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Souls in Exile: Identities of  
Bilingual Writers

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In this discussion, the author highlights the relationship between language and identity by discussing notions such as language as a symbolic resource (Heller, 1995) and language as a badge of identity (Buruma, 2003) in a society. The reasons why a number of bilingual writers have decided to write in their second languages are explored, and issues such as "writer as a migrant," "double belonging and betrayal," "awkward betweenness," and "reconciliation of languages and identities" are discussed. The author argues that the expression "souls in exile" best describes the condition of being for many bilingual writers during their process of looking for the self in writing and in the host culture. It is usually through painful and painstaking struggles that many bilingual writers are able to reach reconciliation between their first and second languages, and to create an enriched self in writing.

Key words: souls in exile, identity, bilingual writers, migrant, betweenness

Bilingual writers become bilingual for varied reasons: some are born into a country that has two or more official languages or a good second/foreign language education system; some live in a multiethnic family in which members speak different languages and learning more than one language is a natural, painless acquisition; others become bilingual because their family language is different from the majority language of the society. There are yet others who have to earn the bilingual status as a result of crossing national borders, either voluntarily or involuntarily. It is this last category to which I tend to pay more attention because of my own cross-cultural experiences. As a bilingual researcher myself, I am often intrigued by the memoirs

of bilingual writers and the stories they write based on their life experiences. I am particularly interested in bilingual writers who have to write in the language that is not the one in which they are raised, writers whom I refer to as *souls in exile* in this article, and who, in most cases, are immigrants and refugees. To this group of writers, being bilingual means more than merely being able to speak two languages. In their attempt to navigate between languages and social contexts associated with these languages, they have raised important questions regarding identity construction for bilingual beings. Through their endeavor of finding the self and understanding others, we have come to the awareness that exile is a condition not only for these bilingual writers but for all human beings.

In this article, I use convenient samples of the works by or about bilingual writers that have come to my attention. I discuss two groups of bilingual writers: *the global souls* (those who either claim to be or may be considered to be), and *the souls in exile* (either voluntary or involuntary). The former are the writers who are raised in multicultural environments and feel comfortable to traverse linguistic and geographic borders, such as Federman (2003), Iyer (2000, 2001), and Lim (2003); the latter are bilingual writers who are forced by circumstances to write in their second/additional language, which is far from "the sounds of home and childhood and origin" (de Courtivron, 2003, p. 1), and have to alternate their feelings and identities while switching languages, including Dai, Djebbar, Dorfman, Ferré, Hoffman, Lerner, Lvovich, and Stavans. I chose these authors because they all talk about some aspects of the identity issue. The fact that they are from divergent backgrounds (Chinese, Algerian, French, Jewish, Hispanic, etc.) provides a spectrum of experiences. I leave out some bilingual writers (such as Ha Jin) because they do not explicitly investigate the issue of identity in the literature I have reviewed. Other bilingual writers, such as Rodriguez, who do articulate their identity concerns but do not readily fit into the two groups I discuss in this article are also not included. Although the focus of this article is on the souls in exile, I will discuss the global souls briefly as a comparison. My argument is that being a soul in exile is the reality that many bilingual writers have to live with as a result of their state of being, although their ultimate goal may be to become a global soul; in other words, to be empowered by both languages and to be able to claim multiple identities.

I will first highlight the relationship of language and identity by discussing notions such as *language as symbolic resources* (Heller, 1995) and *language as a badge of identity* (Buruma, 2003) in a society. Next, I will probe into different reasons why a number of bilingual writers whom I categorize as the souls in exile (e.g., Hoffman, Lerner) and the global souls (e.g., Federman, Iyer) have decided to write in their second/additional languages. Then I will discuss some themes frequently articulated by bilingual writers, such as "writer as a migrant," "double belonging and betrayal," "language quandaries," "awkward betweenness," and "reconciliation of languages and identities".

## LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY

Language and identity are closely related concepts, and they are of particular importance to my discussion of bilingual writers' identities. The metaphors—language as a symbolic resource (Heller, 1995) and language as a badge of identity (Buruma, 2003)—best capture the characteristics of their interconnections.

### Language as a Symbolic Resource

I begin with a discussion on the political aspect of language. The widely accepted idea that language is power has been overused, and has thus become a cliché. However, as Carter (1997) contended, "the fact that it is a cliché should not obscure its truth" (p. 12) because language use aligns with the power of those who use and are able to manipulate the language. Heller (1995) also asserted that language practices are "inherently political" as far as they are related to individuals' access or lack of access to the "production, distribution and consumption of symbolic and material resources" (p. 161) in society.

The relationship between language and power determines that "language is not a neutral entity" (Carter, 1997, p. 12); instead, it is always associated with certain texts and contexts that are determined by social and sociocultural factors. According to Heller (1995), there are different symbolic resources in a society, among which are linguistic resources represented by and through language. Linguistic resources are not equitably distributed in most situations. By virtue of their different social status, people have differential access to different forms of language: some are more highly valued; others are less highly valued. The control people have over linguistic resources also determines the amount of power they have in determining the value expressed through language in society. Therefore, to have more access to the resources in society, people have to gain more power in controlling the linguistic resources and be able to use the language as a tool in achieving their goals. This partially provides an explanation as to why the many bilingual writers discussed in this article struggled to master their additional languages when they were fated to live a bilingual life in a host culture.

### Language as a Badge of Identity

Language is not only related to power in a bigger picture in society; it is also related to power in a smaller picture for individuals in their effort of constructing an identity that allows access to resources in the society of which they wish to become a member. Language in this sense is a "badge of identity" (Buruma, 2003, p. 19) or "a kind of password" (p. 10). If you understand the language

responsively and are able to manipulate it, you pass; if you have access to the more highly valued form of that language, you gain a more prestigious identity. In other words, to construct an identity that allows access, you need to master the language first.

Hamers and Blanc (2000) defined identity construction as psychological processes through which individuals create the self with regard to group membership. According to them, group membership is an aspect of the notion of self and comes into existence through the development of social identity, which derives from individuals' knowledge of their affiliation to one or several social groups and includes "all the values and affective meanings attached to this membership" (p. 200). Hamers and Blanc further elaborated that cultural identity, as part of social identity, "may comprise a diversity of features such as ancestry, territoriality, institutions, values, norms and language, all of which make one cultural group distinct from another" (p. 201). I suggest that among all of the features, language is core because it is the medium of preserving and conveying information about the other features. People identify themselves and are identified through the language they use in expressing their cultural background, their affiliations, their attitudes and values.

In a practical sense, identity is a concept of critical importance in individuals' endeavors to achieve their goals in life. Khayatt (1994) stated, "To me, identity is that part of me that needs to fit into a group, the need to see myself reflected in that group. It is the safety of belonging" (p. 82). However, to those souls in exile—the group of bilingual writers who were not raised in their first language context, this safety of belonging did not come to them automatically either when they started to speak the second language or when they came to live with the group with which they had just become acquainted because of their migrating experience. Seeing that continuing their first language and maintaining that identity did not promise a brighter future, they switched to the new language. However, they had to go through numerous struggles while trying to master the language and reconstruct a second self in their second language to achieve their goals in life, more specifically, to become a successful writer using the second language. Kellman (2003) insightfully asserted that,

As much as flesh and blood, we are composed of and by words. If *Homo sapiens* is a species defined by language, then switching the language entails transforming the self. While it can be liberating, discarding one's native tongue is also profoundly unsettling; it means constructing a new identity syllable by syllable. (p. xiv)

In the following sections, I will probe into the causes for such "unsettling" feelings and how these feelings evolve and exert influence on their lives and on their effort of reconstructing a self in writing.

## SECOND/ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE: PROTECTION OR LIBERATION?

One advantage of writing in one's mother tongue is that it holds "the seamless connection" (de Courtivron, 2003, p. 1) between language and the things and feelings associated with the language. However, writers have to write in their second or additional language for various reasons. Some are compelled to do so as victims of political upheavals, and writing in the additional language seems to offer a protection to them; mastering the additional language may be the only access to the symbolic resources in the society in which they have to live. Others find comforts and liberation by expressing themselves in the language they choose to use; to them writing in an additional language is like flipping out another badge of identity. I will elaborate these two points in the following paragraphs.

Language is often associated with power and politics (cf. Carter, 1997; Heller, 1995). When the political climate changes in a nation or an area, its language changes accordingly; therefore, people's access to the symbolic resources of the society through the language they speak also changes. A case in point is China's Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), during which intellectual and literary language was labeled as the language of "the bourgeois class," as described in Dai's (2002) novel *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*. It is a story of repressed expression of love for literature and civilization among young people in a remote area of China who risked their lives to obtain and read the masterpieces by Balzac and other Western literary giants whose works were labeled as "bourgeois" and were banned. Another example is the upheaval of the Second World War. The war and its aftermath may be the most influential event in recent history that has produced an enormous number of literary works by writers who had to flee their homeland for survival and who have reflected on their life and linguistic torments in writing, such as Hoffman, who wrote *Lost in Translation* (1989), an autobiography about her language quandaries as an immigrant in Canada after the Second World War; and Lerner (2003), who reflected on her painful language-switching process after she fled Nazi-controlled Europe to America.

The previously mentioned writers write in their additional languages because "languages do not only expand through conquest: they also grow by offering a safe haven to those who come to them in danger, those who are falling from some place far less safe than a mother's womb, those who . . . were forced to flee their native land" (Dorfman, 1998, p. 13). For instance, Hoffman was brought to Canada by her parents because of the hostility to Jews in Poland, a country that was occupied by Nazis during the Second World War and later was ruled by the Communists. Her parents had a strong sense of Jewish identity and an awareness of Polish anti-Semitism, and Hoffman was very much formed

within Polish culture (Kreisler, 2000). Poland had been a country from which one could not emigrate; however, in 1956 the ban on emigration was lifted and Jews were encouraged to leave Poland. Her family left the war-ravaged, impoverished country by taking this opportunity. Immigration to Canada offered Hoffman a new life and a new language. To secure the precious peaceful life in this new country, she strived to master its primary language, and at the same time suppress her first language. In her *Lost in Translation* (1989), Hoffman gave a detailed account of her efforts in looking for access to the Canadian life and in securing the hard-earned badge of identity of being Canadian.

Similar to Hoffman, Lerner also launched into the new language for protection, as it was her only choice when she landed on the new shore. A Jew endangered by Nazism, Lerner fled her native Austria and immigrated to the United States in 1939, while her sister had to go to England. The pressure of survival and the desire for success drove her to embrace the only language available to her. However, the fact that she and her sister both had to abandon their mother tongue (and their old identities as a result), and that they spoke different dialects of the English language, created a distance between them. Recounting her rediscovery of the German language, her relationship with her sister, and a part of her abandoned identity, she concluded, "Our lives have been deeply marked by our fate as refugees and by the happenstance of landing on different shores, on different continents. Each of us paid a heavy price for assimilation into a foreign culture." (2003, p. 283). However disturbing their experiences were, they were fated to assimilation because it was the only choice for them at the time and they were only able to realize the loss from deserting their first language after many years.

Apart from the previously mentioned writers, who were forced by circumstances to use their additional languages, there are authors who claim that they chose to use their additional languages for individual, idiosyncratic reasons that had nothing to do with global power or political and social upheavals. Lim, for example, was brought up in three languages. Feeling that she was caught between Malay and Hokkien, the languages spoken by her family members in social communing and in unkind comments about her mother, who abandoned the family, she chose English, the language that did not refuse her. She found comfort in "those sentences, the words and babbling in the pages of English-language books that open compliantly hour after hour to my lonely forays" (2003, p. 45). Iyer recounted growing up in three cultures—English, Indian, and American. He was born to Indian parents in England and was taken to the United States when he was young. He traveled widely around the world—be it the "lonely places," such as Iceland, Bhutan, and Argentina (1993), or the "space between," like Canada (2001). He chose to speak and write in English, the language that was not his mother tongue, and to live in places such as Japan, where he was "a permanent alien," a "Nowhereian" (2000, p. 23), because these

life, work, and travel experiences broadened his mind and enriched his writing; they created immense spaces for his creativity, imagination, and understanding of the global culture.

Federman, however, found no space between the two languages he spoke. He spent the first 20 years in France, and the last 40 years in America; therefore, he asserted that he is inside both languages and cultures. He felt that the two languages in him "fornicate in the same cell" (2003, p. 236); they seem to overlap and embrace one another. He wrote mainly in English because the French language was too restrictive to him in grammar and seemed too dictatorial in content, whereas English liberated him from the French language and the French culture. He claimed:

Language is what gets us where we want to go but at the same time prevents us from getting there . . . then by using another language . . . we may have a better chance of getting where we want to go, a better chance of saying what we wanted to say, or at least we have a second chance of succeeding. (p. 238)

The reasons for these writers to write in the additional language diverge from the reasons the other group of writers, the souls in exile, who were forced to abandon their first language. The major difference is that while one group, the global souls, feels free to write in the language they prefer, the other group painfully and painstakingly tell their stories in the second language they are destined to use. While the global souls have more than one badge of identity to flip back and forth, the souls in exile cautiously conceal their old badge and conscientiously polish their new badge.

## IDENTITY ISSUES OF THE SOULS IN EXILE

Reflecting on their writing, the souls in exile voice their concern of the self in writing from different perspectives. Does writing in a second language reflect their true self? Where do they feel they belong when writing in a second language? How do they view their doubleness in two languages and two cultures? In the following sections, I will address some of the identity concerns articulated by bilingual writers and try to find answers to the aforementioned questions from the few examples available.

### Writing as a Veil and a Mirror

Writing is often considered a conscious and thoughtful reflection of the author's life and attitudes. However, the Algerian writer Djébar (2003) used the metaphor "veil" (perhaps due to her cultural and religious background) to refer to writing in her additional language. She claimed that she has used the French language

as a *veil*, a veil over her individual self, over her woman's body, and over her own voice. She wanted her writing far from her, "as if in its hollows, in its thin and thick cursive script, I could hide myself somewhat, conscious of the extraliterary curiosity that my writings would raise before I even began" (p. 21). Even as she so claimed, however, writing is not only a veil over the self, it is also the revelation of the self. One reason is that the author always attempts to integrate his or her own experiences into those of the characters in the story and speak his or her thoughts through the mouths of these characters. For example, the main characters in Djébar's writing often "struggle against the traditional veil, attempting to remove it yet becoming caught again" (p. 22). As an author, she claimed that she found her space in the writing. It seemed that on the one hand, she tried to keep a distance between her writing and her life; on the other, she expressed her heart's desire by creating rebellious characters so that she felt her own voice was heard by the readers through the mouths of these characters.

Similarly, Hoffman also stated that as an author, she had a chance to bring her own voice to writing. In her interview with Kreisler, she stated that in writing *Lost in Translation* (1989), there was an attempt to integrate the Polish and the American parts of the self; and in *Shtetl* (1998)—a historical account of Poles and Jews in Poland as seen through the history of a small town near the border with the former Soviet Union—there was an effort to mingle the Polish with the Jewish parts of the self. She claimed that for her and her generation, "the division and the distillation" of one part of identity was artificial, whereas "the synthesis and reconciliation" of the identity is more genuine (Kreisler, 2000, p. 5). Hoffman thought that writing emerges from thinking and feeling; writers need to understand their thoughts and feelings about the subject before starting to write and to know what they really want to say about themselves (Kreisler, 2000). In other words, writing mirrors the author's thoughts and reflects the author's life experiences to a great extent.

### Writer as a Migrant

Bilingual writers not only reflect on their writing, they are also frequently concerned with who they are. Some bilingual writers consider themselves as migrants because of the state of their being and the status of their two languages. Migrants, according to Dorfman (2003), are those who "have wavered between extremes" in history, who suffer fragmented anguish, and whose wholeness is a delusion (p. 31). Living in two cultures and straddling two languages, Djébar (2003) did not hesitate to acknowledge her identity as "simply a migrant" by writing every day in the French language, and liked this "most beautiful label" in her Algerian Islamic culture (p. 27). Dorfman (2003), in a more in-depth manner, analyzed the condition of migrants in relation to their languages:

All migrants through history have invariably transferred with them the syllables and significances enclosed in the language they learned as they grew, the language that gave them a slow second birth as surely as their mother gave them a relatively rapid first one. That language, which contains the seeds of their most intimate identity, will be put to the test once the voyage is over, especially if the migrants happen to be unfortunate enough to move to a foreign land. Because waiting for them at the new location are multiple others—with their own dead, their own ceremonies and cemeteries, and of course, their own tongue. . . . It is more frequent in our globalizing world that those who arrive on a hostile shore are faced with an alien tongue. And will therefore be condemned to live a bilingual fate. (p. 30)

As a result of this migrant status, many bilingual writers write their first cultural stories in their second language. This can be a characteristic symptom of bilingual writers who attempt to mingle nostalgia of the old or lost home with the new world in which they are living; and at the same time attempt to grab the readers in the second culture with the alien or exotic stories of their first culture. For example, in Federman's novels the protagonist is often "a Frenchman in exile" (2003, p. 239), but they are meant to be read by English readers; Dai (2002) wrote for French/Western readers about life in China during the Cultural Revolution; and Hoffman's writings in English were usually situated in Poland, such as *Shtetl* (1998). These works touch readers not only because they are good stories about lives in other cultures, but also because readers find in them extreme examples of the fragmented lives and bitter feelings that are beyond the normal human existence.

### Double Belonging and Double Betrayal

Bred in two cultures and speaking two languages, some bilingual writers, mainly souls in exile, feel the doubleness of identities and doubleness in writing styles. Their sense of belonging is complicated by the incessant and perverse doubleness. Faced with such a situation, Dorfman (2003) wanted to know "how to protect the fragile shell of the self bombarded by two needs and two communities that read opposite meanings into every mouthful at every meal" (p. 31). The answer, the possibilities of resolving the fragmented condition, according to him, tended to be phantasmagoric because these possibilities are not always available to everyone. The so-called wholeness of the self is but "a delusion of completeness" (p. 31).

In terms of writing, Ferré (2003) found that writing in English takes much more effort than writing in her first language Spanish. Moreover, "writing in English is like looking at the world through a different pair of binoculars: It imposes a different mind-set" (p. 138). She said that she wrote in different ways in English than in her first language, trying to be straightforward and simple. She made an interesting analogy: "I feel like Emily Dickinson with a loaded gun in my hand: If I shoot, I must bring down my target. Otherwise, I know I'm

going to get shot at" (p. 138). Ferré, therefore, concluded that being a bilingual writer means much more than simply being bilingual:

A bilingual writer is really two different writers, has two very different voices, writes in two different styles, and, most important, looks at the world through two different sets of glasses. This takes a splitting of the self that doesn't come easily and can be dangerous. . . . In traversing linguistic borders, there is a real danger of finding yourself stranded in the connecting labyrinths of words, of losing contact with the spring of the unconscious from which ideas flow. (p. 138)

To Stavans (2003), his double identities were more confusing. When he lived in Mexico, he was perceived as Jewish because of his Hebraic ancestors. Once he crossed the border, he was perceived as Hispanic instead of Jewish. To make things even more complicated, he wanted to turn his past into remembrance and become "a new person" (p. 120) by crossing the border and switching the language; that is, he wanted to be American for the purpose of survival. Eventually, it was not double identities for him; it was multiple identities within one body, one soul. He embraced his hybrid identity and attempted to find happiness in a divided self. His writing is pervaded with a sense of exile—geographically, linguistically, and culturally, such as that in his autobiographic *On Borrowed Words: A Memoir of Language* (2001). This rich memoir tells of his search for home, language, and identity in different periods of his life in Mexico, Israel, and the United States; of a sense of self that shifted depending on the language he spoke. As a wandering soul inhabiting other people's tongues, he chose English as the language for his memoir instead of his other languages—Spanish, Yiddish, and Hebrew. These languages, according to him, are like different masks to wear on different occasions.

Another issue raised here is the sense of betrayal. When writers turned away from their first language, they turned away from their first culture, from their past. By claiming rights in the second language, they felt that they betrayed their first language. However, by turning from time to time to their first language, they betrayed their second language as well. Therefore, Djébar (2003) condemned that, as "a passing writer," what awaited her was not "double loyalty," but "double betrayal" (p. 26). Faced with such a situation, some writers endeavored to find a balance by writing in two languages at the same time, or by translating writing in one language into the other. Dorfman (1988), for example, published *Mascara* in both English and Spanish, and Federman was enthused in translating his own work in order to avoid "a sense of incompleteness" (2003, p. 239) when the texts exist only in one language.

### Language Quandaries

On top of all the other difficulties for people who traverse linguistic and geographic borders, language choice is also a dilemma. At an early stage, it

seems inevitable for many bilingual writers to struggle to make a living, struggle to prove their competence, and above all, struggle to master the second language and make it serve their purposes in life. What accompanies them may also be the feeling of being misplaced.

Lvovich suffered the "emotional dysbalance" (1997, p. 71) of language and identity in her early years of immigration. She claimed that she left her homeland Russia without regret, but she hated the real world around her in the United States, where she had to build a new life and search for a new self. These tasks seemed extremely difficult at the beginning when her third language, English, did not touch base with meaning. She wanted the new world to belong to her, but found herself being lost—"I did not know who I was anymore" (p. 66). Her professionalism, erudition, and knowledge were ignored by the academia, so she had to *prove* it, to *show* it to people who in fact turned a deaf ear to her "desperate calls for help" (p. 66). The chances for success were by no means equal for her.

Hoffman's earlier life as an immigrant had an enormous impact on her sense of language choice. When Polish lost its relevance in the new world and her command of English was not sufficient to articulate her interior and exterior world, she felt that she was without language. Understanding that "to be without language is to live in a very dim world" (Kreisler, 2000, p. 2) both internally and externally, and that language shapes people and people's perceptions of the world, Hoffman decided to write in English, the language that she would need to live. By writing in English every day, she struggled to make the English language inhabit her, help her create a new self, and find a voice in her writing. However, she found it hard to leave her first language and the life attached to it, as well as the unhappiness and the sense of loss in those first stages of immigration. What she chose to do was to squash her first language and her first self down, "out of the memory and consciousness" (Hoffman, 2003, p. 52). Before English "came to occupy all the strata of thought and self," she was afraid of releasing her first language from "its choked, underground life" (p. 52).

It usually does not take very long to learn to get by in a new language; however, as Lerner (2003) asserted, it takes years to "master the language" (p. 271). During the process of mastering the second language, there arises another question—how to treat the first language, to keep it or to leave it? What happens if they choose the latter? What is the effect of such a choice on their psyche?

Hoffman (2003) recalled her talk with a poet who was taken from his native Russia to a refugee camp in Germany and then to Israel when he was young. The poet said that he had killed his first language, Russian, because he wanted to become a writer in Hebrew and his beloved first language would have interfered with the project: "I almost remember the decision to do it—to murder Russian within me" (p. 50). As for Hoffman herself, although she did not "do anything as

violent as killing Polish" (p. 50), she did want Polish silenced so that she could make room for English within herself. It was her conscious decision to displace, to abandon, and to reject her beloved, comfortable mother tongue because, as she later reflected, her attachment to Polish was so strong that she was not able to "form an equally strong bond to the new language in which I was fated to live" (p. 51). This "process of linguistic transmutation" (p. 51) was evidently difficult and painful, as well as emotionally disturbing to her. It was after many years that she started to realize the loss and tried to pick up the abandoned thread in her book *Lost in Translation*.

Similar to Hoffman's experience, Lerner (2003) also made the conscious decision to change the cynical attitude towards the United States and embrace its primary language after she emigrated from Europe. "If that means suppressing and denying some of my European habits in thought and attitude, so be it" (p. 275). She could foresee the gains in such an enterprise when she was young, but she was only able to see the cost of it, which was much greater than she would like to admit, after more than 50 years.

It is hard to say if leaving their mother tongue to embrace the new language offered liberation or protection, or even a resolution for these writers to gain access to the desired society. It is apparent that, after many years, the pain came back to them; they started to look back for the lost mother tongue and the intimate feelings and memories attached to it. "If you are forced to give up your mother tongue, what is lost?" Lerner (2003, p. 276) asked. Her intense drive to become an American writer had pushed her into leaving her language of childhood behind, not counting the cost. However, through writing, she had found her way back and found that the cost of abandoning her first language was enormous:

Losing one's mother tongue is inconceivable—one assumes one can always return to it. But that is not so. . . . When you lose your language, you lose the sound, the rhythm, the forms of your unconscious. Deep memories, resonances, sounds of childhood come through the mother tongue—when these are missing the brain cuts off connections. (p. 276)

Although the return of the mother tongue has brought some healing of the other losses, it cannot heal all the wounds in memory. Being able to reflect on the losses and return to the first language, however, is a blessing to these bilingual writers. At least, they are able to pick up the lost thread eventually and find a balanced psyche for themselves. It may not be able to bring the soul in exile home, but it can bring it closer to the place where home is located.

### Awkward Betweenness

Bilingual writers not only have wounds in memory about their lost mother tongue, they may also be faced with awkwardness of being in-betweeners. Language is a living entity; it grows and changes. When one does not use it, one loses the fluency and adequacy in the language. Some souls in exile abandoned the expressiveness of their first language by repressing it. However, the new language stayed "linear and flat" (Lerner, 2003, p. 276) for a long time before they could finally make it their own. "Living in translation" was the state of being with which they had to cope, with "no sure footing," "no clear-cut markers," and "no obvious signposts" (p. 277). Lerner reflected that she lived "a split life, living in one language and speaking in another," having "an overwhelming sense of inadequacy and frustration" (p. 272).

The sense of betweenness is also pervasive among the global souls. Lim grew up in a multilingual environment. However, preferring one language to others still made her feel awkward when with her family. She recalled, "I have grown up like a fish not in three languages but between them, not swimming proudly among these languages but as shamefully ostracized from two" (2003, p. 45). Despite the fact that her choice of language had nothing to do with political upheavals or economic crisis, she was not able to avoid the frustration of being an in-betweener.

As for Iyer, it was another kind of in-betweenness. He had grown up in three cultures simultaneously, but felt he belonged to none. He claimed that he had lived "in the cracks between them," having no history and living "under the burden of no home" (2000, p. 23). However, he chose to live in the language that was not his mother tongue, in the place that had no connection to his childhood experience. His life was different from the souls in exile—the bilingual writers who were forced to leave behind their mother tongue, and whose goals were to relocate their first language and feel at home in the second language and culture, or to reach a reconciliation between the two.

### Reconciliation of Languages and Identities

After long and disturbing periods of struggle in life, along with confusions about identities, bilingual writers, namely the souls in exile, are usually able to find a balanced self through writing and reflection. With the reconciliation of the two languages, they can expect fresh discoveries of the self. Hoffman's return to Polish after a 20-year hiatus, although not a smooth process, enabled her to find, with much pleasure, that

It is possible now to go back and forth with the knowledge that both languages that have constructed me exist within one structure; and to know that the structure is sturdy enough to allow for pliancy and openness—and, who knows, perhaps for new discoveries yet. (2003, p. 54)

Similar to Hoffman's experience, Dorfman (2003) was able to "embrace the need to live in two dimensions, pledge loyalty to two cultures," and was content in being a resident of dual existence, "married to two tongues, inhabited by both English and Spanish in equal measures, in love with them both now that they have called off the war" for his throat (p. 33). What came out eventually was not the victory of one language over the other, but "a cohabitation" (p. 33)—the two languages reached a truce within him. He could proudly announce that he was "a fluid bigamist of language," trusting that "the distress of being double and somewhat homeless is overshadowed by the glory of being hybrid and open" (p. 33).

Lvovich (1997) was finally able to assume her English-speaking American identity when her third language, English, found its place and came to peace with her other languages—Russian and French; and when she figured out that she did not have to exhibit her French identity to avoid being Russian, Jewish, Soviet. Above all, her new self arose when she came to realize that she did not have to suffer from being exiled in her own country and she could build an American self and a real life with it through her English language. This complex healing process, as she claimed, "marked the birth of a balanced social and language ego, without which functioning in a new language and culture is impossible" (p. 68), and this "new identity building process—thinking, speaking, crying, joking, laughing and dreaming, expressed in a foreign language—becomes a creative discovery" (p. 69).

When the conflicts between languages come to peace, bilingualism begins to demonstrate its tremendous advantage—"having two different views of the world is profoundly enriching" (Ferré, 2003, p. 138). With two languages at their discretion, bilingual writers can be enriched by instead of being afflicted by bilingualism (Federman, 2003). In Lvovich's (1997) words, "Bilingualism is a way of life; it is an absolute involvement in two cultures and two societies that means . . . close ties with people . . . and with the cultural heritage" (p. 71). Having a grateful feeling that there will be more room for life and growing with each language and each identity, being exiled is no longer a torture. As de Courtivron (2003) asserted, "we are all exiles. Exile is, after all, only a metaphor for the human condition" (p. 7) because we all try to understand the self and others with whom we reach out to communicate. The difference bilingual writers make may be that their rich experiences in navigating between words and worlds enable them to understand the meaning of home more deeply than monolingual beings.

## CONCLUSION

In this article, I have argued that souls in exile is the reality in which many bilingual writers are fated to live although they are endeavoring to reach a reconciliation of languages and a reconstruction of identities through writing.

For bilingual writers, bilingualism means more than being bilingual, being able to use two languages. They write in their second language for various reasons and to serve various purposes; bilingualism therefore, carries different meanings for them. For the souls in exile, the earlier contradiction and later reconciliation between the first and second languages demonstrated their struggles in finding themselves in writing and in life. The way they constructed the characters in their stories, the way they narrated their language journeys in their memoirs, all told the reader that while constructing a self in their second-language writing can be difficult, their double competencies in the two languages have enriched their writing and lives. While looking for home is a perpetual theme, being an exile is also a blessing, a gift that not all are able to obtain. It is this state of being in exile that has given them the chance to be different and to be able to find the different selves.

However, it also needs to be noted that the proclaimed goal of becoming a global soul is elusive; it is like a dream that may not be completely achievable. The difficulties of becoming a global soul are not to be overlooked, and the elusive nature of being a global soul is also not to go unnoticed, although it is but human nature to pursue perfection that can hardly be achieved in real life. Although such writers as Dorfman, Hoffman, Lvovich, and Ferré claimed that they have reached the reconciliation of languages and cultures, the sense of exile may continue to accompany them as they write or talk about their fragmented feelings in the early migrating years. Even if they are able to become the proclaimed global souls, they may still have feelings of exile because global souls like Iyer asserted that they suffered the sense of having no home.

Analyzing the work of bilingual writers and their struggles with language and identity not only provides insights into the nature of bilingualness, but also has profound implications for the education of bilingual individuals. In this mobile, pluralistic, and in some parts turbulent, world, more and more people are either blessed to be bilingual or fated to be so. If the former, it may be easier to help the bilingual individuals to realize the great advantages of having two or more languages in their command and to build a confident self. If the latter, it may be a more challenging task to assist these second-language individuals to walk out of the shadow of having to leave behind their first language, their homeland, and their previous identities, while at the same time struggling to learn a new language and earn new identities in a new culture. The stories of and by the bilingual writers discussed in this article suggest that educators at different levels need to pay special attention to the particular problems and psychological needs of these exiled bilinguals, be they children or adults. The pain of losing one's home and language is already beyond words, but the journey of finding a new voice in a new language can be made much shorter and less of a struggle if educators in the host culture have a sense of empathy and understanding, and reach out to offer a hand.



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