

Language Learning Memoirs as a Gendered Genre

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The paper argues that while the analysis of cross-cultural lifewriting may provide important insights for the study of second language acquisition and socialization, researchers should approach language learning memoirs as a genre and not simply as ethnographic data, subject to content analysis. Using gender as a case in point, the paper analyses a corpus of sixteen full-length language memoirs and seven essays within a theoretical framework, which combines sociohistoric, sociocultural, and rhetorical analyses of the narratives in the corpus. The analysis of these texts demonstrates that social, cultural, and historic conventions shape stories that are told about language learning. It is argued that treating language memoirs as a genre has a great potential for future studies of second language learning. While this approach prevents the researchers from using the narratives simplistically as an objective 'source of ethnographic data', it allows for a complex, theoretically and sociohistorically informed, investigation of social contexts of language learning and of individual learners' trajectories, as well as an insight into which learners' stories are not yet being told.

In recent years, autobiographies of second language learners have received increased attention in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) (Kramsch 2000; Kramsch and Lam 1999; McGroarty 1998; Pavlenko 1998; Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000; Schumann 1997; Spolsky 2000; Young 1999). Language memoirs, such as Rodriguez's (1982) *Hunger of Memory* or Hoffman's (1989) *Lost in Translation*, have been acknowledged as a legitimate data source in the hermeneutic tradition, complementary to more traditional empirical approaches. McGroarty (1998), Young (1999), and Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) have encouraged the researchers to examine this unique source of information about learners' motivations, experiences, struggles, losses, and gains, since 'the long-term and historical perspective they add to the general grasp of language learning issues is vital' to our field (McGroarty 1998: 598). Miller (1996) has argued that the writers' reflections on their acquisition of language and literacy are particularly important, since as writers they 'needed to develop knowledge about language and, as a rule, an ear for meanings that is more acute and subtler than that possessed by the rest of us' (p. 275).

The goal of the present paper is to examine social, cultural, and historic conventions that shape language learning autobiographies, using gender as a case in point. To begin with, I will contextualize the study of language memoirs by situating them within a rich tradition of American cross-cultural

autobiography. Then, I will explore the possibilities and limitations of the use of cross-cultural autobiographies for the study of gender in SLA. An analysis of sixteen full-length language memoirs and seven essays suggests that cultural and historic conventions shape the stories that are told about language learning. While male narrators in the corpus link gender and language learning only marginally or not at all, for female narrators this connection is a dominant theme. Far from suggesting that gender as a system of social relations does not play any role in language acquisition by male learners, this disparity indicates that American cross-cultural autobiography is a conventionalized genre which may legitimize or devalue certain topics and themes in the process of construction of gendered voices. At present, these memoirs provide the field with a wealth of observations about learning experiences of middle-class Caucasian, Asian, and Latina females but are rather scarce about the role of gender in language learning of heterosexual males, gay and lesbian learners, working-class individuals, or African immigrants. I will argue that approaching language memoirs as discursive constructions, rather than as factual statements, has great potential for the field of applied linguistics. Preventing the researchers from using the narratives simply as 'sources of ethnographic data', it will allow for a complex, theoretically and sociohistorically informed, examination of individuals' perceptions of social and cultural contexts of second language learning, examination that will look not only at the content of the stories, but will also consider how the stories are being told and whose stories remain untold for a variety of reasons.

SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING MEMOIRS AS A GENRE

Cultural and historic influences on language memoirs

The identification of 'language memoir' as a distinct genre, relevant to the study of second language learning, can be attributed to Alice Kaplan, herself an author of a language memoir *French Lessons* (1993). In an essay entitled 'On Language Memoir' (1994) Kaplan tells the story of her discovery:

For several years I have been working on a memoir which I refer to, in shorthand, as a 'memoir about learning French'. . . . When I began, I read as many scholarly disquisitions as I could find on second language acquisition—linguistics, sociology, education—and I found methods and statistics and the occasional anecdote, but nothing, really, about what is going on inside the head of the person who suddenly finds herself passionately engaged in new sounds and a new voice, who discovers that '*chat*' is not a cat at all, but a new creature in new surroundings. . . . When I turned to fiction, I found, to my delight, that there is an entire genre of twentieth-century autobiographical writing which is in essence about language learning (Kaplan 1994: 59).

I suggest that for the purposes of the field of applied linguistics, these memoirs are best understood in the context of the genre they belong to—American

cross-cultural autobiography, a genre governed by specific cultural and sociohistoric conventions. In their discussions of autobiography, many literary scholars have acknowledged its partial, subjective, and socially constructed nature, indicating that memoirs cannot be approached simply as authoritative 'inside' stories, which provide verifiable information about subjects. For many, the 'truth' of autobiography is 'less a function of the relation between narrative and life-history than of the intimate link between text and self' (Couser 1995: 35). Thus, in the present study autobiography is viewed as culturally, socially, historically, and rhetorically constructed through discourses recognizable by a specific community.

While traditionally autobiography was situated in a single cultural context, the twentieth century witnessed an explosion of narratives which linked two or more cultures, expressing the 'narrated self as conjuncture *between* languages and cultures' (Hokenson 1995: 92). For the purposes of this paper and following the conventions of literary scholarship (Boelhower 1991; Hogan and Hogan 1997; Hokenson 1995), I will use three terms to refer to these autobiographies. *Immigrant autobiographies* will refer to memoirs written by first generation immigrants who arrived to the target language country as teenagers or as adults and who discuss both the country of their birth and their new culture (for example, Hoffman 1989; Lvovich 1997). *Ethnic autobiographies* will include immigrant memoirs as well as narratives of those who arrived to the New World as children or were born and grew up in ethnic neighbourhoods (for example, Kingston 1975; Rodriguez 1982). The term *cross-cultural autobiographies* will refer to all of the above as well as to any other narrative which explores transitions and interactions between cultures, whether written by a member of both cultures or not, such as narratives written by temporary expatriates and visitors (for example, Davidson 1993; Watson 1995).

The focus of the paper will be on the analysis of contemporary American cross-cultural autobiographies, with the understanding that autobiographies produced in different literary traditions or in different times may be very distinct in shape and scope (Hokenson 1995; Wong 1991). For instance, many South Korean and Eastern European language learning autobiographies aim at instructing foreign language learners and thus focus on language learning strategies and the development of linguistic and strategic competence, rather than on transformations of identities. One example is a memoir of a well-known Hungarian linguist and polyglot Kato Lomb (1978). This book, written and published in the 1970s under the communist regime, is a perfect case study of sociohistoric influences on language learning autobiography. Following the conventionalized master narrative of the communist times, Lomb first offers a brief critique of capitalism in a sketchy discussion of the unemployment crisis of the 1930s in Hungary. This crisis prompted her to learn English in order to earn money through private English lessons. Then, the author praises the Soviets describing how, following the end of the Second World War, the Russian occupation of Budapest in 1945 allowed her to

improve her Russian. The rest of the text is dedicated to lively and detailed descriptions of the author's learning strategies which allowed her to achieve literacy and interactional competence in a variety of languages while living in Hungary and travelling abroad. Not surprisingly, she does not mention her own privileged position and the fact that the Iron Curtain prevented most Eastern Europeans from learning Western languages in the target language contexts and limited any potential contact with the speakers of these languages.

Sociohistoric influences on language learning memoirs are also visible in the comparison of contemporary American autobiographies to early American immigrant narratives, as both types of stories were not simply written by individual authors but also 'written for us by law, literature, politics, and history' (Zaborowska 1995: x). Early and mid-century immigrant narratives typically avoided the problems of language acquisition (Morrow 1997). This avoidance is not surprising, as traditionally the master narrative for immigrant lifewriting in the USA has been a success story (Boelhower 1991; Hokenson 1995), promoted by a variety of governmental and educational establishments and encouraged by the publishers. This story focused on cultural assimilation, 'marrying in', and appropriation of material benefits, all of which may be successfully accomplished by first generation immigrants. In contrast, achieving full mastery of English language and literacy is a much more challenging enterprise, which for a long time was obscured in American immigrant autobiographies. It was postmodernity with its obsessive fixation on language that changed the conventions of Western, and, in particular, American cross-cultural memoirs. Inspired by the work of Bakhtin, Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, and Kristeva, postmodernist theory focused on language as the main site of world and identity construction, echoing earlier insights of Sapir and Whorf, and leading to a revival of interest in the linguistic relativity hypothesis (Gumperz and Levinson 1996; Lakoff 1987; Lucy 1992). Bringing language learning and use to the foreground in the 1980s, this perspective, influenced by advances in feminist and critical theory and the revival of ethnic consciousness, demanded new stories which dealt with the role of language in the shaping and reshaping of identity, and which viewed language socialization as intrinsically related to race, ethnicity, class, and gender. The shift in storylines is recognized by the Polish-American writer Eva Hoffman (1989) who, in her acclaimed autobiography *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, acknowledges that 'the postmodern condition' requires a different narrative than the one her predecessor Mary Antin wrote almost a hundred years ago:

And what is the shape of my story, the story my time tells me to tell? Perhaps it is the avoidance of a single shape that tells the tale. A hundred years ago, I might have written a success story, without much self-doubt or equivocation. A hundred years ago, I might have felt the benefits of a steady, self-assured ego, the sturdy energy of forward movement, and the excitement of being swept up into a greater

national purpose. But I have come to a different America, and instead of a central ethos, I have been given the blessings and the terrors of multiplicity. . . . If I want to assimilate into my generation, my time, I have to assimilate the multiple perspectives and their constant shifting (Hoffman 1989: 164).

Kingston's (1975), Rodriguez's (1982), and Hoffman's (1989) language memoirs are a response par excellence to the postmodernist call. The notion of self as fluid, fragmented, and multiple, allows the authors and the readers to explore the links between multiple languages and selves in ways that were previously non-existent and/or impossible: challenging the essentialist notions of self, deconstructing various ethnic, national, colonial, and gender identities, and showing 'gaps and fissures under the pressure of travel and contact' (Hogan and Hogan 1997: 149). In the new cross-cultural lifewriting, many authors emphasize the fact that the price of 'successful' assimilation may at times be unbearably high; they also deal with the impossibility of expressing 'in one narrative, and in one language, the experience of two cultures' (Couser 1989: 228). Ironically, however, most authors, except perhaps for the celebrated Nuyoricans writing in Spanglish (Hernandez 1997), confine the narrative to one language only, English. It is in this language that various authors explore new hybrid identities and create new lifeplots and narratives, new postcolonial and racial consciousness through the use of metaphors and tropes of travel, borders, margins, crossing, and conjunction. Oftentimes, however, the new metaphors are used to serve the old plot of 'unproblematic successful assimilation.' An excerpt from an essay *Code Switching*, by a Bombay-born American author Ginu Kamani (2000), ridicules this new immigrant story with its obligatory links between language, identity, race, class, and gender:

Starting at the age of fourteen, I began shedding the skin of being a group member of Bombay's urban, upper-middle-class, merchant-caste, top-dog culture, where nothing about my 'identity' or my 'culture' or my 'background' need ever have come under scrutiny; and began accepting, even collaborating in the repositioning of myself in the semblance of a Midwestern suburban, hard-working, economically viable citizen, who could presumably put aside race, class, name, gender, and language issues to passionately embrace and then fearlessly overthrow underdog status with the mother-of-invention adaptability necessary to overcome social, psychological, and cultural hurdles—emerging finally as a free individual, a successful American, comfortably ensconced in personal goals and ideals, dedicated to the pursuit of happiness, blessed with inalienable rights and just a few rag-tag social responsibilities (Kamani 2000: 95–6).

Like no other, Kamani's (2000) ironic essay calls attention to the fact that the new discourses of 'assimilation', produced and reproduced in the legal documents, media, and literary texts, have solidified enough to shape new stories, to give the old stories new legitimacy, and even to make it possible for

a storyteller to ventriloquate other voices rather than to search painfully for his or her own. Nevertheless, a close look at the rhetorical devices used by Kamani allows me to argue that rather than reproducing the master narrative of which she is painfully aware, the author positions herself at a distance to it, mocking the idea that one can put race, class, or gender aside and become a 'free American', 'dedicated to the pursuit of happiness.'

To conclude, I suggest that the shift of attention, proposed in the present paper, from the 'informational value' of language learning autobiographies to the social and rhetorical forces that shape them does not diminish their potential usefulness. This shift represents a broadening of scope, which is a part of the linguistic turn in the humanities in general, indicative of the growing importance of discourse analysis in a variety of fields, including applied linguistics. The insights offered by highly reflective bilingual writers and scholars should not go unnoticed and unappreciated by applied linguists as they offer a glimpse into aspects of language learning and use so private, personal, and intimate that they are rarely dealt with in the study of SLA (see, however, Pavlenko 1998, *in press a*; Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000). These insights can only increase in value if we understand the sociohistoric and sociocultural circumstances that brought them into being. In the rest of this paper I will discuss how an analysis of cross-cultural autobiographies can contribute to the study of the role of gender in the process of second language acquisition and socialization.

Gender in cross-cultural autobiography

The view of gender adopted in the present paper is that of 'a system of culturally constructed relations of power, produced and reproduced in interaction between and among men and women' (Gal 1991: 176). This feminist and poststructuralist perspective (for a more detailed discussion, see Pavlenko 2001) views gendered subject positions as socially constructed whereby gender is inscribed on the body through socially, culturally, and historically shaped discourses of gender. In Western societies, these discourses construct a dichotomous system comprised of men and women and medically enforced upon intersexed infants. In contrast, other communities consider a third or a fourth category, such as hijras in India or berdache in Native American tribes, and may 'interpret the bodies' of the newborns differently. Most importantly, the feminist poststructuralist view of gender emphasizes that even in societies that see gender as dichotomous, there are no simply 'men' and 'women'—gendered subject positions and power relations are complicated by race, ethnicity, culture, class, sexuality, (dis)ability, age, and social status. Thus, while they may all be seen as women, a working-class Chicana lesbian, an elderly white welfare recipient, and a successful African-American executive occupy different subject positions and may have very little in common.

Autobiographic selves are also shaped by ideologies of gender and selfhood

which view gender in conjunction with race, class, and ethnicity. Several feminist scholars (Benstock 1988; Conway 1998; Gergen 1997; Heilbrun 1988; Jelinek 1980, 1986; Smith 1987) argue that autobiography in the Western world evolved in order to record and explicate the life of upper- and middle-class white males. This evolution resulted in differentiation between male autobiographic narratives, which became archetypal quest narratives, and female narratives, which evolved as a subset of manstories. A definition of a prototypically male life story is offered in Conway's (1998) insightful analysis of the development of autobiography in history:

For men, the overarching pattern for life comes from adaptations of the story of the epic hero in classical antiquity. Life is an odyssey, a journey through many trials and tests, which the hero must surmount alone through courage, endurance, cunning and moral strength. Eventually, unless the hero has displeased the gods through some profoundly shocking violation of taboos, he is vindicated by his successful passage through his journey of initiation and returns to claim his rightful place in the world of his birth. His achievement comes about through his own agency, and his successful right of passage leaves him master of his fortunes, though, of course, still subject to the whims of the gods or the turning of the wheel of destiny (Conway 1998: 7).

Similarly, for many years, a typical immigrant narrative was a male story of a heroic quest for membership in a new community, which goes through 'puzzling out the (serio-comic) enigmas of American ways' (Hokenson 1995: 100) and ends in a Horatio Alger type of success, whereby the new ways are appropriated and the old ones left behind. At the end the hero may produce a chipper statement of the kind found in an autobiography by Panunzio (1928): 'I am in a special way happy to have learned the English language and through its medium to have become acquainted with the stalwart thought of the Master minds of the Anglo-Saxon race' (as cited in Boelhower 1991: 127–8). Perfect examples of such autobiographies are Edward Bok's (1920) *The Americanization of Edward Bok* and Jacob Riis's (1924) *The Making of an American*. Focused on success, these stories do not give us much information about anxiety, miscommunication, and misunderstandings, linked to second language learning and use, nor do they speak about possible pains and losses associated with the process of cultural transition, or about roles and expectations for males in a new culture.

In contrast to the heroic quest story, the prototypical form for autobiography of white middle-class females evolved as an erotic quest, a fundamentally male projection on the female figure (Conway 1998). Firmly established in a literary canon by the early nineteenth century, it began to shape narratives written by middle-class women which used to portray a heroine on a quest for the ideal mate (oftentimes with property and social mobility). Most importantly, in their written life accounts, Western women tended to present themselves as protagonists with no agency or power to act

on their own behalf (Heilbrun 1988). While in the second half of the nineteenth century, American women's newly won access to education and professional careers could have given rise to heroic quest stories, these pioneer women professionals consistently downplayed their achievements in their public writings, were silent about their ambitions, and 'recounted their lives as though their successes just happened to them' (Conway 1998: 15), hiding their agency behind the passive voice and the conditional tense.

A slightly modified script was available for immigrant women's stories: assimilation through erotic quest and ensuing marriage to a native-born male (Zaborowska 1995). In this case, it didn't even matter whether the female authors stuck to the plot or not, for, with the exception of the short-lived successes of Antin and Yeziarska, immigrant women's stories were continuously ignored by the literary establishment. Only recent attention to the role of gender in immigrant lives led to the study of American immigrant women's narratives and to inclusion of their stories in the 'canon' of the US immigrant literature. Looking at the Eastern European accounts of gendered Americanization, feminist scholars found that mainstream immigrant narratives were often challenged and revised in immigrant women's stories, which described identity struggles triggered by a gender-related lack of freedom, repression of sexuality, and explicit threats to the gendered identity of the Old World men stemming from the possibility of women's emancipation (Bergland 1994; Burstein 1998; Wasson 1994; Zaborowska 1995).

However, while these narratives brought gender to attention, it was not until the 1970s and 1980s that language came under scrutiny in relation to gender, starting with Maxine Hong Kingston's (1975) *The Woman Warrior* and Eva Hoffman's (1989) *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, the memoirs which both continued and reshaped the tradition of female immigrant writing begun by Antin and Yeziarska. These contemporary memoirs suggest that there is more than one story to tell about gender, race, class, and cross-cultural transitions. Thus, in an essay, which describes a lecture she once gave to a gathering of librarians, an upper-middle-class Japanese and now an American writer and Harvard professor Kyoko Mori (2000) rejects a prototypical story of an immigrant woman which conflates foreignness with poverty:

The stories they are waiting for—of a brave but disadvantaged immigrant woman trying to understand an unfamiliar language, missing the customs and the foods of the homeland, overcoming one 'culture shock' after another—have nothing to do with me. I resent being expected to tell such stories because I have none to tell and also because, even when they are true stories for many first-generation immigrant women, there is something self-congratulatory or condescending in most listeners' attitudes. The stories of immigration are often heard by non-immigrants in the spirit of 'I am so lucky that I was always an American.' They are the adult, quality-of-life versions of

'those poor starving children in China', for whom we were supposed to eat all the food on our plates (Mori 2000: 138–9).

This possibility of multiple stories being told about cross-cultural transitions and the role of gender in second language socialization will inform the ensuing discussion of language learning memoirs. While written by authors who occupy very different subject positions and often espouse dissimilar, even diametrically opposed, views of the world, these narratives have one trait in common—all reject the simplistic 'success story' plot, opting for the shades of grey and the layers of complexity in depicting controversies and contradictions which often accompany second language learning and use.

METHODOLOGY

The aim of the present study is to examine ways in which gender is discursively constructed and written about in contemporary language learning memoirs. Sixteen full-length autobiographies and seven essays were chosen for this purpose, the main requirement being a publication date between 1975 and 2000 and the presence of one or more chapters where language learning and use were main discussion topics. The year 1975 was chosen as the publication date of Kingston's (1975) *The Woman Warrior*, the memoir considered by many as signalling the appearance of a new type of cross-cultural autobiography. Heilbrun (1988: 12) also named 1973 as the turning point for modern women's autobiography, coinciding with the strengthening of the feminist movement, which prompted women to create new spaces for themselves and to tell stories previously considered untellable.

Table 1 provides a full list of autobiographies analysed in the study. Several memoirs are written by immigrant authors who arrived in their new country and learned their second language—in which they now work and live—as teenagers and adults: Lilianet Brintrup, Andrei Codrescu, Ariel Dorfman, Marianne Hirsch, Eva Hoffman, Helen Kim, Natasha Lvovich, Kyoko Mori, Jan Novak, Ute Margaret Saine, Luc Sante. Ethnic lifewriting is represented by the work of Julia Alvarez, Judith Ortiz Cofer, Maxine Hong Kingston, Helie Lee, Elaine Mar, and Richard Rodriguez, who moved to the USA at an earlier age and/or grew up in various ethnic neighbourhoods; these memoirs discuss a different language learning path, a transition from a minority to a majority language. Finally, to provide a contrast to the theme of 'Americanization', I included narratives of temporary expatriates, Cathy Davidson, Alice Kaplan, David Mura, Karen Ogulnick, and Richard Watson, who live in the USA but have made linguistic journeys into French (Kaplan, Watson) and Japanese (Davidson, Mura, and Ogulnick).

If we look at gender distribution, ten cross-cultural autobiographies and six essays are authored by fifteen women (Alvarez, Brintrup, Cofer, Davidson, Hirsch, Hoffman, Kaplan, Kim, Kingston, Lee, Lvovich, Mar, Mori, Ogulnick, Saine) and six autobiographic novels and one essay by seven men (Codrescu, Dorfman, Mura, Novak, Rodriguez, Sante, Watson). The fact that there are

Table 1: Language learning memoirs and autobiographic essays

Author (year)	Title
<i>Memoirs</i>	
Alvarez, J. (1998)	<i>Something to Declare</i>
Codrescu, A. (1990)	<i>The Disappearance of the Outside</i>
Cofer, J. O. (1990)	<i>Silent Dancing: A Partial Remembrance of a Puerto Rican Childhood</i>
Davidson, C. (1993)	<i>36 Views of Mount Fuji: On Finding Myself in Japan</i>
Dorfman, A. (1998)	<i>Heading South, Looking North: A Bilingual Journey</i>
Hoffman, E. (1989)	<i>Lost in Translation. A Life in a New Language</i>
Kaplan, A. (1993)	<i>French Lessons</i>
Kingston, M. H. (1975)	<i>The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts</i>
Lvovich, N. (1997)	<i>The Multilingual Self</i>
Mar, E. (1999)	<i>Paper Daughter. A Memoir</i>
Mori, K. (1997)	<i>Polite Lies. On Being a Woman Caught Between Cultures</i>
Mura, D. (1991)	<i>Turning Japanese</i>
Ogulnick, R. (1998)	<i>Onna Rashiku (Like A Woman): The Diary of a Language Learner in Japan</i>
Rodriguez, R. (1982)	<i>Hunger of Memory</i>
Sante, L. (1998)	<i>The Factory of Facts</i>
Watson, R. (1995)	<i>The Philosopher's Demise: Learning French</i>
<i>Essays</i>	
Brintrup, L. (2000)	Turbulent Times
Hirsch, M. (1994)	Pictures of a Displaced Girlhood
Kim, H. (2000)	Beyond Boundaries
Lee, H. (2000)	Dissassembling Helie
Mori, K. (2000)	Becoming Midwestern
Novak, J. (1994)	My Typewriter Made Me Do It
Saine, U. M. (2000)	Now Is the Time to Try Something—But Have I Got Nine Lives?

twice as many female authors in the corpus as there are male ones can be clarified by the demographics of the genre itself. Despite a careful search and a policy of including all memoirs which had a discussion of language issues in at least one chapter, I was unable to locate any more male language memoirs than the ones in the corpus. Moreover, only three male autobiographies were explicitly concerned with the issues of language from start to finish (Dorfman 1998; Rodriguez 1982; Watson 1995). Despite an abundance of contemporary

male writers who mastered a second language in adulthood and became fluent enough to create in this language (Joseph Brodsky, Jerzy Kosinski, Milan Kundera, Czeslaw Milosz, Joseph Skvorecky, to name just a few from the so-called Eastern European canon), their accounts of the language learning process *per se* are either missing or, as is the case of Kosinski, written by others (Sloan 1996). Thus, even though cross-cultural autobiographies by male authors abound in contemporary writing, many writers choose to avoid talking about their own language learning and instead ponder upon more 'universal' and philosophical issues such as belonging and acculturation, ethnic and cultural identities, the relationship between two or more languages in translation and use (Baranczak 1990; Cadet 1998; Zongren 1984). Therefore, it appears that language memoirs may be a feminized genre, and later on I will discuss the reasons for why it may be so.

The methodology chosen to analyse the texts is informed by Denzin's (1989) sociohistorical approach to the interpretive study of autobiography, which sees autobiography as a 'literary and sociological form that creates particular images of subjects in particular historical moments' (Denzin 1989: 35). To carry out language autobiography analysis in this framework, I have designed and carried out the following two steps:

1. The focus of the study on the sociohistorical situatedness of autobiographic narratives led me to analyse whose language learning stories are being told and to reflect upon those whose stories are still not represented in the genre.
2. I hypothesized that cross-cultural autobiographies written in the USA in the last quarter of the twentieth century, in the presence of a strong feminist movement, may exhibit differences with regard to importance accorded to gender as a system of social relations, whereby female narrators draw on discourses of gender more so than the male ones. In order to see if this was the case, I first identified all discussions and/or explicit references to the narrator's gendered subject position (for example, 'As a woman, I . . .') or a particular aspect of gender relations, roles, or expectations (for example, 'Girls weren't expected to do as well in school as boys . . .'). The length of the reference varied from one sentence to one thematically bound episode. Then, I identified and counted all discussions and/or references to the links between gender and language learning, which similarly varied in length from one sentence to one thematically bound episode. I then compared the number of references to the links between language learning and gender by male and female narrators (see Table 2). In addition to looking at how different authors draw on discourses of gender, I have considered the use of metaphors as rhetorical elements used by authors in their construction of gendered narrative voices.

In my analysis I conceptualized the autobiographic self as a narrative voice, situated at 'the intersection of the diachronic and synchronic dimensions of

language' and mediating 'between different, often conflicting, historicities and collectivities' (Kramsch 2000: 1). For the purposes of this study, I view the *narrative voice* as a conventionalized discursive construction carried out by the author through the emphasis (or lack thereof) on particular discourses, as well as the use of particular metaphors and other stylistic and rhetorical devices (such as, for example, passive voice and conditionals in the nineteenth-century female narratives). In all of the autobiographies in the corpus the gender of the narrative voice corresponds to that of the author, which is conventional for non-fiction autobiography. Nevertheless, in what follows, the terms 'female' and 'male' will most often refer to narrative voices only, in the acknowledgment that non-fiction autobiography is still a literary genre and literature abounds in examples of male voices created by female writers and vice versa.

LANGUAGE LEARNING MEMOIRS AS A GENDERED GENRE

Autobiographic narratives as gendered acts of identity

My analysis of the autobiographic memoirs and essays in the corpus suggests that they are best seen as narrative acts of identity, which 'impose order on experience that was both disruptive and confusing' (Holte 1988: 28), oftentimes negotiating a new self through the process of retelling one's life in another language (Pavlenko 1998). As Codrescu jokingly points out, 'it was high time that I became the author of something I could call "my life" in order to get on with it' (1994: 21). For many, one of the key issues in question is that of language ownership. Several authors, such as Rodriguez (1982) and Hoffman (1989), explicitly defy the ideology that presents native speakers, born into the language, as the only legitimate users of that language. In telling their stories, the authors, many of whom became scholars, literary critics, and writers in their second language, claim and validate their own subject positions of legitimate speakers and users of their second language. Similar negotiation is taking place in stories of ethnic writers born in the USA: many of them continuously have to prove to those around them that they have the same rights to language as white middle-class Americans. 'Where did you learn English?' kids and teachers keep asking David, a third-generation Japanese-American, and he has to explain over and over that he 'learned English in the same way they had, at home, in school, on the streets of my hometown, Chicago' (Mura 1991: 76).

A consideration of social contexts discussed in the narratives in question suggests that some groups are much better represented than others. To begin with, all of the narrators speak from the upper-middle-class position of an educated professional. Some have started out as members of middle- and upper-middle-class households (Alvarez 1998; Dorfman 1998; Hoffman 1989; Lvovich 1997; Mori 1997), while others had working-class beginnings (Kingston 1975; Mar 1999; Ogulnick 1998; Rodriguez 1982). Nevertheless,

members of both groups emphasize their current positioning as that of members of the American intellectual elite. For Hoffman (1989), Mar (1999), and Mori (1997) the cross-cultural journey culminated in attending or being invited to work at Harvard, the ultimate symbol of success and acceptance. It is worth noting that, in constructing these trajectories, many narratives implicitly or explicitly (for example, Rodriguez 1982) equate successful language learning and assimilation to white middle-class values, rather than emphasize diversity and multiplicity of possible outcomes.

Other demographics of this set of narratives also deserve a close consideration. Well represented groups consist of Eastern Europeans (Codrescu, Hirsch, Hoffman, Lvovich, Novak), Western Europeans (Saine, Sante), Chinese (Kingston, Mar), Japanese (Mori, Mura), Koreans (Kim, Lee), Latinos (Alvarez, Brintrup, Cofer, Dorfman, Rodriguez) and North Americans (Davidson, Kaplan, Ogulnick, Watson). Language learning narratives of other cultural and ethnic groups, in particular, those of African immigrants, are conspicuously missing (see, however, Cadet 1998, and Danquah 2000, for general accounts of African immigrant experiences). Similarly absent at present are coming out stories of gay and lesbian learners which discuss links between language learning and non-mainstream sexual identities.

My analysis of learning metaphors and of references to gender and language learning also indicates that learning memoirs are acts of gendered identities. Reflecting on the predominance of women's texts in the area of intercultural autobiography, Hokenson (1995) suggests that since women have been shown to function simultaneously in both dominant and muted cultures, their art traditionally shows a sense of the self as plural, thus, they bring a more heightened sense of inter-identity and a clearer perspective on the issues of plurality and bridging cultures. His suggestion finds ample support in the narratives in question: 'a significant part of learning language involves learning muteness, learning to submit', says Ogulnick (1998: 29) about her experience of learning Japanese. Literary theorists also suggest that both the foreigner and the female are conceived as the Other (Todorov 1984), and, thus, the foreigner by definition becomes 'the feminized position that the dominant culture assigns to all newcomers regardless of gender' (Zaborowska 1995: 8). Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that a genre that highlights vulnerability, silence, and adjustment is conceived as feminized and became dominated by female authors.

When one looks at the stories that female narrators are telling in this corpus, it is clear that some contemporary female stories of language learning and socialization explicitly break out of the canon of erotic quest writing and focus instead on the heroic quest for the taming of language by active agents (Hoffman 1989; Kaplan 1993; Lvovich 1997; Ogulnick 1998). As such, they can be seen as written against gendered conventions of the past, whereby females were constructed as passive human beings with no agency and no other interest but to create a family. At the same time, as I will argue below, language learning stories are now gendered in a new way, which leads the

female authors to draw on discourses of gender, in particular acknowledging the difficulties of growing up female and struggling against patriarchal dictates. In contrast, the male narratives in the corpus are still written as heroic quest stories whereby the protagonist wins over language (Dorfman 1998), fails after a heroic battle (Watson 1995) or is consumed and transformed by language (Rodriguez 1982). The discourses male authors draw on are those of race, class, and culture, but not gender. In what follows, I will explore some ways in which authors construct conventionalized female and male voices in language learning stories.

Female narrative voices

Finding voices authentic to women's experiences is problematic for women in any culture: historically, women's experiences have been interpreted for them by men and according to male norms. The problem multiplies when a woman is undergoing a number of other transitions in which both her public and private persona have to be reconstructed. In her analysis of writing by bilingual writers, Miller (1996) observes that many women have written of dilemmas implicated in language and literacy learning as specifically ones of gender: 'Their need to wrench new or altered meanings out of the language—and their difficulties in doing so—have been experienced by some women writers as comparable to a bilingual's or a colonial's needs and difficulties' (pp. 291–2). Similarly, Jouve (1991) remarks that perhaps bilingualism is a natural female condition and the experience of geographic and linguistic identity splits is simply 'a more graphic form of what women who strive to speak with their own voice experience anyway' (p. 17).

Not surprisingly, the preoccupation with the sound and the authority of their voices is one of the key issues for many female narrators (for example, Hoffman 1989; Kim 2000; Kingston 1975; Mori 1997, 2000). The dominant metaphors for language learning in their memoirs are the *invention of voice*, and the *appropriation* and *internalization* of others' voices:

Normal Chinese women's voices are strong and bossy. We American-Chinese girls had to whisper to make ourselves American-feminine. Apparently we whispered even more softly than the Americans. Once a year the teachers referred my sister and me to speech therapy, but our voices would straighten out, unpredictably normal, for the therapists. Some of us gave up, shook our heads, and said nothing, not one word. Some of us could not even shake our heads. . . . Most of us eventually found some voice, however faltering. *We invented an American-feminine speaking personality* (Kingston 1975: 200, my emphasis).

All around me, the Babel of American voices, hardy midwestern voices, sassy New York voices, quick youthful voices, voices arching under the pressure of various crosscurrents. . . . Since I lack a voice of my own, the voices of others invade me as if I were a silent ventriloquist. They ricochet within me, carrying on conversations, lending me their

modulations, intonations, rhythms. I do not yet possess them; they possess me. But some of them satisfy a need; some of them stick to my ribs. . . . Eventually, the voices enter me; by assuming them, *I gradually make them mine* (Hoffman 1989: 219–20, my emphasis).

Paolo, I have to admit now that I carefully ‘overheard’ all your phone conversations, *trying to make your speech my own* (Lvovich 1997: 50, my emphasis).

When I wrote, I wasn’t concerned about who I was supposed to be, or what role I had to play, or whom I needed to please. I wrote as my heart dictated, and I began to hear ‘*the still, small voice*’ *within me* (Kim 2000: 124, my emphasis).

Male narrators appear to be less preoccupied by the notion of voice. Codrescu (1990), for instance, refers merely to the physical properties of the vocal tract in passing when talking about the internalized necessity to whisper about certain things in communist Romania:

I struggled with the volume of my voice. It took me at least two years before I could *speak in a normal tone* about politics or art or drug-visionary experience. *I lowered my voice* automatically on these subjects, maintaining all the while the elegant obscurity of phrasing that had been the necessary cover where I came from (Codrescu 1990: 116, my emphasis).

The only one who shares the female preoccupation with marginality and with finding a public voice and all the authority accorded to it, is Rodriguez (1982), whose linguistic and ethnic memberships position him as a powerless minority member. His descriptions of growing up in a Mexican American family portray his perception of Spanish as a private language and English as the language of the public sphere, authority, and confidence:

Often, the speech of people in public seemed to me very loud, *booming with confidence*. The man behind the counter would literally ask, ‘What can I do for you?’ But *by being so firm and so clear*, the sound of his voice said that he was a *gringo*; he belonged in public society (Rodriguez 1982: 14, my emphasis).

It is possible to say thus that Rodriguez’s (1982) memoir is written ‘against gender’ in his preoccupation with voice and authority. At the same time, the feminist poststructuralist view of gender suggests that no one could be seen as just a ‘man’ or a ‘woman’. Therefore, considering the narrator’s initial subject position in its entirety—male, Mexican, dark-skinned, working-class—allows us to understand that it is indeed logical that Rodriguez is searching for authority, power, and voice in ways similar to many women who find themselves in less than privileged positions. He also pays a price for his acquisition of public voice, as the members of his own family see his verbal ability as a feminine trait, which violates the silent macho ideal. While preoccupied with voice, Rodriguez (1982) nevertheless doesn’t specify whose

voices he internalizes in the process of learning his public language. The voices internalized by female narrators are often those of intimate partners, as is the case with Alvarez and her sisters whose 'American boyfriends had whispered sweet colloquialisms in our ears' (Alvarez 1998: 51). In some female stories, sexual attraction is equated with attraction to language, whereby the male and the idiom are linked as 'competitors and seducers' (Zaborowska 1995) and it is not quite clear which one the heroine is really after:

When I fall in love, I am seduced by language. When I get married, I am seduced by language. My husband too is a master of the riff, and when I listen to him improvise about Whitman's poetry, or his Jewish aunts and uncles, or a Wasp Connecticut wedding, I think, maybe this bebop speech can carry me right into the heart of America (Hoffman 1989: 219).

. . . what I really wanted from André was language (Kaplan 1993: 86).

When I saw Him [her French teacher] and heard Him pronounce the first sound, I wanted to become who I have become—as a person, a scholar, a professional, and a woman (Lvovich 1997: 20).

While in early immigrant tales this attraction results in a Hollywood-style happy ending where the native-born prince 'carries the passive heroine off into the happily-ever-after of successful assimilation' (Zaborowska 1995: 245), contemporary autobiographies present a much more complicated tale in which the relationship or marriage fails and the heroine is left alone to conquer the new language:

I wanted to breathe in French with André, I wanted to sweat French sweat. It was the rhythm and pulse of his French I wanted, the body of it, and he refused me, he told me I could never get that. I had to get it another way (Kaplan 1993: 94).

At times, the heroine may be responsible not only for herself but for her immediate family and for whatever prince she may have brought with her to the New World. Thus, Lvovich (1997) finds herself in New York City as the main breadwinner and the only English speaker in her extended family, a position previously occupied by immigrant males only:

I have to survive and support my family, take care of everything and everybody (Lvovich 1997: 62).

In cases when intimate relationships fail to provide the entry into the desired speech community, many women rely on friendship. Thus, another metaphor for language learning, encountered in several female narratives, is *reinvention through friendship*, whereby the learners in question attempt to re-create themselves through others. 'Mona is the mediating figure who allows me both to acculturate and not to,' confesses Hirsch (1994: 83). 'Miriam is one of the people through whom I've gained a meaning here', states Hoffman (1989:

279). Ogulnick's (1998) memoir is almost completely structured around her interactions with Japanese friends, with chapters 5 through 7 entitled *Keio and Me*, *Akemi and Me*, *Satoko and Me*. She emphasizes that her female friends with their communicatively oriented speaking styles turned out to be much more helpful as language partners than a male colleague Keio:

Unlike the rigid boundaries I experienced with Keio, which made me feel blocked off and distanced from him emotionally, Akemi's personal stories, vivid details, imagery, and concreteness, helped to draw me in. . . . Our personal, intimate way of speaking seems to be a type of 'female genre', and a benign tactic used, in both directions, as a means to smooth social boundaries (Ogulnick 1998: 60, 79).

Lvovich (1997) describes her acquisition of English and her 'becoming American' as fully mediated through friendships with her American colleagues:

I reinvented myself in these friendships, becoming American: We laugh, make jokes, exchange news, cry on each other's shoulders and talk a lot about teaching, about our students, and books to read in class. . . . There are other meaningful relationships with people we met in the United States. . . . All of them contribute, in one way or another, to my new American identity building, to my life in contact with languages, since they interact with me socially, emotionally, linguistically (Lvovich 1997: 81).

These pathways of internalization and mediation are fully compatible with female narrators' motivation in language learning, often expressed as the need for connection, which may overpower any resistance to gendered positioning:

My desire to 'fit into' and be accepted by the society in which I lived and worked, and my motivation to become more proficient in Japanese, made me very attentive to the ways people acted, moved, spoke. . . . My desire to be accepted and recognized as a speaker of Japanese overpowered any subconscious resistance I may have had to complying with what I perceived as submissive female behavior (Ogulnick 1998: 35, 135).

In sum, it appears that female narrators who position themselves as agents have nevertheless some rhetorical devices at their disposal to construct uniquely feminine voices and relational selves. In order to create these recognizable female narrative voices, the authors in this corpus appeal to the metaphors of language learning as *invention*, *appropriation*, and *internalization of voice*; they also see language learning as a *reinvention of self through friendship* and as *connectedness with others*. These findings support previous studies which identified the emphasis on voice and the authority that comes with it (Heilbrun 1988; Miller 1996), as well as on personal connections and

interdependence (Conway 1998; Gergen 1997; Heilbrun 1988) as the key features of contemporary Western female autobiographies.

Male narrative voices

A memoir of an American man learning French, Richard Watson's (1995) *The Philosopher's Demise: Learning French*, tells us a very different story of language learning, where the learner is motivated by the desire to conquer the language in order to perform a professional identity. Having spent his whole life as a Cartesian scholar in America, perfectly able to read and translate from French, at the age of fifty-five Watson found himself obsessed with the desire to learn spoken French so that he could interact with the French scholarly community:

Once I decided to learn to speak French it became—did I say?—almost immediately an obsession. All those years of guilt and embarrassment at being a Cartesian scholar who could not speak French (even if no one else noticed or cared), the difference between what I was and what I appeared to be, combined to drive my ambition to a frenzy. I would learn to speak French, whatever it took, however long. One day, by God, I would sit at a table in a restaurant in Paris with a group of French Cartesian scholars, and we would talk! (Watson 1995: 65).

Watson's story is a quest—and a failed quest at that—narrative par excellence as it takes the reader through a series of mostly failed attempts to conquer the language through individual efforts, private tutorials in the USA and classes at the Alliance Française in Paris. Foregrounding the torturous aspects of the quest, using verbs such as 'sweating' and 'laboring', comparing language learning to boyscout hikes and mountain climbing, Watson paints a picture of learning as a *test of endurance* rather than as the internalization of voice:

My fifty-five-year-old ear and tongue were stiff as boards. But I knew what was required, and if the quickness of youth was gone, the staying power of age was not. I would beat myself into shape. . . . I continued to push myself with the comforting conviction that very few adults would submit themselves to such torture (Watson 1995: 8–9).

. . . it was clear that it embarrassed me to speak French. . . . But just as you must survive humiliation and submit to agonizing tension, so also must you overcome embarrassment. Make an ass of yourself. If you want to learn (Watson 1995: 12).

I was more tense [in class—A. P.] than I have ever been in my life or ever want to be again. The first time I ever climbed a mountain wall with hundreds of feet of exposure below me, that time we arrived back at the entrance of a cave to find a wall of water roaring in and had to crawl downstream as fast as we could for a long distance to clamber up into passages above water level, my Ph.D. oral exam—none of those times could begin to compete with the state of tension I was enduring now. And how am I to characterize or express

adequately my sensations when with every indication of justified anger and disgust, The Professor called me an idiot and an imbecile? (Watson 1995: 39).

Dorfman (1998: 112–13) tells a similar quest story about his re-learning of Spanish in high school after the family return to Chile from the USA, framing it as a story of *revenge*. Publicly humiliated in the classroom for his inferior use of Spanish, he vows to win a prize for the excellent use of Spanish upon graduation. Eventually he does but his teacher-tormentor is no longer there to witness his success. In a Monte Cristo-like way, the next encounter with the cruel teacher takes place many years later in the USA, at the MLA convention where the narrator is a prize-winning novelist delivering a keynote speech and the teacher is a humble college professor requesting an autograph. In Codrescu's (1990) memoir, *suffering* and *exile* are similarly linked with the destiny of a poet:

In 1965 my mind was imbued with the mystical potencies of deracination. I wanted to suffer the way our great exiled poets had suffered. . . . The decision to be a poet, I told myself, carried with it intrinsically the necessity of exile (Codrescu 1990: 39).

What is interesting about these stories and metaphors is not that there is anything intrinsically masculine about metaphors of *exile*, *revenge*, or *test of endurance*, but that the authors portray language learning as an individual enterprise, accomplished by one, in spite of the others who challenge him (Dorfman 1998; Watson 1995), or even through separation of the narrator from those close to him (Codrescu 1990; Rodriguez 1982). As such, these stories conform to the pattern identified in previous research on gendered aspects of Western autobiographies: male memoirs privilege individual achievements, while female memoirs accord high importance to personal relationships, commitments, and interactions (Conway 1998; Gergen 1997). We can see that while for many female narrators in the corpus the relationships in the new language are both a goal and the means to learn the language (Brintrup 2000; Davidson 1993; Hirsch 1994; Hoffman 1989; Kaplan 1993; Lvovich 1997; Ogulnick 1998), the male narrators downplay the importance of relationships, and, in particular, intimate relationships, through which they could be learning the language, portraying the learning instead as a solitary quest and an individual achievement. Thus, Dorfman positions himself as fully in charge of the learning—and attrition!—processes that involve only himself and his two languages, without any interference from the people around him:

I willed myself to become monolingual again (Dorfman 1998: 101).

. . . from the beginning I did not allow my new language to enter into dialogue with the older one. I stubbornly avoided comparing their relative merits, what one could offer me that the other could not (Dorfman 1998: 101).

While Kaplan (1993) talks about her own wants and stubbornness in a very similar way, her own learning, like that of Hoffman and others, is portrayed as predicated on personal relationships and interactions. Watson, in contrast, expresses his disappointment at the fact that the nature of language learning and use defies individualism: to learn and use a language an individual has to be a member of a language using group, and thus

To learn French I might have to give up my lifelong adherence to the doctrine of extreme individualism (Watson 1995: 81).

Overall, it appears that the male memoirs in the corpus emphasize individual achievements and obscure contributions of others to their language learning. As pointed out earlier, it is possible that this tendency is linked to the more general pattern of downplaying personal relationships, identified by literary scholars and historians in Western men's autobiographies (Conway 1998; Gergen 1997).

The discussion above explored some ways in which authors construct conventionalized gendered voices in language learning stories. Clearly, the authors' own emphasis is not always and exclusively on gender and, as people who are claiming their right to the language they are using, male and female immigrant authors, for instance, may have much more in common than not. At the same time, it appears that while both male and female narrators position themselves as agents in contemporary language learning stories, their masculinities and femininities are performed through different discursive means and their agencies take different paths. Female voices are constructed as relational selves through metaphors which emphasize voice, connectedness, and friendships, while male narrators are positioned as individuals who conquer the language, oftentimes through a painful quest but not through internalization of others' voices. Thus, a learning narrative in which a male narrator would admit being seduced by the female's language and wishing to internalize her voice would be written explicitly against the conventions of the genre. At the same time, I would like to emphasize that the main difference between the two types of narratives in the corpus is not in the use of metaphors or any other rhetorical devices but in the discourses on which the authors draw to construct autobiographic selves. This difference will be explored next.

Gender as a theme in language learning memoirs

While the metaphoric analysis of these language learning memoirs suggests that in the creation of gendered narrative voices the authors may be relying on different metaphors of language learning and different storylines, the count of explicit references to gender and to links between gender and language learning suggests that the narratives also differ in the importance they accord to discourses of gender and to the relationship between gender and second language learning. As seen in Table 2, it is mostly in the female

Table 2: References to language and gender in female and male narratives

Author	Number of references
<i>Female</i>	
Alvarez, J.	16 (two essays are entirely about being a gendered language user)
Brintrup, L.	3
Cofer, J. O.	3
Davidson, C.	10
Hirsch, M.	1 (the focus of the essay is on the link between gender and language learning)
Hoffman, E.	19
Kaplan, A.	1
Kim, H.	3
Kingston, M. H.	6
Lee, H.	2
Lvovich, N.	4
Mar, E.	7
Mori, K. '97	8
Mori, K. '00	2
Ogulnick, R.	24 (the whole book is on the role of gender in the learning of Japanese)
Saine, M.	1
TOTAL:	110
<i>Male</i>	
Codrescu, A.	0
Dorfman, A.	0
Mura, D.	0
Novak, J.	0
Rodriguez, R.	1
Sante, L.	1
Watson, R.	6
TOTAL:	8

narratives that gender is considered as a category that may be mediating the learning experience.

Smith (1987) points out that every woman who writes autobiography ends up interrogating the prevailing ideology of gender, if only implicitly. This suggestion is fully borne out by the autobiographies in question where female

voices are continuously preoccupied by the social and cultural constraints on gender construction, particularly visible in transition, while in the male narratives gender is rarely if ever mentioned (especially, in connection with learning). The only narrative that questions the links between masculinity and heterosexuality is that of Mura (1991); however, even Mura does not ponder upon the implications of his subject position of a Japanese-American male in Japan for his interactions in Japanese. Instead, his discussions of learning Japanese are framed in terms of ethnicity and culture. Novak (1994) does not refer to either gender or class in his essay, relying instead on cultural categories. Sante (1998) considers the relationship between his bilingualism and his American masculinity only once, in passing, when pointing to a possibility of an alternative route of teenage development which would have taken place, had he remained in a French-speaking context where 'pretty girls would speak French' (p. 263). In Watson's memoir, four out of six references to the possible influence of gender ideologies on language learning experiences have to do with the narrator's perception that 'for American men at least, French sounds syrupy and effeminate' (1995: 52). The other two are his contention that unlike French women who speak clearly and articulately, French men mumble (Watson 1995: 99), and his opinion that the French have not yet 'grasped the concept of sexual harassment' (Watson 1995: 31). When it comes to the analysis of interactions, Watson privileges the categories of class, social status, and culture. Similarly, Dorfman (1998) ponders upon links between language and identity from the point of view of culture, society, and history. Class, social mobility, and fluidity of ethnic, racial, and cultural categories preoccupy Rodriguez (1982) who in passing links Spanish with machismo, and his learning of English with a loss of masculinity from the perspective of his Mexican family. What remains undisclosed in his memoir, however, is the possibility that the narrator's attraction to English may also be motivated by the desire to escape the gender conventions of his native culture, and to embrace his sexuality as a gay man, a subject position validated by his English-speaking community more so than by his Spanish one.

While, in this corpus, the male narrators describe themselves mostly as neutral/asexual language learners and do not dwell on gender issues, female ones are very aware of being gendered—and oftentimes sexualized—language learners and speakers. Even the titles of their autobiographies indicate the pervasiveness of the category of gender in their writing: Kingston (1975) has entitled her memoir *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*, Hirsch (1994) *Pictures of a Displaced Girlhood*, Mori (1997) *Polite Lies. On Being a Woman Caught Between Cultures*, Ogulnick (1998) *Onna Rashiku (Like a Woman): The Diary of a Language Learner in Japan*, and Mar (1999) *Paper Daughter*. Several essays also come from a collection edited by Danquah (2000) and entitled *Becoming American. Personal Essays by First Generation Immigrant Women*. In short, it appears that while all narratives are gendered performances, part of the performance of American femininity includes drawing on discourses of

gender, or, in other words, speaking from an explicitly gendered perspective and emphasizing gender as a theme. At the same time, it would be precipitous to say that gender doesn't play any role in second language learning by male learners. Rather, we may conclude that just as race is a more common preoccupation in memoirs written by African-American, Asian-American, and Latino writers than in narratives by their Caucasian colleagues, gender appears to be a more transparent category in male lifewriting, in particular in relation to second language learning. This lack of emphasis does not indicate, however, that gender is not a mediating category but rather that it is a category still invisible to some.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I will summarize the answers to the two questions asked in my study and discuss some of the implications of these answers for future inquiry in bilingualism and SLA. Before I proceed to this discussion, however, I will acknowledge three main limitations of the present study. To begin with, recognizing that different literary communities have different master narratives and genre conventions, I chose to discuss language memoirs written in the contemporary American tradition of cross-cultural lifewriting. This limits my discussion to a particular set of narratives, and leaves the question of how language learning may be constructed in other languages and cultures to further investigation. A related and a very important limitation is the authors' language of choice, in the present case exclusively English. This choice may act as a 'filter' of sorts and privilege authors with a particular stance toward the intended audience, most likely a bid for acceptance. Wong's (1991) analysis of Chinese-American immigrant literature suggests that 'immigrants who write their autobiographies in English are perhaps already predisposed to orient themselves to the dominant society in certain ways' (p. 151). It is quite possible that cross-cultural memoirs written by the same authors in other languages, and thus addressing a different audience, would paint the authors' acquisition of English in different ways. It remains to be seen what we can learn from stories told in other languages, or even from literary accounts written in English and turned down by American publishers as incomprehensible to the larger public. Finally, all the memoirs in question are written either by those who had acquired English successfully, or by Americans who had attempted to learn another language. While the latter strand allows us some glimpses into the nature of 'failure' in language learning, it is a failure experienced by speakers of a powerful language. Only further inquiry could illuminate the experiences of immigrants who did not achieve a similar success in their learning of English, or experiences of people who are in the process of learning languages other than English, French, or Japanese. Thus, I am positive that examination of language learning narratives offers a productive way to expand the study of second language learning by giving it a 'human face' and that future research will find ways to overcome the

limitations of the present study. With this, I will proceed to describe the insights language learning autobiographies can offer on the role of gender in second language socialization.

To begin with, my analysis of the corpus of sixteen full-length language learning memoirs and seven autobiographic essays established that at present language memoirs provide the field with a wealth of observations about learning experiences of middle-class Caucasian, Asian, and Latina females but are rather scarce about language learning of heterosexual males, gay and lesbian learners, working-class individuals, or African immigrants. One reason for the scarcity of male language learning narratives in this corpus, entertained here, is a heightened sensitivity of female authors to the issues of voice, in particular, public voice, and authority (Miller 1996). At the same time, current research suggests that language learning may be gendered—just as it is influenced by the social constructs of class, ethnicity, or race—for all learners. Thus, it may be beneficial for the field of SLA to broaden the scope of narrative inquiry and elicit the stories of those who have not yet been heard and in ways they have not yet been told. This means that, in addition to examining learning experiences of middle-class Caucasian men and women, or immigrant women, we may want to examine experiences of working-class immigrant men or of unsuccessful learners who were marginalized or discriminated against for a variety of reasons. Finally, in order to avoid a monolingual bias in this type of research, it would be very informative if the stories were collected in more than one language since recent research also persuasively demonstrates that storylines may shift with the language in which they are told (Koven 1998).

In the answer to the second question, the narratives in the corpus suggest that the female narrators draw on discourses of gender significantly more than the male narrators. In particular, they continuously reflect upon the gendering of their second language socialization, while we have yet to read stories where male narrators ponder upon the implications of their gendered positions as husbands, fathers, sons, communicators, or providers in a new culture. This disparity is explained by the sociohistoric and sociocultural shaping of the autobiographic genre, where performance of contemporary femininity—but not masculinity—is predicated upon explicit questioning of ideologies of gender and selfhood. At the same time, the lack of explicit discussions of the role of gender in language learning by male learners in no way indicates that gender as a system of social relations does not play a role in their learning experiences. Rather, this silence suggests that particular types of Western masculinity may be performed through lack of attention to the issues of gender, or that at present the role of gender—unlike that of race, class, or culture—is obscured by privileged ways in which male learners are often positioned (Polanyi 1995; Teutsch-Dwyer 1998). I have also identified some differences in the metaphoric construction of gender in these memoirs. While most female authors in the corpus construct feminine selves by representing language learning as the internalization of others' voices and a reinvention

through friendship, most male authors perform masculine selves by representing language learning as an individual achievement in the quest for language.

Several questions that were not fully explored in the present study will hopefully guide future narrative research on second language socialization. What are the differences in narrative conventions for language learning stories told in different languages and in different cultures? What are the differences between learning narratives within the same culture created during different historic periods? What are the similarities and differences between different types of learning narratives, such as, for instance, oral histories, which may be more inclusive of learners from different socio-educational backgrounds, diaries, and literary autobiographies? What are the stories of language learners who didn't get into the spotlight yet and what can their stories tell us about the links between language learning and race, class, gender, and sexuality? It is my hope that this future research will find a place for various types of narrative data alongside the information that can be gathered through more empirically oriented approaches, while at the same time acknowledging the sociohistorically shaped nature of narrative activity.

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