

**Mothers' Experiences of French Mother tongue Maintenance:
Towards a Critical Literacy Approach**

By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to explore how francophone mothers, having taken on the primary responsibility of teaching French to their young children, experience loss of their mothertongue and describe support and barriers to regaining and maintaining their native language. The principal research questions were:

- 1) How do francophone mothers residing in Greater Vancouver perceive the experience of maintaining and regaining their mothertongue?
- 2) How do francophone women living in an English-majority city feel supported or challenged in their decision to speak and improve their French while they take on the primary responsibility for teaching French to their pre-school aged children?
- 3) How do the women connect their experience of motherhood with their own language maintenance and revival?

A literature review indicated three overall notions: 1) In North America, the ideal mother is portrayed as being sacrificial and ultimately responsible for her children's education and well-being, 2) language, identity and community are closely linked concepts, and 3) critical literacy is an educational process that can assist mothers interpret their social present for the purpose of transformation. A review of the literature produced few studies which included francophone mothers' experiences of maintaining their mother tongue while teaching their children French. Participants were eight women who had one or two children, six years or younger, living at home with whom they spoke solely or predominantly in French. Analysis of the interview transcripts revealed several themes. Firstly, although the women experienced language loss in diverse way, all the participants connected their decision to speak French with their children to an attachment

with their own personal and cultural sense of identity. Second, participants described that, as compared to before motherhood, they were much more motivated to communicate in French and participate in various francophone activities. Third, women felt that lack of resources in the community, lack of time and having an English speaking partner limited their ability to actively improve their French. Fourth, participants in the study believed that having a greater number of established activities for children and their parents whereby mothers could connect with one another and build friendships would greatly support their desire to improve their fluency in French. The results of this study have implications for the services provided by associations representing francophones in British Columbia, for official language policy in French-minority Canada, for adult educators working with critical literacy and feminist concerns, and for people interested in promoting family health.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale for the Study

A large amount of research has been done about the phenomenon of heritage language loss and second language learning among immigrants to Canada, but the subject of language loss, language choice, and language maintenance among francophone mothers living in English-majority Canadian cities has not been extensively researched.

The themes of access, position, imposition, and repositioning recur in the practise and theory of adult education and are especially relevant when considering barriers to learning. Mothers are positioned in society as their children's primary teachers. Their own ambitions are frequently subordinated to this primary function. Yet, motherhood presents an interesting opportunity for women who have native language loss and wish to (re)gain fluency in their mothertongue: at the same time as they teach their children, mothers can improve their own language abilities. However, in order to teach their children, women choosing to speak their mothertongue must have a certain sense of confidence and competence. Since individuals learn language through informal, repeated contact with the spoken language and/or through formal instruction (Rockhill, 1991, p. 340), mothers who have experienced some French language loss may seek out formal, non-formal and informal educational opportunities to improve their abilities¹. However, given the minority language status of French in British Columbia, the demands placed on

¹ Adult educators frequently distinguish between non-formal, formal, and informal education. Non-formal education can be defined as "an organized, systematic, educational activity outside the established formal system – whether operating separately or as an important feature of some activity – that is, intended to serve identifiable learning clienteles and learning objectives" (Coombs, 1973, p. 11 cited in Rubenson, 1982, p. 3). This could include, for example, a yoga course taken through a community centre. Formal education refers to learning that takes place in the "hierarchically structured chronologically graded 'education system' running from primary school through the university" (Rubenson, 1982, p. 3). Informal education encompasses the intentional learning not included in formal or non-formal educational activities. This could include self-directed learning.

mothers, and the lack of existing educational opportunities specifically geared for this adult population, further loss of first language seems nearly inevitable.

Very little research exists concerning the experience of francophone mothers in English-majority environments within Canada. The studies that have included this population have focussed primarily on the topic of francophone assimilation and linguistic maintenance in general. For example, Stebbins (1994) studied the role that everyday French language life-styles had in the maintenance, transmission, and development of French language among Franco-Calgarians. As part of this study, Stebbins explored how parental involvement in children's francophone activities helped Franco-Calgarian adults maintain their native language. His study did not focus on the experiences of women, or of women who are mothers; rather, he conducted unstructured interviews with eighty-five adult respondents to determine how leisure activities helped preserve the francophone dimension of the participants' identities. Heller and Lévy (1992) in another frequently cited study, explored the experiences of francophone women in linguistically exogamous relationships, from the viewpoint that the women were a "double-minorité" on the basis that they are non-males and non-anglophones. Heller and Lévy conducted twenty-eight interviews in 1989 and aimed to learn how francophone women in mixed marriages understood their identity and how this understanding was related to social and symbolic influences. Their study, which encompassed women's experiences with language maintenance and transmission, did not aim to understand this experience in the context of existing language loss or of motherhood.

Thus, there is a gap in the research concerning the experiences of francophone mothers who are striving to maintain and regain their mothertongue while assuming the

primary responsibility for transmitting French to their young children. The choice to speak French is not necessarily easy, nor straightforward, and may be further complicated when a native French speaker has experienced some first language loss.

Loss of a first language is common in a second language environment (Kouritzin, 1999, p. 12). Mothertongue language loss is a powerful, individual experience. The impact of loss of a first language varies widely and “struggles to explain can never fully describe the impact of the loss of the first language” (Kouritzin, 1999, p. 204). Language is a social and interactive skill and, in the absence of a supportive social environment, it becomes intensely vulnerable. This is especially true when a socially useful competing language is present (Berko-Gleason, 1982, p. 20). A bilingual mother who takes on the primary care for her child is a strong determinant of her child’s mothertongue. Given that successful first language acquisition occurs through interaction and not mere exposure, a mother can establish, in her children, the strong foundations of a first language. Like her child, the mother requires interaction and exposure to increase her own language skills. The social construction of motherhood and its demands make this relatively difficult for francophone mothers who belong to a linguistic minority and use French principally in the family domain.

1.2 The Researcher

My mothertongue is French and I was raised in that language by both my parents while growing up in Vancouver. My mother is French-Canadian from Quebec. My father, who is originally from Pakistan, immigrated to Canada at age 30 and learned to speak French when I was born, four years after he met my mother. My father and I spoke French until I was 12 years old whereas my mother and I still speak French to one

another. My parents' marriage did not last and they separated when I was 14 years old. A few years later, my mother moved away from Vancouver and, because I had no regular practice speaking French, my ability to communicate in French declined.

Although I had always assumed that I would speak to my child(ren) in French, I had never made an effort to maintain or improve my language skills after switching from a bilingual elementary school to an English highschool. When, at the age of 32, I became pregnant, I was conscious of the extent of my first language loss and I experienced an intense desire to improve my French. Part of my motivation came from wanting to raise my son, Loïc, in French. Giving him another language, I presumed, would be good. This is the way I had perceived it to be in my own life. Still, more important than enriching his life (for he may choose, in the future, not to speak French), was the awareness that if I didn't speak to Loïc in French, the yearning I felt to express myself easily and confidently in that language might become a permanently unfulfilled desire. I could easily envisage a time, in the near future, when my abilities in French would bring me more shame than satisfaction. Speaking to Loïc in French would be an opportunity to improve *my* French. Thus, since my pregnancy, I have been engaged in a linguistic rebirth that has centred around preventing further language loss, improving my language skills and taking steps to help promote intergenerational transfer of the French language.

At the time of this study in 2003, I was a full-time student and was in a common-law relationship with Loïc's father, Raúl, a man who had moved to Vancouver from Mexico 17 years prior. At the time of the study, I was striving to regain my French mothertongue. I was raising my two-year-old son, speaking exclusively to him in French and frequently feeling inadequate about my ability to express myself well in French. As I

experienced my own linguistic rebirth, I was increasingly aware of how intentional my efforts were to seek out situations and people that would assist me to improve my French. As a result of the demands of motherhood and my formal educational pursuits, I battled to make time to improve my French. Participating in activities at the Centre culturel francophone de Vancouver (hereinafter called the Centre culturel), seeking out and building friendships with other francophones, and taking a course in advanced French were educational opportunities that I felt obliged to forego in order to maintain some sense of balance in what already seemed like a very full existence. Reflecting on my own situation caused me to question how other francophone mothers residing in an English-majority environment experienced their choice to speak French to their child in the face of language loss. I wondered what motivated them to continue to speak in that language and how they perceived and explained existing and potential obstacles and support to maintaining and regaining their mothertongue.

1.3 The Research Questions

It is my hope that by exploring and better understanding the experiences of francophone women who raise their children in French despite having first language loss, this research can facilitate mothertongue maintenance among francophone women in Greater Vancouver. In an effort to expand knowledge of francophone mothers' experiences of language maintenance and revival, and with the purpose of reducing the present research gap, this study will explore answers to the following questions:

- How do francophone mothers residing in Greater Vancouver perceive the experience of maintaining and regaining their mothertongue?

- How do the women feel supported or challenged in their decision to speak and improve their French while they take on the primary responsibility for teaching French to their pre-school aged children?
- How do the women connect their experience of motherhood with their own language maintenance and revival?

1.4 Definitions

A given word may have multiple meanings and various connotations. In order to clarify the meanings I have adopted and applied to terms used in this research, I provide the definitions that follow:

Francophones: People who routinely speak French (Stebbins, 2000, p. 20).

Institutional completeness: This term refers to a community's level of social and cultural organization that, for language use, is sufficiently developed to allow an individual to carry out a full-scale linguistic lifestyle over a normal year (Stebbins, 2000, p.19).

Language loss: In the context of mothertongue loss, language loss refers to "lack of first language development, delayed first language development, or a progressive loss of previously-acquired language ability" (Kouritzin, 1999, p.11). Language loss implies that, for a given individual, there was a stage of fuller proficiency.

Language shift: Refers to the change from the customary use of one language (the source language) to that of another (the target language). In language shift, the language input for generation B is a modified version of the language that was acquired by generation A. Over numerous generations, individuals and language communities become increasingly more dominant in the majority language. Thus, the language user in the shift scenario has simply never acquired particular elements of the source language; as such, shift refers

to a different dimension of language change than does language loss (Kouritzin, 1999, p.13; de Bot, 1998, p. 348).

Literacy: A complex set of abilities to comprehend and use the dominant symbol systems of a culture for both personal and community development. The need and demand for these aptitudes vary in different societies (The Centre for Literacy of Quebec, 2003).

Mothertongue: The language the person first learned at home in childhood and still understands (Statistics Canada, 2002).

1.5 Context

Francophones in Vancouver are a minority that account for 1.5% of the city's population (Stebbins, 2000, p. 172). They have different origins that include Quebec, Acadia, Lebanon, North Africa, South Asia, and Western Canada. Francophone life in Western Canada is marked by great institutional incompleteness meaning that francophones living in this city carry out a substantial proportion of their daily, weekly and yearly activities in English. Despite the French official language status, there is very limited employment available in French in Vancouver. Therefore, the large majority of francophones work in English. Although they can drive to obtain French services from accountants, doctors, and travel agents for example, most francophones choose to access these services locally (in English) and only sporadically carry out consumer activities in French (Stebbins, 2000). French is most often used, sometimes exclusively so, in areas of leisure, education, religion and family. There exists, then, a restricted linguistic lifestyle centred around both formal and informal structures such as clubs, societies, associations and relationships with friends, relatives and acquaintances. Each individual develops, within these spheres, her own limited way of participating in the range of

activities available in French. This participation is vital for community maintenance and development.

Francophone women who live in Greater Vancouver have an important role in deciding the home language and mothertongue of their children. Language choices may be difficult, especially as 81.3% of francophones in British Columbia (BC) are in relationships with people who are not francophones (Stebbins, 2000, p. 187). In linguistically exogamous families, where one parent's mothertongue is other than French, the transmission of the French language is much more likely to occur when the francophone parent is a female, compared to families where the francophone parent is a male (O'Keefe, 2001). The advantage first-language mothers have in transmitting their language confirms the larger role mothers play, in comparison to fathers, in raising their children, especially when the children are young (Stebbins, 2000). Francophone mothers' choices influence their individual sense of identity and are consequential for linguistic assimilation, a phenomenon that pertains to the ability to speak a language, to the actual use of a language and to the identification with a particular language community (O'Keefe, 2001).

This study aims to reveal how mothers, seeking to improve and maintain their native tongue in an English-majority environment, understand and explain barriers and support to doing so. A better understanding of the formal and non-formal opportunities women seek may influence the future development of educational projects. In March 2003, the federal government announced its plans to spend \$650 million over five years to increase the number of Canadians who speak both official languages. This represents a 35% increase in Canada's bilingualism budget. Approximately \$325 million will be

spent on education, focusing on teaching anglophones French. Another \$260 million will be spent for French services in everything from early-childhood programs to health care and justice. The remainder of the money (\$65 million) will be used to expand the number of bilingual public servants (CBC online, March 2003). Although I am ambivalent in my stance regarding bilingualism in this country, I am convinced of the personal and cultural benefits of speaking more than one language. The federal government's interest in promoting French presents an opportunity to develop and introduce formal and informal educational programs for francophone mothers who experience language loss. On a practical level, this would mean fulfilling the objective of increasing bilingualism. Women may be able to use their improved language skills not only for personal fulfillment, but also to gain access to increased employment opportunities. The results of this study may be a first step in determining how mothers living in an English-majority society wish to regain, improve and reconnect with their mothertongue and their reasons for doing so. This knowledge may assist adult educators plan programs and influence policies that pertain to language maintenance for women and their families.

1.6 Overview of the Literature

This study is based on the premise that mothers who have experienced first-language loss seek to improve their own language skills when they take on the primary responsibility for teaching their children French. However, as mothers struggle with obligations resulting from their gendered position in society, with constraints associated with belonging to a francophone minority and with a culture that values children's language learning as a priority, they find little support in formal and informal adult

education to assist them with reversing language loss. A review of the literature revealed few studies that consider the experiences of language maintenance among francophone women who mother in linguistic minorities. Related literature, however, suggests that while francophone mothers strongly connect their identity to their native language, they encounter barriers to language maintenance associated with the social construction of motherhood. Critical literacy, used to engage in transformative praxis, is a means by which adult education can respond to mothers' desire to maintain their mothertongue.

The first area of literature that has relevance to this study deals with the social construction of motherhood. In contemporary Western society, the idealized notion of motherhood infiltrates every aspect of life including the division of labour in the home, employment laws, and governmental policies. It is filtered continuously through books, television and other media. The ideal mother is sacrificial and ultimately responsible for her children's education and well-being (Rossiter, 1988; Phoenix & Woollett, 1991; Forna, 1998; Chodorow, 1978). The social construction of motherhood in our society fundamentally demands that she be everything to her child and is enamoured with creating an intensive, exclusive bond between the mother and child. Consequently, mothers frequently feel guilty and tend to blame themselves when they cannot meet societal expectations. Even though the demands placed on mothers are unrealistic, many women aim to fulfill the expectations placed on them by the myth of the ideal mother (Forna, 1998; Levin & Estable, 1981). There is an over-emphasis on parenting skills and not enough emphasis on helping mothers learn about their own needs and ways to claim their own, individual adult lives (Levine & Estable, 1981).

The second area of literature that has relevance to this study concerns the connections between language, identity and community. Identity encompasses a person's desires, such as her desire for affiliation, security and recognition (Norton, 1997, p. 410). Which languages women speak or write, for what purposes, and how these choices are perceived by women and others are considerations that have an impact on identity formation. The meaning of mothertongue language loss varies among individuals and also impacts an individual's sense of identity. Among people who have completely lost all their native language ability, loss results in loss of first language identity and a sense of exclusion from the first language culture. In some cases, loss of ease with one's mothertongue can result in leaving the language community (Kouritzin, 1999, pp. 201-202). Loss needn't be total and can refer to a diminished ability to understand and express oneself. This study did not address issues concerning language loss that occurs when a language is threatened with extinction, as is the case with many First Nations languages in Canada. Although I recognize that many communities suffer because their language is not recognized and officially protected – or worse yet, declining and facing the very real possibility of disappearance – my decision to stay away from this topic was intentional as I felt that language disappearance was not directly pertinent to the topic of this study. Rather, I chose to focus on the experiences of women trying to maintain their native tongue as they deal with the reality imposed by their gendered position in society.

Women, like men, use language to negotiate social relationships, to exert power, and to establish a sense of belonging. Language competence, indeed, is not value-free (Burton, 1994, p. 11). The way language is used and the way it is perceived is associated with numerous related factors which include the prestige of the language, the value

community members attach to their identity as members of the linguistic community, the economic and social utility of the language, the extent to which access to quality education is available in the language, and the range of institutions which are available to the language community (O'Keefe, 1998, p.10).

The third area of literature that is relevant to the study concerns the use of critical literacy as an educational process whereby mothers can participate more actively in public life. It is in public life – and not in isolation – that decisions about women are made and discourses about us are created (Rossiter, 1988, p. 282). To practice critical literacy involves employing the capacity to read, write and discuss in a context where learners are consciously striving to interpret their social present for the purpose of transformation. Critical literacy, which aims to understand the ongoing social struggles over the definitions of social reality and over the signs of culture (McLaren and Lankshear, 1993, p. 413), could assist francophone women investigate how their own literacies are socially constructed within existing political contexts. By rendering the structure and practice of representation problematic, critical literacy focuses attention on the importance of dialogue and on the importance of acknowledging that meaning is not fixed.

Existing studies (Heller and Lévy, 1992; Stebbins, 1994) highlight the inter-relations between parenthood and language maintenance in francophones living in Canada. Stebbins' study, in particular, emphasized that parents' participation in their children's francophone activities and schooling, promoted language maintenance in the adults. Heller and Lévy (1992) studied women's subjective experience of their francophone identity and how this played out in their family life, including their role as

wives and mothers. Neither of these studies, however, examined how women experienced the connections between motherhood and language maintenance. In order to better inform adult education practices and policies for francophone women who wish to maintain and regain their mothertongue, there is a need to explore how they perceive the barriers and support to preserving their mothertongue. The present study aims to address that need.

1.7 Research Design

This study made use of a qualitative research design informed by feminist research discussions. Feminist research focuses on gender differences in society and how they relate to social organization. This type of research challenges predominant beliefs, norms and values of a society on the basis that these prevailing notions have been determined by people – frequently white, middle-class men – who represent only portions of society.

1.8 Method

The participants in this study were francophone women who had experienced some language loss and wished to prevent further loss. The women, who desired to improve their language skills, had the primary responsibility for transferring the French language to their young children.

Prior to interviewing the women in the study, I asked a friend and fellow graduate student to interview me so that I could better assess the quality of the questions and the possible responses they might generate. The pilot interview allowed me to refine my interview questions. Once I was satisfied that my questions were appropriate to my research interest, I began to recruit participants. Via the mail, I sent an introductory letter (Appendix A) to four francophone people I was personally acquainted with and to 12

organizations whose clientele was largely or partly francophone (Appendix B for sample letter sent to organizations and Appendix C for list of organizations to whom I sent the letter). I also told friends and classmates in the UBC Adult Education Masters Program about the study and two classmates offered to advertise the poster for recruitment (Appendix D) on bulletin boards. To the organizations, I also sent a poster for recruitment. All of the individuals with whom I was acquainted invited me to send them an email with the content of the letter and offered to forward the email to their own contacts.

There were a total of eight participants in the study: seven women who volunteered to participate and me, the researcher. Participants were ultimately recruited from the following sources: two acquaintances to whom I sent the letter volunteered to participate, one person responded to a poster on a bulletin board at a French immersion elementary school, three people responded to the email that was distributed via the acquaintances and one woman, who I met at the park when we were there with our children, volunteered for the study after a lively conversation we had on the topic of the study. To compensate participants for their time, they were offered a \$15.00 gift certificate to Sophia Books, the only specialty French bookstore in Vancouver.

I gathered information in person through semi-structured interview questions (Appendix E). During the interviews, I asked participants about their family and educational history as it pertained to languages and asked them to describe their own language choices currently and as compared to before motherhood. The interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. After doing the in-depth analysis, I had a series of new, more focussed questions that I wished to hear

responses to (Appendix F). When designing the study, I had planned to gather all, or most of, the participants for a focus group once the initial analysis had been completed. I had anticipated that the conversations originating from this type of gathering could provide a rich source of information. However, in the end, it proved very difficult to find a time during which the participants could meet as a group. Finally, only two of the participants were able to meet at the same time and I conducted an in-person follow up interview with both of them. I met with a third participant in person at another time. With the fourth and fifth participant, the follow-ups were conducted over the phone since two of them felt their time was very limited and preferred the convenience of talking over the phone. In the case of the sixth participant, it was I who opted for a phone conversation because the participant had already addressed several of the follow up questions in the initial interview and I found it more time efficient to ask for confirmation and clarification over the phone as compared to travelling the distance to her home. I was unable to carry-out any follow up with seventh participant; she left me a voice message in response to my initial call requesting a follow-up meeting, but did not return the subsequent call or two emails in which I asked about her availability for specific dates and times.

1.9 Scope, Implications, Delimitations

The purpose of this study was to explore how linguistic-minority women understand and describe the experience of preserving their mothertongue while they take on the primary responsibility for transferring the language to their young children. The aim of this study was to understand the emotional and practical experiences connected with being a mother who, despite the feeling of language loss, assumes the primary

responsibility of teaching her child(ren) French. I hope that by providing a better understanding of the complexities involved in this situation, the study will inform the policies and practices of program planners and other professionals who have an interest in motherhood and language transfer and maintenance. I also hope that this research will begin to fill the gap that exists in the literature regarding the experiences of francophone women who live and mother as linguistic minorities in Canada.

Narrative inquiry, as a qualitative methodology used in this research, entails limitations: certain stories will emerge and others remain untold. Respondents may represent themselves in a particular way and, likewise, researchers, influenced by the focus of their research and the dynamics with the participants, may choose to represent participants in a specific manner. Researchers use narrative analysis to look for a "good story"; as such "we potentially walk into the field with constructions of the 'other,' however seemingly benevolent or benign, feeding the politics of representation..." (Fine, Weis, Weseen, and Wong, 2000, p. 117). Thus, in narrative inquiry, not only is the collection of information problematic, but so is the interpretation, representation and analysis of data. Researchers write in their own voice but are challenged by having to present three different perspectives: 1) their own, as researcher who is "choreographing the narratives" (Fine et al., 2000, p. 120); 2) the narrators, many of whom are philosophical social critics; and 3) those people and institutions that are being criticized.

This study was delimited to the experiences of eight women, seven whom I would consider relatively or very privileged in the context of contemporary Western society: seven participants were white, six were university educated, seven were in heterosexual marriages or common-law relationships, and five had partners who held professional

positions and full-time employment. As a result, with the exception of one participant, the women did not appear to be experiencing challenges related to poverty and none of the women were challenged by dominant culture racism. Furthermore, the seven women who were raising their children in the context of a typical nuclear family (husband-wife-child(ren)) did not face judgments that arise from alternative conceptions of family (lone parent, adoptive parents, gay/lesbian parents). Thus, I would speculate that, aside from the participant who faced tremendous financial difficulties and was raising her son as a lone mother, none of the women would consider themselves disadvantaged in the fundamental sense of the word which typically refers to women who lack affordable housing, have experienced domestic violence, family problems, eviction, mental illness, and/or drug and alcohol abuse. Consequently, the findings of this study may differ from research findings involving participants who are disadvantaged or had different lifestyles and lived elsewhere in Canada. Nevertheless, despite the apparent advantages had by most of the women, all of them faced linguistic disadvantages imposed by the burden of the ideology of motherhood. Language maintenance involved much more than negotiating the practical difficulties of living in an English-majority environment; it was complicated by issues closely linked to women's gendered positions in society.

1.10 Structure of Thesis

The structure of this thesis is as follows: In chapter 2, I review literature relevant to the study; chapter 3 describes the research design while the findings are represented in chapter 4. In chapter 5, I elaborate on the findings and their implications for language maintenance practise and policy, noting how women's lives are burdened by the ideology

of motherhood and calling attention to the role of critical literacy in helping francophone women maintain their mothertongue.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

In this section I review literature that is relevant to the experiences of being a mother in Western society who desires to maintain her mothertongue in a minority-language environment. There is very little information in the literature that pertains to the relationship between motherhood and mothertongue maintenance in circumstances where the mother has experienced, and wishes to prevent, mothertongue language loss. In order to provide background to the study via existing research, I have accessed three different bodies of literature that have implications for and relevance to this study. First, I summarize literature that concerns mothering, paying special attention to the concept of motherwork, and highlighting the myth of the ideal mother. Second, I review literature that examines the connection between identity and language. Lastly, I summarize literature pertaining to critical literacy, calling attention to the use of critical literacy in adult education. I conclude the chapter with a summary of the literature review.

2.2 Motherhood

Motherhood is frequently presented as natural and instinctual. Women are seen as “naturally” connected to children via their childbearing and lactation capacities and their traditional responsibility for childcare. The profound importance of women’s mothering for family structure, for the sexual division of labour, for ideology about women, for relations between the sexes, and for sexual inequality has largely been taken for granted (Gordon, 1990). Feminist theory, however, focuses political attention on questions concerning personal life, family life, sexual division of labour, women’s control of their bodies and sexuality, and on questions about education, training and

equality in the paid economy. Feminist analyses rupture the myth of motherhood as an inherently natural manifestation of being female and present an alternative analysis. The family is seen as a socially constructed unit where women's positions reflect gendered relationships within the wider society. "That women mother is a fundamental organizational feature of the sex-gender system: It is basic to the sexual division of labor and generates a psychology and ideology of male dominance as well as an ideology about women's capacities and nature" (Chodorow, 1978, p. 209).

Motherhood, as an experience and institution, is a constitutive aspect of some women's lives (Gordon, 1990, p. 127). Yet, women come to motherhood by a variety of paths and mother in diverse and differing circumstances. In many respects, motherhood and the experience of mothering are similar among all women: motherhood creates and provides both intense joys and privations. Feminist theory uncovers the ways in which women's lives are bound by their most intimate and caring relationships. Although many women have an immense ability to nurture and support, this ability is frequently assumed to be part of their primary activities. As a result, assumptions about women's "natural" ability to care for others is not balanced with caring for one's self. In fact, women's attention to their own needs and desires is often seen as selfish and unnatural.

Discontentment results "when the interests of love are not balanced by other kinds of interests, and indeed crowd out other sources of pleasure, satisfactions, and meaning" (Ruth, 1995, p. 219).

Freire (1972) describes the oppressed as being submerged in situations that render critical awareness and response nearly impossible. Indeed, women's lives have been dominated by a perceived obligation to conform to an ideal image. Unwittingly, many

women frequently participate in the preservation of a patriarchal society that denies the full range of their potential. Thus, in spite of all the historical changes in what constitutes family, “our ‘metanarratives’ persist to unusually strong degrees in maintaining stable enduring images of the natural order of things” (Polakow, 1993, pp. 51-52, cited in Hart, 1995, p. 108). The enduring myths continue to place mothers in a specific domestic and social space in relation to children, husbands and the state. Gender (as a social construct) determines what is considered work and non-work. The unpaid work of mothering is largely left to women and women continue to be devalued by association with giving birth to and raising children.

2.2.A Motherwork

Motherwork describes the numerous efforts and activities that comprise motherhood and refers to the reproductive, domestic and emotional labour of women in the home. Women do the majority of the unpaid work within the family and community and this work is generally unrecognized and unrewarded (Levine & Enstable, 1981, p. 12). Due to their ability to bear children and because society relegates them to the task of raising children, women have a distinctive set of responsibilities – and consequently, liabilities – pertaining to childcare (Forna, 1998, p. 14). Thus, maternal caregiving, although devalued, is (ironically) considered essential for a child’s healthy growth and development. Mothers are perpetually constructed as the principal source of influence in their children’s development. “Their main roles with regard to their children is that of pedagogues...” (Woollet & Phoenix, 1996, p. 80). Therefore, an important component of motherwork involves women’s involvement in their children’s education. Smith (1999) writes about the intersecting discourses of mothering and schooling where the family has

the primary responsibility for a child's school achievement and overall success. One component of being a "good mother" is teaching and partnering with educational experts; as such, the "child's mother is available to do the work for the school that is done invisibly in the home" (Smith, 1999, p. 163; Griffith & Smith, 1991). Literature on family literacy frequently emphasizes the need for mothers to support their children's literacy acquisitions. The words 'family' and 'parent' are generally euphemisms for the maternal parent. The focus is on meeting children's needs and interests and the mother is educated in order to teach her children (Sparks, 2001, p. 51).

Motherwork is frequently classified as "nonwork," a category that is unpaid. "It is not considered real work in the official, normative sense of the word whose meaning is inseparable from a market perspective" (Hart, 2002, p. 24). When people speak of work, they refer mainly to work done outside the home in exchange for wages. Hart (2002) distinguishes the term motherwork from motherhood specifying that "while motherwork holds on to the nurturing, life-affirming connotation of the term mothering, it also takes the latter out of the conceptual box of "nonwork" ..." (Hart, 2002, p. 3). Motherwork, Hart (2000) explains, is a type of "subsistence work" meaning it is work that is oriented towards preserving life and surviving rather than profiting from the conditions of life. Subsistence work suggests an intricate fusion of the economic and social-cultural aspects of work and production. Subsistence work "maintains, cultivates, cleans up, mends, repairs, nurtures, comforts, heals for the sake of maintaining, mending, and sustaining life itself – above anything else" (Hart, 2002, p. 36). Caring is the essence of motherwork (Hart, 2002, p. 5). Since caring involves a plenitude of skills, tasks, and abilities and requires various forms of knowledge, it also signifies a staggering amount of work and

responsibility. Motherwork consists of a unique series of relentless demands which entails immense responsibility and minimal control (Maushart, 2001, p. 119). Indeed, it involves “listening, trial and error learning, changing one’s rhythm, working simultaneously at different levels, uncertainty, and physical exhaustion” (Rossiter, 1988, p. 244). Motherwork includes feeding, clothing, teaching, and nurturing children as well as protecting and providing for them in countless other ways. Not only does it comprise the socialization of children, but also “the servicing of adult male (s) in the family, sexually and/or domestically, to reinforce their ongoing attachment to the labour force” (Levine & Estable, 1981, p. 12). Mothers must have or develop a multitude of skills in order to juggle their numerous roles and meet the omni-present challenges of their work.

It is important, when considering motherwork, to point out that in Canada in 1996, 60% of Canadian mothers with at least one child under the age of 6 years was employed (Early Childhood Development, 1999, A portrait of Canadian families section). This means that, because of the continuing gendered division of labour in the household, women working in the formal economy have a “double day”: they are employed outside the home and are largely responsible for child care and for domestic chores (Gee, 2000, p. 103). This situation creates demands that cannot be met and so mothers devise strategies to help them cope with the various responsibilities they take on. Motherwork receives very little public recognition and, frequently, mothers themselves do not acknowledge the strength, power and courage they demonstrate, daily, as they carry out the demanding tasks and responsibilities involved with caring for their children.

2.2.B The Myth of the Ideal Mother

The ideal mother is sacrificial; her children come before herself or any need, person or commitment. She follows the advice of child-care experts and doctors and educates herself concerning child-development issues. The ideal mother cares for her children at home and has the responsibility of ensuring that her children 'turn out right' (Hardyment, 1990, cited in Phoenix & Woollett, 1991, p. 14). The normative social constructions of good/normal mothering imply that, in order for mothers to fulfill this responsibility, the 'right circumstances' must be present. The legitimate circumstances in which to rear children are usually implicit rather than explicit. These ideal circumstances concern the family make-up (heterosexual, married), the woman's age (not too young, not too old), social status (upper-middle class), as well as the employment situation (father is employed and provides financially for the family; mother is ever present in her children's lives when they are young; if she has to work outside the home, she arranges her job so that she can be there for her children as much as possible).

Many women are in the grip of this pernicious construct: they cannot live their lives according to the ideals, yet cannot imagine motherhood any other way. Women are socialized to assume that if anything goes wrong with their children, it is the mother's fault (Levine & Estable, 1981, p. 31). Consequently, women are constantly assessing their performance in terms of unattainable goals and apologizing for supposed deficiencies in themselves and their children. "We have had established for us an unworkable job description. Knowing that others blame us, we in turn blame ourselves." (Levine & Estable, 1981, p.31). Women's feelings of guilt intensify and aggravate as they receive a torrent of advice from pediatricians, psychologists, teachers and other

professionals considered experts in child-care. Collectively, this advice reinforces the narrow ideal of the perfect mother. "The futility of trying to conform to so many pressures means that many mothers feel like failures, and the lasting effect on almost all mothers is the battle with guilt which has come to characterize modern motherhood." (Forna, 1998, p. 87). Thus, along with the idealized depiction of motherhood, guilt becomes a tool of enforcement. In fact, guilt has become so strongly linked with motherhood that it is considered to be a natural emotion. Mothers are repeatedly told that they are supremely powerful in determining their children's future; consequently, this implies that woman's every failure and refusal to sacrifice will damage not only the mother-child relationship, but every relationship in the child's life and his or her entire future, in general (Forna, 1998, p. 12; Ambert, 2001, p. 25). Furthermore, women are told that many of society's ills can be prevented – or could be cured – if women were to stay at home with their children. The culture of mother-blaming has become deeply embedded in society and bad (that is, different than "ideal") mothering is deemed an important contributory cause to a large array of contemporary problems (Forna, 1998, p.12).

As a result of the pressure on mothers, women mother with an ingrained notion of guilt and they approach their role with a tremendous degree of anxiety, resolved to do it right, and determined not to be criticized. "The ideology which accompanies the myth of the perfect mother can only conceive of one way to mother, one style of exclusive, bonded, full-time mothering" (Forna, 1998, p. 3). Western society demands that a mother be everything to her child and is as absorbed with trying to create an intensive, exclusive bond between the mother and child (Forna, 1998, p. 220). The push for an exclusive

bond between mother and child implies that child rearing be the mother's primary occupation and source of satisfaction and this, inevitably, supports a society in which women are expected to be full time mothers. Thus, women in capitalist patriarchal societies assume the primary responsibility for child-care and this sole care taking function "justifies women's location in the private sphere – in nuclear families and away from and outside the making of culture" (Rossiter, 1988, p. 241). The complex and demanding task of child rearing is rendered most challenging when women mother in isolated nuclear families. Yet the social construction of motherhood in Western society favours isolation. Isolation, asserts Rossiter (1988), is a form of oppression that occurs on a day-to-day basis. In North America, mothers are viewed as being all-powerful in determining their children's destinies and considered their children's primary agents of socialization. Mothers are often defined by the services they provide for their children and their existence is viewed in relation to the children's needs.

Identification with the child can lead to an extraordinary shift in identity. Rossiter (1998, p. 244) describes how mothers suspend their own identity in order to anticipate and understand their children's needs. However,

A mother's sense of continuity with her infant may shade into too much connection and not enough separateness. Empathy and primary identification, enabling anticipation of an infant or child's needs, may become unconscious labeling of what her child ought to need, or what she thinks it needs. The development of a sense of autonomous self becomes difficult for children and leads to a mother's loss of sense of self as well. (Chodorow, 1978, p. 211 cited in Rossiter, 1998, p. 245)

Chodorow (1978) labels this phenomena "over-investment" while other authors have used the terms "intensive parenting" (Hays, 1996) or "hyper-parenting" (Engberg, 1999). Over-investment is created and maintained in conditions of isolation (Rossiter, 1988, p. 245) and isolation is a condition that coincides with the enduring myth of motherhood.

The social construction of motherhood curtails women's life choices, personal liberty and severely limits a mother's access to resources, including her ability to earn an income.

While it frees men to pursue more autonomy and advantage in life, motherhood remains a large obstacle to women achieving equality in contemporary society.

The myth denies that the problems...of women are real or valid and instead insists that they are natural and inevitable. And in so doing negates...even the creation of a rhetoric or framework which would allow women to discuss the source of their problems. (Forna, 1998, p.260)

2.3 Language and Identity -

Most people value their language not only instrumentally, as a tool, but also intrinsically, as a cultural inheritance and as a marker of identity....Their language is a repository of the traditions and cultural accomplishments of their community as well as being a kind of cultural accomplishment itself. It is the vehicle through which a community creates a way of life for itself and is intrinsically bound up with that way of life. For the group as a whole, its language is a collective accomplishment. An individual member's use of the language is at once a participation in this accomplishment and an expression of belonging to the community that has produced it. Because this participation has intrinsic value, members of a language community identify with that language – they take pride in its use and in the cultural accomplishments it represents and makes possible. (Réaume, 2000, p. 252)

Language use and notions of social identity and culture are inextricably linked.

Language is the means by which community members communicate with one another and it is how individuals establish that they are, in fact, members of the same cultural community (Kouritzin, 1999, p. 9). The concept of community implies a sense of belonging and includes meaningful relationships and interactions between individuals, groups and institutions. Community implies both similarity and difference simultaneously. The commonality found in a community need not be uniformity and the relative similarities or differences among community members are not a matter of objective assessment, but rather a matter of feeling, as experienced by the members (Cohen, 1985). Members of a community have something in common with one another

that distinguishes them in a significant way from the members of other groups.

Individuals perceive boundaries – such as physical or linguistic boundaries – which help define their community; “but not all boundaries, and not all the components of any boundary, are so objectively apparent... This is the symbolic aspect of community boundary and, in so far as we aspire to understand the importance of the community in people’s experience, it is the most crucial”(Cohen, 1985).

A speech community is a theoretical concept central to the study of language in society. It reflects what people know and do when they interact with one another. Language, and the way we use it, is closely bound up with our existence as human beings, both as individuals and as members of a community (Agers, 1997; Morgan, 2001). Speech communities are built around culturally and socially constituted interactions. Members of a speech community are aware of a shared set of norms, local knowledge, beliefs, and values, and are capable of knowing when they are being adhered to and when the values of the community are being ignored. Speech communities cannot be defined by established physical locations; they can be experienced as part of a nation, village, neighborhood, club, on-line chat room, or religious institution (Morgan, 2001). A family is possibly the smallest speech community, while the broadest speech community would include all those who use the same language (Ager, 1997).

A speech community defines what constitutes a standard language. For example, a dialect becomes a standard first by being selected from among the available dialects, then by being elaborated, and finally by being accepted. These actions are not conscious and planned but happen by consensus and agreement. These social processes of selection are continuous for all living languages because social or political circumstances are

nearly constantly changing (Ager, 1998, p. 3). A speech community, built around the knowledge of communicative practices and their implementation, is an important aspect of identity.

Identity is how a person perceives her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future (Norton, 2000, p. 5). Thus, language, society and identity are closely linked (Ager, 1997; Edwards, 1994; Kouritzin, 1999). It is noteworthy that, although identities are multiple and may overlap, people have maintained their identity even when language has been altered, lost or replaced (Kostomarov, 1993, p. 4). In discussing language and identity, Edwards (1994) considers the concept of “symbolic ethnicity”. Symbolic ethnicity is “a new kind of ethnic involvement... which emphasizes concern with identity” (p.128). This involvement gives significance to symbols. One of these symbols is language which,

having lost its communicative role, retains a sentimental and emotional grip on the group.... Ethnic identity is allegiance to a group – large or small, socially dominant or subordinate – with which one has ancestral links.... Symbolic or subjective attachments relate... to an observably real past. (Edwards, 1994, p. 128)

Through language, individuals cope with conventionality and creativity. By selecting and combining available linguistic resources, individuals create their voice and make choices regarding their identity (Johnstone, 2001, p. 124).

2.3.A Language and Power

Mothertongues are relations that must be negotiated and validated by various parties and the outcome of these relations is largely dependent on who has more power. Consequently, even the apparently simple act of defining mothertongue can be problematic. Definitions of mothertongue can be based on origin, identification,

competence and function or a combination of these criteria. When the criterion is origin, mothertongue is defined as the language one learned first. However, if internal identification is used as the criterion, the definition of mothertongue is the language one identifies with as a native speaker. External identification is used when others identify an individual as being the native speaker of a given language and competence is employed when the mothertongue is the language one knows best. If function is the criterion then mothertongue is defined as the language one uses most (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2002). The definition that demonstrates the highest awareness of linguistic human rights considers the individual's origins and internal identification. By contrast, a definition by function is the most exclusive because speakers of minority languages generally cannot choose which languages to use at work, at school, in daycare, or otherwise.

Stebbins (2000, p. 23) explains that researchers who specialize in the study of French-speaking Canadians prefer to use the term "minority society" over the term "powerless minority" when referring to francophones living in English-majority societies. The fact that francophones have special legal rights, by virtue of Canada being a bilingual country, leads Stebbins to conclude that francophones are not powerless. Although that may be true to some degree, one cannot forget that, typically, in a linguistically diverse community, the dominant language group is associated with greater power, prestige and access to economic benefits (Burton, 1994, p. 24).

The word mothertongue hints strongly at the part played by women in language transmission. In Western society, appropriate infant and child care involves mental and social stimulation; early maternal attention is expected to be devoted to talking, playing, reading, responding and initiating communication with one's young child. These types of

demands, imposed upon women from various professionals, point to the highly communicative nature of childcare. Women's linguistic choices are particularly salient when they belong to a linguistic minority because they are frequently held responsible for transmitting language to their children (Burton, 1994, p. 11). As such, mothers may be seen as the 'guardians' of a minority language and, consequently, may also be considered the transmitters of cultural identity. Furthermore, in any linguistic minority, women's continued use and transmission of a minority language may display loyalty to the linguistic group, as well as a strategy for survival. Work related to the transmission of language, like emotional work and feeding, involves complicated tasks that entail planning, managing, monitoring and coordinating. Like emotional work and feeding, the work is largely invisible because it is mainly mental and spread over time; it remains invisible when done well but becomes noticeable when it is not completed. Work related to the transmission of language is part of the overall and ultimate responsibility women have for childcare, as ascribed to them by the ideology of motherhood. However, a mother's responsibility "cannot be taken for granted, since motherhood is a social construct open to change as well as a biological state. In addition, the real or symbolic responsibility of mothers for language transmission interacts with a number of external factors" (Burton, 1994, p. 24). Indeed, patterns of language use are generally complex within a minority context and the co-existence of one or more languages is part of the reality of all minority communities (O'Keefe, 1998, p. 7).

The ability to speak a language, individuals' identification with a particular language community, and the actual use of a language, all impact the linguistic vitality of a given language. The existence of two or more languages within a society inescapably

creates overlap between languages and language communities. The permeable boundaries between speech communities means the languages intersect, and the vitality of both languages are somehow impacted. Consequently, languages have a span of existence granted by human society and culture rather than by natural laws (Edwards, 1994, p. 8). Languages do not vanish because they are intrinsically better forms of communication. It is people who adopt a new language, shift their loyalty from one language to another and, consequently, allow a language to fall out of use. In some cases, a community is forced to change its loyalty and thrust into adopting a new identity; but in other cases, the new language's advantages surpass the disadvantages, and the move is made voluntarily (Ager, 1997, p. 27). Thus, "language maintenance by choice" can be distinguished from "language maintenance by exclusion". In the case of the latter, the majority language group discriminates against the minority group who, as a result becomes segregated and consequently maintains its language. In the case of the former, bilingualism can be maintained due to lack of discrimination; minority language support can be found in schools, in the media, popular culture and other realms of the surrounding society (Boyd & Latomaa, 1998, p. 320).

Education, numerical strength of minority language users, mothertongue literacy, elapsed time since immigration, age, family size, presence of an extended family, social class, types of daycare, and types of schooling have all been correlated to language loss (Tosi, 1998, p. 331). Mundane economic and pragmatic facts have a great deal to do with minority language vitality (Edwards, 1994, p. 10). The prevalence of in-group or out-group marriages are also a factor in language viability, as is institutional completeness, a term that describes the "degree to which a language community finds it possible to live a

normal and complete social life in and through its own tongue” (Edwards, 1994, p.10). A group’s own views of its linguistic situation as well as the attitudes held by those outside the group -- especially those whose social, economic and political positions are powerful -- are factors that affect language loss (Edwards, 1994, p. 10). Behind the political, social and economic conditions that affect individual choices lies a complex array of language attitudes and feelings about language. Two particularly strong feelings are those of exclusion and inclusion. Ultimately, matters of power, prestige and status interlock with human perceptions to change language usage (Edwards, 1994, p. 205). Rather than pertaining to any intrinsic qualities of language, social situations intertwine with other cultural matters, and individuals maintain, drop or shift languages.

2.3.B Language Loss

Language loss refers to the diminishment of an individual’s language proficiency (Extra & Verhoeven, 1998, p. 47). This situation is characterized by the presence of another language, generally the dominant language, which is used more frequently by the language loser (de Bot, 1998, p. 348). An individual who has experienced language loss struggles to find words and rules in the language to which she/he has not been sufficiently exposed. “Ultimately...frequency of activation is the main factor in the decline of language skills...” (de Bot, 1998, p. 348).

The most common familial consequence of first language loss is the loss of extended family (Kouritzin, 1999, p. 169). The intergenerational conflict that emerges between parent and child is one of the gravest outcomes of first language loss (Tse, 2001, p. 52).

When a first language is lost...what is lost is no less than the means by which parents socialize their children....Talk is a crucial link between parents and

children: It is how parents impart their cultures to their children and enable them to become the kind of men and women they want them to be. When parents lose the means for socializing and influencing their children, rifts develop and families lose the intimacy that comes from shared beliefs and understandings. (Wong Fillmore, 1991, cited in Kouritzin, 1999, p. 15)

One could argue that the above statement perpetuates the myth of the ideal mother who, assigned to the role of educator, fails her children and the community when she is unable to ensure that her children maintain their mothertongue. I chose to include it for it's reference to the fundamental importance of language in communication.

Communication and language encompass so much more than the ability to form grammatically correct sentences with proper syntax. Loss of language can be a deeply emotional phenomenon which affects family relationships and can also result in lack of acceptance by members of the community. Those who don't speak the community language may be considered outsiders who lack one of the most notable symbols of group membership (Tse, 2001, p. 52).

Another significant consequence of language loss is the formidable task involved in reclaiming the language. Language learning requires frequent and continuing contact between learners and target language speakers (Wong Fillmore, 1989, p. 321 cited in De Houwer, 1998, p.79). Finding educational opportunities may be difficult for those who wish to maintain and improve their mothertongue. If the language is offered as part of a regular foreign-language program, the course rarely meets the needs of native bilinguals who have a different linguistic profile from that of typical foreign-language learners. Teaching materials may not be appropriate for these learners since many of them have advanced speaking abilities but limited literacy. Finding informal opportunities may also be challenging for adults trying to regain their language skills. The difficulties

encountered may lead individuals to give up learning the language and to abandon the potential of (re)becoming bilingual and biliterate (Tse, 2001).

2.4 Critical Literacy

Given the relative lack of control women have over decision-making in their homes and communities, over money and careers, over their bodies, and over customs and traditions, women's participation in education poses a tremendous challenge (Rockhill, 1991, p. 334). There are inextricable links between opportunities provided by society and women's ideas of what they are supposed to be, what they are entitled to want and what they expect for themselves (Luttrell, 1997, p. 50). Women's needs are often subordinated to the needs of the family and the patriarchal system. In order for women's literacy education to respond to women's varying needs, the focus of adult education must be broadened to address women's multiple roles and desires. In other words, literacy must be valued in its own right for multiple tasks beyond the need for becoming a child's primary teacher.

Critical literacy challenges the idea of identity as uniform and aspires to develop "critical citizenry, whose actions are informed by democratic principles of justice that address issues of oppression and discrimination and allow for the creation of multiple spaces where hope is shared..." (Brady, 1994, p. 143). It is both an emerging act of consciousness and of resistance. It enables a critical examination of how culture, power and ideology function to disempower some groups of people while privileging other groups. I recognize, when suggesting critical literacy as a tool for social praxis for francophone women who mother in linguistic minority environments, that individuals experience different levels of disadvantage. Relatively speaking, the women represented

in this study would be considered privileged for they were mainly white, university-educated women in traditional heterosexual relationships (seven were white, six were university educated and only one woman was a lone mother). All the women were able bodied and only one – the lone mother - expressed anxiety about her lack of financial resources. Thus, I am aware that the women who participated in the study did not fit the typical description of disadvantaged woman; nevertheless, they did face disadvantages as a result of being a linguistic minority. Furthermore, and of notable consequence, the women faced disadvantages as a result of being burdened by the ideology of motherhood which places the ultimate responsibility for childcare and childrearing, including the expectation of constant availability, on women. Consequently, I suggest the use of critical literacy to address the specific disadvantages experienced by francophone women who mother in an English-majority environment despite the experience of language loss. “Critical literacy is essential to the work of mothering and the work of supporting and sustaining life itself” (Hart cited in Sparks, 1996, p. 52). Becoming literate suggests the ability to participate more fully in society; as such, women’s literacy can pose a threat to the societal division of labour and the perceived primacy of women’s unpaid work in the home.

Giroux (1993, p. 367) describes literacy as a way of organizing, inscribing and manifesting meaning. Literacy is not only about the practice of representation, but also about practices that disrupt and fracture existing ideological systems that belong to current cultural and social formations. Tacit assumptions that make up definitions of social reality are questioned; thus literacy becomes critical as it renders the structure and practice of representation problematic. Critical literacy becomes the interpretation of the

social present for the purpose of transformation. It focuses on the importance of recognizing that meaning is not permanent and that to be literate is to engage in dialogue with others who speak from different histories and experiences. Literacy “as an emancipatory program requires that people read, speak and listen in the language of difference, a language in which meaning becomes multiaccentual and dispersed, and resists permanent closure” (Giroux, 1993, p. 369). McLaren and Lankshear (1993, p. 27) caution that diversity must be interpreted as something greater than an assortment of “ethnic add-ons” and that it should be used “as a politics of *thinking from the margins* [emphasis in original], of possessing integral perspectives on the world.”

Critical literacy adopts the view that, under the hierarchy of capitalism, patriarchy, ethnicity, and so on, society is structured in a way that creates conflicts of interests between different groups of human beings. The interests of certain groups are systematically privileged at the expense of the interests of other groups. Literacy, like society, is socially constructed within political contexts. Reading, writing and oral communication are made, socially, into many and diverse forms. As such, McLaren and Lankshear (1993) urge us to think in terms of literacies rather than literacy (p.xvii) noting that what literacy is is a function of how writing and reading (and, I would add oral communication) are conceived and practiced within particular social contexts. Political agents, acting within established power structures based on dominant ideologies, effectively decide what literacy will be for others (p. 4). Shore (1997) writes:

We are what we say and do. The way we speak and are spoken to help shape us into the people we become. Through words and other actions, we build ourselves in a world that is building us. That world addresses us to produce the different identities we carry forward in life: men are addressed differently than are women, people of color differently than whites, elite students differently than those from working families. Yet, though language is fateful in teaching us what kind of

people to become and what kind of society to make, discourse is not destiny. We can redefine ourselves and remake society, if we choose, through alternative rhetoric and dissident projects. This is where critical literacy begins, for questioning power relations, discourses, and identities in a world not yet finished, just, or humane.

Discourse is a vast concept that involves creating, shaping, and constraining social life. Discourses function to sanction “appropriate” activity. They originate and are experienced within political contexts – that is, within power relations inherited by people existing within a given cultural space and social time.

As discourse, literacies shape social practices of which they are mutually constitutive... Discourse is like (and includes) language in the sense that only once norms and rules for use are established and observed can linguistic meaning be ‘stamped’ and communicated, and people participate in speaking the language. Only with rules, norms, and meanings in place can language operate as a medium for giving shape to human life. (McLaren and Lankshear, 1993, p. 10)

Literacies, as forms of discursive production, are inherently political: they organize ways of thinking into ways of being and doing. To view literacy as discourse involves questioning how literacies are created, what they are created as, and how they shape human life.

Literacy is a discursive practice in which difference becomes crucial for understanding not simply how to read, write, or develop aural skills, but also how to recognize that the identities of “others” matter as part of a progressive set of politics and practices aimed at the reconstructing of democratic public life. (Giroux, 1993, p. 368)

Educational discourses which consist of many ideologically informed views about how and why things should be done lend meanings to these activities, thereby shaping how learners “turn out” and how they “don’t turn out” (McLaren and Lankshear, 1993, p. 12).

Critical literacy investigates the communication devices that assign people into dominant, conventional and widely uncontested social relations (McLaren and Lankshear, 1993, p. 413). Learners who are engaged in the process of critical literacy

recognize that prevailing social arrangements exist for the advantage of certain privileged groups, not because they are the only possible arrangements. Critical literacy challenges the status quo in an effort to discover and reveal alternative paths for social and self development. As Shor (1997) writes: "This kind of literacy--words rethinking worlds, self dissenting in society--connects the political and the personal, the public and the private, the global and the local, the economic and the pedagogical, for rethinking our lives and for promoting justice in place of inequity".

Critical literacy offers an approach by which women can understand the causes of their subordination and subservience.

Teaching women to read and write through critical analysis of generative themes which reflect their lives and experience will not of itself bring about a "revolution" in attitudes toward women and the manner in which they are treated. Hopefully, however, it will enable women to travel with a different consciousness of their world, their place within it, and their personal and collective power to transform what is inhumane and unjust within their current circumstances. Any lesser view of the aims and purposes of literacy for women effectively promotes and prolongs their domestication – in Friere's sense of the word, and within his realms of word and world alike. (Bee, 1993, p.107)

Critical literacy can help enable women to convert individual powerlessness into a collective struggle that has the capacity to transform their lives and, ultimately, the wider social order. Bee (1993, p. 105) argues that women who actively understand the structural arrangements in society which maintain their economic, social and political inferiority, can initiate change. Brady and Hernandez (1998, p. 333), however, warn that any attempts to change the political, cultural and social aspects of the dominant patriarchal society will be interpreted by those with social power as an attack on democracy. Green (2001) issues a warning of a different type, pointing out that "although taking a critical stance may unravel or expose the power base of the society it does not necessarily provide access to it" (p. 9). Yet, without any attempts to alter the

concept of literacy and broaden the notions of social justice, society will continue to reproduce existing power structures which establish grounds for oppressive relationships. Freire (1972) writes that the oppressed, “having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom” (p. 31). He explains that freedom would require the oppressed to replace the image of the oppressor with responsibility and autonomy. “Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly.” (p. 31). Critical literacy can aid women recognize the causes of their oppression and, given that they perceive the ability to transform the “limiting situation”, it can help women create new situations which lead to what Friere (1972) called a “fuller humanity”.

2.5 Summary of the literature review

This literature review has included research from motherhood ideology, language and identity, and critical literacy. The literature reviewed in this section presents three prevailing concepts. Firstly, there reigns in Western society a myth of the ideal mother who is sacrificial in her devotion to her children; the work performed by mothers, many of whom attempt to live-up to this ideal, is rarely valued. Secondly, there exists a multitude of interconnections between language, identity and community; these links constantly affect the equilibrium between language maintenance and language loss. Thirdly, adult education can make use of critical literacy to assist women to analyse the way texts and their discourses work to represent reality and define what is necessary for us. As such, critical literacy can be used to help women become agents of social change.

Although mothers may be motivated to improve their own literacy in order to help their children learn, they may also be motivated by other personal and political ambitions.

The central topic of this study is the mother's literacy: how she thinks about and experiences her literacy, how she moves towards or away from it and how she negotiates her identity. There is a need to investigate the experiences of mothers who wish to regain their mothertongue and who, despite having some mothertongue language loss, take on the primary responsibility of teaching their young children French. There are inextricable links between opportunities provided by society and women's ideas of what they are supposed to be, what they are entitled to want and what they expect for themselves (Luttrell, 1997, p. 50). Women's needs are often subordinated to the needs of the family and the patriarchal system. Yet, "critical literacy is essential to the work of mothering and the work of supporting and sustaining life itself" (Hart cited in Sparks, 1996, p. 52).

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Researcher Role

In this research, I was both participant and researcher. By assigning myself the role of participant, I felt I could legitimately and liberally express and include my own viewpoints on the topic of the study. My opinions could outright be recorded and I felt I could more genuinely include my voice throughout the study. As a researcher, this method of inquiry made me acutely aware of my biases and compelled me to be honest (with myself and others) about my assumptions and beliefs. Initially, I approached this study with strong criticisms towards women who do not speak their mothertongue to their children. The root of my emotion did not originate from the fact that the women were not making attempts to maintain their mothertongue for their own pleasure and satisfaction; rather, I felt baffled that the women were “depriving” (that is the way I saw it) their children of another language. Over time, through reflecting on the readings, my own situation and the conversations I had with the participants, I developed an alternate way of feeling about the situation. Now, I have a greater understanding and appreciation of my privilege. Language maintenance is of absolute importance to me because I am who I am: a woman who lives in emotional and economic security, is physically and mentally healthy, whose parents have always appreciated and loved languages, who is supremely fortunate to be able to pursue her intellectual interests, and whose experience of being francophone is a positive memory and reality.

Yet, no woman is the same and each has a unique past and present that shape her identity, desires and circumstances. As researcher and participant, I became and remained acutely aware of how differently perceptions are formed to an apparently

similar circumstance. As a result, I feel that I became a better and more curious listener, and was better able to appreciate women's various ways of understanding and coping with their individual life circumstances.

3.2 Research Methodology

Feminist qualitative research, although diversified and dynamic, concentrates on, and makes problematic, the plurality of women's situations and the institutions that frame those situations (Oleson, 2000, p. 216). The research questions of interest to this study suggested I use a feminist qualitative research design. This type of design would provide in-depth, individual descriptions of mothers' experiences concerning language loss and maintenance.

At the basis of qualitative research lies the idea that meaning is socially constructed by individuals who are in interaction with their world (Merriam, 2002, p. 3). Qualitative research aims to understand how individuals interpret their reality at a particular point of time in a given context. Increasingly, feminist qualitative research has abandoned the "concept of an essentialized, universalized woman" (Oleson, 2000, p. 222) and this belief has been replaced with the view that women's knowledge emerges from women's situated experiences (Oleson, 2000, p. 222). Warns historian Joan Scott (1991, p. 779 cited in Oleson, 2000, p. 228) "Experience is at once already an interpretation and in need of interpretation". Thus feminist qualitative research recognizes that, although women's experience is important, it is necessary to take into account how that experience emerged and what material, historical and social circumstances existed. Furthermore, feminist qualitative researchers acknowledge that not only the participant but the researcher has "attributes, characteristics, a history, and gender, class, race, and social

attributes that enter the research interaction." (Oleson, 2000, p. 226). Indeed, researcher and participant are continually positioned and being (re)positioned by history and context.

The type of approach I chose to use to conduct the qualitative research is narrative analysis. "Narratives are first person accounts of experiences that are in story format having a beginning, middle, and end." (Merriam, 2002, p. 286). These accounts were elicited through the use of open-ended questions. Open-ended questions used in unstructured interviews attempt to understand the multifaceted behaviour of members of society. The open-ended interview process allows narrators more freedom to "explore complex and conflicting experiences in their lives" (Anderson and Jack, 1991, p. 23). Thus, life narratives aim to construct and communicate meaning. The focus of narrative inquiry is on process and interaction and "it is the interactive nature of the interview that allows us to...go behind conventional, expected answers to the woman's personal construction of her own experience" (Anderson and Jack, 1991, p. 23). In the end, the story is always co-authored for, in fact, the researcher retells the participants' accounts. As such "we, too, are story tellers and through our concepts and methods - our research strategies, data, samples, transcription procedures, specifications of narrative units and structures, and interpretative perspectives - we construct the story and its meaning" (Merriam, 2002, p. 287).

3.3 Recruiting Participants

Participant recruitment involved purposive strategies aimed at finding women who met the participant criteria of the study. The main method of recruitment was to send a letter to key francophone contacts who I presumed would have access to a network

of francophone women (Appendix C). These key contacts included, but were not limited to, the Fédération des parents francophones de Colombie-Britannique (FPFCB), the coordinator for the Mini-Franco-Fun in Vancouver, the person who coordinates admissions for the French pre-school on the west-side, the owner of Sophia Books, the Francophone School Board, Éducacentre and a French family day-care provider in Vancouver. Along with the letter, I included two posters (Appendix D) and offered to send the criteria via email so that they could easily forward the information to their own set of contacts. I also posted an announcement at the Centre culturel and in the French Department at the University of British Columbia (UBC). To compensate participants for their time, they were offered a \$15 gift certificate for the Sophia Books.

3.4 Participant Criteria

Women were recruited on the basis that French was the principle language of communication between mother and child, both inside and outside the home. In addition, each woman was to be Canadian and meet the following criteria:

1. bilingual in spoken and written French and English, but perceives that she has had some French language loss
2. feels that she would like to be more fluent in French
3. her mothertongue is French and/or her home language during childhood was French
4. her partner does not speak French
5. has at least one child who is 12 years of age or younger

Despite the fourth criteria, several participants had partners who spoke varying levels of French. As the principal language of communication with their partners was English, I made the decision to include these women in the study since I realized that the

presence of the other criteria was more significant to the purpose of the study than was the fulfillment of criteria 4. Although this study did not target women of a particular marital status, all of the women who participated, except one, was married or in a common-law relationship. Furthermore, each woman, except for me, was Caucasian.

3.5 Sample Size and Interview Context

There were eight participants in this study, including myself. The sample of eight participants was considered adequate given the resources available to me, the student researcher. Originally, I had aimed to interview five other women but recruiting participants happened easily and I happily accepted the opportunity to hear more women's stories than I had planned to hear.

Participants were interviewed at a time and location of their choice. Most participants were interviewed in their homes, while another was interviewed in a coffee shop and another chose to come to my home. The interviews took place largely in French but the conversations frequently moved between French and English. All the interviews began in French; sometimes it was I who temporarily switched to English to more easily express a thought or pose a question whereas other times the participants shifted to English for a while in the natural flow of their dialogue.

3.6 Permission

Women who were interested in participating in the study called me and I explained the study to them over the phone before sending them a letter of introduction (Appendix A) and a consent form (Appendix G) that met the UBC Behavioural Ethics Board requirements. Within a few days of sending them the letter, I called to answer any questions they might have about the study and to confirm their participation. At the time

of the interview, participants returned to me the signed consent form outlining the interview procedure (including the option to withdraw at any time), provisions for confidentiality, and the post-study handling of data. I provided them with a copy of the consent form for their records. The consent form had my phone number in case participants wanted to contact me after the interview or any time during the study. It also contained the phone numbers of my research supervisor and the UBC Office of Research Services, in case participants had any ethical concerns about the study.

3.7 Data Collection

Prior to conducting the interviews, I developed a list of twenty-five questions (Appendix H) that captured the essence of what I wanted to learn from the participants for the purpose of the study. Inspired from the literature and from my personal experience, these questions covered topics concerning the individual's personal language history, her experience and concerns with language loss, questions about communication within and outside the home and family, involvement in the francophone community, changes in her language use over time and specifically since motherhood, and her dreams and hopes for her and her family's language development in the future. From that list, I then generated five open-ended and fairly broad questions (Appendix E) which summarized the scope of the information I aimed to obtain and used these guiding questions during the interviews. I sent these questions to the participants before meeting with them for the interview. Prior to interviewing other participants, a friend and fellow student interviewed me. This interview allowed me to get a sense of what the interview process felt like and also enabled me to assess and refine the questions and their wording. The questions covered five major themes pertaining to language: 1) the individual's

language history, 2) her current situation, 3) issues around language, decision-making and motherhood, 4) changes in language use connected to mothering, and 5) hopes for the future. Information was gathered via semi-structured in-person interviews that lasted between sixty and ninety minutes. The first round of interviews were audiotaped and transcribed.

As I completed the data analysis and was writing up my findings, I made a list of unanswered questions and of questions that I wished to probe further (Appendix F). I attempted to arrange a meeting where the participants could explore these questions together but was unsuccessful in being able to find a date and time that suited more than two people. In the end, I met with these two women for an hour. The women knew each other as they had both been participating in the Mini-Franco-Fun for over a year and appeared comfortable engaging in discussion together. This interview was audiotaped. I met with another participant in person for one hour and took notes on her responses. I ended up conducting two of the follow-up meetings over the phone since scheduling a meeting time was difficult and these participants indicated a preference for a phone conversation; these interviews lasted between fifteen and twenty minutes and I took notes on the participants' responses. Lastly, there were some questions that pertained only to individual participants which I asked solely to them (via email and/or when I did the follow-up interviews). These were questions that I required clarification on, or statements for which I wanted to confirm my interpretations, after having done the data analysis. I was unable to communicate with one of the eight participants for any follow up. I left her two voice-mail messages and one email message over a span of approximately three weeks. Although, approximately two weeks after I left the first

message she left me a message indicating interest in answering any further questions, she did not return subsequent messages.

3.8 Confidentiality

In order to protect each participant's anonymity, interview transcripts did not include the participants' names, addresses, and phone numbers. Each transcript was identified by a code which was linked to the audiocassettes. The audiocassettes and transcripts are currently stored in my home office where they will be kept for five years before being destroyed, as per the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board guidelines.

Pseudonyms have been used to refer to some participants in the research report whereas other participants requested that I used their real names.

3.9 Transcription and Data Analysis

Interview audiotapes were transcribed within one to three days of each interview. I transcribed the interviews so that I could listen to the interviews in detail, capturing subtleties that I had not been able to register in the face-to-face meetings, and gleaning great amounts of information that had been revealed by each participant. I transcribed each interview in the language it had been uttered, not worrying about the fact that I misspelled the majority of the French sections. I read each transcription numerous times, initially noting with pencil in the margin any words or phrases that seemed to highlight important elements of the participant's experiences. I then created a summary, in English, of each interview with headings and sub-headings to help me begin to name the broad themes. Then, I re-read the transcriptions and the summaries and identified the emerging themes and categories. I created a Word document for each category, making a table where the theme was listed at the top of the table and the participant's names formed

rows down the left side of the table. Then, I reviewed each transcript again, very carefully, and transferred sections of each into the appropriate cell for each table so that I ended up with several individual documents which summarized all the participants' comments about a given theme (Appendix J). It was during this process that I translated many of the participants' quotes. Some of the quotes were straightforward to translate and, in my opinion, described the phenomena in question with the same vividness in English and in French. However, I felt that the splendor of some of the other quotes was lost or diminished in the English translation. I have included the original French version of these quotes in Chapter 4 "Findings". Quotes that were originally spoken in English are indicated with an asterisks (*) in Chapter 4.

3.10 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the degree to which the account portrays what the researcher is looking at (Oleson, 2000, p. 230). According to Lincoln and Guba (cited in Hoepfl, 1997), the central question addressed by the notion of trustworthiness is: "How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to?" (1985, p. 290). There are four criteria for determining the trustworthiness of qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

3.10.A *Credibility*

For a study to have credibility, the researcher must provide information regarding the subjects and the study setting. Credibility refers to evidence, provided by the researcher, demonstrating that the inquiry was conducted in a manner that ensures that the participants are adequately identified and described. The credibility criteria involves

verifying that the results of qualitative research are believable from the participant's perspectives (Strauss, 2003). Since from this perspective, the purpose of qualitative research is to describe or understand the phenomena of interest from the participant's eyes, the participants are the ones who can rightfully judge the credibility of the results (Yasin, 2002, Qualitative validity section). In this study, I endeavoured to establish credibility by providing multiple quotes from each participant and by verifying several statements with the participants in the conversations and contacts which followed the initial interview.

3.10.B Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree to which qualitative research results can be generalized to other similar contexts or settings. The qualitative researcher enhances transferability by thoroughly describing the research context and the assumptions that were central to the research. From a qualitative research perspective it is the person wishing to "transfer" the results to a different context who is responsible for judging how sensible the transfer is (Yasin, 2002, Qualitative validity section). The findings of this study may be transferable to francophone mothers with similar educational, economic and social backgrounds as those who participated in the study. The results may be transferable to francophone women who live in large urban regions in Canada and who share characteristics of language loss and similar responsibilities for mothering.

3.10.C Dependability

Dependability emphasizes the need for the researcher to account for the ever-changing conditions that are part of the phenomena being studied. In the study design,

the researcher is responsible for accounting for changes that were created by her improved understanding of the research context. Dependability requires that the researcher document the changes that occur in the setting and how these changes affected the way the research approached the study. Dependability also seeks to ascertain to what extent the researcher described the physical, social and interpersonal contexts within which the data were collected (Strauss, 2001).

The initial interviews for this study took place in June 2003, within a three-week period of one another. Between six to eight weeks after the first interviews, I conducted follow-up interviews and contacts in which I asked participants further questions, asked them to verify my interpretations of what they had said and requested them to provide missing factual information. At the time of the second contact (by phone or in person), I noticed some contradictions in what had been said previously and noted these in my own notebook. Even my own personal experience, feelings and emotions about some of the topics pertaining to the study transformed over time. This transformation did not take a linear direction, but lunged forward and was tugged backwards at various times. In an effort to augment the dependability of this study, I kept a notebook where I recorded questions and ideas as I thought of them.

3.10.D Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the study results could be verified or substantiated by others. It aims to illustrate to what extent the data, as presented by the researcher, helps confirm her general findings. Confirmability seeks to determine to what extent the categories delineated by the researcher are meaningful to or derive from the participants (Strauss, 2001).

Confirmability can be achieved in a number of ways: The researcher can keep a record of the procedures used for checking and rechecking the data throughout the study; she can take a "devil's advocate" role with reference to the results and document this process; and, the researcher can seek out and describe and negative instances that contradict and challenge prior observations. Lastly, the researcher can conduct, after the study, a data audit to judge the potential for bias in the data collection and analysis procedures (Yasin, 2002, Qualitative validity section).

In this study, I aimed to achieve confirmability by remaining genuinely committed to hearing the participants' stories and listening to their experiences. Although it was tempting at times to try to direct the conversations and test whether other women shared my opinions, I refrained from exerting excessive control. By providing numerous, lengthy quotes and contradicting experiences from different participants, I have striven for confirmability.

3.11 Summary

The study participants were francophone women who were concerned about preserving and/or regaining their mothertongue, and who, despite their personal experience with language loss, had assumed the primary responsibility for teaching French to their young child(ren). Participants were recruited via francophones who are involved in the community and who distributed the participant recruitment announcement. Participants were offered a \$15 dollar gift certificate as a thank-you for taking part in the study. There were a total of eight participants in the study, including me. Initially, information was gathered via semi-structured in-person interviews, which lasted between sixty and ninety minutes. These interviews were audiotaped and then

transcribed and analyzed for recurring themes or noteworthy exceptions. After completing the initial data analysis, follow-up information was obtained from six of the participants by phone or in person and some clarification of personal details was obtained by email and phone.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

I begin this section with a short narrative of each participant and then detail the themes that arose from the interviews. Since I have written about my background and experience in other places throughout this thesis, I have not included my own narrative in the following section.

4.2 Participants

Eight women, including me, participated in the study. As shown in Table 1 (Appendix I), all participants were born in Canada and were raised, in childhood and adolescence, speaking French only or a combination of French and English. With the exception of one single mother, all participants were living with their husband or common-law male partner (when referring to husbands and/or common-law partners, I will use the term “partner”). In each of these seven cases, the principal language of communication between the couple was English. Two of the women had two children living at home and the other six women had one child living at home. Children ranged from 15 months to 5 years of age at the time of the interviews. The women in the study spoke predominantly French to their children and each mother planned to have her child attend a school in the Francophone Program¹. The only exception to the above was Nicole who spoke English to her son but French to her daughter and whose daughter

¹ The “Francophone Program” refers to the program offered in Francophone public schools, schools that are under the direction of the Francophone School Board of BC. Francophone public schools differ from French immersion schools in that the classes are entirely in French (with the exception of English classes). In order for a child to be eligible to attend the French cadre program, at least one of the parents must fulfill the following criteria:

- The parent’s first language learned and still understood is French; or
- The parent has received his/her primary school education in Canada in French; or
- The child has received his/her elementary and/or secondary school education in Canada in French; or
- The child is currently receiving his/her education in Canada in French.

There are two francophone program schools in Vancouver: École Rose-des-Vents and École Anne-Hébert.

had begun French school in September 2002. Following is a summary of the participants' individual stories.

4.2.A Carole

Carole was raised in Quebec City where she attended school in French. During the first few years of elementary school, she went to a school where children were taught to write phonetically and she did not learn traditional grammar and writing. When she switched schools in grade three, she worked very hard to re-learn spelling and grammar that conformed to traditionally accepted convention. She describes her difficulty in writing, stemming from her early elementary school education, as something that has "always been a problem for me...." Although, throughout her adult life, she has continuously put effort into bettering her written French, she describes that the trouble with writing remains "like a stain". In order to help improve her written French and English, and also to provide an additional career option, Carole enrolled in a correspondence course to become a certified translator (of written text). She began the course a few years ago but stopped pursuing the certificate when her son was born in August 2001.

Carole moved to Vancouver 16 years ago, at age 25. She lives in Vancouver's West End with Dave, a monolingual English speaker, and their son, Jean. She has worked at Immigration Canada for 15 years and she will be returning to work on a part-time basis in October 2003. In preparation for her return back to work, Jean recently began English childcare close to his home three days a week.

4.2.B Nicole

Nicole was raised in a small francophone city in the province of Quebec. She did her schooling in French but participated in English language exchange programs during highschool and university, noting that it was as if she knew that her future would be largely in English. She studied occupational therapy at an English university in Montreal and it was at that time that she met with Andrew, whom she later married. Andrew, Nicole says, “manages very well” in French but “did not feel confident enough” to pursue his career in a francophone environment. He moved to Vancouver shortly after completing his degree and Nicole arrived six months later, in 1994, at age 29. Here she has lived since, with the exception of two years spanning from January 2000 to December 2001, during which time she and her family lived in Boston. Nicole works full-time as an occupational therapist in Burnaby, a pace she finds hectic, but is taking on while her husband begins his home-based business. At the time of the interview, Nicole’s daughter, MacKenzy, had just completed kindergarten at L’ École Rose-des-Vents and her son, Frederick, who is 3 years old, was attending an English family daycare. Nicole speaks primarily French to her daughter but regularly catches herself, mid-way through a conversation, speaking in English. Nicole generally speaks English to her son for he strongly rejected her efforts to speak French to him when he was younger. She says that although he now tolerates her speaking French to him without becoming highly frustrated, he responds to her only in English. Nicole thanks her daughter’s school for giving her a tremendous amount of support in pursuing her French. For Nicole, having the *option* to access French resources is very important. “For me, it’s not so much to use [the resources] much, but it’s having the option”.

4.2.C Odette

Odette was born and raised in a small town in the Province of Quebec and she, like Nicole and Carole, did her schooling in French. She completed her undergraduate and graduate degrees in fine arts at an English and French university respectively. It was while writing her masters thesis that she began to question her competence in written French. Her thesis supervisor, she recalls, was very “picky” and she frequently felt that she hadn’t mastered a sufficiently high standard of French throughout her previous schooling to write with the ease and competence that she would have wanted to write with. It was while studying that she met Ian, a fellow class mate. She moved to Vancouver in 1995, with Ian, at age 34. In the winter of 2001, their son, Félix, was born. Since his birth, Odette has assumed the primary care responsibilities for Félix and has taught visual arts to adults on a part-time basis. Currently, she is working on a writing project and caring for her son. Since her son’s birth, she doubts her choice of words much more often, and is more concerned with her language loss than she was in the past.

I’ve noticed I have a lot of trouble with gender...not for everything, but...For example, I’ve always said “une avion”, and then, at some point, I told myself “it isn’t une avion, it’s *un* avion”, and I had to go to the dictionary to check. Then, I had to ask myself if I’d always said “une avion”. Have I always said it wrong? It’s fascinating, because it’s not like I can check. I’d have to call my parents and maybe they’ve always said it right and I’ve always said it wrong (laughs). It’s strange because we don’t know where it [language] was lost...Is it by living here? By being in a different environment? Because people from Quebec don’t speak an impeccable perfect French. It’s a French that over there is acceptable and accepted. But now that I’m here and I want to speak correctly, I suddenly have all these doubts.”

Je questionne beaucoup plus les mots quand je lui parle. J’ai remarqué que j’ai beaucoup de difficultés avec les genres, à savoir un/une. Pas pour tout, mais...Par exemple, je disais toujours “une avion”, puis à un moment donné, je me suis dit, “ce n’est pas une avion, c’est un avion”, puis il a fallu que j’aie dans le dictionnaire pour aller voir. Puis, je me suis demandé, est-ce que j’ai toujours dit “une avion”? Est-ce que je l’ai toujours dit incorrectement? C’est très fascinant, parce que je ne peux plus vérifier, non plus. Faudrait que je téléphone à mes

parents et peut-être eux ils disent un avion, et moi je disais “une avion”, tu sais? (rires). Alors, c’est drôle, on ne sait pas où on l’a perdu...est-ce que c’est en venant ici? En habitant ici? En étant dans un milieu différent? Parce que les Québécois, on ne parle pas un français impeccable. C’est un langage qui là-bas est accepté et acceptable. Mais, là quand tu arrives et tu veux faire comme il faut, j’ai plein de doute tout d’un coup.

4.2.D Pascale

Pascale was born in Quebec where she lived for the first four years of her life. Her parents are both francophones: her father is from Belgium and her mother is from a small town in the province of Quebec. Between the ages of four and sixteen, Pascale moved frequently because of her parents’ work. She lived in Iran, Belgium, Ottawa, Montreal and changed schools regularly, attending French, English and bilingual schools. However, the majority of her education until grade 13, was in French. At age 19, she left Montreal where she had been living and dancing professionally for three years and moved to Germany to pursue her dancing profession. She lived and danced professionally in Germany for five years. In Germany, Pascale met Graham, another professional dancer and Canadian. Pascale recalls that it was during her five years in Germany where her daily activities were conducted primarily in English that she began to lose her French. Pascale and Graham moved back to Canada in 1995 and agreed to live in Vancouver because Graham wanted to make his home in this city and did not wish to live in Montreal. Although Graham is a native English speaker, he learned French in school and speaks French fluently. He and Pascale speak English together but both Graham and Pascale speak French to their daughters, Colette and Élise. Colette currently attends an English pre-school on a part-time basis and Élise will be attending an English daycare come September 2003 when Pascale returns to study at the university, part-time. Pascale finds her language loss “frustrating and depressing”, and has contemplated ways

to prevent further loss but says “There is very little time to include French...If French isn’t easy to access, making the effort is difficult...I am struggling to find a balance. It’s always a challenge, to find time...”

4.2.E Delores

Delores was born and raised in a small town in Manitoba. Her mother is a francophone who spoke French to her children but was also fluent in English. Her father, bilingual in Ukrainian and English, spoke English only to his children. Delores attended a French elementary school, a bilingual middle school and an English highschool. The community in which she lived was bilingual and so were her friendships. Delores moved to Vancouver in 1989 after spending five years in Regina working as a legal secretary. She lives in North Vancouver with her husband, Victor, and their daughter Dimitra who is 3 ½ years old. Delores speaks mainly French to her daughter but has noticed that, as her daughter ages and her vocabulary expands, she is beginning to speak to Dimitra more often in English. Like Nicole, she frequently catches herself in mid-conversation, speaking English with her daughter. Says Delores “you really have to make a conscious effort to use French when you live here [because English is everywhere]*²”. She describes how, in the past, her language loss “did not bother me” and recalls “..I knew that I would get it back if I wanted it. Not to the same level...No, I was never scared [that I would lose it] – I didn’t realize to what extent I would be having difficulty. I really didn’t.*”

² Words that were originally uttered in English by participants are indicated by an asterisk, as previously mentioned in section 3.9.

4.2.F Marie-France

Marie-France grew up in Montreal where she was raised in a French-English bilingual household. She did her elementary and highschool education in French. She left Montreal at age twenty-three and moved to Vancouver in 1985. Marie-France is a single mother who lives with her 2 ½ year old son, Shaham, in a coop in the East End of Vancouver. She has twin daughters, aged 20, whom she mentioned but did not talk much about. Marie-France cares for her son full-time with no support from family or other child-care providers. She receives income assistance from the government and is under high financial stress. She explains her lack of involvement in the Francophone community "...on social assistance, that is another thing that stops us from being able to go out. We don't have the means to even get out of the house. We don't have enough money, just to pay the bills, a bit of food, the money is out a week before the next cheque. It's very hard to live like this." In the fall, Marie-France has enrolled to begin school at Langara College Campus with the aim of eventually working and earning a decent salary. Her son will attend a family daycare where the caretaker speaks French. Currently, the effort of being a full-time single mother on social assistance consumes almost all her energy. About her son, she comments "It's a demanding age, he's after me all day, he wants something all the time."

4.2.G Christine

Christine was born in Calgary and raised there for nine years before moving to Ottawa. Although her parents both spoke French to her at home and she attended a French school in Ottawa, she grew up bilingual and English became her preferred language of play and leisure early in childhood. Her parents were, she recalls, "always

nagging” her to speak French, but she and her sisters would roll their eyes and continued to favour English. Christine moved to Montreal and completed her university education in English; she did not socialize with other francophones. She recalls “So, my connection with French started to – not disappear – but to become extinguished”. In 1994, while she was travelling in Asia for one year, Christine met Sergio, a man originally from Argentina whom she later married. She moved to Vancouver in 1995 where she now lives with her husband and their daughter who is 3 ½ years old. At the time of the interview, Christine was commuting from her home in North Vancouver to work, full-time, as a teacher in a bilingual elementary school in Vancouver. Her daughter will be beginning French pre-school in September 2003.

4.3 Interview Results

Several broad themes repeatedly emerged when I analyzed the transcripts originating from the conversations the women and I had had in the summer of 2003. First, although the individual participants experienced and described their language loss in different ways, all cited an attachment to their francophone culture and identity as a reason for speaking to their children in French. Second, the women in the study claimed that their children provided the motivation to improve their own French mothertongue and were participating in various activities that helped them maintain and build their French fluency. Their participation in these activities following motherhood had increased as compared to their participation prior to motherhood. Third, lack of resources in the community, lack of time, and the fact that their partner was not fluent in French were key barriers the women identified in their ability to more actively pursue a

French linguistic lifestyle. Fourth, participants in the study named ideal circumstances and resources they felt could support their desire to improve their fluency in French.

4.3.A Language and Identity

Prior to motherhood, the majority of the women in the study carried out their lives almost entirely in English. As a result, all of the women had experienced some loss of their mothertongue. The women perceived, experienced and described this loss in different ways. The women believed that sharing their mothertongue with their children was an important connection to their francophone culture and family and many described their choice as a gift to their children. Most of the women recalled the decision to speak French to their newborn child as being clear and apparent and felt that it would make no sense to communicate in another language with their child.

4.3.A.i Descriptions of Language Loss

All of the participants in the study had experienced some loss of their French mothertongue. This loss was felt to varying degrees and manifested in different ways but always resulted in a sense of frustration, discontent, or longing.

Carole: For the first 16 years here, I barely used my French... At work, everything is in English. Occasionally, I had francophone colleagues and would always speak to them in French. There were phone conversations with my mother. But, that too, it is always the same thing, the same vocabulary. It was as if my French wasn't evolving. So, for years, I was in this state of incompetence. I felt like I couldn't speak English like I wanted and I was losing my French and unable to speak French like I wanted either. This type of incompetence weighed heavily on my shoulders for years.

Participants described a loss of vocabulary and expressed concern over the fact that their French had not been evolving as it would have had they been living in a francophone environment. Odette, when speaking of her personal experience, felt that the challenge

extended beyond maintaining her language to assuring that “the language remains alive, that it evolves”.

All of the women said they lacked French vocabulary for work or other hobbies that they conducted only in English. More aware of their doubts, difficulties and hesitations when speaking French, several participants described the French language as being complicated. The majority of the participants said they found it more difficult to write and read in French as compared to doing the same activities in English. Many of the women interviewed said that it was easier to do these tasks in English, especially when they felt tired, rushed, or wanted to enjoy themselves more fully. For me, not being able to write confidently and easily in French is extremely frustrating; I struggle to write simple sentences and always check a reference text to ensure that I have correctly conjugated my verbs and properly spelled words.

Pascale: French, I’ve realized is such a beautiful language. One takes longer to express the same thing and it seems that I lack patience now towards written French, or more intellectual French. It’s like I’m at a lower level than before in my education. I can’t focus on a literary piece of work anymore... It’s like I find more anchors in English. In French, I feel like I’m plummeting down a steep hill, (gestures as if she’s trying to grab onto something)... That I find frustrating and a little depressing.

Pascale: Le français, je me suis aperçu est une langue tellement belle, on prend plus longtemps à exprimer la même chose et on dirait que j’ai même plus la patience. J’ai un manque de patience envers le français écrit, ou plus intellectuel. On dirait que je suis maintenant à un niveau peut-être secondaire 3 ou 4 dans ma tête. Je n’suis plus capable de me fixer à une oeuvre littéraire, ou autre en français... On dirait que je trouve plus les ancres en anglais. Mais en français, on dirait que je déboule la colline (gestures as if she’s trying to grab onto something). Alors, ça, je trouve ça très frustrant et un peu déprimant.

For some, the awareness of loss could be traced to a particular memory or incident.

Pascale recalls responding to an email from her aunt three years ago:

All of a sudden, I felt uncomfortable, “shit, I can’t remember how to conjugate that verb, I’ll have to use another”. So, here I was having to use substitutes

because I couldn't remember how to conjugate the verb off the top of my head. Having to find an alternative made me sad and bothered me.

I recall, as a teenager, switching to English with my mother when I wanted to express myself more fully. Especially when the topic was highly emotional, I would switch to English because I felt “more powerful” than I did when communicating in French. Delores, too, recollects “falling back” on English with her family because she had, over time, become more comfortable in English than in French.

The consequence of loss was frequently accentuated as mothers endeavoured to communicate well with their children. Some of the women described the regular use of a French dictionary when reading to their children. Others noted that they frequently found themselves, mid-way through a conversation, speaking to their child in English and commented on having to be “vigilant” in order to maintain the conversation in French. Yet others talked about lacking the vocabulary to describe a scene or event. Said Christine,

I have no doubts about wanting to speak French to my daughter. The doubts come when I think that my French isn't good enough. I end up speaking less to my daughter [than if I were speaking in English] because it is more of an effort and because I sometimes lack the vocabulary.

Interestingly, many of the participants felt that they were able to re-acquire their French fluency within days of being immersed in a francophone environment where their conversations and interactions were conducted in French and where French was the majority language heard, seen and used in their surroundings.

4.3.A.ii Language as a Gift and a Source of Pleasure

Despite language loss and the effort required to speak French, all of the participants in the study had an attachment to French, as demonstrated by their

commitment to speak French to their children. Several participants talked about the pleasure they feel when speaking French, specifying that this pleasure was not derived from ease of speaking, but rather from something more closely related to their sense of identity.

Odette: I speak French to my son because it is my language... I do it so he can understand me – so he can know me fully... I'd be a total fake if I raised him in English... I manage well in English, but it remains a foreign language to me. Even if one masters the language, it's as if the heart knows that it is not our language. I've never wanted English to be my language. I don't want that to change (laughs)! ... French is the way I think. Language is a way of feeling things, of seeing the world... Completely different. Even if the differences are small, they are there and are meaningful.

Pascale: I feel more pleasure speaking French. I feel you'll know me better, discover me in a different way because you are francophone and you'll discover the francophone me. You wouldn't get the same person, the same results [if we were speaking English].

Women enjoyed speaking French for a variety of reasons which included a feeling that they were more themselves in French, that they typically perceived a stronger warmth when conversing with other French-Canadians, and that there was a stronger attachment to words and their meanings in French as compared to English words. Speaking French, in these cases, led to feelings of inclusion within a community of speakers. Odette had a sense that people saw her as different when she spoke in English and, as a result, she felt more excluded when she communicated in English. She didn't perceive this exclusion negatively and claimed that, in fact, it suited her. Expressing myself in French nearly always generates self-doubt and so I participate less readily in conversations in French; as such, I feel a stronger sense of exclusion among francophones than I do around anglophones. Unlike Odette, this sense of exclusion does not suit me for I want to participate and feel annoyed when my own lack of confidence – and perceived sense of incompetence -- impedes me from doing so.

The women's sense of identity, as has been mentioned before, was closely tied to their use of language. Identity formation is a highly complex process which is affected by notions of community and influenced by practices of exclusion and inclusion. Pascale, who spoke English without the trace of a French accent, talked about having a "split personality" in English and said she felt more "whole" when she conversed in French. All the women that I was able to speak with following the first interview said that they felt their identity was definitely that of a francophone. In my own experience, my sense of francophone identity shifted and became stronger in motherhood. In fact, several of my close friends even commented on the notable difference in my interest in French since Loïc's birth; one girlfriend, who met me once my mother had moved away, said that she had never even thought of me as a francophone prior to my son's birth. Pascale's sense of identity was also very interesting and complex. During the interview, Pascale reflected that, as a result of having lived in numerous countries and attended a variety of schools (unilingual French, unilingual English and bilingual), French language and identity has a number of meanings. Said Pascale:

...In fact, I have a fundamental identity problem....I don't feel entirely Quebecoise in Quebec because I have a Belge father and my accent is fairly neutral. And, I feel a bit like a chameleon because I am able to act like a pure Quebecoise, I can also put on the French act because I did part of my schooling in the French system [from France], I can also act a bit Belge. So, my French identity is very diffuse, very bizarre...So, for me, being in Vancouver is very reassuring, it's like escapism. Here, in Vancouver, I'm francophone and I don't have to put a precise label on it like I'd have to if I were living elsewhere. And, I like that. I'm francophone."

Pascale: C'est ça le problème – en fait, j'ai un problème d'identité fondamental... Je ne me sens pas Quebecoise complètement au Québec parce que j'ai un père Belge et j'ai un accent plutôt neutre. Et, je me sens même comme un caméléon, je suis capable de faire la Quebecoise complète, je suis capable de faire la Française de France quand je suis à Paris parce que j'ai étudié au Lycée Claudel, je suis capable de faire un peu la Belge. Donc, mon identité francophone est très diffuse et *très* bizarre. Donc au fait pour moi, c'est très rassurant d'être

ici, c'est comme escapism. Ici à Vancouver je suis une francophone et j'suis pas obligé de me mettre a very precise label comme je devrai le faire ailleurs. Et j'aime ça. Je suis francophone.

Many women referred to the fact that the French language was a big part of their culture, history and identity and that they wished to transmit that to their child. The majority also claimed that it was important that their children learn French in order to be able to communicate with their francophone family (even if the family members speak English). Several participants in the study perceived that knowing French was an “advantage” and spoke enviously of countries in Europe where multilingualism is the norm. Nearly all of the women described their choice in terms of a “gift” to their children. The women who had learned English as adults commented on the effort required to do so and felt that helping their children learn French was a gift because children learn languages with more ease than do adults. Speaking French was also considered a “richness” that mothers wished to share with their children. From their own perspective, the women felt that speaking French was also a benefit. When I was interviewed, I told my friend:

Having another language has brought me so much... it has opened me up to more people, to another culture, to a lot of things I wouldn't understand [if I only spoke English], because French culture is very different than English culture. And, I find that it's a whole richness in my life that is so intangible.*

Nicole echoed my sentiments, sensing that speaking French “opened” her world in a way that couldn't take place if she spoke only one language. Both Pascale and I described the ability to speak French as a connection to our past and, specifically, to our childhood. Delores described the advantage of being multilingual in more pragmatic terms, noting that she had more job skills than someone who is monolingual. She enjoyed the sense

that she could choose between languages and saw herself as having greater choices and increased freedom as a result of speaking French.

4.3.A.iii The Decision to Speak French to my Child Was Clear

The decision to speak French to the children at their birth was, in all but one case, described as clear, obvious, and natural. In fact, the majority of the women did not recall going through a decision-making process.

Carole: I did not make the decision to speak French to Jean. I think it was just there. It was, like, obvious. It's as if it were impossible to think of doing otherwise.

Others echoed the above sentiments, stating that "it wasn't really a decision", but rather a "given". Christine's story differed slightly for she could trace her decision back to a particular incident that occurred when she was attending a French highschool in Ottawa.

Christine: I was always getting caught by the drama teacher speaking English, and was often in detention because you'd get put in detention if you got caught [speaking English] more than three times. One afternoon, the [drama] teacher organized for us to see a play...and it was about a mother and her child and the mother had lost her French. The child, now an adult, had asked his mother "Mommy what are the songs you used to sing for me in French?" and she had answered "Oh, I don't remember" and I had started to bawl. I felt so guilty – like, ungrateful...disrespectful, everything... Then, I started to more or less make an effort after that and I decided, at that point, that I'd always speak French to my children. Because it is important for me, it was part of my culture, my identity. And, I wanted to continue that.

One notable exception to all of the above is the case of Pascale for, as she describes, it was her husband who encouraged her to speak French to their first-born child. During her pregnancy, Pascale recalls that she did not think much beyond childbirth and the only language issue she and her husband considered was finding a name that could be suitable in both French and English. Once her child was born, all she

could think of was “breastfeeding and sleeping” and she began to speak to Colette in English.

Pascale: My daughter was six weeks old and Graham had returned from work one night and had said to me “you’re speaking *English* to the baby” (perplexed). I felt a little awkward and sheepish and I said “I know. It doesn’t feel good, you’re right, but I’m kind of not feeling right about the French either, I’m very confused...I don’t even know her, she’s our new baby, I feel like I’m trying to get to know a stranger and I don’t know what language to speak to her.*”

She continues, explaining that her husband encouraged her with the following words:

“Honey, you’re French. If you don’t start now, you never will. Speak French to this baby, she’s your child, she’s French, she’s half-French.” Although Pascale questions why she did not instinctively speak French to her first child (she did, however, speak French with her second right from her birth), she states that once she made the switch, she “did not dream” of speaking to her in English.

Although the choice to speak French was, for almost all the women, an easy one, most participants recalled that speaking French to their children felt forced at first. One participant described having to “discipline” herself to speak French to her newborn and remembers giving herself “pep-talks”. I recall watching a video taken when Loïc was a few weeks old and feeling that my French voice sounded foreign to my self. Nicole said she struggled with “mother’s guilt” over the fact that she frequently, without being aware of it, switched between French and English even though professionals promote the “one-parent-one-language principle”³.

4.3.B *Motivation and Participation*

The participants credited their children for the desire to improve their

³ In families who adopt a language strategy founded on the one parent-one-language principle, each parent speaks a different language to the child. This practise is believed to enhance the development and maintenance of children’s bilingual abilities. (Yamamoto, 2001, p. 99)

mothertongue and for wanting to speak French. The participants in the study described, in motherhood, taking more interest in French and/or being more involved in the francophone community as compared to before the birth of their child.

The women in the study repeatedly said that their children motivated them to speak French. Said Carole about her son: “he has awakened the need for me to speak French”. Many of the women gave “thanks to” their children for generating this desire to improve and maintain their French fluency. For several of the participants, the motivation to speak French was concomitantly fueled by the knowledge that the mother was, until the child reached school-age, her child’s principal French language educator. That knowledge, for me, has been a source of motivation and of stress. Perceiving that my French is not sufficiently good (by whose standards? I ask myself), I have felt inspired to improve it; sadly, most of my energy goes not to improving my French, but rather to feeling frustrated that doing so requires time and resources that I feel I don’t have ready access to.

All of the women said that they use their French much more now than they did prior to motherhood. The participants were accessing a variety of French resources and, in some cases, their involvement in the community had changed notably since the birth of their children. In fact, some of the women had intentionally avoided the francophone community prior to motherhood. Carole and Nicole, two of the women who were raised entirely in French, spoke about their intentional lack of involvement with the francophone community when they arrived in BC – an involvement that did not restart until after the birth of their children. They describe how, upon their arrival in Vancouver, they were keen to learn English and felt their progress would be impeded by regular

contact with francophones. Nicole said her decision to remain uninvolved also had to do with the fact that she felt no connection to the people she met at the Centre culturel when she explored that venue.

Nicole: When I arrived, I went maybe one or two times [to the Centre culturel], but I didn't have the feeling, I didn't click with the people I met in the francophone community. Later, I didn't feel the need anymore. I listened to the French radio, I heard French on the street, I listened to the French TV, I spoke with my family and friends each week – I didn't miss French...I had my little French side and that was fine.

For some of the other women, the lack of involvement was not calculated, but rather a product of living in an anglophone environment. The women living and working in Greater Vancouver pursued leisure and employment in English and all of them said that, prior to their child's birth, they made very little use of French. Aside with occasional conversations with their family, nearly all other conversations and leisure and work activities took place in English⁴.

For some participants, including myself, a shift in concern over language loss occurred during pregnancy. There were participants who recalled feeling their French "had to improve" for they would need to converse with their child eventually. Delores described not being able to complete a sentence in French. However, actions to improve their French were, when taken, limited to some reading in French, listening to the French CBC and brief French conversation. For the other participants, the francophone revival occurred after childbirth.

⁴ The only exception to this phenomena was Carole: she too had been living entirely in English until one and one-half years before her son was born when she was hired, through her work with the federal government, to teach someone French. What began as a part-time duty, evolved into a full-time position where she was responsible solely for teaching one individual French. She credits that opportunity and her son for helping her immerse back into French.

4.3.C Activities That Contribute to Language Maintenance

4.3.C.i Individual Activities

With the exception of Nicole and Christine who had full-time employment outside the home, and Pascale, the participants reported that, in comparison to before motherhood, they read more often in French and listened more often to the French radio. Collectively participants read a variety of materials including novels borrowed from the library, purchased books, as well as magazines and *L'Express du Pacifique*, Vancouver's only French newspaper. Reading and listening to the radio, participants felt, helped increase their vocabulary. Radio was appreciated as a way of staying in touch with current, well-spoken language. Odette and I shared a strong enthusiasm for radio shows that originated in the province of Quebec. We both felt that shows taped in BC were less beneficial in terms of language maintenance because the interviews are frequently with francophones who have experienced language loss or with anglophones who are struggling to express themselves in French. Several of the participants said they watch some French television, particularly the news and some also listen to French music on compact discs.

4.3.C.ii Activities with Children

Although some of the participants read in French, listened to the French radio and watched some French television, it was through activities and interactions with their children that women felt they were most actively maintaining their language, preventing language loss, and getting involved with the francophone community.

Conversations and Reading

The ongoing act of communicating in French with their children had contributed to the improvement of each woman's French oral abilities. Several participants noted that they were careful to articulate clearly and to speak slowly and well now that they were speaking French to their children.

Odette: It's really since Felix was born that I want to ensure that I speak [French] properly. Maybe not well, but rather properly in the sense that I am expressing myself so that he'll learn to speak French properly.

Odette: C'est plus depuis que Félix est né que je veux m'assurer de parler correctement. Peut-être pas bien, mais, correcte la façon dans laquelle je m'exprime pour que lui il ait un français correct.

Most women felt that the ongoing acts of describing and explaining which are part of the common conversations mother have with their young children frequently challenged them to learn new vocabulary. Many of the participants said that reading to their children in French helped them expand their own vocabulary. The mothers believed that, as their children aged and the books they read became more complicated, they would continue to benefit by learning additional vocabulary. Many of the women borrowed books from the public library for their children and some used Tire-Lire⁵.

Singing and Music

Many of the mothers sang regularly with their children and felt that music was a good way to learn language. The women were especially fond of singing traditional songs from their own childhood and also learned songs from contemporary French artists. Nicole recalls playing music and singing a lot when MacKenzy was young and said that

⁵ Tire-Lire is a resource centre, physically based in Coquitlam, available to all members of the FPFCP for an annual fee of \$10. Tire-Lire has a large French selection of children's books, compact discs, videos, DVDs as well as puppets, games and parenting magazines for adults. Members can order on-line, via fax or phone and items are mailed to the member's home, free of charge. Return postage is also free.

she tended to use videos more often now that her daughter was older. Although Marie-France said she sang with her son, she also told me that she could not afford the cost of purchasing music.

Informal Gatherings with Friends

Activities with children that promoted the mothers' language maintenance sometimes extended beyond the house and family. Several women said that they enjoyed friendships with one or a few other francophone mothers and their children. These women would plan visits where the children could play together (and with their mothers) and during which time mothers could talk in French.

Organized Activities

There are very few organized activities in Vancouver for francophone parents and their pre-school aged children. Two of the existing activities, the Chansons, Contes, Comptines and the Mini-Franco-Fun were attended almost exclusively by mothers although these activities were open to both mothers and fathers with young children. Delores had enrolled in Chansons, Contes, Comptines, a 10 week pilot program offered, free of charge, by Éducacentre where mothers and their children met weekly for 1 ½ hours. An animator would lead the group of 10 or so parents and their children in songs, rhymes and storytelling. Delores said that she enjoyed the exchange of information regarding events and resources in French that occurred among group members. Carole, Odette, and I participated in another organized activity called the Mini-Franco-Fun, a weekly drop-in attended by francophone mothers and their children. The group meets at Gordon Neighbourhood House in downtown Vancouver for 1 ½ hours per week. The Mini-Franco-Fun is an unstructured gathering during which mothers play with their

children and talk amongst themselves. The only structured activity occurs during the last 20 minutes when mothers and their children sit in a circle and sing. There are usually between five and eight adults who attend with their children who are typically two to three years of age. Four of the participants in the study partook, this year, in one or both of the annual designated-francophone “larger-scale” activities for children. These are the francophone day at the International Children’s Festival and the Festival d’été organized by the Centre culturel⁶.

It is worth noting that, with the exception of Odette and Nicole, the women rarely participated in any French leisure activities in the community with other francophone adults when activities did not involve their children. Going to French movies, concerts, plays, getting together with francophone friends, or renting French videos was not something women did regularly, if at all.

4.3.C.iii Unique Ways of Pursuing Francophonie

Nearly every woman had found a unique manner to develop and pursue her francophonie in a way that was very different than she had done prior to motherhood. Below, I describe each of these unique strategies:

Carole: Carole had established, over the past year, a weekly gathering of francophone mothers and their children. This group, entitled the Mini-Franco-Fun, began because Carole was “panicked” that her son would not learn French if he heard only his mother speaking that language. Having heard that her child would accept French more readily if he heard other people – not only his mother – speak French, Carole volunteered to begin

⁶ Yearly, the Vancouver International Children’s Festival devotes one day in their program to shows that are bilingual or have some French content. Every year in June, the Centre culturel organizes a “Summer Festival” and dedicates one afternoon to activities and performances in French for children.

a Mini-Franco-Fun in her neighbourhood. She has devoted several hours every week, since June 2002, to coordinating all the details of each weekly gatherings including leading the singing.

Nicole: Nicole has connected with the francophone community “more than ever before” since her daughter started school at l’École Rose-des-Vents in September 2002. Nicole participated in a committee for the after school day-care, volunteered in classroom activities and field-trips, and assisted with preparing some documentation for families at the school. In this way, Nicole has started to meet other francophone parents and their children. Together, the mothers and their children occasionally participate in activities outside of school. She cited how, for example, this year, a group of parents and their children went to the Festival d’été organized by the Centre culturel.

Odette: Unlike Carole and Nicole who have become involved directly via their children, Odette’s involvement has been more solitary: she has begun to write a book in French. A teacher of visual arts for the past four years and an artist, she had experienced a burn-out and was now thoroughly enjoying the change in focus from teaching to writing.

Delores: Delores has pursued her francophonie by means of volunteer work. She has, for the past eighteen months been on the steering committee which is responsible for establishing the first French group daycare in Vancouver. The committee is comprised entirely of Francophones and she devotes between five and eleven hours a month to her work.

Marie-France: Marie-France, at age 42, is going back to school in September 2003 with the aim of becoming a French teacher. She said, “I figure that since I’ve already got the

language, why not use it? I tell myself that I could contribute to the French language here in Vancouver.”

Christine: Christine is doing what Marie-France is aspiring to do in the future: teach in French or bilingual schools. Although she hadn’t done her education degree with the aim of working in French immersion, that is the context she has ended up teaching in and recognizes that her work has allowed her to better her French.

If I didn’t work as a teacher in a French school, I’d be in bad shape.

Si je ne travaillais pas comme prof dans une école francophone, ça ferait vraiment dur mon affaire.

As for me, aside from undertaking this study, I also started a French Parent-Child Mother Goose Program⁷ at my local community centre. My motivations for doing so were twofold: firstly, I felt there was a lack of French activities for francophone parents and their children and, secondly, I hoped that, through my involvement, I might build relationships with some francophone parents in my neighbourhood. In order to facilitate the program, which I did from September 2002 – March 2003, I learned a large number of French songs and also attended a workshop to become a certified Mother Goose facilitator. I ended my involvement in the spring because most of the attendees were anglophones who wanted their infants and toddlers to be exposed to French and, thus, one of my major needs was not being met.

Only Pascale, at the time of the interview, had not taken on any particular line of work or apparent “project” that brought her closer, in any obvious way, to the local francophone community.

⁷ The Parent-Child Mother Goose Program is a national program that promotes the use of the oral tradition to help parents bond with and nurture their young children. By focusing on the pleasure and power of using rhymes, songs and stories, parents are helped to gain skills and confidence which can enable them to create positive family patterns.

4.3.D Barriers

Lack of resources in the community, lack of time, and the fact that, with one exception, their partner was not fluent in French were key barriers these particular women identified in their ability to improve their mothertongue.

4.3.D.i. *Lack of Resources in the Community*

Among all the participants, Nicole is the one who perceived most enthusiastically the future of French in the community and in her family. Since Nicole's daughter had started school in September, 2002, Nicole felt "rather satisfied" with respect to the options available for francophones. Through her involvement at her daughter's school, Nicole was now in touch with a group of people she felt connected to and talked excitedly about exploring the various activities she was learning about through the school and parents.

Nicole: Sure, there are always things to improve, but I sense a lot of life [in the community], a lot of desire.

Oui, je suis plutôt satisfaite par rapport aux options. C'est sûr qu'il y a toujours des choses à améliorer, mais je sens beaucoup de vie, de vouloir.

Unlike Nicole, the other participants in the study, none of whom had children at school, felt that there was a deficiency of services available in French for mothers and their pre-school aged children. Most mothers relied completely on themselves to improve their French.

Odette: Well, it boils down to a personal discipline, in the end, because I don't really see what I could do, outside of making the effort myself...

Odette: Ben, c'est juste une discipline personnelle finalement, parce que je ne vois pas vraiment ce que je pourrais faire, en dehors de moi-même...c'est juste à chaque jour d'être consciente de ça.

Others, like Christine, blamed themselves for not being aware of resources available for francophones in Vancouver and for not being more actively involved in the francophone community.

Christine: There probably are services, or some francophone associations... It'd be nice if there were plays and shows... I know that there are some... but there is no group or network to keep me informed. I have no idea what is going on. It's rather my fault, because there must be something in Vancouver – there is a francophone centre – or something – what is the name of the centre?

Some of the women were not aware of the services offered by the Centre culturel and those that were generally felt that there was little of interest to them or their children.

Said Pascale “I had never been there before my daughter was born... Now, I've been there two or three times... but I haven't found much there really.”

As previously mentioned, women attempted to improve their French principally through reading, listening to the radio and connecting with other francophone mothers. As a group, the women acknowledged the various resources which are available, more or less on a regular basis, such as the public library, Tire-Lire (closed in the summer), the Mini-Franco-Fun, and French story-time at the Centre culturel and the North Vancouver public library. Only Christine was not familiar with these services. Individually and collectively, however, the services did not provide a strong support base to the women whose children were not yet at school.

The participants who borrowed French books from the public library felt that the choice of books, authors and videos was limited and not up-to-date; this impeded somewhat the frequency with which they read and watched French videos. The fact that only two branches in Vancouver carry French material also made it more difficult to access French materials. With respect to activities, most are offered infrequently (once a week or less and last between ½ hour – to 1 ½ hours) and mothers and their children

could not necessarily accommodate their schedules to make it to the activity at the assigned time. Furthermore, because some of the activities relied on volunteers to operate, they were not offered consistently throughout the year. Marie-France and I both separately recalled making a special trip to the Mini-Franco-Fun when there used to be one on the East Side of Vancouver only to find ourselves alone, with our children, because the volunteer-mother who had previously been organizing the weekly visits, had not been replaced by another volunteer. Both of us had been asked if we would like to take on this volunteer position with the Mini-Franco-Fun but had declined on the basis that we did not wish to commit to being involved in an activity we were not familiar with; nor did we feel we had the energy to add another task to motherhood.

In addition to taking responsibility for their own learning, the women in the study felt it was entirely up to them to provide opportunities for their children to learn French until the children began school. All the women were grateful for the existence of a French School Board and were very happy at the prospect of their child attending French school. They felt, however, that it was their responsibility to establish the basis for French communication in their child prior to the start of school. Those women whose children were showing a preference for speaking French felt relieved, like they had successfully (but, possibly only temporarily) conquered a large hurdle. Those whose children were speaking English, despite the mother speaking only or predominantly French to them, wondered what they had done wrong or felt that they had, as Odette put it, to "double up" their efforts. And so it is with eagerness that the women anticipated the child's immersion into French at school. Pascale described herself in a "waiting" state: waiting patiently for school to start because she felt school would provide an avenue for

her involvement in the francophone community, friendships, and overall pedagogical support given to fulfill her wish to her daughters to learn French and participate in francophone culture. Although, I too look forward to the ways in which Loïc's attendance at school will support me in my own language maintenance efforts, I am also concerned about the fact that I will be alone in being able to help him with his homework (since my partner does not speak French). Delores also expressed this same thought to me.

4.3.D.ii. Lack of Time

Not only did the participants feel that lack of resources created a barrier to improving their French, but they felt they lacked time and energy needed to read, listen to the radio, watch TV and participate in activities with their children.

Marie-France: I'm tired of diapers. I spend my day cleaning, cooking, cleaning, cooking, washing... I look forward to him being out of diapers. It'll give me a break... because I've got him all day, everyday.

Women who listened to the radio often did so in the car when the child was not present, whereas reading was done sporadically, normally when the child was sleeping. The women also considered it challenging to arrange play dates with other francophone friends and their children, given work-schedules, daycare schedules and other leisure activities that families engage in. Additionally, distance and subsequent time to reach a function's destination was an important factor that women considered when deciding to participate in an event: women preferred activities that were within walking distance or close driving distance (taking the bus was rarely mentioned). Whether she was employed full-time outside the home, or cared for her child full-time, each woman felt that various priorities competed for her time; this impeded her ability to improve her French for she

could not necessarily participate in, and take full advantage of, existing activities and resources.

4.3.D.iii Intentional Isolation

Women compensated for the lack of easily accessible resources by isolating themselves with their children so that they could have time to communicate only in French. In order to help limit the children's exposure to English, many of the mothers chose to be alone with their children so that they could immerse their child in French -- something that they could not do if the child and mother were with anglophones. Pascale described the intentional isolation as a "francophone bubble"; this was a place where she was completely free to communicate only in French to her daughters.

Carole: I think, sometimes, I prefer to be alone with Jean [on the 2 weekdays that he's not in daycare], I don't look for things in the community because there isn't anything, I like isolate myself and I think spending that time alone with him in French will become more and more important.

Carole: Je crois que des fois je préfère être seule avec Jean pendant ces deux jours-là, je ne cherche pas des choses dans la communauté parce qu'il n'y en a pas, je vais comme m'isoler parce que ça va devenir encore plus important que je passe ce temps-là avec lui en français.

Here, Carole is anxious about having less time with her son when she goes back to work in the fall of 2003. At that time, he will be spending nearly all his waking time in an English daycare. When not in daycare, he will be with both his parents. Since his parents speak English to one another, the child will have very little opportunity to be surrounded only by French. Having an English-speaking person in the adult relationship affects not only the child, but is one of the major barriers women identified to their own French-language improvement and involvement.

4.3.D.iv. Partner not Fluent in French

Each women, except Marie-France who is a single mother, spoke only or predominantly English to her partner and described events and circumstances that demonstrated that her partner's lack of French fluency was an impediment to her own ability to improve and maintain her French. Even though some of the women in the study described their partner as being able to manage well in French, each woman felt that the partner's lack of French fluency, as compared to her own, affected her pursuit of activities in French. The women whose partners did speak French had all attempted, at one time or another, to speak in French as a couple. All the women said that these episodes were very short for they had quickly become impatient with the slower pace of conversation and their partner's limited abilities to express themselves.

Interestingly, prior to the first interview, I had not contemplated the extent to which being in a linguistically exogamous relationship could limit an individual's ability to pursue a French linguistic lifestyle. For that reason, I had not probed this issue in the initial interviews. However, this theme came up repeatedly in the women's stories. When I conducted the follow-up interviews/conversations and asked women directly if they felt that their partner's lack of fluency impeded their own language development, most women denied that it did. But their stories contradicted them. The women said that social situations which involved French and English speakers, such as dinners at home with a francophone girlfriend and her spouse, were carried out mainly in English to accommodate for the fact that there was at least one monolingual English speaker. Other women said that they avoided social situations where there would be a majority of

francophones for concern that their husband would feel isolated, excluded or frustrated by the situation.

Delores: I notice, with my husband, that I find it hard to go to activities with francophones, he feels apart. That's why he doesn't often come. Well, what's he going to do? You know, he gets frustrated....

Delores: je m'aperçois avec mon mari, je trouve ça difficile d'aller aux activités avec les francophones, il se sent à part. C'est pour ça qu'il vient pas souvent. Ben, what's he going to do? T'sais, he gets frustrated...

In the above case, Delores believes that her husband's sense of frustration will motivate him to learn French, something she said that he'd like to do. Like Delores, Carole, Christine and I have partners who have said they would like to learn French; none of the men at the time of the study were, however, actively studying French.

Other women, knowing that their husband would withdraw socially from a situation where there was a majority of francophones, chose not to participate as a couple in activities of this type. Women described having to make choices between actively engaging in situations where they could communicate in French, or participating in an activity that directly involved their spouse and child. Women felt they had to determine priorities given limited flexible time, limited time to be together as a family and, in some cases, limited time to be with their children.

Pascale: I feel always a little torn, I think that's really the word, torn, between my needs and those of Graham's too. Because I know that if we had three francophone couples here in the house, he would feel apart. Even though he speaks French very well. He'd always feel apart. And that, that -- I always feel a bit guilty, I don't want to exclude him either.

Pascale: Je me sens toujours un peu torn, je pense que c'est vraiment le mot, déchire, entre mes besoins et ceux de Graham aussi. Parce que je sais que si on avait trois couples francophones ici dans la maison, il se sentirait un peu à l'écart. Malgré le fait qu'il parle très bien le français. Il se sentirait toujours à l'écart. Et ça ça -- je me sens toujours un peu coupable, je ne veux pas l'exclure, non plus.

The women, many of whom had partners who work full-time, frequently opted, when their husbands were home, to spend time as a family as opposed to participating in francophone activities either alone or with their children. In Carole's case, her husband's lack of French fluency was of chief concern for it meant that, as a family, communication would be limited to English; this, she predicted, would mean that, in the near future, her son would choose to speak in English when his father was present in order to include him in the conversation. For Carole, the thought of her son not speaking French created an "internal panic"; she desperately wanted Dave to learn French so that it could become the language of communication in the home.

In my own case, prior to this study, I had (to my own surprise) never contemplated the extent to which Raúl's inability to speak French affected my tendency to socialize in French. All my francophone friends had been made recently in motherhood and our time together always involved our children; thus, I didn't have the sense that I was depriving myself of adult relationships that I could otherwise have had if Raúl spoke French. Naturally, when I listened to the other women's stories, I realized that my francophone activities were largely restricted to activities I did with Loïc. Once, during the summer I went hiking with a group of francophones, without Loïc and without Raúl. Although I had fun and enjoyed meeting new people, I realized that I find it very difficult to take time to do something in French when it doesn't involve Loïc. I currently spend a lot of time away from Loïc as I work full-time to complete this thesis. When I'm not working, I generally want to be doing an activity or socializing with close friends in his presence or exercising. Other times I spend time with him because I feel as if I'd be acting too selfishly if I were to do something without him. I feel split between different

priorities and am not always sure where to put my time. I don't experience this same level of responsibility towards Raúl. However, if I were to develop closer relationships with other francophones through activities that did not involve my child, I would observe with interest how I negotiate issues of time alone, with my family, and with my spouse and shifts in feelings of responsibility towards Raúl and Loïc.

4.3.E Ideal Circumstances and Resources

The participants in the study named a variety of resources and circumstances that they felt would, most ideally, support them in maintaining and improving their French mothertongue. Some women specifically stated they wished Vancouver were more bilingual. They longed to be able to speak French to their grocer, the banker, their neighbour and other acquaintances. These same women made reference to the official bilingual status of Canada but lamented the fact that, in reality, bilingualism in this country is virtually non-existent. A few of the women said that, given the opportunity, they would like to live with their family, for one to three years, in a francophone environment, either in France or Canada. Others said that they would like to be able to use French in a work environment. The majority of the women expressed a wish for more expansive and up-to-date library resources, such as books, videos, DVDs for both them and their children. Several mothers commented that they frequently have to "Canadianize" French (from France) vocabulary in their toddler's books and wished for books with French-Canadian vocabulary. Delores suggested a Tire-Lire for adults: a resource centre with a rich selection of contemporary authors, current magazine subscriptions and music, that women could order from.

Many of the women, when asked if there were resources that they wished were in place to help improve their mothertongue, said that taking a course was not something they wanted to do. There was a sense that they were "above that": they had taken numerous French courses in the past and this type of formal content was not of interest. Odette, however, suggested that she would like to attend a weekly gathering that focussed on conversation. She imagined a situation whereby francophones could drop-in and converse in the presence of a resource person who could help with questions concerning sentence-structure or vocabulary. She was inspired by a similar program at her neighbourhood house for people learning to speak English. Pascale and I would like to participate in a book club and both felt we would enjoy the challenge involved with discussing the books' themes. A book club could provide us with incentive to read in French on a more regular basis.

All the women valued their existing friendships with other francophone women with children and cherished the limited circumstances that allowed them to socialize with these same people. With two exceptions, all the women also craved and wished for further opportunities to interact with other mothers and their children. The exceptions to the above were Odette who described herself as a loner and Nicole who, due to her active participation in parent committees for her daughter's school and after-school-care, interacted regularly with other francophone parents and felt fulfilled in that respect. Christine suggested having an email list and website to inform francophone parents of various activities taking place in Greater Vancouver. She also proposed that the website include a list of recommended books, music and movies. As someone who works full-time, she felt she would greatly appreciate having this kind of information in a central

location and readily available. In fact, many women mentioned how much effort it had taken them to learn of existing resources in French, such as daycares and schools.

Other participants in the study, however, wished for organized and regular parent-child playgroups in their neighbourhood and many commented that they would have liked the public libraries to offer more French equivalents to the English Parent-Child Mother Goose and story-time. The participants said that they would like these activities to be offered at a variety of times so that they could attend in addition to working full-time. The women felt that if these activities were advertised through an established organization in their neighbourhood, such as a community centre, that would greatly increase their likelihood of knowing about the activity.

Indeed, the women in the study spoke warmly and enthusiastically about their current friendships but lamented the fact that spending time with these friends was challenging due to conflicting schedules, various other competing priorities and physical distance. Having a larger number of activities available in a wider range of locations would give the women a greater chance to participate in activities with other francophones. This would help satisfy the women's needs to maintain their mothertongue and would also give them an opportunity to connect with one another.

4.4 Summary of Finding

The women in the study had diverse experiences of language loss. Although the women perceived and addressed the loss in various ways, they all described how their motivation to improve and maintain their native tongue had increased. The women spoke of having a strong sense of connection to their francophone identity and wished to transmit part of their culture and history to their children. They described feeling more

authentic when speaking French and sensed that they revealed themselves more openly by communicating in French as compared to communicating in English. Furthermore, many of the women spoke of the immediate connection they frequently establish when interacting with other francophones and of the pleasure they derived from speaking with other francophones. Women participated in a number of individual and group activities that helped them maintain their own mothertongue. However, few women engaged in regular social activities in French without their children.

Most of the women in the study felt there were limited supports and resources available in the community for their French mothertongue maintenance and identified barriers that prevented their participation: lack of time and the existence of other priorities. Some women blamed their own lack of initiative for not participating more fully in activities that could help their language maintenance. Many of the participants indicated that they restricted social activities with other francophone adults out of concern that their partners would feel excluded because of their inability to speak fluent French. Thus, women frequently participated in French activities with their children alone; social activities (in or outside of the home) that involved both their child and husband were carried out in English. The women offered suggestions for services that could assist with their language maintenance and development: the existence of more programs in French for mothers and their pre-school children, a better selection of books and videos at public libraries, and easier and more central access to information about services in French.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research was to explore how francophone mothers, having taken on the primary responsibility of teaching French to their young children, experience loss of their mothertongue and describe support and barriers to regaining and maintaining their native language. Participants were eight women who had one or two children, six years or younger, living at home with whom they spoke solely or predominantly in French. The women who were married on in common-law relationships spoke mainly or solely in English with their partners and only one of the fathers spoke mainly in French with his daughters. None of the women had francophone parents living in the province and only one had a sister living in town (with whom she speaks a mixture of French and English). Analysis of the interview transcripts revealed several themes. Firstly, although the women experienced language loss in diverse way, all the participants connected their decision to speak French with their children to an attachment with their own personal and cultural sense of identity. Second, participants described that, as compared to before motherhood, they were much more motivated to communicate in French and participate in various francophone activities. Third, women felt that lack of resources in the community, lack of time and having a partner with limited French fluency impeded on their ability to actively improve their French. Fourth, participants in the study believed that having a greater number of established activities for children and their parents whereby mothers could connect with one another and build friendships would greatly support their desire to improve their fluency in French.

5.2 Findings and Implications for Practice and Policy

This study aimed to gain further understanding into the following research questions:

1. How do francophone mothers residing in Greater Vancouver perceive the experience of maintaining and regaining their mothertongue?
2. How do the women feel supported or challenged in their decision to speak and improve their French while they take on the primary responsibility for teaching French to their pre-school aged children?
3. How do the women connect their experience of motherhood with their own language maintenance and revival?

It was my hope that by exploring and better understanding the experiences of francophone women who raise their children in French despite having first language loss, this research could facilitate mothertongue maintenance among francophone women in Greater Vancouver.

5.2.A Review of the Findings

The findings of this research suggest that francophone mothers in this study felt a powerful attachment to their francophone identity and sought to transmit, through language, a sense of their identity and cultural heritage to their children. This study reinforces what many authors (Stebbins, 1994; Wei, 2000; Yamamoto, 2001) have previously found: that a person's mothertongue is a key element of an individual's identity, well-being, dignity, culture, beliefs, knowledge and practices. Identity is simultaneously personal and collective and once a person is competent in a language, she can claim – or reject – membership in the linguistic community and can choose whether she wishes to identify publicly with the language (Stebbins, 2000, p. 34). By choosing to

transmit the language to their children, the women were publicly displaying their attachment to their mothertongue and demonstrating their desire to work for the survival and development of their language. Furthermore, the women derived pleasure from speaking French and so in “giving” the language to their child experienced enjoyment, especially from their connections and relationships with other francophones.

All the women perceived some loss of their mothertongue as compared to their abilities in the past. Their individual experiences of loss, however, varied greatly. This variety in the experience of loss coincides with the findings in Kouritzin’s (1999) study on mothertongue language loss. At times the women described the loss of their mothertongue as a source of frustration. This frustration was felt most strongly when they encountered difficulties communicating verbally with other francophones, including their children, or when writing in French. The women compared their abilities now to the fluency they had in the past, noting that they communicated with more ease in the past. Others lamented the fact that their mothertongue had not evolved in adulthood in the same way that it would have had they been living in a francophone environment. At other times, the woman addressed their language loss more matter-of-factly: as a skill that could easily be regained given the time and the right opportunities, such as living in a francophone-majority environment.

Without exception, the women perceived themselves as being more interested in using, maintaining, and improving their French now that they were mothers as compared to before motherhood. The women felt a great sense of responsibility towards their children’s French language development and learning. During the interviews, I was surprised by the frequency with which the conversations turned to the women’s concerns

regarding their children's language acquisition; although the women were fully aware that the study concerned their own language learning and maintenance, the focus frequently drifted to their children's language developments. Interestingly, they did not describe the responsibility for teaching their children French as a burden or appear to see it in any other negative terms. Rather, there was the sense that they were grateful to their children for reconnecting them with French or for providing incentive to improve and maintain their French. The majority of the women emphasized wanting to speak French *well* so that their children would not only learn grammatically correct French, but would also – they hoped – speak without an English accent.

This study reinforces findings from other researchers such as Mace (1998), Auerbach (1995) and Rockhill (1991) who found that, within the family, mothers generally take on responsibility for aiding and developing their children's literacy. Auerbach (1995, p. 645) has criticized the dominant family literacy models for attributing children's literacy struggles to the parents' inadequate skills and inapt beliefs about literacy. "When the 'problem' is framed in terms of inadequate family literacy practices, beliefs and values, the remedy is framed in terms of *changing family behaviors and attitudes within families* [emphasis in original]" (Auerbach, 1995, p. 647). According to the myth of the ideal mother which makes a mother responsible for her children's (and other people's) education, "inadequate family literacy practises..." would actually refer to a mother's inadequate practises concerning literacy. However, this image belongs to a mothering discourse that corresponds to middle-class resources, time and knowledge. Luttrell (1997, p. 105) writes: "The myth of maternal omnipotence makes it appear that individual women are solely responsible for what happens to children. As a result, the

politics of caregiving go unchallenged.” The francophone women in this study have little support for aiding their children learn French and logically perceive that they are solely accountable for transferring this skill to their children. Since all the women in the study planned to enroll, or already had enrolled, their children in the Francophone Program, they may have been feeling the additional pressure to fulfill an unspoken expectation: the child should eventually be able to express him/herself well in French, preferably without an English accent. Mothers whose children do not speak French well may worry that they will be judged by other people in the future for having “failed” to teach their children French. Many women frequently internalize cultural images of ideal mothering and, accordingly, they judge themselves and others against an externally defined ideal.

Nicole’s case offered an interesting twist to the issue of maternal responsibility for literacy and for the case of motherhood as a site of immense learning. All the mothers whose children are not yet at school felt responsible for teaching their children French and expressed varying levels of anxiety or preoccupation around whether they would be capable of instilling a desire to speak French in their children. In contrast to the other participants, Nicole spoke positively about the support she currently has for the transmission and maintenance of French (her own and her daughter’s). Where Smith (1999) describes the negative consequences of imposing the burden of (school-related) literacy on mothers, Nicole felt she had gained a tremendous amount of support for her own language development through her child’s attendance at a French school. As a result of her own involvement in her child’s education she felt much more connected with other francophones because she actively participated in parent-school committees.

Not only did the women feel responsible for their children, but, in several cases, the women felt a sense of responsibility for their partner's well-being and this acted as an impediment to the women's active participation in francophone social activities. What I am attempting to illustrate by emphasizing the responsibility women take on for others is the fact that women's care-taking activities are at risk of consuming their existence and of hindering the development and fulfillment of their own needs. One of these potentially unfulfilled needs could be preventing further mothertongue language loss and/or improving their native language abilities.

5.2.B Awareness and Access to Resources

Collectively, the women described a vast range of attitudes, perceptions and experiences vis-à-vis their efforts to regain and maintain their language abilities. I have arranged these on a continuum with three arbitrary self-selected points.

- (1) On one extreme there were three women who perceived that their own motivation was the decisive factor determining their involvement, or lack thereof, in francophone activities. These women blamed themselves for not being more informed about, or involved with, the francophone community. To my surprise, these women did not, when asked, attribute the challenges in participation to factors, other than themselves. I had expected that most women would promptly be able to list a number of barriers preventing them from actively regaining, improving or regaining their mothertongue and was surprised when women assumed the responsibility for this difficulty.
- (2) Two of the above women had a vague notion that resources might exist and supposed that these resources, or information, might be available through the Centre culturel francophone de Vancouver. Although all of the participants in the study were aware that

there exists an organization whose programming concerns the francophone community, three of them were unfamiliar with the type of programs, resources or services this organization, or the umbrella organization - The Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique (FFCB) - offer, nor were they entirely sure of the name of the organization or familiar with its location.

(3) Among the five other participants, one was somewhat informed and the other four were keenly informed about the services offered through the Centre culturel and in the community at large. They made use of those services and resources when these matched their interests, budgets and schedules. Overall, they perceived that the resources were deficient and two of these women (with the exception of their participation in the Mini-Franco-Fun) were not inclined to look at all to an organized body for activities or resources that would allow them to foster their language skills.

5.2.C. Implications for Practise

As previously mentioned, many francophone women sought activities where they could interact with other francophone adults and their children. Libraries, community centres, and private organizations offer a plethora of such activities in English but activities in French are much less available and accessible. Arguably, there are activities of this type in French: there is a half-hour of French story time in North Vancouver on Monday mornings, there is a one hour story-time in Vancouver once every two weeks for children ages four years and up, and there is the Mini-Franco-Fun that meets for one and half hours in downtown Vancouver once a week. Furthermore, once a year, the Vancouver International Children's Festival devotes a day to bilingual productions and the Centre culturel organizes a three hour children's festival. These activities, as I have

just indicated, occur so infrequently or in so few places that unless one is inclined to drive or take the bus to reach the activity and unless one has a schedule that permits participation at the precise time during which the activity is offered, then the opportunity is missed. As such, women end up having to rely on their own initiative to connect with one another. Given that most women have been leading a predominantly English-linguistic lifestyle prior to motherhood, they may not have easy access to a network of francophone friends and acquaintances. Several women, unable to find suitable and convenient activities in French, opted to spend time alone with their children in order to be able to provide their children with some exclusively "French time". Although this strategy allows the children to hear only French for a given amount of time, it also perpetuates the women's isolation.

According to information on their website, the FFCB, which has over thirty francophone member associations, offers a wide range of support and development services in the areas of culture, education, communications, economy, youth and community action. Explains the website, the FFCB "represents its members to the public for the defense of rights and the proliferation of Francophone services, and it helps its members in their political, social and economic activities". Although this is certainly true, I think the FFCB and some of the member and supporting organizations that could be of most interest to Francophone mothers, such as the Fédération des parents francophones de C.-B. (FPFCB), the Centre culturel francophone de Vancouver and Éducacentre, are failing to attract an important segment of the francophone community by focusing their marketing efforts in French-language publications and venues. Prior to investigating the services available for francophones in Vancouver as part of a course I

took in the summer of 2002, I was largely unaware of the structure of the FFCB. As previously mentioned, several of the participants in the study admitted to knowing very little about services offered in French in Vancouver.

In French-minority societies, such as Vancouver, francophones conduct nearly all their activities in English; French, if used at all, is used in the areas of leisure, religion, education and the family (Stebbins, 2000, p. 23). For that reason, it would seem logical for the FFCB to promote its services to francophones via English medium for this would potentially allow a much larger number of francophones to be aware of the services available to them through the FFCB. This awareness could mean that, given the need or interest, an individual would already have some knowledge of where to access resources. Certainly, a new mother who, facing an enormous shift in identity and whose time is consumed with the repetitious tasks of motherhood, would appreciate having this information readily available in her list of existing resources. Recently, to their credit, the FPFCB began an initiative whereby they have accumulated a list of francophone resources for new mothers. This 'kit', which includes a list of local resources and services pertaining to children and French, a French book for infants, a receiving blanket, and information in French on the (nutritional and health) care of children, is mailed free of charge to a francophone mother requesting it. I learned of this through their newsletter which I receive by virtue of being FPFCB member. I suspect that this initiative was prompted by the fact that, within the past year, two of the female staff at FPFCB have become mothers, but this is just a guess on my part...

The FPFCB loosely coordinates the Mini-Franco-Fun, gatherings where the intent is to provide children, aged five and younger, the opportunity to play and interact with

each other in French and to provide a venue for francophone parents to meet one another. I use the word “loosely” because, although the gatherings appear on the website and people may originally hear about the Mini-Franco-Fun through the FPFCB, the organization of the gatherings is entirely dependent on parent-volunteers. Thus, for the gatherings to occur, a parent must take the initiative to begin a group, find a venue for the weekly play-dates, take calls from all people inquiring about the gatherings, plan activities for the gatherings, and send messages and make phone calls to notify participants of any changes or special events. This assumes that there is someone, historically - not surprisingly - a mother, who is willing to devote a significant amount of time and enthusiasm to ensuring that the Mini-Franco-Fun takes place and that the gatherings are an enjoyable place for women and their children to meet and socialize. This current practise adopted by the FPFCB perpetuates a system whereby mothers’ time and their work is undervalued. Ideally, the FPFCB would employ an individual to implement and coordinate a series of Mini-Franco-Fun throughout the city. Program promotion would be done through the FPFCB and through the venues, such as neighbourhood houses and community centres, where the Mini-Franco-Fun would take place. The employed individual would assume all the responsibilities that are currently taken-on by the parent volunteer. It is important to note that, at the time when I first learned about the Mini-Franco-Fun in the summer of 2002, there were two in Vancouver, aside from the one that was starting in downtown. Both were on the East Side of Vancouver and neither exists today, one year later. It is difficult for one volunteer to sustain such an intensive program and problems with continuity arise if the volunteer can no longer fulfill the duties required to maintain the program.

5.2.D. *Towards a Critical Literacy Approach*

In addition to a lack of resources and/or inadequate resources in the community, the women's stories revealed that a shortage of time and energy limited their participation in activities that could help promote language maintenance and build language skills.

Women who were employed outside the home, as well as women who were not, shared this perception. The main difference between the women who worked outside the home and those that did not, was that the former were keenly aware of the amount of time consumed by their work, including the commute to and from work, whereas the latter had a sense of "not knowing where the time goes". Several women described feeling exhausted at the end of the day and said they were unable to muster the energy to read in French, let alone read anything at all.

Given that many of the women in the study and a majority of women, in general, devote a large part of their time and/or energy to care-giving activities, how can adult education address the needs of francophone women facing mothertongue language loss, without stalling on the basis that what is fundamentally needed is a re-construction of motherhood and society? I would like to suggest critical literacy as an approach to address this situation.

Literacy is a way in which people relate to one another in social contexts that include home, community, education, work, and bureaucracy. The politics of gender permeate every one of these contexts. To be effective, adult education must move beyond acknowledging gender as a major source of social stratification and must work to transform the unequal distribution of power and resources in society. Women's literacy skills have frequently been applied to gender-related roles and are generally not

recognized or rewarded as being socially valuable. As previously mentioned, "women's literacy skills have typically been a means of fulfilling the needs of others rather than tools for their own public participation and achievement" (Hayes, 1988, p. 7). The invisible nature of women's literacy is challenged when women begin to claim education to fulfill their own needs. Educational programs are a public means of validating skills and knowledge that remain devalued in the domestic sphere. Yet participation in these programs is uncertain given the conflicts between family responsibilities, personal relationships, work and education. As Mace (1998) writes: "Time for reading and writing conjures up time for being still, for pausing and considering: the kind of time which is unimaginable for most women..." (p. 16).

In the context of improving literacy, the case of francophone mothers is unusual but not unique. There are many ethnic groups residing in Canada who feel tremendous pressure to assimilate and whose language may not survive intergenerational transfer. Francophones theoretically have an advantage since French is an official language in Canada and, therefore, is promoted through various federal policies. Furthermore, more than 80% of franco-British Columbians were born within Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2003, The francophone population section); thus, as Canadian citizens they have advantages not necessarily shared by many immigrants or other people newly arrived to this country.

Sylvia Scribner adopts a useful approach to literacy: she suggests to ask not "What is literacy?" but "What are the social motivations for literacy in a given country at a given time?" (Scribner cited in Mace, 1998, p. 12). In the context of this small exploratory study, the word 'country' may be substituted by 'individual' or 'community'.

Motivations for literacy, Scribner describes, may be of three types: 1) Literacy as adaptation, where literacy is a tool to help people respond to given demands, 2) Literacy as power, where it is used to help poor communities develop and grow, and 3) Literacy as a state of grace, where literacy enhances personal growth and discovery. Literacy, understood in this way, becomes a relative matter; it fluctuates depending on who people are and the social context in which they exist. Literacy, then, becomes a plural – and not singular – activity. In this study, which was comprised of mainly white, privileged women, the desire to regain and maintain one's mothertongue could be largely categorized as literacy as a means to enhance personal identity and growth.

The type of adult education required to reverse mothertongue loss straddles (a combination of first and second)-language-learning and critical literacy. Critical literacy encourages ways of thinking that uncover social inequalities and injustices and it helps those who engage in it to address disadvantages and to become agents of social change. Critical literacy provides a venue whereby women can analyse the powerful ways in which visual, spoken, written, multimedia and performance texts manipulate our feelings, attitudes and values. Enhanced knowledge leads to greater power when literacy, as an act of knowing, is connected to a form of advocacy. Freire (2001) writes that language is impossible without thought. Literacy requires individuals to reflect critically on the profound significance of language.

Speaking the word really means: a human act implying reflection and action. Speaking the word is not a true act if it is not at the same time associated with the right of self-expression and world-expression, of creating and re-creating, of deciding and choosing and ultimately participating in society's historical process. (Freire, 2001, p.340)

In this way, critical literacy becomes a political commitment. Adult educators, influenced by feminist theory and working towards social change, are constrained by

existing ideologies about motherhood. Yet, literacy seen as plural presents adult educators with an opportunity to address the literacy needs of francophone mothers in a way that engages not only our intellects, but also our imaginations, emotions, and memories.

5.3 Implications for Future Research

The results of this study indicate several future research directions. A study focusing on the experience of mothertongue maintenance and loss among francophone mothers who had raised their (now teen or adult) children in a French-minority environment could provide interesting information about how the mother's language loss may have been affected by their children's interest in – or lack of interest in– speaking French. Gaining the perspective of women whose children may have ultimately refused to speak French to their mother, would furnish insightful information about how a woman's own motivation to maintain her language is affected when her child no longer "provides the motivation" as many of the women in this study claimed was the case. Participants in such a study could also reflect on what educational opportunities helped/could have helped them to maintain their mothertongue. Naturally, it would also provide illuminating information about what barriers these woman faced when trying to maintain their mothertongue in an English-majority environment. Another study of interest would involve investigating the experience of francophone mothers who, having undergone some language loss, have opted not to speak French to their children; this type of study could explore how the women's decision relates to their own sense of identity as francophones. A study, similar to the one I have conducted, involving francophone fathers who take on the primary responsibility for teaching their young children French,

could also provide a rich source of information to compare the experiences and perceptions of women and men. Research looking into multi-lingual and multicultural relationships as they affect mothertongue maintenance might highlight how men and women adopt different language strategies to reflect and reinforce their gendered roles in society. It could also be of interest to explore the role of the French School Board in helping parents whose children are enrolled in French schools maintain their mothertongue. It would be very interesting to do a follow-up study with the participants from this study in five or ten years' time to discover how their mothertongue maintenance and interest in improving their mothertongue had evolved as compared to their current perceptions of the expected evolutionary process. Lastly, the findings from this study could be used as a basis for designing similar studies for other ethnic and language communities residing in Greater Vancouver since issues of language loss affect all people living in linguistic minorities. For example, one could design a study to explore the experience of mothertongue maintenance among First Nations people in Canada. Information from such a study could influence policy that could help First Nations people recover their mothertongue and/or prevent the extinction of their language.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

This study had a number of limitations related to my ability to acquire information. As an inexperienced researcher, I struggled with knowing how much to try and deflect the conversation away from the children's language acquisition to issues more directly concerned with the women's own language maintenance. Although I guided the conversation with the questions I asked, I hesitated to adhere too strictly to my pre-conceived notions of the "proper" direction of the conversation. Intuitively, I felt that

hearing about the women's concerns helped me gain a strong sense of larger issues concerning women's perceptions vis-à-vis care-taking and responsibility. Furthermore, because I felt indebted to the women for opening up to me, I was also very conscious of limiting how much I probed, questioned and reflected out loud on some statements so as to not appear critical of some of the information I heard, especially the contradictions.

The findings are limited by the fact that I was not able to conduct follow-up interviews in person with all but two of the women (I was not able to contact Christine at all). I made three attempts to find suitable dates and times for a group meeting but was not successful in arranging a joint meeting. At the point when it became apparent to me that I would not be able to gather several women together at one time, I decided to go ahead with only meeting Carole and Odette. Again, because I felt concerned with not being too "pushy", I opted for phone follow ups with Pascale, Marie-France, and Nicole. I wanted to accommodate these mothers with whom I had struggled to try to find a suitable time/date to meet. Phone conversations lasted approximately fifteen minutes versus the in-person follow ups which lasted one hour. This indicates to me that there is a very different dynamic that can be established with face-to-face contact as compared to over the phone.

Another limitation to this study is that, although the women came from a variety of backgrounds, they were all Canadian born and Caucasian (I was the only non-Caucasian participant). In fact, the majority of the women fitted the category of "white, middle-class (or above), heterosexual, nuclear family". This means that none of the women, myself included, were experiencing racism. Furthermore, we were all, with one exception relatively (or very) privileged in that we lived in relative financial security (ie

the women were employed and/or had partners who had secure employment or, in my case, had family support,). Having this type of security, in addition to being able-bodied and mentally healthy, I believe, allowed the women to be preoccupied with issues of language loss. Although most of the women in this study were relatively privileged, they were not free of the demands imposed by the ideal of motherhood. This ideal which places the ultimate responsibility for childcare on women places large demands on a mother's time, energy and attention. Women, despite their relative privilege remain largely affected by gendered processes within the family setting and the larger society. However, had there been more women who struggled financially, who lacked basic education, who were physically and emotionally threatened, suffered racism, or were originally from other francophone countries, the information gleaned might have produced different findings. Women who are disadvantaged, because they have to struggle to have basic needs met for them and their children, may not have the energy to be troubled primarily with language loss.

Lastly, it is important to note that the experience of the small sample of francophones represented in this study may not be representative of the larger population of francophone mothers in Greater Vancouver.

5.5 Impact of the Research on the Researcher

Baffled by how I could possibly regain my mothertongue given the limited resources for early mothers who are francophone, I began this research. As I read and observed and talked with other women, my awareness of the social construction of motherhood grew and I was maddened by the situation I found myself in: I felt robbed of time by the load imposed on me by motherhood. I wished for ways to simultaneously

combat isolation, continue to enjoy my child, and connect with native French speakers. Doing so could provide friendships and strong support in regaining my mothertongue while having the additional benefit of surrounding my son by French, thereby helping him learn the language from someone other than me.

During the interview and analysis process, I was stunned by how little the participants complained about the responsibility they faced as minority mothers in charge of teaching their young children French. I began to question and doubt my own perceived sense of injustice at having very little community support for early mothers who wish to raise their child in French in Vancouver. I began to wonder if I shouldn't "cool it on the feminism" if I wanted to remain somewhat happy and maintain my relationship with Raul. A part of me envied the participants for not feeling like me: hugely disturbed by my language loss, perplexed by how to negotiate regaining my mothertongue in view of all the other demands on my time, upset by the fact that there are few organized activities for francophone mothers of pre-school children and wishing for more support and resources.

Yet, as a result of my own lived experience, especially since my son's birth, and because of the readings and reflections, the writing and the listening that I have done over the course of this study, I feel more justified than before in maintaining my beliefs. This research has confirmed my passion for the topic of French mothertongue maintenance and has provided me with an immense opportunity to learn, critique and create. My wish now is to contribute in tangible and practical ways to French language maintenance among francophone women and to actively pursue my own language revival.

5.6 Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to learn about how francophone mothers describe, explain and identify barriers and support to regaining and maintaining their mothertongue. This study aimed to explore the experiences of francophone mothers who, having perceived some mothertongue language loss, wish to prevent further loss and/or regain a higher level of fluency in their native tongue. The study helped determine some of the challenges faced by women who desire to maintain their mothertongue while taking on the primary responsibility for teaching their young child French. The research done for the study provided insight into the experience of language loss and drew attention to the powerful relationship between language and identity. It also highlighted the fact that, despite this powerful connection and the desire to maintain their language, women's lives are charged with mothering and care-taking responsibilities and practices that leave them with little time, energy or inclination to pursue learning that is focused entirely on their needs. Furthermore, this study added to a body of literature that describes the complexities of belonging to a French-linguistic minority in an English-majority society in Canada. It is my hope that this study will help promote policies, practices and research that consider the perspectives of francophone mothers so that they, and other women belonging to various linguistic minorities, can be supported to maintain their mothertongue in a way that is convenient, enjoyable, social and honours their strong sense of francophone identity.

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APPENDIX C: LIST OF ORGANIZATIONS

(List of organizations to whom I sent a recruitment letter and advertisement poster)

Alliance francaise de Vancouver , 6161 rue Cambie , Vancouver, BC , V5Z 3B2
 Canadian Parents for French - BC Branch #203 - 1002 Auckland Street , New
 Westminster, BC , V3M 1K8
 Conseil scolaire francophone de la C.- B., 180 -10200 Shellbridge Way,
 Richmond, BC , V6X 2V7
 Ecole Anne-Hebert, 7051 Killarney, Vancouver, BC, V5S 2Y5
 Ecole Rose-des-Vents, 5445 Baillie Street, Vancouver, BC, V5Z 3M6
 Educacentre, 2412 rue Laurel Street, Vancouver, C.-B., V5Z 3T3
 Federation des parents francophones de C.-B., 1555, 7e Ave. Ouest, #223,
 Vancouver, BC V6J 1S1
 L'Express du Pacifique, 1551, 7e Avenue Ouest, Vancouver, C.-B. , V6J 1S1
 Reseau-femmes Colombie Britannique, 1555, 7e Ave. Ouest, Vancouver, BC
 V6J 1S1
 Le centre l'erable Montessori, 3150 rue Ash, Vancouver , C.-B. , V5Z 3C9
 Le Zebre, 1235 28e Avenue est, Vancouver, C.-B. , V5V 2P8
 Sophia Books, 492, Rue Hastings ouest, Vancouver, C.-B., V6B 1L1

Letter also sent to the volunteer organizer of the Mini-Franco-Fun, to the volunteer coordinator for the French pre-school at L'Ecole Rose-des-Vents, and to a French daycare provider. I have not provided names or addresses for these people in order to protect their privacy.

APPENDIX E: IN-PERSON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

THEME: HISTORY

Please tell me about the language(s) you spoke (to your parents, to your siblings, to friends, and others) when you were growing up?

THEME: CURRENT SITUATION

Please tell me about the languages that you regularly use to communicate both inside and outside the home.

How do you describe your membership in the francophone community? (in the past – ie before motherhood – and now?)

Why do you speak French to your child?

THEME: DECISION-MAKING

How do you remember making the decision to speak French to your child?

Can you recall and describe any thoughts and/or concerns you had around the decision to speak French prior to your child's birth? How have these concerns evolved over time?

THEME: CHANGES AND STRUGGLES

Have you noticed any changes in the way you use French or think about using French since you have been mothering?

How has speaking French with your child shaped your own language development and usage?

Why do you think these changes are taking place and how do you feel about the changes?

THEMES: HOPES, DREAMS, FUTURE PLANS

Do you currently have concerns about your own ability to speak French?

When you think about the near and far future, what are your hopes for your own French language usage/development?

What kinds of support from the wider community do you receive (or do you wish were in place) to help with your efforts to improve and maintain your French?

What would be the ideal situation?

APPENDIX F: FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

Many women spoke of the pleasure of speaking French. Can you tell me more about this in your experience?

Concepts to listen for:

Preference for speaking which language and why?

What is pleasurable about connecting with other Francophones? (

How do you think about your identity (Francophone? Anglophone? It depends on...?)

Several women said they felt they were giving their child a gift by speaking French. What benefits do you experience from speaking French? What gifts has it brought to you?

Please comment (agree, disagree, other?) on the following statements from your own perspective:

Although some of the participants read in French, listened to the French radio and watched some French television, it was through activities and interactions with their children that women felt they were most actively maintaining their language, preventing language loss and participating in the francophone community.

Women felt that the ongoing acts of describing and explaining which are part of the common conversations mother have with their young children frequently challenged them to learn new vocabulary.

Women rarely participated alone (without their children) in any French activities in the community (– movie, concert, play, getting together with francophone friends).

In addition to taking responsibility for their own learning, the women in the study felt it was up entirely up to them to provide opportunities for their children to learn French until the children began school

Other women, knowing that their husband would withdraw socially from a situation where there was a majority of francophones chose not to participate as a couple in activities of this type.

The women, many of whom had partners who work full-time, generally opted, when their husbands were home, to spend time as a family as opposed to participating in francophone activities either alone or with their children.

APPENDIX H: LIST OF 25 QUESTIONS

(List of 25 questions that were used to develop the five guiding questions)

A. Origins

Purpose of questions: to gain a sense of the participant's language history and of her geographical past.

1. Please briefly describe the cities in which you have lived and for how long you lived there.
2. Please tell me about the language(s) you spoke (to your parents, to your siblings, to friends, and others) when you were growing up?
3. Please tell me about the languages you speak and/or understand currently and tell me how you learned the languages. (Educational background)

B. Family communication

Purpose of questions: to learn about home language(s) and how these are supported.

4. How would you describe your partner's ability to speak/understand French?
5. Which language(s) are spoken in your home? (By mother, partner, extended family, siblings, child-care provider, friends, – and under what circumstances).
6. Please describe the general use of these languages in the context of a typical day or week. Probe under which circumstances the mother speaks French to other people and to her child. When does she use English?
7. Who else, if anyone, speaks French with your child? (How often? Relationship to family?)

C. Decision-making

Purpose of questions: to find out how the mother describes her decision-making with respect to the choice to speak French with her child.

8. When did you make the decision to speak French to your child? What do you remember about making this decision? (Did you discuss your decision with anyone? If so, who, when, what type of discussion?)
9. Did anyone or anything in particular influence your decision to speak French to your child? Describe.
10. Why do you speak French with your child?
11. What are your plans for schooling/childcare? What type of childcare do you currently have, if any? (Check if French is a consideration in choosing schools/childcare)
12. If you were to have another child, would you do anything differently regarding language use?

D. Languages – shifts in usage over lifespan

Purpose of questions: to learn more about the participant's language use and language shifts with special attention given to shifts that occurred in motherhood.

13. In which language(s) do you communicate most fluently?
14. I am curious to know how your language use has changed in your lifetime and how you feel about the language changes. Thinking about the languages you speak now, how would you describe your knowledge/ability in these languages now compared to in the past? (Oral and written abilities; probe language loss)
15. Have you noticed any changes in the way you use French or think about using French since you have been mothering? Please tell me more about this. (How has speaking French with your child shaped your own language development and usage? Why do you think these changes are taking place and how do you feel about the changes?)
16. How do you describe your membership in the francophone community? (In the past/now) How would you describe your current identity as a francophone? In what ways (if any) has your sense of francophone identity changed over the years and, specifically since you're become a mother?

E. Concerns about language

Purpose of questions: to uncover some of the mother's concerns vis-à-vis language use and intergenerational transfer.

17. Can you recall and describe any thoughts and/or concerns you had around the decision to speak French prior to your child's birth? How have these concerns evolved over time? How have they been resolved (if at all)?
18. Can you please describe whether there is anything you find especially easy/difficult and/or frustrating/rewarding about speaking French to your child?
19. Do you currently have concerns about your own ability to speak French? If so, please describe what they are and how you think about/are resolving them.
20. What do you find difficult/easy about addressing these concerns? What gets in your way? What do you feel might make things easier?
21. What do you consider the most critical issues with respect to language transfer? (In your own situation and in general) If you could, how would you resolve these issues?

F. Hopes, dreams and future plans

Purpose of questions: to find out how the mother envisions her own and her family's language use in the future.

22. When you think about the near and far future, what are your hopes for your own French language usage/development?
23. How do you plan/hope to achieve that?
24. What do you think might help/hinder you get there?
25. What are your hopes for your family's language usage/development?

APPENDIX I: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Name	Language spoken to participant by her own mother	Language spoken to participant by her own father	Majority language of city/town in which participant was raised (0-16 years old)	Language spoken by partner to child	Main language of communication between participant and her partner	Plans to send child to Francophone Program	Language in which participant was schooled E=elementary school S=secondary school	Child(ren)/birth date
Carole	French	French	French	English	English	yes	French – E & S	son/Aug. 2001
Nicole	French	French	French	English	English	yes*	French – E & S	daughter/Apr. 1998
Odette	French	French	French	English	English	yes	French – E & S	son/May 2000
Delores	French	English	Bilingual	English	English	yes	French – E English – S	son/Feb. 2002
Marie-France	French	English	French	N/A	N/A	yes	French – E & S	daughter/Dec. 2000
Christine	French	French	English 0-9 Bilingual 9-17	Spanish	English	yes	French – E & S	son/Feb. 2001
Pascale	French	French	0-4 French 5-9 Farsi 10-16 French	French	English	yes	French – E & S	daughter/Mar. 2000
Isabeau	French	French (0-10 yrs) English (11 +)	English	Spanish	English	yes	French – E & S	daughter/June 1999
								daughter/Feb. 2002
						yes	Bilingual – E English – S	1 son/2 years old

*Nicole's daughter began attending the Francophone Program in September 2002 for kindergarten

APPENDIX J: SAMPLE TABLE USED IN DATA ANALYSIS

(Sample table used in the analysis of individual transcriptions. This system helped me identify and categorize themes. Main/recurring themes are in bold on the right hand side. Words underlined in the left hand column denoted participant quotes that I felt were especially representative of the theme.)

	Concerns about losing Fr (prior to motherhood)
<p>II: prior to having your daughter, were you ever concerned about the fact that you were losing your French?</p> <p>D: <u>No, it didn't bother me b/c I knew that I would get it back if I wanted it. Not to the same level – it depended on what I needed. No, I was never scared that – I didn't realize to what extent I would be having difficulty. I really didn't.</u> But, I find that when I go back to Manitoba, within a day or two, I'm very comfortable using my French. And, for some reason, the words come to me. My mind goes in French mode. <u>But, here I find it very difficult to switch back and forth. I think in English, the words come to me in English and when I try to think of the French translations, it doesn't come to me. Not as quickly as it does in Manitoba when I'm in the environment.</u> Or, give me a cocktail and I'm thinking in French! It's the strangest phenomena – I start thinking in French and I'm trying to figure out the English word for it! Don't ask me – it's liquor!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knew she would get it back if she wanted to (but not to the same level) • Didn't realize how difficult it would be • When back in Manitoba, feels that she regains comfort level w/in a day or two • Words come to her more easily in Man than they do here • Struggles with translations here
	Decision to speak French
<p>II: can you tell me a little bit about the decision making process? Did you always know that you'd speak French to your daughter?</p> <p>D: Yes. Yup.</p> <p>II: Did you discuss it with anybody? Did you and your husband ---</p> <p>D: No, I just told him. It wasn't something that was up for discussion. You know, I didn't just tell him. We didn't really discuss it. What I did was I expressed my wishes and my husband was quite excited about it. He makes an effort to speak to her in French. He'll tell her some words in French, he'll say this is this, you know. And, I think they'll be learning at the same time. He finds it an advantage tool.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always knew she'd speak French to child • Told husband that it was important to her • Husband was very supportive • Feels that husband and daughter will be learning Fr at the same time

Volunteering in the Fr community

II: Do you know about Educacentre?.

D: Yeah, that's where I go all the time.

II: You go there? (surprised). What do you do there?

D: I look for a job! No! Pour la garderie française, c'est Jean-Pierre Gauthier – un des directeurs d'Educacentre – et aussi France Dumas – sais-tu qu'on commence une garderie en français? On a 5 personnes sur le conseil – moi, je suis la secrétaire. C'est pour ça que je connais Educacentre.

- On steering committee for L'Ile aux enfants garderie – project initiated by staff.

II: Je comprends que tu connaisses Educacentre! (we talk a bit about the garderie -- talking in French). Then I explain in French that the reason I mentioned Educacentre is because of the program francisation familiale.

Francisation familiale at Educacentre

D: Ah, oui, j'ai pris un dépliant. Je l'ai mis dans ma chambre avec mon ordinateur – puis j'attends. Je pense que s'il voudrait, il pourrait. On va voir. Oui, mais je viens juste d'apprendre de ça. A cause que j'ai jamais pensé, je pensais qu'il allait apprendre avec moi et Dimitra. Avec Dimitra, il apprend pas mal en même temps.

Decision to speak French/support from spouse

II: Donc la décision, tu lui en as parlé, tout va bien...

D: C'était important pour moi. Et puis, à cause que c'est important pour moi, c'est important pour lui. Tu sais, il le fait, "ok, c'est vraiment important que Delores envoie Dimitra à l'école", it's good enough for him. Il est content avec la décision et il va me supporter. Puis, je peux le voir déjà. Puis, v fait longtemps. Il était toujours content que je parle à notre enfant en français. Puis, il supporte toujours ça. Puis, ça ne lui fait rien qu'on parle en français ensemble. A cause qu'il sait comment difficile ça va être. Puis, il peut le voir. Mais, au moins on voit une amélioration, en allant à la maternité en français, deux matins par semaine.

- Husband supports her b/c he knows how important it is for her
- He doesn't mind that we speak Fr together
- He knows how hard it is going to be

II: Vous remarquez la différence?

D: Oui, absolument. (talks about the situation at Leoni. Temporary help. Olivier talked to Dimitra in French the first day, but Dimitra answered in English, so Olivier started speaking English). C'est bien dommage. Oh, well.

Friendships

II: Alors, la tu parles français avec ta fille, et tu fais du bénévolat. Es-ce-que tu parles français avec d'autres gens?

D: Ah, oui. J'ai des mamans que je connais dans le west end, des mamans qui viennent du Québec, je pense. Linda, Chloé, Magdie. Linda et Magdi ont une petite fille qui s'appelle Chloé et je les ai rencontrées par un mom's group, tu sais avec les health nurses.

II: Au centre ville?

D: C'était au West End. Je demeurais au centre-ville. C'est là que je les ai rencontrées -- au Gordon Neighbourhood House.

II: Es-ce-que tu allais au MFF?

D: Oui, j'ai aussi été au MFF. Il y en avait un à Educacentre qui vient de finir. J'ai fait ça. Oui, je suis allée a 2 MFF, il en avait un a Frog Hollow. Je suis allée, et je suis allée à Kiwassa House aussi. Mais, les mamans que j'ai connues c'est a cause des health nurses. J'ai aperçu qu'ils parlaient en français avec leurs enfants, et puis je me tenais avec elles à cause que "ah, finalement! Quelqu'un avec qui que je peux parler le français!". C'était vraiment bien.

II: Oui, puis vous avez formé des amitiés?

D: Oui.

II: Et garder des amitiés?

D: Oui. (continued in original)

- Meets with a group of moms that she met through the mom-child groups organized by the community health nurses when she lived downtown
- Has been to MFF at Frog Hollow and Kiwassa, but the moms that she meets with is thanks to the gatherings that took place at community centre (why? What was the difference between those and the MFF?)
- I noticed that the moms at the mom-child gatherings were speaking Fr and thought "finally, people I can speak Fr with!"
- She hangs out with them b/c they speak Fr very well
- They meet when they can, it depends on people's schedule