

**“We just do us”: Exploring the language use and cultural  
identity of intercultural couples in Auckland**

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## **Abstract**

The growing diversity in multicultural Auckland suggests a growing number of intercultural intimate relationships. Existing New Zealand studies have discussed how the rise in such relationships can threaten language maintenance and impact cultural identity in minority and migrant language communities. Yet, few studies have looked in to these issues from the perspectives of intercultural couples themselves. This research investigates the sociolinguistic attitudes, practices and cultural perspectives of Auckland-based couples to explore how language and cultural experiences impact their everyday life with others, their relationship dynamics and their construction of identity.

This qualitative inquiry generated its primary data through semi-structured interviews conducted with six couples, of which one partner of each couple was a LOTE (Language other than English) background migrant and the other was an English-speaking background (ESB) New Zealand-born. Demographic questionnaires provided context to the interview data, and a researcher journal informed the theme-based analysis.

Interview data showed that couples downplayed cultural differences and engaged in talk focused on their similarities, shared values and their individual personalities. Couples all have their own unique way of communicating and negotiating their cultural and linguistic selves, in-between cultures, in their everyday lives. At the same time, key common aspects identified across all participants' communities of practice were humour, conscious communication, translanguaging and creative language play. Findings signalled the ability for partners to (re)construct their identity in the other language and culture. This often occurs through the use of humour, which is pragmatically and semantically challenging.

This study goes beyond focusing only on linguistic and cultural differences, and highlights the diverse experiences of individuals, as well as evolving patterns of language and communication in intercultural communities of practice. It also underscores the need to address prevailing monolingual attitudes and cultural constructs in the host society, which undermine individual authenticity, belonging and connection. The experiences reported by couples in this study indicate the value and importance of LOTE learning and plurilingual education for fostering a more inclusive culture.

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## **Attestation of Authorship**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material that to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

**Signature:** Sophie Moore

**Date:** November 2021

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Ethics approval was granted by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEK) on 22 November 2019 (Reference number 19/386).

# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background to the study

As one of a few ‘superdiverse’ cities, Auckland is home to a vast array of languages, cultures and ethnicities, which has generated national discussion about the need to nurture and support different languages and cultural identities, and encourage “intercultural approaches, where cultures exchange and interact constructively” (Auckland Council, 2018, p. 60).

Intercultural intimate relationships provide a context to explore linguistic and cultural diversity and effective intercultural and interlingual practices (Piller, 2000), and are a private site where language beliefs and practices meet (Torsh, 2020). Intercultural couples are also said to be faced with juggling identities and their associated ideologies (Breger & Hill, 1998), which raises the question of how languages, cultures and identities are successfully negotiated and constructed in such relationships. This study specifically seeks to understand the linguistic and cultural attitudes, choices and practices of Auckland-based native English-speaking background (ESB) partners and migrant partners whose native tongue is a language other than English (LOTE). In other words, this study looks at the attitudes and experiences of couples in a linguistic minority/majority relationship.

My personal interest in this topic stems from my own linguistic and intercultural relationship experiences, which made me intrigued by the cognitive, emotional and social impacts of exposure to a new language and culture. Ten years ago, I experienced first-hand the power of language for survival. I was working in Japan as a translator and international relations coordinator when the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami struck the Tōhoku region where I lived. After the first magnitude 9 shake subsided, my colleague and I were rushed to the local radio station where we began interpreting tsunami warnings into English for foreign residents. Access to information in languages other than Japanese was critical for migrants at this time. This turned out to be one of the greatest disasters of all time and nearly 20,000 lives were lost. Now, 10 years later, I am on another journey learning the capacity of language to connect to place, others and self in my home country, Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ).

I have gained new perspectives on communication and culture through my language and intercultural relationship experiences, which have shaped my sense of self. In those relationships I have been in both the position of migrant second language speaker and native speaker. When I was in Japan as a young adult I found myself in the position of minority language speaker. Now, I find myself in a different position with the choice to learn the native language of my partner in my home country.

For the purpose of this study, I define my current relationship with my partner as intercultural due to the continuous interplay, shifting and reshaping and occasional blending of our languages and cultural practices. People such as ourselves, whose private communication is intercultural communication, are not a minority these days (Piller, 2002); as the world has become increasingly connected, interpersonal relationships are constantly being constructed across cultures. Discussions of experiences in relation to the negotiation of language, culture and identity have arisen many times among acquaintances who are also in intercultural relationships. Hearing stories of communication successes, and challenges, and of new knowledge and perspectives, made me see the potential for a research study to explore these phenomena further. I embarked on my research into intercultural relationships with an open mind. My aim was to understand different perspectives on the phenomena referred to above, and how they interplay in people's daily lives. I did this through examining views and experiences articulated in interviews with both partners in an intercultural relationship where one partner is a native English speaker and one is a non-native English speaker migrant.

## 1.2 Aims and significance of the study

To my knowledge, in-depth qualitative studies to date have not addressed the perspectives and experiences of intercultural couples together in NZ. There has been limited research internationally examining the views of native English-speaking partners in an English-dominant context, and of couples without children. As such, few studies have given attention to the private language and cultural practices, and motives for and value of the use of LOTEs in intercultural relationships beyond intergenerational transmission. This identified gap led to the development of the following research questions, which the proposed study seeks to answer:

- (1) What are intercultural couples' attitudes towards language, identity and multiculturalism in Auckland?
- (2) How do intercultural partners report the negotiation and construction of language and culture within their relationship and in their daily lives?

The aims of this study are twofold: to create a space for both migrant LOTE partners and NZ-born ESB partners to reflect on and share their individual and shared experiences and accounts of language, culture and identity in their daily lives, and provide an avenue to deepen the discussion on communication and culture in the context of multicultural Auckland.

## 1.3 Thesis structure

This thesis is organised into seven chapters. Chapter 2 will situate and guide the focus of this study by drawing on theory and literature explaining key concepts relevant to the aims in 1.2 above. It will provide a brief overview of cultural and linguistic diversity in Auckland and NZ,

before discussing societal language ideologies and sociolinguistic factors that may contribute to language choices. Literature examining communication, culture and identity construction in a second language learning and bilingual context will be presented, including international literature on intercultural couples to date, to provide context, identify gaps in the field and frame the focus for this study.

Chapter 3 outlines the rationale for the chosen methodological approach, in line with literature and existing research in the field. It describes the study design, including the research instruments and the process of data collection and analysis. It will consider my role in the study as an ‘insider’ and researcher. The data interpretation approach detailed in this chapter provides important context for the subsequent three chapters.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 present and discuss the key common findings through the voices of the participants. Chapter 4 focuses on partners’ attitudes and everyday experiences of language and culture, situated in the context of Auckland. Chapter 5 focuses on the shared private language and culture of the couples. Chapter 6 examines data pertaining to a salient aspect of couples’ communication—humour—to illustrate and add another layer of depth to themes discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter 7 concludes this thesis by drawing together the key findings in relation to existing studies and theoretical positions identified in the literature review. This final chapter provides reflections on the contributions and limitations of this research, and areas that may benefit from future research.

## Chapter 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

This study explores how language is valued, negotiated and constructed in ESB and LOTE-background couples' daily lives, and the factors and motives that may play a role in their language choices and practices. This includes how their language repertoires and identifications may intersect with and reflect discourses or ideologies, i.e. "any belief that mediates language use" (Piller, 2002, p. 13). In order to examine participants' experiences of the interrelationship between language, culture and identity, this literature review will discuss language in relation to migrants, native speakers and couples.

Context to this study is firstly provided through a brief overview of cultural and linguistic diversity in NZ and Auckland, and the lack of NZ couple studies to date. Then, key factors that impact language choice will be addressed, including the global spread of English and native speaker ideology. The chapter then turns to research addressing the nexus of communication, culture and identity, discussing social constructionist and poststructuralist views, with reference to global couple studies. The review concludes by discussing the dearth of research related to the perceptions and experiences of ESB/LOTE couples in an English-dominant context, those without children and the NZ context, which drives the motivation for this Auckland-based study.

### 2.2 The Aotearoa New Zealand and Auckland context

This section provides an overview of the linguistic and cultural landscape of NZ and Auckland in order to situate the experiences of the couples in this study. It addresses cultural and linguistic diversity, prevalent monolingualism and the lack of literature related to intercultural partnerships.

#### 2.2.1 Cultural and linguistic diversity

NZ is now classified as one of a few super-diverse countries due to significant growth in linguistic and cultural diversity during recent decades (Spoonley, 2020). Māori are tangata whenua (people of the land) and Te Tiriti o Waitangi/the Treaty of Waitangi is the bicultural foundation upon which NZ's multicultural society lies. The country has sustained a historically high level of net migration relative to its population since late 2014, with its annual figure above 40,000 (with the exception being, at the time of writing, due to COVID-19 travel restrictions), and its highest at 91,900 in 2020. In the 2018 census, approximately 180 ethnic groups were recorded nationwide, 27 percent of New Zealanders reported being born overseas and more than 170 languages were identified as spoken in NZ (Stats NZ, 2020). In the global context, Auckland, the focus of this study, has been named the fourth most culturally diverse city in the

world (International Organization for Migration, 2015; Peacock, 2016), with more than 220 recorded ethnic groups, 41.6 percent of the population reportedly born overseas and approximately 30 percent of residents able to speak multiple languages (Stats NZ, 2018).

A ‘super-diverse’ city, such as Auckland, is described as having a complexity of diversities in relation to its residents’ ethnic, national and cultural backgrounds, its languages and (sub)cultures, as well as socioeconomic levels, social and living circumstances, and migration patterns (Vertovec, 2007). The term ‘super-diversity’ goes beyond migration and focuses on “transformative ‘diversification of diversity’” within and between cultural groups (Vertovec, 2007, p. 1025) and the connecting variables that shape people's lives and opportunities. It adds complexity to sociolinguistics issues (Vertovec, 2019). Creese and Blackledge (2010) propose that superdiverse societies can be better understood by examining the ways both migrant and non-migrant communities negotiate their place within their changing environment through a sociolinguistic lens. Piller (2013) argues that an important focus of sociolinguistic research now should not be linguistic diversity in itself but the intersection of monolingual ideologies and multilingual practices (see also Torsh, 2020). The significance of the current study is that intercultural relationships within the context of this research are one such site where social and cultural borders are crossed and reconstructed (Heller & Lévy, 1992; Qian & Lichter, 2007).

Despite NZ’s vast linguistic diversity and recognition of the value of languages as a national resource for cultural diversity, cultural identities of individuals and communities, and international connectedness (Auckland Council, 2018; Human Rights Commission, 2008; Royal Society of New Zealand [RSNZ], 2013; Waite, 1992), it remains a predominantly monolingual English-speaking society (Major, 2018; RSNZ, 2013; Stats NZ, 2020). The number of monolingual English speakers is gradually decreasing with the continual rise in migrants and growing proportion of people speaking non-official languages (see Appendix A for census graph). However, the most recent 2018 census data shows that a significant 75.4 percent of the NZ population still only speak one language—English (Stats NZ, 2020). While the two official languages are te reo Māori and New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL), English is a de facto official language and the dominant language spoken, and has historically been primarily used in government and the education system.

Views on language in NZ have been shaped by its colonial history, and a hegemony of monolingualism has prevailed in education policy and practice (Major, 2018). While much research recognises that learning a second language (L2) improves cognitive processes, creative thinking (Bialystok, 2011; May et al., 2004), academic success across the curriculum and intercultural skill acquisition in students (Byram, 2012), to date a L2 curriculum has not been at the forefront of government priorities in NZ. A focused solution to address NZ’s linguistic diversity remains unrealised (Harvey, 2015, 2018), as while national languages policy is said to

have been under discussion for some 50 years (Kaplan, 1994), disconnects have been evident between plans and frameworks, and implementation has been slow. Moreover, recent statistics show that while recent growth in te reo Māori education is visible, the number of secondary students opting to study another language has declined from one in four in 2013 (Auckland Languages Strategy Working Group, 2018) to one in six (Radio New Zealand, 2020).

As Auckland's population grows and changes, daily practices, conceptualisations of national identity and the identity of New Zealanders will change further (Tan, 2015). Progressive diversity impacts community connections, behaviours and the nature of family units and their familial perceptions and practices. While tensions could emerge over this process (for example in relation to child-rearing practices), NZ sociologist Paul Spoonley notes that interethnic partnerships provide an opportunity for new identities and practices to be forged (Spoonley, 2020). While some may see ethnic intermarriage as being equated with no longer being a member of an ethnic community, mixed identity does not mean that ethnic identity is weaker or less important to individuals and communities (Spoonley, 2015, as cited in Tan, 2015). The present study explores perspectives and experiences related to language practices and identity among a group of intercultural couples in Auckland with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

### 2.2.2 Defining intercultural couples

Previous studies employ a number of different terms to describe a relationship between two people of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, including intermarriage, interlinguistic marriage, mixed-marriage, transnational, transcultural, cross-cultural, multicultural, interracial, interethnic or intercultural relationship. The different focus of studies in the field is reflected in these terms.

With global migration and diverse relationships and family configurations the new normal, it is unsurprising that a growing number of studies explore language use among multilingual families and couples in different contexts across the globe. Scholars in the field frequently focus on married couples with diverse ethnic and/or national and linguistic backgrounds to explore language use in a family context (de Klerk, 2001; Dumanig, 2010; Gonçalves, 2013a; Piller, 2002; Remennick, 2009; Seward, 2008; Torsh, 2020). Many studies feature bilingual/multilingual couples who can speak two or more languages, to explore their language choices, negotiations and identity constructions (Bartzen, 2013; Beraud, 2016; Gonçalves, 2013a; Gundacker, 2010; Pietikäinen, 2014; 2017; Piller, 2000, 2002, 2008; Tien, 2013; Tien et al., 2017). Several studies have been conducted with couples from different linguistic backgrounds who use English as a lingua franca (ELF) as their second languages together (Dervin, 2013; Gundacker, 2010; Pietikäinen, 2014, 2017). These studies expand ELF research

beyond its usual professional and institutional contexts to explore its use in social relationships and how couples succeed in maintaining a close relationship in ELF.

The term intercultural couple is commonly used in studies to reference two partners from diverse sociocultural backgrounds, namely of different country of origin (nationality) and first language (Cools, 2011; Dervin, 2013; Gonçalves, 2013a; Pietikäinen, 2017). The current study adopts this term, as it examines the negotiation and construction of communication and culture between two partners of different nationalities and first languages. In this study, the term intercultural couple specifically refers to partnerships between migrants whose first languages are not English and New Zealand-born native speakers of English. In using this term, I acknowledge that all couples are intercultural in the sense that each partner brings diverse personal and social experiences to a relationship (Bystydzienski, 2011). In exploring couples' communication, I draw on the definition of intercultural communication (IC) as "concerned with how people from different 'cultural' backgrounds interact with each other and negotiate 'cultural' or linguistic differences perceived or made relevant through interactions, as well as the impact such interactions have on group relations and on individuals' identities, attitudes and behaviors" (Hua, 2016, p. 3). I also bring with this an understanding that culture is fluid, meaning that people may not experience culture in the way that it is traditionally categorised by differences and may identify with multiple cultures.

### 2.2.3 Intercultural partnerships in Aotearoa New Zealand

Literature on intercultural partnerships in NZ is limited. Inter-marriage statistics are not reported on in the NZ five-yearly census data and there is little information to give an indication of intercultural partnership figures outside the domain of marriage, aside from the number of partnership visas<sup>1</sup> processed by Immigration New Zealand (INZ) annually (see Appendix B for figures). However, the aforementioned migration trends in NZ suggest a growing number of intercultural couples.

Surprisingly, few quantitative studies have analysed ethnic inter-marriage trends in NZ. Demographers Didham and Callister (2014) produced a report based on a comparative study they conducted on the 2001 and 2013 census figures and found ethnic inter-marriage to be significantly more common among Asian, Māori and Pacific people than Europeans, and particularly for those born in NZ. Qualitative studies examining intercultural couples' perspectives on communication and culture have not been identified in the NZ literature to date. It became evident that while NZ-based research examining language maintenance, shift and

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<sup>1</sup> Partners of a NZ citizen or resident can apply for a Partner of a New Zealander Resident Visa to live in NZ permanently.

cultural identity in minority and migrant community contexts is growing (see, for example, Dagamseh, 2020; Kasarla, 2021; Kaur, 2019; Lee, 2013; McKee, 2017; Wilson, 2017; Wohlfart, 2017), research on intercultural couples in the NZ setting remains in its infancy.

NZ migrant and minority community studies indicate the importance of language to ethnic/cultural identity and the importance of heritage language maintenance in the private domain for (ethno)linguistic vitality and transmission of language to future generations (e.g. Kasarla, 2021). Also noted are the complexities and competing tensions that exist to prioritise English for social and economic success, and desire for greater government and institutional language support for language valorisation and (ethno)linguistic vitality (Crezee, 2008; Lee, 2013; McKee, 2017; Trinick et al., 2020; Wilson, 2017). External threats to linguistic identity are in some instances noted to increase its vitality through the response it invokes in these communities and their belief in its importance, for example in the case of NZSL (McKee, 2017).

Interethnic intimate relationships are reported in some of these NZ studies as complicating heritage language maintenance and transmission in the family setting (Lee, 2013; Wilson, 2017), in line with wider literature reporting that greater language maintenance is often observed among groups who favour endogamous marriage (Clyne, 2003). The current research focuses on intercultural couples who are largely absent from NZ studies to provide first-hand accounts of their views and experiences of language, culture and identity in their daily lives. The following sections describe experiences of intercultural couples in existing global research, and relevant factors that have generally influenced those experiences. It also examines sociolinguistic literature relating to migrant and local partners separately.

## 2.3 Language and society

This study examines the views and experiences of both migrant and local partners in relation to language, as well as their experiences of host society attitudes. Accordingly, the literature addresses language use in the context of migration and the positioning of native speakers, as well as language and cultural practices among couples in existing global research.

This section specifically addresses how language status and ideologies contribute to interactional inequity for non-native speakers, and the disincentive for native English speakers to learn LOTEs. It examines sociolinguistic hierarchies, interactional inequality and being 'different' from the norms of a dominant group.

### 2.3.1 The global status of English and education

Language is not only a means of communication but also a medium of power, as interactions reflect and reproduce social structure (Bourdieu, 1991). Different values are attached to different languages, linguistic varieties and practices, which exist in a sociolinguistic hierarchy

(Dewaele, 2009). The English language is particularly empowering, given its position as the only hypercentralised global language in the world (de Swaan, 2001). As a globally valued widely spoken language, English has a significant impact on the attitudes and motivations of native English speakers to learn other languages (Torsh, 2020; Ushioda, 2017). Its status as a global language would appear to create a lesser need for Anglophones to learn other languages (Piller, 2016a). Not only does this create a disincentive for native English speakers to engage with other languages, but complacency or resistance may also be observed, reflecting an ideology of English as ‘enough’ or ‘sufficient’ (Gayton, 2018).

Much research acknowledges that national language(s) and policies have a significant influence on the language beliefs, choices and practices in interpersonal and intergroup communication and identity construction (see Anchimbe, 2013; Johnson, 2013; May, 2000; McCarty, 2011). Scholars note the importance of the language learning context in shaping learning beliefs in second language learners, and link low motivation to learn LOTEs and poor language learning outcomes to inadequate language policy and education (Cameron, 2021; Lo Bianco, 2010, 2014). It may promote the belief among native English speakers that acquiring another language is a difficult achievement. Those who have been raised in a monolingual setting may view multilingual competence as “‘different,’ even ‘abnormal,’ perhaps ‘uneducated,’ and possibly incompatible with modernity and upward socioeconomic mobility” (Ricento, 2013, p. 528). Ricento (2013) notes that even in the diverse NZ setting there are views of indifference towards multilingual competence, language mixing and other language practices. A recent Auckland council study, as part of the 30-year plan for Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, revealed that nearly half of the Aucklanders surveyed viewed the region's ethnic and cultural diversity negatively and that “local boards experiencing growth and demographic changes tended to view ethnic and cultural diversity less positively, with some saying it made Auckland a worse place to live” (Truebridge, 2020). Some NZ studies have shown migrants may cease speaking a language to avoid the stigma attached to language and cultural stereotypes they experience (Crezee, 2008; Kuiper, 2005).

The role of language has often been overlooked in intercultural education for the monolingual, monocultural mainstream (Dervin & Liddicoat, 2013). Dervin and Liddicoat (2013) argue that we need to look beyond language as a code and recognise its importance as an integral part of human life and social practices where meaning is interpreted and created, as it constitutes cultural perceptions and how we make sense of ourselves and others. Scholars argue that both public and private domains of language use require attention to help to shift wider attitudes towards language use, and propose the value of “language advocates/champions” (Trinick et al., 2020, p. 32; see also Spolsky, 2019). A recent NZ study commissioned by Te Taura Whiri i te

Reo Māori<sup>2</sup> centred on the experiences and value of te reo Māori language from the perspective of Pākehā learners (Nelson, 2018), informing the “challenges and advantages involved in becoming bilingual Pākehā citizens of Aotearoa New Zealand” (p. v). The current study aligns with this by creating a space for native English speakers to share their perspectives and experiences of the value of learning and using LOTEs and the significance this holds for them in their daily lives on an interpersonal level.

### 2.3.2 Native speaker ideology

Relations of dominance and discursive practices are complicated by the ideology of the ‘native speaker’<sup>3</sup> (Doerr, 2009). According to Bourdieu (1991), a person’s language skills, accent, grammar and vocabulary differences indicate quantities of linguistic capital and can impact access to economic and social opportunities, and can determine or construct their social position. The concept of native-speakerism has been the focus of much discussion within educational cultures and as a concern related to inequalities in English language teaching (Canagarajah, 1999; Holliday, 2006; Pennycook, 1998; Swan et al., 2015). Holliday (2006) also argues that “native-speakerism needs to be addressed at the level of the prejudices embedded in everyday practice” (p. 386) in order to understand the meanings and realities of those outside the English-speaking West. Torsh (2018) noted in her study that there is less research on how native-speakerism instilled through educational experiences is reflected in the context of interpersonal relationships.

Often the ‘native speaker’ is regarded as the ‘ideal language user’ (Doerr, 2009) and the genuine embodiment of standard language, and that authority is brought to its speakers who use legitimate authentic language (Kramsch, 1998). An important part of a speaker’s social identity is the way they speak, including their accent, which holds a vast amount of social information (Kim et al., 2019), through which they are often evaluated by other speakers. Language is often evaluated as a measure of belonging, and being a ‘native speaker’ is used as a yardstick by which knowledge of a second language is measured. As ‘non-native’ speakers’ language constructions may differ from ‘native speakers’, their linguistic competence is often viewed as inferior (Ellis, 2015; Holliday, 2009).

Inequalities can be observed in interactions in which ‘native speakers’ take an authoritative stance by emphasising the linguistic features and circumstances of a ‘non-native’ speaker’s utterance instead of their communicative function (Liddicoat, 2016). Second language speakers

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<sup>2</sup> The Māori Language Commission, an autonomous Crown entity under the Māori Language Act 1987, plays a critical role in actively promoting the use of Māori as a living language.

<sup>3</sup> The term ‘native speaker’ and ‘non-native speaker’ are placed in quotation marks hereinafter as they are constructed notions (Doerr, 2009; Holliday, 2009).

may have to adapt their expressions to meet these demands, creating tension and anxiety when conversing (Bourdieu, 1991). Scholars discuss how linguistic and cultural superiority is displayed through forms of ‘othering’ (Canagarajah, 1999; Dervin, 2013; Holliday, 2015; Hua & Kramersch, 2016; Pennycook, 1998) and how ‘others’ are perceived and judged based on their ‘nonstandard’ language forms or ‘foreign’ accents (Ricento, 2013). Liddicoat (2016) notes that these interactional inequalities are related to the social construction and performance of their identities, and that the ideological construction of the ‘native speaker’ may be affirmed or resisted and reframed in such interactions.

Individuals who have 'non-native' accents can experience stigma as not being native born (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010) and research suggests that they are perceived more negatively, and as less intelligent, less competent and inferior in status. Workplace studies and anecdotal evidence suggest the consequences this has for employment opportunities and promotions, relating to assumptions about cultural fit or linguistic proficiency, as well as differences in and lack of familiarity with pragmatic norms (Piller, 2016b; Sachtleben, personal communication, September 3, 2021). Seals (2021) notes the problematic underlying assumption that a ‘native speaker’ holds more linguistic knowledge and ability, which fails to account for complex and dynamic language abilities. The New Zealand Language in the Workplace Project (LWP) (Marra et al., 2009; Vine, 2020) identified the challenges of cultural communicative norms for migrants in their daily experiences in the workplace. As a result of this research INZ has developed resources for improving communication between NZ employers and migrant employees.

### 2.3.3 Language choice in intercultural relationships

When it comes to language attitudes and choice among couples, Piller (2002) notes that issues related to language knowledge and ideologies make the matter much more complex than simply selecting one language over another. In Torsh’s (2020) review of the literature, she states “Language choice is complex and embedded in issues of identity and power. Language choice can further come about due to language desire for what that language represents or as a result of linguistic insecurity in the second language” (p. 25).

In the intercultural couple context, many studies have investigated the linguistic choices and practices of the migrant minority language partner in the intermarriage space, and often those of the female partner in the context of bilingual child-rearing. Torsh (2020) extended this work by focusing on the attitudes and approaches of ESB majority speaker partners towards multilingualism and the use of LOTEs in their relationships in Australia. The author provided new insights into the differing attitudes that ESB and LOTE partners hold in relation to language learning and practice, illustrating tensions between multilingual pride and the monolingual mindset. Torsh’s (2020) findings demonstrated that linguistic insecurity was felt

by ESB speakers due to their poor language learning experiences. In addition, she noted that ESB partners showed that they were committed partners in ways other than learning and using their L2, for instance by supporting the migrant partner with their professional English. Both Piller (2002) and Torsh (2020) posit that the powerful position that English occupies and the typically differing second language learning trajectories of 'native' and 'non-native' English speakers results in L2 English speakers having stronger ownership of the language in comparison to ESB L2 learners. Torsh's (2020) study placed greater focus on the views of the ESB partner, while the current study looks at the perspectives of both partners in an intercultural relationship.

Remennick (2009) noted the imbalance of material and symbolic resources between partners in her study of Russian immigrants married to native Israelis. However, the author noted that advantage does not necessarily sit with the native partner, as the immigrant partner may have a higher level of symbolic and cultural capital due to their social mobility and education, while the local partner may have greater material and social network resources.

Kurban's (2015) study, which examined the construction of professional identities among native English speaker (teachers) and 'non-native' English speaker partners in bilingual marriage in Istanbul, noted that greater linguistic power may be legitimised for the 'non-native' English speakers through their relationships with a 'native speaker' (and their familial and social networks). The author noted that the marriage provided a supportive natural learning environment in which the 'non-native' English speaker could develop their English and that they were given (greater) 'right to speech' (Bourdieu, 1977). The study noted the privilege and 'symbolic power' that native English speaker participants already hold, which gives them a different position in their host communities of practice.

Overall, the views and experiences of English-speaking background and LOTE migrant partners, and thereby the tension between English monolingualism and language diversity, have largely been overlooked in the literature to date, with the exception of Torsh (2020). The current study addresses the social and emotional processes related to LOTE use beyond the childrearing context and aims to provide a holistic view of language negotiation and practices among couples by addressing both partners' perspectives.

## 2.4 Language and identity

This study examines identity construction from the perspective of both the majority English language speaker and the bilingual/minority language speaker. This section addresses theories related to the construction of identity in relation to language use and surrounding social discourses, and second language learning, and the changes that individuals undergo with contact

with new language and culture. It discusses how language is the vehicle through which culture is constructed and how new identity can be created and reconstructed in social interactions.

#### 2.4.1 Identity construction

Identity is about constructing meaning about who we are and how we relate to others, and is in a continual process of being re-defined (Fishman, 1983; Holmes & Wilson, 2017). Languages are connected to cultures and identities “at the level of doing, at the level of knowing and at the level of being” (Fishman, 2001, p. 3) and research supports the notion that language is an integral part of an individual’s identity (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005a, 2005b, 2010).

Language can determine an individual’s potential to be part of society (as discussed in section 2.3), as well as play an important role in constructing identity (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton & McKinney, 2011; Weedon, 1997). More recent scholarship has taken the view that identities are mediated through language use irrespective of social groups that individuals ‘belong’ to (Baxter, 2016; Motschenbacher, 2010; Pavlenko, 2002; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). Norton (2000) argues that it is through language that we negotiate our sense of selves in the social world that surrounds us and that identity negotiation and construction occurs in every interaction.

According to Bucholtz and Hall (2005a), identity is “the social positioning of self and other” (p. 586) as it is constituted through social, cultural and interactional complexities. The scholars adopt a deliberately broad definition of identity (drawing on a variety of theorists) when they assert that “identity may be in part intentional, in part habitual and less than fully conscious, in part an outcome of interactional negotiation, in part a construct of others’ perceptions and representations, and in part an outcome of larger ideological processes and structures” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005a, p. 585). Individual lived experiences and sociocultural conditioning shapes composite identities in people (Ting-Toomey, 2017). Self conceptualisation depends on how these interrelated dimensions intersect, which also impacts the relationships developed with others.

Davies and Harré (1990) introduced the concepts of interactive positioning and reflexive positioning to explain the identity negotiation process. They explain that individuals position each other through what they say, which interplays with an individual’s own positioning or self-representation. Parts of linguistic repertoires can be drawn on to highlight or downplay aspects of social identities, although it is noted that some are more negotiable than others due to positioning by dominant groups (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004).

#### 2.4.2 Language and belonging

Migrants often find their identity and status challenged in their new place of residence where their language is not the dominant one or known (Ricento, 2013). Acculturation stress may be

experienced due to a contradiction between the way an individual self-identifies and the way they are identified by others (Bartzen, 2013; Cools, 2009). Cultural categorisation in the form of stereotypes or racism can also affect an individual's ability to form social connections, integration into host culture and their sense of self. Mainstream cultural discourses continue to simplistically and problematically construct identities by conflating ethnic and linguistic background with culture (e.g. Lee, 2015). Hua and Li Wei (2016) refer to this marginalisation in everyday interactions as nationality and ethnicity talk (NET), which in essence constitutes identity calibration through the positioning of self and other. These social constructions may not fit individuals' experiences of fluid, shifting cultural identity. The contradiction observed in individuals who do adapt to the expectations of the dominant language/group is that they may feel a lack of belonging or disconnected or not true to their own identity (Fishman & García, 2010; Scollon, 1996).

Scholars also discuss a sense of 'in-betweenness' in bilinguals (Gonçalves, 2013a, 2013b; Wierzbicka, 2004). In Wierzbicka's (2004) research about the relationship between multilingualism and emotions, she explained the influence of language on being and feeling:

For bilingual people, living with two languages can mean indeed living in two different emotional worlds and also travelling back and forth between those two worlds. It can also mean living suspended between two worlds (Wierzbicka, 2004, p. 102).

Two NZ studies addressing language and identity among NZ-born Pasifika (Taumoefolau, 2013) and bilingual Pākehā (Nelson, 2018) gave voice to participants' sense of 'in-betweenness' or existing in a third space, which can be lonely and isolating. Taumoefolau (2013) states that this feeling of not being full members of NZ mainstream society or Pasifika culture can be intensified by lack of language proficiency and experiential knowledge to enable their cultural participation. Nelson (2018) described the *te reo* journey among bilingual Pākehā as creating a "sense of not quite belonging and not being a fully equal member of the *te reo* community" and "their experience of being different from both monolingual Pākehā and from Māori" (p. 25), as they had had "grown a new layer of self that their pre-existing friends and family did not share" (p. 25). In Gonçalves' (2013b) study on language practices and negotiations of identity among Anglophone and native German-speaking Swiss married couples, she noted that some people in intercultural relationships may be living another identity than they grew up with or "living between different cultures" as "culturally hybrid individuals" (p. 528).

### 2.4.3 Second language learning and identity

Migrants undergo identity transformation in a new environment, which often involves learning another language. Second language learners bring with them their social histories, self-image and habitual communication in their original cultures, negotiating a new sense of self in a new environment through language.

An increasing volume of literature addresses the connection between language and identity in multilingual, multicultural contexts (Norton Peirce, 1995; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004) and there is now considerable interest in the connection between language learning and identity (Block, 2014; Canagarajah, 2004; Norton, 2000, 2013; Norton & McKinney, 2011; Norton & Toohey, 2011; Pavlenko, 2002; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007). Norton Peirce (1995) pioneered research in this field through her theory relating social identity, power relations and second language learning. She takes a poststructural view of identity maintaining that learners are constantly engaged in identity negotiation and construction when they interact, and positioning within social structures and individual agency determines identities (Norton, 1997).

Learning a second language is now understood to be “investment in a learner’s own identity, an identity which is constantly changing across time and space” (Norton, 2013, p. 51). It is by and through language, and language learning practices that identity is shaped in individuals (Canagarajah, 2004; Norton Peirce, 1995). Norton Peirce (1995) argues that learners can construct a new social identity that enables them to become an active participant in social discourse through considerable efforts in their second language. Crezee’s (2008, 2012) studies investigating language use among older Dutch migrants in NZ reflected Norton’s theory through participants’ desire and efforts to recreate a new ‘Kiwi’ identity as fully participating members of society and as NZ parents. This was demonstrated in their choice to speak English at home for the benefit of quicker language acquisition of the new language for their children.

Canagarajah (2004) makes the point that the construction of identities is a key motivation for language learning in individuals, so it is important to look at how a learner’s identity shapes and is shaped by the process of language learning and its practices. Pavlenko (2002) also argues that second language learning is as much a means of socialisation and identity construction as it is acquisition of a new language. Thus, language is not just a means of expression but a result of how learners define and redefine their social environment and themselves. In this way, language learning and identity (re)construction are closely connected. Studies suggest that language learning plays a crucial role in the (re)construction of the learners’ identities (Norton, 2000; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004).

#### 2.4.4 Social and discursive construction of identity

The shift from essentialist to constructionist views of culture and identity has been reflected within the changing foci of intercultural couple studies. The focus of much research has been the challenges that couples experience resulting from differences in national culture and/or communication (Breger & Hill, 1998; Bystydzienski, 2011; Molina et al. 2004; Romano, 2008; Softas-Nall et al., 2015; Tien, 2013; Tien et al. 2017; Tili & Barker, 2015), with some specifically focused on issues related to race and ethnic difference between partners without featuring language (Bystydzienski, 2011; Karis & Killian, 2009). More of the recent research

focuses on couples' effective communication and negotiation of cultural backgrounds (e.g. Dervin, 2013; Gonçalves, 2010, 2013a, 2013b; Piller, 2002, 2007; Rubin Damari, 2010; Wilczek-Watson, 2016). In addition, several studies explore the idea of identity negotiation and third culture building among ELF and multilingual couples (Bartzen, 2013; Beraud, 2016; Gonçalves, 2010, 2013a, 2013b; Pietikäinen, 2017; Seward, 2008; Singleton & Pfenninger, 2018). Studies have frequently focused on bilingual communication in the family context (Bartzen, 2013; Cools, 2011; de Klerk, 2001; Gundacker, 2010; Pietikäinen, 2014; Piller, 2002; Torsh, 2020; Yamamoto, 2001; Yates & Terraschke, 2013) but few studies focus on attitudes and experiences of intercultural couples without children.

Intercultural couple relationships are often seen as a measure of relations between ethnic groups, or a decreasing importance of ethnic/cultural difference as a result of crossing ethnic/cultural boundaries (Qian & Lichter, 2007). While such relationships may be perceived as a measure of assimilation or the diminishing of ethnic/cultural boundaries between partners (Alba & Nee, 2003, as cited in Yodanis & Lauer, 2017), Yodanis and Lauer (2017) found that the use of two languages was a way for couples to preserve and celebrate their two heritage cultures and mutually engage in each culture. Findings from 28 interviews with individual partners in interethnic relationships in Vancouver indicated couples shared "an appreciation for, interest in, and commitment to difference" (Yodanis & Lauer, 2017, p. 125). Recognition, value and maintenance of difference was central to the construction of the relationship. Yodanis et al. (2012) also found that partners were able to access and enact an affiliate ethnic or multicultural identity due to their relationship (see also Jiménez, 2010).

Focus on challenges stemming from cultural 'difference' between partners in intercultural relationships has been critiqued by scholars (Dervin, 2013; Piller, 2000, 2002; Wilczek-Watson, 2016) who note the risk in reducing culture to race/ethnicity and presenting an over-generalised view of culture. Using a social constructionist approach, Piller (2000) proposes that it is "much more useful to ask how cultural and national identity is 'done,' i.e. how it is constructed in ongoing interactions" (p. 21), rather than inquire into the use of different communication styles by different cultural/national groups. She argues that it is important to gain a deeper understanding of how identity constructions differ with language choice and between different languages and power dynamics in interactions, as misunderstandings can affect the life chances of the minority.

In Piller's (2002) pioneering work using this approach to analyse communication among bilingual English/German married couples in Germany, she argues that intercultural communication is a result of discursive framing and orienting to cultural difference, not because of differences in national and linguistic backgrounds. Thus, intercultural communication rests on whether a couple view culture as a category in the first instance. She treats cultural identity,

difference and similarity as discursive constructions. Piller (2002) found that couples tend to attribute differences they experience to individual character/personality rather than national cultural differences. She concluded that partners often view themselves as “just two people” (Piller, 2002, p. 197) rather than ‘intercultural’ (see also Dervin, 2013; Wilczek-Watson, 2016). Hybrid or transcultural identities were observed in couples’ ‘unique’ form constructions in interactions comprising aspects from both partners, and in their talk.

Following Piller, scholars Rubin Damari (2010), Dervin (2013), Gonçalves (2013a, 2013b) and Wilczek-Watson (2016) have taken a social/discursive constructionist approach to investigating the language and culture of intercultural couples, maintaining that it is through language itself that culture is defined and identity formed. Wilczek-Watson (2016) investigated food-related interactions among Polish–British couples and observed hybrid identity negotiated in their interactions. This was visible in ‘similarity talk’ and ‘difference talk’ (see also Piller, 2002) in video-recorded naturally occurring interactions and interviews. This complexity and fluidity of identity was also reported by Rubin Damari (2010) who noted that an Israeli–Jewish American couple reevaluated their positioning toward each other on an ongoing basis. The centrality of language in constructing identity was illustrated through partners’ references to multiple stances where former ones represented stronger aspects of their identities. In Dervin’s (2013) study based on five interviews with partners of ELF couples in Hong Kong and Finland, he found that couples use and question stereotypes in their relationships to “negotiate their identity, intimacy, relationships and everyday lives” (p. 133). In both Dervin’s (2013) and Wilczek-Watson’s (2016) studies, stereotyping was identified as strategic between partners, and served to lighten interactions.

In the diglossic situation of central Switzerland, Gonçalves’ (2013a) used discourse analysis of observation and recordings over a period of three years to investigate the reasons for language practices among Anglophone and native German-speaking Swiss married couples and how they negotiate hybrid identities. Her research drew on Bucholtz and Hall’s (2005a) sociocultural linguistic model, which views identity as emerging through the social positioning of self and others. Data indicated that the performance of ‘doing Swiss’ was negotiated and co-constructed based on the positionings partners took up and refuted within the context of the social interaction.

Singleton and Pfenninger’s (2018) study exploring second language proficiency as a function of cultural identity through interviews with two couples and one individual of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds in German-speaking Austria showed the process of L2 learning to be affected by the context in which it takes place. Their findings suggested that the principal language used by the couple shaped and shifted identity construction, which had a dramatic effect on both linguistic and cultural affiliation for the partner for whom it was their L2.

Across the majority of these studies, discursive practices utilised by partners have demonstrated the complexity and fluid nature of their identities, moving beyond cultural differences and breaking down the perceived sociocultural divides.

#### 2.4.5 Language of the couple

As discussed earlier, with a poststructuralist/discursive constructionist approach, identities are regarded as a form of doing, and are constructed socially and locally on an ongoing basis, and therefore also within specific communities of practice (CofP). A CofP has been defined as a group's shared "ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations" (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992, p. 464), which are mutually negotiated and co-created through interactions on an ongoing basis. Emphasis is placed on the co-construction of social meaning in a CofP due to its defining factors of domain, community and practice (Wenger et al., 2002). A CofP is defined by its process of social learning and is about members negotiating and learning practices that contribute to and satisfy their common goal (Meyerhoff & Strycharz, 2013). The marital unit or relationship dyad is said to be the smallest, most intimate CofP (Gonçalves, 2013a), in which meanings are shared and constructed. It is through language that most of the ongoing identity construction is performed in a CofP (Piller, 2002), and members' shared discourse reflects their shared worldview and includes their unique linguistic practices that distinguish them as a group (Wenger, 1998).

Communication is integral to the success of any relationship, but there is an added complexity when partners bring with them different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Seward (2008) found communication was a key aspect of the couples' positive identity and that being willing to communicate or to listen was more critical among married couples in the US than being able to communicate in either of their languages. Piller (2002) emphasises the importance of a couple's private language when she states that it is the 'glue' of their relationship. Singleton and Pfenninger (2018) noted the same among their participants in German-speaking Austria. Speaking German was reported to feel odd and uncomfortable by a participant: "we met in English and it's like talking in a foreign language to her ... like it feels weird" (Singleton & Pfenninger, 2018, p. 17).

Studies on ELF couples support the notion that their common language English marks their identity (Beraud, 2016; Pietikäinen, 2014, 2017) and through which they acquire a new identity (Gundacker, 2010). Beraud (2016) found that ELF created a private space for the Norwegian–Ukrainian couples "in the ocean of Norwegian" (para. 36) in which they resided. Klötzl (2015) argued that in the process of navigating territoriality and cooperativeness, ELF couples establish their own private code. Dewaele and Salomidou (2017) found that the language of the other partner often ended up becoming the "language of the heart" (p. 128) as emotional communication improved over time.

## 2.5 Language and emotion

Mastering the pragmatic norms of a language often presents the greatest challenge for second language speakers. Research has shown that multilingual speakers struggle to express their emotions in their second language (Dewaele, 2008, 2013; Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2013; Pavlenko, 2005). Dewaele (2008) notes the sociopragmatic and sociocultural difference in weight of emotional expressions in languages, which can mean a long period of socialisation is required before becoming affective reactions in individuals in their second language. The emotional patterns of migrants are also said to shift in response to their new sociocultural context over time to resemble the patterns of the host culture (De Leersnyder et al., 2011).

In the intercultural couple context, the expression of emotions has been reported in studies to present a challenge for intercultural partners, which can influence language choice (Dewaele, 2018). Research has shown communication conflict to arise when a partner has insufficient language skills to express their feelings, notably in the context of an argument, causing them to revert to their native language even if it is not the language most frequently used by the couple (de Klerk, 2001; Pavlenko, 2005; Piller, 2002). Accordingly, the partner speaking their 'non-native' language may report feelings of inequality due to the weaker position they are put in (Cools, 2009). In Bartzén's (2013) study, female participants in intercultural relationships reported using their L2 or a combination of languages for expressing affection or terms of endearment, more so than when they were upset or when they argued.

While the first language (L1) is generally regarded as the language of preference for emotional expression (Dewaele 2008; Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2019; Panicacci, 2019), language configurations are said to differ in individuals according to perceived language emotionality (Pavlenko, 2005), which can increase over time (Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2019). Some studies suggest that a second language can be emotionally significant when becoming part of social relationships (Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2019; Panicacci, 2019). Varied perspectives on this were observed in a worldwide large-scale study (Dewaele & Salomidou, 2017), which investigated how language and culture differences affect emotional communication in cross-cultural couples. An online questionnaire conducted at the beginning of the relationship, and at a later point, revealed that half of the 429 participants expressed limitations and reduced emotional resonance in the foreign language, while a third reported having no difficulty. On the other hand, the qualitative data from written interviews with eight of the participants, showed that more than half had constraints with the foreign language, but a quarter expressed emotional liberation. What is significant in this study is that while views differed among individuals, challenges faded in more than three quarters of participants in a matter of months. Of note too was the fact that female participants were more likely to adopt their partner's language, while overall they reported less authenticity and more

difficulty expressing emotions in their foreign language than males, albeit at the beginning of the relationship.

## 2.6 Translanguaging/code-switching

This thesis discusses multilingual motivations, experiences and practices among partners, and the changes that they encounter through contact with new language, individually and as a couple.

When two speakers of different languages interact, their languages influence each other, which is a phenomenon commonly known as language contact (Matras, 2009). A natural consequence of language contact is language mixing, which has taken on many definitions by scholars, such as code-switching, code mixing, loan words and translanguaging, along with differing conceptualisations and interpretations of this language phenomenon.

Code-switching can refer to using more than one language or variety alternately in a single interaction (Grosjean, 1982; Woolard, 2004), or it can be an umbrella term used to refer to the various ways speakers use other languages among English conversation (Pietikäinen, 2017). Loan words, on the other hand, typically refer to the “borrowing [of] a word from one language in a speech segment spoken in another language” (Crezee, 2008, p. 17). Code-switching was in the past commonly perceived as incorrect use of language or deficient language, while now it is considered a normal and common feature of bilingual discourse (García, 2009; Myers-Scotton, 2017). Code-switching can be a conscious choice in multilingual communication. It is not uncommon for multilingual speakers to code-switch emotion words (see for example, Pavlenko 2008), as speakers may feel some languages have a more adequate or appropriate emotional expression over others (Verschik, 2016).

Diverse language practices have also been noted to be consciously engaged for specific outcomes, for example, serving pragmatic functions of marking humour, marking identity and modifying requests (Nightingale & Safont, 2019). Pavlenko (2005) notes that those who challenge perceived language boundaries may engage in deliberate language play of two or more languages. Code-switching is also viewed as a resource for the performance of intercultural identities. Otsuji and Pennycook (2010) suggest that speakers from different and mixed backgrounds “play with and negotiate identities through language” (p. 246). The cognitive, social and emotional benefits of language play are increasingly recognised (Bell, 2016), despite concerns that innovative language risks miscommunication and language processing challenges (Giora et al., 2015) (see findings 5.2).

Recent studies, particularly in the field of education (Seals & Olsen-Reeder, 2020), demonstrate a move away from monolingual and monocultural ideology to the celebration of diverse linguistic practices, through drawing on the concepts of translanguaging and multicompetence.

Translanguaging is the utilisation of diverse and fluid language practices by those who speak more than one language and between those with different backgrounds (García, 2009). It moves beyond the external view of languages as separate modalities or discrete entities to an understanding of the language of the bilingual as simply their own, which is formed and used in social interactions (Vogel & García, 2017). The mind of the speaker is one integrated whole repertoire that is activated when communicating and making meaning, therefore a speaker does not necessarily translanguage when they lack words in one language as is sometimes presumed (García, 2009).

Translanguaging is now seen as a paradigm shift, as it gives value and power to all languages, not just to dominant ones, and is transformative in the sense that it challenges language-related hierarchies and macro views that multilingual individuals may come up against in society (Blommaert & Rampton, 2011; Li Wei, 2011). Makoni and Pennycook (2007) argue that ‘named languages’ of nation-states are political and social constructs, and contend that our understanding of language now should be based on what is often perceived as exceptional, different and marginal, as all languages are in effect creoles.

Cook (1991) coined the term multicompetence to express the linguistic knowledge of multilingual speakers in language theory, defining it as “the compound state of mind with two grammars” (p. 112) and “a language supersystem” (Cook, 2003, p. 2). In contrast to a language deficit lens, multicompetence celebrates the “intricate interactions between languages” (Dewaele, 2016, p. 461) through its view that all knowledge is used by a speaker in interactions (Cook, 2012). With this view, languages are one connected system, and there is evidence to suggest that the nature of a multilingual speaker’s knowledge of the dominant language varies from that of a monolingual, even if they are less proficient in one of the languages (Verschik, 2016). Polish-English writer Hoffman (1989) describes this multicompetence from her own experience as cross-fertilisation between languages: “Each language modifies the other, crossbreeds with it, fertilises it” and “makes the other relative” (p. 273).

Studies among ELF bilingual couples (Beraud, 2016; Pietikäinen, 2014, 2017) have shown their language practices and linguistic culture building to reflect ‘linguistic relaxedness’, which comprises code-switching/translanguaging within partners’ shared range of language resources and competencies. Their mixed language practices were habited and facilitated meaning-making and marking identity. Co-constructed meaning and mutual understanding were noted to be of more importance to couples in Beraud’s (2016) study than correct use of language. Contrary to negative attitudes towards code-switching, her findings signalled it to be a “significant communicative resource that offers flexibility of self-expression, signaling of culture, and increased linguistic awareness” (para. 37). Pietikäinen (2014) found that while ELF couples mentioned code-switching, they were not always aware of the switching, indicating that it was

an automatic process and that they had a relaxed attitude towards the language mixing. This may not be the same for couples/parents who are fostering language transmission to children, in which a structured language plan may be necessary (De Houwer, 2005).

The current study explores how the recent attention to diverse fluid and outcome-oriented language practices may relate to the communication of ESB/LOTE couples in this study, which has not been explored in the NZ context.

## 2.7 Humour

This section discusses literature on humour in intercultural communities of practice, as it presented as a key finding, which mirrored several of the common themes related to language, culture and identity that arose throughout this study.

Humour serves multiple purposes in interactions and varies on an individual, social and cultural level (Reimann, 2010). The interactions of members of a community of practice typically involve “local lore, shared stories, inside jokes, knowing laughter” (Wenger, 1998, p. 125). Humour can provide insights into shared culture that forms among members of different communities of practice (Holmes & Marra, 2002a).

Existing literature suggests that there are fundamental differences in perceptions of humour across cultures, which directly influences its use (Davies, 1990; Jiang et al., 2019). However, due to increased multicultural contexts across the globe, scholars note the relevance of research on humour addressing cultural constructs as opposed to national cultural differences, especially as collective humour fosters a sense of identity, belongingness and wellbeing in individuals (Jiang et al., 2019). Interactional preferences can be partly attributed to cultural attitudes towards humour, such as teasing and self-mockery, which is pervasive in British conversation (Sinkeviciute, 2016). An example of this is jocular mockery or ‘taking the piss’, a common form of humour in NZ, which is said to strengthen the bonds between people through communicating a shared ethos of ‘not taking yourself too seriously’ (Haugh & Bousfield, 2012).

Humour is thought to present one of the greatest challenges for a second language speaker, and in particular, word play (Bell, 2009; Vaid, 2006; Vincent-Durroux et al., 2020). Humour is noted as one of the most challenging forms of intercultural communication, as it is deeply rooted in cultural knowledge (Lee, 1994). There is significant evidence in research to suggest that culture presents the greatest challenge for second language speakers in understanding humour (see, for example, Bell, 2009; Morain, 1991). This challenge was reflected in Pierson’s (2015) study, which investigated co-creation and methods of generative design through humour among multicultural couples in Auckland. Pierson (2015) found that couples in her study predominantly focused on humour from the dominant current shared culture due to the time, effort and words required for comprehension and production of humour in the other language.

Due to its context-embedded and socially ingrained nature, the comprehension of humour depends upon shared experience, assumptions and values (Holmes & de Bres, 2012). As humour generally requires “shared, tacit linguistic and cultural knowledge” (Vaid, 2006, p. 152), proficiency in a language does not guarantee understanding of culture-specific humour. Engaging in humorous word play “requires knowledge of the linguistic and cultural conventions of a speech community, which prescribe what can be talked about and how” (Vaid, 2006, p. 155). For this reason—cultural differences, language and lack of shared knowledge—it has been suggested that the most successful humour over a diverse demographic does not require specialised language, background or cultural knowledge (Reimann, 2010). The use of humour has often been encouraged by educators in the classroom as it relaxes L2 learners and makes L2 learning fun (Bell, 2009). However, research shows that second language speakers may hold negative feelings about using and learning L2 humour in social relations outside the classroom, and being able to maintain humour in social situations, thus stressing the importance of learning humour to create and maintain relationships with ‘native speakers’ (Bell, 2009).

Coates (2007) states “One of the strengths of humour is that it allows us to explore, in new ways, what we know, and even, by using other words, to explore things which are difficult or taboo” (p. 32). Kalocsai (2014) reported on studies with a group of Erasmus exchange students at universities in Hungary and Prague, which examined the creation of humour in and through ELF. The author found that their multilingual resources, including code-switching, enabled them to socialise into their new communities of practice. They navigated shared experiences of being together in a “strange/foreign land” and concern about having “bad English” (Kalocsai, 2014, p. 142) through humorous narratives, and created humour in the construction of new linguistic code/translanguaging outside of the ‘native speaker’ norms. According to Kalocsai (2014) “by practicing humour” students “simultaneously practiced solidarity and rapport, which helped them create a fun and a family and friendship support system at the same time” (p. 168).

Humour is one type of culturally adaptive communicative practice that members of a group use to build culture, solidarity and mark boundaries. As part of the Language in the Workplace Project,<sup>4</sup> NZ scholars have demonstrated this through exploring how different multicultural workplace CofPs use humour by employing ethnographic observation combined with discourse analysis (Holmes & de Bres, 2012; Holmes & Marra, 2002a, 2002b; Marra & Holmes, 2007). Humour was found to be used subversively among colleagues in these workplaces, i.e. as a socially acceptable way of disagreeing or challenging authority, which is able to be engaged by those in a less powerful position, as well as create a social boundary between speakers (Holmes & Marra, 2002b).

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.wgtn.ac.nz/lals/centres-and-institutes/language-in-the-workplace>

Holmes and de Bres' (2012) study examining humour among Māori and Pākehā workers also observed humour as a way to enable healthy discussion and assert power. They found humour contributed to constructing positive relationships, job satisfaction, productivity and creativity in the workplace. Their findings connect humour, ethnicity and identity, stating that "Humour is a classic means of blending disparate identities and yoking together incompatible concepts" (Holmes & de Bres, 2012, p. 504). The authors suggest that the complexities of perspective and attitude in humour could be further examined, as members of minority groups face the challenge of balancing ethnic values and meeting host society norms for success.

While there is limited qualitative research centering on humour in the intimate intercultural relationship context, Bustamante et al.'s (2011) study noted it as one important coping mechanism for culture-related stress among partners and thus a relationship success factor. Romano (2008) also found that "learning to share laughter, building up a repertoire of funny incidents, and having private jokes were some of the best ways for them to grow closer" (p. 185). In Chiaro's (2009) chapter on humour as a "harmonious factor" (p. 211) in long-term relationships between bilingual cross-cultural couples, she cites McCarthy and Carter (2004) and Coates (2007), who discuss how playful forms of humour create a sense of solidarity and exclusive intimacy, involving what the former the term the "interactive pact" (p. 172). Other couple studies acknowledge humour in relation to communication challenges (Bystydzienski, 2011; Gundacker, 2010; Seward, 2008; Tien, 2013). Seward (2008), for example, found potential language challenges such as mispronunciation draw partners closer if they see the funny side of it rather than considering it a point of frustration. The author noted humour as a source of either inclusion or differentiation between partners, as it is often bound in specific language and culture. The current study takes a more in-depth look at the uses and sources of humour arising in couples' accounts beyond linguistic and cultural challenges (see findings Chapter 5).

## 2.8 Summary

This literature review chapter presented a snapshot of the linguistic and cultural context of NZ and Auckland, discussed the role of language and second language learning in the construction of culture and identity, and the impacts of English as a global language and native speaker ideology, all of which highlight the complexity of language in relation to issues of identity and power.

It was evident upon reviewing existing global literature that there is an absence of research

investigating native English speakers' attitudes and experiences of learning LOTEs, and ESB partners' and LOTE partners' shared experiences in an English-dominant context, including those without children. The only NZ-based couple study featured in the literature was Pierson's (2015) generative design thesis on humour. In order to address these gaps in the literature, the current study explores the negotiation and construction of language, culture and identity and attitudes towards the use of LOTEs among intercultural couples in Auckland. The next chapter will describe the theoretical framework of the current study as well as the rationale for choosing this approach.

## Chapter 3 Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the rationale for the qualitative research approach selected for this study. In section 3.2, the theoretical and methodological approach is briefly outlined, with reference to established research approaches in the field of intercultural couple research. The participant recruitment process and the qualitative data collection methods are described in 3.3, to wit in-depth interviews, a questionnaire and a researcher journal. A discussion of how their respective principles suit this study and how they have been applied as methods is also provided. Section 3.4 addresses how ethical considerations have been managed in respect to the participants and to my position as both researcher and ‘insider’ to the group being studied. The data analysis process is then outlined in 3.5. Reflections on the methodology and research design are provided in section 7.2 of the final chapter of this thesis.

### 3.2 Theoretical framework and approach

This study is a sociolinguistic exploration of Auckland-based intercultural couples’ views on language, culture and identity, and the ways they report to engage in each other’s languages and build a shared culture. To meet the aims of this research, I opted for a qualitative research framework comprising semi-structured, in-depth interviews with participants, followed by thematic analysis to uncover the most salient findings. Qualitative research studies aim for depth rather than breadth, as their methods provide researchers with a rich, in-depth understanding of people’s beliefs, experiences and behaviours (Denzin, 1989), which aligns with the objective of this exploratory study. In conducting this research, I apply the understanding that meaning-making is a social practice, and that language use, culture and society form a dialectical relationship (Fairclough, 2013).

While qualitative approaches have faced some critique for overly focusing on individuals’ experiences and meaning without taking into account contextual sensitivities (Silverman, 2010), this research aims to provide insight into factors influencing participants’ linguistic and cultural orientations and experiences. While qualitative research often gives a voice to the underrepresented or marginalised (van den Hoonaard, 2008), this research explores the perspectives of both LOTE-background migrant partners and native English speaker partners together.

This research aimed to deepen insights into the interrelationship between language, culture and identity in couples’ daily lives, and how this intersects with societal discourses, also known as the ideologies and beliefs that mediate language practices (Piller, 2002). In line with the intercultural couple studies discussed in the literature review, this study draws inspiration from

those works that employ social constructionist and poststructuralist approaches (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004; Piller, 2002; Torsh, 2020) to examine identity negotiation and the role of language in their lives. This study also takes on Fairclough's (2013) perspective that "language connects with the social through being the primary domain of ideology, and through being a site of, and stake in, struggles for power" (p. 12). Although this study did not set out from a critical stance or a place of investigating power or social inequity, it became apparent in the interviews that such issues were inextricably connected to my participants' experiences of language and culture.

As also referenced in the literature review, I draw on the Community of Practice (CofP) model in exploring how couples build their shared culture and linguistic identity. A CofP is useful in that "it provides a framework for analysing the process by which sociolinguistic meaning emerges in which the individual and community are interdependent and inextricably linked" (Corder & Meyerhoff, 2007, p. 441). In examining couples' shared culture, I draw on Cools' (2011) view of culture, as situated in discourse and in a social context where differences are understood through diverse communication, as "discursive intercultural is the place where meanings and practices are constructed through and within communication itself" (p. 22).

### 3.3 Research design and data collection process

#### 3.3.1 Participant recruitment

This study utilised purposive sampling (Dörnyei, 2007) to ensure participants met key criteria and characteristics in line with the research foci and objectives. The study advertisement (Appendix D) and the Information Sheet (Appendix E) specified that participants needed to be in a committed intercultural relationship (over one year together), reside in Auckland, be over 18 years of age and not have children. As the study explores how two partners negotiate and engage in the other's languages and cultures in the English-dominant context and their attitudes towards LOTEs, I specifically sought couples where one partner is a New Zealand native English speaker and the other partner is a migrant whose first language is not English. Participants needed to be able to communicate comfortably and competently in English, as interviews were conducted in English.

Ethics approval was granted by Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEK) prior to commencement of participant recruitment (see Appendix C). In an attempt to recruit a diverse range of participants, the study advertisement was posted on notice boards at two Auckland universities and on Facebook, and it was circulated via email to staff and student university and wider community networks. The snowball technique (Frey et al., 2000) was also utilised in which potential participants were encouraged to pass the advertisement onto others who might be interested. This sampling method enabled me, after an initially slow response

rate, to recruit the target number of 12 participants (six couples) suitable within the scope of the Master's study. It would not have been ethical to directly approach acquaintances to seek their participation due to the personal nature of potentially sensitive topics that might arise in discussion about couples' relationships. Those interested in participating made initial contact by email and were sent the study Information Sheet, given an opportunity to ask questions before agreeing to participate and signed a Consent Form (Appendix F) prior to commencing the interview. It was crucial that both partners willingly chose to take part, and respondents were unable to be interviewed in instances where this was not the case and there was not voluntary consent by both.

Couples were given the choice to be interviewed at Auckland University of Technology or at their own homes, to facilitate comfort, openness and convenience (Gundacker, 2010). As one couple requested a Skype interview due to their circumstances, subsequent participants were also offered this option. This did not seem to impact the level of interview interaction in comparison to the face-to-face interviews. Three of the interviews took place at Auckland University of Technology, two via Skype and one at a participant's home. Both partners were interviewed during the same interview session. Interviews were completed just prior to Auckland's first COVID-19 lockdown.

### 3.3.2 Interviews

While the overarching theoretical and methodological framework informed this study, a participant data-driven approach was important due to its open exploratory design, and to ensure integrity of the views and experiences of the couples reflected. For this reason, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were selected as the main method of data collection, as they are a key site to investigate, in participants' own words, how they understand and experience the world (Kvale, 2007). As noted by Brinkmann and Kvale (2018a), "the research interview is an interview where knowledge is constructed in the interaction between two people" (p. 17). Interviews suit exploratory or emergent studies (Gibson & Hua, 2016), as they focus on the most important details of an experience according to the interviewee (Guest et al., 2013). They offer a solution to the widely acknowledged challenge of eliciting attitudes (focus of research question one), where direct observation of beliefs and feelings is not possible (Gibson & Hua, 2016). Key scholars in the field advocate for methods such as semi-structured and open-ended interviews to produce rich data to generate 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) of specific contexts in which intercultural communication takes place (Piller, 2011). The qualitative researcher's ability to produce such detailed accounts is critical to understanding nuances and interpreting the meaning of a situation.

I did not opt for ethnography involving the collection of natural speech data through direct observation in the field, firstly due to the timeframe and scope of this study, and secondly this

decision took into account the Observer's Paradox (Labov, 1972). The Observer's Paradox refers to the idea that it is difficult to elicit data on natural language in use without it being influenced by the presence of a researcher or 'observer'. The Observer's Paradox is noted as a particularly complex concern in the context of the intimate dyad (Walters, 1996, as cited in Piller, 2002). Instead, I sought self-reported language use and reflections on experiences and learnings from partners through interviews to address research question two.

I formulated an interview guide noting its successful utilisation by scholars in the field (Beraud, 2016; de Klerk, 2001; Gundacker, 2010; Pietikäinen, 2017). To meet the research aims of this study it consisted of a list of open-ended questions within four dimensions: the couple's background and story; language use; cultural practices; and attitudes towards their linguistic situation, identity and couplehood (see Appendix H). A guide is advantageous in that greater consistency can be ensured across multiple interviews by covering the same general lines of inquiry (Patton, 2015). It also serves as a useful tool through which novice researchers such as myself can build confidence and experience to use more open-ended questions (Merriam, 2016) and to probe further within the subject (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018a). One pilot interview was conducted in advance, which provided me with the opportunity to check the clarity and relevance of the questions.

To facilitate a relaxed interview atmosphere where participants felt at ease to open up about potentially personal topics, it was important to take a little time for introductions and refreshments before the interview commenced. I endeavoured to build trust with the participants (Gibson & Hua, 2016) by discussing my position in an intercultural relationship, providing a brief outline of the study aims and how the data would be used for academic publication, and giving assurances of anonymity. Although the interview design aimed to be unobtrusive, due to the intimate nature of the research, I iterated that participants were not obliged to answer any questions they did not feel comfortable with. With the aim to lessen the concern of participants offering information that they perceive the researcher to require, I reinforced that the aim was to simply understand their views and experiences in their own words. I was cognisant of the importance of staying neutral when asking questions so as not to impose my views on the interviewees or influence their answers and overall findings, or introduce a power dynamic in the interview setting (Gibson & Hua, 2016). I found it was important to clarify certain points when necessary to ensure correct comprehension rather than automatically applying my 'insider' assumptions.

The two partners were interviewed together to maintain focus on couplehood and their shared construction of language, culture and identity. This was also to enable them to reflect and build on each other's ideas, noting that interviews are a conversation in which to explore how "meaningful reality is communicatively co-constructed" (Seward, 2008, p. 80). There was often

dialogue just between the two partners, which allowed me to observe their way of communicating. There were occasions where one partner spoke considerably more than the other, and so I endeavoured to reframe the question to the other partner, so as to engage the other partner's views too following the first partner's response. Following the questions relating to couplehood, each partner was asked additional questions to capture their individual perspectives and experiences that add context to the couple dynamics and experiences. I opted not to conduct the individual interviews away from each other, as the aim was not to test them, but to provide further personal and historical context to the data. Interviews were audio-recorded and on average lasted for 1 hour 30 minutes; the shortest was 60 minutes and the longest was 1 hour 50 minutes. The detailed accounts provided by participants were testimony to their openness and willingness to share their views and experiences, and this included challenges they face, indicating the interview did not privilege a comfortable view of the phenomenon.

### 3.3.3 Questionnaire: Participant demographics

Participants' demographic details were gathered via a short written questionnaire (see Appendix G) to contextualise the interview data. Key information from this questionnaire is presented in Table 1 below. Participants' ages ranged from 25 to 50 years old with the majority of the 12 participants aged between 25 and 35 years old. Nine of the 12 participants had completed tertiary education at an undergraduate level and five had completed a postgraduate qualification. Participants had a range of careers, of which five were in the field of education/academia.

**Table 1**

*Participant Demographic Details*

Couple (Pseudonyms)	Medium and location of interview	Ethnicity		Migrant's length of time in NZ	Length of couple relationship
		Female partner	Male partner		
Céleste and Kai	Auckland University of Technology (face-to-face)	French	Chinese New Zealander	9 years	6.5 years
Hanna and Noah	Skype video	German	New Zealand European	3.5 years	4.5 years

Mariana and Jack	Auckland University of Technology (face-to-face)	Colombian	English <sup>5</sup>	2.5 years	2 years
Maddy and Christoph	Skype video	New Zealand European	German	13 years	3 years
Rachel and Mark	Auckland University of Technology (face-to-face)	Bengali	New Zealand European	10 years	2.5 years
Lucia and Ben	Participants' home (face-to-face)	Argentinian	New Zealand European	2 years	1 year

Although the study was open to all couple types, all participants were heterosexual. Five of the migrant participants were female and one was male. There was only one NZ-born female participant. One English-speaking background participant was born in England. The migrant participants had lived in NZ for between two and 13 years at the time of data collection. While expressions of interest were received from several other couples of different ethnicities, including of Māori and Pacific origin, they were unable to participate, as in all cases they did not meet at least one of the other study criteria, such as not having children. Reflections on this are discussed in section 7.4 of the conclusion.

In addition to the details above, the demographic questionnaire sought information from participants on their first spoken language(s), language(s) they can hold everyday conversation in and language(s) they use to converse with their partner. This information is presented in Table 2 below. I noted slight variances in the way the participants reported second language abilities in the questionnaire and in the interviews. However, the context provided in the interviews gave further clarity to the way L2 abilities had been reported in the questionnaire. Additional background on the linguistic situation of each couple will be provided in findings Chapter 4.

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<sup>5</sup> This participant revealed in their demographic questionnaire that they were born in England, though they migrated to NZ at a young age.

**Table 2***Languages Spoken by Participants*

<b>Couple and ethnicity</b>	<b>First spoken language(s)</b>	<b>Language(s) they can converse in</b>	<b>Language(s) used in relationship</b>
<i>Céleste</i> (French) <i>Kai</i> (Chinese NZer)	French English	French, English English, Cantonese, French <sup>6</sup>	English, a bit of French
<i>Hanna</i> (German) <i>Noah</i> (NZer)	German English	German, English, Spanish English, German, 3 additional languages at a basic level	English, German <sup>7</sup>
<i>Mariana</i> (Colombian) <i>Jack</i> (English)	Colombian Spanish English	Spanish, English English, Japanese, Spanish	Mainly English, Spanish <sup>8</sup>
<i>Maddy</i> (NZer) <i>Christoph</i> (German)	English German	English English, German	English
<i>Rachel</i> (Bengali) <i>Mark</i> (NZer)	Bengali English	Bengali, English English	English
<i>Lucia</i> (Argentinian) <i>Ben</i> (NZer)	Argentine Spanish English	Spanish, English English, Spanish	English, Spanish <sup>9</sup>

## 3.3.4 Researcher journal

This study places importance on the “participants’ views of the situation being studied” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 8), while also taking into account how my interpretation flows from my own life experiences. It thus needs to be acknowledged that my insider perspective provides context to the study, and shapes the interpretation and insights into the participants’ experiences. As this study was in part motivated by my own intercultural relationship experience, I considered employing my own analytic autoethnography to add another dimension to exploring the link between language and identity and its relationship with personal, cultural and social factors.

From the beginning of the research, I kept a journal documenting notes about the research process, observations following interviews and, in addition to this, my own self-reflections from

<sup>6</sup> Although Kai did not record French in the questionnaire, in the interview he indicated that he can speak basic French.

<sup>7</sup> The couple did not record German in the questionnaire, but during the interview they reported that they use it.

<sup>8</sup> The couple indicated that they use a lot of Spanish words, though this was not recorded in the questionnaire.

<sup>9</sup> Ben wrote Spanish in the questionnaire, while Lucia did not.

the research process, and observations, as they arose in my own day-to-day experiences. The journal provided an additional tool to explore how my own lived experiences and self-positioning may deepen insights of the themes that arise. While analytical autoethnography could not be incorporated due to the more limited scope of the Master's thesis, the process of journalling and self-reflection allowed me to delve deeper into my positionality as a researcher, the participants and the culture under exploration (Ellis et al., 2011), which informed the interpretation of data.

### 3.4 Ethical considerations and position of researcher

#### 3.4.1 Participant interviews

Ethical issues need to be considered from the beginning to the end of the interview investigation (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018b), especially when researching private lives through interviews (Mauthner et al., 2002). Informed consent was gained from participants prior to data collection, including permission to audio-record the interviews, which was critical for comprehension, transcription and analysis of data. I personally transcribed all audio-recordings to maximise confidentiality of data, increase accuracy of the transcripts, and to become closer to and more immersed in the data for analysis. Participants were given the opportunity to review and verify the interview transcripts. As a further measure to protect interviewees' privacy and anonymity, demographic data is presented in a generalised way in this thesis, i.e. it is not explicit about age, and pseudonyms have been assigned or chosen by the participants themselves if they wished.

#### 3.4.2 Researcher positionality

Researcher reflexivity and positioning are important considerations for the rigour<sup>10</sup> of interpretive analysis in qualitative research (Saumure & Given, 2008). Schwandt (2000) posits that understanding of others and ourselves occurs in dialogue and necessitates engaging and examining our biases. While a critique of qualitative research is its risk of bias due to researchers' idiosyncrasies (Dewaele, 2009), it generates rich descriptions of dynamic processes in participants' own words (Dörnyei, 2007). In order to reduce subjectivity, it is important for the intercultural researcher to give consideration throughout the study to their role, and the influence of their presence and decisions on the research and make this explicit (Woodin, 2016). From the inception of this research, I have made transparent my dual role as researcher and member of the community of people I am engaging with and researching, and throughout the research process I needed to be cognisant of this. My own experiences were what made me see

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<sup>10</sup> "In essence, a more rigorous research process will result in more trustworthy findings. A number of features are thought to define rigorous qualitative research: transparency, maximal validity or credibility, maximal reliability or dependability, comparativeness, and reflexivity" (Saumure & Given, 2008, p. 795).

the potential for this study and inspired me to embark on it. Being a member of the group I am researching affords a perspective of insider knowledge, and it is important to acknowledge that the influence of my personal views and experiences were present in the analysis process. My research journal noting observations about the data collection and analysis was a useful tool for self-reflection and interpretation throughout.

### 3.5 Data analysis

The challenge in analysing the interview data was organising and making sense of the large amount of in-depth interview data generated by the participants, as the written transcripts were on average 20 pages per interview. Following each interview, I noted down general observations from memory to add additional context for my analysis, for example, what seemed to stand out as important to the couple and how they communicated with each other. I listened to the audio-recordings repeatedly where necessary to become as familiar with the interview data as possible, and during the process of transcription to ensure that the data was accurately written verbatim. Transcripts were then read multiple times. Couples provided an English translation or interpretation for any examples of their code-switching or private language that they discussed in the interviews.

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and thick description (Geertz, 1973) were used to identify patterns and themes in the data. The large amount of data meant that the analysis process was iterative and cyclical. Preliminary thematic analysis was conducted manually by making summaries of the main points in the margins of the transcripts. NVivo software was utilised for a more detailed stage-two thematic analysis, to assist with the data breakdown and to group themes. As part of the analysis process, I created several visual mind maps to identify possible overarching and interrelated subthemes. For example, challenges and successes related to couples' communication, and their attitudes towards learning and using their second languages. Nodes in NVivo were initially divided by the research question foci: 'attitudes to language', 'identity' and 'communication'. Passages from interview transcripts were extracted to support the themes that emerged within each. As I came across a new theme and created a new node in NVivo, I cross-checked for similarities in other interviews transcripts. Overall, the analysis process was iterative with periodic reference back to the research questions and transcripts. In other words, a close interaction between analysis and text was integral to drawing out the most salient findings.

Analysis was discussed with my supervisors from initial coding through to final themes for the purpose of corroboration and to reduce bias, as were the notes I made in my research log related to interpretation of participants' statements.

### 3.6 Summary

This chapter has outlined the research approach, the methods and data collection procedure, and the analysis of data, informed by relevant literature. The design of this research placed importance on couples sharing and discussing situations from their own perspectives. A qualitative sociolinguistic approach utilising in-depth interviews and thematic analysis aligned with the exploratory study design, producing rich data and the natural emergence of a variety of themes. The questionnaire provided context to the interview data, while the journal added another layer to aid in the interpretation of the data. The following Chapters 4, 5 and 6 present and discuss the key findings across the six in-depth interviews.

## Chapter 4 Everyday experiences of language and culture: *“Both cultures need to know each other”*

### 4.1 Introduction

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 provide a detailed analysis of key research findings about couples’ attitudes to language, culture and identity, and their experiences and negotiations of these in their daily lives. Thematic content analysis of the data from the six interviews identified four overarching, interconnected themes: the power of language; culture through language; language and culture play; and humour. This chapter will present findings on the first of these overarching themes, with the second and third discussed in Chapter 5, and the fourth discussed in detail in Chapter 6. While the focus of this study is on the couple, common findings among ESB and LOTE partners are also discussed, as each partner’s experiences had an influence on the couple’s language use and culture building, and brought to light macro factors at play. Verbatim excerpts from the in-depth interviews are presented to illustrate key findings and maintain centrality of the participants’ voices.

Section 4.2 of this chapter begins by introducing the participants through their linguistic profiles. Section 4.3 discusses factors that have the potential to impact their language choices, and dynamics and strategies perceived to undermine and strengthen identity and couplehood. Communication within and outside the relationship is examined.

### 4.2 The couples’ language profiles

An introduction to each couple is presented here with information pertaining to their language choices, motives and use in the relationship, to set the scene for the analysis of their detailed interview responses.

**Céleste and Kai** (French and Chinese New Zealander) “I try my best to use French with him but not as much as he would like” – Céleste

English, the language in which the relationship began, was highlighted as a default for Céleste and Kai. However, the couple playfully switch between English and French and often use French as a private code in public. They feel connected by similarities in their education, second language learning and overseas experiences. Despite Kai’s ability, desire and efforts to use French more frequently in the relationship, Céleste mostly responds in English, as it is hard to change the status quo. Kai’s language skills are influenced by the relationship context and he consequently struggles with polite grammatical forms when speaking to French people outside of the relationship. The couple have the additional challenge of a third language, Cantonese, in the mix, which Kai speaks with his family. There have been misunderstandings between Céleste and Kai’s family when speaking English, so she says she is just happy to listen to them talk. Kai

says he speaks English, Cantonese and a little bit of French with Céleste. He notes, “it’s become a habit, we just speak day-to-day stuff, I’ll speak French quite often”.

**Hanna and Noah** (German and New Zealander) “It’s more like kind of an invented language. It’s German but we use English structure and German just to make it sound a bit fun” – Hanna

The couple share a mutual interest in languages and they have fun mixing English and German words and phrases, which has become a habitual practice. However, they place importance on English for Hanna’s linguistic benefit and the opportunities this creates for her while she is in NZ. They note that roles will reverse in the future if they move to Germany, but that they would still speak English at home in Germany for the same reason and their mutual comprehension. Noah says that learning languages is part of who he is, but his current preferred approach over lessons in German is just doing it and learning it as he goes. He notes, “There's more to know and it's fun trying to speak something else”.

**Mariana and Jack** (Colombian and English New Zealander) “We make Spanglish and Englese” – Jack

Education and teaching are common interests for Mariana and Jack, so sharing their respective heritage languages and cultures with each other deepens their connection. They appreciate the learning opportunity, growth and the balance of two worldviews that their relationship and both languages provide. English is predominately supported for Mariana’s academic success as she is pursuing English-medium postgraduate education. Jack adopts a relaxed approach to language learning, as he recognises the benefit of the ‘silent period’ of second language acquisition where the L2 is being actively processed while listening and absorbing the language. This also stems from his first experience learning a second language where he felt pressure to understand everything. The couple teach each other Spanish and English words constantly and language mixing is part of the learning process for them, which they have a lot of fun with: “We play a lot with the language” – Mariana.

**Maddy and Christoph** (New Zealander and German) “Mostly it’s English but I do occasionally ask ‘what is that word in German?’ just purely curious” – Maddy

Christoph is very proficient in English due to migrating to NZ with his family when he was a teenager. There has not been a great desire for either of them to speak to each other in German, nor does Christoph have a great desire to maintain a strong connection to Germany. Maddy felt

some pressure from his family at the beginning of their relationship to learn German, but she feels that learning a second language is difficult. She finds differences in communication style and humour to be an ongoing challenge when she is with Christoph's family and believes learning German would help her to understand the culture that accompanies it. The additional pressure to be perfect in German because it is his language has played a part in preventing her from actively learning it. Instead, a relaxed approach to learning vocabulary has been taken; post it notes labelling things in German have become part of their furniture. They incorporate basic words into their conversations to have fun; as Christoph notes: "A lot of the time we'll be joking around".

**Rachel and Mark** (New Zealander and Bengali) "We speak exclusively in English" "I'm not so interested in trying to learn a language fluently but I have always been intrigued by some of the language uses" – Mark

The principal language of the relationship is English, in which the couple are able to express their shared liberal views and engage in philosophical discussion. While there has been some pressure on Mark from Rachel's family to learn Bengali, his decision not to has been impacted by former challenges he faced learning languages. He places importance on cultural understanding and has found that Bengali colloquialisms and turns of phrase enable him to understand how the culture operates, which have a lot of utility to the couple in their day-to-day lives. The couple say they have a lot of fun sharing jokes and idioms, which Rachel translates. She says, "to me it doesn't really matter if he speaks Bengali or not because our daily conversation is in English".

**Lucia and Ben** (Argentinian and New Zealander) "I try to speak Spanish when I can. I'm still learning" – Ben

In the case of Lucia and Ben, Argentine Spanish is being actively incorporated wherever possible into their conversation. Ben has a strong desire to connect with her family who speak little English and are planning a visit to NZ. Ben is taking lessons once a week with a private Argentinian tutor, as there is no other means to learn Argentine Spanish. For the couple the lessons are not frequent enough but are costly, and they split the cost. It is the first time Ben has learnt a second language. The current trend is for Ben to slip Spanish words into English conversation as part of his learning process and get feedback from Lucia. They mix the two languages frequently and create their own hybrid words. Lucia is exposing Ben to as much Argentine culture as possible and the couple socialise with her Spanish-speaking friends

regularly. For Lucia, it is extremely important that Ben learns Argentinian; she says “It’s part of my identity and it shows really interest in me, which I appreciate lots”.

### 4.3 Language as a form of power

This study aimed to understand the factors behind language attitudes, choices and practices among couples, and how culture and identity are being negotiated and constructed in their relationships and daily lives. Participants’ responses illustrated how competing language ideologies, differing sociocultural understandings and interactional inequalities are present in and part of their day-to-day experiences, which can impact the way language is used among partners (see Heller & Lévy, 1992; Piller, 2015; Torsh, 2020).

#### 4.3.1 Linguistic and cultural capital and the deficit model

The language attitudes and experiences expressed by participants in this study share similarities with Torsh’s (2020) findings, which indicate that power relations have a part to play in the differing language learning experiences of migrant and native partners where the ‘hypercentral’ language functions globally (de Swaan, 2001). What was notable in this study was that both LOTE migrants and ESB NZ partners’ perspectives and experiences reflected a level of linguistic and cultural disadvantage. Monolingual bias, cultural stereotyping and deficit-based linguistic assumptions were part of migrants’ experiences, which impacted their self-expression, authenticity and self-perception. Educational background and the dominance of English, on the other hand, affected ESB partners’ perspectives and experiences of learning and using L2s. For both partners, these factors impacted their linguistic identity, cultural and social connections. These themes are explored in detail with quotes from participants in the sections below.

##### *LOTE migrant experiences*

Hua and Kramersch (2016) assert that “Parties involved in intercultural communication are rarely in an equal power relationship” (p. 376). Hanna noted the potential for such a power asymmetry in interactions between ‘non-native’ and ‘native’ speakers due to their differing commands of language.

Hanna (German) – Sometimes I wonder, because when you don’t speak the language properly you kind of always feel a bit disadvantaged, so I would be interested to see how that would be the other way around.

Several other migrant participants also reported feeling disadvantaged or disempowered as a result of their second language skills inhibiting authentic self-expression (see Norton Peirce, 1995) and impacting their ability to participate in social situations. As discussed in 2.3, linguistic capital has implications for social positioning, in terms of access to economic and

social opportunities (Bourdieu, 1991), and migrants may need to adapt not only to meet societal norms but also in interpersonal contexts. What was apparent in migrants' accounts about responding to dominant linguistic and cultural expectations was that it had both positive and challenging aspects. While it helped them to engage and identify more with the dominant culture and gain more acceptance within the host society, they indicated that their personal identity was compromised in the process.

Céleste, Hanna, Christoph and Lucia highlighted the challenge of meeting the demands of the dominant linguistic norms in order to be recognised as a member of the host society and not be viewed as an outsider (see section 2.3.2). Frustration, linguistic anxiety and hesitance (see Bourdieu, 1991) were evident in migrants' recounts of linguistic discrimination in Auckland related to accent, pronunciation, lexical choices or for using their L1 instead of English in public. They also explained they were on the receiving end of cultural assumptions and stereotyping. For Christoph, who has spent the longest period of time in Auckland out of the migrant participants, his earliest recollections of linguistic discrimination when he first arrived in NZ have had a profound long-term impact on his self-perception.

Christoph (German) – I do still I hear my accent, like I still feel quite self-conscious about it, sometimes if I talk to someone for quite a while I can completely forget about it, but sometimes it just pops into my head “you sound kinda thick”.

Christoph's statement demonstrates how language stigma can threaten identity functioning in 'non-native' speakers, and in doing so signals the privileges afforded to native English speakers (see also Kurban, 2015; Torsh, 2020). His partner Maddy emphasised how she downplays his ethnicity in instances where his accent is raised in social situations, as it does not define him as an individual:

Maddy (New Zealander) – I do forget that a lot to be honest that he's from Germany and when I introduce people to [Christoph] like they will pick up on the accent and sometimes I'll say yeah he's from Germany, but oftentimes I don't think I make a song and dance about him being from Germany, he's [Christoph].

Kurban's (2015) assertion that greater linguistic power may be legitimised through relationships with a 'native speaker' or that symbolic power may be greater through familial and social networks in the host society (see section 2.3.3), were echoed in participants' reports of language experiences in social situations, as above.

Liddicoat (2016) argues that inequalities of power in interactions relate not merely to language ability but also to the way individuals socially construct and perform identities. This is visible through the authoritative stances that 'native speakers' may take up by emphasising the language features of 'non-native' speakers. It was apparent in LOTE participants' discussions

about their day-to-day experiences, that native English speakers can exercise a degree of authority and linguistic elitism in their interactions, whether this position is taken up consciously or unconsciously, which may stem from engrained dominant discourses. Lucia reported asserting her linguistic knowledge, self-positioning and providing perspective to her work colleagues in response to being teased about her accent and direct communication style.

Lucia (Argentinian) – In my job my two coworkers drive me crazy, they sometimes correct me on my English. They make fun of my English because I have the [name] accent ... So they joke and mock all the time and I'm like "so when you joke about that, just think that I speak two languages and you speak one, who's more intelligent?" ... and they are like "oh yeah yeah you are right".

This is perhaps an example of what Dervin (2013) refers to as "the power game" (p. 135) and hierarchy in intercultural communication, or the "Othering game" noted by Hua and Kramsch (2016, p. 376), in which the 'native speaker' and specialist of the 'culture(s)' has superiority attached to the language (see Canagarajah, 1999; Holliday, 2015; Pennycook, 1998). Viewing second language proficiency through a deficit lens as opposed to a strength reflects an ignorance attached to the monolingual mindset and lack of awareness about L2 cognitive processes. As Cook (1992) asserts, L2 speakers should be viewed as multicompetent L2 users rather than measured against idealised 'native speaker' standards or correct standardised language. Céleste highlighted the assumptions she also faces based on her accent, and their impact on her social encounters and linguistic identity. These excerpts illustrate NET talk (see Hua & Li Wei, 2016).

Céleste (French) – I'm asked every couple of weeks or every week "are you on holiday here?" "how long have you been on holiday here?" So it's just my accent I just can't lose it ... people don't understand. It's really cute but you're not taken seriously, so sometimes it's a little bit frustrating and I would just like to be able to switch back to French and say what I want to say in French.

Lucia further commented on the common misconception that 'non-native' speakers' linguistic knowledge is inferior to 'native speakers', despite her experience and conscious efforts with her second language, and exposure to specific English terminology in her job that not all native English speakers would be familiar with. Instances of negotiating and asserting linguistic knowledge were also evident in interactions between some partners:

Lucia (Argentinian) – ...that's another funny thing ... so what are the 'learnings' from this study right, and he's like "that's not a word believe me I speak the language, it's my mother language", and I'm like "really? aha it's my second language but I tell you 'learnings' is a word".

Ben (New Zealander) – I'd never heard it spoken before in my life.

Lucia – I use it all the time at my job because in projects it's like what did we learn about this project.

Narratives in this section illustrate how language can be used as a cultural power tool in daily interactions to affirm dominant ideologies, as well as serve a social function to enhance group belonging, exclude outsiders and possibly even make them feel inferior. Some participants demonstrated agency and resistance to cultural power when it was projected into their social relationships (see Liddicoat, 2016), as seen in Maddy's and Lucia's statements above.

#### *Native English speaker experiences*

While five of the six migrant participants raised the need to adapt to meet the dominant English communication norms for their ability to succeed at work and form social connections, two couples also raised how the global status of English can severely limit the cultural experiences and perspectives of native English speakers who do not have the same need to engage with and learn about other cultures and languages. Here Mariana and Jack discuss English education as essential for 'non-native' English speakers to be able to engage in and be a part of the global world, in contrast to native English speakers often having the choice to learn a second language for their own pleasure or personal reasons.

Mariana (Colombian) – In English culture, sometimes English people lost these things, you don't know of the third world ... and it is sad as well ... both cultures need to know each other but of course because the science and a lot of things are mainly created in English we need to know and I agree with that, I mean I don't feel bad for that, just ... to come here and speak English is because I need to know other parts ... it is a necessity ... it is not the same as that ... I wanna speak Spanish it's fun, it's nice, it's beautiful...

Jack (English New Zealander) – Not because you need it to participate in the global world.

Responses by ESB partners signalled that they felt linguistically disadvantaged, suggesting that the migrant partner may have higher linguistic and cultural capital due to their global experiences, as indicated in Remennick's (2009) study. Two ESB participants in this study who were not actively learning their partner's L1 voiced the challenges, pressures and linguistic insecurity of learning a second language potentially "within a fragmented and undervalued system" (Torsh, 2020, p. 22). Couples in this study shared the view that LOTE learning is overall undervalued in Auckland and that the city's policies and practices do not wholly reflect its multicultural, multilingual label.

The interpersonal relationship factor was also highlighted as a contributor to ESB partners' linguistic insecurity and their hesitance in L2 learning (see section 2.3.3). Maddy, for instance, voiced the additional pressure she placed on herself to be perfect in German because it is her partner's language.

Maddy (New Zealander with German partner) – ... it is really hard to learn languages ... I know that like I'm aware that this is like his language that he

grew up with and so ... I'm really scared to mispronounce it like I do have this real fear of learning it almost because when you learn you stuff stuff up you get it wrong and I feel like really bad.

Mark, too, shared this perspective that languages are difficult and discussed his prior challenges learning them at school and university, which played a part in his decision not to undertake formal learning of his partner's L1.

Mark (New Zealander with Bengali partner) – ...there has been a little bit of pressure to learn Bengali and I've mostly resisted that on the basis that I've got a fairly long track record of trying to learn languages that are presumably easier ... and have been terrible ... I had various attempts at high school and actually at university as well ... I sort of came to the conclusion that really the only bona fide way to learn languages is to immerse yourself in the country or place, and that it's really only a superficial understanding that you are going to develop, particularly someone like me.

Those who had prior experience learning a second language and living overseas pointed out the superior advantages of full linguistic and cultural immersion, and reported having gained greater cultural literacy in the process. In line with this view, migrant partners pointed out that their NZ partners' knowledge of their heritage language and culture is often limited to and dependent on context they are able to provide (through the NZ partner's cultural lens) to form mutual understanding. It was a heightened issue when NZ partners had not had the opportunity to visit their partners' home country and be immersed in the culture. For example, Rachel commented:

Rachel (Bengali) – ...it's just not knowing or understanding the context and it just reminds you that [Mark] hasn't been to Bangladesh yet, so whatever he learnt about Bangladesh or Bengali culture was either from me or from my little group of friends.

NZ partners reported that in addition to educational and contextual barriers, lack of interactional opportunities contributed to their linguistic disadvantage and impacted sociocultural participation. Even Kai, who was learning his partner's L1 (French) remarked that as 'non-native' English speakers often want to practise their English "especially it's quite hard to find people to speak that language to you ... if ever we want to shift to France, it would be good to have a little bit more comfort with the language." Despite his efforts to engage with his partner in French (and other French speakers) and his desire to improve, English, the language the couple used when they first met, becomes the default when they communicate:

Kai (Chinese New Zealander) – That's one thing also with [Céleste] and I, is that [even] as my French improves, to change that default I think is quite hard.

Such reflections demonstrate the impact that English as a globally valued, widely spoken language has on native English speakers' chances for success in acquiring languages other than English (LOTEs). Participants in the current study noted that it is difficult to avoid the

dominance of English in the relationship. Some ESB partners expressed their insecurity learning L2s and noted that it is hard to change the language of a relationship.

#### 4.3.2 Negotiating language and roles

When it came to negotiations of language in the relationship, challenges noted by both partners related to pragmatics<sup>11</sup> and the time and energy required to explain cultural context. Kai, Lucia and Hanna reported that one partner may want to converse in their L2 or discuss language matters, but a barrier is that the other partner does not have the energy, which causes frustration. Despite Lucia's positivity towards Ben's efforts with Spanish, she voiced her mixed emotions of love and annoyance due to the time and the effort required from both partners:

Lucia (Argentinian) – I love him so much for trying but at the same time I'm super tired and it takes me ages and I have to translate words, it's like a piece of work sometimes.

L2 communication was noted as less tiring over time as the relationship progressed, but misunderstandings could be ongoing. Hanna highlighted the importance of continued clarification of meaning, as it cannot be assumed that language is no longer the issue as second language proficiency increases.

Hanna (German) – It's not as exhausting anymore. But there are still sometimes misunderstandings and they are now more subtle I would say, and that could lead to more conflict because at the start it was obvious that it was probably a misunderstanding or that I don't know the word or that I didn't know how to use it properly or what he means, and now because it is more fluent ... and if you have a misunderstanding then you don't necessarily assume straight away that it is a language issue.

Noah (New Zealander) – Yeah. Sometimes it just feels like [Hanna] is being a dick, but it's just how you say something, or she is using the wrong word (laughing).

Both migrant and NZ partners reported assuming the role of teacher to correct the other partner's language, or felt responsibility for their sociocultural inclusion when there were language barriers.

Participants' comments showed that migrants may demonstrate agency through active resistance to acculturation. One migrant participant touched on the expectations placed on her to learn and know English culture along with the language, which she and her partner recounted as their biggest language-related conflict. Roles and identity were spotlighted, as while Jack reported a sense of responsibility to create mutual understanding of an English comedy show he was

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<sup>11</sup> Pragmatic competence refers to one's ability to deduce and produce communication that is appropriate to the sociocultural context in which interaction takes place (Kecskes, 2014).

watching, his partner Mariana asserted her right not to take on all aspects of the culture. Jack explained, “I felt I had to take it upon myself to explain it to her” though she had not asked about it, while Mariana demonstrated she still has the power to choose what knowledge she will take on:

Mariana (Colombian) – We for example sometimes learn in English, it doesn't mean that you know English culture, so that was the problem like ah of course I try to learn English but I don't know all of the cultural things that English involves. So that was the problem that I said to you “I don't have to know that”.

This couple's dialogue illustrates both sides of the linguistic assimilation argument—the tension between enabling sociocultural engagement and disconnection with mainstream culture (see 2.4.2).

While participants noted some dependence on language support from the other partner, which could impact on the relationship dynamic, at the same time they noted how empowering it was to give each other the space to learn by themselves. Hanna reflected, like other participants, that while she felt at times disadvantaged by her ability to express herself in English, her partner's decision to not always help her with English had empowered her to succeed independently (see also Martin & Nakayama, 2007; Seward, 2008):

Hanna (German) – I always feel a bit disadvantaged and sometimes frustrated, but it's not that bad anymore, but it bugs me that he always has the right words if he wants them he has the right words and I always have to find my way around to what I want to say ... that is actually a good thing what [Noah] did ... I had to ask people although he stood next to me ... so I had to get out of my comfort zone.

Mariana and Jack placed importance on striking the balance between helping one another enough that language does not become a barrier to social and cultural participation, while allowing each other to feel a sense of achievement, growth and empowerment in the learning process by themselves.

Jack (English New Zealander) – I try not to [translate]. I think you've gotta find your own way, maybe too much sometimes. I think there have been times where I step back so much that it was difficult for you that I could have given you more help.

Mariana (Colombian) – I mean I am so easy with that. I don't understand some things and I can't be sad every time I'm [not] gonna die because I don't understand all the things, so sometimes it's like ok I don't understand, it's ok.

Jack – That's part of the process.

Mariana – Yeah that’s normal life. I feel that way as well like with time I understand more and more and more.

### 4.3.3 Navigating external views as a couple

Three couples reported that the memorable communication challenges they faced often lay with those outside their relationship, and that how to communicate about their relationships to others was a learning curve and required concerted effort. They navigated instances of cultural prejudice, questioning about the legitimacy of their relationship or their relationship choices related to language and culture, through developing and engaging communication strategies about recurring, anticipated topics (see also my discussion of humour in Chapter 6).

Lucia (Argentinian) – ...we are stigmatised by the fact that sometimes people from outside other countries just get into relationships with locals to get residence or papers and partnerships ... I try to explain all the time to everyone that ... I presented all the paperwork and I am fully capable of getting it without a guy...

Ben (New Zealander) – I always got asked that too ... I nip it in the bud even if they weren’t asking in that context.

Similarly, Mark and Rachel discussed creating a “foolproof strategy” for communicating their cultural, religious and relationship choices to their respective families.

Mark (New Zealander with Bengali partner) – So [Rachel] and I have both sort of bucked against I guess cultural and religious norms ... so I guess there is me understanding how that plays out is something that I had to get my head around and also I guess how we navigated how we were going to tell respective families ... would probably be one of the difficulties that we had.

Christoph noted that their concern for others’ views about their relationship became less prominent as the relationship progressed. Their solidarity was most important.

Christoph (German) – If there is anyone on the outside looking in, it bothers us less and less what anyone thinks of us or what our views are ... we just speak our minds and we just do us.

#### 4.3.4 Summary

This section discussed both LOTE partner and ESB partners' second language experiences, interactional complexities in the host society and within their relationships, including some of the impacts of this in their everyday lives and how they navigate these experiences. It illustrated tensions between self-representation and positioning by others, or what Bucholtz and Hall (2005a) refer to as "the social positioning of self and other" (p. 586). The differing perspectives on language and culture that couples encounter have provided important context for understanding their own representations of culture and culture building, and the importance and value they place on language(s) and communication in general in their daily lives, which will be examined further in the next section.

## Chapter 5 The couples' language: *"We are learning to share and learning to make"*

### 5.1 Introduction: Culture through language

Having illustrated how language can be used to measure belonging and construct social position in interactions, this section discusses the significance of language for the couple as a resource for constructing their own culture. It discusses how their language reflects their shared beliefs and how it marks their unique culture. It describes how meanings and practices are constructed through communication, and its cognitive, social and emotional impacts. Section 5.1 of this chapter explores conceptualisations of culture and difference, and the significance of language in couples' daily lives. 5.2 presents participants' self-reported language practices, highlighting their learnings and successes.

#### 5.1.1 Notions of culture and difference

There was a strong interplay between language, culture and identity in couples' interview dialogue, which prompts the need for a discussion on what culture means to couples to set the scene for analysis. Interview data highlighted the issue that essentialist views of culture conflated with nation and ethnicity construct and perpetuate differences and sociocultural divides between people, which not only threaten personal identity and social cohesion, but can also create a perception that intercultural relationships and intercultural communication are problematic. A traditionalist view of culture may assume that it is something that people 'have' and that therefore behaviour can be predicted according to cultural norms, which may not fit an individual's experience of a fluid and shifting cultural identity. Categorising culture in this way can assert power over how authenticity is ascribed to individuals, as it takes attention away from the aspect of self and appreciation for the individual (Sökefeld, 1999) and their agency.

Participants were cognisant of the risk of reducing culture to ethnicity. As discussed in the literature review, labels, stereotypes and institutionalised practices have the power to influence the way people position and define themselves (Fishman & García, 2010). Argentinian Lucia, for instance, stated that she does not fit the multicultural label or immediately consider herself as belonging to the multicultural community in Auckland, particularly as larger minority and migrant populations tend to be prioritised and reflected in government and community initiatives. Couples discussed how as a society we do not give proper consideration to the meaning of culture and that we have lost the nuance of the term 'multicultural'. Mark explained, "We tend to conflate race with culture, which is very problematic. I think that obscures having a conversation about what are some of the underlying values that innate in all of us ... that all of us sort of see as being right or wrong that we can get behind, so [multicultural has] become a very loaded term." He elaborated by sharing what he had learnt from discussions with his

partner and other migrants, “that a lot tend to sort of shy away from wanting to take on this kind of banner of multiculturalism you know. Some come here bringing a strong sense of cultural identity with them, others come escaping senses of culture and identity” (see further 5.1.5).

Seward (2008) suggests that researchers may find values, attributes and markers that define us as humans to “defy racial, cultural, national, and religious boundaries” (p. 213). In the interviews of the current study, couples moved away from cultural labels, downplayed cultural differences in their relationship, and instead foregrounded partners' individuality and the couple bond. When asked if couples see themselves as ‘intercultural’, all six stated that they do not think of themselves as being from very different backgrounds, and simultaneously emphasised their shared interests and core values, their communication and their connection as two people (see also Piller, 2002).

Rachel (Bengali) – That is something I have never thought to be honest, have you?

Mark (New Zealander) – I think we use a similar kind of...

Rachel – Because our interests are so similar

Lucia (Argentinian) – It’s interesting because we don’t realise about that until someone tells us. It’s so weird right you are just from different countries and you are connecting and you love each other right and it’s like wow, but no we don’t think about it really.

Kai (Chinese New Zealander) also emphasised the commonalities he shares with his partner when he expressed that what he loves about his relationship is that “it’s also a culture which is not really based on your ethnicity or race ... what’s the common denominator is generally the level of education and the level of mindset ... we’ve got this similar globalised culture and I think that’s quite a big factor.”

The consistency in participants’ responses indicate that cultural differences in their eyes have not had a major impact on their relationship. Throughout the interviews participants repeatedly attributed any differences they may experience in the relationship to their personalities rather than their respective heritage cultures to reinforce that the cross-cultural element does not hinder forming an intimate relationship (see also Dervin, 2013; Piller, 2002; Wilczek-Watson, 2016).

This section has discussed the importance of language to frame culture. Next, the value participants place on learning and using LOTE and its perceived impact on couplehood will be discussed.

### 5.1.2 The importance of LOTE learning

People’s attitudes towards maintaining, abandoning or learning a language are said to be connected to different political, national, social and gender identities, as well as new imagined

futures (Pavlenko, 2005), and imagined communities in which learners want to participate impacts language learning (Kanno & Norton, 2003). The way people feel in different languages is also said to be strongly influenced by their sociolinguistic histories (Pavlenko, 2005), as observed in the language profiles of couples in this study and discussed in section 4.3.

Heller and Lévy (1992) note that linguistic assimilation is not necessarily inevitable in intercultural relationships, as language choice can change over time with investment in competing language ideologies. Martin and Nakayama (2007) and Seward (2008) suggest that power relations are at the root of the decisions couples make and that they often reflect empowerment of the other partner. Some participants in the current study reported that their investment in language learning in their relationships deepens their understanding of one another and helps to balance power inequities. Hanna perceived a power imbalance to be present in relationships where the ESB partner has not been in the position of learning and speaking their partner's mother tongue:

Hanna (German) – I do think that it has a power thing, that if you only speak the language of one partner the other partner is I think yeah it's not equal even though you are aware that the other person is not less intelligent or whatever it is still. And if you make the effort to learn the other language you have a better understanding of what it means because you know I am still the same person but I can't express myself the way I want to.

Hanna noted that learning an L2 fosters empathy for the experiences of migrants and understanding of the complexities of language and identity construction, as she referred to her own struggles related to self-expression in the host society.

For the majority of couples (four out of six) in this study, it was important that the ESB partner learn the migrant partner's L1, and they stated they would encourage other intercultural couples to engage in both languages as it enabled them to deepen their understanding of one another:

Mariana (Colombian) – I know it's something that [Jack] always said and I never forget—he wanted to know me—and one of the ways to know me is speaking in Spanish and I super agree with that as well.

Ben (New Zealander with Argentinian partner) – Just dive in, like don't avoid it. Like you're missing out on so much if you don't. There's the whole other side of the person that you are missing out on if you take it for granted and don't put in the effort, you may as well not bother.

Overall, however, it was more important to the migrant participants in this study that their partner show interest, openness and willingness to learn than become proficient in their L1. Similar to Hanna, Lucia (Argentinian) attributed the love she has for her partner to his willingness to 'come into her world' and learn her L1: "It's extremely important that he is interested, and that's one of the reasons I love him so much, the fact that he's interested in me

shows some respect.” Céleste, too, expressed appreciation for her partner's drive to use French, as it enhances mutual understanding of the effort required with a second language that is part of her daily reality.

Céleste (French) – And it’s not so much that he can’t speak French but the fact that he’s everyday trying to learn French. I really appreciate that even though I’m not putting in much, cos it’s a lot of effort.

Mariana and Jack concurred that both having had the experience of learning a second language increased their mutual understanding and connection:

Mariana (Colombian) – I think we both learnt languages and this makes our relationship as well very easy.

Jack (English New Zealander) – I think it makes us more empathetic right cos we understand the challenges for the other person.

What was notable across participants’ narratives was that language choices in their relationships were often linked to issues of identity and power, and that mutual understanding and connection was fostered through engagement in L2 learning. The next section demonstrates further ways in which language helps couples in this study to feel connected.

### 5.1.3 Language as a cultural connector

Relational culture is produced through partners’ private discourse and meaning that brings together their attitudes, identities and actions (Wood, 1982). Findings confirmed that the language used by couples is fundamental in negotiating and shaping their day-to-day experiences and shared culture. Couples focused on the ‘inter’ or the interactional space that forms their relational culture. Mariana’s statement is reflective of the overall view held by participants in this study that the ‘language’ or culture of their relationship is a dynamic learning process of knowledge exchange and collaborative meaning-making.

Mariana (Colombian) – ...this is sort of a Spanish different meaning, but for me language is not just Spanish and English ... I mean the whole language ... it’s something that we are learning to share and learning to make as well.

Hanna spoke about the inextricable connection between language and culture, how cultural perspective and understanding is gained through language and how essentially to speak the language is to ‘do’ culture.

Hanna (German) – I think that’s true you only understand the culture really if you understand the language, there is some truth in it ... because of how it transports some thinking the way if you use a different language. You can’t really talk about the culture in a different language.

All six couples indicated their appreciation for learning new ways of expressing similar and different ideas and nuanced expressions, and that this was a benefit to learning another language.

Hanna (German) – Sometimes I know there's a better way of saying it in German and sometimes there's a better way of saying it in English and to have that I think that's amazing ... Some would describe things better than, you sometimes don't have the word in the language.

For example, Mariana mentioned her joy in sharing Spanish words such as 'buen vivir'<sup>12</sup> to introduce her partner Jack to her indigenous culture, which she values greatly.

Analysis revealed that the use of the migrant partner's L1 in the relationship was an important connector for four couples, of which expression of emotions and private code formed a special part. There was a strong sense of its importance in expressing emotions, and two couples mentioned using it for terms of affection.

Kai (Chinese New Zealander) – There are heaps [of benefits], just like things you can't express in English like just even a feel. I mean my French isn't very good but a feel, like a certain emotion you can't really express in English I think.

Lucia illustrated how it is important for her to convey more nuanced Spanish expressions of feelings to her partner:

Lucia (Argentinian) – 'Paja' for us means a state of laziness that goes beyond being lazy. It's an inside deep laziness and there's no such expression in English, so I tell him sometimes "I'm so paja today" ("I'm just so lazy"), but lazy is too light, this is like an interior sentiment you know.

While migrant partners appreciated sharing their L1 expressions and demonstrated emotional attachment to their L1, English was noted as being more formal and less emotive by several migrant and NZ participants. Kai commented on an increased emotional connection and perhaps more genuine, authentic expression with his partner through French:

Kai (Chinese New Zealander) – For me I feel like I'm closer to her now that I speak a bit of French with her, like I feel if I speak English to her I feel quite distant, it feels formal like with certain things I say it almost feels like when I speak English I feel like I have to be an adult.

Lucia, too, pointed out how she brings the Spanish 'spice' and energy to interactions and noted her enjoyment and strong preference for speaking Spanish. Mariana also felt more connection to

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<sup>12</sup> Translates to 'living well' (living in harmony with other people and nature).

the rich, emotive Spanish language that she shared with her partner Jack. He agreed that Spanish words are romantic and their equivalents in English can be “very perfunctory”.

Some couples also illustrated their connection through using the migrant’s L1 as an intimate code:

Jack (English New Zealander with Colombian partner) – ...sometimes I feel you know self-conscious to be overheard and Spanish is like a little private room for us to talk and not have to worry...

When asked about the advantages of speaking the two languages, Céleste too highlighted the use of French as a private means of communication for her and her partner, as well as demonstrating his commitment to the relationship:

Céleste (French) – it kind of shows that he really that he puts a lot of effort into it and I really appreciate that, and as well it’s quite convenient when we need to have a private conversation (laughing).

Additionally, the L2 for the NZ partners was reported to benefit forming relationships and developing stronger connections with the migrant partner’s friends and family. Even having some limited L2 vocabulary was said to spark a conversation and make a point of connection even if speaking in English:

Mark (New Zealander with Bengali partner) – [Rachel’s friends] are all capable of speaking English but it might just engender conversation or they might laugh and say “oh you learnt a new word”.

Conversely, not learning the migrant partner’s L1 or being familiar with the style of communication was reported to make it difficult for the NZ partner to connect culturally and emotionally:

Maddy (New Zealander with German partner) – I feel like there would be a benefit to learning German in regards to like just understanding the culture that comes with it ... it’s something that still gets us into trouble sometimes as a couple is like, so in Germany if someone speaks and they didn’t hear you properly and they would say “pardon I didn’t hear you, can you say that again?” and they will up the ante like they will say it louder, so to me as a Kiwi it came across quite aggressive ... as if he’s really frustrated and angry at me ... but that was a big learning curve, they are not shouting at me and angry with me, they are just trying to help me out...

As seen in the example above, not having learnt the language in the participant’s eyes was a perceived impediment to cultural understanding, participation and emotional connection, which was attributed to a pragmatic mismatch in English and German.

Overall, analysis of interview data indicated that the value of engaging in LOTE was that it fostered a greater connection among partners through a broader base of expressions and the

connected knowledge and values that they relate to, as well as enhanced social connections with the people closest in the migrants' lives. The migrants' L1 also provided a comfortable space for several couples to communicate privately and express emotions or matters of the heart, corroborating Piller's (2002) observation that a couple's private language is the key element in the relationship that acts as "a glue that binds them together" (p. 222).

Partners pointed out that their communication habits provided some advantages to both the relationship and to each individual, and these will be detailed in the next section.

#### 5.1.4 Communicative competence

Data showed conscious communication to be central to couples' shared culture (see also Cools, 2011; Seward, 2008) and was reported to benefit partners on a personal level, in terms of their cultural fluency and general communication skills. While all couples said that communication presented a layer of complexity in the relationship, it was also perceived as one of the greatest strengths of the relationship due to the exchange of knowledge, values and perspectives, as well as good communication habits developed in the relationship from the conscious efforts they put into communication. They reported enhanced general communication skills and deeper understanding of one another. In fact, the couples in this study pointed out that their communication is always interesting because the need to go deeper makes it more engaging and profound, which supports deeper mutual understanding.

Christoph (German) – It certainly doesn't get boring because you have, like there are some misunderstandings like the way you try to bring a point across or the way it comes out, so you kinda have to kind of get deeper into it and like fully explain what you meant and how you meant it and just kind of um yeah make the other person understand, which I feel like helps us both yeah just understand how each of our minds work.

Jack (English New Zealander with Colombian partner) – I think it's nice in an intercultural relationship because it makes it a conscious thing, like we are aware that we might misunderstand each other sometimes, so we concentrate on that and we emphasise trying to understand each other actively a lot, and I think a lot of people take that for granted, even more so especially people who speak the same language cos they are like "oh we just speak the same language, so I know what they mean" but they don't actually.

Mariana (Colombian) – Yes, that's true, yes. I mean yes it's their language, and we share the same values as language.

Notably, participants discussed their effective communication habits when asked what they love the most in their relationship and the most important thing for their relationship. This reinforces their language awareness and that conscious communication is a key aspect of their relational culture. Rather than problematising their communication due to their divergent linguistic backgrounds, participants highlighted their communication as transformational for the

individual and the relationship because of the opportunity this provides to engage on a deeper level.

The next section describes in participants' words how they undergo identity and personal changes through contact with new language.

#### 5.1.5 Linguistic identity construction

Intercultural couple relationships have often been considered a reflection of the assimilation process or the weakening of cultural boundaries (Alba & Nee, 2003), while Yodanis and Lauer (2017) found that the use of two languages could be used to maintain and celebrate two distinct cultures, and enable formation of affiliate cultural identities in partners in Vancouver (Yodanis et al., 2012). Panicacci's (2019) study of migrants found that languages played a crucial role in shaping individuals' cultural identity, and that L1 and L2 frequency of use, particularly for expressing emotions, impacted attachment and sense of belonging to heritage and host cultures respectively. In Singleton and Pfenninger's (2018) research with interlingual partners in Austria, linguistic and cultural affiliation and identity construction was noted to be strongly driven by the principal language of the couple, which had a profound impact on the partner for whom it was their L2.

A key research aim that this study addressed was how language contributes to the cultural identity of partners, and upon examining participants' attitudes, experiences and negotiations of this, my data revealed rich and unique experiences specific to each couple. As noted in the literature, language is an important expression of identity, which is continually evolving and constantly being re-defined, and cultural identifications can shift depending on the language adopted. Findings from the current study confirmed that language was central to a sense of self among participants, and identity shift through language use was reported by both NZ and migrant partners in a number of ways. Data signalled perceptions of threatened linguistic identity and also the construction of multilayered identities mediated through language use.

In addition to growing connections between partners, second language learning and use and the access it provides to new social, cultural and linguistic resources, impacted the construction of participants' identities and their formation of new identities (see Norton Peirce, 1995). As noted by Norton Peirce (1995) and Norton (1997), language learners construct and reconstruct their identity and relationship with the social world when they speak in each social context. Identity is shaped by language used in different contexts and established through one's language choices, and this negotiation takes place in all interactions.

The majority of participants (eight) in this study who spoke a second language reported a perceived change in their personality or perspective or a personal transformation when switching languages (see also Bartzen, 2013; Grosjean, 1982, 2011; Pavlenko, 2006).

Noah (New Zealander with German partner) – It does feel different speaking in a different language because you can be a different person in a way.

The perceived change was attributed to the diverse expressions, knowledge and cultural perspective that they have acquired and can engage in interactions with others. For Lucia, her tacit cultural knowledge and background expressed through the Spanish language allows her to feel her authentic self and it is important for her NZ partner to learn it to understand and connect to her. Conversely, the inability to express herself with ease in the same way in English gives rise to her current sense of two separate identities:

Lucia (Argentinian) – ...there's the NZ [Lucia] and then there's the Latin [Lucia] which has Latin language and jokes and ways of saying things and attitudes and backgrounds and things that I need to explain. So I kind of feel sometimes that I am a different person because maybe I'm funnier in Argentinian because I have like lots of anecdotes or stuff like that that are connected to the cultural stuff ... while here with him I'm like well to tell you a joke I need to give you the context and explain a lot so I maybe don't even say it.

Discussions indicated that language formed a strong part of participants' sense of self, and for the migrant sharing their L1 enabled them to reconnect to their roots and appreciate aspects of their heritage culture:

Mariana (Colombian) – I think that sharing knowledge as well as English and Spanish is a good thing to return back to my thinking in Spanish, my Spanish culture, so when I share with [Jack] I return back and oh I saw my thing like before it was normal in my life, but now that I share it with [Jack] I feel oh no that is so great, yes.

This also helped Lucia and Ben to address the most challenging factor in their relationship:

Lucia (Argentinian) – For me it's the fact that he doesn't know my other side, there's a part of me that he doesn't know and that's not only the language, it's cultural.

Ben (New Zealander) – I would definitely agree. I do feel like there is a whole side to you that is absent and I'm unlocking it slowly.

Both migrant and NZ partners reported that exposure to and speaking an L2 enabled them to develop another dimension to their identity. While Ben was getting to know Lucia better through actively engaging with the Argentine language and culture, on the other hand he interpreted the term multiculturalism as the impact this has had on forming his own affiliate Argentinian identity:

Ben (New Zealander) – Just the way I embrace her culture I suppose, as being a Kiwi guy, like I live my day to day as I would but when I'm with her I drink maté [tea], speak the language, and hang out with her friends and I have my Argentinian side that I am slowly growing.

Even Maddy who was limited to conversing in English (as seen in 4.3.1), reported being able to utilise a more direct communication style that she has been exposed to with her German partner's family and thereby enact her 'German' self (see also Yodanis et al., 2012):

Maddy (New Zealander) – I can utilise that in my day to day conversations that I can embrace my inner German here and like ask someone more directly than I would if I had just adopted the more Kiwi approach...

Participants' discussions also pointed to an identity shift due to adaptation and redefining of themselves. While language has been identified as enabling construction of an affiliative cultural identity or promoting cultural pluralism, Hoffman (2003) also points out "[th]ere are people for whom leaving one's mother tongue is a liberation; they feel they can invent new personae in new words" (p. 53). The two couples where the NZ partner was not actively learning the migrant's L1 commented that a migrant may not always have the desire to maintain a strong connection with aspects of their heritage culture and this could involve opting not to use their L1 as frequently (see Remennick, 2009). Mark reflected on the experiences of his Bengali partner Rachel, and those of their migrant acquaintances, stating that migrants may not want to take on a multicultural label, depending on their level of receptivity to aspects of the host culture and if there are aspects of the heritage culture they do not wish to retain or remain connected with.

Section 4.3 touched on how language can impact one's sense of self and sense of group affiliation among migrants, which is further elaborated on in the views expressed in this section. The language and identity link was highlighted in migrants' reports of feeling a challenged connection to family and friends in their home country due to the changes in their communication resulting from L2 acquisition. Migrants Lucia, Céleste and Hanna conveyed their frustration at needing to adapt their communication to meet L1 and L2 norms but not feeling as if they are able to do either well enough, and sometimes felt in-between two worlds and communication styles (see section 2.4.2). Hanna's comment highlights the challenge of adapting and improving English and avoiding language attrition in German:

Hanna (German) – I always say my English doesn't get better but my German gets worse, that's sometimes a bit frustrating.

Lucia noted a similar difficulty and how the diverse nuanced expressions and representation of concepts she has acquired through English have affected her interactions with friends in her home country.

Lucia (Argentinian) – ...when I came back to Argentina I felt like an idiot because half of the words were in English ... There are just some words or some phrases or some things that I don't have in Spanish that are exactly what I want to say in English and the same in Spanish ... there's not a passionate expression like that. So I came back and I felt like challenged and

my friends were like “wow you’re now an English bitch” and I’m like “sorry” (laughing).

Céleste discussed the impact that adapting her communication to meet the NZ norms and avoid being misunderstood subsequently had on her interactions in French and her personal and social identity in both contexts:

Céleste (French) – ...I would speak even more softly or you can’t have nuance ... people never understand. I stopped being ironic because people always thought I was making a mistake ... I don’t say as many jokes as I used to do in France, I don’t do that anymore. So yeah I would say maybe ... I’m quite different when I speak French than when I speak English, really ... I kind of lost it a little bit in French as well ... and sometimes it’s a little bit painful when I see my dad and my sister and I remember that that’s what we used to do but I can’t do it anymore because I kind of lost the habit.

These reflections highlight that habitual communication is inseparable from one’s identity. It also indicates that language behaviour, authenticity and social connection can be shaped and constrained by the way others comprehend and respond to one’s use of language. While individuals learn how to adapt to (cultural and linguistic) norms of the host society, it may still be a challenge for them to assert their identity authentically in interactions (see section 2.4.2). As a result, they may feel as if they are in-between two cultures and that they do not fit either (see also Gonçalves, 2013a, 2013b; Wierzbicka, 2004).

When asked if speaking her L1 French with her partner helped her to maintain it, Céleste agreed that it encouraged a switch back to her L1 but at the same time she is mindful of societal expectations to use English within an earshot of non L1 speakers (see Kuiper, 2005).

Céleste (French) – Probably a little bit yeah because instead of having the reflex of speaking English now ... I have the reflex sometimes of speaking French when I’m supposed to speak English (laughing) ... actually people are quite nice because sometimes really we should be speaking English and we speak French, yeah my colleagues are.

These comments reflect a sense of unease about not speaking English, the complexity of ‘multi-competence’ (see 2.6), and how this intersects with the dominant language.

While several migrants voiced the tension between adapting to dominant language norms and retaining those of their L1s, migrant and ESB partners recognised and appreciated the positive communicative benefits they gained from exposure to diverse communication. Noah pointed out that learning other languages makes you reflect on your own language and teaches you a lot about etymology and meaning: “you learn a lot about your own language from learning other languages, like where words come from and what they all mean” – Noah (New Zealander).

Through exposure to German, native English speaker Maddy reflected that she has gained more awareness of the communicative norms in NZ English, such as the tendency to use softening devices, and has developed an appreciation for a more direct style of communication, to the extent of regularly utilising it in her day-to-day interactions.

Maddy (New Zealander) – When I'm talking to anyone now you can kind of almost embrace that a little bit yourself and be more direct but not because I knew that it came across to me as quite rude when I first heard it knowing where that boundary is of being direct but not rude, so it's almost like I can utilise that in my day to day conversations ... yeah realising that it's not specific to Germany it's like a lot of cultures actually are quite like that, NZ has got this very like fluffy way of saying things at times as well so yeah it's kind of been quite eye opening.

Mariana also stated that she has developed greater appreciation for diverse communication styles and an enhanced communicative skillset through contact with English.

Mariana (Colombian) – Now I think with English I improved my Spanish, it is crazy. Because English culture is very concrete you go to the point and you say la la and it is very useful, and in Spanish people we are very talkative blah blah blah and sometimes it is difficult for us to get to the point ... So I am learning from English these things, so when I return back to Spanish I find it easier to get to the point ... so I feel like the cool thing now is I improve my thinking.

Mariana and Jack emphasised the importance of reciprocity in their communication with one other. This meant trying to strike a balance between expressing themselves authentically without compromising the other individual. They also noted the wider implications this has for their ability to interact constructively with others.

Mariana (Colombian) – I feel like sometimes we need the balance, I just keep my feelings and don't say nothing. I mean I think we together try to find the balance between those kinds of things.

Jack (English New Zealander) – Yeah what is the line between doing what other people need and being polite and also expressing your own needs enough and being honest. It's a tricky balance to find, but if you have them both together then it's the best of both worlds.

Mariana – That's the benefit I think, that we learn how to be, we share that, so be polite and on the other side be more open.

### 5.1.6 Summary

This section discussed how language shapes social and cultural connections in participants, impacts authenticity and sense of belonging, and how language diversity can make a couple stronger and their appreciation of culture better. The next section illustrates their communication and language practices with examples, and their reflections on their learnings and successes with this.

## 5.2 Language and culture play

A common aspect of couples' CofP identified across couples in this study was creative language mixing. The four couples using both partners' L1s reported that explicit language plans can place tension on the relationship due to time and energy required, as well as potential teacher dynamics and competency pressures. Instead, creative language learning and use categorised by linguistic relaxedness (c.f. Beraud, 2016; Pietikäinen, 2014) was the naturally adopted approach in couples' day-to-day lives. Hanna and Noah commented that their current relaxed approach to using German in the relationship is a result of a previously frustrating attempt at a language plan:

Hanna (German) – ...we just play with the language a bit.

Noah (New Zealander) – ...at the start we would have time when [Hanna] would just speak in German.

Hanna – Well we said because I didn't speak any English and then it was so exhausting for me to find words and then I always said ok five minutes in German to give me a break, but somehow then I don't know obviously we didn't speak because [Noah] didn't speak German and I...

Noah – Yes I did.

Hanna – ...I got frustrated waiting for him, he's not a big talker anyway and then in German that was just like hopeless.

Four couples in this study reported frequently mixing their L1s together, which Hoffman (1989) asserts is inevitable with two languages as “[e]ach language modifies the other, crossbreeds with it, fertilises it” and “makes the other relative” (p. 273). As discussed in the literature review, hybridised language practices may create a third space in which identity can be negotiated (see 2.4.4 and 2.6). Analysis of data in this study suggests that the practice of language mixing created a neutral yet transformative space for partners to enhance meaning, express themselves authentically and co-construct their private, unique little culture. Their language practices were

reflective of translanguaging, which is common among bilinguals who make meaning and communicate by fluidly using all their linguistic resources and not viewing them as separate language categories (García, 2009). In line with Pietikäinen's (2017) study investigating the interaction, identity and multilingual practices of ELF couples, translanguaging was noted to become a habited part of the 'couple tongue', and was apparent in processes of meaning-making and marking identity. This data also aligned with Beraud's (2016) study, which noted mutual understanding and co-operative meaning-making were more important than grammatical correctness and lexical choices among couples.

The concept of play and creativity was prominent in couples' language and culture-building. It was visible in their reported language practices and repertoires, and in the role of L2 learning. As well as sharing expressions in their respective L1s, couples said that they frequently created their own words and phrases. This was reported to be a way to better understand one another when one partner's language competence and/or lexical knowledge was limited, or to enhance understanding as a part of the language learning process. For example, what began as substitution of L2 words or literal 'loan translations' of L2 lexical items early on in the relationship for a couple became a fun, habited phrase, which is now part of their unique everyday language:

Hanna (German) – 'Activate the water cooker' ... So for boiling or starting the kettle. But ... at the start he confused me. For me it was water cooker, and he thought that was funny and now we always say water cooker instead of kettle so that I have to think for me it's still water cooker now I don't even think it's a kettle.

Some of this couple's creative language was constructed as a way to problem-solve gaps in linguistic knowledge they initially faced. However, Hanna reported that she was not always sure whether words her partner used were real English words due to the way he playfully mixed German and English, which was confusing for her at times: "...sometimes I'm not sure is that a proper English word and he wouldn't tell me, he doesn't tell me and then I'm never sure yeah."

While Giora et al. (2015), state that innovative or ambiguous language can cause communication processing challenges and risk misunderstanding as observed above, Bell (2016) calls attention to the cognitive, social and emotional benefits of creative language play that are beginning to be understood. Participants in this study emphasised their fun in creating their own language, signalling that second language learning was an interesting, creative and educational experience.

Huth (2016) also asserts that language play can be a marked activity due to what utterances achieve, perform and accomplish in social and interactional spaces. For example, false friends<sup>13</sup> were noted as a linguistic resource a couple intentionally drew on to construct fun.

Céleste (French) – With the false friends he would on purpose use a word that he knows is not the right one but it's just because it's cute.

Another couple noted their constant play in co-constructing their language, which creates a space for them to express themselves equally.

Jack (English New Zealander) – We make Spanglish and Englese. (laughing)

Mariana (Colombian) – It is funny because when we met I said to [Jack] “I'm gonna destroy English, it is my way to destroy the imperialism”.  
(laughing)

Mariana – So [Jack] as well said he is gonna try to destroy Spanish  
(laughing), so we create the words. But it is every time, like we never stop.

Jack – We play.

Mariana – We play a lot with the language.

This couple's comments and labelling of their language as 'Spanglish' and 'Englese' may be symbolic of their negotiation and construction of identity and culture in an English-dominant context. Their language mixing may be seen as an agentive and collaborative resource to perhaps break monoglossic perspective and embrace linguistic fluidity and hybridity. Translanguaging, which is noted as a process and a resource for learning (see also Beraud, 2016; García & Li Wei, 2014; Pietikäinen, 2014; Rajendram, 2019), was also reflected through this couple's purposeful over-application of grammatical structures to create new hybrid words.

### 5.2.1 Summary

As seen in participants' accounts in this section, language mixing was a natural way for couples to bring fun and creativity with the language learning process and in constructing their own culture and establishing their own culturally empowering practices. It created a space for individual agency, balancing cultural perspective, and drawing them closer

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<sup>13</sup> Words that share the same form across different languages but have a different meaning and etymology.

together.

This chapter brought attention to individuals' language and cultural experiences in the host society and within their relationship. The next chapter aims to deepen understanding of their negotiations, play and construction of identity and shared culture further evidenced through the lens of humour, which was a recurring theme across all participants' discussions.

## **Chapter 6 The use of humour in intercultural relationships: “We laugh a lot”**

### **6.1 Introduction**

Humour can give insight into the unique culture developed in different communities of practice (Holmes & Marra, 2002a). This chapter gives focused attention to humour to exemplify couples' culture, as it was a salient feature of their communication across all six interviews. Humour is also examined as a form of negotiation, play and construction of identity among partners. The couples reported humour to be the greatest challenge to understand linguistically and culturally through their second languages, but at the same time it was highlighted as a particularly successful aspect of their relational culture.

Much of the research connecting humour and ethnicity to date has been based on cultural comparison (see 2.7). Existing literature indicates that use of humour, perceptions of humour and the relationship between humour and psychological wellbeing differ by culture (Jiang et al., 2019). In Holmes and de Bres' (2012) workplace research they also highlight that preferences in styles of humour relate to cultural values. Their work takes the humour and ethnicity link further by addressing its connection with identity, stating that “Humour is a classic means of blending disparate identities and yoking together incompatible concepts” (Holmes & de Bres, 2012, p. 504). While the functions, categories and linguistic features of humour have been broadly researched, there have been fewer studies conducted on spontaneous humour in conversational contexts and less in the context of different ethnic groups (Holmes & de Bres, 2012). Additionally, few intercultural couple studies have given it detailed attention (see 2.7).

In the reported interactions of couples in this study, humour served multiple functions within and outside of their relationships, in the process shedding light on their experiences in the host society and negotiations of language and culture together. Humour was reported in response to discrimination (see 6.2); to foster social inclusion where there were language barriers (6.3); to negotiate cultural differences (6.4); to share culture (6.5); and in creatively constructing their own language (6.6). Humour was constructed through language with a focus on content narratives and in language with a focus on word play (see also Kalocsai, 2014). Data suggested humour was a spontaneous and also deliberate communicative practice, and in each context served to strengthen couples' bonds.

### **6.2 Facing prejudice**

The study of Bustamante et al. (2011), which focused on culture-related relationship stressors among intercultural couples from a range of backgrounds in the United States, identified humour as a coping mechanism used to help maintain a satisfying relationship. There was not a

strong emphasis on cultural factors between partners in the current study and cultural difference was rather downplayed in responses. However, humour was reported when facing discrimination or cultural assumptions from others. For instance, this couple saw the funny side of outsider glares they encountered and responded with humour.

Rachel (Bengali) – I don't consciously think of myself or about us about the fact that we came from a very different cultural background, I mean of course we are a biracial couple and when people see us on the street they would be like "oh". (laughing)

Mark (New Zealander) – That's something we notice and we laugh about, even in Auckland, like the staring that happens, and it's usually other migrants looking at us.

Rachel – And that's probably a reminder to us oh ok we are different.

Mark – Yeah. I usually, just to annoy [Rachel], I start staring at her myself and I get right under her eyes looking. (laughing).

Kai and Céleste, too, made light of discrimination they reported, when asked if they feel they are able to express themselves freely as a couple in Auckland:

Kai (Chinese New Zealander with French partner) – Yeah apart from when we get kicked out of the pub, but I don't really care I mean it's funny more than...[did not finish sentence].

This comment evidences negative attitudes towards diversity that are present in Auckland despite the city's strong multicultural label, yet at the same time it speaks to the attitude of couples in the face of this. In the same way that language can create and maintain inequalities between people, couples in this study appear to utilise humour to redefine and build their positive culture and solidarity.

### 6.3 Fostering social inclusion

Humour was also noted between partners to foster social inclusion in group situations where there were language barriers. Hanna recalled two instances where her NZ partner highlighted her misuse of words or pronunciation in her second language English, with friends in social situations, as well as when alone together.

Hanna (German) – [Noah] has a list in his phone of funny things that I said ... sometimes when we meet with friends he pulls it out and then they all laugh ... well I can laugh about myself so that's fine ... but he likes to say things that I mispronounce or that I said the wrong thing which was funny...

Noah – You mean with (names of friends).

Hanna – And then he laughs about things that I am saying and that makes me so self-conscious that I can't say the word anymore so...

Noah – But I do that with German words as well (laughing).

While Hanna reported the impacts his teasing about her language proficiency had on her confidence communicating in English, Noah was attempting to address potential interactional inequalities and facilitate social inclusion. He conveyed concern about the impacts of the language barriers she faced in his comment that he was “worried that she’s getting tired or not having a good time ... or that what we’re doing is not fun because she doesn’t understand what’s going on, so she doesn’t really get why other people are having fun.” Here, Noah was highlighting the correlation between language proficiency, social participation and wellbeing, and was tapping into playful banter as a way to break the ice and foster social inclusion.

#### 6.4 Negotiating cultural differences

Romano (2008) noted that intercultural couples can transcend cultural differences through humour. In the current study, cultural differences were referenced but were not framed as an issue among couples. Partners instead drew attention to their respective cultural backgrounds and divergent communication styles by joking about them. The following couple’s exchange demonstrates how they directly drew on cultural stereotypes in a light-hearted way to address this.

Jack (English New Zealander) – Sometimes we joke, like I say “oh that’s so English of me” or you say “oh that’s so Latin of me”.

Mariana (Colombian) – Like when I am dramatic (laughing). I feel like omg that’s so Latin American culture, but we laugh it’s not something like omg.

While Piller (2002) notes that cultural stereotyping can be harmful as it undermines the individuality of partners, Dervin (2013) and Wilczek-Watson (2016) also found that the use of stereotypes specifically related to partners’ language use gave couples a platform to “negotiate their identity, intimacy, relationships and everyday lives” in a positive way (Dervin, 2013, p. 133). Data from the current study aligns with this view.

Cultural stereotyping and joking were observed in interview conversation when discussing what partners love the most about their relationship. In this excerpt, Lucia makes explicit her Argentinian identity through an account of how her partner and others describe her and find her dynamic communication a source of amusement:

Lucia (Argentinian) – They call me at my job [name] because I’m like that, I’m loud, I’m really different from the Kiwi people, and it’s not only him, it’s my friends, my coworkers, they laugh a lot because I am too straight, honest, noisy and I tell people off ... I add that spiciness to an office that

maybe is boring and silent sometimes ... I'm the one who wears colours and makes noise and is loud.

Gonçalves (2013a) (see 2.4.4), noted partners often construct themselves and each other as essential beings in social interactions, as could be interpreted in the excerpt above. The perceived differences in Lucia's communication style are responded to here through joking and laughter. Another couple in the current study referred to cultural norms in explanation of their divergent habits in social situations. Here Céleste and Kai recounted sharing the funny side of such differences they experience in their relationship through joking with friends.

Céleste (French) – [We share] like funny things with close friends but only anecdotal like “he does this like this and I do this like that ... oh it's so funny, me too”, things like that.

Kai (Chinese New Zealander) – Like French people ... they sort of like to wake up really early and see the sun rise and do things, but ... Chinese people, we like to party late and then sleep late so there's always this problem.

Although couples reported cultural stereotyping from others, it was also a feature of their own humour. Perhaps to move beyond the notion of difference the following couple intentionally emphasises it through light-hearted joking.

Lucia (Argentinian) – We were like “The patitas<sup>14</sup> are like 400 pesos amazing!” and he imitates a Mexican tone he goes “patitas!” and he uses this all the time and I'm like “that's so racist” and he's like “yeah” “patitas”, and now he jokes about that a lot.

This appears to align with findings on cultural preferences towards humour and the use of jocular mockery in New Zealand to strengthen relational bonds, noted by Sinkeviciute (2016), and Haugh and Bousfield (2012), as discussed in the literature review chapter. When asked whether couples speak the migrants' L1 together, a NZ partner responded that he uses the occasional word to joke around with his partner, as opposed to seriously trying to learn the language:

Mark (New Zealander) – Yeah sometimes, mostly just to wind her up, not because I am making an honest attempt to learn.

Rachel (Bengali) – Yeah just to piss me off he will just say something and mock the stuff.

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<sup>14</sup> “Patitas is like chicken nuggets in Spanish” – Lucia.

Humour reported by some couples reflected an attempt to balance diverse cultural viewpoints. The following joke about real-world issues may illustrate the negotiation of couple identity within a hybrid space where there are potentially conflicting viewpoints and the complexity of balancing diverse perspectives.

Lucia (Argentinian) – Well we laugh a lot because we say that in Argentina, well here the Coronavirus is super important and in Argentina it is important, but we have so many things that can kill you actually, like if you survive to the bus stop and no one robs you and punches you and kills you then Coronavirus is not going to kill you don't worry, and stuff like that, we joke a lot with that.

In sum, humour was observed as a way couples broached potentially challenging topics related to linguistic and cultural difference in a more comfortable light-hearted way (see also Dervin, 2013), and as a way to share and shape cultural perspective. The next section will look at engaging with another language and culture through humour.

## 6.5 Sharing culture

Humour was reported among participants as the most difficult aspect to comprehend and use in their second languages (see section 2.7). The following observation about the use of humour in this couple's relationship is reflective of the overall view held by participants in this study.

Mariana (Colombian) – I think the cultural difference is for example when we make jokes (laughing) because sometimes I make jokes and he doesn't get the jokes (laughing). And I had to explain it, "ah no, I tried to say that la la la" and "ah ok", and so it is nice because we learn as well the humour. That is the hardest level in the other language we think. To understand jokes is so hard, so [Jack] sometimes has to explain.

Mariana indicated that despite humour being a challenge experienced by both partners, learning and sharing new humour makes their interactions linguistically and culturally enriching.

Humour is often described as 'high context', meaning that it can be communicated in an implicit way and heavily relies on shared contextual understanding (see 2.7). One NZ participant who was not actively learning her partner's L1 repeatedly emphasised the ongoing challenge she faced understanding the humour her partner used with his family. Maddy was dependent on seeking clarification from her partner to avoid misinterpretation and misunderstandings, and to feel culturally and socially connected to them:

Maddy (New Zealander with German partner) – We usually like, I just sort of laugh at the time, with his parents, but then afterwards when we've left I'll be like I'll quiz [Christoph] like "Are they being sarcastic or what was that?" "When they said that what did they mean by it?" "Were they picking on me or were they being funny?" or stuff like that.

Participants highlighted the challenge of explaining cultural context in addition to translating unknown words (as observed in section 4.3.2), and Maddy believed she would develop a deeper understanding of the German culture if she learnt the German language. This aligns with Marra and Holmes' (2007) findings about workplace intercultural communication that highlighted the importance of understanding and appropriately using humour for team integration, and with Seward's (2008) study, which discusses humour as a "shared construction of cultural meaning" (p. 132), in this instance causing Maddy to feel disconnected.

As discussed, making sense of jokes can require substantial explanation of context, even for 'native speakers' who may not know the background content being referred to. Pierson (2015), who investigated humour among multicultural couples as a means to explore co-creation and develop methods of generative design, found that couples share more humour based on their current living environment rather than delving frequently into humour from their 'non-shared' cultures. This was attributed to the additional words, time and effort required with the second language, making the joke fall flat in the process. In this study, however, participants reported making an effort to understand and use jokes from their partners' heritage cultures.

Noah (New Zealander with German partner) – I guess there's just some things that you don't expect to be able to talk about in the same way, and for me a lot of it is jokes that [Hanna] just won't get ... but she's learning some of them (laughing).

While in the current study humour was highlighted as the most challenging form of communication to understand semantically and pragmatically, once the time was taken to explain the words and cultural context, it had a lot of utility in the relationship and became habitual.

Lucia (Argentinian) – ...we have to stop the video every second not to translate but to give context of the translation, but then when he understands it he laughs a lot and we use it actually, we use it a lot, we use so many things that are already explained, so he just uses it in everyday conversations which are really funny.

Partners accepted that effort and investment in their communication was required and that meaning may be compromised at times, but that there were greater benefits to their communication as a result.

Couples reported sharing humorous idioms and cultural jokes specific to the migrant partner's heritage culture to grow linguistic and cultural knowledge and apply them to their current environment, which often became their private in-jokes.

Jack (English New Zealander) – The other day she was telling me ... a joke in Spanish and I didn't get it at first, we've got a cup at our house and it has a hare on the side, like a wild rabbit and she just taught me the word for it ...

she said there's this idiom in Spanish which is like you sell someone a cat as a hare and it means like you give them something that they didn't ask for or you gave them a bad deal or you ripped them off ... and this is something you couldn't say in English ... only Spanish could have made that joke at that time.

Mariana (Colombian) – Definitely. And you as well, you teach me a lot about English, how you can say it in English and the meaning.

Similarly, this couple enjoyed sharing idioms to deepen cultural understanding. While the NZ partner was not actively learning his partner's first language, he was learning cultural phrases that in turn had humorous utility to them alone as a couple.

Mark (New Zealander) – ...I'm interested in other cultures and the historical context of things, and to me it's all sort of a learning experience, some of these phrases, you know I'm not so interested in trying to learn a language fluently but I have always been intrigued by some of the language uses and I mean I think a good example would have been like a joke or a saying that we were talking about a couple of months ago...

Rachel (Bengali) – Oh there is a saying ... If I translated that into English it would be like "I know what's in your kitchen" or "I know what's in your kitchen pot"...

Mark – Which makes no real sense as a direct translation.

Rachel – ...So it's basically referring to the fact that some people ... are ... so nosy about other people so they know what is being cooked in your kitchen as well.

Mark – Yeah so it's like they know everyone's gossip, to the point upon they even know what you are cooking for dinner that night ... But then that saying can sometimes be applied to people in NZ.

Rachel – Of course.

Mark – So there's that occasional person, that's kind of how it came about as a bit of a joke.

This data highlighted the use of in-jokes to form common ground and team membership, in line with Marra and Holmes' (2007) multicultural workplace study. The next section will discuss this through participants' unique co-created language.

## 6.6 Creative language play

Marra and Holmes (2007) demonstrated that communities of practice develop their own unique style of humour. The term 'interactive pact' has also been used to refer to the solidarity and sense of exclusive intimacy created between partners through the playful humour they construct together that only they understand (Chiaro, 2009; Coates, 2007; McCarthy & Carter, 2004). In

this study, the ‘interactive pact’ was observed in couples’ own creative constructions of language and their language mixing, which form part of their private, shared little culture. The following couple illustrate this through their private running jokes created through phrases they share, translate and use in each other’s L1.

Lucia (Argentinian) – Everytime I say something that he doesn’t care about or he says something that I don’t care about we look at each other and we’re like “cool story bro” and he will be like “mira vos che”, the translation is...

Ben (New Zealander) – It’s like ‘look at you’ like oh you’re cool ... but it’s almost sarcastically insulting.

Lucia – Ironic.

Jack and Mariana also discussed the playful side of negotiating each other’s languages and cultures, and constructing their own. Their comment that what they find the most amusing is that nobody else understands their jokes and their own language and that they need to explain this to others, reinforces their sense of unity and unique culture.

Jack (English New Zealander) – It’s kind of funny, it’s funny that they don’t understand and it’s funny not getting it as well.

Mariana (Colombian) – But the funniest thing I think is that we create together like a kind of special language that nobody understands but us and now we have to explain our jokes, our language to others, and we mix the language.

## 6.7 Summary

The theme of humour came across strongly in the data in this study, providing a lens through which to view themes addressed in Chapters 4 and 5 in greater depth. Couples’ use of humour, which was collaborative, acted to build their positive ‘community of practice’, solidarity and connectivity, and social cohesion with others, in alignment with data in Holmes and Marra’s (2002a) and Marra and Holmes’ (2007) workplace studies.

While humour is a known marker of group membership and bonding, this study also points to humour as an expression of cultural agency. Humour enabled couples to light-heartedly address linguistic and cultural differences and share different perspectives. Some contested humour was reported as challenging societal norms, judgements and stereotypes.

The data in this study shows that humour can be a useful tool to challenge and move beyond social constructs (see Romano, 2008) and power inequities (see Holmes & de Bres, 2012), deepen linguistic and cultural understanding, and consolidate shared culture. The ability for participants to learn and use humour in their second languages and create their own together was important for growing and strengthening their linguistic identity and couplehood.

The next and final chapter will present a summary of the most salient findings and implications of this research, and provide reflections on the methodology and recommendations for future studies.

## Chapter 7 Conclusion

### 7.1 Reviewing the original aim of the study

This research began with wanting to understand in depth the sociolinguistic attitudes, cultural perspectives and reported language practices of Auckland-based intercultural couples who have received little attention in sociolinguistic research to date. This study offers a multifaceted view of couples' communication, in terms of their pragmatic challenges and successes, multilingual practices and linguistic identity construction. In doing so it also explored how language repertoires and identifications may intersect with social and cultural discourses. As outlined in Chapter 1, by exploring the perspectives of both ESB partners and LOTE partners, and couples without children, this study also aimed to contribute knowledge to the field on language attitudes and practices in an English-dominant context, and the value placed on LOTEs beyond intergenerational transmission.

This chapter will start by reviewing the methodological approach before revisiting the research questions and the most salient findings of the study in light of the existing literature. The contributions and limitations of the current study, and recommendations for further research that can build on these findings will be discussed, before providing concluding remarks.

### 7.2 Reflections on methodology and research design

The intention was to give a voice to both LOTE and ESB partners through in-depth interviews together, to understand both partners' perspectives and experiences in their own words, their reflections on how they communicate with each other and the meanings they make of their experiences. My own experience of second language learning and intercultural relationships led me to believe that couples would have rich insights into the cognitive, emotional and social processes involved in navigating another language and culture, and their detailed interview discussions were testimony to this. Rich descriptive data were produced through participants' shared and individual accounts of these phenomena, and how they build meaning around their experiences.

The snowball sampling approach was an effective way to reach participants from a variety of backgrounds across Auckland after initially slow recruitment. While the participation of couples from a greater variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds would have provided an even richer perspective of the phenomena in the Auckland context, the number of participants was restricted to within the scope of a Master's study. Having a small sample size allowed for an in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives, experiences and contextual factors, and represented a group of ESB/LOTE-background partners who have not had explicit focus to date.

This study, which drew on concepts of social constructionism, poststructuralism and the community of practice model, contributes to literature investigating how cultural and national identity is ‘done’ or constructed through language (Dervin, 2013, Gonçalves, 2013a; Piller, 2002; Rubin Damari, 2010; Wilczek-Watson, 2016) and the influence that dominant ideologies may have on language attitudes, choices and repertoires in the interpersonal context (Piller, 2002; Torsh, 2020).

This study employed a highly inductive approach to allow themes to be guided by the participants’ responses. It was a challenge to present the findings coherently due to the interrelated nature of the themes. Analysing the large amount of data generated in this exploratory study proved challenging, which made reflections recorded in a research journal, discussion and corroboration with supervisors, and a multi-stage iterative analysis invaluable.

### 7.3 Findings overview

This research set out to explore the following two research questions:

1. What are intercultural couples' attitudes towards language, identity and multiculturalism in Auckland?
2. How do they report the negotiation and construction of language and culture within their relationship and in their daily lives?

In answering these questions, this study provides insights into how couples experience language and culture in the host society in their daily lives, and how they draw on both their languages and cultures in a variety of ways to form new understandings and connections together.

Existing couple literature has highlighted the complexity of language in relation to issues of identity and power (Piller, 2002; Torsh, 2020). Exploring couples’ attitudes to language and culture in their everyday lives in the current study revealed varying degrees of linguistic, cultural and social capital (see also Remennik, 2009) experienced by ESB and LOTE partners. Through exploring the perspectives of both partners, this study has shown how language status and ideologies can contribute not only to interactional inequity for ‘non-native’ speakers but also for native English speakers’ chances to broaden and improve linguistic and cultural fluency.

This was evident through migrants’ ongoing experiences of bias towards their accents, deficit assumptions about their linguistic and cultural knowledge, and ‘nationality and ethnicity talk’ (see Hua & Li Wei, 2016) in the host society. They illustrated the seeming contradiction in the way in which belonging continues to be measured by ‘nativeness’ within a context that is home to and defined by its many languages and ethnicities. This study has highlighted the stigma that ‘non-native’ speakers of English may experience, suggesting a level of cultural and linguistic

superiority exercised in interactions, yet a level of insularity in overlooking complex and dynamic language abilities (see Seals, 2021). While, overall, participants downplayed challenges, some migrants indicated that these experiences impacted authentic expression, social connections and sense of belonging.

On the other hand, some ESB participants expressed the need for greater educational (see also Torsh, 2020) and interactional opportunities for their chances to succeed in acquiring languages other than English (LOTEs), and to deepen their cultural understanding. Their accounts suggest a connection between fragmented language education, negative self-efficacy learner beliefs and L2 motivation (see 2.3.1). Those actively learning their partner's L1 noted the difficulty in changing their default use of English with their partner, the language in which their relationship was formed, but noted too that it needs to be prioritised for the migrant's chances for success.

The findings of this study suggest that while, overall, couples hold positive attitudes towards their freedom of expression and diversity in Auckland, they do not perceive the city's multicultural label to be reflected to the same extent in policy and practice. One participant noted they would like to see inclusion of broader cultural groups represented in local community events and initiatives. Another suggested, based on their experiences, that it would be important for future research to address the language and cultural perspectives of a broader range of New Zealanders.

In answer to research question two of this study, how language, culture and identity is negotiated and constructed in couples' daily lives, findings revealed rich experiences unique to each individual, as well as common observations across couples. Chapter 4 demonstrated that couples developed and engaged in communication strategies to navigate or preempt differing external views. Anecdotal evidence of their social interactions suggests humour is commonly drawn on to broach matters of language and cultural difference and mitigate tensions.

Participants reported drawing on their rich linguistic and cultural repertoires, humour and stereotypes, and asserting agency and perspective in their daily interactions. I would argue that in these ways migrants and couples are to some extent providing influence on pre-conceived notions of linguistic and cultural difference and 'norms'.

Language and identity studies about couples have primarily gathered data with migrant partners, multilingual or ELF couples. The current study adds the perspective of an ESB partner (see also Torsh, 2020) who may be a new second language learner/emergent bilingual adult, in addition to the migrant partner. Participants constructed their identities as language learners/users rather than bilinguals and discussed how they navigated and established autonomous learning strategies and ways of communicating together. In contrast to couples with children who may need to adopt a more structured language plan in order to achieve language transmission, the participants in this study reported a relaxed, playful and creative approach to facilitate meaning-

making and mutual understanding. This was of greater importance than grammatical and lexical precision, corroborating findings of ELF couple studies (Beraud, 2016; Pietikäinen, 2014). Importance was placed not on fluency but on an openness and willingness to try and learn the migrant's L1 (see also Seward, 2008), which was reported to enhance empathy and mutual understanding of their experiences. Finding a balance between helping and empowering each other to succeed independently in matters of language comprehension was important to couples (see Martin & Nakayama, 2007; Seward, 2008). Their accounts support Bell's (2016) assertion that creative language play brings cognitive, social and emotional benefits.

Few studies have focused on the positives of intercultural relationships, but couples in this study highlighted the intercultural and plurilingual benefits for the individual and couplehood. They emphasised the continual learning and insights they gain through the opportunity to share and create together. While differences in sociopragmatic norms, communication styles, expressions and humour can be semantically and pragmatically challenging for couples, participants perceived numerous reasons and benefits to include LOTE as part of their couple language, and that these advantages outweigh the pragmatic and semantic challenges. Partners who had learnt and used LOTE in their relationship discussed how this influenced their subsequent experiences positively.

Some existing studies suggest greater preference for expressing emotions in one's L1 (Dewaele 2008; Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2019; Panicacci, 2019) and indicate that gender may be a factor related to emotional resonance of a second language (Dewaele & Salomidou, 2017). Socialisation into the L2 culture and frequency of use of L2 are also noted as strong predictors. However, ESB partners in the current study reported emotional liberation and greater emotional connection through engaging in the more nuanced and emotive words that LOTE have, and the broader cultural perspective and shared understanding that come with the process of learning a second language. They also reported greater flexibility of self-expression and the ability to draw on and utilise a greater base of expressions and communication styles in their daily lives, and develop new aspects of themselves in the process (see also Jiménez, 2010; Yodanis et al., 2012). The results of this study corroborated Pavlenko's (2002) assertion that learning a second language is not only about acquiring a new language but is also a process of socialisation, self-growth and identity construction.

### 7.3.1 (Re)constructing identity through language and humour

While a growing number of studies address identity construction from a language acquisition point of view (see 2.4.3), which was reflected in individual partners' responses, this study illustrates how couples negotiate their own unique linguistic and cultural way of communicating together. Participants' responses indicated that their heritage cultural identities are not less important or weaker as a result of their relationships, but that they have found ways to share and

celebrate aspects of both languages and cultures and construct their own linguistic and cultural uniqueness as a couple (see also Klötzl, 2015).

Migrants expressed occasions where it was challenging for them to connect socially in their host and home countries, as their ways of communicating are not necessarily shared or understood within their pre-existing or new social networks (see also Nelson, 2018). Together, couples reported the need for understanding and reciprocity when communicating with one another. As Jack noted, “It’s a tricky balance to find, but if you have them both together then it’s the best of both worlds.” This study has demonstrated the ways that couples attempt to negotiate this through their communication and language awareness, through questioning constructs and rules, creating their own words and shared references, playful languaging patterns and practices, and through humour.

Although humour presented one of the greatest challenges to partners semantically and pragmatically, sharing, learning and constructing their own was an important part of the ‘glue’ (Piller, 2002) of their private language and relational culture. This included stereotypes (Dervin, 2013; Wilczek-Watson, 2016) and their own creative language constructions (see Kalocsai, 2014). Responses suggested it enabled couples to share culture and language in a light-hearted way and yoke together cultural and linguistic differences, balance their cultural values and perspectives alongside host society values, and strengthen their bond (see Holmes & de Bres, 2012; Kalocsai, 2014; Marra & Holmes, 2007).

Corroborating findings of existing international studies, both partners in the current study considered their private language and communication to be the strength and highly valued aspect of their relationship (see also Cools, 2011; Seward, 2008). Couples reported a rich and fulfilling relationship due to the transformative opportunity not necessarily realised in intracultural relationships (see Cools, 2011) to enhance communication skills and habits, grow language, cultural awareness and self-reflection, and deepen connection.

### 7.3.2 Reframing ‘intercultural’

The term ‘intercultural’ has been used in this study, in line with literature in the field, to refer to the fact that two partners bring diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds to their relationships. What was notable throughout the interviews was that participants deemphasised cultural differences between themselves and that they addressed how labels and stereotypes conflate culture and nationality and negate individuality and authenticity. This prompted me to reconsider the use of the term ‘intercultural’.

As noted in existing studies (Dervin, 2013; Piller, 2002; Wilczek-Watson, 2016), cultural identity, difference and similarity are discursive constructions and the ‘intercultural’ aspect depends upon whether or not one orients to cultural difference. Existing studies discuss third

culture or hybrid identity forming between couples, interlinked to their ongoing linguistic and cultural negotiations (Dervin, 2013; Gonçalves, 2013a; Piller, 2002; Rubin Damari, 2010; Seward, 2008; Wilczek-Watson, 2016). Couples in the current study spoke of sharing a similar ‘globalised culture’ in which ethnicity and difference are less relevant to them. They stressed the importance of recognising each partner as unique individuals not bound by cultural stereotypes and the couple as “just two people” (Piller, 2002, p. 197). The formation of their own linguistic and cultural identity and culturally empowering practices was reflected in a participant’s statement: “we just do us”.

#### 7.4 Limitations and directions for future research

Findings from this study represent the perspectives and experiences of six ESB/LOTE couples without children from across the Auckland region. It needs to be noted that there were some similarities across the educational backgrounds of participants, and some migrant participants shared geographic/ethnic backgrounds. Diverse couples and individuals, including Māori, Pacific and LGBTQI, did express interest, but did not meet criteria of not having children or of one partner being a native English speaker. This indicates the desire for broader migrant, diaspora, indigenous and minority groups in NZ to have a voice in future studies addressing language use, culture and identity.

While this study focused on the experiences of two partners, couples with children were also interested in participating, which would be a natural follow-on study. Further research could investigate how children impact the language decisions made by couples, and how families with multiple ethnicities, cultural identities and languages navigate these competing loyalties. Studies could investigate the impacts of a neutral sociocultural context for partners who are both ‘non-native’ English speakers who use English as a lingua franca in NZ. Quantitative studies have not analysed intercultural partnership trends in recent years, and such investigation may inform a greater understanding of cultural orientations and demographic patterns in ‘superdiverse’ NZ.

The couples interviewed in this study had been together for at least a year, and a longer-term relationship and residence in this context may generate different findings. A longitudinal study could provide insights into how language and cultural perspectives and practices may change over time. The current study provides a basis for further research into the use of humour to explore competing ideologies and culture-building in intercultural contexts.

Based on the views expressed by ESB and LOTE-background participants, this research suggests that there is a need to better explore and understand language attitudes, learner beliefs and needs among ESBs and bilinguals in English-dominant contexts, and New Zealanders’ attitudes to linguistic and cultural diversity. This study could also be replicated in regions that

are less ethnically and linguistically diverse than Auckland to understand how experiences may vary.

This study has reported some values native English speakers attribute to second language learning, which merits continued scholarly focus given the prolonged discussion about language in education policy in NZ. The presence of monolingual, monocultural bias and the languaging advantages voiced by participants in this study have implications for research ahead. One such focus must be how more linguistically and culturally inclusive pedagogies and practices can shape understandings, attitudes and experiences of educators and learners. Further attention to the cognitive, social and emotional impacts of L2 learning, as noted in this study, may assist in nurturing inclusive linguistic and cultural practices in our education system and communities.

## 7.5 Concluding remarks

While several of the research findings echo those of existing international literature, this study was one of the first of its kind in Auckland, NZ. It contributes another layer to existing couple literature and focused discussion about communication and identity in an English-dominant context. Auckland is now one of the most diverse cities in the world, and daily practices, ‘norms’ and conceptualisations of what it means to be a New Zealander are continually evolving. Through a sociolinguistic lens, this study has shed some light on the perceptions and experiences of a small group of Aucklanders who are connecting across cultures, within this increasingly diverse environment. They have demonstrated the significance that language holds for them in their daily lives on a personal, interpersonal and intergroup level, providing insight into the complex way in which language is not only a means of communication but a matter of identity, belonging and connection.

This thesis has shown that while couples navigate an added layer of complexity in their interactions, their partnerships are a lot of fun, they bring transformative opportunities for personal growth, deeper mutual understanding and connection within their relationships and their communities. Their partnerships provide space for new identities and linguistic practices to be forged. The findings of this study may reflect and have implications for a much wider demographic beyond couples within the diverse, bicultural context of Auckland and NZ. This thesis concludes with the words of a participant Jack.

View your situation as a benefit rather than a drawback cos we're in an international world now, everyone is from a different country these days. It's a strength I think because it gives you an opportunity to be more empathetic with each other, more understanding. The moments where you are working hard to understand each other are the moments that you are getting closer to someone else, so to really cherish that I think is very important.

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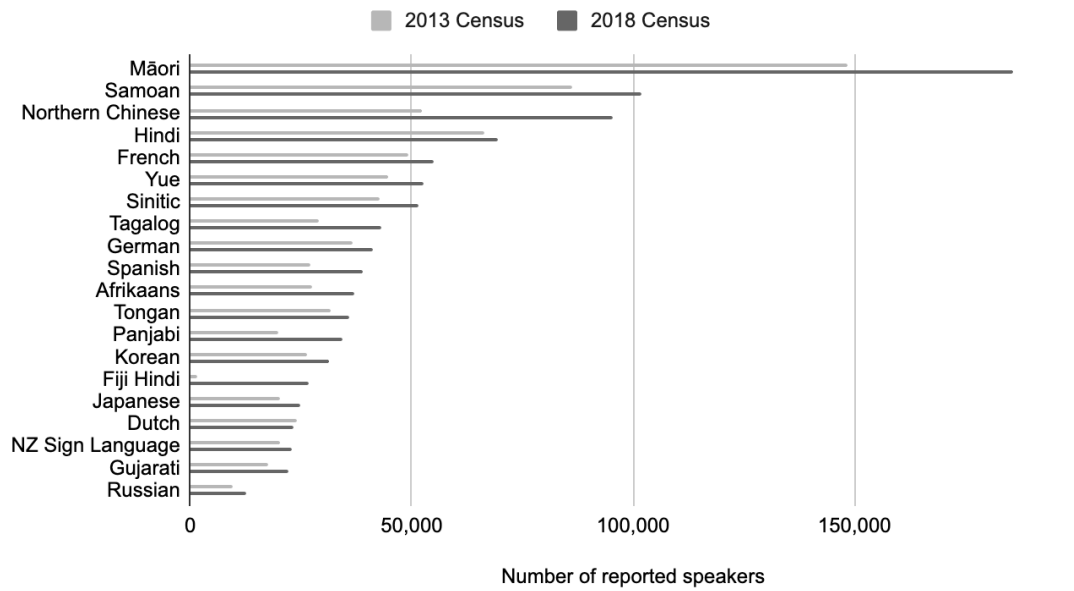
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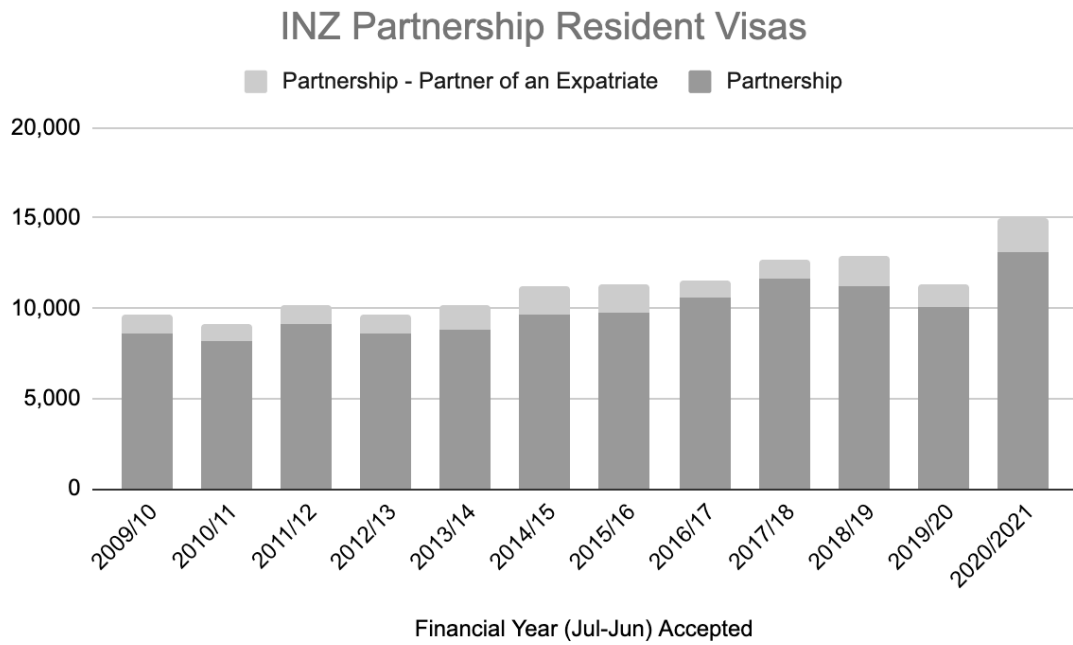
# Appendix A: Languages Spoken in Aotearoa New Zealand

Most common languages spoken nationwide after English



*Note:* Graph generated from 2013 and 2018 Stats NZ census data (Stats NZ, 2014, 2020).

## Appendix B: Immigration New Zealand Partnership Visa Figures



*Note:* Graph generated from Immigration New Zealand figures (Immigration New Zealand, 2021).

## Appendix C: Ethics Approval Letter



### Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

Auckland University of Technology  
D-88, Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142, NZ  
T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316  
E: [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz)  
[www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics](http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics)

**AUT**

TE WĀNANGA ARONUI  
O TĀMAKI MAKĀU RAU

22 November 2019

George Major  
Faculty of Culture and Society

Dear George

Re Ethics Application: **19/386 Examining attitudes towards language, multiculturalism and identity in intercultural couple relationships in Auckland**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 21 November 2022.

#### Standard Conditions of Approval

1. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the [Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research](#) and as approved by AUTEC in this application.
2. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using the EA2 form.
3. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using the EA3 form.
4. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form.
5. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
6. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
7. It is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard.

AUTEC grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management approval for access for your research from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted. When the research is undertaken outside New Zealand, you need to meet all ethical, legal, and locality obligations or requirements for those jurisdictions.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

For any enquiries please contact [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz). The forms mentioned above are available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>

Yours sincerely,

Kate O'Connor  
Executive Manager  
**Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee**  
Cc: [jxt1535@autuni.ac.nz](mailto:jxt1535@autuni.ac.nz); [sophie.moore@aut.ac.nz](mailto:sophie.moore@aut.ac.nz)

## Appendix D: Study Advertisement

The logo for Auckland University of Technology (AUT), consisting of the letters 'AUT' in a white, bold, sans-serif font on a black rectangular background.

### ARE YOU IN AN INTERCULTURAL RELATIONSHIP?

#### Looking for participants for a study on language, culture and identity

You are invited to participate in a research study examining the attitudes and experiences of intercultural couples in Auckland, conducted by AUT Master of Language and Culture student Sophie Moore. The study aims to learn more about how intercultural couples negotiate language, culture and identity and their experiences in the context of multicultural Auckland.

To participate in this study you need to reside in Auckland, be over 18 years of age, have no children, be in a committed romantic relationship (over one year together) where one partner is a NZ-born English speaker and the other partner is a migrant with a first language other than English. You will be interviewed about your views on language, culture and identity, together as a couple and separately. Interviews will be conducted in English, so you need to be comfortable using English in everyday situations. Interviews will take place during January–March 2020 at Auckland University of Technology or at your home.

If you would like more information about participating, please contact:  
Researcher: Sophie Moore at [jxt1535@autuni.ac.nz](mailto:jxt1535@autuni.ac.nz)  
We look forward to hearing from you!

#### Researcher

Sophie Moore  
School of Language and Culture  
Auckland University of Technology  
[jxt1535@autuni.ac.nz](mailto:jxt1535@autuni.ac.nz)  
(09) 9219999 ext 6307

#### Project Supervisor

Dr George Major  
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AUTEC Ethics Application: 19/386

# Appendix E: Participant Information Sheet



## Participant Information Sheet

### Date Information Sheet Produced:

14 October 2019

### Project Title

Examining attitudes towards language, multiculturalism and identity in intercultural couple relationships in Auckland.

### An Invitation

Kia ora! My name is Sophie Moore. I am a Master of Language and Culture student in the School of Language and Culture at Auckland University of Technology. I am inviting you to participate my Master's research project titled '*Examining attitudes towards language, multiculturalism and identity in intercultural couple relationships in Auckland*'. Before you decide if you want to take part or not, I want to tell you why the research is being done, and what you can expect if you do take part. Please take your time to read the information. Your participation in this research is completely voluntary and your decision to participate or not will not result in any advantages or disadvantages for you. Thanks for reading this.

### What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this research is to learn from your experiences and views as intercultural couples to broaden our understanding of our multicultural society and Auckland identity. As diversity increases in Auckland, we need to know more about the potential impacts this has on language use, culture and identity. I would like to hear from you in your own words about how you as a couple practise your language(s) and culture together in your everyday lives and your views on identity in Auckland. This research expands on previous intercultural couple research overseas, as there has been little research done on this topic in New Zealand to date.

The findings of this research will be reported on in my Master's thesis and may be used for academic publications and presentations. You will have the opportunity to check your transcript and remove or alter any of your own comments.

### How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

You saw my advertisement and you responded to it.

You can participate in this research if you:

- are in a committed romantic relationship (over one year together) where one partner is a NZ-born English speaker and the other partner is a migrant with a first language other than English
- are over the age of 18
- reside in Auckland
- do not have children
- are comfortable using English in everyday situations (the interviews will be conducted in English).

Feel free to contact me (Sophie) at [jxt1535@autuni.ac.nz](mailto:jxt1535@autuni.ac.nz) if you are unsure of your suitability to participate or if you have any questions.

### **How do I agree to participate in this research?**

If you and your partner would like to take part in this study, please email me: [jxt1535@autuni.ac.nz](mailto:jxt1535@autuni.ac.nz). As data collection will take place between January and March 2020, please express your interest as soon as possible. If the number of volunteers exceeds the target number of participants (between 3 to 6 couples), the first couples to express interest will be selected. If you decide to participate you will be emailed a Consent Form for both you and your partner to read through and both sign and return to the above email address.

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

### **What will happen in this research?**

If you volunteer to participate in this research you will be interviewed together with your partner, either at Auckland University of Technology or at your home if you prefer, on a day that suits you, your partner and me (the researcher). The couple interview will be approximately 1 hour and will be audio-recorded. Following the interview together with your partner, you will also be interviewed for approximately 15–30 minutes by yourself without your partner to give you a chance to express your individual views. This could be on the same day as the couple interview or a different day, depending on your availability. You do not need to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering. You will also each be asked to complete a short written demographic questionnaire by email once you have provided written consent to participate, which will take you approximately 5 to 10 minutes. This is to provide context to the interview data.

After the interviews have taken place and been transcribed, you will be emailed a copy of the interview transcripts for you to review. You will have the opportunity to correct any information before it is used for analysis and return to me by email. The data from the interviews and the questionnaire will only be used for the purposes of this research and related academic presentations.

### **What are the discomforts and risks?**

Participating in this research is not anticipated to cause you any disadvantages or discomfort. You may feel concerned about sharing potentially sensitive personal or relationship information, or that your participation may influence your relationship with your partner, or you may be concerned about exposing your identity via audio recordings. However, I would like to reassure you that you do not need to answer any questions that you feel uncomfortable answering/do not want to answer, and that your interview recordings will not be shared with anyone apart from myself (the researcher), the Project Supervisor George Major, and a professional transcriber who will sign a confidentiality agreement. You will be given the opportunity to review and edit the transcript from the interviews. Your data will be reported using a fake name (or pseudonym) unless you give permission in the Consent Form for your real name to be used in any report of the research. Your questionnaire data will be anonymous.

### **How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?**

If you decide to participate you have the right to withdraw from the study at any stage, you can ask any questions about the study at any time during participation, and you can decline to answer any questions in the interviews or stop the interview at any time.

### **What are the benefits?**

This topic has been increasingly studied overseas in recent years, but we do not know much about it in New Zealand, so this research may result in an increased awareness about intercultural couples' experiences in the Auckland context. It may provide further important insights about language, culture and identity in our multicultural society. It will also give you as a participant an opportunity

to reflect on and voice your views and experiences. This research will also assist me in obtaining a Master of Language and Culture qualification.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

While efforts will be made to remove information that might identify you, as the participant size is small, complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed. However, the utmost care will be taken to ensure that no identifying details are revealed.

The transcriber will sign a confidentiality agreement prior to involvement in the research, which means that they cannot disclose any information provided by participants to anyone else. Your information will only be used as described in this participant information sheet.

The research data will be stored for six years in a secure storage facility provided by the Faculty of Culture and Society, Auckland University of Technology, according to AUT Ethics protocol, which only the Project Supervisor and I will have access to. The data will be permanently destroyed after six years.

**What are the costs of participating in this research?**

The only cost for you is approximately one hour and 40 minutes of your time for questionnaire and interviews (approximately 10 minutes for the written questionnaire, 1 hour for the couple interview, 30 minutes for the individual interview), plus some additional travel time to and from Auckland University of Technology, unless you would like the interview to be held at your home. In addition, following transcription of the interviews you will be given the opportunity to review your statements and this could take approximately 30 minutes.

**What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?**

You have two weeks from the date of this invitation to decide if you would like to participate in this research.

**Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

If you participate in this research, I (the researcher) will maintain your name and contact information so that I may provide you with a summary of the research findings. However, your personal information will never be related to any of the study findings. You are also always free to contact me or the Project Supervisor via phone or email, or ask us not to contact you further after the interviews.

**What do I do if I have concerns about this research?**

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Dr George Major, [george.major@aut.ac.nz](mailto:george.major@aut.ac.nz), phone: (09) 921 9999 ext 6463.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK, Kate O'Connor, [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz), (09) 921 9999 ext 6038.

**Whom do I contact for further information about this research?**

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows if you have any questions or want to know more about the study:

***Researcher Contact Details:***

Sophie Moore, [jxt1535@autuni.ac.nz](mailto:jxt1535@autuni.ac.nz), phone: (09) 921 9999 ext 6307.

***Project Supervisor Contact Details:***

Dr George Major, [gmajor@aut.ac.nz](mailto:gmajor@aut.ac.nz), phone: 921 9999 ext 6463.

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on **22 November 2019**, AUTEK Reference number **19/386**.

## Appendix F: Consent Form



### Consent Form

*Project title: Examining attitudes towards language, multiculturalism and identity in intercultural couple relationships in Auckland.*

*Project Supervisor: Dr George Major*

*Researcher: Sophie Moore*

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 14 October 2019.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- I understand that notes will be taken during the couple and individual interviews and that they will also be audio-recorded and transcribed.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.
- I agree to take part in this research.
- I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes  No
- I wish to be identifiable by my real name in any report of the research (please tick one): Yes  No  (If you select no, your identity will be kept completely confidential)

Participant's signature: .....

Participant's name: .....

Participant's contact details:

.....  
.....  
.....

Date:

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 22 November 2019 AUTEC  
Reference number 19/386**

## Appendix G: Demographic Questionnaire

The logo for AUT (Auckland University of Technology) is displayed in white text on a black rectangular background. The background of the entire page header is a purple and black geometric pattern.

### Demographic questionnaire

**Research Project Title:** *Examining attitudes towards language, multiculturalism and identity in intercultural couple relationships in Auckland*

1. **What is your age? (please circle)**
  - a. 18–24 years old
  - b. 25–34 years old
  - c. 35–44 years old
  - d. 45–54 years old
  - e. Over 55
  
2. **What is your gender? (please circle)**
  - a. Female
  - b. Male
  - c. Other (please specify)
  - d. Prefer not to say
  
3. **What is your ethnicity?**
  
4. **What is your country of birth? If not New Zealand, how long have you lived in New Zealand?**
  
5. **What is your first spoken language(s)?**
  
6. **In which language(s) could you have a conversation about a lot of everyday things?**
  
7. **In which language(s) do you converse with your partner?**
  
8. **What is your occupation?**
  
9. **What is your highest educational qualification? (please circle)**
  - High school graduate
  - Trade/technical/vocational training
  - University Certificate/Diploma
  - Bachelors degree
  - Honours degree/Postgraduate Certificate or Postgraduate Diploma
  - Masters degree
  - PhD
  - Other (please specify)
  
10. **Do you practise a religion? If so, which religion?**

**Researcher Contact Details:** *Sophie Moore, jxt1535@autuni.ac.nz, phone: (09) 921 9999 ext 6307.*

**Project Supervisor Contact Details:** *Dr George Major, gmajor@aut.ac.nz, phone: 921 9999 ext 6463.*

*Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 22 November 2019, AUTEK Reference number 19/386.*

# Appendix H: Indicative Interview Guide

## Interview Part 1 – Couple together

### *The couple's background and story*

1. Could you tell me a bit about yourselves and how you met?
2. Do you see yourselves as an intercultural couple?
3. How long have you been in a relationship?
4. How long have you lived in Auckland?
5. Have you lived together in any other countries? Have you lived in any other countries separately?

### *Language use in the relationship*

6. Which language(s) do you each speak, and which do you use together?
7. Does this change in different contexts?
8. Do you have a plan for language use? Or in what ways do you try to maintain using both languages?
9. Do you feel that there have been benefits to conversing in both languages?
10. Have you experienced any communication challenges?

### *Cultural practices*

11. Do you do activities from each of your cultures together? And in the community?
12. Do you experience cultural differences in your relationship?

### *Attitudes towards linguistic situation, identity and couplehood*

13. What do you like about the culture of the other that you like to maintain?
14. Do you feel that you have had to compromise on anything from your heritage culture?
15. How do you feel about your identity living in Auckland?
16. Have there been any challenges being in an intercultural relationship?
17. What do you love most about your relationship?
18. What do you think is most important to maintain a successful intercultural relationship? Any advice you would give other couples?

## Interview Part 2 – Individual partner

19. Where did you grow up?
20. How did you learn your second language? (if applicable) Are there/were there any barriers to you learning the language?
21. How do you feel when you speak your second language to your partner?
22. Do you think there are benefits to learning your partner's language? (*NZ-born*)
23. Do you feel you manage to maintain your native language? (*Migrant*)
24. What does the word multicultural mean to you?