages become absolved and replaced by the constructed memory of psycho-social continuity. Previous memories of language thus become idealized following their moment of psycho-social split. Following the inscription of what Derrida calls "an added mark" (24, 26, 27, 29, 61 and 69) a migrant's primary language is thus commonly embraced as a nourishing and reassuring object. Such a language becomes part of an imagined transitional phenomenon that can only exist following the fragmentation caused by the psycho-emotional trauma imposed by the life-changing act we know as migration.

### **Language Migrants' Third Individuation**

In “Strange Lands” Akhtar highlighted the difference between migration and ongoing life-long changes. He explained how our lives are naturally shaped by a series of transformations and by everyday migrations. Life-changing events are varied and ongoing; these are usually not considered traumatic because they either occur gradually, or they are contextual and thus, for the most part ‘expected’. When navigating through the chain of predictability, as with choice, our ego tends to be better equipped to adjust and slowly evolve. Instances of predictable changes can be seen with the birth of a sibling, or of one’s child for example, with the start of a new school, a graduation and even with the realization that we are growing older. We understand that as we become adults we typically search for new jobs and migrate into new relationships that knowingly and unknowingly uproot while repeating our original object-relations in the form of transferences.

By contrast, the problem of socio-geographic and linguistic relocations is rooted in the subject’s initial inability to cope with sudden, unknown and therefore highly unpredictable situations. It lies in the radical change of circumstances that alienate, while infringing upon the subject’s sense of continuity. Migration, asserts Akhtar (1995), “taxes the ego’s adaptive capacities and thus cause drive dis-regulations” (1058). In “Strange Lands Location and Dislocation” Akhtar (2012) also explained that there is a phenomenological resemblance between migrants’ experiences and subjects’ first and second individuation<sup>29</sup> and that such a resemblance accounts for the repetition of

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<sup>29</sup> As explained by Akhtar (2009), the first individuation is a process that occurs during infancy. It involves the infant’s emergence from “existential symbiosis with the mother to [the development of his [or her] psychic separateness and psychic individuality” (262). The second individuation, continues Akhtar, occurs during adolescence during which increased “disengagement from early objects becomes necessary for “extra-familial object relations” to occur. This individuation stage leads to intense idealizations and....struggles around control issues (6).



defenses against the loss of love that surges during the earlier periods of individuals' post-natal lives.

As described in the previous section, when migration occurs, the subject's past becomes unattainable, as if lost in time. During socio-geographic and linguistic relocations a person's homeland "symbolic of the mother" (Akhtar 1995, 1058) is separated from the subject's present reality. In search for comfort, a migrant commonly tries to retain the memory of wholeness, in terms of wishing for an unquestioned living and belonging. Such memories become retrospectively constructed in the form of the defense known as idealization. This is a defense that echoes Levésque's opening remarks on his desire and need to feel as one with an uncontaminated, idealized tongue that reflects the affective experience bonded with our first love: with the love we all experienced before the introduction of our father, the law of prohibition and the eventual break that leaves us forever searching for an imagined unconditional, and reassuringly perfect love. This libidinal perfection, however, is never found.

Also echoing a response deployed during early stages of post-natal life is splitting, a defense that separates objects into good and bad, and comforting and alienating. With this unconscious regression a migrant experiences dichotomized feelings about his or her two lands and two self-representations (Akhtar 1058). Stengel addresses this defense when he discusses the commonality of a migrant's rejection and devaluation of the host language. In *Lost in Translation*, splitting can be perceived in the manner in which Hoffman expresses her dislike and detachment from the sounds of the host language when she states: "I can't imagine wanting to talk their harsh-sounding language" (105). Such sense is highlighted in Hoffman's (2001) essay "New Nomads",

in which she imagines that newcomers commonly feel that “their language is the true language, that it corresponds to reality in a way other tongues don’t” (49). Stengel’s (1939) theory suggests that the refutation of the host language becomes evident when the subject tries to convert others to their primary language and, most commonly and concurrent with Hoffman’s assertion, by feeling that their mother tongue is the only language of genuine expression (475).

Akhtar (1995) expands on this argument by including the devaluation of the host culture and its landscapes (1065). The temporary problem that rises from newcomer’s aggression and projected inner turmoil rests in the manner in which it seems to further isolate the individual from the overall host environment, thus providing a temporary setback to the psychic integration of the newcomer’s experiences.<sup>30</sup> The rejection expressed by Hoffman is extended to people who form part of the host community. Hoffman’s anxiety is expressed, for example, under “Exile” when she writes:

There is too much in this car I don’t like; I don’t like the blue eye shadow of Cindy’s eyelids, or the grease on Chuck’s hair, or the way the car zooms off with a screech and then slows down as everyone plays we-are-afraid-of-the-policeman. I don’t like the way they laugh. I don’t care for their “ugly” joke, or their five-hundred-pond canary jokes, or their pickle jokes, or their elephant jokes either. And most of all, I hate having to pretend. (118-119)

Another example is presented under “New World” when this writer judges her new friends under Polish standards: “Even a relatively intelligible person, like Lizzy, poses problems of translation. She –and many others around me- would be as unlikely

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<sup>30</sup> At a conscious level, however, the projection of aggression comes hand-in-hand with introjections. Together these establish, according to Klein (1975), the basis of object-relations (49-50).

in Poland as gryphons or unicorns” (175). Aside from the projected negativity seen in the manner of her harsh judgements, Hoffman’s rejection is extended to her physical environment. She shares her recollections of landscapes and perhaps as a part of an excess in discourse, she mentions the way in which her surroundings, perhaps unwillingly, became part of her physical, and therefore affectual, reality: “These mountain streams and enormous boulders hurt my eyes – they hurt my soul... I can’t imagine feeling that I’m part of them, that I’m in them” (100).

For Akhtar (2012), a newcomer’s rejection of the host country’s landscapes relates to a natural response to the individual’s loss of his or her previous transitional space. In “Strange Lands” he stated that regardless of migrants’ libidinal loss from old relationships, for human beings, it is easy, and unavoidable, to eventually find transferences in other people. What gets lost with migration is the subject’s integration with physical surroundings. Thus, following the individual’s socio-geographical relocation, a migrant “can recreate people but not the physical space”. Akhtar added that the importance given by migrants to previous landscapes rests in their transitional nature: in the way in which spaces once seemed to provide the subject with a “neutral space of experiencing”. Childhood landscapes become unconsciously incorporated as an external-internal reality, they are taken-in as a part of the self. These experiences are affectively remembered and often internalized as idealized memories.

The drastic loss of physical spaces triggers within the subject a sense of nostalgia and even a rejection of the places that, instead of representing part of the subject’s internalized and highly idealized history, symbolize the physical space in which the new sense of loss and displacement has set in. A reverberation of this theme is

found in much of Hoffman's writing. A very specific account that supports this argument is found with the writer's allusion to Vancouver, when she states: "Vancouver will never be the place I most love, for it was here that I fell out of the net of meaning into the weightlessness of chaos" (151).

For migrants, the significance of the phenomenological resemblance of migration and the subject's first two separation-individuation phases rests in the way in which such perceived unconscious repetitions provide the individual with a road map to eventual integrations. Thus following a newcomer's identity crisis and state of psychic flux reminiscent of the adolescent's second individuation (Akhtar 2009, 1052-1053), the subject eventually integrates his or her experiences. Adding to this argument we may also suggest that, if provided a good enough environment, a migrant's third individuation emerges with the acquisition and eventual incorporation of the host language: an acquisition that, similar to that of an infant's primary language, aids in the ongoing development of a subject's personality.

### **An Exploration into Hybrid Identities through Hoffman's "New World"**

"New World" provides readers with descriptions of occurrences and attitudes that developed twenty years following her arrival from Poland. Grounded in self-acceptance, this section becomes a reverberation of Brown's third and final stage of culture shock: the phase in which an individual "begins to accept the differences in thinking and feeling" that surrounded him or her, and thus the stage in which the subject becomes "more empathetic with persons in the second culture". As seen with Hoffman, during this final stage she experiences what Brown calls a "near or full recovery" (cited by Block 2007, 60). Having gone through the process of acculturation, Hoffman embraces her

new subject position, which corresponds to a hyphenated identity<sup>31</sup>, an identity that relates to her new life within language(s).

In a 1964, during an interview on German television, Hannah Arendt was asked about her experiences as a German-Jew following the World War II. To this Arendt noted that in spite of German aggression, what remained for her was her German mother tongue. In *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, Giorgio Agamben (2002), reflects on this interview and argues that what tends to remain is its remnant. He grounds his discussion in an explanation of the 'life of a language' and in the way in which a symbolic code is naturally pulled by opposing tensions: by anomia which is the one moving toward innovation and transformation, and by the current within the terrain of grammatical norms which moves toward stability and preservation. The intersecting point between these two currents is the speaking subject or 'auctor' who decides what can and cannot be said through "the sayable and the unsayable of language". When the relation between norm and anomia is broken, language dies and a new linguistic identity emerges (159-160).

For Hoffman, Polish did not cease to exist. Yet since it became barely spoken and it no longer endured the transformations that influence all internally and socially lived languages. Polish became a symbolic code suspended in time; a fragment of the language of her parents and of her past. It signified the symbolic code that named her rupture, the tongue that became disconnected with her social and inner realities, with Hoffman's eventual likes and dislikes, her -adult- insecurities and success. As a subject,

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<sup>31</sup> The changes undergone by Hoffman relate to the age during the time of her migration. As Akhtar (2012) suggested that unlike children and adolescents, "adults' structuralization has already taken place, and drives have attained fusion and genital primacy". This discussion is also prominent in "Third Individuation" in which Akhtar (2009) describes that in adults, the ego is better organized after the post adolescent superego is in place. Therefore, adults' moral, temporal and linguistic transformation as a result of immigration is a matter of adaptation rather than a replicated scenario (1052-1053).

Hoffman evolved within her new world and thus became influenced by the introjections, projections, and establishment of ongoing object relations that, for the most part, existed in the third space that evolved within her English-speaking reality. Thus, in time, through her acquisition and ensuing internalization of English, Hoffman's new tongue became the system of meanings that allowed for her to adjust as a migrant. Here we may suggest that her sense of linguistic laceration became seemingly effaced through the acquisition of English and its eventual internalization. In time, English was transformed into her dominant language, the symbolic code that gave her freedom and a second chance in world and personal views. English became a transparent medium entrenched within the fabric of her dreams (242-243) and the medium of her later triangulations.

The final section of Hoffman's memoir is a testimony of age-related permeability, of the inevitable influence that language, history and culture have on the developing subject<sup>32</sup>. It bears witness to migration as a benign trauma, of our human need and desire for integration and of our ongoing need for subjective growth. "New Land" speaks to our universal drive for integration and organization, which according to Klein (1975), is one of the ego's primary functions (57). "New Lands" describes Hoffman's eventual restructuring, one that fits with what both Klein and Kristeva call the work of Eros (Klein 1975, 57; Kristeva 1996, 80-81).

Through "New World" readers are exposed to the ego's eventual binding of the psychic division that was caused by the subject's trauma. Hoffman's narrative

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<sup>32</sup> Similar to Akhtar's (2012) discussion on migration and the relevance of the age-related structuring of the ego, in "Empathy in Language Learning" Guiora et al (1972) explain that age –and therefore maturation– influences learners' ability to learn a language and 'sound native' (111). When discussing the concept of the 'language ego' this article argues that as individual's age their ego boundaries become solidified, and this, subsequently, impacts their ego permeability, which results in the subject's ability to assimilate native-like speech and identify with the host community (112). For Hoffman, having migrated during her late childhood allowed her to transform within language and hence to eventually assimilate within the host culture.

demonstrates how in time, with a good-enough environment, a migrant's sense of nihilism subsides, her psychic equilibrium becomes re-established and her sense of new continuity can be made. The individual thus regains her sense of temporal continuity, a continuity that allows for the vision of a future to return, quoting from Hoffman (1990), "like a benediction, to balance the earlier annunciation of loss" (279).

Hoffman's pronounced transformation reflects Kristeva's (1996) understanding of the relation between trauma and creativity. The integration and transformation reveal the extent to which many individuals, after having had their language and "symbolic bonds severed" and after being silenced and thus living "outside of language and inside the secret crypt of silent pain", are able to transform themselves by eventually "rising to the levels of words and of life" (80). Hoffman's "New World" engulfs the period of this writer's new form of expression and growth, as well as the period of re-fuelling and temporary return to Poland, where she realizes that just as her life has changed so too did her country of birth. Equally important, this is a period in which we see that the sense of succumbing to internal colonization and thus complying with a self-imposed notion of a perpetual newcomer ends. For Hoffman, accepting change and thus the integration of multiple affiliations and identities deepen her understanding of language as a medium for migrants' translation.

## **Conclusion**

Hoffman's memoir brings together the themes of my study, which are language, child and adolescent translingual memories and translingual subject's identity constructions. Hoffman's recollections provide us with a discussion on the conflicts between host/foreign linguistic immersions and emotional trauma. Her memoir

exemplifies the subject's unconscious wish to synthesize conflicting introjections, to restore ruptures, and then to narrate socio-affective losses. As she describes through her former piano teacher's words, when she explains that migrating makes subjects feel fragile as plants with their roots exposed (82). This powerful statement knowingly and unknowingly suggests how socio-geographic, linguistic and affective relocations leave migrants feeling raw and exposed. Such physical and psychic sensations return individuals to their earliest beginnings, to a time that left a mark on their affective histories and to a period during infancy that preceded language. Along with Melanie Klein, I characterize this experience through love and hate, loss, anger, guilt, recurrent anxieties and the urge for reparation.

As seen with Levésque, a primary symbolic code is charged with our human need to belong to something that exists within and outside of the self. For migrants the unconscious construction of an idealized memory of their mother tongue is also driven by a desire to restore and invent the sense of wholeness and unquestioned living they have retrospectively experienced before the marking of a conscious trauma. The otherness that was consciously and/or unconsciously perceived by newcomers within language becomes dissipated and replaced by an "illusion for what one has never had" (Derrida 1996, 33). Such assumptions explain why for Derrida the created notion of a mother tongue is a psycho-emotional refuge in exile. A mother tongue, as proposed by both Derrida and Adorno is never inhabitable (Adorno 1974, 87; Derrida 1996, 58, 61). Instead the mother tongue is both an exile and a restorative nostalgia. For migrants a primary language is an unconscious invention and symptoms of loss can be found in an



obsession, a lament, and protection against migrants' trauma over the uncertainty of meaning.

This chapter's connection between migration and trauma leads us to our next chapter, which builds upon the pedagogical implication and relation of trauma and learning. Following Britzman's and Pitt's conceptualizations and while accounting for the aforementioned psycho-emotional and social factors that influence the experience of migration, I study the stimulating and debilitating effects of anxieties in the second language classroom and examine the aggression in learning. My next chapter is a look into the relevance of anxiety to host language acquisition, host-language pronunciation, primary language attrition and to the ongoing constructions of language learners' identities.

**CHAPTER V: LANGUAGE AND AGGRESSION: THE TELOS OF LANGUAGE LEARNING THROUGH AN EXPLORATION OF ALICE KAPLAN'S *FRENCH LESSONS*, ALICE PITT'S "LANGUAGE ON LOAN AND RICHARD RODRIGUEZ' *HUNGER OF MEMORY***

Learning a new language is more than just an acquisition of a new linguistic system. It is an experience interlinked with questions of culture, involving the transformation of the way of thinking, feeling and acting.

-David Block, *Second Language Identities*

A topic debated during the defense of my comprehensive exam touched upon the differences ostensibly marked between a migrant's and a foreign student's host language acquisition. The phenomenological similarities between these learners were questioned and differences were brought to the fore. I suggested that the social and circumstantial realities that infringe upon both kinds of learners create the ethos of their host foreign language acquisition, impacting their attitudes towards and perceptions within the target language. As seen with Eva Hoffman, a young, first generation migrant often feels a marked sense of doom by her exilic position and becoming permanently uprooted from her known past and presumed future. The predominant feeling is a forced historical disruption from the comfort of her native home, language, culture and understood sense of self.

I contrasted my perceptions with conversations I often have with enthusiastic second language students who approach me for letters of reference in support of their applications to study a foreign language abroad. I stressed that unlike child and adolescent migrants, foreign students have a pronounced sense of choice. For these adolescents, the prospect of living in a foreign land and culture is embraced as a temporary, welcomed and highly enriching learning experience. I compared my students' attitudes with those of young migrants and explained that

for under-age emigrants, migrating is barely perceived as a source of excitement and it is rarely interpreted as a privilege, even if in actuality it may be one. Instead, for those unwilling to relocate, their move is often felt as an injustice, as a source of inner pain and inconsolable tears.

My memories of inner and social chaos were compared with my students' excitement. I remembered how there was no pleasure in unwillingly becoming a displaced child and/or adolescent, to become a linguistic minority and therefore an outsider. The discussion brought me back to times when I felt embarrassed for being forced to speak without being understood and to memories of feeling humbled for experiencing a need to belong while being repeatedly let down by my perceptual misfit and by my attempts to interact with people my age while becoming marked by the absence of shared cultural histories and of commonly understood signs, rules, words and sounds.

Nine months following my comprehensive exams, on the night before my students' Spanish midterm, I found myself struggling to write a cohesive opening for this fifth chapter on language learning and on its epistemological connection to crisis. Having no genuine notion of the paths through which my words would venture, I once again began to consider the circumstantial differences and similarities between the two types of language learners. I sat at my kitchen table feeling exhausted by the sight of language memoirs that stood before me. Even though they were migrant-narratives that depicted writers' memories of living between homes and languages, they were accounts that fell short of offering the taste of foreign language learning that Alice Kaplan's (1993) non-migrant, second language memoir evokes.

The thought of having to work with literature that only partially narrated the social and inner struggles of significant language learning drained me, so my tired thoughts took flight... I thought of my students' anxieties within and outside of our second language classroom in

connection to their commonly voiced desire to live within the compounds of a foreign host language and culture. I felt a renewed sense of bewilderment by the antithesis of their in-class struggles and their hopes and daring considerations to study abroad. I then took a last look at my almost illegible notes and felt overtaken by a fleeting thought, which made me scribble:

For non-migrant, foreign language students, their choice to temporarily move away from their homes may create a space for them to escape from their realities, to hide and even reframe their identities under a more acceptable ... perhaps even idealized light.

On the following morning, after coming home from giving my students their –much dreaded- midterm, I noticed that without intending, my penciled words entered the realm of an initially unperceived problematic. The sentence bent on the uneven margin of my draft spelled a disjunction of meanings, one that pointed to the words ‘choice’ and ‘necessity to escape’. The disjointedness of my words, which during the late hours of the night eluded me, led me to reconsider the concepts of ‘need’ and ‘aggression’ in relation to foreign students’ efforts to embody a new language. This almost belated insight created a space for me to reassess what may lie beneath the dynamics that give life to individuals’ desire to become language migrants, to live in internal exile, and to reinvent themselves between languages. It made me question what may lie beneath their willingness to become estranged subjects within their own reality-driven narratives.

This accident of thought made me consider the relevance of not limiting my dissertation to host foreign language acquisitions that exclude the experiences described by foreign students learning a host language abroad. This slip –if I may call it as such- became the drive that propelled my interest in accounting for the nature of linguistic transformations undergone by both, migrant and non-migrant host foreign language learners. While not disregarding the manner in which young migrants’ internal and external exilic condition adds to the perceptual

precariousness of their emotional lives, this chapter pays close attention to the subjective meaning behind all linguistic relocations. It considers Akhtar's discussion of subjects' universal needs and nature, and opens my study to the consideration of narratives provided by migrants and by language learners who have a perceptual choice of temporal relocation.

Hence, by taking a hermeneutic approach to language memoirs and while looking into pedagogic and psychoanalytic theories of learning and not learning, this chapter examines how host language acquisition –for both types of language learners- compares with other forms of significant learning. I ask: What can migrants' and foreign language students' desire to learn a host second language tell us about their inner realities and about the meaning they knowingly and unknowingly attach to an acquired second language? How may second language acquisition aid in the natural and significant process of learners' personal growth? To what extent does significant learning become a module or constituent in children's and adolescents' process of self-reinvention? What does my own exclusion of foreign students' language-related experiences tell me about my own life and perceptions within languages? And finally, and at the heart of this chapter, how is significant language learning tied to matricide, crisis and aggression?

### **Significant Learning and the Re-creation of the Self**

In "Reading Histories: Curriculum Theory, Psychoanalysis, and Generational Violence" Jen Gilbert (2010) explains that reading entails innovation and transformation, murder and reparation. Through reflections drawn from a conference she attended on curriculum studies, as well as discussions on generational violence and on Arendt's concept of natality, Gilbert suggests that reading exposes a learner to ideas that allow her to "imagine worlds beyond the confines of the known" (67). Her argument is also grounded in André Green's and Alice Pitt's psychoanalytic theories on reading and its stark relation to matricide. Beginning with Green,

Gilbert quotes: “to read is to feed off the corpses of one’s parents, whom one kills through reading, through the possession of knowledge” (cited in Gilbert 67). Gilbert links Green’s words with those of Pitt, who, in “Mother Love’s Education”, explains that: “reading enacts unconscious phantasies of murder and reparation... an “act that is no less violently felt than if an actual murder has taken place” (cited in Gilbert 67).

Following these quotes Gilbert proposes that a subject’s encounter with knowledge changes the reader’s sense of self and her relationship with her parents (67). Gilbert describes that following the phantastical violence engendered through the acquisition of knowledge, what drives the child’s desire to continue to read and thus introject “food for the mind” is the unconscious understanding that the mother survived her child’s act of violence (67-68).

This psychoanalytic notion is difficult to ignore when studying child and adolescent second language acquisition. Consequently when revisiting Pitt’s discussion in her article “Mother Love’s Education” I noted how as unimaginable as these words may seem for readers who are new to psychoanalytic thought, it is not difficult to link this phantasy to any significant learning that entails, by its very influence, a perceived transformation. Matricide becomes a part of every child’s developmental need to transform by moving away from her earliest days and times of dependence from her first love object. As Pitt explains, in its psychoanalytic sense, this unconscious act gives way to the birth of a child’s psychic reality, or a reality interconnected with aggression, symbolization, guilt and need for reparation (87-88). Equally important, this creative replacement is needed for infants’ development into speaking beings: it is key to the child’s loss of the unspoken self and transition into language; it is born through and within the child’s membership to the wider community of competent speakers (88-90).

When looking closely into language-related narratives, the prevalence of this developmental act becomes evident. It is explicitly found, for example, with Richard Rodriguez

(1983) in his memoir *Hunger of Memory*. This writer, a 1.5-generation Mexican-American migrant, begins his narrative with descriptions of a happy, early childhood. In the initial sections of his text this writer reflects upon his early interactions with his parents and siblings, interactions that, according to this writer, were filled with love, laughter and sounds of the Spanish language. Quoting from Rodriguez:

*Español: my family's language. Español: the language that seemed to me a private language. My parents would say something to me [in Spanish] and I would feel embraced by the sound of their words. Those words said: I am speaking with ease in Spanish. I am addressing you in words I never use with los gringos. I recognize you as someone special, close, like no one out-side. You belong with us. In the family (Ricardo)... I lived in a world magically compounded with sounds...delighted by the sounds of Spanish at home. (14-15, original italics)*

Rodriguez describes the turn of events that takes place upon entering the American-Catholic school system. While reminiscent of that moment in time, Rodriguez narrates about his in-class silence and about the struggles he experienced as a monolingual Spanish speaker, before his linguistic and academic difficulties were overcome through his exposure to English in both at school and eventually at home.<sup>33</sup> One of the most prominent aspects of Rodriguez' descriptions is not limited to the ease in which he acquired the host English language. Instead, it relates to the excitement he eventually experienced through reading English written texts and to the manner in which the acquisition of knowledge -learned at school- resulted in guilt (28, 30) and in a silencing void between himself and his parents (24, 27).

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<sup>33</sup> Rodriguez explains that following his teachers' suggestions, his parents began speaking English with noticeable Spanish accents and "ungrammatical speech" in their home in hopes of helping their children academically with the linguistic struggles they were experiencing as monolingual Spanish speakers in an English dominant school (19-20).

In his memoir Rodriguez offers an incidental reverberation of Pitt's matricidal discussion. By introducing Richard Hoggard's description of a scholarly child, Rodriguez, who consistently refers to himself as a scholarly student, cites: "a scholarly boy...cannot forget that his academic success distances him from a life he loved, even from his own memory of himself...." (51). Later in that same page Rodriguez adds: "...parents *become* the figures of lost authority....the scholarly boy cannot afford to admire his parents" (51, *original italics*). Equally important, the isolating conflict and inner guilt endowed by Rodriguez' love for reading and for learning new concepts are highlighted when he writes:

I kept so much, so often, to myself. Sad. Enthusiastic. Troubled by the excitement of coming upon new ideas. Eager. Fascinated by the promising texture of a brand-new book. I hoarded the pleasures of learning. Alone for hours. Enthralled. Nervous. I rarely looked away from my books – or back on my memories...I slipped quietly out of the house. It mattered that education was changing me. (54)

Rodriguez' school and library books not only opened doors to new knowledge. Books exposed him to the acquisition and eventual internalization of the host English language. Reading and learning introduced him to an entirely new reality, to a wider community of speakers and, according to this writer, to a new and improved social status. For this 1.5-generation Mexican-American migrant, learning English offered him a subjective change, one which translated into an eventual break from the discrimination and poverty suffered by his own Spanish-dominant parents (51, 56, 58-59).

For Rodriguez, encountering a world of a new language and of ideas that resided outside of his home created a conflict born from destruction and creation, or, quoting from Rodriguez, "loss and gain" (27). His distinctive narrative offers concreteness through a rationalized example of the possible dynamics that give way to reading and thus to the violence



defined by matricide, by an act that becomes intertwined with individuals' conscious and unconscious desire to give up their earliest childhood condition by altering their inner and social selves through learning.

Pitt (2013) also shares this view regarding the epistemological and affective significance of a learned –and internalized- second language. She proposes that becoming a speaking subject in another language exposes the learner to the interminable play between constraint and creativity. She explains that the transformative nature of this specific learning act produces thrills and anxieties, loss and renewal, mastery and forgiveness. Second language learning, recalls Pitt, become “experiences of transfigurations” (37). In her paper she taps into the emotional quality of second language acquisition, suggesting that acquiring a foreign language provokes “passionate, eroticized experiences that... might be akin to falling for poetry or music or visual art” (42). Pitt speaks of her own recollections of pleasure and agony while studying German in Canada and later in Germany. The antagonistic feelings experienced through the acquisition, and/or reacquisition, of this second language are read when she recalls feeling “enveloped” and “romanced” by the sounds of German (38) and later, feeling frustrated as well as impatient through her struggles to keep up with the challenges of becoming proficient in a second symbolic code (39-40).

Most of us know that if one truly needs to learn a second language, the process of its acquisition gives way to an encounter with fears as well as thrills and excitement. Based on my own remembered occurrences, the act of significant language learning can easily turn into an experience that, in my opinion, can be equated with that of an indisputable roller-coaster-ride of confounding emotions. Yet in “Language on Loan” Pitt offers more than my recent claim. Her descriptions give voice to the pedagogical and affectual space that genuinely precedes linguistic expression, one that is lived by learners who desire a language that is only beginning to be inhabited. Following the stage that Granger (2004) highlights and terms as that of “silence” in

second language learning, Pitt describes entering the phase in which the new language is no longer a source of distress, when it is no longer persecutory, feared and rejected. She describes the period in which the second language becomes appreciated for its symbolic and epistemological nature, when it begins to offer its newest learners a creative alternative to self-expression and a space in which subjects can feel re-born through the world offered by the new language. Quoting from Pitt:

The idea that children growing up in Germany saw a plate where I saw an abyss woke me right up to the power of language to represent the world. It was not God that created the world; it was language, and I had just been let in on the mystery. In that instant, the problem of translation vanished, and my German lessons became experiences of transfiguration. (37)

Pitt offers her memories of language learning along with her understanding of Alice Kaplan's descriptions of life-changing experiences within and outside of French, Kaplan's acquired second language. *French Lessons* is analysed for the manner in which Kaplan offers phenomenological descriptions that also unmask the act of second language learning, exposing it in all its layers, colours and hues. In her memoir Kaplan offers the personal reasons for her perceived need to hide behind an adopted language: She testifies to her necessity to escape from the emptiness caused by her father's sudden death and from the anxieties that resulted from the incompatibility she experienced with her sick and lonely mother.

Relevant to my current chapter, Kaplan's descriptions expose the aggression that stemmed from having had her happy childhood end by her father's sudden death. She directly and indirectly exposes how her choice to acquire and internalize the French language is fuelled by her loss and sensed crisis, by her adolescent need to idealize that which lies outside of her

English-world and confining reality and by her desire to rebel and become renewed through a genuine process of self-transformation.

I find that the descriptions provided in Kaplan's self-narrative complement those of Winnicott (2005), who explains that the basis of all learning, as well as eating, is emptiness (cited in Britzman and Pitt 2004, 365). For Kaplan, French became the language that allowed her to fill her sensed inner void. As with Pitt (2014), Kaplan's acquisition of French became a source of nourishment, one that almost replaced her need to eat. As presented in *Language on Loan*:

"She [Kaplan] more or less stopped eating, and she chased the language her fellow students spoke, but mostly she chased French" (42).

For Kaplan French was the language to cover pain, one that enabled her attempt to start over. It seems almost natural to suggest that Pitt's, and my own choice to analyse Kaplan's memoir may, at least in part, relate to the manner in which it offers descriptions of the writer's need to work through conflicts that stem from matricide. As with Rodriguez, in Kaplan's text readers are given a glimpse of the way in which learning a new symbolic code and internalizing its phonemes and mannerisms draws the learner to a perceptually acceptable, new and often idealized reality. In Kaplan's memoir, the projection of an idealized transformation is conceivable under "Leaving", for example, when she recalls meeting with Ted and feeling excited by the romanticised prospect of studying in Switzerland and incidentally, by becoming transformed by her welcomed adventure:

I loved imagining coming home, suave and seductive, before I even left...on the other side of the world...I would be a new person. I wouldn't recognize Ted anymore. I wouldn't even understand his [English] language. (40, 41)

One important aspect is Kaplan's imagined assumption of a sudden and complete linguistic shift. Another aspect relates to the location in which she chose to bare farewell to her friend Ted and presumably to her monolingual, teenage life in Minnesota. Not only does her last reunion take place in a cemetery, but when she and Ted look for a particular place to kiss, they chose to lie beside and eventually over the corpse of a young woman who shared Kaplan's first name. In the final section of "Leaving" Kaplan writes:

The marble on Alice Bergstrand's grave was refreshing. Ted's kisses came faster. I got dizzy from the cold of the marble, the warmth from Ted's mouth; I felt myself cutting, cutting through time and place, slipping through a trap door into another world... With my hands on the marble, I propped myself over him. His eyes were closed...I looked around me... I could see the lake with a few sailboats on it, across Lake Calhoun Boulevard. It wasn't my home anymore. It was a landscape. (41)

For Kaplan, moving abroad signified an internal relocation of homes, a way out of her present life and a way into a highly romanticized reality. When preparing to leave Minnesota becomes "a landscape", already a part of her rejected present and remembered past. The realization and idealization of a language's transformative nature, of its ability to temporally pull her away from her understood past, turned her French lessons into an exhilarating experience (Kaplan 1993, 55-56). This writer's acquired French became her transitional language. French developed into the symbolic code that invoked her sense of inner growth, one that spelled while enabling the underlying intent of matricide, of the act that moves the subject away from the old self and the oppressive love that signifies the first object and times of dependency. Such inner growth allows for the individual to find symbolization through the development of a new form of expression, of novel meanings, unfamiliar relations and, equally important, a new persona.

### **Bidirectional Aggression in Language Learning**

Relevant to our discussion is the dynamics of a complex, multidirectional intersection of aggression and desire that exist within the language learning occurrence. If we look closely into this specific learning act we can derive the presence of a well-defined violence that points to our civilized discontents<sup>34</sup>, to our nature and interactions with the other. Within the process of language learning, aside from the aggression exercised towards one's mother, and oneself, through matricide, there is also a violent force that is projected towards the learner. According to Kaplan: "It is violent being thrown into a new language and in having to make your way. Violent and vulnerable: in a new language, you are unbuttoned, opened up" (139). This acknowledgement of aggression is discussed by Pitt, who, in "Language on Loan", also makes reference to the conflict and helplessness inflicted upon the subject when becoming submerged into the world of foreign language learning and into a reality that, according to Pitt, uproots while exposing the "vulnerability of our human nature" (6). Kaplan's and Pitt's words address the aggression suffered by those who become immersed within the borders of a foreign language. Such violence, according to Deborah Britzman and Alice Pitt are constitutive of significant learning.

In "Pedagogy and Clinical Knowledge", Britzman and Pitt present the manner in which the act of learning, as a cognitive phenomenon, taps into the learner's history of affect. They discuss individuals' response to new material and explain how foreign information, or data that does not fit within the learner's schemata, is felt as "a force that is not secured by meaning or understanding" (369). Foreign information becomes part of a force that challenges learners' false sense of security and of mastery. The new data becomes involved within a dynamic that disables the subject's ability to make relations and therefore think. (366) Since the new

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<sup>34</sup> In *Civilization and Its Discontents* Sigmund Freud (2002) defines people as split subjects, he describes our universal needs and outlines the known and unknown aggression that is innate to each and every one of us, an aggression that often becomes sublimated through art, and/or controlled by religion and by society's codes of civilized, social conduct. Society's imposition and governance over our natural inclination or nature, suggests Freud, is at the root of our human discontents (103-104).

information creates a “rupture of cognitive frames” (Felman 1991, 56), the subject is left feeling anxious, helpless and, as a result, in a state of crisis.

The learner is made to feel vulnerable by the interruption caused by such an act: by the break between the old and the new, between what is part of a continuous frame of experience and that which disrupts and gives rise to a chain of events involves the interplay between the individual’s internal and external realities (Britzman and Pitt 2004, 371-372). This state imposed by the new body of knowledge brings back the subject’s known and unknown history, her memories and phantasies of learning and not learning, as well as her repression(s) and resistance(s) to learn. Equally important, awakening the individual’s history of object relations causes the inevitable rise of transferences (368-369) as a force that, regardless of its connection with the learner’s forgotten past, is felt as one that belongs to the present (Freud c1935, 395; Klein 1975, 48).

However, as seen in my Chapter IV, crises resolve themselves through the binding work of Eros. As suggested by Britzman and Pitt, once the tension that emerges from the subject’s inner and outer realities becomes confronted, through a negotiation between the ego and its environment, symbolization occurs and the learner’s experience is brought into relief through significance (369-370). Founded on earlier ontological discussions of language, I assume that Britzman’s and Pitt’s theory of significant learning is, once again, synonymous with language acquisition, especially within the transformative context of host foreign immersions. We have already seen that the attention given to the affective side of second language learning is not, in its strict sense, a contemporary concern. Stengel (1939) has also suggested that within foreign linguistic immersions, language acquisition becomes an “anachronic” act that uproots the subject’s past. In other words, the immersion into a foreign tongue places the subject back into a primary situation of language, taking the learner back to a forgotten history that preceded the use and/or proficiency of her first language. For this psychoanalyst and former migrant, when

subjects are forced to communicate within a poorly known language, they re-live and therefore unknowingly respond to their infantile, repressed histories (476).

A reverberation of Stengel's theory can be found in "Language on Loan" where Pitt, when referring to her own experience as a second language learner notices an internal dilemma that, paradoxically, is needed:

... our history of having to learn intrudes. It reminds us of our helplessness and dependency, our fight with authority, as necessary as it may be, and our guilt at having abandoned our earliest loves –our parents and even our omnipotent child selves who could, if only in fantasy, make reality bend to our wishes and believe that infinity is ours to find in the starry night. (40)

Interrelated with these thoughts, and also grounded in her experiences as a foreign language student and a postsecondary foreign language educator, Kaplan calls the language classroom:

...the rawest pedagogy I have ever been in. A place where content means almost nothing and power, desire, provocation almost everything...Language learning can show up people's craziness in dramatic ways....famous stories about language learning ...[are about] battles of the will with fierce parental overtones. (128)

Pitt and Kaplan speak to the internal and external dynamics that are at play within the context of in-class language learning. Their assertions give rise to a conflict that, according to Gilbert, "is necessary for intellectual development" (6). Equally important, their testimonies move our theory beyond the hierarchic dynamics that are indeed present within second language classrooms and within all interactions between individuals of differing linguistic proficiencies. Their words also speak of an added crisis that, as described in Chapter IV with Hoffman's narrative, relates to the individual's sudden change in identity: from the problem of perceiving oneself as Other

and from the trauma that stems from having to speak a poorly-known language. Such acts force learners to confront their affect and to perform their own ignorance (Britzman 2006, 43).

Regardless of the nature and assumed length of subjects' geographical and linguistic relocations, with all host foreign language immersions subjects experience a cumulative trauma of separation that exposes individuals' aggressive nature. The language learning act, if significant, sets in motion crises that, with a good enough environment, becomes benign and eventually embraced as one that enables and nurtures learners' growth and transformation within the co-dependent reality we know as the third space.

### **Known and Forgotten Histories in the Acquisition of A New Symbolic Code of Meanings**

It seems incomplete to discuss the aggression that exists within the dynamics of second language learning without reconsidering the authority that emanates from a host language, and the threat perceived by learners through their social and inner "struggles to keep up" (Pitt 2013, 39). As discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, while addressing Britzman's (2006) "Identification with the Aggressor", when confronted with the vulnerability and helplessness inflicted by an object's authority, subjects, in their attempt to turn passivity into activity and free themselves from the oppressing aggressor, commit the libidinal act of introjecting all or parts of the object with the motive of destruction and defeat (45, 49-51). By becoming active, moreover, the individual no longer feels like a victim; she breaks free from oppression and echoes the aggressor in her desire to dominate.

Relevant to my work I suggest that within the terrain of foreign language immersions one can assume that linguistic minorities unknowingly turn passivity into activity by committing the libidinal act of introjecting or absorbing all or parts of the foreign language, while identifying the members of its linguistic community with those who embody its authority. Likewise in his



memoir, Rodriguez (1983), describes his interactions with his primary-school teachers while considering his identification with authority:

I began by imitating their accents, using their diction, trusting their very direction. The very first facts they dispensed, I grasped with awe. Any book they told me to read, I read –then awaited for them to tell me which books I enjoyed...it was the nun's [teacher's] encouragement that mattered most to me. (52)

Rodriguez' memory of his own identification with his teachers becomes further evoked in that same section when he mentions:

When I was in high school, I admitted to my mother that I planned to become a teacher someday. That seemed to please her. But I never tried to explain that it wasn't the occupation of teaching I yearned for as much as it was something more elusive: I wanted to *be* like my teachers, to possess their knowledge, to assume their authority, their confidence, even to assume a teacher's persona. (58, *original italics*)

For Rodriguez, the embodiment of the host language was achieved through his identification with teachers who symbolized, while highlighting, the host linguistic and social authority. It is significant to also add that the undercurrent that feeds a subject's desire to master a new language is also unquestionable in Kaplan's memoir. It is seen, for example, when she describes her ranting interpretation of André's rationale for leaving her and worse yet for replacing her apparent love with that of Maïté's:

It's because my French isn't good enough" and "It's because she is French." When he told me I couldn't understand his language, André had picked the accusation I was most vulnerable to. Afterwards I thought, "I'll show him. I know all there is to know about his language. I'll know his language better than he does, someday."....I wanted to breathe in French with André, I wanted to sweat French sweat. It was the rhythm and pulse of his

French that I wanted, the body of it, and he refused me, he told me I could never get that. I had to get it another way. (93-94, *original italics*)

Of course it is almost inconceivable for me to read these narratives and discuss these theories without connecting them to my past and present experiences within languages. It makes me reminisce on and even reconsider my own conscious and unconscious motives to learn, relearn and obsess with the language that as a child I felt as other. I assume it should be no surprise that as an undergraduate student, under the belief that I would obtain easy credits, I decided to drop psychology as a declared major to pursue the study of the Spanish language. As a young adult, I became obsessed with its sounds, rules and linguistic irregularities. Not only did I feel the pressing need to master the Spanish language, but in time, I switched my role within the foreign-language classroom: from student to instructor.

My academic choice allowed me to master the Spanish language, to understand its grammar, its irregularities and thus to make it perceptually mine. Even though English is the language I currently live and breathe, Spanish turned into the language I truly know, the one held within my childhood tears and dreams, the one that reflects the otherness that will always exist within the inner compounds of my known and unknown self.

## **Conclusion**

Language is not a machine you can break and fix with the right technique, it is a function of the whole person, an expression of culture, desire, need....Inside our language is our history personal and political (Kaplan 1993, 98).

A lived language is a representation of the self, of the speaker's desires, wishes and histories. Through language the subject is able to transform herself, to understand and represent her world. Language is also a vehicle through which individuals are able to learn about our social and inner realities, about the essence that resides within the self and the

otherness that gives away subjects' known and unknown histories. In this final chapter I took a hermeneutic approach to the study of my own assumptions and interpretations of migrants' and non-migrants' host foreign language acquisition. I accounted for the manner in which my overall history may knowingly and unknowingly interact and give way to my understanding of my own and of others' realities.

I realize that we often choose to work within areas that speak to us, because of the topics' relevance to our own lives and subjective make-up. This engagement with topics that are perceived as irreducibly ours often grants us with the drive to stay afloat within the difficulties perceived through our encounter with difficult knowledge. However, the problem we may stumble upon when addressing issues linked to our own known and seemingly forgotten histories relates to the exposed and sometimes hidden affect that is at play with our qualitative interpretations.

It is not ground breaking to claim that when we are emotionally involved with a topic, we may unknowingly become influenced by a perspective that, instead of sweeping across the broadness of an entire picture, becomes partial in its one-sided view and understanding of events. Nine months after my defense and following the completion of this chapter, I can now say that in spite of my experiences as a migrant, a postsecondary second language educator and a translingual subject, my initial argument, which was grounded on the many inner voices that fed my stance, was lacking in discursive neutrality. When discussing the phenomenology of foreign language learning, the thick, red line I traced dichotomizing the types of socio-linguistic and cognitive experiences –that of migrant and a non-migrant language learners- clouded my view of the universality of our common need to belong and, at times, of our need to hide or run away from experiences and situations that may make us feel confused, unsatisfied and possibly, incomplete.

My initial view of the young, exiled migrant made me take sides; it blinded me to the affective experiences encountered by those who, regardless of perceived choices, also enter the world of foreign languages and desire, the affective world of idealizations, of linguistic dislocations, challenged identities and intersemiotic translations<sup>35</sup>. I am not denying how a young migrants' precarious, imposed position taints her initial attitude towards her new situation and language, and how her perception to her newfound experience increases her sensed crisis. But returning to Akhtar's (2012) words, understanding our universal need for love, safety and sense of continuity, we cannot refute that even among those who choose to study abroad, becoming immersed within the borders of the foreign becomes an experience that universally threatens the self by impacting the subject's relation with her first loves and sense of socio-linguistic continuity.

Analysing the experiences described by 'language migrants' –by migrants and foreign students- led to the interpretation of the experiential commonalities in foreign language learning. Studying self-narratives provided by both types of host language learners enabled a fuller look into the vicissitudes of significant language learning, and of its relation to crisis, trauma and creativity. Such a combination created a space for the examination of the dynamics of aggression that are inherent to each and every subject, a violence that becomes unconsciously brought to the fore through perceived threats. With foreign-linguistic immersions I noted that subjects' aggression grows from their circumstantial sense of loss, from the precariousness of their vulnerability as learners and from their uprooted fears and anxieties, which become juxtaposed with individuals' common need for independence. There is, after all, the desire to

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<sup>35</sup> Intralingual translations are defined as translations between signs of the same language. From a post-structural perspective we understand that language and culture are not fixed or stable entities, thus one creates signification [with a Bakhtinian orientation: one creates one's own accent] from a through plural, fluid, non-unitary categories that build upon the phenomenological production of diverging and often conflicting signs. Intersemiotic translations, on the other hand, speak to this fluidity. However, its focus is not limited to the one language. Instead, it looks into the meaning-makings that are communicatively produced and understood through the interaction and 'passage' between linguistic and non-linguistic signs, between language and cultures that, from a subjective perspective, are in contact with one another (Karpinski 2012, 3-6).

grow and develop as subjects through processes of transformation. As seen with significant language learners, with those who become 'internally' exiled, such transformation often occurs through the subject's need to connect with a new, outer world. It transpires through the embodiment and re-accentuation of a symbolic code of meanings and behaviours that, from a young learner's perspective, are always awaiting for the impossibility of acquiring, mastering and re-signifying the learned language as one's own.

## CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

Trust in language is the opposite – distrust of language – situated within language. Confidence in language is language itself distrusting – defying- language: finding in its own space the unshakable principles of a critique.

-Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of a Disaster*

Through a close interdisciplinary study of language migrants' lived, reconstructed and imagined histories of early socio-linguistic and affective ruptures, I have examined the ontology of a lived language, the dynamics within significant host foreign language learning and the manner with which autobiographic child and adolescent narratives of language-related traumas shape and define the speaking subject. Such examination has retrospectively shaped the choices –and order- of the translingual narratives I have analyzed for this study. Following my introductory chapter -chapter one- and my theoretical chapter –chapter two-, I studied historical trauma within language through the analysis of Hijuelos' memoir-chapter three-. Migration and benign trauma were addressed through Eva Hoffman's narrative –chapter four-, and the trauma of significant language learning was studied with Kaplan's and Rodriguez' translingual memoirs and Pitt's article on second language learning –chapter five-.

For this dissertation I addressed three main problematics: 1) the validity of written memory in the examination of the effects of early host-foreign language immersions, 2) the sense of otherness that resides within an appropriated, internalized tongue, and 3) the innate situation of language in relation to our psycho-social and affective nature and cognitive developments.

Throughout my dissertation I used the term translingual and translingualism in association with a condition born from a juxtaposition of internalized tongues: from the feelings that emerge when individuals exist within a third space carved in-between two or more linguistic

codes. The term translingual is not original to my work. Steven Kellman described a translingual being as one who is able to write “in more than one language or in a language other than [his or her] primary one” (cited in Karpinski 2012, 230). Karpinski expanded on this term by defining the translingual subject as an individual whose subjectivity becomes translated by the fractional incorporation of his or her migrant reality within uneven languages (95). In a similar vein and following Kellman’s and Karpinski’s steps, Paola Bohórquez (2008) explains that a translingual being is one whose subjectivity is affected by the imbalanced co-dependence of two or more linguistic codes (2).

Following Bohórquez’ description, I symbolize the term translingualism as a condition that destabilizes subjects’ internal and social realities, as one that stems from living within a socio-affective area filled by confounding silences, emptiness, resentment, aggression, desires, guilt, yearning for love and an interminable need for synthesis and forgiveness. My first problematic questions the theoretical validity of a study based on the lived and imagined descriptions found in self-narratives. I thus looked into how first hand descriptions provided by language migrants commonly disclose the feelings associated with their sensed linguistic imbalance. I observed that in memoirs centered in first-hand translingual experiences, writers’ own lives are made into the subject of intense, self-critical discourse, a discourse that splits while blending feelings with emotions, one that juxtaposes and highlights the cognitively unknown with the traces of the perceptually known.

Through self-reflexive narratives my work researched how the emotions rooted in the crises associated with child and adolescent host-foreign language immersions and significant language learning become integrated as a repetition of subjects’ earliest mark. My interdisciplinary approach to the study of translingual recollections offered, in agreement with Pavlenko (2007), an insight into writers’ worlds, into realities “inaccessible to experimental methodologies...” (162). With memoirs and self-reflexive essays I examined the way in which

writers use language to symbolize, interpret their worlds and position themselves as subjects living outside and/or in-between lived languages and cultures. As seen with Hijuelos, Hoffman, Kaplan, Rodriguez and Pitt, the significance of language migrants' narratives rests in the way in which such texts become spaces for idealizations and despondency. I analysed how writers' discourse became entrenched with affect, how their lives and selves -in relation to the intersection between their mOther tongue with the internalized language of the Other- became conceptualized and therefore understood, and accepted by means of their narratives.

My work with first hand reflections also tapped into the paradoxical uniqueness of an internalized language in relation to the otherness it often evokes. The study of language, affect and the unconscious began in my first chapter when addressing Heller-Roazen's work in "Hubda" and in "Schizophonetics". As I observed with the description of Canetti's feelings: for those of us who, for the most part, love and relate within our second symbolic code of meanings, we often note that the sounds and intonations of our childhood language, reminiscent of our earliest times, remind us not only of moments of need and persecutory feelings, but also of times of nourishment, of bountiful love and hence, of the oceanic feeling that nurtured us as infants. Hence, it should come as no surprise that the perceptual abandonment of our primary language has traces of desire, longing and guilt, of idealizations, splits and overall defenses that flow into our language-related behaviours and onto the poorly understood dynamics that took and continue to take place within our third space.

I noted that a fascinating aspect of a primary language relates to its affective fusion with speakers' first love objects and, in agreement with Sigmund Freud, to how easily a negative encounter within language turns into a source of a deep-rooted emotional trauma. Interconnected with such findings my second chapter looked at how a lived tongue is linked to speakers' early and later socio-affective and cognitive development. I examined the manner in which a primary and later language become an intricate part of the self, exposing subjects'



personal and universal nature in relation to others and to their earlier and later selves. I stressed that it is incomplete if not impossible to fully understand the subjective currency of a lived tongue, the feelings its use and/or absence evokes, and speakers' choice of language use, without conceptualizing the complexity of our universal disposition in relation to our personal and shared histories.

In chapter I two studied the epistemological significance of a primary language. While presenting a theoretical and foundational ground on which all other chapters lean, this chapter highlighted the need for researchers in the field of language to understand the dynamics that influence behaviours surrounding the internalization of languages. I discussed the way in which lived symbolic codes form part of our amplified biography, and how our language lies at the core of our system of conscious and unconscious, individual and social, meanings and corresponding affect. I focused on the way in which an appropriated tongue allows speakers to express themselves, to transition, to repeat, to feel and often, to understand the remembered and perceptually forgotten realities that give way to their sense of being and existing as subjects.

I addressed how our primary language and the ego share a concurrent, interrelated development. As argued by Felman (1987), language is born through incest, through the law of prohibition. With an initial focus on one's primary language I stressed that its significance rests in its developmental as a transitional relevance, and in the manner in which it forms part of our intermediate area of experiencing and reality testing: how a primary language plays an active role in our transition from the pleasure principal to the reality principal. I also noted that a lived tongue is influenced by ongoing inner and social occurrences, that a mother tongue is linked to our internal world while seemingly existing outside of us.

I studied the way in which a lived language is a trait that we learned from the other, yet since it becomes re-accentuated by our thoughts, use, beliefs, it is mistakenly felt as our own. Since a present and/or previously lived tongue is linked to our remembered, perceptually forgotten memories, it becomes inevitably tied to our desires, disappointments, fabrications and wishes. An internalized tongue becomes a vehicle that promotes our subjectivity and socio-cognitive and affective growth. Through our language and its intersection with knowledge and culture we develop our sense of subjectivity. As an accomplice in our development our symbolic code withholds, transmits and transforms our sense of being, as well as our thoughts, interpretations and overall behaviours. In short, with language we unknowingly expose our affective prototype and thus respond to language in ways that shed light on our earliest and later, remembered and repressed histories. The manner in which we embrace or reject an internalized tongue exposes our known and unknown realities that become entrenched within, and reflective of, the dynamics that took and continue to take place within our psyche.

I looked into how our language marks us historically and geographically, at the way in which it holds much more than social, symbolic meaning, and is more than a container of shared ideas and culture. I pointed at the way in which an internalized symbolic code is the fertile ground through which we love, hate, and relate to others through the introjection of the outside world and the projection of ourselves onto the other. Our language impacts the manner in which we think, perceive our occurrences, and express or attempt to express our thinking in relation to others and to our own realities. The exploration of the emotional significance of language led to the appreciation of how traumas within language shape speakers' affective attachments and detachments, while shedding light onto their universal nature.

Following my introductory and theoretical chapters, I examined the effects of living through a language related 'historical' trauma –from an early age- in chapter three, with the examination of *Thoughts without Cigarettes*. As seen with Hijuelos' love-hate association with

his Spanish tongue, for former monolingual subjects, the memory of a symbolic code, as is the self, is fragmented and that such fragmentation often situates crisis while giving way to a drive that propels speakers' desire to conceptualize the eventual integration and/or void that define their subjectivity within and perceptually outside of their first language(s). In this third chapter I highlighted the significance of a primary language and the manner in which one's mother tongue becomes tied to and affected by our early beginnings, to our history of object-relations, and to our known and unknown connection with our mother, father, loved ones and earlier selves. *Thoughts without Cigarettes* grounded many of the language-related theories discussed in the two previous chapters. It began the conversation of language and emotional trauma, and of what it means for the subject to have his language disrupted during early childhood.

Hijuelos' work unpacked descriptions of the emotive significance of having to subjectively and objectively construct one's life as a 1.5-generation migrant, to become retrospectively transformed within the otherness that the space in between a primary and second language often evokes. The study of Hijuelos' memoir provided much more than an exposure to a linguistic break in continuity and more than a young migrant's layered transformation within his host language and culture. *Thoughts without Cigarettes* disclosed defense mechanisms triggered by the writer's experiences between languages: mechanisms such as transferences, idealizations, splits and identifications that were distinctly tied to his particular history within competing languages and cultures. Hijuelos' relationship and the consequential feelings experienced with his first and later objects of affection correlated with the sentiments he held with the languages these significant objects spoke and the cultures they represented. The developmental, socio-affective and cognitive worth of language, as well as the relation between language and Winnicott's transitional phenomenon, were also solidified with the interpretation of Hijuelos' written words.

In my fourth chapter I analysed migration and adolescence through Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation*. I looked into why a mother tongue's sudden interruption and loss of socio-affective and instrumental function give rise to the inscription of a set of cumulative crises. I conceptualized language-related trauma through a psychoanalytic look into the meaning of a primary and second tongue, and examined the manner in which language becomes a reservoir of transferences, early and later interrelated desires, and of spoken and unspoken fears. With Hoffman's descriptions I realized that whether host-language immersion occurs during childhood or adolescence, becoming resubmitted to a stage of linguistic infancy forces subjects to re-live their first mark and eventual separation from their first objects. This chapter grapples with young migrants' initial and later feelings and responses to host-foreign immersions. In connection with my previous chapters I discussed that a primary language's rupture triggers a sense of emotional trauma and how a mother tongue's replacement is synonymous of internal and external transformations: with the remaking of the external and internal self and with growth within the flow of the foreign and yet internalized other.

In this chapter I argued that our primary language is associated with our infancy, with our earliest emotions, our memory of wholeness and unquestioned identity, and how for monolingual emigrants, becoming choiceless -in their immersion within the grounds of a host-foreign language and reality- triggers a sense of temporal rupture and a threat to their basic need for love and safety. I explained how such occurrences lead to migrants' perception of an emotional trauma and thus to a destabilizing sense of internal and social chaos. I also highlighted that as a result of the trauma of migration individuals experience an intrasubjective split that further disrupts their sense of stability.

As noted in Kramsch's text and with Akhtar in his 2012 conference, Eva Hoffman's classic migrant memoir commonly appears in theoretical discussions of language. This is due to the manner in which Hoffman's narrative exposes the eminent significance of language in the

construction and reconstruction of subjects' internal and social 'I' and to the way in which it grounds our subjectivity, sense of belonging, love, growth and temporal continuity. Hoffman's *Lost in Translation* offered a retrospective look into the challenges she recalled experiencing as a monolingual Polish emigrant immersed within the compounds of a host foreign tongue and reality. Her memoir describes young migrants' classical struggles and initial resistance. It voices their eventual need to learn the host language in hopes of experiencing a sense of belonging, and thus overcoming the emptiness, loss, internal void and the inner and social estrangement that was introduced by their unwanted socio-geographic and linguistic relocation.

In this chapter I stressed that as a trademark of late childhood and adolescence, young subjects' primary language becomes idealized and the acquired later language becomes part of their hybrid reinvention. I analysed children's and adolescents' physical move away from their retrospectively glorified past and established homeland and examined teenage idealization and its relation to subjects' interpolations. I stressed the difference in emotional impact between forced and chosen migration and looked at the ideologies that shape and define such socio-geographic, linguistic and affective moves. I explained how migrant children feel exiled from their homes and –retrospectively- idealized language and past, and how such exilic state influences their response to their newfound reality and to the development of their new –and often unwelcomed- sense of self.

I described how the acquisition, internalization and dominance of the host tongue are reflective of an individual's ability to integrate the event of the migrational –and matricidal- trauma, one that, borrowing from Derrida, becomes a later mark. When a language migrant is submerged within a good enough host environment, he or she is able to relive the first unconscious integration, to repeat and eventually synthesize the experiences that led to the experiences that led to his or her third individuation and re-organization of identity (Akhtar 1995, 1053). Hence, in my dissertation I interpreted migration as a benign trauma, one that becomes a

necessary condition in the production of meaning and individuals' inner and social growth. Since language and the self are intertwined, understanding the fragmentation caused by language migrants' linguistic interruptions offered a space for me to conceptualize what lies underneath the layers of the socially constructed self. I looked into our human disposition, into our aggressive inclinations and into the developmental dynamics of violence that resides within our being.

I focused on young subjects' innate desire to fit in and at how such desire or need to socially belong creates a space for young migrants' introjections, projections and eventual identity shifts. These discussions channelled the discussions provided in my fifth chapter, in which I examined Kaplan's, Rodriguez' and Pitt's language-related recollections and retrospective thoughts. Understanding the unconscious value of a primary language led to a better conceptualization of the aggression that exists within its replacement. I looked into the link between desire and matricide and at the manner in which these acts exist in tandem with the aggression that is constitutive of all significant learning.

Kaplan's and Pitt's reflections fostered the link in experiential similarities between young individuals forced into becoming migrants and host-foreign language students who choose to study a foreign language abroad. I noted that even though young migrants are affected by a forced relocation and sense of permanent change in comparison to foreign language students, host-foreign language students' choice to temporarily relocate is often rooted in their innate need to individualize and thus distance themselves from the conflicts that stem from relations they hold with their first objects and, by extension, with their motherland. To learn a new language within a new culture is to transform and break from the oppressive love that is tied to individuals' early beginnings. For many adolescents and young adults, such a perceptual choice becomes a developmental need, becoming part of the subject's third individuation. Thus understanding the effects of foreign-host language immersions also allowed me to draw

parallels between young migrants and host-foreign language students. Equally important, with both language-related occurrences subjects experience the trauma associated with significant learning. This third type of language-related trauma is marked by a set of cumulative crises, along with the matricidal violence that relate to the acquisition and internalization of a new tongue.

My fifth chapter took an unexpected turn, exposing how reading, theorisation and control of meaning often become a new curiosity toward the self. In my case it translated into a closer look into my own reality. Through an inevitable and yet unplanned hermeneutic approach I examined what the interpretation of language memoirs meant to me as a translingual subject. It brought me back to my own drive to understand my own remembered occurrences. Hence, my research incited a closer look into my own response to translingual narratives, into my own professional choice, my obsessions with grammar, my unwelcomed silences, along with my attitudinal stance as a multilingual subject, a Spanish language pedagogue and a parent.

Studying descriptions offered by language migrants reminded me of my childhood and adolescent migrations and my host-foreign linguistic immersions. It made me revisit the shattering of continuity I experienced within language, and the way in which such interruptions were perceived as emotional traumas. It awoke the memory of the crisis associated with the fragmentation in my continuity within language, as well as the anxieties that stemmed from significant language learning, the guilt reborn from primary language replacements and the need and utmost desire to connect and feel at ease within languages. In short, my work recapped the feelings that often stem through my history and from the conflict that arises from the internalization of my competing worlds. It reminded me of the way in which living between languages has forced me to construct a fragmented life between lands, ways of life, bifurcating times and porous memories.

In addition, my study made me wonder if I expect more from my postsecondary students' language acquisition than was expected of me as a young, unwilling –and angry- young migrant. I question if my expectations and the elusive sternness I often exercise when grading my students' grammar are not reflexive of the behaviours exercised by my past educators, but instead of the pressures I knowingly and unknowingly placed on myself as a language student. I realize that although the manoeuvres of memory may at times infringe upon the facts of our lived past, it never blurs the accurateness in emotions of our lived and perhaps imagined experiences, of the way in which specific occurrences made us feel, the way certain truths affected us and may still affect us to our present day.

Such realizations make me return to André Green's words. Specifically when he states that our affective history relates to occurrences that are not –at least in its entirety- based on conscious lived experiences. Instead it is formed by:

... a combination of: what has happened, what has not happened, what could have happened, what has happened to someone else but not to me, what could not have happened, and finally – to summarize all these alternatives about what has happened- a statement that one would not have even dreamed of as a representation of what really happened. (2-3)

In conformity with André Green –and, as explained earlier, with Melanie Klein's work- my focus in relation to my first problematic was not placed on the accuracy or possible inaccuracy of the narratives I have analyzed, but on how descriptions of migrating occurrences made subjects feel, how their remembered memories became engraved as part of their realities, and how such perceptions and memories became subjective truths that influenced language migrants' interpretations, ongoing responses, understandings and eventual subjectivities.

As for my second problematic, the otherness that becomes exposed through and within an internalized language, as Britzman (2010) once stated: "with language we hide", but as seen throughout this dissertation through our language(s) we also expose our inner worlds and the conflicts that are born from the juxtaposition and interaction of our earlier and later selves, and



the internalization of our shared, social realities. To speak any language is to speak the language of the Other and to hear the Other within the self. As communal beings we speak the symbolic code we learned from those who surround and inevitably influence us. With a good-enough environment, however, the otherness that becomes constitutive of all languages eventually becomes partially altered, and almost hidden, with what Bahktin (1981) calls our own “distinctive accents” (5). Such alteration explains how we take language’s external origin for granted and often mistakenly perceive it as our very own.

Now returning to this final chapter’s opening quote, although Blanchot’s (1995) discourse of language diverged from my focus on affect, language acquisition and use, Blanchot’s words led me to consider the vastness that encompasses the phenomenon of language, its deceitfulness and the manner in which an internalized tongue is linked to the complexity of our inner and social worlds. His words made me look at how our language exposes while hiding our love, hate and torments, and the manner in which an internalized symbolic code can often make us feel secure in light of our insecurities, by giving us comfort and allowing us to transition away from, while always liking us to, our first and later love-objects.

In relation to my third problematic, the situation of language is a complicated one: to conceptualize our socio-affective relation to internalized symbolic codes, the undercurrents present with language acquisition and the study of the transformative dynamics associated with a mother tongue’s social and affective replacement, researchers must look beyond the – conscious- socio-pedagogical realm and examine what exists at the root of the developmental and transitional phenomenon we call language. Our words hold the not-so-hidden-key to our unconscious, to our nature, to our subjective makeup and hence, to the Otherness that becomes unveiled through our responses, emotions and ongoing attitudes and conceptualizations. To become a translingual being and to internalize a second language, especially during the early, transitional years of one’s life, implies a break in linguistic and

cultural continuity: it means to undergo a set of crises and ongoing transformations that together foster our need for synthesis and inter-semiotic translations -between linguistic and non-linguistic signs-. As thinking, feeling and speaking socio-cultural subjects we live and understand our realities between the fluent boundaries of borrowed tongues. To experience language migrancy and therefore, to abandon our monolingual selves leads to ongoing and destabilizing changes that incite and pave the way for the remaking of our subjective developments, the formation and rebirth of the hybrid subjects we are or, quoting from Kramsch, hope to become.

As we continue to live in a globalizing era of transnational social movements, looking closely into a language's symbolic currency and into the social, emotional and psychological consequences of abrupt host-foreign immersions is of utmost relevance to our Canadian reality: it is of significance to individuals trying to grasp their experiences as language migrants, and of value to psychologists, psychoanalysts, counsellors and social workers, as well as researchers in the field of pedagogy, sociolinguistics, migration and memoir studies. My dissertation highlights the need for a curricular focus on the emotionality of language learning: on the socio-affective, linguistic and developmental significance of offering foreign-host language students the opportunity to relate with language migrants' descriptions of experiences, and for students to verbalize and thus understand their own occurrences through the writing of reflexive/auto-biographical narratives. My study contributes to a richer understanding of child and adolescent language-migrants' subjectivity and opens new directions for the interpretation of identity constructions within the fluid landscape of internalized language(s).

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