I

Bilingual Adults

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I

Why Are People Bilingual?

Out of curiosity, I googled the word "bilingual" and came up with more than 32 million hits (a number that will have increased by the time you read this). I then looked up the ways the word was used and found it in the contexts of bilingual dictionaries, bilingual professions, bilingual people, bilingual laws, bilingual nations, bilingual books, bilingual toys, bilingual studies, bilingual ballots, bilingual databases, bilingual schools, and so on. As I went through the list (I gave up after a few pages), it became clear that the word "bilingual" was being used in many different ways, such as, "who know and use two languages" (in reference to bilingual people), "which are presented in two languages" (bilingual books, ballots), "which need two languages" (bilingual professions), "which recognize two languages" (bilingual nations), or "which go from one language to the other" (bilingual dictionaries). It also emerged that some expressions are not clear. Is a bilingual school, for example, a school that welcomes and caters to two monolingual language populations, a school that uses two languages in its teaching, or a school that promotes bilingualism in its children? The take-home message from this is that we must

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be careful in interpreting the word “bilingual” when we see it or hear it.

In this book matters will be simpler, as we will be concentrating on bilingual adults and bilingual children. In addition, I propose this definition of bilinguals at the outset:

Bilinguals are those who use two or more languages (or dialects) in their everyday lives.

Three points need to be made with regard to this definition. First, it puts the emphasis on the regular use of languages and not on fluency, as I shall discuss in more detail in Chapter 2. Second, it includes dialects along with languages. Thus, an Italian who uses one of Italy’s many dialects, such as Pugliese, as well as Italian is considered to be bilingual, just as a person who uses English and Spanish on a regular basis is. Third, the definition includes two or more languages, since some people use three or four languages, if not more.

I have often been asked why I don’t use the word “multilingual.” Two reasons come to mind. The first is that some people are “only” bilingual (they know and use two languages) and it seems odd to use the term “multilingual” when describing them. The second is that the word “multilingual” is used less than “bilingual” in reference to individuals. There is a long tradition in the field of extending the notion of bilingualism to those who use two or more languages on a regular basis.

Before spending several chapters examining the bilingual person, we need to ask ourselves why people are bilingual and why it is that so many inhabitants of the world use two or more languages in their everyday life. In this chapter we will look first at the factors that lead to bilingualism, and second at how extensive bilingualism really is.

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Reasons That Lead to Bilingualism

If you attempt to find out the number of languages there are in the world, you will come up with many different answers. A primary reason for this is how you define a language as compared with a variety of a language, often called a dialect. When you include each dialect as an independent language, the count goes up; when you don't, the number goes down. The Web site and reference book *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* presents a comprehensive catalogue of all the known living languages in the world today. It basically applies the criteria of mutual intelligibility between dialects and a common literature to determine whether two dialects are part of the same language, but it also allows for exceptions based on ethnolinguistic identities. According to the latest count by *Ethnologue,* close to 7,000 languages exist in the world (the exact number in the 2005 edition is 6,912 languages). The area with the fewest languages is Europe (only 239 languages) and the area with the most languages is Asia (2,269). One outstanding area, which we all tend to see as vast but devoid of important land masses—and hence of languages—is the Pacific, but in fact as many as 1,310 languages are spoken on the various islands scattered across the great expanse of the Pacific Ocean.[1]

With so many languages in the world (even though, according to *Ethnologue,* some 516 of them are nearly extinct), a lot of contact is bound to take place between people of different language groups. And with such language contact, bilingualism will arise. Members of one group will learn the language of another—just as, for instance, Swiss Germans learn French, or immigrants to the United States learn English. Sometimes the learning is reciprocal, although this is rare. Other times, interacting groups will learn

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a lingua franca (a language of communication), such as Swahili, which is used for between-group interaction in Eastern Africa.

Let us now look more closely at the reasons for language contact and bilingualism.

Linguistic Makeup of a Country

A rather rough way of assessing the amount of language contact that takes place in each country is to divide the number of languages in the world (some 7,000) by the number of countries (192, according to the United Nations at the time of writing). The result, an average of 36 languages per country, gives us some idea of the extent of linguistic diversity. According to linguist William Mackey, however, this figure requires a few correctives. First, Mackey points out, some languages are numerically more significant than others. *Ethnologue* estimates that 94 percent of the world's people speak 347 languages, or approximately 5 percent of all the languages. Among the languages spoken by the most people we find Mandarin Chinese, Spanish, English, Bengali, Hindi/Urdu, Arabic, Portuguese, Russian, Japanese, and French. Second, some languages are spoken natively in several countries (for example, Spanish is spoken throughout Central and South America, English in many Commonwealth countries). That said, many countries are home to numerous languages: there are some 516 languages in Nigeria, according to *Ethnologue,* 427 in India, 275 in Australia, 200 in Brazil, 280 in Cameroon, and so on. In fact, it is difficult to find countries with only one or two languages; they are usually isolated geographically (islands such as Greenland and Saint Helena) or politically (North Korea, Cuba).[2]

Linguistic contact within a country, and hence bilingualism, will

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depend on many factors. One is language distribution within the country. If the distribution is geographically based—that is, if the various languages are found in specific areas—there may be less contact than if the language groups all occupy the same territory. One example with which I am very familiar is Switzerland, where the linguistic borders between the four national languages are relatively well delineated: French is spoken in the west, Italian basically in the Ticino area (central southern tip of the country), Romansh in a small area in the eastern part of the country, and German in the rest of the territory. Invariably bilingualism occurs all along the linguistic borders (I live some three miles from the French-German border) and also in border towns like Fribourg and Biel/Bienne. In other countries, two or more languages occupy the same territory (for instance, English and Spanish in the American Southwest), and in such cases the chances of bilingualism are greater, all other things being equal, since much more contact takes place between groups.

Another factor is the language policy of the country. If a government recognizes several languages and gives them some official status (as Canada does with English and French, and Belgium with French, Flemish, and German), then the language contact may not be as great as in countries that recognize one official language among the many that are spoken. In the case of Belgium, for example, some contact occurs between the indigenous language groups and each group learns the language of the others in school, but many people lead their lives in basically one language. In contrast, when a country has just one national language (recognized or not), or an accepted lingua franca, as in many African nations, then members of most language groups have to become bilingual (examples would be the Inuit in Canada, the Navajo in the United States,

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the Kabyles in Algeria, the Albanians in Greece, the Hungarians in Romania, the Finns in Sweden, and so forth). Of course, other factors will have some influence, such as the linguistic and education policies of a country and the attitudes vis-à-vis different language groups. A Belgian offers this assessment of the linguistic situation in his country:

> Every child at school learns both languages starting in early primary school. Flemish-speaking people . . . learn and know French much better, because French is a much more useful and international language.[3]

Movement of Peoples

In today's world, in addition to language contact between indigenous groups, contact occurs between the indigenous groups and speakers of other languages who have immigrated to that region or country. Several patterns may lead to bilingualism. Most frequently, at least nowadays, the immigrants (to the United States, England, or France, for instance) learn the language of their new homeland, but the indigenous population may also learn the language of the settlers (thus, historically we find American Indians learning English in the United States, and Egyptians learning Arabic during the Arab settlement of Egypt). In some cases, but rarely, each group learns the language of the other (as when Spanish settlers in Paraguay learned Guaraní and Guaraní Indians learned Spanish).

People have always moved within and across countries and continents and have done so for many different reasons. Trade, commerce, and business have long given rise to language contact and

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hence bilingualism. In earlier times, when traders traveled to areas where another language was spoken or a lingua franca was used, many—buyers as well as sellers—became bilingual. Greek was the lingua franca of trade in the Mediterranean during the third, fourth, and fifth centuries BCE. Today, Russian is the language of trade and business throughout Russia and the nations of the former Soviet Union (more than a hundred languages are spoken in the Russian Federation), and of course English is a major language of trade and business throughout the world. Business today increasingly operates on global dimensions. Many people move to another country for a few years to work for an international division of their company; their families often accompany them, and both adults and children may become bilingual. And we should note here that it is not always necessary for people to migrate physically for language contact to take place. A great many businesspeople communicate with each other by phone and online, in English and other international languages, across countries and time zones, and then return to their normal, often monolingual, lives at the end of the workday.

People also move around the world for political and religious reasons. World history is full of examples of people moving to another land and, more often than not, another language, for political reasons: Russians migrated after the 1917 Revolution, Sudeten Germans after World War II, Cubans during the Castro era, Vietnamese after the fall of South Vietnam. As for religious migrations, Huguenot Protestants fled France after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 and settled in Russia, England, Holland, and America, for example. In the twentieth century Russian Jews left the Soviet Union under difficult circumstances and settled in Israel or the

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United States, among other countries. And in recent years, many Christians have been leaving the Middle East and resettling elsewhere.

Even though military invasions, wars, and colonization are probably less frequent today than in the past, they have been the cause of much language contact. Alexander the Great and his armies spread Greek throughout the Middle East; the Roman Empire brought Latin to much of Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East; the Spanish conquistadores in the Americas spread their language; colonizations in the nineteenth century increased the number of speakers of French, English, and Russian, and so on.

Finally, migration for economic and social reasons is a major factor in the movement of peoples and hence of language contact. People have always moved to other regions, countries, or continents in search of work and better living conditions. Many countries throughout the world have a history of immigration, and many, such as Australia, Canada, the United States, Brazil, and Argentina, have been built on this very phenomenon. Western Europe, which many left in earlier centuries for better conditions elsewhere, has now, in turn, become home to large immigrant communities that are in various stages of integration.

Within the first few generations of immigration, there is a great deal of language contact as immigrants and their descendants continue to speak their native language and also, most of the time, the language(s) of their new country. It has been estimated, for example, that owing to immigration, some 300 different languages are spoken in London today, and that even a small market town like Boston in Lincolnshire, England, with a population of 70,000, houses some 65 spoken languages.[4]

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Education and Culture

Education and culture have always been and will always be domains in which outside languages are learned and used. As far back as the time of the Roman Empire, almost all educated Romans learned Greek, which was the language of medicine, rhetoric, philosophy, and so on. Later in Europe, Italian and then French took on the same role, as did German for scientific domains in the nineteenth century. Today, English has taken over as the main lingua franca of education and culture. In addition, millions of children and students, in many different countries, not only learn one or two languages as subjects in school but are also educated in a language that is not their native language. This is the case, for example, in numerous African and Asian nations as well as in most immigration countries. A Marathi-Hindi-English trilingual writes:

> When I first went to school I did not know English, but I started English as a subject in secondary school, and then English was the medium of instruction at college.[5]

A Farsi-English bilingual says:

> I did not know how to speak English until I was ten years old, when I went to an English-speaking school in Tehran.[6]

Some schoolchildren and older students may actually travel some distance to be schooled or to go to college in a different language. An example close to my home is seen in the French border area where I live in Switzerland. There is a long-established tradition among Swiss German students of crossing the linguistic border

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to attend our local French-speaking high school instead of going to their own German-speaking high school. We often hear the students chatting away in Swiss German as they walk from the train station, and by the end of their schooling they have become German-French bilinguals. As for college, one need only think of all the students who travel to France, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States, and elsewhere, to obtain a degree. These students become active bilinguals very quickly.

Other Factors

Among other factors leading to bilingualism, three come to mind: bilingual families, people's professions, and deafness. Concerning the first, there are innumerable bilingual households in which the children learn the home language (or home languages) as well as the language(s) outside the home. We will come back to this in Part 2 of this book, but this is a very common way of becoming bilingual. Here is the testimony of one English-Spanish bilingual:

> I was born and grew up in Colombia, South America. In the type of family environment I was brought up in, hearing and speaking two languages [Spanish and English] was a normal thing. My mother is Canadian and my father Colombian, and each would speak to us in their respective native language.[7]

Second is the simple fact that certain jobs require the knowledge and use of several languages. We have already mentioned trade, commerce, and various financial businesses. Many other professions need people to know two or more languages as well: tourism and travel, the hotel and restaurant industry, diplomacy, research,

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the media (including foreign reporting), show business, language teaching and bilingual education, interpreting and translation, aid to developing countries, and so on. Today's workplace is very often bilingual, if not multilingual.

Third, being hard of hearing or deaf often leads to bilingualism in the language of the majority group (English in the United States, for example) and the sign language of the Deaf community that exists in the country or region (American Sign Language in the United States, for instance).[8]

The Extent of Bilingualism

Based on this discussion of the wide extent of bilingualism, one wonders what has given rise to the following misconception:

Myth: Bilingualism is a rare phenomenon.

This false impression probably comes from the fact that one rarely has an overall view of the amount of language contact that occurs in the world. It may also be that some people have very restricted definitions of what it means to be bilingual (we will come back to this in the next chapter). What is certain is that bilingualism is present in practically every country of the world, in all classes of society, in all age groups.

So how many bilinguals are there? Even though I have worked in the field for many years, I still haven't found a good answer. Like many others, I have reported that half of the world's population, if not more, is bilingual. But the data we all would like to have are missing. This is because counting the number of users of a single language is already very difficult (see the problem of separating a dialect from a language) and also because surveys and censuses do

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not agree on what questions to ask. Should individuals be asked which languages they know, which they use, which they spoke as a child? In addition, bilingualism and biculturalism are sometimes seen as phenomena that "dilute" a linguistic or cultural group (does the bilingual/bicultural person belong to group A or group B?) and hence it is easier to ask simple, one-language and one-culture questions.

That said, there are some data around that we can use. For example, the European Commission published a report in 2006 that asked Europeans about their mother tongue and their knowledge of other languages. To the question concerning which languages (excluding the mother tongue) people spoke well enough to be able to have a conversation, 56 percent of those polled (in twenty-five different countries) named one other language, thus indicating their potential bilingualism (even if they did not speak the two languages on a daily basis), and 28 percent named a third language (making them potentially trilingual). So slightly more than half of Europe's population is probably at least bilingual. As would be expected, the countries with the most bilinguals are primarily the smaller ones: Luxembourg, Slovakia, Latvia, The Netherlands, Slovenia—to which we should add Switzerland, which was not included in the poll as it is not officially a member of the European Union. The more monolingual countries are primarily the larger ones, such as Great Britain—where, nevertheless, 38 percent of those polled reported being able to speak at least one language other than their mother tongue.[9]

How about North America? Let's begin with Canada. Statistics Canada reports that slightly more than 5 million people claimed in Canada's 2001 census that they were bilingual in English and

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French, an 8.1 percent increase over the number five years earlier. They represent almost 18 percent of the population. As would be expected, almost half of the Francophones are bilingual, as opposed to only 9 percent of the Anglophones. In addition, another 18 percent of the population reports having some mother tongue other than English and French; since most of those individuals probably also use one of the two national languages, the bilingual population of Canada is therefore probably around 35 percent, a percentage somewhat lower than Europe's.[10]

What is the situation in the United States? More than thirty years ago, in *Life with Two Languages,* I analyzed the 1976 Survey of Income and Education. It had asked language questions of those who reported a non-English background in the household. I worked out then that a bit fewer than 13 million inhabitants (some 6 percent of the population) reported speaking both English and a minority language on a regular basis—that is, they were bilingual. I concluded that the United States was a heavily monolingual country when compared with other countries of the world.[11] Since then, the U.S. censuses have asked which language is spoken at home other than English and how well the person speaks English. Close to 18 percent of the population in the 2000 census reported speaking another language at home, up from 14 percent in 1990 and 11 percent in 1980. Of the almost 47 million who reported using another language, close to 36 million reported that they spoke English very well or well, which would mean that some 13.71 percent of the total U.S. population was bilingual. If we add those who reported speaking English "not well," the overall percentage of bilinguals increases to close to 17 percent.[12] If one adds the many Americans who use a second or third language outside the home and who weren't

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counted as other language users in the censuses, we certainly have an increase in the proportion of bilinguals in the United States. The numbers do not reach those of Europe, not to mention those in many Asian and African nations, but the United States is certainly a country with many bilinguals—an estimated 55 million in 2009!

As for the languages spoken in the United States along with English, by far the most-used language, according to the 2000 census, is Spanish (some 28 million speakers, an increase of 10 million between 1990 and 2000).[13] Following Spanish, in the top ten one finds several Asian languages (Chinese, Tagalog, Korean, Vietnamese) as well as "old" European languages (French, German, Italian, Russian, Polish). The latter, with the exception of Russian, have lost speakers compared with the past. It should be noted that a number of languages that were in the top ten in the middle of the twentieth century, such as Yiddish and the Scandinavian languages, had fallen off strongly by 2000. For example, the number of Yiddish speakers had gone from 1.7 million in 1940 to fewer than 200,000 in 2000 (and it was mainly being spoken by elderly individuals).

In sum, bilingualism is a worldwide phenomenon, found on all continents and in the majority of the countries of the world. In some, such as the Asian and African countries for which we unfortunately do not have good data, the percentages found in Europe and North America are most probably surpassed. As a Luganda-Swahili-English speaker writes concerning Uganda:

> Everybody in my country is encouraged to speak as many languages as he or she can master. As a bilingual I find that I can relate to a wide range of people who come from different parts of Uganda.[14]

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An Akan-Fanti-English trilingual from Ghana says:

> People take pride in being bilingual because they are generally looked upon with respect. Some of the languages are dominant, and being able to speak them is a great advantage. Ghana really encourages bilingualism . . . My experience as a bilingual is a great one. This is because I have been able to communicate freely and with ease with others who are not my kinsmen.[15]

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2

Describing Bilinguals

One day, I was sitting at an outdoor café and overheard three people talking about what it means to be bilingual. I pricked up my ears but resisted the temptation to interrupt, even though they were talking about my pet subject. One of them insisted that being bilingual meant being totally fluent in two languages; another agreed and added that the bilingual person also had to have grown up with both languages. The third person was less assertive and mentioned simply the regular use of two languages. "After all," she asked, "someone might know two languages fluently but almost never use one of them; does that make him bilingual? What about the person who doesn't know the two languages to the same level but who uses them regularly? Isn't she bilingual?" I sipped my coffee quietly at the next table and promised myself that in my next book on bilingualism I would write a chapter on this very issue.

Below, in addition to examining the criteria of fluency and use, we will look at some other factors that help characterize bilinguals, such as which languages they use and what they use them for, what their language history is, their proficiency in the various linguistic skills, the language modes they navigate in, and whether they are also bicultural.

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Language Fluency or Language Use?

A number of years ago, I asked some monolingual college students what they understood me to mean when I told them that person X was bilingual in English and French. The top answer (from 36 percent of the students) was that it meant X speaks both languages fluently. When asked to rate the importance of fluency on a 1 to 5 scale, where 1 was not important and 5 very important, they gave "fluent in two languages" a high mean rating of 4.7.

The notion that being bilingual means being fluent in your languages is widespread. The bilingual writer Nancy Huston, who is Canadian but has lived in France for many years, has given much thought to her dual language and cultural status and has written about it. I will mention her views in several parts of this book. For Huston, true bilinguals are those who learn to master two languages in early childhood and who can move back and forth between them smoothly and effortlessly.[1] Even some linguists have put forward fluency as the defining characteristic of bilinguals. The American linguist Leonard Bloomfield, for example, wrote that bilingualism was the native-like control of two languages.[2] Several decades later, the lecturer and diplomatic interpreter Christophe Thiery set the bar very high when he wrote,

> A true bilingual is someone who is taken to be one of themselves by the members of two different linguistic communities, at roughly the same social and cultural level.[3]

He reported that the "true" bilinguals he studied had learned their languages in their youth (before age fourteen), had spoken both languages at home, had gone back and forth between the two language communities, and had been taught in both their languages.

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In addition, they had no accent in either language, they were equally fluent in all the skills of their two languages, and they did not let one language interfere with the other when speaking to monolinguals.

A major aim of this book will be to show that the majority of bilinguals simply do not resemble these rare individuals. While a few may, such as interpreters and translators (and we will turn to them in the chapter on "special bilinguals"), most bilinguals are simply not like that. They may not have acquired their languages in childhood, spoken their languages in the home, or lived in two-language communities. Many have not been schooled in all their languages, many have an accent in one of their languages, and more often than not one language does interfere with the other. If one were to count as bilingual only those who can pass as monolinguals in each language, one would have no label for the vast majority of people who use two or more languages regularly but do not have native-like fluency in each. According to the fluency definition, they are not bilingual, and yet they are not monolingual either, because they live their lives with more than one language.

The monolingual view of bilingualism that one still finds in the general public (but much less often among specialists in bilingualism) has led to a common misapprehension:

Myth: Bilinguals have equal and perfect knowledge of their languages.

Some add that bilinguals must have acquired their languages as children, and some others bring in the idea that they should not have an accent in any of them. These are the "real," the "pure," the "balanced," the "perfect" bilinguals. All the others (in fact, the majority of people who use two or more languages in their everyday life) are viewed as "not really" or "less" bilingual. One conse-

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quence of this is that the language skills of bilinguals have almost always been appraised in terms of monolingual standards. The effects of bilingualism have been closely scrutinized, and bilinguals themselves rarely evaluate their language competencies as adequate. They have a tendency to assume and amplify the monolingual view of bilingualism and thus criticize their own bilingualism. They complain that they don't speak one of their languages well, that they have an accent, that they mix their languages, and so on. Many do not want to be labeled bilingual, and some even hide their knowledge of their weaker language.

All this is unfortunate, as it does not take into account the reality, which we will discuss in more depth in the next chapter, that most bilinguals use their languages for different purposes, in different situations, with different people. They simply do not need to be equally competent in all their languages. The level of fluency they attain in a language (more specifically, in a language skill) will depend on their need for that language and will be domain specific. Hence, many bilinguals are dominant in one language, some do not know how to read and write one of their languages, and others have only passive knowledge of a language. Perhaps a sprinkling of bilinguals may have equal and perfect fluency in their languages, although Einar Haugen—one of the fathers of bilingualism research, whom I had the honor of knowing—did not believe this was truly possible. He wrote:

> Is it possible to keep the patterns of two (or more) languages absolutely pure, so that a bilingual in effect becomes two monolinguals, each speaking one language perfectly but also perfectly understanding the other and able to reproduce in one the meaning of the other with-

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> out at any point violating the usage of either language? On the face of it one is inclined to say no. Hypothetically it is possible just as a perfectly straight line or perfect beauty or perfect bliss are theoretically possible, but in practice it is necessary to settle for less.[4]

Because defining bilinguals in terms of language fluency is problematic, many researchers have opted for language *use* as the defining criterion, and little by little an increasing number of bilinguals are adopting it when describing their own bilingualism. Uriel Weinreich and William Mackey, two important scholars who marked the field of bilingualism in the second half of the last century, both leaned in this direction. They defined bilingualism as the alternate use of two (or more) languages.[5] My own definition—bilinguals are those who use two or more languages (or dialects) in their everyday lives—is very similar and also puts the stress on language use.

The range of who can be considered bilingual increases considerably when one concentrates on language use. At one end we find the migrant worker who may speak with some difficulty the host country's language and who does not read and write it. At the other end, we have the professional interpreter who is fully fluent in two languages. In between, we find the scientist who reads and writes articles in a second language but who rarely speaks it, the foreign-born spouse who interacts with friends in his first language, the member of a linguistic minority who uses the minority language only at home and the majority language in all other domains of life, the Deaf person who uses sign language with her friends but a spoken language (often in its written form) with a hearing person, and so on. Despite the great diversity among these people, they all share a common feature: they lead their lives with two or more languages.

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Language Fluency and Language Use

Despite the increasing emphasis put on language use when describing bilinguals, one cannot do away with the notion of fluency—that is, which languages bilinguals know and the degree of proficiency they have in them. I have developed a grid, shown in Figure 2.1, that takes into account both factors.

Language use is presented along the grid's vertical axis by a continuum (from "never" used to "daily" use), and language fluency is presented along the horizontal axis ("low" fluency to "high" fluency). A bilingual's languages can be placed on the grid according

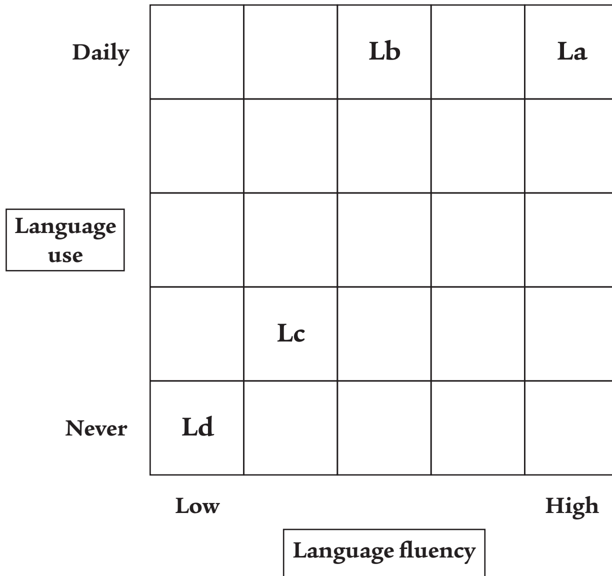

Figure 2.1. Describing the bilingual in terms of language use and language fluency. The languages in this example are English (La), Spanish (Lb), Italian (Lc), and French (Ld).

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to the levels reached in each dimension. In the example given, I depict the bilingualism of Ana, a second-year chemistry major at a large midwestern university. Because of her background (her parents emigrated from the Dominican Republic), the year she spent abroad in Italy, and the languages she studied at school, she has four languages: La (English), Lb (Spanish), Lc (Italian), and Ld (French). She has high fluency in La (English) and medium fluency in Lb (Spanish), both of which she uses daily. She has rather low fluency in Lc (Italian), which she uses irregularly with an Italian girlfriend she met in Italy (the friend knows three of Ana's languages), and low fluency in Ld (French), which she never uses. (Interested readers might wish to fill in the grid with their own languages according to their use and fluency levels.)

The older definition of bilingualism puts the emphasis on high language fluency (the right-hand part of the grid). Since our example bilingual, Ana, has medium fluency in Lb, she might not have been counted as a bilingual according to that view. The more recent definition of bilingualism puts the emphasis on regular language use (top part of the grid); we see that Ana uses both La and Lb on a daily basis and so can be considered bilingual. Whether Ana is trilingual (in La, Lb, and Lc) depends on where the border is drawn on the language-use continuum. At first glance, we could say that she is bilingual in languages La and Lb and has some knowledge of Lc and Ld. This pattern is common in today's world: bilinguals may use two or more languages on a regular basis and also have some knowledge of one or more other languages.

In this book I will often address the issue of which languages a bilingual *knows,* even if it is with a very low level of fluency, and which languages he or she *uses.* I will do so by referring back to this grid.

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Making Things a Bit More Complex

Many other factors—in addition to traditional biographical data (age, sex, socioeconomic status, occupation, and so on)—need to be taken into account when describing bilinguals. I will mention a few here and take some of them up again in later chapters.

First, as indicated in Figure 2.1, we need to know which languages bilinguals actually know and which they use. Many of us know several languages to varying degrees (in my case, the number is four) but we use fewer than that on a regular basis (in my case the number is two). We also need to know what the relationship is between the languages a person uses. This will help us understand the influence that one language can have on the other (languages that are closer to one another, for example, have a tendency to influence one another more).

It is also important to know whether some languages are still being acquired (think of someone who has been in the United States for only a year and is still making progress in English) and whether other languages are in the process of being restructured, that is, being modified due to the influence of a stronger language. This would be the case, for example, with Hindi for a Hindi-French bilingual in France who has very little use of her Hindi because she has been living abroad for ten years.

The language history of the bilingual is a third thing to keep in mind. Which languages (and language skills) were acquired, and when? Were the languages acquired at the same time (something that is relatively rare) or one after the other? For example, many people acquire one language at home and then a second language when they start school. And how were the languages acquired? In a natural setting or more formally (at school), or a combination of

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both? How a language was acquired can have an impact on how well one knows it, especially regarding reading and writing competence. We also need to know what the pattern of language use was over the years. In sum, the age at which a language was acquired, how it was acquired, and the amount of use it has been given over the years has an impact on how well a language is known, how it is processed, and even the way the brain stores and deals with it. We will come back to this question in the chapter that deals with languages across the lifespan.

We also have to know about the bilingual's proficiency (fluency) in each of the four skills (speaking, listening, reading, writing) in each language. (So far we have mentioned only a global measure of fluency for each language.) A way of representing this, for a given moment in time, is to use four of the grids presented in Figure 2.1, one for each skill, filling in each one according to the use of the skill and the fluency in the skill. More complete proficiency tests can then be administered, as well as self-assessment questionnaires.[6] What one will find is that many bilinguals may not know how to read and write a particular language, even though they speak it and listen to it. In addition, their proficiency will rarely be equal across languages, as we discussed above, and they might have an accent in a language, a topic we will come back to in a later chapter.

Another important factor that characterizes bilinguals concerns the functions of their languages: which languages (and language skills) they use, in what context, for what purpose, and to what extent. We know, for example, that with many bilinguals only one language is used for certain specific domains (such as at work, for religious practices) whereas others may cross domains (as when several languages are used with friends). In the next chapter we will exam-

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ine the influence this has on language dominance as well as on such behaviors as translation.

A full description of the bilingual also needs to take into account language mode, which is the state of activation of the bilingual's languages, depending on such factors as situation, interlocutor, and topic. In some situations, such as when speaking with monolinguals, only one language is active and being used. For instance, when I am addressing a French audience, only my French is present and I deactivate my other languages so that they do not intervene. In other situations, however, such as when speaking to another bilingual who shares the same languages, two or more languages can be active and can interact in the conversation. For example, when I speak French to my wife, who is bilingual in French and English, I may bring in words and sentences from English, depending on my need for them, as I know she will understand me. In this situation (called a bilingual mode), bilinguals can simply bring in the other language for a word, a phrase, or a sentence (through mechanisms called code-switching and borrowing), or they can actually change the language they are speaking (referred to as changing the base language). I will spend three full chapters on such phenomena, as they are central to bilingual communication.

A final factor to keep in mind is biculturalism: whether bilinguals interact with two or more cultures or whether they live their lives within one culture. Not all bilinguals are also bicultural. For example, a Moroccan who knows and uses Moroccan Arabic as well as Modern Standard Arabic and who has lived all his life in Morocco is bilingual but not bicultural. Nevertheless many bilinguals, such as first-generation immigrants, *are* also bicultural, and this plays a role in their bilingualism. We will discuss this in Chapter 10, "Bilinguals Who Are Also Bicultural."

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3

The Functions of Languages

We will begin this chapter with a brief visit to the town of Pomerode, in the state of Santa Catarina in Brazil. In this community of some 20,000 inhabitants, founded by German immigrants from Pomerania in Germany, both German (more precisely, Pomeranian) and Portuguese are spoken by a majority of the population. What is interesting is how the inhabitants distribute their languages across the domains of their lives; some domains are covered by one language, some by the other, and some by both.[1] In certain situations, for example, only Portuguese is used (with the authorities, in clubs, for sports, for writing), in others only German is used (for example, at church), and in some areas both languages are employed (at work, in stores, at home, with friends).

What is true of Pomerode's Portuguese-Pomeranian bilinguals is true of most bilinguals throughout the world, whether they live in communities with other bilinguals or by themselves. They distribute their languages across the different domains of life and use different languages with different people. After a discussion of the principle describing this phenomenon, we will study the impact it has on bilinguals' language fluency, language dominance, and translation abilities, as well its less direct consequence for memory.

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What Languages Are Used For

What I call the complementarity principle can be stated as follows:

> *Bilinguals usually acquire and use their languages for different purposes, in different domains of life, with different people. Different aspects of life often require different languages.*

The complementarity principle is illustrated in Figure 3.1. In the figure, I have taken up our example of Ana from the previous chapter, and I have attributed her languages to the domains in which she uses them. To simplify things, I reduced the number of domains covered; in reality there would be many more. Ana's fourth language (Ld, French) is not represented in the figure as she never uses it. Each domain is represented by a hexagon and can be covered by one, two, or three languages. We see that La (English, Ana's best-known and most-used language according to the figure in Chapter 2) is used by itself in five domains of life: college, shopping, going out, boyfriend, and official matters. Language Lb (Spanish, also a highly used language but with medium fluency) is used by itself in two domains of life: with parents and with distant relatives; and La and Lb together cover three domains: siblings, friends, and religion. Finally, we note that Lc (Italian), which Ana does not use very much and does not know very well, shares just one domain with La and Lb (distant friend).[2]

For all bilinguals we can draw the same kind of language-use pattern covering domains such as parents, children, siblings, distant relatives, work, sports, religion, school, shopping, friends, going out, hobbies, and so on, and come up with a distribution of their languages. Some languages will cover many domains, others fewer, and some will cover domains along with another language

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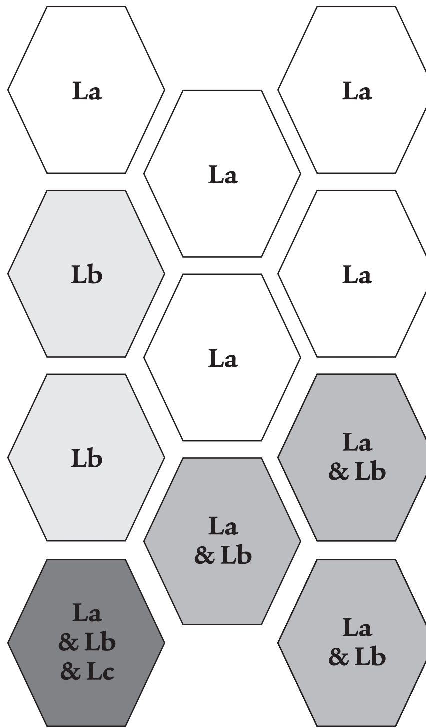

Figure 3.1. An illustration of the complementarity principle. The domains covered by languages La (English), Lb (Spanish), and Lc (Italian) are represented by the hexagons.

(or other languages). Rarely do bilinguals have all domains of life covered by all their languages (La *and* Lb at work, La *and* Lb at home, La *and* Lb with one's family). If all languages were used in all domains, there would probably be much less reason to be bilingual. Just one language would normally be sufficient.

It should be noted that with diglossia, a form of societal bilin-

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gualism where two languages or two varieties of a language are employed by a group, each language has a very precise domain of use. Thus the principle stated above is rigidified in diglossia: very few if any domains are covered by two or more languages.

The Impact of the Complementarity Principle

A first impact this principle has is on language fluency. In general, if a language is spoken in a reduced number of domains and with a limited number of people, then it will not be developed as much as a language used in more domains and with more people. It is precisely because the need for and uses of their languages are usually quite different that bilinguals do not develop equal and total fluency in all their languages. This is also true for certain language skills, such as reading and writing. Many bilinguals have not had to read and write in one or more of their languages and hence have not developed those skills. And even if they do have reading and writing skills in each language, the levels of competence are probably different because their need for those skills is not the same in everyday life.

If a domain is not covered by a language, bilinguals will simply not possess the domain-specific vocabulary, the stylistic variety, or even sometimes the discursive and pragmatic rules needed for that domain. Let me give a personal example. When I was on the faculty of Northeastern University in Boston in the 1970s and '80s, I taught introductory statistics, among other courses. I therefore knew the "language of statistics," but I knew it only in English. When I came back to Europe and offered to teach a statistics course in French, I suddenly found myself in difficulty. I simply didn't have the vocabulary in French and didn't know how to say such things as "stan-

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dard distribution," "scattergram," "hypothesis test," and so on. It was a very odd feeling. My French is fluent and yet there I was, struggling to get concepts out.

I know that many bilinguals have shared the experience of suddenly having to use a language that they don't usually use in a particular domain. What happens then is interesting, but also frustrating at times. You tend to fumble in the language that is new in that domain. When you don't find the right word or expression, you are tempted to draw from the other language or languages you know, a tactic that sometimes works when you are speaking with other bilinguals who share your languages but that is inappropriate when you are speaking to monolinguals. So you continue to struggle and perhaps finally resort to bringing in some of the words from the other language(s) all the same, by adapting them and explaining them. Sometimes you simply try to shorten the conversation. As one bilingual writes:

> Whenever I have to explain in French anything about my professional activities or my former school experience in the U.S., I find it very hard not to use English words, because these experiences belong to my "English-related background." I have learned the business language in the U.S. and find it difficult to express the same ideas in French. Luckily this occurs most of the time with bilingual friends and therefore it doesn't bother anyone to switch from one language to another or to mix both in the same conversation.[3]

Three students of mine (Christine Gasser, Roxane Jaccard, and Vanessa Cividin) interviewed English-German and French-Italian

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bilinguals about domains that were linked to particular languages (such as work, family, shopping, hobbies).[4] Before the interviews, they learned how the subjects' languages were distributed across the domains, and they divided the domains into two categories for a particular language: a strong domain (a domain in which the language is used) and a weak domain (where the language is not used). They then observed how their subjects talked about these domains with them. (In the interviews, the subjects knew that they were speaking to fellow bilinguals and hence could call on their other language if they needed to.) What they found was that the subjects brought in their other language two to five times more often when they were speaking about a weak domain, as compared with a strong domain. In the weak domain they simply didn't have the vocabulary they needed to speak that language by itself and hence called upon the other, stronger language. This shows how hard it is to speak to someone in the "wrong" language—and things only get worse when that person is monolingual and does not know the speaker's more favorable language.

Well-learned behaviors are special cases for the complementarity principle, since one language has almost exclusive control of the behavior in question. For example, counting and mathematic computations are usually done in the language in which they were learned. An Arabic-English-French trilingual once wrote to me:

> There is one type of activity that I find I always use French for, and that is mental arithmetic. I learned arithmetic in French, and I find that I remember multiplication tables best in that language and have continued using it for that purpose.[5]

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And an Alsatian-French bilingual stated:

> I do not know how to count in Alsatian very well. I have to think about numbers above twenty and especially about dates.[6]

I have known bilinguals who do simple arithmetic in one language and more advanced mathematics in another because they changed their language of instruction between the two. Praying is another specialized area where the complementarity principle is at work. Many bilinguals can recite a prayer in one language but have great difficulty doing so in another, simply because they did not learn it in that language. Phone numbers can also be a problem. When I lived in the United States I knew my phone number in English only, and I had to go through a painstaking process to convert it into French when I had to give it in that language (when speaking French with French-English bilinguals, I would simply switch to English for the phone number so as not to have to go through that process). Now that I am back in Europe, my current phone number is in French in my memory and its English version is simply much less available to me.

A second effect of the complementarity principle concerns language dominance. It is recognized in the field of bilingualism that many bilinguals are dominant in one of their languages, as opposed to being "balanced." Even though dominance is difficult to define (is it based on fluency only, on fluency and use, or on the ability to also read and write in the language?), most specialists put the emphasis on fluency: subjective fluency (as it is reported by the bilinguals themselves) and objective fluency (as it is evaluated by assessment tools).[7]

To assess subjective fluency, bilinguals are given language back-

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ground questionnaires that include self-rating scales for their two or more languages and the four skills in each language (speaking, listening, reading, and writing).[8] Among the tools used for assessing objective fluency, one finds language evaluation measures taken by outside judges (including pronunciation evaluation) as well as behavioral tasks that measure, among other things, the time needed to do such things as carry out a command, name a picture or a number, read a text. These instruments also contain translation tasks. Based on the various measures obtained, evaluators determine a dominance rating: the person is dominant in Language a, or dominant in Language b, or balanced in both languages.

These various approaches have been criticized for reducing the complexity of the bilingual's language behavior to a number of rather simple tasks. Admittedly some assessments may produce a global measure of dominance—confirming, for example, that Ana (our example) is indeed globally dominant in La (English). In Figure 2.1, we saw that she is generally more fluent in La than in Lb (Spanish) and, of course, much more fluent in La than in Lc (Italian) or Ld (French). And in Figure 3.1 we observed that she covers many more domains with La than with Lb or Lc: nine in all for La, counting shared domains, as compared with six for Lb, and only one for Lc. So Ana does appear to be, at first sight, a "dominant" bilingual in English rather than a "balanced" bilingual. But the problem with global dominance assessments is that they do not take into account how the languages are distributed over domains. Even though Ana is globally dominant in La, we see that there are two domains in which she uses Lb exclusively. She is probably dominant in Lb in those domains, as could be shown with the right assessment tools. In fact, back in 1971 Robert Cooper had already shown evidence for this. He found that Spanish-English bilinguals

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had very different word-naming scores depending on whether the domain proposed was family, neighborhood, school, or religion. In some domains they would have been considered balanced, but not in others.[9] In sum, bilinguals should not be surprised that, even if they are globally dominant in a language, they may feel less dominant, or not dominant, in that language in a particular domain; this is simply a reflection of the complementarity principle at work.

A final effect of the principle concerns translation. Consider the following long-standing belief:

Myth: Bilinguals are born translators.

How often have we been asked as bilinguals, "Oh, since you're bilingual in X and Y, could you translate this for me?" And how often have we felt inadequate in proposing a translation? Of course we try to please our interlocutor (until the requests become too frequent or difficult), but we often have to explain why we couldn't do a very good job—because we didn't know several translation equivalents, for example, or didn't understand part of a domain-specific text. The response we get is invariably, "Oh, but I thought you were bilingual!"

Bilinguals' lack of translation skills can be explained by means of the complementarity principle. Unless bilinguals have domains covered with two languages, or they acquired the language they are translating into (the target language) in a manner that puts the emphasis on translation equivalents and thus on building a bridge between La and Lb, they may find themselves without the resources to produce a good translation. In given domains, they may be missing the required vocabulary and set expressions. This is exactly what happened to me when I had to translate statistical terms from English into French; I just didn't have them. In addition, bilinguals

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may lack stylistic variety in the target language, or the cultural or technical knowledge required to understand what is being said in the source language. Hence, even though bilinguals can usually translate simple things from one language to another, they often have difficulties with more specialized domains. This does not make them any less bilingual; it simply reflects the fact that their different languages are distributed across different domains of their lives and overlap only in some of them.

There is also a slightly less direct consequence of the complementarity principle that relates to memory. It seems that bilinguals remember things better when the language that is used for recall matches the language used at the time of the event in a particular domain. Researchers Viorica Marian and Ulrich Neisser mention two anecdotal pieces of evidence when introducing a study that confirms this point. The first anecdote was offered by the multilingual researcher Aneta Pavlenko. When asked, in Russian, for her apartment number in the United States, she erroneously provided the number of her old apartment in her native country, which she knew in Russian. The other anecdote was offered by Elizabeth Spelke, who related that a bilingual child had learned a French song while on vacation in France but could not recall the song on his return to the United States. However, when he was once again in a French-speaking environment, he remembered the song without any effort.[10]

For their study, Marian and Neisser interviewed a number of Russian-English bilinguals, in English and in Russian. They gave them English prompt words in the English part of the study, and Russian prompt words (translation equivalents) in the Russian part. The English prompt words included, for example, “summer,” “neighbors,” “birthday,” “cat,” “doctor.” The task of the bilinguals

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was to describe an event from their own life that the prompt word brought to mind. The researchers also asked the participants, after the interview, to indicate the language in which they had been spoken to, they had spoken, or they had been surrounded by at the time that each recalled event took place. If the event prompted by the word "cat" took place in Russian, the researchers called this a Russian memory; if in English, then it was an English memory. They found that their bilingual subjects accessed more Russian memories when interviewed in Russian than when interviewed in English, and more English memories when interviewed in English than when interviewed in Russian. Marian and Neisser concluded that bilinguals are more likely to retrieve events (memories) that occurred in a particular language if that same language is also used in the retrieval setting. They called this language-dependent recall. Thus the complementarity principle also manifests itself in the recall of events that took place in the bilingual's different languages—which, as we have seen, are usually linked to different domains.

The complementarity principle is certainly one of the most pervasive aspects of individual bilingualism. Bilinguals who speak two or more languages feel its constant presence in their everyday lives. They may even comment openly on its different manifestations, without finding the exact words to account for them.

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4

Language Mode and Language Choice

When communicating with others, bilinguals have to ask themselves two questions (which they often do subconsciously): which language should they use, and can they bring their other language(s) into the interaction if they need to? Figure 4.1 illustrates the process of asking—and answering—these questions. To simplify things, the example concerns someone who uses just two languages; we will talk about tri- and quadrilinguals later.

The bilingual's two languages, which are visually represented by the squares in the diagram, are inactive (or deactivated) before the interaction (these squares are filled in with diagonal lines). In our example, the bilingual answers the "which language" question with Language a (La). It becomes activated and is then represented with a solid black square. This first process, choosing which language to use, is called language choice, and the language chosen is called the base language.

The next question is whether the other language should be brought in or not. If, for example, the bilingual is speaking to a monolingual who does not know her other language, the answer is no, and we see in the diagram (on the lower left) that the other lan-

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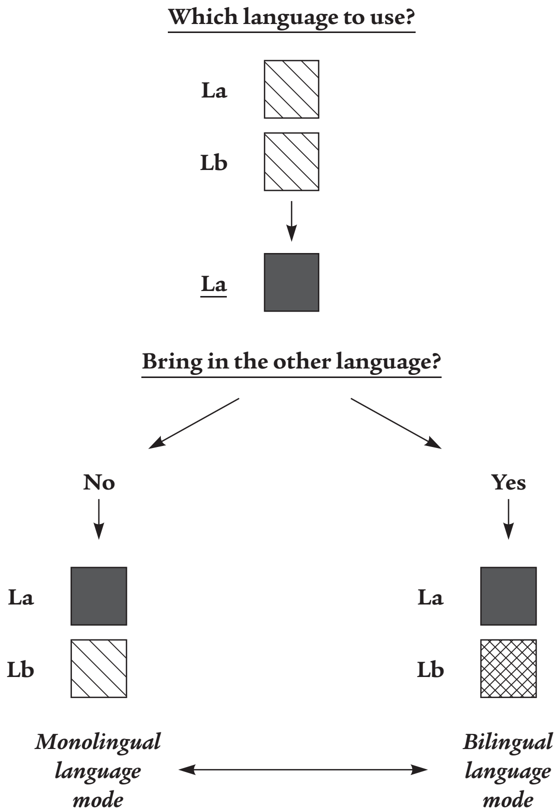

Figure 4.1. Deciding which language to use and whether to bring in the other language.

guage (Lb) remains inactive; only La is active (solid black). In this situation, the bilingual is said to be in a monolingual language mode, as only one language is active. When my wife speaks to her aunt, for example, she chooses French as the base language and deactivates her English because she knows that her aunt would not

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understand her if she brought English into their conversation. She is, therefore, in a monolingual language mode. If, however, a bilingual is talking to another bilingual who shares her two languages (La and Lb), and she feels comfortable bringing in the other language with that person, then Lb will also be activated, but less so than La (see the cross-hatched lines filling the Lb square on the lower right). This situation is referred to as a bilingual language mode. Thus, when my wife and I talk to each other we choose French as our base language, but our English is also active and we sometimes bring it in to refer to places and people we know in Britain or the United States or to things we did in those places. With us, La is the most active language, as it is the base language, but Lb is on standby in case it is needed. Much of the bilingual's language behavior revolves around the possibilities offered in Figure 4.1, as we will see below and in the next two chapters.

Language Mode

Looking at Figure 4.1 again, we see that the monolingual language mode and the bilingual language mode are endpoints on a continuum (an arrow line links them). In their everyday lives, bilinguals find themselves at various points along this continuum that induce different language modes.[1] At one end of the continuum bilinguals are in a monolingual mode, as when they are speaking (or writing) to monolinguals in one of the languages they know (family members, friends, colleagues). They can also be in this mode if they are reading a book written in one of their languages, or watching a TV program in just one language. At the other end of the continuum, bilinguals find themselves in a bilingual language mode when they are communicating with bilinguals who share their two languages,

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such as close friends or siblings, and with whom they feel they can bring in the other language. They might also be in bilingual language mode when they are listening to a conversation between other bilinguals in which the two languages are used. Bilinguals can also be in an intermediary mode on the continuum, for example when their interlocutor is bilingual but does not like to bring in the other language during a conversation, or when they are talking about a subject in the "wrong" language (their other language is probably activated in such a situation, even if they do not use it).

Bilinguals differ from one another in terms of how much they move along the language-mode continuum. Some stay at the monolingual end, whereas others will move right along the continuum, choosing different points on it depending on the situation, the person they are speaking with, the topic, and so on. Those who live in bilingual communities may find themselves at the bilingual end of the continuum during the major part of their day. Movement along the continuum can occur at any time, as soon as there is a need for it. We might start at the monolingual end and then, halfway through a conversation, realize that the person we are talking to is also bilingual and move to the bilingual end. We might also start at the bilingual end and then come to understand, as the conversation takes place, that our interlocutor dislikes switching languages. We will then deactivate the other language and speak monolingually.

Many researchers believe that, in a monolingual mode, the language not being used is not totally deactivated (note that the squares in Figure 4.1 representing deactivated languages are not white but are partially filled in with diagonal lines). This is because bilinguals are often influenced by their other language, even in a monolingual situation. We can see this in the dynamic interfer-

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ences they produce—that is, the deviations that are due to the deactivated language, such as when one says in English, "He liked very much the person" based on the French, "Il aimait beaucoup la personne."

In a bilingual mode, the base language is normally more active than the other ("guest") language, but there are instances when both need to be fully active, such as when a bilingual person is listening to two people speaking different languages or when he or she is interpreting. In the latter case, you need to have access to both the source language (the entering language) and the target language (the language you are interpreting into). Note also that in a bilingual mode the base language can change; one can start speaking La to an interlocutor and then change over to Lb by simply flip-flopping the levels of activation of the two languages (something that can't be done in the monolingual mode).

Then there is the case of the tri- or quadrilingual person. Figure 4.2 shows how a trilingual's languages can also be activated to different degrees. The trilingual has chosen Lb as the base language and has also activated Lc but not La, since the person she is speaking to knows just two of her three languages. She is therefore in a bilingual mode. With someone who knows the same three languages she does, and with whom she feels comfortable bringing in the other languages, she would be in a trilingual language mode. The same thing can happen with people who use four or more languages in their everyday life.

Choosing a Base Language

As we saw in Figure 4.1, bilinguals, when communicating in a bilingual mode, first have to choose a base language (also called a host

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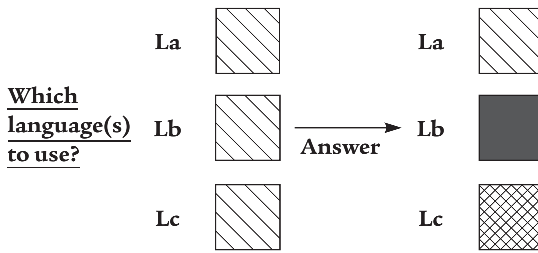

Figure 4.2. A trilingual in a bilingual mode.

or matrix language) to use with their interlocutors. The process of language choice is probably one of the most interesting bilingual phenomena, even though bilinguals don't give it much thought. Anthropologist Carroll Barber studied the language behavior of twelve trilingual Yaqui Indians of the Pascua Yaqui tribe in Arizona. She was interested in understanding when it was that they used Yaqui, Spanish, and English. She wrote:

> The men often find questions about their use of their languages rather ridiculous; naturally they speak Yaqui to Yaquis, Spanish to Mexicans, and English to Anglos. As one of them said, "I could talk to you in Yaqui—you wouldn't understand me." The problem does not seem so simple, however, when it is realized that in many of their social relationships they are dealing with people who speak at least two of their languages. Why then do they choose to speak one language at one time and another at some other time?[2]

Below, we will look at the factors for language choice according to four main categories: participants, situation, content of discourse,

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and function of the interaction. We will address the complexity of the phenomenon and see how it can sometimes break down.

Within the participants category, one factor that is crucial for language choice is the language proficiency of the speaker and the interlocutor. One usually attempts to use the language that will be the most successful for communication. I've heard many bilinguals state that they use language X with a certain person simply because she does not master the other language sufficiently well. Another factor that seems to play an important role is the language history between participants. One develops an "agreed upon" language with certain individuals, even if it has never been discussed, and this becomes the language of communication from then on. In fact, this agreement is so strong that an interlocutor may be puzzled or surprised if it is broken (for example, with a sudden change of base language over the phone).

A participant's attitude toward a language and a group may also explain language choice. Members of stigmatized minorities may no longer wish to speak the majority's language; this is true of people who have suffered in the past at the hands of the majority (such as German Jews during World War II and Russian Jews more recently, who refuse to use German and Russian, respectively, in their new countries). Other factors in the participants category include age, the socioeconomic status of the participants, their degree of intimacy, the power relationship between them, and so on.[3] What is fascinating here is that in bilingual communities, some bilinguals who deal extensively with the public, such as storekeepers, sales representatives, police officers, and others, develop a finely tuned sense for determining which language to use with a particular person. They base their decision on such cues as the person's stance, dress, and facial expression—and they are often right.

Concerning the next category, situation, the location of the in-

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teraction is an important language-choice factor. In bilingual Paraguay, for example, one will tend to address someone in the countryside in Guaraní but use Spanish in the cities.[4] Elsewhere, members of minorities may well speak the majority language when out in public together and keep their minority language for use when they are at home (I have noticed this with young North Africans in France). The formality of the situation is also important. In Switzerland, for example, Swiss German is not usually spoken by members of the federal government when they are giving a speech on TV (they will use German), although they will speak it as they are coming into the studio, and with friends and colleagues afterward. Of course, the presence of monolinguals is of crucial importance. How many times have I seen this situation: a group of people is speaking language X together until a monolingual of language Y arrives; they then switch over to language Y to include that person. But then the group switches right back to language X when the monolingual is having a side conversation or steps away for a few minutes! Unfortunately, a person can on occasion be left out because she does not master (or master sufficiently well) the language of the others. This can be quite frustrating, and usually something gives way quite rapidly—either the person wanders off or the others integrate her, even if it means having someone translate the major points of what is being said.

As for the content of discourse, we have already discussed this when dealing with the complementarity principle. Some topics are simply better dealt with in one language than another, and bilinguals speaking among themselves may well change base languages when they change topics. In Paraguay again, school, legal, and business affairs are usually discussed in Spanish rather than in Guaraní. I know I change languages, for example, when I talk about

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cognitive psychology with my son, with whom I normally speak French; we each have a larger vocabulary in English in that domain and it just simplifies things to move over to that language when we want to talk about some recent research.

Finally, concerning the fourth category, the function of the interaction, we should keep in mind that people often communicate to achieve something and not just to pass information along to someone else. Thus there are many instances of choosing a particular language to raise one's status, to create a social distance, to exclude someone, to request something, or to give a command. For example, Gerard Hoffman mentioned in his study that, in the Puerto Rican community in Jersey City, New Jersey, some Puerto Rican foremen would change languages when they changed roles: they would speak Spanish to the other Puerto Ricans at lunchtime but employ English during work hours, when their status changed to the role of foreman.[5] As for excluding someone, all bilinguals have "played" with language choice, although there is always the danger that it can backfire and create an embarrassing situation. I was once told by a young Greek American woman about a time when she was in a crowded student cafeteria with a friend with whom she normally spoke English. They changed over to Greek to comment on people around them, thinking they would not be understood. After a few minutes, one of the people they had talked about folded his newspaper, turned toward them, and said with a large grin, "Good-bye!" in Greek.

Usually several factors taken together explain a bilingual's language choice, and some factors have more weight than others. In her classic book on Guaraní-Spanish bilingualism in Paraguay, Joan Rubin states that three factors (countryside, school, and public functions in the capital city) clearly indicate which language to

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use (Guaraní for the first factor, Spanish for the other two) but that the rest can best be placed in a decision tree that orders them.[6] At the very top of the tree is location, then formality, then intimacy, then seriousness of discourse, and if you have not branched off before this point, there are still three remaining factors: the first language learned, the person's predicted proficiency, and the sex of the two participants. Not all language decisions require one to go through so many steps, but language choice remains complex even though it is a well-learned behavior that takes place smoothly and rapidly. Bilinguals are usually quite unaware of the many factors behind their choice; it is just part of being bilingual.

However hard one tries to find the right language for a given context, it may happen that a satisfactory solution cannot be found. I observed one such situation when my wife and I were sitting in a restaurant in the German part of Switzerland one day. I could not help but notice that the five people at the table right next to ours did not all share the same languages. I made a sketch of the situation at their table when I got back home (see Figure 4.3). Clearly the father, mother, and daughter in the group were visiting from the United States and had invited the daughter's grandmother and great-aunt to dinner. The father and daughter spoke the elders' languages (German and French) in addition to speaking the mother's only language (English). In the figure, I have indicated who communicated with whom and the language used (E for English, G for German, F for French). I also show, with the discontinuous lines, who could not communicate with whom: the mother with the grandmother and the mother with the great-aunt. Note that two people were pivotal throughout the meal, the father and the daughter. They knew and used all three languages and hence could ease the communication flow. This is a good example of the com-

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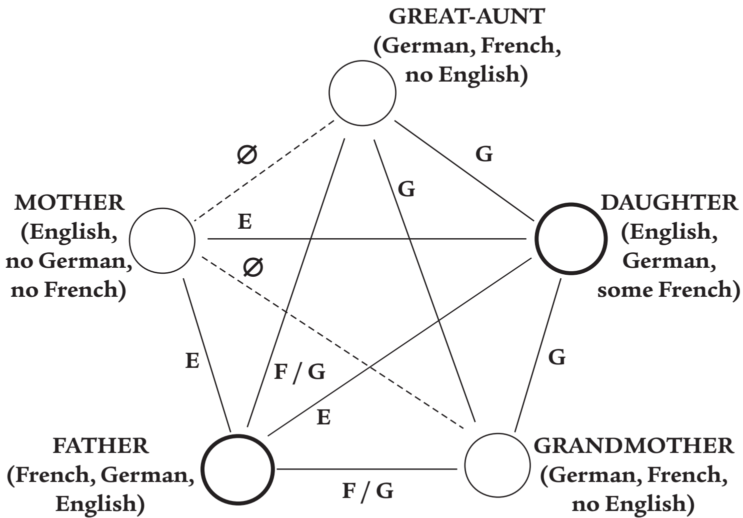

Figure 4.3. The languages spoken around a dinner table.

plexity one can find in language-choice situations, and also of the fact that some people may be marginalized when they do not share the others' language(s). It also shows how important go-betweens can be; they play a crucial role that can at times be quite taxing.

Another example reveals how a factor that at first sight should play the most important role in the choice of a base language may be put aside for a second, less important factor. I was sitting in my office one day when a student came in and asked in French, with great hesitancy and a very heavy American accent, whether I was Professor Grosjean. I replied that I was. Aware of my interlocutor's very poor French, and mindful of the importance of establishing good communication concerning an administrative matter, I suggested in English that we speak English. To my amazement, she did

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not take me up on my offer. She continued with her very hesitant French, which I had difficulty understanding. I asked again, in English, whether she did not wish to change over to English and was told, in French, that she had come to Switzerland to learn French and wanted to speak it. Hence, we continued in French, but since I wasn't sure we were understanding each other, I gave her some documents to take with her and wound down the interaction. Thinking back on it, I suppose I should have agreed to act as a language teacher and gone along with her wish to speak French, but it was a busy day and I didn't think we were communicating optimally. It made me grateful, though, that most interactions in language-choice situations are usually more smooth and efficient.

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5

Code-Switching and Borrowing

We have seen that if a bilingual person is interacting with another bilingual who shares her languages, then a base language will be active during their communication and the other language will also be active, although less so. The bilingual speaker can bring in that other language if the need arises and if she feels comfortable doing so with her interlocutor. Here is an example. A French family is watching some ice fishermen on Walden Pond in the dead of the winter. The young son, Marc, shows real interest in the equipment being used and the fish that are brought up. The mother, who often brings in English when she is speaking French, is getting very cold and says to her husband: "Va chercher Marc *and bribe him* avec un chocolat chaud *with cream on top*." The French parts mean "go fetch Marc" and "with a hot chocolate," respectively. There are two ways of calling in the other, "guest" language: through what is called code-switching (as here) and through borrowing.

Code-Switching

Code-switching is the alternate use of two languages, that is, the speaker makes a complete shift to another language for a word,

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phrase, or sentence and then reverts back to the base language. Hence, bilinguals who code-switch are speaking language X in a bilingual mode when they call upon language Y for a moment. In the example above, the bilingual brings in whole phrases from English. Code-switching may also be done with single words, as in: "On a pris un *trail*" (We followed a trail), or whole clauses, as in the following Russian sentence with a code-switch into French: "Chustvovali, chto *le vin est tiré et qu'il faut le boire*" (They felt that the wine is uncorked and it should be drunk).[1]

Code-switching has often been criticized, mainly by monolinguals but also by some bilinguals. Many feel that it creates an unpleasant mixture of languages, produced by people who are careless in the way they speak. This has led to another common misconception:

Myth: Bilinguals code-switch out of pure laziness.

Code-switching has been given pejorative names such as Franglais (the mixture of English and French) and Tex-Mex (the combination of English and Spanish in the American Southwest). Reactions to code-switching can be rather strong. One is reported by Lynn Haney in her biography of the famous African American singer and dancer Josephine Baker. It should be recalled that Baker lived most of her adult life in France and spoke fluent French. Haney writes that when Baker returned to the United States on a visit, she was at a dinner party and was mixing some French into her English in addition to having sprinkles of French in her American accent. When she asked an African American maid for a cup of coffee, in French, the maid exclaimed that Baker was full of — and told her to speak the way her mouth was born![2]

Negative attitudes like these, as well as the worry that code-

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switching will lead to some form of "semilingualism," have led some bilinguals, such as language teachers and bilingual parents, to discourage code-switching and to avoid doing it. I would like to allay the reader's fears by quoting the distinguished linguist Einar Haugen, who wrote the following very sensible statement based on many years of research on bilinguals:

> Reports are sometimes heard of individuals who 'speak no language whatever' and confuse the two to such an extent that it is impossible to tell which language they speak. No such cases have occurred in the writer's experience, in spite of many years of listening to [their] speech.[3]

Personally, I have seen uncontrollable switching only in aphasic bilingual patients—that is, patients who have a language impairment stemming from a cerebral vascular accident (or stroke). But even then, it has been uncontrolled in just a handful of individuals; most aphasic patients control their code-switching well.

Bilinguals code-switch for many reasons. One primary reason is that certain notions or concepts are simply better expressed in the other language (they seek *le mot juste,* as one says in French). If the person you are speaking to understands your other language and accepts code-switches, and the better word or expression is from that language, then you can simply bring it into what you are saying. The analogy I use is having cream with coffee instead of just having it black; the word or expression in the other language adds a little something that is more precise than trying to find an equivalent element in the base language. The following is an example I have cited many times. My wife and I adopted the word "playground" as a code-switch when we were in the United States, as it reflected better the kind of free environment kids could have fun

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in, as compared with the traditional French *parc,* with its strict rules and rather poor offering of swing sets. (Since then, I'm happy to say, things have changed considerably in France and Switzerland and we, along with others, use a new expression that reflects this, *terrain de jeu*.)

A second reason for code-switching is to fill a linguistic need for a word or an expression. As we saw in Chapter 3 in the discussion of the complementarity principle, if a domain is covered wholly or partly by a language other than the one we are speaking, and the situation is conducive to code-switching, then we will bring in the words and expressions we need, either because they are the only ones we have or because they are the most readily available. As a French-English bilingual once wrote to me:

> The reason why I use so many words in English when I speak with French-speaking people is because I find it very hard to convey certain ideas or information about my daily life in this country [the U.S.] in a language other than English. Notions such as "day care center," "finger food," "window shopping," and "pot-luck dinners" need a few sentences to explain in French."[4]

For this bilingual woman, her home and young-children domains were covered mainly by English and so she code-switched into English when speaking about them. Another linguistic reason for code-switching is to report what someone has said in the other language. It would sound unnatural to translate it for a bilingual who understands the other language perfectly.

Code-switching is also used as a communicative or social strategy, to show speaker involvement, mark group identity, exclude

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someone, raise one's status, show expertise, and so on. As concerns exclusion, let me take an example from one of my earlier books. Nicole, a French-English bilingual in the United States, was a registered nurse in the cardiovascular unit of a large urban hospital on the East Coast. She spoke English at work, but since the arrival of a French Canadian colleague, she had sometimes been using French with her when they were alone. One day the two were asking a patient some questions about his recent heart attack. Toward the end of the interview, Nicole switched quickly into French without turning away from the patient and said softly: "Ça me paraît grave" (It seems serious). She then asked the patient a few more questions in English.[5] All bilinguals reading this can probably think of one or two times in their own experience when they rapidly slipped into another language to convey something to just one of the people they were with. But this can be a risky communicative strategy, in addition to being perceived as impolite, as the person being excluded may know the other language well enough to understand what has just been said.

An example of code-switching used to raise one's status was given by linguist Carol Myers-Scotton and her coauthor William Ury. The scene takes place on a bus in Nairobi. A passenger gets on and the conductor tells him, in Swahili, that the fare is fifty cents to go to the post office. The passenger gives him a shilling and the conductor tells him to wait for his change. When the bus nears the post office and the change still hasn't been handed over, the passenger tells the conductor that he wants his change. The conductor replies that he'll get his change. The passenger then switches over to English and says, "I am nearing my destination." The switch is an attempt by the passenger to change his status from equal to higher

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than the driver and hence to have more authority (English is the language of the educated elite in Kenya). But in this case, the conductor counters the attempt by saying, in English, "Do you think I could run away with your change?" thereby reestablishing status equality between them.[6]

It is interesting to note that code-switching can also take place in different modalities. Some bilinguals code-switch when writing, for example (in letters, e-mail messages, and so on) but they have a tendency to flag the words with quotation marks or by means of underlining. They are aware that the reader might be led astray if this precaution is not taken. Of course when you are writing for yourself (for example, taking notes) anything goes, and many of us bilinguals take multilingual notes full of unflagged switches. Code-switching can also take place between an oral language and a sign language. Paul Preston, himself an English–American Sign Language bilingual, interviewed a number of bilingual hearing adults, the children of Deaf parents. While most of the interviews took place in English, he noticed that his informants would sometimes switch to sign language. The reasons he gives are very similar to the ones we have already mentioned: his informants code-switched when they felt that a sign expressed a concept better, when they were momentarily unable to think of the English word, when they were paraphrasing Deaf people, and when they became emotionally unable to speak.[7]

In recent years, considerable work has been done by linguists to better understand how code-switching takes place.[8] One of the results has been the realization that, instead of being a haphazard and ungrammatical mixture of two languages, code-switching follows very strict constraints and is implemented by bilinguals who

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are competent in their languages. Linguist Shana Poplack, a pioneering expert on code-switching, writes:

> Code-switching is a verbal skill requiring a large degree of linguistic competence in more than one language, rather than a defect arising from insufficient knowledge of one or the other . . . [R]ather than representing deviant behavior, [it] is actually a suggestive indicator of degree of bilingual competence.[9]

My own work on the phonetics of code-switching shows that there is indeed a sudden and complete sound shift to the other language at the switch break but that the prosody may, at times, remain that of the base language.[10] In a pilot study I conducted with my colleague Carlos Soares, we showed that if a code-switch is short and corresponds to a minor syntactic unit, as in the example at the beginning of this chapter, then it is integrated into the prosody of the base language. If, on the contrary, it is longer and a more important syntactic unit, then it will bring with it the prosodic patterns of the guest language. Thus, in the sentence, "Marc, savonne-toi. *You haven't used soap for a week!*" the first part, which can be translated as "Marc, soap yourself," has the characteristics of French prosody (a long falling contour) whereas the second part maintains its typical English prosodic pattern (a final rise indicating surprise). As for the listener's perception of a code-switch, how efficient it is will depend on such factors as the specificity of sounds and groups of sounds in the guest language (the more specific, the easier the perception), the existence of a similar-sounding word in the base language (this has a tendency to delay the perception), the number and frequency of code-switches, and so on.

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Borrowing

Another way bilinguals bring in their less activated language is by borrowing a word or short expression from that language and adapting it morphologically (and often phonologically) into the base language. Unlike code-switching, which is the alternate use of two languages, borrowing is the integration of one language into another. Figure 5.1 illustrates this.

As we can see in the top part of the figure, which depicts a code-switch, the person speaking Language a (La; empty rectangles) shifts over completely to Language b (Lb; shaded rectangle) and then switches back to La (empty rectangles again). With borrowing, on the other hand, the element borrowed from Lb is integrated into La; this is shown in the bottom part of the figure by the rectangle with diagonal lines, depicting the "blending" of Lb and La.

There are two forms of borrowing. Probably the most frequent is when both the form and the content of a word are borrowed (to

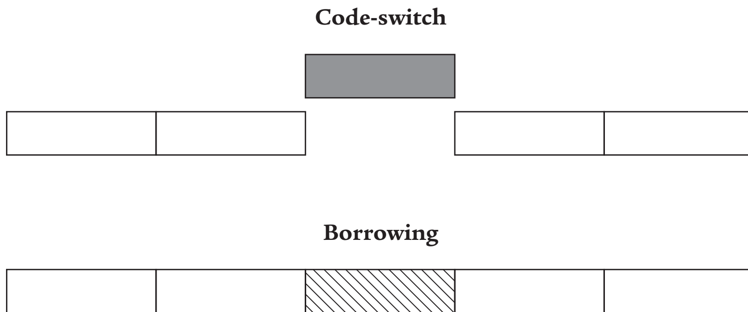

Figure 5.1. Illustration of the difference between a code-switch (the alternate use of two languages) and a borrowing (the integration of one language into the other).

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produce what has been called a loanword or nonce borrowing, or more simply a borrowing), as in these two examples taken from French-English bilinguals: "Ça m'étonnerait qu'on ait *code-switché* autant que ça" (I can't believe we code-switched as often as that) and "Maman, tu peux me *tier* /taie/ mes chaussures?" (Mummy, can you tie my shoes?). In these examples, the English words "code-switch" and "tie" have been brought in and integrated into the French sentence. The parts of speech that are borrowed the most are nouns, followed by verbs (as in the above examples) and adjectives; the other parts of speech are borrowed much less often.

The integration of borrowings has been the object of much research. There is still some controversy surrounding their phonological adaptation (are they fully adapted to the base language or do they keep some of their guest-language phonology?) but there is less debate about morphological adaptation. As we can see in the examples above, the English word "code-switch" is brought into French and given the past-participle "-é" ending; the same is true in the second example, where the infinitive "-er" ending (pronounced /e/) is given to the English word "tie." When nouns are concerned, they are adapted to the noun morphology of the base language—for example, they may be given a plural form and a gender when the borrowing language requires it. Thus we find the following English borrowings in Spanish: "el *trainer*," "esa *girl*" (this girl), and "la *responsibility*."[11] Note that when a borrowing comes into a sentence and does not require a morphological marking, and if is not phonologically integrated—that is, pronounced with the phonetics of the base language—it is difficult to distinguish it from a one-word code-switch. This has caused much debate among specialists about whether we are dealing with a code-switch or a borrowing.

A second type of borrowing, called a loanshift, occurs when the

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speaker either takes a word in the base language and extends its meaning to correspond to that of a word in the other language, or rearranges words in the base language along a pattern provided by the other language and thus creates a new meaning. An example of the first kind of loanshift would be the use of *humoroso* by Portuguese Americans to mean "humorous" when its original meaning in Portuguese is "capricious." Another example would be *soportar* in Puerto-Rican Spanish; it normally means "to endure" but has now also been given the English meaning "to support." As for the rearranging of words, also called calques or loan translations, an example was noted in Florida in the Spanish speech of bilinguals who said *tener buen tiempo* (based on the English "to have a good time") instead of using the Spanish *divertirse*.[12] Another example of this kind would be: "I put myself to think about it," said by a Spanish-English bilingual, based on the Spanish expression *me puse a pensarlo.*[13]

Why do bilinguals borrow? The reasons are very similar to the ones given for code-switching, although there are fewer communicative strategies in play. Using the right word is at the top of the list, along with using a word from a domain covered by the other language (yet one more example of the complementarity principle at work). Linguists have spent considerable time explaining why immigrants, when speaking their native tongue, borrow so much from their host country's language. Practically overnight, they find themselves living with new realities and new distinctions in domains such as work, housing, schooling, food, sports, flora and fauna, and so on. Very often the vocabulary of their first language is not adequate to cover this new life. As Uriel Weinreich, the well-known researcher on bilingualism, once said, it is only natural to

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use ready-made designations from the other language instead of coining new words; after all, few users of language are poets![14]

It is important to distinguish the spontaneous borrowings of bilinguals (also called speech or nonce borrowings) from words that have become part of a language community's vocabulary and that monolinguals also use (called language borrowings or established loans). The latter, while originally brought in by bilinguals, are now used by all speakers of the language. In the following sentences, every third or fourth word is an established loan from French that has now become part of the English language: The *poet* lived in the *duke's* manor. That day, he *painted*, played *music*, and wrote *poems* with his *companions*. The process through which some borrowings used by bilinguals become integrated into the monolingual's language is complex and has a number of variants: some words are borrowed very quickly while others go through a long process; some are brought in by one bilingual and others are accepted by a large bilingual community before being transferred to the monolingual group. Weinreich likens spontaneous borrowings to sand being carried by a stream, whereas established borrowings are like the sand that is deposited at the bottom of a lake.[15] Whether the sand keeps moving or is deposited depends on many factors; the same is true of borrowings.

When spontaneous borrowings become established borrowings, they have not only gone through an integration process but have also survived the resistance of some of the speakers of the language concerned. One may think of the French as being opposed to using English words, but some segments of the population do not hesitate—often unconsciously—to replace older, worn-out French words or expressions with new ones from English. Hence the existence of

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new English words in today's French, such as "cool," "top," "look," "best of," "too much," and the like. Having said this, there are institutions that attempt to reduce the amount of borrowing that takes place. In France, for example, the French Academy regularly proposes French words to replace English words for new concepts. Some are adopted by the French (*courriel* is now used as frequently as "e-mail") but others are simply not used, such as *bouteur* instead of "bulldozer." Languages know how to make good use of new words, and words can take on a life of their own. Take an example from French: the word "people" has now been borrowed into French, but with the meaning of celebrities (movie or soap stars, singers, actors). It has been fully integrated into the language and is now sometimes written as *les pipols.* This has led to such derivatives as *la pipolisation.*

The opposition to loans from other languages is not something new, and it has not always worked in the same direction. Back in 1300, Robert of Gloucester wrote the following about the domination of French over English:

> If a man knows no French, people will think little of him
> . . . I imagine there are in all the world no countries that
> do not keep their own language except England alone.[16]

Who could have thought that seven hundred years later the situation would be reversed, with English influencing French.

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6

Speaking and Writing Monolingually

When communicating with others, bilinguals are constantly asking themselves—subconsciously most of the time—which language they should use and whether they can bring in another language. When they are in a monolingual language mode—that is, in the presence of monolinguals, or bilinguals who do not share their languages (or with whom they don't feel they can code-switch or borrow)—the answer is apparently quite simple: they will have to use the language the others know, and, if possible, they will not let another language intervene. But things are not always straightforward concerning the second point, the presence of the other, nonactive language.

Choosing a Language

At first sight, choosing a language for communicating in a monolingual mode appears to be a simple operation. We "shut off" our other language or languages and speak just one. After all, if we were to start speaking a language that our interlocutors did not know, we wouldn't get very far. As the Yaqui Indian mentioned earlier

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said, "I could talk to you in Yaqui—you wouldn't understand me."[1] I have been impressed over the years by how bilinguals excel at choosing the appropriate language and how proficient they are in deactivating their other languages. Suddenly, bi- or multilinguals who have two or more languages at their disposal can become speakers of a single language. I often think of tennis champion Roger Federer, who gives interviews in four languages (Swiss German, German, English, and French) and usually does so without letting his other languages intervene. In such situations, he is most often in a monolingual mode, as he can't expect that the interviewers, and especially the public he is speaking to, will know his other languages.

Bilinguals who manage to stay in a monolingual mode and, in addition, who speak that language fluently and have no accent in it, can often "pass" as monolinguals. I was quite surprised one day, several years ago, when I heard the baker's wife down the road from where I live answer the phone in fluent Swiss German. I had known her for some ten years and had always believed that she was Swiss French. I would have expected that she would have to struggle with German like most Swiss French do (not to mention with Swiss German, which the Swiss French rarely speak). But she was conducting a fluent conversation in what, I was to find out, was her mother tongue. I was just as surprised when I learned that the actress Natalie Wood, who starred in the 1961 movie *West Side Story,* and whom I had thought of as a totally monolingual person, was in fact born into a Russian-speaking family and was bilingual in Russian and English. Many examples come to mind of this "miracle" of bilingualism—the hidden languages that people know but have never used in our presence.

Choosing a base language and sticking to it for monolingual

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communication, whether when speaking or writing, is just part of being a bilingual. Sometimes more than communication is at stake, and keeping to the monolingual mode is all the more crucial. Olivier Todd, the Franco-English journalist and writer, describes in his autobiography how his British mother and he had missed the last boat to England when the Germans invaded France. They remained in France for the duration of the war and his mother was in partial hiding, as she would have been sent to an internment camp if the Germans had known her nationality. Todd explains how they had agreed not to speak English in public—on the street, in cafés, on the bus. If an English word or sentence ever escaped her, Todd, who was a child at the time, was to squeeze her hand. The problem was that his mother was very anti-German, and one day on the Métro she burst out against the occupiers in English, right in front of a German officer. Todd tells us that they were lucky that day and nothing happened. Olivier Todd's mother made it through the war without being identified as a British subject.[2]

Researchers have long been intrigued by how bilinguals manage to control the language they speak and how they keep out their other languages. On a cognitive level there is active debate about the mechanisms involved. Some researchers, such as David Green of the University of London, talk of the inhibition of the languages not needed, whereas I take a "softer" stance and advocate the deactivation of those languages but not their inhibition.[3] I believe that the bilingual language system has to allow for switching back and forth between a monolingual and a bilingual mode, and that even in a monolingual mode, as we will see below, the speaker can call upon the other deactivated language. This is more difficult to do when a language is inhibited than when it is deactivated.

Neurologists and neurolinguists have recently conducted brain-

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imaging studies in an effort to better understand the structures that control language choice. Jubin Abutalebi and David Green reviewed the literature, and they suggest that several neural structures of control play a role: the left caudate in the subcortical area of the brain appears to supervise the correct selection of languages; the left prefrontal cortex updates and keeps on line the relevant language, as well as inhibits the languages not being used; the anterior cingulate cortex signals to the prefrontal cortex potential errors in language choice; and the left and right posterior parietal cortex biases selection toward the language in use and away from the language not in use.[4] This research, which is still very recent, is helping us understand how bilinguals select the right language to use and keep out the others, to some extent at least, as we will see below.

When bilinguals are in a monolingual mode, that is, speaking or writing in just one language, we expect that their other languages are deactivated and do not intervene. This would make sense, since the bilinguals are usually communicating with people who do not know the other languages. In fact, however, things are not quite as simple as that. Bilinguals may sometimes code-switch when speaking or writing monolingually, and they regularly produce interferences. We will examine both processes below.

Code-Switching in a Monolingual Mode

One reason for code-switching in a monolingual mode is to bring in a proper noun from the other language. Some bilinguals prefer to pronounce names (of a city, a newspaper, a person, even one's own name) in their correct language, which may force them to code-switch, whereas other bilinguals will adapt them phonologi-

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cally into the base language, thus borrowing them in. There are no rules here. On the one hand, we don't want to sound too sophisticated or distant by switching over to the other language. It is also important that our interlocutors understand us, and code-switching might cause miscomprehension. On the other hand, adapting a name into the base language might distort it too much or detach it from reality. After all, an American friend named Jonathan just doesn't seem to be the same person when his name is pronounced in French. Deciding whether to say the proper noun in its original form or adapt it to the language being spoken will depend on many factors, but the central factors are clear communication and not distancing oneself too much from interlocutors. When I lived in the United States, I would anglicize my family name and then spell it out; giving the French version was not a solution, as most people simply wouldn't understand it.

Proper nouns aside, bilinguals may well code-switch momentarily when in a monolingual mode, either because they have not mastered the language that well (as when a highly dominant bilingual is speaking in his weaker language) or they do not have the required vocabulary for that particular domain in the language they are speaking (the complementarity principle). When they code-switch out of the blue like this, their interlocutors will often be taken aback. I've had people spring a code-switch on me when I didn't expect it and have been momentarily "deaf" to it. This simply shows how deactivated the other language can be when one is in a monolingual mode.

When the interlocutor, or one of the interlocutors, knows the speaker's other language, he or she can propose the translation equivalent in the language that is being spoken. This is a common strategy in multilingual countries, where people often understand

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several languages even if they prefer not to speak them, and they are ready to help out a bit. I once heard an American professor say on a French radio program during an interview, "Il n'est pas *ruthless*" (He's not ruthless). The reporter, who wanted the interview to be understandable to the listeners, came in immediately with the French expression, "sans scrupules." The professor said, "Oui . . ." and then continued what he had been saying.

If the interlocutor does not seem to know the bilingual speaker's other languages, then a code-switch will need to be accompanied by an explanation. One produces the word or expression in the other (guest) language, perhaps with a preceding phrase such as, "In language X we say . . . ," and then one proceeds. Of course, this cannot be done too often, because it slows down the interaction and may not be looked upon favorably by those listening.

Interferences

Despite the fact that bilinguals sometimes want to keep out their other languages when they are speaking or writing monolingually, and although they may have filtered out all code-switches, the other languages can still enter in the form of interferences: deviations from the language being spoken (or written) stemming from the influence of the deactivated languages. Interferences, also called transfers, accompany bilinguals throughout their life, however hard they try to avoid them. They are the bilingual's uninvited "hidden companions," often present even though one tries to filter them out.

Interferences are of two kinds: static interferences, which reflect permanent traces of one language on the other (such as a permanent accent, the meaning extensions of particular words, specific

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syntactic structures, and so on), and dynamic interferences, which are ephemeral intrusions of the other language, as in the case of an accidental slip on the stress pattern of a word due to the stress rules of the other language, or the momentary use of a syntactic structure taken from the language, or languages, not being spoken. In what follows, I will not distinguish between the two types of interference. Usually they are difficult to separate—except in the case of an accent, which is most often a static interference.[5] The discussion will emphasize dynamic interferences—elements of the other language that slip into the language you are speaking or writing, most often without your being aware of them. It is only when your interlocutor asks what you meant by word X or corrects your syntax or looks at you in a strange way that you realize, after the fact, that the other language has slipped in. You are often left with the feeling that you were *sure* that X was a word in that language, or that the structure was correct, when in fact that was not the case. (I was interested to see the interferences the copy editor of this book found after I sent the manuscript to the publisher; there were a few, even though I was working in a monolingual mode and trying to write in English only—except for examples, of course.)

It is important at this stage to differentiate interferences from other deviations that are due to the level of fluency attained in a language. These intralanguage deviations reflect the person's interlanguage (the linguistic knowledge level reached in the language) and may include overgeneralizations (for example, taking irregular verbs and treating them as if they were regular) and simplifications (dropping pluralization and tense markers, omitting function words, simplifying the syntax), as well as hypercorrections and the avoidance of certain words and expressions.

Interferences can occur at all levels of language. At the first level,

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that of pronunciation (phonology, prosody), a "foreign accent" is a direct reflection of the interference of another language. Traces of an accent can be permanent (it is simply the accent you have when you are speaking language X) or ephemeral, such as momentary slips in the pronunciation of a sound, the wrong stress placement on a word, the intonation of a phrase based on your stronger language, and so on. These accidental slips, which often increase in number when you are tired or stressed, will often "give you away" as a speaker of the other language. Your interlocutor may then ask you what other language you speak, or may—very nicely—tell you how well you speak the language you are using.

Interferences at the word level (individual words or expressions) resemble the lexical borrowings that we examined in the preceding chapter. In fact they may well be explained by similar psycholinguistic mechanisms, although this has not been studied adequately. Just like borrowings, you can import, involuntarily of course, both the form and the meaning of a word. Thus, a French-English bilingual once said to her English-speaking nephew, "Marc, you're *baving!*" She pronounced "baving," based on the French word *baver* (to dribble), like "patting." Marc looked at his aunt with puzzlement and she quickly corrected herself. Another example would be, "Look at the *camion!*" where the French word *camion* (truck) is pronounced as if it were an English word (like "canyon").

A more subtle type of lexical interference—the bête noire, so to speak, of bilinguals—is similar to a loanshift, where only the meaning of the word is brought in and added to an existing word. For example, in the sentence, "Look at the *corns* on that animal," the meaning of French *cornes* (horns) has been added to that of the English word "corn." Another example would be, "Oh, he's in the *stove,*" which a Norwegian American boy said when a stranger asked

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him where his father was. The interference comes from the Norwegian *stova,* which means living room.[6] In these two examples, the base- and guest-language words resemble each other to a large extent (they are near homophones, and near homographs when written; often called "false friends"), but that does not have to be the case, as we see in the example "Don't move the *needles* on the clock," based on the French word *aiguilles* (which means both needles and hands of a clock); the word should have been "hands." These accidental borrowings (loanshifts) can occur frequently in a bilingual's language because the words pronounced are definitely those of the base language and the bilingual believes he or she is speaking just one language, and yet the words are used with the wrong meaning. Nancy Huston, the Canadian and French bilingual writer, reports that she ends up avoiding the use of false friends such as *éventuellement* and "eventually," "harassed" and *harassé,* to make sure that she won't mix them up.[7]

Interferences at the level of idiomatic expressions and proverbs are also very frequent and particularly difficult to filter out. Bilinguals may translate them literally from the other language into the language they are speaking and not be aware that the meaning is not always transparent. Hence, "I'm telling myself stories" is a literal English translation of the French expression "je me raconte des histoires"; the bilingual speaker should have said, "I'm kidding myself."[8] Another example would be the literal translation of "as alike as two peas in a pod," which would not mean anything in French; one should say "comme deux gouttes d'eau" (literally, "like two drops of water"). Here are two examples where the literal English translation of a German expression comes close but isn't quite right: "Winter is before the door" is based on "Winter steht vor der Tür"; the English expression is "Winter is around the corner." And

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"He was laughing in his fist" comes from "Er hat sich ins Fäustchen gelacht"; the correct English expression is "He was laughing up his sleeve."[9]

Interferences at the level of syntax are also quite frequent, such as when bilingual speakers use the word-order pattern of one language in the other, insert determiners when they are not normally present, use the wrong preposition (again based on the deactivated language), and so on. For example, if French-English bilinguals say "on *the* page five" instead of "on page five," they are probably thinking of the French equivalent, "sur la page cinq." The same is true of "I saw that *at* the television," based on "J'ai vu ça à la télévision."

As for interferences when writing, many are similar to the ones that crop up in spoken language at different linguistic levels (for example, lexical and syntactic). Among the things that are specific to writing, though, one finds spelling differences between languages. For instance, near homographs—that is, words that are spelled only slightly differently in two languages—are often a problem. Many English-French bilinguals have to stop and think about how many *d*'s there are in "address" (there is only one in French), how many *p*'s in "development" (there are two in French), if there are two *h*'s or not in "rhythm" (there is only one in French), and so on. Personally, I bless the development of grammar and spelling checkers in word processing programs, especially for difficult languages like French that have complex grammatical rules. However, word processors do not catch errors in higher-level aspects of language use, such as style and level of formality. These can be quite different in two languages (for example, the greeting and farewell phrases in letters, the style of reports, and so on) and we can easily write something incorrectly based on what we know from another language.

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Interferences and Communication

The interferences bilinguals produce when communicating in a single language can have different impacts on the comprehension of their monolingual listeners (or readers). At the level of sentence structure, Uriel Weinreich proposed three categories, which we will address in order of the least impact to the greatest impact. In the first category, the interference pattern is possible in the base language and has no negative impact on comprehension. Thus an English-Russian bilingual who uses a subject-verb-object order in Russian, based on the normal English word order, produces a perfectly good Russian sentence, although that particular word order is not a necessity in Russian. In the second category of interferences, the meaning of the sentence is understandable by implication. Weinreich cites the German-English bilingual who says "yesterday came he," based on the German, "gestern kam er." Although the English sentence is not grammatical, the meaning can be understood. Finally, in the third category, the interference produces an unintended meaning and hence communication is affected.[10] I like to cite an example that caused me problems in my teenage years as a bilingual. I would say to French friends, "Je te manque," based on "I miss you" in English. My friends would look at me with a puzzled expression because I was in fact telling them that *they* were missing *me* instead of that I was missing them. I should have said, "Tu me manques."

Since instances of Weinreich's first two categories of interference seem to occur much more frequently, interferences seldom affect communication. In the long term, bilinguals who need to communicate in a particular language, either by speaking or writing, or both, will normally develop enough skills in the language to com-

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municate satisfactorily. The interferences they produce will likely not be that numerous. In addition, monolinguals who live or work with bilinguals grow accustomed to language that is influenced by the other tongue. They get used to hearing an accent, strange sentence structures, words that are not quite appropriate, and this makes communication easier. An interesting example comes from English–American Sign Language (ASL) bilinguals, who sometimes retain facial expressions from sign language when communicating in an English monolingual mode. Paul Preston mentions the occasional use of prolonged eye contact, which is crucial in Deaf culture but which makes hearing people uncomfortable. In addition, he evokes the arched, furrowed eyebrows that are part of asking a "what, where, who, which" type of question in ASL, a facial expression that can be misunderstood as accusatory or angry in the hearing world.[11]

Many bilinguals have reported making more errors (many of them being interferences) when they are tired or stressed. Sentence structures that are normally controlled, morphological endings that are normally inserted, intonations that are usually mastered—all of these things can start breaking down in certain conditions. Nancy Huston evokes this with humor:

> The use of a foreign tongue discourages not only loquacity but pedantry; it prevents you from taking yourself too seriously . . . The minute I start yelling at my children, for instance, my accent worsens and my vocabulary shrinks—this makes them burst out laughing and I can no longer make my rage credible; I have no choice but to calm down and laugh.[12]

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A final point concerns the direction of interferences. If bilinguals are heavily dominant in a language, then the interference flow is straightforward: the stronger language influences the weaker language, either in a permanent manner (perhaps in the form of an accent) or in an ephemeral way (what we have called dynamic interferences). However, if the two languages have more or less equal importance (at least in everyday use), then interferences can go both ways. The British researcher Vivian Cook is well known for his work showing how knowledge and use of a second language can have an influence on the first language.[13] When interferences are bidirectional, some bilinguals may report that they know neither language well, or that their languages are influencing each other. Eva Hoffman, in *Lost in Translation,* states this very appropriately:

> When I speak Polish now, it is infiltrated, permeated, and inflected by the English in my head. Each language modifies the other, crossbreeds with it, fertilizes it. Each language makes the other relative. Like everybody, I am the sum of my languages.[14]

In various writings, I have insisted on what I call the bilingual or holistic view of bilingualism, which proposes that the bilingual is an integrated whole who cannot easily be decomposed into two separate parts.[15] The bilingual is not the sum of two (or more) complete or incomplete monolinguals; rather, he or she has a unique and specific linguistic configuration. The coexistence and constant interaction of the languages in the bilingual have produced a different but complete language system.[16] The analogy I use is that of the high hurdler in track and field who blends two competencies,

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that of the high jumper and that of the sprinter, but is neither one alone.

In sum, the influences of the other language, notably in the form of interferences, are present in bilingual language but they do not usually affect communication. I would even suggest that they may render what is said more original and less stereotypical. As we will see, the prose of such bilingual writers as Joseph Conrad and Samuel Beckett contains traces of their other language. Interferences greatly enriched their writing and helped make it what it is.

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7

Having an Accent in a Language

Even though very few of us are professional linguists, we all have something to say about a person's accent. An accent is one of the things that we notice most in someone's speech and we always have an opinion about it. The issue of accents gets more complicated with bilinguals and their two or more languages, especially because of a popular belief:

Myth: Real bilinguals have no accent in their different languages.

The reality for bilinguals is quite different. Having a "foreign" accent in one or more languages is, in fact, the norm for bilinguals; not having one is the exception. Whether one has an accent mainly depends on when the language was acquired. Having an accent does not make someone less or more bilingual. Some extremely fluent and balanced bilinguals have an accent in one or the other of their languages; other less fluent bilinguals may have no accent at all. The world is full of respected scholars, writers, politicians, and others who are bilingual and speak with an accent in one of their languages.

Take, for example, the illustrious author Joseph Conrad, mentioned briefly at the end of the preceding chapter. What one tends

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to forget about Conrad is that he was originally Polish, not British, and that he had a very strong Polish accent when he spoke in English. And yet his English prose is recognized as outstanding and he remains one of English literature's great authors of the turn of the twentieth century. In a totally different domain, a recognized American statesman and Nobel Prize winner, Henry Kissinger, has a strong German accent when speaking in English, a language that he masters fully.

In sum, there is no relationship between one's knowledge of a language and whether one has an accent in it. Because accents are in fact normal among bilinguals, we will examine why people have accents, what they mean at the phonetic level, and the disadvantages and advantages for bilinguals of having an accent.

An Accent: Why and How

One can have an accent in a language for several reasons. First, and quite simply, it can be because one has acquired a particular dialect of the language. Thus an English speaker from India may simply have the accent linked to Indian English and it may have nothing to do with the age at which his English was acquired. A second, better-recognized reason is the influence of one's first language on the second. An English-French bilingual may have an English accent in French because she acquired French later on in life. This was the case for my English great-aunt, who had moved to France in her twenties. She had a strong accent when she spoke French, although her French was otherwise impeccable and quite refined.

What kind of influence can the first (often stronger) language have on the second (often weaker) language? First, if the latter has a sound that isn't found in the first, the speaker may use a replace-

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ment that is phonetically close. For example, because there is no "z" sound in Norwegian, Norwegians speaking English sometimes say "rosses" instead of "roses." There is no "ch" sound in Portuguese (as in "church") and so a Portuguese person speaking English may say "shicken" instead of "chicken." The same is true for the English "th" sound replaced by "s" or "z" or "f" or "v" by French speakers, who may say "sanks" instead of "thanks." Note also that if the second (or weaker) language has two rather similar sounds where the first (stronger) language has only one, the bilingual may fail to distinguish the two sounds and use only one, based in part on the first language. Thus, a French person may use the same sound when pronouncing "hit" and "heat," "rim" and "ream," and so on. At the level of prosody, word stress can be particularly difficult to master. Instead of stressing the first syllable in "LI-brary," a French person may say, "LI-BRA-RY." This pronunciation is still understandable to an English-speaking listener, but when the stress is put on the wrong syllable (and the others are reduced), intelligibility problems can occur, for example, with "e-DIN-burgh" instead of "E-dinburgh."

An accent can also be caused by the second language's influence on the first. This can happen after many years of greater use of the second language and reduced use of the first. I once met a French woman who had learned English when she came over to the United States with her husband, whom she had met on a U.S. military base in France. She had lived in the Midwest, far removed from any French speakers, and she had rarely returned to France. When I met her, some twenty years later, she spoke French with a rather strong American English accent: her intonation in French was English, her stop consonants ("p," "t," "k") were aspirated and no longer French, and so on. She was very conscious of the change and I spent the

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greater part of our conversation telling her it was quite natural that she would have an accent in French, given the circumstances of her life.

What about an accent in a third or a fourth language: where does it come from? It really depends on when and where one has acquired the language. For example, I acquired my Italian in my teens when English was my stronger language (although it's not my first language), and so I have an English accent in Italian. Had I acquired it earlier, I might have a French accent in Italian or no accent at all. One should also note that a bilingual can have an accent in all of his or her languages. This can happen, for example, when a bilingual has spent her early years going back and forth between two or more linguistic communities (for example, between Germany, Italy, and England). Again, there is nothing wrong with having accents in several languages, although the bilingual may feel that she speaks no language correctly. This is false, of course. Having an accent is not an indication of how well one has mastered a language.

Researchers do not agree on an age limit distinguishing between the likelihood of not having an accent in a second language and having one. Some have proposed that a language can be "accentless" if it is acquired before age six, and that the window (what some call the sensitive period) remains open until age twelve.[1] There are many exceptions, however, including reports of highly motivated people (language teachers, for instance) who have learned a language later but compensated for that disadvantage with intensive contact with native speakers, extended stays in the country in question, the study of phonetics and pronunciation, and so on, and who "pass" as native speakers of the language.[2] Personally, I know individuals who arrived in a new country at age fifteen and even later and yet do not have a foreign accent in that language. And

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they didn't have to work hard to attain this fluency, they tell me. Despite such accounts, early learning—acquiring a second or third language in early childhood, and using it extensively—is a good guarantee for "accentless" speech. (I put "accentless" in quotes because all speech is accented, by definition, although not in the sense used here.)

Disadvantages and Advantages of Having an Accent

What are the reported disadvantages of having an accent? The one that is mentioned the most is that it makes you stick out from the others when you want the exact opposite, to blend in. Eva Hoffman, author of the much acclaimed *Lost in Translation,* writes about her experience of having an accent during her teenage years:

> Some of my high school peers accuse me of putting it on in order to appear more "interesting." In fact, I'd do anything to get rid of it, and when I'm alone, I practice sounds for which my speech organs have no intuitions, such as "th" (I do this by putting my tongue between my teeth) and "a," which is longer and more open in Polish (by shaping my mouth into a sort of arrested grin).[3]

And as an adult, if one's accent is quite strong, and the society is not positively inclined toward the group you belong to, an accent can have a negative effect on the way you are perceived and treated. James Bossard, a sociologist, gives us this example:

> Benjamin . . . has been a traveling salesman. He was reared in a Yiddish-speaking home, and he speaks English today with a remarked Yiddish accent. Benjamin says

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> that this fact handicaps him in selling, particularly in certain areas of the country.[4]

Having an accent may also give the wrong impression—that the speaker does not know the language when he or she does know it, maybe even extremely well. In addition, it may signal that the speaker has not tried hard enough to learn the language, when in fact the accent is the result of neuromuscular factors and not a lack of effort put into language learning. Finally, having an accent does not normally impede communication, but from time to time one can meet a person who has such a strong accent in one of his or her languages that it seems like the person is speaking the other language. Intelligibility suffers, even though the person may be quite fluent in the language. When this happens in a conversation, for example, one can normally find strategies for understanding what is being said. If this is not possible, one may have to shorten the interaction (in as a polite way as possible); fortunately such instances are relatively rare.

An accent can seem odd or startling when a person's name does not match up with his accent. In Switzerland, for example, a person with the very French name Jean-François Guignard may speak French with a German accent. This could simply be because he and his parents (say, a Swiss French father and a Swiss German mother) moved to the German part of Switzerland when he was young and he acquired French rather late in life. People may be taken aback by his accent and wonder why he has it, but it is not that surprising when they know the full story. Another disadvantage to accents that is mentioned by many is that stress and emotion can make an accent reappear or increase in strength. Canadian and French bilingual author Nancy Huston reports that her English accent in

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French becomes stronger when she is nervous, when she speaks to strangers, when she has to leave a message on an answering machine, or when she has to speak in public.[5]

Clearly, there are also advantages to having an accent. One is that the accent may be seen positively by a person or a group. Huston writes:

> The minute I detect foreign intonations, my interest and empathy are quickened. Even if I have no direct contact with the person in question . . . my ears prick up when I hear her accent and, studying them unobtrusively, I try to imagine the other, faraway side of her life.[6]

Tony Blair, the former prime minister of the United Kingdom, has a strong English accent in French, but the French love it when he gives speeches in their language, especially as he invariably makes them laugh with his British humor with its irony, innuendo, and deadpan style. Numerous performing artists have played on their accent to appeal to their audience, such as French singer Maurice Chevalier and Italian actor Roberto Benigni when performing in English, and British singers Petula Clark and Jane Birkin when performing in French. I have also known of cases in which an accent was a major factor in a person's falling in love with someone (although not the only factor, one hopes).

Another, slightly less romantic advantage to having an accent is that it clearly marks you as a member of your group. For example, a Swiss person from the French-speaking part of Switzerland speaking German with a French accent is revealing, unconsciously, the group he belongs to. Some people do not want to be seen as belonging to the other language group and purposely use their accent as a signal of their original group membership. Elizabeth

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Beaujour, an expert on bilingual writers, writes that the Russian-born French writer Elsa Triolet had a strong Russian accent in French, which embarrassed her. She retained it, however, and Beaujour claims that it was her way of showing that she had not betrayed her linguistic loyalty to Russian, her first language.[7] Finally, having an accent can be self-protective: it prevents members of the group you are interacting with from expecting you to know all the group's cultural and social rules. In short, it allows you to be different.[8]

To summarize, having an accent when you know and use two or more languages is a fact of life; it doesn't make you any less bilingual, and it rarely impedes communication. It is something bilinguals get used to, as do others they interact with.

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8

Languages across the Lifespan

In Chapter 2, I stressed how important it is to take into account the language history of bilinguals. To understand an individual bilingual's language knowledge and use, we need to know, for example, which languages, and language skills, were acquired, as well as when and how. Were the languages acquired at the same time—something that is quite rare—or one after the other? We also need to know about the pattern of language fluency and use over the years. Hence, examining how languages wax and wane during a lifetime, which may well include the learning of new languages and the forgetting of older ones, is very much part of understanding the bilingual person.

The Wax and Wane of Languages

To illustrate the language history of bilinguals, I will offer my own case as an example, as it will allow us to see how the waxing and waning of languages is a dynamic process, how language dominance may change over time, and how a bilingual's language history can be quite complex. In Figure 8.1, I present five language use and language fluency grids based on the configuration set up in

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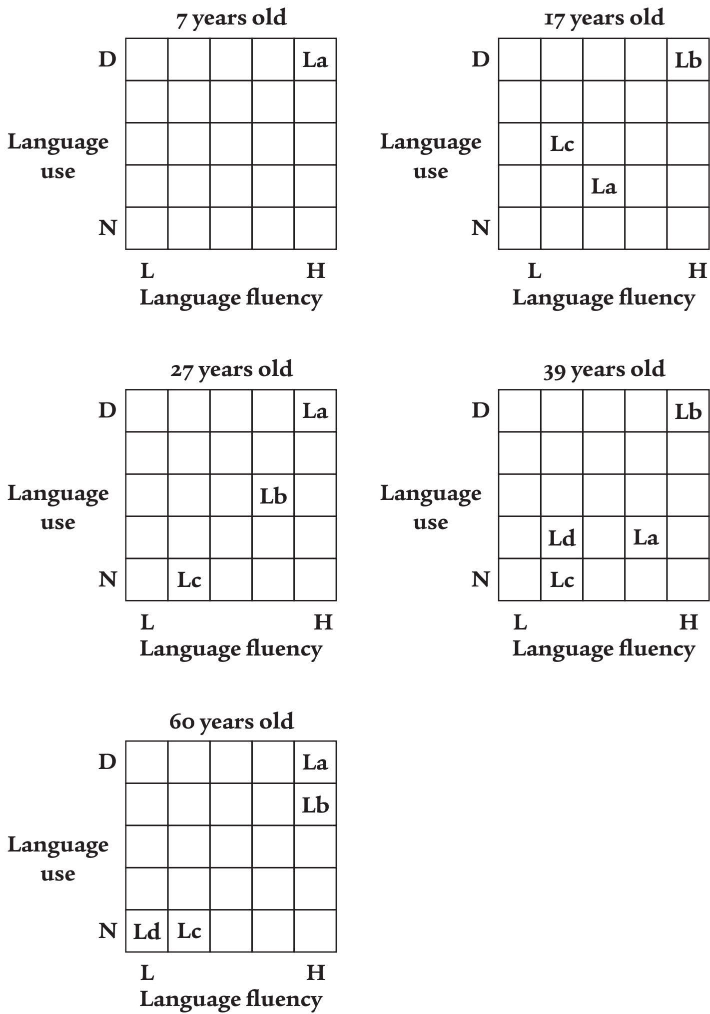

Figure 8.1. The wax and wane of languages in a bilingual. The axis for language use goes from never used (N, bottom) to daily use (D, top), and that for language fluency from low fluency (L, left) to high fluency (H, right). The four languages in question are French (La), English (Lb), Italian (Lc), and American Sign Language (Ld).

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Chapter 2. Recall that language use is presented along the vertical axis, on a continuum from never used (N) on the bottom, to daily use (D) on the top, and language fluency is presented along the horizontal axis, from low fluency (L) on the left, to high fluency (H) on the right. Each grid, with the exception of the last one, corresponds to the status of my languages one year before a major language change. The four languages involved are French (La), English (Lb), Italian (Lc), and American Sign Language (Ld).

In the first grid, we see that in my early years (at age seven) I was monolingual in French (La). It is the only language represented on the grid and it is placed in the top right square, which corresponds to daily use and high fluency (for a boy of that age, of course). At eight years of age I was put into an English boarding school in Switzerland, followed by a similar school in England. Hence the appearance of English (Lb) in the second grid, which quickly became my stronger language. I also acquired Italian (Lc) during the months I spent in Italy over the school breaks. So in the second grid (age seventeen), English is the most-used and most-fluent language. I hardly used French at that time and had only medium fluency in it; I used Italian more than French, but my Italian was not quite as fluent.

At age eighteen, a second major linguistic change occurred. I left England and returned to France after an absence of ten years. Overnight, French became my most important language (although it was several years before my fluency improved) and English became the less-used language. So in the third grid (age twenty-seven) French has gone back up to the top right square and English has dropped in fluency and especially in use. As for Italian, it was not being used at all and its fluency was thus also quite low.

Two more linguistic changes took place in my life after that.

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When I was twenty-eight my family and I moved to the United States for a one-year stay that was to end up lasting twelve years. The fourth grid (age thirty-nine) shows my language status at the end of that period, just before we returned to Europe. English is back up in the top right position, French has dropped a bit in fluency and even more in use, and Italian remains in the same place. During this period, I also had the privilege of discovering and learning an exceptional language, American Sign Language (Ld), the language used by the Deaf in the United States to communicate among themselves and with signing members of the hearing world. Unfortunately my fluency in ASL was never very high and I didn't use it much (mainly at work), which explains its lower-left position on the grid.

Finally, at age forty, I returned to Europe with my family (to the French-speaking part of Switzerland), and once again my languages reorganized themselves. The final grid, which represents my languages a few years ago (age sixty), is where things stand now, with two highly fluent languages, French and English, the first used slightly more than the second, and two languages, Italian and American Sign Language, that are never used, with Italian slightly more fluent than ASL.

An interested bilingual reader might wish to take a colored pen and fill in the grids in Figure 8.1 for points just before major changes in his or her own language history. One could also examine the fluency and use of each language skill (speaking, listening, reading, writing) at each stage; this would entail filling in four grids per stage.

A few general comments can be made based on my particular language history. (I kept it quite factual for the purpose of illustrating the chapter. Of course, it was also a very human experience with

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its ups and its downs, especially at age eighteen—but that is another story.) First, as we can see, an individual language history can be quite complex. In my case this was because of repeated immigration. Other bilinguals may have more straightforward histories (for example, those who live on language borders or in multilingual countries), but important life events may nevertheless change the relative importance of their languages—events such as starting school (and learning to read and write in one or several languages), getting a job, settling down with a spouse, or losing a close family member with whom a language was used exclusively.

Second, we see that this is a dynamic process in which new situations, new interlocutors, and new language functions involve new linguistic needs (recall the complementarity principle). New needs will change the bilingual person's language configuration. Typically there are periods of stability, of varying duration, and then periods of language reorganization during which an existing language may be strengthened, another one may lose its importance, yet another may be acquired, and so on. One should be careful not to judge a person's bilingualism during these transition periods, as the skills required by the new environment may not be fully in place. It is also during these periods that bilinguals need to be reassured about what is happening to them. Even if their general level of communication is affected for a while, it will recover as their languages reorganize themselves.

Third, the figure grids show clearly how global dominance in a language can change and how the bilingual's first language is not automatically the stronger language at a particular point in time. In my experience, language dominance changed four times and there were two periods, both about ten years long, when my second language was the dominant language. I have known many bilin-

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guals who have started their lives with one language as the dominant language and then at some point, after a transition, found it replaced by a second language. One should be careful, therefore, not to think that the bilingual's first language, or mother tongue, is the stronger, most fundamental language; it really depends on the individual's language history and, as we have seen, on the complementarity principle. Finally, an examination of bilinguals' language history will help counter another false idea:

Myth: Real bilinguals acquire their two or more languages in childhood.

One can become bilingual in childhood, but also in adolescence and in adulthood. In fact, many people become bilingual as adults, after they immigrate to another region or another country or because they marry someone who speaks another language that becomes the language used in the home. With time, adults can become just as bilingual as those who acquired their languages in their early years, although probably without the native-speaker's accent for some of them.

Language Forgetting

Changes in the life of bilinguals, such as immigration or the loss of a close family member, may be the start of what is sometimes referred to as language loss or language attrition. I will use the better known expression "language forgetting," even though it is not clear whether a language is really forgotten or is simply so deactivated that one can no longer access it correctly. The language researcher Linda Galloway presented a very fine example relating to a heptalingual—someone with seven languages—five of which were in

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the process of being forgotten at the time of the study. This person first learned Hungarian, followed by Polish at age four when he moved to Poland. He seemed to have "lost" his Hungarian then, until he returned to Hungary at age six. At age ten he moved to Romania, where he learned both Romanian, in school and with friends, and Yiddish, spoken socially. He returned to Hungary at age twelve where, in school, he studied German, English, and Hebrew. He then spent six years in Germany, where he went to college, and German became his dominant language. At age twenty-five he left for the United States, where English became his primary language. His wife is Hungarian but they mainly use English in the home. When Galloway met this person, he was actively using only two languages, English and Hungarian; three were dormant, on the way to being forgotten, German, Hebrew, and Yiddish; and two were all but forgotten, Romanian and Polish.[1]

Language forgetting is a phenomenon that is probably as common as language learning, and yet it has received little attention in the past. This is now changing, thanks to the work of such researchers as Monika Schmid, Barbara Köpke, and Kees de Bot, among others. When the domains of use of a language are considerably reduced, if not simply absent, the process of language forgetting will begin, and it will extend over many years. It can be observed in various ways: in hesitant language production as the bilingual searches for appropriate words or expressions; frequent code-switching, borrowing, and interferences as he or she calls on the dominant language for help; pronunciation (sounds, intonation) that is marked increasingly by the other language or languages; "odd" syntactic structures or expressions that are borrowed from the stronger language, as well as many writing difficulties, particularly in spelling but also at other linguistic levels. Language

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comprehension is less affected, although the person may not know new words and new colloquialisms in the language that is being forgotten. People who are in this extended process of forgetting a language and are using only one language are "dormant bilinguals." They often avoid using the fading language because they no longer feel sure about their knowledge of it and they do not want to make too many mistakes. If they do have to use it, they may cut short a conversation so as not to have to show openly how far the attrition has progressed. Personally, I try not to use my Italian or my sign language. If I am in situations where there is no other option left, I find myself struggling to express even simple things. I am constantly excusing myself, commenting on how bad my knowledge of a particular language is, falling back whenever I can on my two other languages, or asking others to help me out.

Although people have their lives to live and cannot stop to worry about a language that they are forgetting, in certain contexts, such as with speakers of that language, they become conscious of the "lost" language, and some may feel guilty about it. Hence such remarks as "I really should have kept up my X" or "I wish I could speak X the way I once did." One should keep in mind, though, that language forgetting is simply the flip side of language acquisition (both are governed by the strength of the need for a language) and they are just as interesting linguistically. But the attitudes one has toward them are very different. Whereas language acquisition is seen positively ("Oh, you're learning Spanish, how wonderful!"), language forgetting is not talked about in such terms and those who are losing a language often experience regret if not remorse. These feelings may be even stronger if one's name is linked with the language in question. Hence, an Italian American person with an Italian name may find herself having to explain, and lamenting, the loss of the Italian she no longer ever uses.

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Language loss is usually quite a slow process, but bilinguals may sometimes amplify the "damage" observed because the impression it leaves can be so disturbing. In one of her books, author Nancy Huston analyzed the status of her English ten years after moving from Canada to France, where French had become her dominant language. She wrote that she was frightened by the atrophy of her mother tongue. Her vocabulary was much reduced, she observed, and it was only when she read Shakespeare, Joyce, or Djuna Barnes that she rediscovered hundreds of words that were no longer part of her vocabulary. She concluded that, far from having become "perfectly bilingual," she felt doubly "mi-lingue" (semilingual).[2] Of course, even though Huston was going through a dominant French period at that time, she was far from semilingual, even though she felt that this was the case. This is the impression that many have when they see that one of their languages is "withering away." A few years later, Huston started writing novels in English (her first books were in French), and since then she has become one of a few exceptional bilinguals who write prose in both of their languages.

Bilingualism and the Elderly

As the years move on, bilinguals sometimes ask themselves what the status of their language knowledge and use will be in old age, especially in their second language, which may have become their everyday mode of communication. Nancy Huston is married to a Bulgarian-French bilingual, and they use French, his and her second language, as their common language. She evokes this question in a startling but touching way:

> We're sometimes filled with dread at the perspective of a quasi-autistic communal old age. At first our acquired

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> language will desert us bit by bit and our sentences will be studded with blanks: 'Could you get me the . . . ? You know, the thing that's hanging from the . . . in the . . . ??!' . . . Eventually, with French totally erased from our memories, we shall sit in our rocking-chairs from dawn to dusk, nattering incomprehensibly in our respective mother tongues.[3]

Robert Schrauf, an expert on aging in bilinguals and biculturals, reassures all of us who live with two or more languages that the probability that we will in any way resemble Huston's description is extremely low. Admittedly, old age has an impact on language perception (poorer speech discrimination, difficulty with more complex or faster speech, poorer storage of the information obtained) and with language production (word-finding difficulties, especially proper names), but this is true of both monolinguals and bilinguals. Schrauf states quite clearly that older bilinguals experience the same kinds of age-related processing deficits as monolinguals, although he does add that little is known about bilinguals who are dominant in one language.[4]

Just recently, two studies seem to show that, on the contrary, elderly bilinguals need not worry about being any different from elderly monolinguals. In the first study, a Canadian specialist in the cognition of bilinguals, Ellen Bialystok, and her collaborators studied inhibitory control in monolinguals and bilinguals of various ages, using what is known as the Simon task. The study's older subjects—the ones we are concerned with here—were between the ages of sixty and eighty. Subjects were asked to look at a computer screen and to press the response key marked "X" when they saw a red square and the key marked "O" when they saw a blue square. The

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squares appeared either on the left or the right side of the screen. In congruent trials, the red square appeared above the "X" key and the blue square above the "O" key; in the incongruent trials, the red square appeared above the "O" key and the blue square appeared above the "X" key. The authors' findings replicated the well-attested congruency effect: the subjects were faster in responding when the colored square appeared on the same side as its corresponding key (for example, when the red square was on the same side as the "X" key), and slower when the color and the key were not on the same side. This is known as the Simon effect. What is even more interesting, though, is that the bilingual subjects in the older group were faster than a matched monolingual group, on both the congruent and the incongruent trials.[5] In a control study, the authors ruled out the possibility that the speed difference was due to baseline differences between the groups.

The authors' explanation for the elderly bilinguals' advantage was that the need to manage two active language systems, and to manipulate attention to one or the other, or both, during language use, is carried out by the same general executive (cognitive) functions that are responsible for managing attention to any set of systems or stimuli. In other words, a lifetime of activities such as language choice, which forces bilinguals to activate one language and deactivate (maybe even inhibit) the other, at least in the monolingual mode, has given them an attentional advantage in the kinds of tasks in which you have to pay attention to one cue (the color of the square) and not another (where it is located). Bilinguals seem to have a head start, and this can be observed in bilingual children too (which we will address in Part 2).

The second study, also conducted by Ellen Bialystok and her collaborators, has received much attention in the popular press, as it

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shows that being bilingual may well delay the development of dementia in old age. Dementia is a general term applied to cognitive disorders that have an impact on memory, language, motor and spatial skills, problem solving, and attention. Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia; others include brain injury, brain tumors, and so on. The authors examined 184 patients diagnosed with dementia, 51 percent of whom were bilingual. The latter were fluent in English (the language of the monolinguals) as well as another language (in all, they represented twenty-five different languages). The bilingual subjects had spent the majority of their lives, at least from early adulthood, regularly using both languages. When the authors compared the age of onset of the symptoms of dementia in the two groups, they found that the bilinguals had a mean age of onset 4.1 years *later* than the monolinguals (at 75.5 years versus 71.4 years). The authors argue, once again, that the attentional control that bilinguals use to govern their languages—choosing one or the other or both, keeping one suppressed while activating the other (at least when communicating in the monolingual mode)—is akin to other complex mental activities that appear to protect against dementia. They conclude tentatively (the findings are still recent) that while bilingualism does not appear to affect the accumulation of pathological factors associated with dementia, it enables the brain to better tolerate the accumulated pathologies.[6]

Growing old as a bilingual does not seem to be very different from growing old as a monolingual, with its advantages and disadvantages; it may just be, though, that bilinguals have a few additional cognitive benefits in their favor.

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9

Attitudes and Feelings about Bilingualism

Almost everyone has something to say about bilingualism. Here are extracts from the testimonies of three bilinguals:

> Dutch-English bilingual: "You are able to communicate with people in different countries."
>
> American Sign Language–English bilingual: "Bilingualism gives you a double perspective on the world."
>
> German-French-English trilingual: "There is the advantage of being able to read a greater variety of books, of traveling, and of conversing with people directly."[1]

We will start with a closer examination of the perceptions of bilinguals themselves (positive and negative) and then move on to how monolinguals see bilingualism.

How Bilinguals View the Advantages of Bilingualism

One major point that comes up often is the ability bilinguals have to communicate with different people of different cultures and in

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different countries.[2] It is certainly true that being bilingual allows you to interact with many different people, especially if the languages you use are major world languages. It is also the case that if one does not master a language sufficiently well, or at all, communication can be very difficult. When the Italian soccer coach Fabio Capello was appointed to be England's national coach, many in the media asked how he would be able to communicate with his players as his English was limited. He was reported to have said things like, "At this moment, my English is not so well" and "I am very proud and hon-or-ried."[3] He stated that he would study English intensively, but members of the press were dubious. (I am happy to report that a few months later he had made good progress.) On a more serious note, there is the story of Mario Capecchi, a Nobel Prize winner for medicine, who at age seventy was reunited with his half-sister, Marlene Bonelli, age sixty-nine, whom he had not seen since World War II, some sixty years earlier. He had been separated from his mother and sister during the war and had had to fend for himself in very difficult circumstances while his mother was interned in the Dachau concentration camp. His mother and he were finally reunited in 1946 and they moved to the United States, but without his half-sister, who was at this point in Austria. Capecchi and his sister only saw each other again in 2008, under very moving circumstances. The problem was, they had no common language—his sister did not speak English and he didn't speak German, his sister's main language.

Linked to the ability to communicate with more people is the fact that bilingualism allows one to read more books (if one is literate in several languages, of course) and, for some bilinguals, it allows for greater clarity in speaking and a richer vocabulary. Another linguistic advantage is that knowing several languages seems

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to help you learn other languages. Many bilinguals have reported on this and the claim makes sense. First there is the fact that new languages may be related to the ones already known and this will facilitate learning (knowing French will help you learn Spanish, knowing Dutch will facilitate the learning of German), and there is also the fact that the human mind structures languages—their phonology, morphology, syntax, and so on—in such a way that links are created between them. These links, in turn, can be a real help in the acquisition and use of a new language.

Bilingualism also seems to encourage divergent thinking. It has often been reported that bilingual children are able to distance themselves from the form of a word rather early on and can appreciate that something may be named in many different ways and serve different purposes. Besides the cognitive advantages for older bilinguals, mentioned in the previous chapter, bilingualism has cognitive benefits for adults across the board. In one study, researcher Anatoliy Kharkhurin asked bilinguals and monolinguals to undertake various tasks, such as imagining difficult situations and identifying the troubles they might encounter, or drawing pictures with incomplete figures or with triangles. From these he obtained various measures of fluency, originality, elaboration, and flexibility. He concluded that bilinguals were superior in divergent thinking tasks that require the ability to simultaneously activate and process multiple unrelated concepts from distant categories. The bilingual subjects were superior to monolinguals in three of the measures, fluency, elaboration, and flexibility; the one area in which they behaved identically to monolinguals was originality, that is, the ability to produce uncommon ideas or ideas that are totally new or unique.[4]

The social and cultural dimension of bilingualism is often men-

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tioned as a real advantage for those who know and use more than one language in everyday life. Bilingualism is reported to foster open-mindedness, offer different perspectives on life, and reduce cultural ignorance. A more instrumental advantage is also mentioned: bilingualism may lead to more job opportunities and greater social mobility, and may also be a real advantage in one's current occupation. I have known people who were offered a particular job, or new responsibilities, precisely because they knew one or two additional languages. In a large European Union survey conducted in twenty-nine countries in 2006, the job factor was mentioned many times in respondents' answers to the question, "What would be your main reasons for learning a new language?" A third of the respondents answered, "To use at work (including traveling abroad on business)" and a fourth indicated, "To be able to work in another country" and "To get a better job in your own country."[5]

Other advantages put forward for being bilingual are that it allows one to help others, it creates a bond with other bilinguals, and it sometimes allows one to understand what others may not. The final report on the European Union survey summarizes many of the advantages given above:

> The benefits of knowing foreign languages are unquestionable. Language is the path to understanding other ways of living which in turn opens up the space for intercultural tolerance. Furthermore, language skills facilitate working, studying and traveling . . . and allow intercultural communication.[6]

I was touched when I received this testimony from a German-French-English trilingual who, in a few lines, said it all so well:

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> Being a trilingual has helped me in various ways. I have achieved greater stature in my work environment; I have developed my lingual capacities; I have become more open-minded toward minorities and more aware of their linguistic problems; I have enjoyed various forms of literature and felt a certain amount of pride in being able to read in three different languages . . . Life never becomes boring, because there is more than just one language available. Being trilingual has been a guide to understanding and helping others.

All the advantages cited above are important for daily life, and quality of life, and show clearly why it is crucial to encourage and foster bilingualism. But they can never compare with such exceptional moments as when lives were spared precisely because of bilingualism. Here are two examples. A Bengali-Urdu-English trilingual once told me that when Bangladesh had its war of independence in 1971 against Pakistan, he was arrested by a Pakistani Punjabi/Urdu platoon one day and was on the verge of being shot. Although Bengali himself, he managed to be released because he showed his captors that he could speak Urdu and that he could recite a few verses of the Koran in Arabic. The second example concerns August Bohny, a Swiss citizen who was recognized as Righteous among the Nations by the State of Israel for having risked his life to save Jews during the Holocaust. Bohny was a primary-school teacher who worked for the Red Cross in World War II. He went to France to set up homes for parentless children, many of them Jewish, who had been taken out of internment camps. One morning, the pro-German Vichy police came to his house and asked him to give up the Jewish children he was hosting (twelve of them were

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sleeping right there in the dining room). Bohny spoke good French (he was Swiss German) and managed to delay things by convincing the officers to go back to the village to phone their headquarters. While they were away, he roused the children and quickly sent them out to the farms that surrounded the village. When the police came back, Bohny told them that the children were gone. His own suitcase was ready, as he thought he would be taken to prison, but nothing came of it and he managed to continue his exemplary work until the end of the war.

How Bilinguals View the Inconveniences of Bilingualism

According to the bilingual individuals I surveyed, the inconveniences of bilingualism are less numerous than the advantages. In fact, when I asked a group of bilinguals and trilinguals what the disadvantages were, 52 percent of the bilinguals and 67 percent of the trilinguals replied that there weren't any.[7] That said, there are some negative aspects that I will mention.

First, bilinguals who do not know one of their languages well sometimes report that they get tired and frustrated having to use it (speaking or writing) and that they invariably make mistakes when doing so. The author Richard Rodriguez mentions this aspect in his book *Hunger of Memory,* when recounting how his Spanish-speaking father dealt with English in his family:

> Though his English improved somewhat, he retired into silence. At dinner he spoke very little. One night his children and even his wife helplessly giggled at his garbled English pronunciation of the Catholic Grace before Meals. Thereafter, he made his wife recite the prayer at

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> the start of each meal, even on formal occasions when there were guests in the house. Hers became the public voice of the family.[8]

Rodriguez tells us that his father was not shy but that he simply didn't master English as well as Spanish; when speaking the latter, he would convey a confidence and authority not expressed in English.

Another disadvantage bilinguals mention concerns the influence of their stronger language on a weaker one. Some bilinguals report that, when speaking monolingually, they often have to struggle to keep code-switches and borrowings out and they have to put up with interferences that increase in number as they get tired, nervous, angry, or worried. In fact, the fear of having languages "contaminate" one another has pushed a few people not to learn or use another language at all, even when their environment encourages them to do so. A good example is that of the French writer, poet, and surrealist André Breton, who spent time in the United States during World War II (he worked for the U.S. Office of War Information). He is reported to have refused to speak and write in English, although his passive knowledge of the language was good. The reason he gave was that he didn't want his French to be affected by English. Bilinguals are rarely as puristic as Breton, but it is true that some are particularly careful not to let interferences seep through; this leads to careful, sometimes hesitant speech that sounds almost abnormal in its correctness.

Some bilinguals report difficulties adapting to new situations and new environments that require more of one language and less of the other (see the complementarity principle). They feel they don't have time to adjust, and they struggle with the language that

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is suddenly thrust to the forefront. Any bilingual who, after even a short journey, has suddenly had to adjust to a new language environment will sympathize with this. Similarly, having to speak in public can be very trying if it has to be done in the "wrong" language—either the weaker language or the language not normally used in formal situations.

Another inconvenience mentioned by bilinguals is that they are often asked to act as interpreters or translators, and many find this both difficult and tiring (as I discussed earlier). Since they may not want to refuse a favor asked of them, they often struggle through the job but then report how stressful it was. The situation can be even more difficult if a bilingual has to serve as intermediary between two cultures when he or she is personally involved. Paul Preston, who interviewed a number of English-ASL bilinguals, sons and daughters of Deaf parents, gives us the vivid testimony of a person who had to interpret at her father's funeral because there was nobody else who could do it:

> I didn't want to do it . . . but I had to. For Mamma. There wasn't anybody else. I just kept sobbing and signing, all mixed up, all at the same time. [signs, "*Never again.*"] I never want to do anything like that again."[9]

One disadvantage that we will return to in the next chapter is that some bilinguals who are also bicultural do not feel they belong to any cultural group. They feel estranged from their cultures, particularly at turning points in their lives (for example, when they return "home," which is no longer home).

Despite these pluses and minuses, I asked bilinguals if they felt they were any different from monolinguals. In general, they an-

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swered that they did not, except for the fact that they have more languages and hence can communicate with more people.

Bilingualism as Seen by Monolinguals

The attitudes and feelings that monolinguals have toward bilinguals, and bilingualism, are extremely varied. They range from the very positive to the very negative. The world expert on bilingualism, Einar Haugen, stated this in the following way back in 1972, and what he said is still relevant today in many places:

> Bilingualism is a term that evokes mixed reactions nearly everywhere. On the one hand, some people . . . will say, "How wonderful to be bilingual!" On the other, they warn parents, "Don't make your child bilingual."[10]

Not only is there a difference of opinion regarding adult bilinguals as opposed to child bilinguals, but there is especially a difference regarding bilinguals of a higher socioeconomic status as opposed to bilinguals of a lower status, primarily those who are immigrants or members of a minority language group. Whereas the former impress monolinguals with their ability to master languages and to move freely from one language to another, the latter are seen more negatively, particularly if they speak the dominant language with an accent and have children who are having difficulties adapting in their monolingual school. Many of the myths that are discussed in this book emanate from this latter monolingual view of the bilingual person.

Unlike smaller European countries and countries in Africa and Asia where multilingualism is the norm, the United States and other large nations such as England and France have not been

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very supportive of their inhabitants who live their lives with two or more languages. Here is what linguist Barry McLaughlin said about this some while back, in 1978:

> In the United States, monolingualism traditionally has been the norm. Bilingualism was regarded as a social stigma and a liability . . . This hostility toward bilingualism has nothing to do with language as such. The hostility is directed not at language but at culture. The bilingual represents an alien way of thinking and alien values.[11]

Have things changed since then? In fact attitudes and feelings simply do not change that fast, as Aneta Pavlenko, a contemporary researcher in bilingualism and herself an immigrant to the United States, attests. She writes that bilinguals are often viewed with suspicion either as linguistic and cultural hybrids who may be in conflict with themselves, or as individuals whose shifting linguistic allegiances imply shifting political allegiances and moral commitments.[12]

The immigrant literature is unfortunately rife with examples of discrimination against immigrants who are also bilingual. I have always personally regretted that large, rather monolingual countries have not fostered the bilingualism of their minorities, immigrant or not. Government-sponsored reports come out every so often lamenting a country's incompetence in second and foreign languages, which, in this age of worldwide contact, has become a serious liability. The paradox, of course, is that there *are* many speakers of second languages in these large countries, but they are not the ones in positions of power where the languages are needed. Millions of dollars are injected into the teaching of second languages

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to monolinguals when second-language skills already exist within many minority groups. Were we to support and cultivate this important national resource, as well as encourage the learning of second languages, we would be on the way to solving the foreign-languages problem that many decry.

In the end, the more monolingual a group or country is, the more difficult it is for the society to understand that bilinguals are a real asset to a nation in terms of what they can bring to cross-cultural communication and understanding.

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Bilinguals Who Are Also Bicultural

Since language is a part of culture and learning a new language may sometimes mean acquiring a new culture, many people share the following false impression of bilinguals:

Myth: Bilinguals are also bicultural.

In fact bilingualism is not coextensive with biculturalism. Many people use two or more languages in everyday life while belonging to just one main culture. For example, a Dutch person may use Dutch, English, and German in everyday life but really only live within the Dutch culture. Hence being bilingual does not automatically mean that one is also bicultural. That said, many bilinguals *are* also bicultural—and these bicultural bilinguals are the subject of this chapter.

Describing Bicultural People

Culture reflects all the facets of life of a group of people: their social rules, their behaviors, their beliefs, their values, their customs and traditions. As individuals, we belong to a number of cultures

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(often called cultural networks) made up of minor and major cultures. Minor cultures include the ones related to specific areas of life, such as one's job, habitat, sports, hobbies, whereas major cultures encompass the national culture of the country we live in, the social and religious groups we belong to, and so on. In a way, we are all "multicultural," and our cultural networks are usually complementary in the sense that we can belong to several at a time. In what follows, we will look at biculturalism as it pertains to major cultures, most notably national or ethnic groups that, in our case, also have different languages. I am interested in the fact that some people are both French and Italian, German and American, Kurdish and Turkish, Russian and Estonian, even though some of these pairings are frowned upon or even rejected by the individual groups in question.

How can one describe people who are bicultural? They have the following characteristics: first, they take part, to varying degrees, in the life of two or more cultures. For instance, Koreans in the United States take part in the life of their Korean community in America as well as that of the larger American society. Second, they adapt, at least in part, their attitudes, behavior, values, and languages to their cultures. Hence, Koreans in the United States adapt their language and their behavior depending on whether they are with other Koreans or with members of the larger American society. And third, they combine and blend aspects of the cultures involved. Certain aspects (beliefs, values, attitudes, behaviors, and so on) come from one or the other culture—hence statements like, "That's my Korean side" or "That's my American side"—whereas other aspects are blends of the two cultures. An example here would be facial expressions and body language, which are often the product of both cultures blended into one unique configuration.[1]

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Thus biculturals will adapt to certain situations or contexts (this is a dynamic, adaptable component of their biculturalism) while also blending some features of their two cultures (this part is not as readily adaptable). Here is how a Franco-American describes his own biculturalism, most notably the blending aspect:

> To me, being bilingual in the U.S. and, more specifically, being Franco-American in our pluralistic society, means that I have two languages, two heritages, two ways of thinking and viewing the world. At times these two elements may be separate and distinct within me, whereas at other times they are fused together.[2]

Figure 10.1 depicts an example of one person's biculturalism. We see the two cultures, represented by squares (here culture A is dominant) and the component that blends certain aspects of the two cultures, represented by the oval. Cultures rarely have exactly the same importance for the bicultural person; one culture often plays a larger role, and so we can speak of cultural dominance in the same way that we speak of language dominance in bilinguals (but

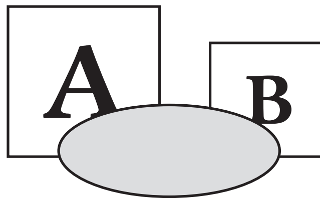

Figure 10.1. A bicultural person's combination of two cultures (culture A, the dominant culture, and culture B), along with the blending component (shaded oval).

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this dominance does not make a person any less bicultural). In the illustration, we see by the relative size of the squares that culture A is more important than culture B. In a bicultural's lifetime, cultures can wax and wane, become dominant for a while before taking a secondary role. In my own case, I feel that I have changed my dominant culture four times since becoming bicultural: it was English in my teenage years, French until age twenty-eight, American until I was forty, and it has been Swiss since then.

People can become bicultural at any time during their life: in childhood, when a child is born into a bicultural family; when a child starts going to school; in adolescence, if the young person moves from one culture to another; and, of course, in adulthood, as with immigrants who settle down in a new country and, over the years, become bicultural. Concerning the latter, the stages that take place in migration are now well studied—arrival, isolation, culture shock, and more or less rapid acculturation. This last stage is affected by the size and concentration of the migrant group, the number of children in the family, the host country's attitude toward the group in question, and so on. The literature also mentions the migrants' idealization of their home country, the return shock they experience when they see that "back home" no longer matches their dreams and memories, and the more or less permanent acceptance of a migratory status. Nancy Huston writes:

> As time goes by, your communications with "back home" become fewer and farther between . . . Your parents age, your siblings change jobs and/or spouses, have children, remarry, redivorce, you can't keep up with it all . . . The foreigners who surrounded you when you first arrived . . .

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> have become your compatriots. Now it is *their* destiny that means the most to you, because it has become *your* destiny.[3]

Biculturals can be involved in more than two major cultures, depending on their life's itinerary. Figure 10.2 depicts a tricultural who is currently dominant in culture B; her next most important culture is C, and then culture A.

Acting Biculturally

Bilinguals who are also bicultural may find themselves at various points along a situational continuum that requires different types of behavior depending on their situation. At one end they are in a monocultural mode, since they are with monoculturals or with biculturals with whom they share only one culture. In this situation they must deactivate as best they can their other cultures. At the other end of the continuum they are with other biculturals who share their cultures. With them, they will use a base culture to interact in (the behaviors, attitudes, beliefs of one culture) and

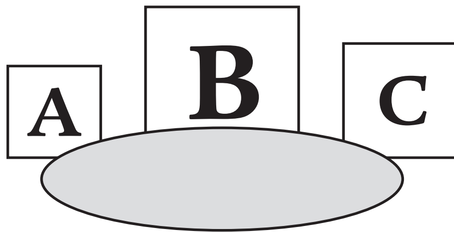

Figure 10.2. The relative importance of the three cultures of a tricultural person (culture B is dominant, followed by C, then A).

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bring in the other culture, in the form of cultural switches and borrowings, when they choose to.

Let us look at the two endpoints a bit more closely. Concerning the monocultural mode, bicultural people in this mode attempt to apply the motto, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." If their knowledge of the culture in question is sufficient (a bit like having sufficient knowledge of a language that has to be used), and they manage to deactivate, at least to a large degree, their other cultures, then they can behave appropriately. Thus, many biculturals will know how to adapt to such situations as welcoming acquaintances at home, holding a meeting at work, dealing with relatives who are monocultural, doing business with the local administration, dressing according to the context, and so on.

However, because of the blending component in biculturalism, certain behaviors, attitudes, and feelings may not be totally adapted to a situation and may instead be a mixture of the person's two (or more) cultures. This form of static cultural interference is a differentiating factor between bilingualism and biculturalism: bilinguals can usually deactivate one language and use only the other in particular situations, whereas biculturals cannot always deactivate certain traits of their other culture when in a monocultural environment. Let me give a few examples. My greeting behavior is not totally monocultural when it should be, despite my efforts to behave in the right way in each of the four cultures I interact with. When in England, I have a tendency to shake hands at the end of a visit when a small wave would be sufficient (shaking hands takes place at the beginning of an encounter, usually, and is not repeated at the end). Kissing when greeting women friends is also problematic: whom to kiss, and how many times? Just think about it: in England and the United States, if kissing is appropriate at

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all, it consists of one brief air kiss; in France, you kiss someone on both cheeks; and in Switzerland, you kiss them three times. Things get even more complex when you meet a Swiss friend in France. (Should it be two kisses, the French way, or three, the Swiss way?) Finally, when trying to attract a waiter's attention in a French café, I just can't bring myself to be quite as conspicuous as the normal French customer. Instead of saying, "Garçon!" with a loudish voice, I try to attract the waiter's attention through eye contact and by raising my hand meekly (which invariably leads to failure, at least for the first few tries).

All biculturals who are reading this can add their favorite examples of cultural blends in domains such as the hand gestures to use with someone, the amount of space to leave between yourself and the other, what to talk about (in some cultures, for example, you don't talk about salaries with people you don't know), how much to tip, and so on. Paul Preston, who has interviewed a number of bilingual-bicultural people who have Deaf parents, mentions that prolonged eye contact, something crucial in Deaf culture, makes hearing people feel uncomfortable and hence they try not to use it that much with them.[4] Another example concerns the complicated *tu* versus *vous* form of address in French. An English-French bicultural friend related something that happened to her as she was adapting to the French way of life:

> I once shocked my friends at a small dinner party by using the familiar "tu" form of address to one of the guests, a girl roughly my own age. She was introduced to me as a friend by my host, who was a good friend of mine, and so I thought I should treat her as a potential friend. I was quite unaware of the embarrassment my behavior was

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> causing the other guests; it was only when she left that the others asked me why I had been so insulting to her. Hadn't I noticed that everyone else said "vous" to her? I realized that the relationships covered by their term "amie" and my unconscious translation "friend" were not equivalent. For me a friend is someone to be friendly with, whereas one may not necessarily be "amical" with an "amie."[5]

Biculturals will invariably say that life is easier when they are in a bicultural mode—that is, with other biculturals like themselves. Bilingualism expert Aneta Pavlenko, herself a Russian-English bilingual-bicultural person, sent me the following example:

> Russian-American teenagers in Philadelphia may spend Friday evening with their families laughing over an ever popular Soviet-era comedy and then go out Sunday night to see a new Hollywood blockbuster. Chatting about the movie in English, they may slip in a few Russian adjectives or a reference to a popular character from a Russian movie.[6]

The bicultural teenagers know that the others are intimate with both of their languages and cultures and that they will understand when they intermix the cultures in their behavior or in what they say. These are precious moments, when the bicultural person can relax and not have to worry about getting things right each time. Bicultural bilinguals often state that their good friends (or their "dream" partners) are people like them, with whom they can be totally relaxed about going back and forth between their languages and cultures.

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The Bicultural's Identity

One important aspect of biculturalism relates to the identity bicultural people decide to take on. Their dilemma is that monocultural members of their different cultures want to know if they are members of culture A or culture B, or of a new culture, when biculturals just want to be accepted—consciously or unconsciously—for who they are: members of two or more cultures. But reaching a point where one can say, "I am bicultural, a member of culture A *and* of culture B" takes a long time and sometimes never happens.[7] Why is that? The process is dual: there is the way members of the cultures you belong to categorize you, and there is the way you categorize yourself. Others will take into account your kinship, the languages you speak and how well you do so, your physical appearance, your nationality, your education, your attitudes, and so on. The outcome, in each culture you belong to, will often be categorical: you are judged by friends, acquaintances, and others to belong to culture A or to culture B, but rarely to both cultures. An additional problem can be that culture A may categorize you as a member of culture B and vice versa, a form of double, contradictory categorization. Examples of this can be found among young second-generation immigrants in Europe today. Those who stayed behind in the home country categorize those who emigrated as Westerners or Europeans, whereas many citizens of the "host nations" see them as members of their parents' original culture. Young North Africans in France, for example, often feel that they are rejected by both the country of their parents and the country where they were born (France). When they return to Algeria or Tunisia or Morocco, they are treated like foreigners with radical ideas and Western mor-

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als, and yet in France they are considered as Arab foreigners and are often discriminated against: their identification papers are checked frequently, they are often mistreated by the police, and they are sometimes threatened with deportation.

Faced with such sometimes contradictory perceptions, biculturals have to reach a decision regarding their own cultural identity. They take into account how they are seen by the cultures they belong to, as well as such other factors as their personal history, their identity needs, their knowledge of the languages and cultures involved, the country they live in, the groups they belong to. The outcome, after a long and sometimes trying process, is to identify solely with culture A, solely with culture B, with neither culture A nor culture B, or with both culture A and culture B.[8] The first three solutions—that is, only A, only B, neither A nor B—are often unsatisfactory in the long run, even if they might be temporary answers. They do not truly reflect the bicultural person who has roots in two cultures, and they may have negative consequences later on. Those who choose to identify with just one culture (whether freely or when pushed to do so) are basically turning away from one of their two cultures, and they may later become dissatisfied with their decision. As for those who reject both cultures, they often feel marginalized or ambivalent about their life. Hence the terms and expressions that abound concerning immigrants and other biculturals, such as "uprooted," "rootless," "hybrid," "neither here nor there," "threshold people." When Paul Preston interviewed bilingual and bicultural hearing children of Deaf parents, he found several who couldn't (or didn't dare) call themselves bicultural, even though their experience was the epitome of biculturalism. One person said:

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> I always felt like I didn't belong either place. I didn't belong with the Deaf 100 per cent and I didn't belong with the Hearing. I didn't feel comfortable with Hearing. I felt more comfortable with Deaf but I knew I wasn't deaf. I feel like I'm somewhere in-between.[9]

The fourth route, where one identifies with both cultures, A and B, is the optimal solution since biculturals live their lives within two cultures, combining and blending aspects of each one, even when one culture is dominant. Some biculturals are helped by the existence of new cultural groups, such as the immigrant groups in North America. Identifying with Cuban Americans, or Haitian Americans, for example, and being able to use those labels, is a fine way of telling others that you are of dual heritage, Cuban *and* American or Haitian *and* American, and that you wish to be recognized as a bicultural individual.

For isolated biculturals, finally identifying with both cultures and admitting openly to being bicultural (and not simply neither A nor B, as many biculturals say) may take time or may actually never be possible. In his autobiography, Olivier Todd, the Franco-British journalist and writer, clearly shows throughout his book *Carte d'identités* that he has been in search of his dual and combined identity, despite the fact that when he was a young man French philosopher and writer Jean-Paul Sartre once told him that his problem was that he was divided between England and France. Todd applauds projects between the two countries, such as the Channel Tunnel, and he feels most comfortable with people who have his dual heritage—his mother, his first wife, Anne-Marie, and many bicultural friends. Even though he never actually uses the term "bicultural" (but then, how many biculturals do?), one clearly

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feels that this is what he aspires to be openly, even though he states that he is slightly more French than English. (Dominance of one culture should in no way be a barrier to accepting one's own biculturalism, although it is for some.) In a very touching part of his book, Todd speaks to Aurélia, his newly adopted little girl of Indian origin:

> "I hope to come back [to India] with you, Aurélia, when you'll be . . . twenty or twenty-five years old . . . I'd like you to be proud to be French *and* Indian."[10]

I had the privilege of meeting Olivier Todd just before I wrote this book, and I asked him about his biculturalism. I stressed the fact that one could be both A and B even if one culture is dominant. He very kindly responded that I was right and that he was, indeed, bicultural.

The writer Veronica Chambers relates how she progressively discovered her dual identity and how a trip to Panama allowed her to go "from being a lone Black girl with a curious Latin heritage to being part of the Latinegro tribe or the Afro-Antillianos." She continues:

> I was thrilled to learn there was actually a society for people like me. Everyone was Black, everyone spoke Spanish and everyone danced the way they danced at fiesta time back in Brooklyn.[11]

A counseling psychologist, Teresa LaFromboise, and her colleagues propose that there are six factors that help biculturals accept and live fully in their biculturalism: having a good understanding of the two cultures involved, having a positive attitude toward both, feeling confident that one can live effectively in the

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two, being able to communicate verbally and nonverbally in the two cultures, knowing what culturally appropriate behavior to use in each, and having a well-developed social network in the two cultures.[12]

I end this chapter on a personal note. When I talk or write about biculturalism, some tell me that I am being too optimistic and that "things are not that easy." Having gone through the struggle of becoming bicultural, I agree with the latter point and do not pretend that the road is without obstacles. I also reply, though, that many biculturals do not receive sufficient help to attain—and accept—their dual identity. Despite this, some come to an acceptance of their biculturalism, even though the two cultures they belong to may not accept them as such. Bicultural people are invaluable in today's world—they are bridges between the cultures they belong to, useful go-betweens who can explain one culture to members of the other and act as intermediaries between the two. As one of Paul Preston's interviewees said, "We can see both sides because we're on both sides."[13]

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11

Personality, Thinking and Dreaming, and Emotions in Bilinguals

In Chapter 3, I mentioned how bilinguals deal with well-learned mental processes such as counting, praying, remembering phone numbers, and so on. In this chapter, we will examine some other topics that often come up regarding bilinguals. Do they change personality when they change language? What language do they think in or dream in? And how do they express their emotions? Such questions are fascinating, as are the answers.

The Personality of Bilinguals

In a news item on 24 June 2008 entitled "Switching Languages Can Also Switch Personality: Study," Reuters reported on research that supposedly showed that "people who are bicultural and speak two languages may unconsciously change their personality when they switch languages."[1] With this wire, the international press agency was simply perpetuating a long-standing misapprehension:

Myth: Bilinguals have double or split personalities.

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What evidence is there for this position? Before describing the study mentioned by Reuters, let's look at what some individual bilinguals have said about this.[2] A French-English bilingual once wrote to me:

> I know that I am more aggressive, more caustic, when I speak French. I am also more rigid and more narrow-minded in defending my assertions.

A Greek-English bilingual noted:

> In English my speech is very polite, with a relaxed tone, always saying "please" and "excuse me." When I speak Greek, I start talking more rapidly, with a tone of anxiety and in a kind of rude way, without using any English speech characteristics.

Finally, a Russian-English bilingual wrote:

> I find when I'm speaking Russian I feel like a much more gentle, "softer" person. In English, I feel more "harsh," "businesslike."

Thus, both the French-English and the Greek-English bilinguals feel they are more aggressive and more tense in French or Greek, respectively, than they are in English, and the Russian-English bilingual is more gentle in Russian.

The impressions shared by these bilinguals and others have been alluded to in the literature. Robert Di Pietro, a linguist who was himself an English-Italian bilingual, once observed that in an Italian American–owned store in Washington, D.C., the butcher's style was different when he changed languages. In English, he was rather formal, whereas in Italian he would joke and sometimes even en-

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gage in mild flirtations with young women.[3] And Charles Gallagher, an expert on North Africa, reported that when Arab French bilinguals enjoyed themselves with French friends, their whole character was quite distinct from that expressed in Arabic.[4]

Psychologist Susan Ervin did some very interesting work at the beginning of her career on this precise question. In one study, she showed Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) cards—cards showing pictures that have ambiguous content—to French-English bilinguals who had lived in the United States for an average of twelve years. She tested them in two sessions, one for each language, that were conducted six weeks apart, and she found significant effects of language on three variables: verbal aggression toward peers, withdrawal-autonomy, and achievement. For example, for the same card one bilingual said in the French-language session,

> I think he [the husband] wants to leave her because he's found another woman he loves more . . . I don't know whose fault it is but they certainly seem angry.

And in the English-language session she said,

> He's decided to get a good education . . . he keeps on working and going to college at night some of the time . . . He'll . . . get a better job and they will be much happier . . . his wife will have helped him along.

Ervin observed that in French, the picture elicited themes such as aggression and striving for autonomy, whereas in English the wife is seen as supporting her husband.[5] In another study, Ervin asked Japanese-American women to complete the sentences she gave them in both Japanese and in English. She found that they proposed very different endings, depending on the language used.

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For example, for the sentence beginning, "When my wishes conflict with my family . . ." one participant's Japanese ending was, ". . . it is a time of great unhappiness," whereas the English ending was, ". . . I do what I want." For the sentence beginning, "Real friends should . . . " the Japanese ending was, ". . . help each other" and the English ending was, ". . . be very frank."[6]

Some forty years later, David Luna and his colleagues conducted the study that was described by the Reuters newswire. Although very similar to the Ervin studies, the earlier work was not mentioned—which is unfortunate, as Ervin had given a reasonable explanation for the results she had obtained. In Luna's research, Hispanic American bilingual women students were asked to perform several tasks. In one study, they had to interpret target advertisements, first in one language and then, six months later, in another. The ads contained pictures of women, and they were asked questions like, "What is the woman in the ad doing?" "How does she feel?" and so on. Luna and his colleagues found that in the Spanish sessions, informants perceived women in the ads as more self-sufficient (strong, intelligent, industrious, ambitious) as well as extroverted. In the English sessions, however, they voiced a more traditional, other-dependent and family-oriented view of the women. In a second study, the subjects were given a timed categorization task that showed that the associations between the category "masculine" and the category "other-dependent," on the one hand, and the category "feminine" and the category "self-sufficient," on the other, were stronger in Spanish than in English, thereby giving converging evidence for the results of the first study.[7]

Does this mean, then, that bilinguals have two identities, as the title of the Luna paper, "One Individual, Two Identities," seems to indicate? Or that the Reuters statement in its wire based on this re-

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search is correct: biculturals who speak two languages may unconsciously change their personality when they switch languages? Could it be that there is some truth to the Czech proverb, "Learn a new language and get a new soul"? One should note first that monocultural bilinguals are not concerned by any of this, even though they probably make up the vast majority of bilinguals in the world. Indeed, in many African, European, and Asian nations, people are bi- or multilingual while being members of just one major culture. But what about bicultural bilinguals? I proposed more than twenty-five years ago, in my first book on bilingualism, that what is seen as a change in personality is simply a shift in attitudes and behaviors corresponding to a shift in situation or context, independent of language.[8] In essence, the bicultural bilingual subjects in these various studies were behaving biculturally—that is, adapting to the context they were in (see the previous chapter). In fact Susan Ervin, in her very first study (1964), stated something similar:

> It is possible that a shift in language is associated with a shift in social roles and emotional attitudes. Since each language is learned and usually employed with different persons and in a different context, the use of each language may come to be associated with a shift in a large array of behavior.[9]

As we saw in the earlier discussion of the functions of languages, bilinguals use their languages for different purposes, in different domains of life, with different people. Different aspects of life often require different languages. Contexts and domains trigger different attitudes, impressions, and behaviors, and what is seen as a personality change due to language shift may have nothing to do with the

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language itself. In fact, when I questioned some other bilinguals, they put their finger right on the explanation. A French-Flemish-English trilingual stated:

> I don't really know if my personality changes when I change language. The main reason for this uncertainty is that I use the two languages in different situations and therefore I would act differently even if it was in the same language.

As this trilingual person clearly indicates, different situations make one behave differently, whether one is using one language or several languages. Just think of the way you speak with your best friend, and the behavior and personality you adopt with him or her, and think of how this changes in the most formal interactions you have, such as with a school head, religious authority, or employer. Another way of examining this is to observe biculturals who are monolingual. Although they have just one language, they probably behave exactly like biculturals who are bilingual, thereby demonstrating that it is not a switch in language that triggers behavioral and attitudinal changes.

A final testimony comes from a Swiss German–French–English trilingual:

> When talking English, French, or German to my sister, my personality does not change. However, depending on where we are, both our behaviors may adapt to certain situations we find ourselves in.

In other words, it is the environment and the interlocutors together that cause bicultural bilinguals to change attitudes, feelings, and behaviors (along with language)—and not their language as such.

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All this makes much less spectacular news, unworthy of a Reuters news story, but probably much closer to the truth.

Thinking and Dreaming in Bilinguals

One question bilinguals are often asked is, what language do they think in? I asked the same question in a small survey I conducted with bilinguals and trilinguals, and the answer was "both languages" (70 percent).[10] But before we try to understand this result, I should stress that thinking can often be independent of language. When people are walking down the street, riding a bus, or jogging in the woods, their thoughts may not be in a particular language, whether they are monolingual or bilingual. Philosophers and psychologists have long acknowledged that thought can be visual-spatial or involve nonlinguistic concepts. Some scholars, such as Steven Pinker and Jerry Fodor, propose that we have a "language of thought" (it has also been called "mentalese") that is prelinguistic; that is, it takes place before the representations we are thinking about are turned into French, English, or Spanish, for example. According to Pinker and Fodor (but there are opponents of this view), it is only at a later stage, in our planning to speak or subvocalizing, that individual languages actually intervene. It is then that we are sometimes conscious of the language that we have activated.

The "both languages" answer cited above is not surprising, since the bilinguals I asked probably took into account their "internal monologues" or "inner speech" when they answered. And since speech (in this case, nonverbalized speech) is normally used in different situations, with different people and for different purposes (see the discussion of the complementarity principle), their answer makes a lot of sense. Thus, were I to think about something I want

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to say in this book, after the "language of thought" (or mentalese) stage, it would be in English, because I am writing it in that language. Were I to think about a shopping list, it would be in French, as I live in a French-speaking region. Were I to think about what a friend told me the other day, it would be in the language that the friend used when we spoke. As linguist Aneta Pavlenko wrote to me, "In that way, context-specific activation . . . affects language selection for 'inner speech.'"[11]

Things are no different when one is dreaming. In the small survey I conducted, almost as many bilinguals and trilinguals (64 percent) said that they dreamed in one or the other language, depending on the dream (when they dreamed with language, of course). Once again, the complementarity principle is at work here: depending on the situation and the person we are dreaming about, we will use the one language, the other, or both. For example, a French-English bilingual in the United States once told me that he had dreamed about a little village in the French-speaking part of Switzerland that he knew well but to which he had not returned for several years. In his dream, he met an inhabitant of the village and he spoke French to him.

One interesting aspect of dreams in bilinguals is that some people have reported speaking a language fluently in a dream when they are not actually fluent in that language. The linguist Veroboj Vildomec reported that a multilingual who spoke some Russian dreamed that he was speaking fluent Russian. But when he woke up, he realized that it had been in fact a mixture of Czech and Slovak, with a bit of Russian, and not fluent Russian after all. Vildomec added that other bilinguals reported producing interferences during their dreams, that is, deviations in a language due to another language, even though they rarely made any when awake.[12]

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It is true that some bilinguals are extremely careful to keep interferences out of their everyday speech, whereas when they are sleeping their brain can relax and let the other language seep in.

Emotions in Bilinguals

A particularly complex, and fascinating, aspect of bilingualism is how bilinguals deal with emotions in their languages:

Myth: Bilinguals express their emotions in their first language, which is usually the language of their parents.

Despite this well-established (but erroneous) belief, things are not quite so simple. First, some bilinguals have grown up learning two languages simultaneously and hence have two first languages with which they will express their emotions. And for the majority of bilinguals who have acquired their languages successively—first one language and then, some years later, another—the pattern is not clear either. Aneta Pavlenko, who is herself multilingual, has spent many years researching the topic of emotions and bilingualism and has written a book on the subject, in which she concludes:

> I have tried to dismantle the myth of a simple, tangible, easily described relationship between the languages and emotions of bi- and multilingual speakers, and to show that this relationship plays out differently for different individuals, and even in the distinct language areas of a single speaker.[13]

This is not to say that some bilinguals do not prefer to express their emotions in their first, often their dominant, language. Think of all those bilinguals who have lived in the same place all their lives, who

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use their first language with their family and friends, who learned their second and third languages in adolescence, and who basically use the latter as work languages. It makes sense that they will express affect in their most-used language, that is, their first language. But as Pavlenko writes, it would be too simplistic to posit that late bilinguals have emotional ties only with their first language and have no such ties with their other languages.[14]

Some bilinguals who have had a traumatic experience in their first language, for example, may decide not to use it any longer when they are in a position to do so. Pavlenko cites Monika Schmid, a linguist who has worked a lot on language forgetting, who mentioned a married couple who had known each other in Germany just before the war, before emigrating. Because of the trauma of what they had lived through during the war, in more than fifty years of marriage they had never spoken German to each other, their first language, not even intimately.[15] There is also the case of the historian and author Gerda Lerner, who had joined the anti-Nazi resistance in Austria before emigrating in 1939 at age nineteen. Once settled in the United States, she refused to use her first language; she was repelled by it in every way. It was only some thirty years later that she reconciled herself with German.

Even without having lived through a traumatic experience, bilinguals may prefer using their second language over their first to convey emotions. One English-French bilingual, who had grown up in England and moved to France at age twenty-one, offered the following testimony:

> It is liberating to speak a language that is not one's mother tongue because it is easier to speak of taboo subjects . . . I find it easier to speak of anything connected

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> with the emotions in French, whereas in an emotional situation in English I am rather tongue-tied, the affective content of the words is so much greater.

She explained to me that her English childhood had lacked affection and that it was in French that she had discovered what love meant. She ended her testimony with the words, "Perhaps one day I'll even manage to say [the English words], 'I love you.'" Another interesting testimony is given by the bilingual writer Nancy Huston. It concerns how she spoke to Léa, her baby girl, who was born some nine years after Huston had moved to Paris. She was going through a strong French-language period and had married a Bulgarian-French bilingual with whom she spoke French. Huston writes that she had started out using English baby talk with Léa but simply couldn't continue. The memories and the feelings that it stirred up were simply too strong for her to be able to continue in English. (Huston went through a very difficult time as a child when, at age six, she experienced her mother's abandonment of the family home.)[16]

Many late bilinguals mention that they can swear more easily in their second language. The same English-French bilingual quoted above wrote:

> I can . . . swear much more easily in French and have a wider range of "vulgar" vocabulary . . . I am finding that gradually the way I use French is influencing the way I use English—I can now say "shit" and "fuck off."

Huston, who wrote her master's thesis on linguistic taboo and swear words, analyzes this phenomenon, which she also experienced in her first years in Paris. She writes:

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> The French language in general . . . was to me less emotion-fraught, and therefore less dangerous, than my mother tongue. It was cold, and I approached it coldly . . . This advantage, however, was not without its drawbacks. In a way, I was almost *too* free in French . . . I was untouched by the language. It did not talk to me, sing to me, rock me, slap me, shock me, scare me shitless. It was indifferent to me.[17]

When bilinguals are tired, angry, or excited, they naturally revert to the language in which they express their emotions, be it their first or their second language. Here is what a Portuguese-English bilingual told me:

> If there is something that makes me angry and if I allow some of my anger to come out, there is no doubt that I will use Portuguese, no matter the context or the situation.

Pavlenko notes that sometimes when bilinguals are really angry, true communication is put aside and they may use a language that their spouse or child cannot understand. This can give them emotional satisfaction even if the words are not understood.[18]

Stress may cause interferences, problems in finding the appropriate word, and unintentional switching. Here is a personal experience. I was once bitten by a stingray while bathing in shallow waters in California. I was in real pain and bleeding quite badly. Since I was with a group of English-speaking people, I recall that I switched back and forth between English and French: I used the former language to ask them to take me to a doctor and I uttered French interjections to help express and ease the pain. In some very

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stressful situations, one language can even be completely cut off. Here is what an American Sign Language–English bilingual once wrote to me:

> One time I was in a very emotional situation and I was unable to speak, but the people with me could sign. They also were bilingual, so I signed and we communicated using sign language.

The language that is used in therapy is also very revealing. Paul Preston recounts how five of the American Sign Language–English bilinguals he interviewed said they felt blocked when in a therapy session because they could not express in English some of the things they really wanted to say in sign language.[19] And Nancy Huston states that she is convinced that she could not finish her own psychoanalysis because it was conducted in French, the language that made her feel protected at the time and the one in which her neuroses were under control.[20]

Emotions and bilingualism thus produce a very complicated and also very personal reality that has no set rules. Some bilinguals prefer to use one language, some the other, and some continue to use both of them. As Pavlenko writes, about her own habits:

> Each language . . . ties me differently, with bonds I cannot shake loose. And so, on a daily basis, I have no choice but to use both English and Russian when talking about emotions. "I love you," I whisper to my English-speaking partner. "Babulechka, ia tak skuchaiu po tebe [Grandma, I miss you so much]," I tenderly say on the phone to my Russian-speaking grandmother.[21]

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12

Bilingual Writers

All groups of people have exceptional members, and it is with pleasure that I mention some of "our" exceptional people in the next two chapters. Few of us bilinguals will become like them (and we don't need to) but they are, in a linguistic sense, our Edmund Hillarys or Tenzing Norgays, and they have their place in our story.

In this chapter I will concentrate on bilingual writers, since writing is a specific area of language and probably one of the hardest cognitive skills that humans acquire. The language in which we learn to read and write fluently in our youth will normally remain the language we will use to write in for the rest of our lives. Of course, some people do write in another language, or several others, but they may not feel totally at ease doing so. However, in the small world of professional literary writing, one finds marked exceptions involving bilinguals. There are some bilingual authors who write books in their second (or third) language—an incredible feat when one thinks about how hard it is to write literature in one's own native language. And, even more exceptional, there are those who write literature in both of their languages. This chapter will be about these outstanding writers.

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Writing in Your Second (or Third) Language

Many writers are bi- or multilingual, but they decide, despite this, to stick to one language for writing—usually their first language. Hence, Isaac B. Singer, for example, the Polish American writer and Nobel Prize winner, always wrote in his native language, Yiddish, even though he knew many other languages, notably Polish and Hebrew. Czesław Miłosz, also a Nobel laureate, was fluent in Polish, Russian, English, Lithuanian, and French, but wrote only in Polish.

A subgroup of these writers are those who choose to author their books in their most proficient writing language, even though it may not be their first language. Two examples come to mind. The first is Richard Rodriguez, the author of the best seller *Hunger of Memory,* whose very first language was Spanish but whose family switched over to English when he started going to school. Hence, English became his dominant language during his adolescence and definitely his writing language. The other example is Eva Hoffman, who moved to Canada from Poland when she was thirteen. She wrote her *Lost in Translation* in English, the language of her high school and university studies. Her book, like Rodriguez's, is a masterly account of her intellectual and human journey into mainstream American society and culture. Both authors have chosen to use English as their written language and have developed strong, sometimes unique, literary voices. Of course, as bilinguals themselves, they have the advantage of being able to oversee some of the translations that are done of their works, but they do not venture into literary creation in their less dominant language.

There are authors, however, who decide to write in their second or even their third language even though they have good writing proficiency in their first language. Probably the most famous is

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Joseph Conrad, the early twentieth-century author of such classics as *Heart of Darkness, Lord Jim, Nostromo,* and *The Secret Agent.* Conrad was born Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski in Poland, where he lived until the age of sixteen. He then lived in France for four years and became fluent in French. He joined the English merchant navy and learned to speak and write English. When he ended his sailing career at the age of thirty-five, he had already written some prose in English, and after that he became a full-time novelist. What is especially interesting is that he did not write his books in Polish, his first language, or in French, a language he wrote fluently, but in English, his *third* language.

According to Conrad's biographer Frederick Karl, his decision not to write in Polish was a way of separating himself from his father and his culture and country. Unfortunately, neither the British nor the Poles understood his situation; the British said that he was a Pole in disguise and the Poles said the reverse (a typical bicultural quandary). Conrad's English prose was superlative and required almost no editing, but in speaking he did retain a strong accent, which prevented him from lecturing publicly. Here, according to Karl, is what Conrad told a Belgian critic some twenty years after having settled down in England:

> My pronunciation [in English] is rather defective to this day. Having unluckily no ear, my accentuation is uncertain, especially when in the course of a conversation I become self-conscious. In writing I wrestle painfully with that language which I feel I do not possess but which possesses me—alas.[1]

Conrad retained complete fluency in Polish and French, and at home he would often carry on conversations in all three languages.

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He also gave advice to translators who were translating his books into French and Polish.

Agota Kristof, a Hungarian-French bilingual, is a contemporary author who writes novels only in her second language. Kristof fled Hungary with her husband and their four-month-old baby during the 1956 uprising (she was twenty-one at the time) and came to settle down in Neuchâtel, Switzerland. She knew no other language than Hungarian when they first arrived, and she worked for a number of years in a local watchmaking factory. She then went back to school and studied French, thanks to a grant from the local university, and started on her literary career some twelve years after having moved to Switzerland. Her books, such as *The Notebook* (1986), a story of twin brothers lost in a country torn apart, have been translated into numerous languages. Her autobiography, *The Illiterate* (2004), recounts her forced emigration to Western Europe.[2]

Writing in Both Languages

As I have said, writing is a difficult skill, in whatever language, and writing literature is an art that only a handful of people ever master. And yet there is a group of exceptional bilinguals who write their works in two languages, not just one. I wish to examine those authors who went from writing in their first language to writing in their second language, those writers, even fewer, who started with their second language and then "moved back," as it were, to writing in their first, and authors who write bilingual works, using both languages in the same piece.

Some bilingual writers who immigrated at one or more points in their lives moved from writing in their first language to writing in their second or third language. Three such authors come to mind.

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Vladimir Nabokov was born in St. Petersburg, Russia, in 1899 and was brought up trilingual in Russian, French, and English. At the age of twenty, he went to Cambridge, where he read French and Slavic literature. Nabokov became well known as an émigré writer in Russian, publishing such works as *Mashenka, The Gift,* and *The Eye* in that language. But later he wrote in English and became famous in the English-speaking world for such novels as *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight, Bend Sinister, Ada,* and *Lolita.* Nabokov also translated Russian works into English and English works into Russian (such as *Alice in Wonderland*).

The second author in this group is Samuel Beckett. Born in Ireland, a native speaker of English, he learned French at school and obtained a bachelor's degree in Romance languages and English. He never really used French in his daily life, however, until he became an instructor at the Ecole normale supérieure in Paris when he was twenty-two. His first works—tales and poems—were in English. In 1937, at the age of thirty-one, he moved to Paris permanently but continued to write in English; *Murphy,* for instance, was published in 1938. During World War II he took part in the Resistance in France and then went into hiding in the Vaucluse region. In 1951 his first French novel, *Molloy,* appeared, and from then on he wrote in both French and English. At that point, according to Elizabeth Beaujour, he stated that he didn't know in advance what language he would use for his next work.[3] Beckett received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969 for his contribution to the literature of two languages.

The third author is Elsa Triolet, born Elsa Kagan, a Russian French novelist of the twentieth century. She spent her early years in Russia and moved to France when she was twenty-two, after having met her first husband, André Triolet. Her early works were in Russian (*In Tahiti, Camouflage*). After divorcing Triolet, she married

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the French poet and novelist Louis Aragon, and the two had parallel literary careers. Her first book in French was *Good Evening, Theresa,* in 1938. It was followed by many other works, including *A Fine of Two Hundred Francs,* which was awarded the prestigious Prix Goncourt.

Elizabeth Beaujour has analyzed the reasons that led such authors to shift over to writing in their second (or third) language. One obvious reason is to be able to write for a wider audience. If you live in a country other than the one in whose language you are writing (you live in France and are writing in Russian, for example), you simply don't have that many readers for your works, even if the émigré community is quite large (as it happened to be for Nabokov and Triolet).

A second reason has to do with how the works are translated into the author's other language (Triolet's books in Russian, for example, were translated into French). Bilingual authors are rarely happy with the job that outside translators do with their work and they often edit the translations extensively. In the end, they frequently resort to translating their own works into their other language. But the process of self-translation turns out to be particularly tormenting for many (Beaujour talks of "the hell of self-translation"), and many bilingual authors express dissatisfaction with their own translations. Beaujour talks of Triolet's perception of the act of translating as the "terrifying spectre of noncoincidence with herself."[4] More recently, Ariel Dorfman wrote the following about his translation/adaptation of his book *Heading South, Looking North: A Bilingual Journey.*

> My rewriting of the memoir in Spanish after I completed it in English followed the structure, story, explorations of history and the mind which its rival language had set

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> out. Spanish had to overflow its words inside the house that English built. And yet, how changed was that house as it filled with Spanish. It was not the same book.[5]

A third reason that some bilingual writers move from writing in their first to writing in their second language relates to the complementarity principle: bilinguals use their languages for different purposes, in different domains of life, with different people. Different aspects of life often require different languages. Beaujour relates that Elsa Triolet realized that her Russian novel, *Camouflage,* had been written in the "wrong" language, since it takes place in France amid characters who speak, think, and feel French. Beaujour also tells us that when Nabokov Russianized his English best seller *Lolita,* he had real problems finding appropriate terms for descriptions dealing with cars, clothing, items of furniture, and so on.[6]

Even though bilingual authors have good reasons for starting to write in their second or third language, it is nonetheless difficult. Triolet talks about the actual physical pain of writing her first book in French (*Good Evening, Theresa*), and Nabokov says the same thing in a more evocative way: he said it was like learning how to handle things again after losing seven or eight fingers in an explosion![7]

As I stated at the beginning of this section, there is another group of bilingual writers, a far smaller group, who start writing in their second language and then revert to writing in their first language, something they had not done before. I had the pleasure of meeting such a writer in Paris when I was preparing this book. Nancy Huston was born in Canada and she lived there for a number of years before moving to the United States, where she went to college. She left for Paris in 1973, where she did her master's thesis with semiologist Roland Barthes. She stayed on in France, and

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when she started to write, she decided to do so in her second language, French. Her first book, *Les Variations Goldberg,* came out in 1981 (*The Goldberg Variations* appeared in English many years later). She gives the following explanation for her decision to write in French:

> I suppose it was to do with the fact that my mother tongue was too emotionally fraught at the time. I preferred something more distant, more intellectual . . . I was in denial of my roots. No childhood, no mother, no problems. That worked for a number of years and then it stopped.[8]

Huston pursued her career as a French-language author for a number of years before deciding to write a novel in English, *Plainsong,* which came out some twelve years after her first book in French. She says of her return to English after her "first efforts" in French:

> My first efforts at fiction . . . tried to be savvy . . . I was starved for theoretical innocence. I longed to write long, free, wild, gorgeous sentences that explored all the registers of emotion, including—why not?—the pathetic. I wanted to tell stories wholeheartedly, fervently, passionately—and to *believe* in them, without dreading the derisive comments of the theoreticians.[9]

In a newspaper interview in 2008, she explained that French had become the language of exchange with her tax advisor and her children's teachers. Her return to English coincided with her return to the piano (from playing the harpsichord), "because," she said, "I'm strong enough to accept emotions."[10]

Nancy Huston now writes in both her languages and translates her works both ways. She states that translation is hard, tedious

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work, and that once she has finished translating a work, she suddenly feels that she could never have written the work in the other language![11] In 2005 Huston won the prestigious Prix Femina for *Ligne de faille,* which she had in fact first written in English *(Fault Lines)* and then translated into French.

While bilingual authors generally choose one language in which to write, writing in their first language only, or their second (or third), or alternating from one to the other, depending on the circumstance, a few decide to write bilingual works in which both languages are present on the same page (see Chapter 5 for a presentation of the bilingual language mode). Elizabeth Beaujour finds that in the twilight of their career, most bilingual writers are not satisfied keeping their two languages separate. They are in search of unity and wish their writing to exist in both languages. They can achieve this by making sure that all of their works are published in both languages (something that Beckett did, and Huston is currently doing), and they can have their characters act as bilinguals do, in a monolingual and also a bilingual way. Beaujour mentions Nabokov who, in *Ada,* had his characters speak three languages and shift from one language to another quite freely.[12]

Today, one does not need to be so advanced in one's literary career to write bilingually, as can be seen in the prose of two Hispanic American contemporary writers. Junot Díaz, a professor of writing at MIT and winner of the 2008 Pulitzer Prize for fiction for his book *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao,* brings a lot of Spanish into his English prose (this particular code-switching style is often known as Spanglish). Here is a very short extract:

> [They] shrieked and called him gordo asqueroso! He forgot the perrito, forgot the pride he felt when the women in the family had called him hombre.[13]

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Susana Chávez-Silverman is a Hispanic American author who has traveled in the Americas and holds a position at Pomona College in California. Her book *Killer Crónicas: Bilingual Memories* (2004) is based on the e-mails that she sent to colleagues and friends when she spent thirteen months in Buenos Aires. She too uses a blend of English and Spanish, but with a frequency of switches that is higher than normal, at least in the written mode. Here are a few lines from the beginning of one of her chapters:

> Como northern Califas girl, of course, había visto mucho
> nature espectacular; the Pacific Ocean como yarda de
> enfrente, for starters, y los sequoia giant redwoods. Yes,
> especially los redwoods. Pero también esa enredadera,
> don't know its name, the one with the huge, velvety deep
> purple blossoms y las fragile, hairy leaves and stems
> como patas de tarántula.[14]

Chávez-Silverman says that she remains bilingual in her writing so as to resist having to choose between the two languages; she hopes that her book will help establish a new trend for bilingual minority writing.

The list of bilingual writers working in their two languages, separately (usually) or together, is not long. As Elizabeth Beaujour says, the phenomenon remains rare:

> While it is not unusual for a writer to *be* a bilingual, it is still rare for a major modern writer to be bilingual or polyglot *as a writer* and to create a body of work of more or less equal weight in more than one language.[15]

As time goes by and bilingualism in all its aspects is more widely accepted, we may discover other writers, themselves bilingual, who never dared show their work in their other language (either the

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first or the second, or both), or who never managed to get it published. A fine example of one such writer is the much-acclaimed Jack Kerouac, the internationally known American novelist of the Beat generation. His *On the Road,* published in 1957 and translated into twenty-seven languages, remains a favorite among many for its anti-establishment, cross-country tale. What few people know is that Kerouac came from a French Canadian family established in Lowell, Massachusetts, and that he spoke French with his parents until the age of six; it was only then that he acquired English. Still fewer people realize that Kerouac wrote at least two books in French (the Quebec French variety known as joual): *La nuit est ma femme* and, discovered only in 2008, *Sur le chemin.* The latter (despite its title) is a different book from *On the Road* and was written shortly after the 1951 version of Kerouac's best seller. It was never published in French but Kerouac did translate it into English as *Old Bull in the Bowery.* Let us hope that many other *Sur le chemin*s, stored away in filing cabinets or in archives, will one day be published so that we can admire the bilingual creativity of their authors.

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13

Special Bilinguals

This book is about regular, everyday bilinguals—that is, the great majority of those who lead their lives with two or more languages. There are, however, special bilinguals who have both a regular and sometimes also a unique relationship with their languages. In the previous chapter, we dealt with bilingual writers. Other special bilinguals, such as second-language teachers, and translators and interpreters, also make a living from their knowledge and use of their languages, while others may depend on their proficiency in their languages to do their job and to assure their safety (secret agents, for example). Among special bilinguals, we also find well-known people—known either because they are outstanding multilinguals or because they are famous for reasons that have nothing to do with their linguistic skills. These special people will be the subject of this chapter.

Second-Language Teachers

Teachers of second languages are also often called foreign-language teachers, although this can be a misnomer when the language they teach is used by millions of speakers in that country, such as Span-

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ish in the United States or Arabic in France. There are two kinds of second-language teachers. First, there are those who teach the country's language, or languages, to others, mainly foreigners (for example, instructors of English as a second language who teach English to newly arrived immigrants in the United States). These teachers do not have to be bilingual in order to do their job and so we will not say much about them here.

Second, one finds teachers who teach a language other than the country's main language or languages. Examples would be teachers of German in England, teachers of English in Italy, and so on. They themselves form two groups. In the first group you find those who acquired the language they teach as a second language, in school or college. They may also have had a short stay in a country where the language they specialize in is used. This is the case with Ms. Wright, for example, who teaches Spanish at a high school in the Boston area. She took modern languages in college, studied Spanish and French, and then spent six months in Mexico. In the second group, you find native speakers of the language who have moved to another country and now teach their mother tongue. This is the case with Ms. Lopez, who teaches Spanish alongside Ms. Wright in the same school. She is originally Venezuelan and she moved to the United States as an adult after having gone to college in Caracas. She is a trained psychologist but took on language teaching when she arrived in the United States, after having followed a number of language-education courses at a local university.

Both Ms. Wright and Ms. Lopez teach Spanish to high school students of various levels. Based on the definition of bilingualism given in Chapter 2, the two are bilingual in that they use their two (or more) languages on a daily basis. Language teachers have varied fluency in the language they teach, and they may even have an ac-

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cent in it, just like normal bilinguals, but they are special bilinguals in a number of ways. First, some, like Ms. Wright, do not use the language they teach outside the classroom very much, since they do not often have a need for it in everyday communication outside of work. Note, though, that this is not the case for Ms. Lopez, who has many Spanish-speaking friends and who uses both English and Spanish outside of school.

Second, they have insights into the linguistics of the language that normal language users do not have. For instance, how many speakers of English can explain, in a pedagogical way, the difference between the prepositions "for," "since," and "ago"? How many speakers of French can explain, in a clear manner, all the rules of the French past participle?

Third, second-language teachers are in a bilingual mode when teaching. When they are using the second language (for example, Spanish) overtly in class, they also have their other language (English here) available in case a student asks a question in it or code-switches for a word or expression. But they themselves may resort very rarely to code-switches and borrowings in front of students, and they may well correct those who slip into their better-known language.

Thus, in moments that would normally be conducive to code-switching and borrowing, and where the latter might facilitate communication, second-language teachers may refrain from calling upon the students' first language in order not to "set a bad example." Nevertheless, as users of the two languages themselves, and in private, they may code-switch and borrow. Having said this, I have also heard language teachers state that they refrain from code-switching outside school so as not to slip by accident into that behavior when they are teaching.

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A fourth way in which such teachers are special bilinguals is that, even more so than regular bilinguals, they rarely believe they are bilingual, since many hold a very strict view of what it means to be bilingual (complete fluency in two or more languages, no accent in either language, and so on). When speaking to second-language teachers who feel this way, I often have to convince them that they are in fact bilingual, even though they clearly have special bilingual characteristics. Finally, they are usually true admirers of the second language they teach (most often in its standard variety) and they have a love for its culture, which they try to share with their students. Once again, this is often not the case with regular bilinguals, who concentrate less on their languages and cultures than on everyday aspects of life.

Translators and Interpreters

When we discussed the complementarity principle in Chapter 3, we saw that bilinguals are often not very good translators and interpreters. This is because, in domains covered by just one language, they do not always know the translation equivalents in the other language. Unless they acquired their second language explicitly, as in traditional second-language courses, bilinguals who are translating will find themselves lacking the vocabulary and also, at times, the linguistic skills and stylistic varieties needed to accomplish the translation. They may also lack the cultural knowledge attached to a language that would facilitate their understanding of the original text—a necessary step to be able to translate correctly.

Unlike regular bilinguals, translators and interpreters must have a complete set of translation equivalents in the other language. They must also know the two languages fluently (at all linguistic

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levels), and in addition they must have a good knowledge of the cultures concerned. Of course, the complementarity principle will continue to play a role, but it will be greatly reduced. Translators and interpreters, unlike regular bilinguals, have to learn to use their languages (and the underlying skills they have in them) for similar purposes and in similar domains of life. This is something regular bilinguals do not often need to do.

Translators indicate which language or languages they can translate *from* (these are their source languages) and which they can translate *into* (their target languages). For example, the source languages might be German and Spanish and the target language, English. In the translation and interpretation world, one speaks of active and passive languages. In the active-language category, language A is the person's native language or another language strictly equivalent to a native language (it is thus the target language). Language B is usually the first second language of which one has perfect command (it will usually also be a target language). In the passive-languages category, you find one or several languages for which the person has complete understanding; these will be the source languages. In addition, many translators and interpreters specialize in domains, such as law, finance, or politics.

Translation is a special bilingual skill: you try to express in one language, in as faithful a way as possible, the meaning and the style of a text in another language. This means fully understanding the original text in the source language, and having the necessary transfer skills, as well as the linguistic and cultural skills, in the target language. Very little room is left for the translator's own intuition or creativity. He or she must follow the original text as exactly as possible and render it in correct prose in the target language. It is no wonder, then, that there are specialized schools where students

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learn the skills linked to translation, usually at the master's-degree level (for example, the Monterey Institute of International Studies in California, and the Ecole de traduction et d'interprétation in Geneva). One of the requirements for entry is to have excellent language skills in two or more languages. Training then transforms the student into a certified translator.

There are literally hundreds of thousands of translators in the world today, many working in the shadow of international institutions, government bodies, large corporations, publishing companies, and so on. As in every other trade, there are certain "champions," translators esteemed for their skills who are unknown to the public but who are well known and highly respected by their peers. There are also some renowned authors who were (or are) translators. For instance, the French poet Charles Baudelaire produced an immensely successful translation of the works of Edgar Allan Poe; the Russian American author Vladimir Nabokov translated *Alice in Wonderland* into Russian, as well as works (often poetry) by Verlaine, Tennyson, Byron, Keats, Shakespeare, and so on; and the Argentinean writer Jorge Luis Borges translated many English, French, and German works into Spanish.

Simultaneous interpreters have an even more complex set of skills. In addition to what has been described for translators, one must add all the linguistic and cognitive skills that allow interpreters to go from hearing oral input in one language to producing oral output in the other language, either simultaneously or successively.[1] This involves, among other things, careful listening, processing and comprehending the input in the source language, memorizing it, formulating the translation in the target language, and then articulating it, not to mention dual tasking (letting the next sequence come in as you are outputting the preceding one), note taking in

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some types of interpretation, and careful enunciation. Interpreter training is therefore very demanding and requires additional years of study.

In terms of language mode, interpreters work in a bilingual mode, but one language is not more active than the other, as in regular bilinguals' communication. Both languages (the source language and the target language) have to be active to the same extent. The interpreter has to be able to hear the input (source) language and also the output (target) language, not only for self-monitoring of what she is interpreting but also in case the speaker uses the target language in the form of code-switches. However, the source-language production mechanisms must be tightly shut off (deactivated) so that the interpreter does not slip into simply repeating what she is hearing instead of interpreting it (as sometimes happens when interpreters get very tired). Given all of these requirements, it is no wonder that interpreters, like translators, are considered special bilinguals, and that regular bilinguals are not born translators and interpreters. A bilingual student learned this the hard way when he tried out for a position as an interpreter:

> When I was a student in Paris, I found an ad one day stating that interpreters were being sought for a one-day conference. They would be interpreting from English into French. Naive as I was—aren't all bilinguals born interpreters, I told myself—I went to the office that was organizing the conference. They were very welcoming and I felt quite confident I could get the job. I was put into a booth for a trial run and I put on the headphones handed to me. The first sentence came through and I managed to interpret it quite nicely. This is going to be a

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> breeze, I told myself. But problems started immediately. As I was outputting the first sentence, the second one was already coming in and I wasn't paying enough attention to it. I could remember its beginning but not its ending. I struggled on but very quickly fell behind the recorded voice and I just couldn't say anything more after a few minutes. I left the booth, and the office, not very proud of myself. The scene remains vivid in my mind some forty years later and since then I have had the utmost respect for interpreters and the training they have to go through to do their job well.[2]

Secret Agents

Many of us believe that agents who work for intelligence services are probably bilingual and bicultural, in the image of Jack Higgins's Kurt Steiner in *The Eagle Has Landed,* a novel about a German attempt to kidnap Winston Churchill during World War II. In the story, Steiner's father was a major general in the German army and his mother was American. Steiner himself, the leader of a German commando unit, had been brought up in both England and Germany and was perfectly bilingual.

As I was researching the literature to find out about the bilingualism of secret agents, I realized that there was very little written about their linguistic skills. And as I dug further, I slowly understood that the classic view we all have is not quite as clear-cut as it would seem. Not all agents, for example, need to know another language well, so long as they are in contact with someone who is bilingual. Thus, a spy who passes government secrets to a member of a foreign embassy can do so in her native language if the embassy

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member (perhaps an attaché of some kind) acts as a bilingual go-between. This is true also for agents who agree to work for a foreign power while staying put in their home country and gradually moving up within various government structures. This was the case with the Cambridge Five in England, notably Kim Philby and Guy Burgess, who spied for the Soviet Union in the middle of the last century while occupying important positions in the British establishment.

"Sleeper" or deep-cover agents are placed by the spying power in a target country and are often natives of that country (or nationals of both countries). Just recently, an example of a sleeper agent received a lot of press. George Koval was born in 1913 in Sioux City, Iowa, and he grew up there as a normal American boy. He played baseball and, of course, spoke fluent American English. During the Depression, his parents and he emigrated to a Siberian city in a region that Stalin had proposed as a Jewish homeland. His parents were committed to communism, and Koval was strongly influenced by them. He was trained at the Institute of Chemical Technology in Moscow and was recruited by the GRU (the largest Russian intelligence agency). Koval was then sent back to the United States and for a number of years was inactive as an agent (his code name was Delmar). He was drafted into the U.S. Army and, little by little, his duties brought him into contact with the atomic bomb project (notably, aspects dealing with the fuel used). What he learned was extremely valuable for the development of the Russian bomb, which was detonated for the first time in 1949. Koval was a very successful agent not only because he was intelligent and well trained (this gave him access to the heart of the bomb project) but also because he was a "genuine" American. He spoke fluent English, he loved baseball, and he was just a regular guy. He fled back to the Soviet Union

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after the war, when he realized that U.S. counterintelligence was closing in on him.

Agents like Koval, though, who in some ways coincide with what we imagine them to be—that is, perfectly bilingual and bicultural—do not represent the majority of agents. Let me conclude this discussion with the example of Britain's Special Operations Executive (SOE) agents, who operated during World War II. The task of the SOE was to infiltrate agents into occupied Europe so that they could organize, inspire, and assist the local resistance groups fighting the Nazi presence. They were taught how to use guns and explosives, transmit messages, carry out acts of sabotage, defend themselves, and so on, and they were either parachuted into the area they were to work in or flown in using light airplanes. Those recruited were either nationals of the country in question or knew it very well. Many of the latter had at least one parent from the target country, or they had worked or gone to school there before the war. For example, one SOE agent in France, Gilbert Norman, was the son of an English father and a French mother and he had been educated in both countries. Another agent, Jack Agazarian, had an Armenian father and a French mother, and had gone to schools in both France and England.

However, other SOE agents were far from being proficient bilinguals. For example, a very successful agent in the Besançon region of France, George Millar (his alias was Emile) spoke good French—but with a strong Scottish accent! He writes in his memoir that he could pass as a Frenchman in front of any German, but he knew that a real Frenchman would know right away that he wasn't French. Since the Germans were often aided by the French Vichy police in their hunt for Resistance fighters, this was potentially a problem. In fact, one day Millar was stopped by two French police officers, who asked him who he really was. He had to admit that he

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was British and, much to his surprise, they let him go, as they were friendly with the Resistance.[3] Unfortunately, other SOE agents were not as lucky as Millar. Francis Suttill, the head of a "circuit" (Resistance network) in the Paris region, had a very poor accent in French, despite having a French mother. To make sure he was understood, he had to rely on the help of a "courier," a young French SOE agent, Andrée Borrel. In addition to the problem of Suttill's strong accent, apparently some of Suttill's agents would get together in black-market restaurants and would talk things over—in English.[4]

Suttill's circuit (named Prosper) was penetrated by the Germans and many agents were caught and imprisoned. After they had been interrogated, they were sent to concentration camps in Germany. Unfortunately, very few managed to survive the ordeal. The reasons for the Prosper disaster are many (one being that there was a traitor among the SOE agents) and a lack of linguistic skills probably does not rank among them. But had the bilingualism and biculturalism of the British agents been total—something one does not expect in regular bilinguals—and had some of them been more careful with their language behavior in public, their chances of remaining free would probably have been better. Nevertheless, these agents were extremely devoted and courageous, and one can only have gratitude for what they undertook in very difficult circumstances. They sacrificed their lives so that France and Europe could be free of the German occupation.

Well-Known Bilinguals

I will end with a few special bilinguals or multilinguals who are well-known people. In the first category are individuals who are outstanding learners and speakers of many languages. They are

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often called polyglots or even linguists (in the sense of being multilingual). Such people are talked about with wonder by monolinguals who go through life with just one language, and by regular bilinguals who may know “only” three or four languages to varying degrees, as is my case. One such person who is often mentioned is Cardinal Giuseppe Mezzofanti, who lived astride the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and was reported to speak fluently some fifty to sixty languages. Another polyglot often evoked is the British explorer, ethnologist, and diplomat Sir Richard Francis Burton, who lived in the nineteenth century. He is reported to have acquired four languages in his youth and then some twenty-five others as an adult, including Gujarati, Marathi, Hindustani, Persian, and Arabic, not to mention many dialects. Burton lived in India, among other places, and explored the Arabian Peninsula and the upper Nile region, and hence made good use of the languages that he acquired.

Professional linguists who study languages as well as language structure and language processing usually know just a few languages, but some are true polyglots. For example, Mario Pei, an Italian American linguist in the past century, and a best-selling author in his field, was reported to be able to speak some forty languages and to be acquainted with the linguistics of about a hundred languages. Another linguist, the late Ken Hale, who taught at MIT, specialized in endangered indigenous languages, which he also learned with great ease. Among his languages we find Navajo, Jemez, Hopi, Tohono O’odham, Warlpiri, and Ulwa.

Leaving aside these rare people, there are many bilinguals who are well known not because they master or mastered a large number of languages, but because of their various other activities. Bilingualism is (or was) just part of their everyday life. In the domain of

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philosophy and religion, for example, Erasmus, the famous Dutch humanist, spoke five languages, partly owing to the fact that he lived in several countries, notably England, France, and Switzerland. He used Latin not only for diplomacy and theology but also in everyday conversations. Pope John Paul II was reported to speak twelve languages, some of which he probably used daily, such as Polish, Latin, Italian, and English. As for his successor, Pope Benedict XVI, in addition to being able to read Ancient Greek and biblical Hebrew, he speaks German fluently as well as Italian, French, English, and Latin. The most surprising bilingual in this category is Jesus Christ, who may have been tri- or quadrilingual. His mother tongue was Aramaic; he then learned Hebrew in his rabbinical training and he may also have known Greek and Latin, both of which were spoken in Palestine at the time.

In the domain of politics and diplomacy, one of the founding fathers of the United States, Benjamin Franklin, who was also a diplomat, scientist, inventor, and printer, was reported to be fluent in six languages (English, French, Italian, Spanish, Latin, and German). Closer to our time, former Canadian prime minister Pierre Trudeau was a French-English bilingual, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of India knew at least two languages (Hindi and English), and President Tito of Yugoslavia was fluent in five languages. The current governor general of Canada, Michaëlle Jean, is fluent in French, English, Haitian Creole, Spanish, and Italian. Former U.S. secretary of state Henry Kissinger is a German-English bilingual, and is easily recognized by his deep voice and rather strong German accent. Madeleine Albright, who occupied the same position, was born in Prague and is fluent in Czech, Russian, English, and French; she also has reading abilities in several other languages. Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court Sonia Sotomayor is bilin-

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gual in Spanish and English, as is Hilda Solis, secretary of labor in the Obama administration. Daniel Cohn-Bendit, the charismatic leader of the May 1968 events in France and currently a member of the European Parliament, is totally bilingual in French and German. He appears on talk shows in both Germany and France and goes back and forth between his two languages, which he speaks with no accent. At least two members of French president Nicolas Sarkozy's first cabinet, Rachida Dati and Fadéla Amara, are bilingual in Arabic and French, although one rarely hears them speak their first language, which is a minority language in France.

Many famous scientists were (or are) bilingual, often because of immigration. Here are just a few, along with their main languages: Albert Einstein (German, English), Sigmund Freud (German, English), Marie Curie (Polish, Russian, French), Guglielmo Marconi (Italian, English), Bruno Bettelheim (German, English), and Roman Jakobson (Russian, French, English, German, and Czech).

In the domain of classical music and fine arts, George Frideric Handel, the Baroque composer, was a German-Italian-English trilingual. The composer and piano virtuoso Frédéric Chopin had a French father and hence spoke fluent French as well as Polish. Arthur Rubinstein spoke Polish, the language of the country he was born in, as well as German, French, and English. Yo-Yo Ma, cellist and composer, speaks Chinese and English. As for artists, Vincent van Gogh was bilingual in Dutch and French, Pablo Picasso was at least bilingual in Spanish and French, and Marc Chagall was trilingual (Russian, English, and French).

The media are increasingly international, and many journalists and reporters are bi- or multilingual. Here are just a few well-known examples: Christiane Amanpour (English, Farsi, French), Ralitsa Vassileva (English, Bulgarian), Octavia Nasr (Arabic, En-

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glish, French), María Elena Salinas (Spanish, English), Olivier Todd (French, English), Nelson Monfort (French, Spanish, English, and Italian), and Jonathan Mann (English, French).

In the field of show business, many bilingual singers, such as Shakira, Nana Mouskouri, Céline Dion, Gloria Estefan, Christina Aguilera, and Julio Iglesias, sing in at least two languages, sometimes many more. As for actors and comedians, many are bilingual, such as Eva Longoria Parker and Andy García (both Spanish-English bilinguals), Aziz Ansari (English, Tamil), Margaret Cho (Korean, English), and Maz Jobrani (English, Farsi). Some actors actually have taken roles in the other language or languages they know and use, for example Jodie Foster (English, French), Sophia Loren (Italian, French, English), Charlotte Gainsbourg (French, English), and Lambert Wilson (French, English). In fact, in certain countries with a large minority language population (such as the Hispanic population in the United States), there is now a demand for bilingual actors.

Finally, the domain of sports is simply replete with bilinguals. I'll mention just a few and let the reader add other names and other sports: tennis (Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal), baseball (numerous major-league players from Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Japan, Mexico, and elsewhere), motor sports (Fernando Alonso, Kimi Räikkönen, Felipe Massa), soccer (Thierry Henry, Patrick Vieira, Jens Lehmann), basketball (Yao Ming, Tony Parker), and so on.

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