

**With loneliness and satisfaction:
tracing the path of cross-cultural
adaptation by members of the
Vietnamese community in Ireland**

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Appendix A:

**The interviews in narrative form
with table of interviewee details**

APPENDIX A

Introduction

The following 18 interviews were written up after listening to people who had a story to tell, often for the first time, of a part of their life that was of significance to them and to myself, the listener. The participants are composed of 10 females and 8 males [see table on page 5 for details] and they allowed themselves to be interviewed as long as their real names were not used. Some people chose their own pseudonyms such as John, Jane and Wendy, and, as all of these assumed names were English, I gave everyone else an English name when asked to choose names on their behalf. One exception is Judy's [F14] family as her children have Irish names, I changed these to other Irish ones as I felt that the parents were making a significant choice with regard to their children who were born in Ireland. Ages range from Aisling [F18] who is in her late teens to Greg [R7] who is in his early sixties. As the community is so small I have not given precise ages or certain dates but have provided an age range such as that for Aisling [F18] and a date range such as the mid-nineties, for example when somebody arrived in Ireland. There are also instances where I have not been precise at the request of interviewees after they read through the text resulting from the interview. Consequently there are some discontinuities in the text. At times, I have mentioned relatives or countries without giving absolute details to comply with people's wishes to remain anonymous. Michael [R13] and Wendy [F17] were the only people who allowed themselves to be taped and the transcripts are provided verbatim.

The interviews are presented in the order that they were carried out and there are times where a statement is not qualified or explained fully. Some of the answers surface in later interview when I asked more of the right questions so that the order of the interviews also mirrors my own development as a researcher during the research process. I have left other explanations to the data analysis rather than tampering with the interviews to give a more polished version of events, which did not actually occur. Although I began each interview with a base set of questions so as to ease participants into the process, each interview is very different as it is unstructured. By using this format I was able to let people tell me what they thought was significant. At times there would have been no interview if I had tried to follow a rigid formula as with Harry [R8] who finally sat down and trusted me with *his story* after being chased for a few weeks. I wrote up the interviews as stories of *lived experience* where my approach has been both influenced and validated by Josselson and Lieblich [1993] who were also interested in the stories that people told. The narratives are not literary texts but a way of making sense of the *lived experiences* presented to me. I am grateful to everyone who so generously gave me their time and their trust.

TABLE A INTERVIEWEE DETAILS

NO	NAME	ARRIVED AS	AGE	STATUS	FIRST LANGUAGE/S
R1	Anne	original 212	mid-50s	widow children	Cantonese Chinese dialect [Hai Nam] Vietnamese
EUM2	Bernie	EU migrant	mid-50s	divorced children	Cantonese Mandarin Chinese dialect Vietnamese
F3	Catriona	family reunification	early 30s	single	Vietnamese
F4	Daniel	family reunification	late 20s	single	Vietnamese
F5	Edward	family reunification	early 40s	married children	Vietnamese
F6	Frank	family reunification	early 30s	single	Vietnamese
R7	Greg	original 212	early 60s	married children	Cantonese Chinese dialect Vietnamese
R8	Harry	original 212	early 30s	single	Vietnamese
F9	Irene	family reunification	early 20s	single	Vietnamese Cantonese Chinese dialect
F10	Jenny	family reunification	early 20s	married children	Chinese Vietnamese
F11	Dave	family reunification	early 20s	married children	Vietnamese
F12	Laura	family reunification	early 30s	single children	Vietnamese
R13	Michael	original 212	mid-30s	single	Vietnamese
F14	Judy	family reunification	mid-20s	married children	Cantonese Chinese dialect Vietnamese
F15	Jane	family reunification	early 30s	married	Vietnamese
F16	John	family reunification	early 20s	single	Vietnamese Cantonese
F17	Wendy	family reunification	late 20s	single	Cantonese Mandarin Hakka
F18	Aisling	family Reunification	late teens	single	Vietnamese

Interview 1 with Anne - The widow

February 1999

Anne arrived in Ireland with her family as one of the original group of Vietnamese who arrived in Ireland in 1979³. She was born in Hanoi and lived in what was North Vietnam before reunification of the country. Her husband worked as a shop assistant and took care of her and her children. Back in Vietnam she lived with her own parents and so was looked after at home. Once she married her husband took care of everything including the arrangements for escaping from Vietnam. It was necessary for the family to flee as they were Vietnamese/Chinese caught up in the wave of anti-Chinese feeling that gripped the country. This had been caused by a combination of internal politics and an attempted invasion by China. Her husband paid for a share in a boat along with some neighbours and the family embarked with a large group on the voyage. They arrived in Hong Kong where Anne spent 3 months in a camp with her family. She said that officials came and asked if they would like to go to Ireland and the family agreed to this though they did not know where Ireland was. They were settled in Dublin with 2 other families from the camp so that there was a point of contact in the new country.

Her husband was able to secure a job as a hospital porter and she too worked in the hospital for a year before having to give up work because of family commitments. Tragically, she was widowed a few years after arriving in Ireland and as her family doctor was worried about her health - she had lost a lot of weight - she asked if she could sponsor a relative so that an adult family member could join her here in Ireland. She was very lonely and felt the need for the kind of family protection that she had been used to particularly as she had a family to raise on her own. With supporting letters from 2 GPs she was able to apply for family reunification and she said that as she was a widow there were no problems with the process.

The loss of her husband interrupted the process of the 'good life' they were building for themselves and their family. Indeed, though her husband had bought a car and they went out at times, including occasional visits to other families, she had stayed in the home to raise her family. She said that she had good neighbours and she was able to go and have a cup of tea and a chat when she felt lonely. It was only recently, with

her children being much older that she had ventured out. She had gone to the Vietnamese Centre where she helped out in the Association building and also went to English language classes to help improve her English. The Association provided a social focus for her that she was able to access. She was lonely and needed English to get to know people. She has difficulty reading English but goes to school to try to improve her level of literacy as well as the general level of English. She said that her children had had to manage by themselves during their schooling as she was unable to help them.

Interestingly, none of her children speak Vietnamese or Chinese and she said they were not interested in the languages so she did not force the issue. She considered it difficult to have access to cultural activities, she would be interested in music but she would certainly not be interested in parties. She considers herself to be Buddhist but not a practising one though there is a temple in Dublin. Indeed, she thought she was not really interested in maintaining her own culture. However, she would like to return to Vietnam for a holiday as she had never been back. Finances have always prevented her from returning. Her children consider themselves to be Irish and she herself is an Irish citizen happy with her life here as she thought it was better than in Vietnam. Furthermore, she is proud of her children as they are in the process of getting a good level of education, including further study at college. The only child who is working does so in a take-away.

Interview 2 with Bernie - An EU migrant

March 1999

Bernie has many worries particularly when she thinks of family left back in Vietnam. Her sister was widowed in Vietnam 7 years ago and has 7 children to look after. As they are poor they cannot afford to go to school and Bernie considered the eldest child to be very short. She had been able to return to Vietnam a few years ago and did not feel at all happy about her sister's situation. She also has a brother there. As she points out there is no social welfare in Vietnam and so family is the only means of support even when family members have retired. There are no family members living near her sister as her family is scattered. She phones and writes to her family and sends presents when her own financial situation allows. Indeed she would like them to visit her here in Ireland. As far as she knew she could not sponsor them as she herself did not have sponsorship rights. Her own situation was complicated as she was a spouse who had been reunified with her husband. He had had been received by another European host country. In her first country of settlement she had tried to bring her family over but with no success

Bernie is of Chinese origin and lived in what was formerly North Vietnam. She was a well-educated woman having gone to university in Hanoi where she studied to be a veterinary surgeon. She practised in the north of the country and described it as extremely hard work and a difficult job. She mainly treated large animals such as pigs, cows and oxen as well as anything else that came her way. The job was physically demanding particularly as she is slight in build. As she had lived in the city the opportunity for an education arose and she went to school with her sister and her brother, all of them in the same class. She was the only one to go to university as she passed her examinations. Generally speaking she thought that the older Vietnamese/Chinese do not have as much education as herself and that some would not be able to read Vietnamese or Chinese. She added that back in Vietnam many people did not have such an opportunity as herself: children in the country, for example, would have been required to stay at home to look after farm animals. Furthermore, with the Communist system, only those considered to be on the 'right side' would have benefited from the system though this has changed.

It was in 1989 that she left Vietnam with her child in order to join her husband who had fled originally with their other child and members of his family. She did not travel with the family as one child was very young so she stayed behind. Her husband went to China and then at one point to Macau for a few years before being received in a European country as a Vietnamese refugee. She remained behind without the protection of her husband and with a young child to look after. It took her nearly 10 years to be reunited with her husband and her other child. But after such a long separation she felt that they were no longer a family. The family unit was finished.

In fact her husband had left with his child, his mother, sister and brother on the first stage of their exodus and crossed into China. From there he had been able to go to a European country with his son and his sister. Her husband had been able to apply for family reunification for other members of his family and thus was able to bring them to their European country. This was easily carried out and achieved in the year after arrival in the host country. She said that movement from China was facilitated by Deng Xiao Ping's policy of opening China up whereas Vietnam was closed to other countries so making it very difficult to leave.

In the European country the family benefited from education. She considered the system in the other country to be beneficial and she herself learnt the language of this host country and was then able to get a job working in a school kitchen. It was easy to meet other members of the Vietnamese community particularly while she had been studying. However, here in Ireland she would know a few people through having come to the Vietnamese Centre and attending language classes at the Centre. She was happy during the period she was learning English even though she had not been able to attend classes on a regular basis due to family commitments. Learning English gave her a feeling of independence as she was able to do things such as talk to the doctor or with officials. Indeed, she considered it extremely important to be educated in the new country. Unfortunately, she had been unable to find any work and her difficulties here in Ireland had affected her health.

In general she did not know any Irish people except teachers at school. Neighbours in the suburb of Dublin where she used to live had been 'all right' but she did not know her new neighbours too well. She had called on them but they did not visit her. She

did not go out apart from school. She was now a divorcee and with no strong family support she felt stressed and unhappy and this had affected her health. It was difficult for her to socialise as she would be looked down on by her ex-husband's family. Indeed, she thought that when she was very old she might return to Vietnam as it was a warmer country and it would be beneficial for her health. However, this was a thought and not a firm plan. She was tied to being here as her child was here and she had followed him here. However, as her ex-husband was also here she found herself in a situation that created strain and stress. She could return to the other European country where she would be better off financially and her other child was there. However, this was the child she did not know as that particular child had left with the father. She was staying in Ireland to be close to the child that she knew well. This child spoke Vietnamese and was also literate in Vietnamese as well as being able to speak a little Chinese.

She considered herself to be Buddhist but perhaps not really. She was able to maintain her own culture by obtaining books and films from France. Her sister lived in France and she had been able to visit her as well as remaining in regular contact by writing. This sister had been living in France for nearly 20 years. She had gone to Laos in the 1950s and then from there to Thailand and then France. Consequently, the family was split with some remaining in Vietnam, some in France, others in another European country and, finally, some in Ireland. Bernie herself was not an Irish citizen but had a passport from the other European country and she was wondering about returning there as her prospects were better but with the drawback of far fewer family members.

Interview 3 with Catriona - A Buddhist nun

March 1999

Catriona has a sister who arrived here originally 20 years ago in 1979 with a few members of her family and she was able to sponsor Catriona in 198-. However, there was a gap of 2 years before Catriona was finally able to come to Ireland. When another family member comes next year then all of the family will finally be together. In Vietnam her father had been a fisherman and her mother had looked after the family in the home until her death when Catriona was a teenager. Catriona had lived in the 'Saigon' area and is Vietnamese. She feels that her life here is better and she said

'My life is safer than in Vietnam''

However, her vocation means that she has some mixed feelings about living here in Ireland with her family though this does not mean that she has any firm plans to change her situation.

The course of Catriona's life changed when she read a book about Buddhism given to her by a friend. The book told the story of a woman whose job was killing and selling chickens. This woman was troubled by a dream where a chicken appeared and taunted her with the notion that if she killed this particular chicken she would be haunted by it. Eventually, after her death she would be reincarnated as a chicken. The woman grew afraid and decided not to kill any more chickens as she did not want to become an animal in the next life. The woman also gave up eating meat and turned to Buddhism. Catriona was influenced by this story and then after watching a film about the life of a monk she decided to become a nun. She made the decision in 1991. Her father was sad because she would have no family of her own. However, they did not try to stop her from her chosen path. They did tell her that it would be a difficult life as she would have to be a vegetarian and give up the idea of family life. Catriona has discovered that she does indeed have difficulties and said

'I have many problem when I'm nun '

"Very hard. I will pass this."

Sometime I feel lonely. Not enough to meditation. Find friend to meditation."

'Feel lonely here. Very sad.'

Her problem is not that of being a Buddhist as she says

“I’m very proud

There is a temple for her to worship in and there is a Master in Ireland under whose tutelage she practised for a year. Her Master went to Belgium at one stage and Catriona lived there too for about a year. Her master’s function is to travel in order to teach Buddhism as well as to administer the temple in Dublin. Consequently, the Master cannot stay in one place even though she may be the only Master in a particular country. Catriona’s family asked her to return home and so she has been separated from her Master for about 7 years. Naturally, she acquiesced to their wishes but this has increased the strain on her as she tries to lead a religious life. Even though she complied with her family’s wishes she feels lonely. She no longer has someone to meditate with on a regular basis because of this decision. She says

“I live alone. Only one Master in Ireland. In Europe many, many temples.”

Though she has some Vietnamese friends she would not consider them to be close friends. Some Vietnamese people do live in her neighbourhood but she has none as neighbours and would consider that they made “small talk” and nothing deeper. Catriona thought this was because there was no one from her village there with whom she had grown up. With such a person she could begin a closer friendship. She says

“People don’t know my village.”

However, some people do confide in her but she would not consider that to be particularly usual. Catriona is outgoing and says

“We love Irish people.”

“I like to talk to Irish people

“What Vietnam like. I told some Irish people about Vietnam.”

She considered children to be friendly in her neighbourhood as well as other people

“Everyone see me say hello.”

Back in Vietnam Catriona still has friends to whom she writes and when she went back to Vietnam to visit her sister she took gifts for friends and family. She has returned twice to Vietnam and feels comfortable there because of the presence of other Buddhist nuns who support and encourage her. She considers returning to Vietnam for this reason as she feels isolated here being in a minority of one

Catriona's worry is that she is not developing spiritually as she has no real partner with whom to meditate on a regular basis. Thus she considers returning as a nun but not for any other reason. However, returning to Vietnam to live permanently is not easy once having left to join family abroad. There are thus difficulties with both courses of action.

At present she is concentrating on her English as she considers that

“My English not enough.”

She had tried learning English prior to this but had only attended language lessons for a few months.

“I wasn't school often.”

These days she is able to combine language learning with an informal job as after school. She minds a little girl who is Chinese.

Interview 4 with Daniel - A lucky young man

March 1999

Daniel is a young man who arrived in 199- with other family members in order to join his relative who had lived here since 1980. He still has family back in Vietnam as there are some 5 or 6 families living around the 'Saigon' or Ho Chi Minh City area. Sometimes, he might phone them but he did not consider himself to be too close to them. As family members were coming in the future he thought that his family here would be fairly complete. Daniel considered it easy to leave Vietnam but felt that the process of reunification was more difficult here in Ireland. Prior to leaving Vietnam he was in college and had embarked on a course training to repair fridges and cool rooms. However, he had only begun the course before leaving to join his family. Though Daniel had been happy in Vietnam he was glad to leave and thought that life was better here as it was easier to get a job and earn some money.

He knows some people here in Dublin who come from the Saigon area though there is no one who comes exactly from where he does. Daniel feels that he knows a lot of people in the community and would go out with friends who are somewhat older than he is and are mainly Vietnamese. He has no Irish friends, certainly no close friends and believes that a lack of English hinders Vietnamese people in general from making Irish friends. Consequently, he goes to the cinema or plays football with Vietnamese friends. He considered language to be a problem as insufficient English made it difficult to make friends. He was sorry about the fact that his own English had not improved. It made it difficult to talk to Irish people so he would listen to people but not talk back. It was easier to talk in Vietnamese. He also felt that generally Irish people did not know much about Vietnam though they did know a little more about China and Japan. Finally though he went to mass regularly he did not know the name of the priest in his local church.

For the Vietnamese New Year he would contribute money which would be sent back to Vietnam to relatives as they had neither luck nor money for the New Year. He had been back to Vietnam recently but said that he had not wanted to stay. He had left friends behind who were not as lucky as he had been. Then, he had been shocked to find some friends had become drug addicts. They had changed completely as they had

a habit to feed. He considered one friend to be a 'dead body walking'. Finally, Daniel felt glad to be in Ireland as
"My family here. All my family my home."

Naturally, he spoke Vietnamese at home with his family, younger members also spoke Vietnamese. The family tried to teach younger members to read and write Vietnamese but it depended on the time being available. Generally speaking it was difficult to access cultural material in Ireland and books and videos would be ordered from France, America or Britain through family members living in those countries. It was possible to buy tapes in Ireland and friends lent them to each other. For Daniel it was easy to order materials and this was done frequently. He had relatives in Australia as well as Germany, Denmark and the three countries already mentioned of France, the USA and Britain.

Interview 5 with Edward - Reunified with his brother

March 1999

Edward has a brother who arrived in Ireland in 1979. This brother later sponsored Edward and other family members to join him. The visas were issued some ten years ago but at that time the family in Vietnam were facing difficult times so that 'Edward' felt unable to come. He had family responsibilities and did not wish to leave his family under such difficult circumstances. Edward worked hard for his family as he was a carpenter. His father had died early so there was a lot of obligation to look after the welfare of the family. He also had to make family arrangements for his mother because that was part of his responsibility. Edward had to help his sisters get married and also help find a suitable bride for a brother. This was an important task as Edward was going to entrust his mother to this bride. His mother could have come to Ireland but she was very old and he had thought that she would have found life difficult in a country with a cold climate and where she could not speak the language. She would also have been very lonely because of the language barrier. Thus, it was only when Edward felt that his family's affairs were settled that he came to Ireland in order to help his brother. Several years had elapsed before he finally travelled on his visa.

Now that Edward is settled here he still thinks about family members back in Vietnam and he keeps in touch by letter. He comes from -----, a port in the north of Vietnam, and knows one other family from there whom he has got to know since coming to Dublin. Edward is working and is able to help his wider family. Family contact is important to him as he says that

"Something inside. Can't talk to others. To family

"Story inside. Talk only brother."

He felt that his English was not getting better but he hoped to do his best even though he had

"very, very poor language."

When he compared life here with his situation back home he thought that it was

"Hard to talk about that."

By this he meant that some things compared favourably whilst others did not. He thought that perhaps he had been happier in Vietnam but that there was more money in Ireland. However he did not equate money with happiness and said

Money never enough

Edward also made the comment that even those Vietnamese who had arrived here when they were young, perhaps as young as six years old, were never happy. Edward thought this to be because such Vietnamese felt 70% Irish and 30% Vietnamese as they had been educated in Ireland. However they were not happy because they looked Vietnamese and so were not considered to be Irish.

Edward knows only a few Irish people; they work in the Vietnamese-Irish Association Centre. He would talk to them sometimes but felt that language was a barrier as he did not have enough English.

‘Just sometime. My English not good enough to talk stories.’

However, he was able to discuss some important football fixtures, was very communicative and able to joke about Ireland's chances in a match with Irish people at the Centre. He has mostly Vietnamese friends, including Vietnamese/Chinese.

Edward would only ever consider returning to Vietnam if he had no children here. His children are here and so he would consider Ireland as home at the moment. He finds a barrier between himself and Irish people and says that he is unable to talk with them. He believes his English is ‘very, very’ bad. This lack of competence and confidence in his ability with the language is considered to be a stumbling block.

“Big problem to do anything especially for children. Their Vietnamese not good. Broken Vietnamese.”

He tries to teach them Vietnamese every day and feels that it is necessary as for him it is the language by which he can

“Control and teach them.”

Without Vietnamese he would be unable to bring up his family. He speaks Vietnamese at home. He does not belong to a religious group or as he says “not Catholic” but he does trust in God and he believes that everyone prays.

Edward thought that it was difficult for him to maintain his own culture.

“Not so easy.”

It is possible to buy cassette tapes here but the choice is limited. He would borrow tapes from friends. He knew that there was a greater availability of material in the USA and in England. Finally, he commented that he would be happier if there were more Vietnamese here. He qualified this remark by saying

‘No Vietnamese business. Too small. No magazine, newspaper.

“In States, France, England same as in Vietnam, doctor, solicitor, meat, vegetable

Interview 6 with Frank - Young man looking for work

April 1999

Frank has a sister who arrived here in 1979 with her family. The family had fled as his sister's husband was Vietnamese/Chinese and so the family would have encountered difficulties had they stayed in Vietnam. Frank comes from Hanoi and arrived several years ago to join his sister. There is still family remaining in Vietnam, namely sisters, brothers and their father. Frank would phone home regularly that is about once a month, and he would send money home which was to help look after his father. Frank thinks a lot about one of his sisters but unfortunately he cannot sponsor her. He is worried about her as he considers her to have economic problems. He came to Ireland because he was young and single whereas other members of his family were married and settled.

He had decided to come as he was a young man with "no job, no future." He says "I finished High School. Stay at home for a few years. Difficult then to get a job. Now easier in Vietnam."

He encountered no problems with the process of reunification saying that he obtained his visa after a few weeks. The process could take longer if you did not live in Hanoi but in the country. When he came he felt bored at first and did not like the weather. He thought that he was

"Not very busy. My personality."

However Frank considered life here to be better as there was "more freedom." He also felt that he could lead a

"quiet life. Can do everything you like. Nobody look [comes] after you."

Frank thought that there were more people here now and mentioned some from Hanoi in particular. Nevertheless, he usually stayed at home though he did have friends who were mostly Vietnamese. He had made friends with some of them while learning English at the Vietnamese English Language Centre which had been located in rooms upstairs in the Association building. His social life was based around the Association building. He felt the Centre was important to him as it provided a focal meeting place. Without the Association Centre he would have nowhere to go and he stressed

that his friends were from the Centre. As far as Irish people were concerned Frank did not think that he had any Irish friends. He did meet Irish people at work in the kitchen of the take-away he worked in. Generally, Irish people did not work in the take-aways. He also met Irish people at the Association Centre but did not go out with them.

Frank had no desire to go back to Vietnam to live. He said

“Too difficult there

Furthermore, he explained that by leaving he was no longer allowed to live in Vietnam even if he was a citizen. He could return for visits but these could only be for 6 months after which he would have to leave. If a person was under 16 or over 60 then they would be allowed back as then there were good enough reasons to return. He considered Ireland to be home. However, Frank felt that things had changed here even in the few years that he had been here. He said

“Easy before. Now more difficult. Irish say have too many refugees. Have some problems. They don’t want blacks. Sometimes they hate them. Don’t want refugees.” Despite this feeling of a change in attitude he still considered it to be good to stay here.

He was worried about his English as it was not improving and he said

“No chance to improve. Need a girlfriend.”

Frank thought his lack of language skills to be a barrier to mixing with Irish people and commented

“My pronunciation not very good. They don’t understand me. I have to repeat twice or third time. I have to spelling to repeat.”

He would like to learn more English in a formal setting though he remarked that

“At my age not very easy to learn. Not young.”

At home Frank spoke Vietnamese and the children at home also spoke Vietnamese. Frank considered it very important to maintain the language and said that one of the children went to the Vietnamese Centre to learn to read and write Vietnamese. For entertainment he watched videos in Vietnamese but listened to music in English. He also read books in Vietnamese. He said that he could not buy anything in Ireland so his family would send over material from Vietnam. Otherwise, if he wanted to buy

books then he would have to place an order with an agent in either Germany or England

Interview 7 with Greg – a 1979 arrival

April 1999

Greg spent 37 days travelling by boat from Vietnam to Hong Kong. He had left as he was of Chinese origin. Greg had embarked on the voyage with about 200 people including members of his family and friends. Once in the camp in Hong Kong he was interviewed and asked which country he would like to go to. So many people wanted to go to America. One of those was his aunt and because of that decision she spent 2 years in the camp waiting to be processed. Other people went to Germany and a friend left for England. Greg said that at the time his feeling was

‘Any country to leave camp quickly

Ireland was offered as an option and he took it though he did not know anything about the country. He thought that Ireland was not generally well-known. Thus, because of this decision he spent 3 months in the camp.

Back in Vietnam Greg had left a good job behind. He had worked in a state haulage company which transported goods ranging from iron to sand round the country. He had lived in the port of ----- in what at that time was North Vietnam. Though it was a hard job there was

“Good money”

He had been a civilian during the Vietnam War and told how his city had been of strategic importance at that time. As a major port it received goods and most importantly food. Shipments originated from the former USSR and Warsaw Pact countries such as Poland, Bulgaria and Hungary. Greg said that American wartime strategy was to bomb this lifeline and try to cut off the flow of food supplies. He remembered the skies filling with maybe as many as 70-80 planes which then bombed the port. He had been lucky to survive.

On arrival in Ireland he stayed in a camp at Blanchardstown hospital for 2 months. He said of this time

“Government send a teacher. Very, very hard. Only know a few. I learn from the Irish people, the teacher here some.”

He was fortunate that he had come with his wife and some of his children but close family members remained behind in Vietnam. Thus at the beginning of the 1980 s he applied to sponsor members of his family who were finally able to travel to Ireland at the end of the decade. He said that it had taken so long as it had been difficult to finalise matters back in Vietnam. Family members had had to wait for visas and passports for a long time.

“Very hard to get paper. Don’t give visa, passport. Wait long, long time.”

Such delays created complications because over a period of years of waiting a family member could get married and that added another set of complications to the situation. Indeed, ‘Greg’ was still waiting for family members to arrive. At present he was not seeking to sponsor others but hoped to do so in the future. However, he did go back regularly to Vietnam on holiday and saw family then.

Within the Vietnamese community he considered that he knew more or less everyone as he played an active role in the Irish-Vietnamese Association. He made friends with people from both the north and the south of Vietnam. Such divisions were not important to him though he thought it might still be a consideration for some members of the community. He also had a very good Irish friend whom he met while job-hunting in 1982. This man had proved to be very helpful and Greg is still friendly with him and visits him. He has found most people to be friendly in the area that he lives in.

“All the neighbour very friendly.”

Greg also knew all the Irish people who worked in the Vietnamese-Irish Association Centre because of his involvement with the Vietnamese community that he helps to represent.

Greg had left Vietnam because he said that there had been “too many war. Chinese, Vietnamese. Now that all his children were finally reunited with their family here he would not consider going back to Vietnam to live. He was an Irish citizen and so were members of his family. He was happy to go back on visits but Ireland was his second homeland. When comparing the two countries he said that in Vietnam the government assisted a person when he or she retired at 55 after having worked for a company or the government for a minimum of 15 years. Otherwise there was no assistance even if someone was old. He considered that such matters were easier here.

as an unemployed person received unemployment benefit and that families also received children's allowance. Furthermore when he looked back over his 20 years of living in Ireland he thought of the changes that had taken place.

"First time come to Ireland different to now 1979 Ireland little bit poor Road

Now big change new roads big building Ireland better now

He found people to be 'friendly and human' and he would try to make friends first with people, that is reach out and "say hello' to them

Greg did feel that one aspect of his life here hindered the rest. He said

'My English very poor because I only talk little bit Very hard for me Difficult for me for my job Government meeting difficult for me No time for school work, work, work when I come [came to Ireland] '

He considered language to be a barrier as it prevented him from doing as much as he wanted as well as from mixing with Irish people.

"If I have more English I can do more job for myself "

He relied on others as he felt his English was not good enough for him to manage. This was a serious issue for him especially as he was a representative of his community.

At home he spoke Vietnamese and sometimes Chinese. However, as his wife was a Vietnamese speaker, it was the dominant language in the home. All his children spoke Vietnamese though not all of them could write it. This was because they had gone to English-speaking schools, that is schools in Ireland, and so had become literate in English. Some of his children had completed both second and third level education and one child was in Northern Ireland gaining a degree. They all spoke good English. His grandchildren spoke both Vietnamese and English though they did not write Vietnamese. Some of his children were also Catholic from their school attendance at primary level.

Greg would obtain videos from Vietnam or Paris as he could not buy them here though he thought that in future it might be possible. He said

' No good business not enough Vietnamese '

Newspapers could be bought in London and books from America. He could obtain such materials from relatives in those countries.

Interview 8 with Harry - The Road From Paradise Island

April 1999

Part 1

During the turmoil in Vietnam after Dien Bien Phu in 1954 Harry's family made the long trek from the north of Vietnam to the south. 1954 had been a momentous year in Vietnam as the French had been defeated in Dien Bien Phu and Vietnam had been partitioned into North and South. In North Vietnam Ho Chi Minh had given those citizens who did not wish to remain 365 days in which to move to South Vietnam. Harry's family undertook this journey and left some of their relatives behind who remained in the north. Then in the mass exodus that began in 1979 the family moved again but this time they were separated. Harry left with his father. His sister left with her husband and children. His mother died a year after they left. He still has cousins in the north of the country and some in the south. His father keeps up contact with the southern relatives but after the death of his wife contact was lost with the family on his mother's side. On a visit to Vietnam they tried to trace them but were unsuccessful. They think that these family members might have moved north to a new economic zone. The government encourages such movement so they might have moved to such a zone where they could reclaim wild land and start a new life. Harry would like to see family come over to Ireland but it would be difficult to sponsor them all. He feels that they are a close family and being together is a source of happiness for them.

Harry's sister and her family went by boat and arrived safely in Malaysia. Here they stayed in a camp and would have liked to go to the USA. Conditions were bad in the camp so when a nun asked them if they wanted to settle in Ireland they took the chance. Thus they came to Ireland to begin a better life than the one they had before which contained uncertainty and unpredictability. Meanwhile, Harry's family were making plans for their own escape. 'Harry' said that it had been a dangerous undertaking organised behind closed doors. Firstly there had to be enough money to pay for a place on a boat. Then, arrangements were made for an assembly point. This had to be somewhere near a small boat. It was a particularly dangerous time because it meant sleeping out with all the possibility of discovery. The small boat transferred the

families to the mother boat. For Harry, who was a young boy then, it was a strange time of adventure and nightmare all mixed together.

Harry spent 3 weeks on the boat, a standard fishing boat carrying a few hundred passengers on board. He thought that the captain had been very good. Harry remembers them running out of water and then having to collect some on a canvas sheet. This took a long time and, at times, the water seemed undrinkable but that was all there was. He ate rice and had water to drink. People fell sick. At times the wind picked up and the boat would be riding huge waves in the evening. Harry felt scared at such times. They saw international ships but did not contact them out of fear. However, they did try once and this particular ship returned their signal. But then the captain thought it could be a Vietnamese patrol boat so they switched off their lights and sailed on. There were worries about food. For Harry though, there was consolation in watching the dolphins riding with the boat, looking at the schools of flying fish jumping out of the water and then being excited and awed by the spectacular sight of humpback whales. Of this time Harry said

“Hope kept you going.”

Malaysia was finally sighted and they sailed into a harbour. The police came. The boat was anchored. Harry discovered that he could not walk properly and staggered off the boat with everyone else. They had arrived in a fishing village and people were good to them. The villagers gave them food and made them welcome. Afterwards, the group was transferred to a camp and Harry remembers seeing skyscrapers from the bus during the journey. Their destination was an island camp called Pulau Bidong where the family stayed for 6 months. This was a camp of thousands situated on a beautiful island with blue sea, a coral reef and the dangers and tensions of mass camp life. Harry remembered the rations which arrived weekly: 250 grams of tinned beef, soya beans, noodles, rice, soup and the palpable tension when they were distributed. Innocent activity could have unforeseen consequences. He remembered that some people made a boat as they wanted to go out and fish to supplement the rations. However, they were captured and beaten as the police did not want any movement away from the island but rather contain everyone on it.

The camp contained a hospital and a library and Harry thought it was “hygienic enough” despite the numbers. It also had an administrative centre. ‘Harry’ lived with his father on a plateau on the island which was safe as it was solid rock and high. This was important as some places on the island were dangerous because of flooding during the monsoon season. He remembered one area under a mountain where some 200 families, who were preparing to go to the USA, perished in a landslide. Harry tried to learn English from an American teacher but spent a lot of time playing truant and going swimming instead. He remembered people trying to fill their days with some meaningful activity. They tried to keep themselves occupied by making jewellery, making clothes, carving small figures or carving boats. ‘Harry’ would watch pieces of wood take shape and he admired the details of the craftsmanship that went into such carvings.

There was a mixture of people, of Catholics and Buddhists at the camp. Harry’s family was Catholic so he went to mass in a church that faced the sea. He thought that this time

“was like a holiday ... but strange sometimes ... not like home.”

He spent his time by being involved in activities: he went fishing or swimming round the island even though it could be somewhat risky. He remembered a waterfall on the island, a big one with fresh water. At night there were fruit bats that were as noisy as monkeys. There was a high mountain on the island and it would take a day to climb up it or to go round it and see the deep blue water below.

The camp administrators organised everything and there was an intercom system to call people for interviews. Americans interviewed people who wanted to go to the States and those who were interested would have to go and register. An American would be present with an interpreter. Harry’s father was interviewed and was asked if he wanted to travel to the United States. If he wanted to take up the offer then the arrangements could be made immediately. This was a very lucky offer as people normally had to wait for a long time. However, his father had kept in touch with the other part of the family group who had found their way to Ireland. Consequently, he explained at his interview that he had family in Ireland and so turned down the offer of a place in the USA. The administrators were then informed and then eventually Harry’s father received the signal that everything was arranged and that they would be

reunited with family already in Ireland. Harry and his father went to a transit camp on the mainland. This camp, named camp 'B', was a locked camp with separate sections according to the countries that people were travelling to. There were separate entrances for each area and Harry noticed that the English/Irish unit was small in comparison to others. Harry stayed in this camp for 2 months and was then taken by bus to the airport. He remembered the heat, the passing smells of food and the scents of the city as they were taken directly to the airport. He was in awe of the plane and its jet engine. During the flight itself, he remembered that the crew were good to them and knew who they were. He thought the flight took about 10-13 hours.

When Harry and his father arrived in Ireland, he found it was so very cold. His sister was waiting at the airport for them and it was a very emotional time for the family as they were reunited. The nun who had helped his family was also there. 'H' remembers going to a supermarket for the first time in his life to buy clothes. It seemed like a warehouse. They then went to stay with their family in the southern part of Ireland.

Part 2

On reflecting on his life in Ireland, Harry thought that he had opportunity here with the chance of education. He also felt that there was more freedom here. Harry also felt that there was a chance here of some kind of life which had to be made the most of. However, he also commented that there was

“always a prejudice somewhere – you have to prove [yourself] twice, you have to work twice as hard.”

He never really went to primary school as he found it difficult to cope with. He had friends, particularly a couple, one of whom was English and the other Irish. They were friendly with him and he felt that they had some understanding of his situation. Secondary school lasted for a week. The children crowded round him to look at the colour of his skin. At that time it was still quite dark. He did not really understand things in school. Consequently, he stopped going. A teacher came to teach the family in their home. He gradually picked up the language and this process took him between 3-4 years until he felt that his knowledge of English was good enough.

Once he was comfortable with his English Harry went to a technical school. The family then moved to another town and he then went to another technical school as he was good with his hands. He took his Group Certificate examinations and then went on a pre-employment course after which he gave up school. For a while he worked in a take-away and also in a factory. Later he worked at home and said that for a while he did not do much. A woman who was teaching his sister English advised him to go back to school to do his Leaving Certificate. She told him that he would really need it to get a job. By this time Harry was 22 years old and he decided to work towards taking the Leaving Certificate. However, he was going to proceed slowly and take things one step at a time. However, there were so many pieces missing in his education that he had to go right back to the beginning of secondary school. This was a tough course of action as people were so much younger than he was. He was able to successfully complete all his examinations and so finally achieved his aim of having a qualification. Harry had the Leaving Certificate.

While he was at school Harry found out that people went on to do college courses. He felt that he had improved and so went to see a careers guidance counsellor for advice. He was confused about what to do. Indeed, what was he to do with his life as he was so much older than the average student. Medicine and architecture were areas that he was interested in. However, it would have taken too long to graduate from either of those disciplines. He then decided on Industrial Design as this combined the artistic and the technical in a course that was not too lengthy. After 3 years he graduated with a Diploma which he topped up with a one year course in Derry so that finally he graduated with a BA in Design. He is now contemplating going further and aiming for a Masters in England. He commented that it was “passion” which kept him going as it was always younger groups of people who were finishing the same courses that he was doing.

Commenting generally on his life in Ireland he said that his father would have friends in the community here. When they first arrived they made some acquaintances and built up friendships slowly. However, as someone who came here as a young person he felt more independent and that he mixed in both worlds. Harry thought that the community here was quite separate even within itself. He attributed this to the small size of the community here. He commented that in England the communities were

much bigger Harry had Irish friends as it was easy to make friends in college with other students His family maintained links with the cousins back in Vietnam He has gone back to Vietnam on holiday and commented that perhaps home was always ‘wherever you aren’t’

He felt he mixed the two cultures that he lived in and was fond of Ireland Looking back on his life here he said that it had been

‘so strange not knowing what to do

Of course his parents had not been able to help him as they had not known what to do either He felt that in comparison with Vietnam there were opportunities to be taken advantage of here He considered that people could make a living here

Harry’s English is fluent and he said that

‘It opens a lot of doors for me’

However, he speaks Vietnamese at home as elders speak Vietnamese He can also read and write Vietnamese The younger family members speak both Vietnamese and English They speak Vietnamese to their elders but English among themselves Reading and writing Vietnamese was a difficult aim for younger family members but they did speak the language He commented that in England there were plenty of community programmes where Vietnamese language and culture were taught He considered it to be important to have *both* sides of the cultural heritage Things were somewhat different in Ireland There were difficulties so, for example Vietnamese music would be brought back by someone returning from a holiday in Vietnam He knew that in the States there were musicians and commented that such things depended on commercial opportunities People would stock up on music and other things when someone was visiting an outlet, either back in Vietnam or in a Vietnamese centre such as Paris or America Harry listened to Vietnamese music as well as music from English-speaking countries

Finally, on reflection he added that the problem with school had been that he had not known what to do and there was no guidance He said that it would have been so helpful if someone else who had been through the experience could explain it all to him He had had to find it all out for himself and this had resulted in Harry wasting a few years of his life

Interview 9 with Irene - A Single Young Woman

May 1999

Irene arrived in 199- with her family and they were sponsored by a relative who came originally in 1979. She comes from a large family and there are still lots of family members back in Vietnam. Certainly her mother has family that she would like to bring over but Irene says that there is no point in trying. Irene does feel that her auntie would benefit from joining the family here as her husband has died and she is now a widow. However, as her children are over 18 the family unit as a whole would be unable to come. Thus they have not tried to bring her over here even though she is very poor at this stage and does not possess a house of her own. In such circumstances other family members have to remain behind because of such responsibilities. It is important to keep family members together as they have to look after each other. Irene phones family in Vietnam sometimes and writes letters fairly regularly. When Irene first arrived she wrote often but now she does not have quite so much free time. She sends money back sometimes but especially for the Vietnamese New Year.

She felt that the process of family reunification was easy to organise from Ireland but it was a complicated process in Vietnam. This was because there were so many things to do. For example, the house, the finances, in fact all such matters had to be tidied up as their life in Vietnam ended. By contrast they had to go through the same process in reverse to begin their new life here in Ireland. In retrospect Irene considered that it took the family about 6 months to organise their affairs in Vietnam. Everything had taken time here in Ireland too though she was not sure of the length of time. She thought it might have taken about 2 years. The family had decided to come as their mother was widowed and life in Ireland would be easier for the family as a whole. Their mother's life had been difficult in Vietnam as she tried to make a precarious living from selling things as well as looking after a young family. As all the children were under 18 years of age the process of bringing them to Ireland was easy. She thought that the family felt that its life here was better than back in Vietnam.

Irene knows that there are other families from the Saigon area living here but there is no one exactly from where she comes from. She made friends with another family

who lives near her and they would go to school at the Vietnamese English Language Centre situated upstairs in the Association Centre. Here she made friends and if there were any parties everyone would be invited. She enjoyed meeting her friends at the Centre. However, she does not have Irish friends though she does say 'hello' to neighbours. This is attributed to her lack of good English.

"Just know people but don't have anything to say because English not enough."

She had made friends with some people at work who were working part-time and had gone out with them once or twice but they had left. She also knew her teachers at the Vietnamese English Language Centre.

On discussing why she had left Vietnam she said

"Because my family lots of children, very young. My family not rich. Very poor. My mum difficult to look after my family. No school. Pay a lot of thing."

She did not wish to return to Vietnam and said

"I like here. Permanent to live here. Can't go to Vietnam to live there if under 65. You have to find the life here. When I come here feel very lonely. Now I live here long time not really [not so lonely]. If you live here permanent you can't feel lonely. Feeling lonely can't help you. A lot of people very good, very kind but some not really. Every country have this."

English was a difficult area for Irene and she considered herself to be rather bad at speaking English. She did feel that it was not necessary to be as fluent as an Irish person as understanding was easier than speaking.

[English] not really very good. I don't think have to have very good like Irish people. Have to talk. Easy to understand something."

However, she did believe it was a barrier with regard to educational possibilities.

"[Education] you can't have it. If I was young I can learn more, like Irish people. 17 a bit old. When I was come here to learn, English difficult to learn. I have to learn little bit enough for me. You have to learn in your mind."

She did believe that language was a barrier.

"You need to have the English. Don't understand. Don't know how to do. What do you want. [what you are asking/saying]."

Finally, she thought that her English was

"Of course not enough."

She would have benefited from more language classes

At home she speaks Vietnamese and occasionally Chinese as her grandmother is Chinese. She also speaks Chinese to her boyfriend as he cannot speak Vietnamese. She can read and write Vietnamese and Chinese a little such as names for example. Her mother speaks Chinese but cannot write it as there were few girls in the Chinese schools in Vietnam. The Chinese schools ceased to exist after the war and so people no longer learnt Chinese but Vietnamese. Irene added that a Vietnamese grandmother would be able to write. Children in the family home were very young but Irene felt that they would probably be trilingual speaking Vietnamese, Chinese and English. She was not worried about their future ability with the English language as they would learn it in school. However, she did express concern for their mother tongue. "Maybe the problem in 10 year[s] no Chinese

Irene considers herself to be a practising Buddhist and would go to the temple in Vietnam. Unfortunately, there is no temple near her home here in Ireland. She thought that it was difficult to obtain Vietnamese magazines in Ireland though there were CDs and tapes available in a city centre shop. Music, magazines or books would be sent by relatives or friends in Vietnam. When her sister went back to Vietnam for a holiday she took some English CDs with her and returned with Vietnamese ones. Chinese tapes, magazines and other material were easier to buy because of the shop in the city centre. These would be mostly magazines and tapes and CDs of Hong Kong singers.

Interview 10 with Jenny - A Young Married Woman

May 1999

When Jenny arrived with her family in the mid-1990 s she was a teenager who had left a large number of relations behind. She has lots of cousins in Vietnam and she keeps in touch by writing letters and sending presents, particularly for the Vietnamese New Year. She would like to see her grandmother, her uncle and her auntie come to live in Ireland as she misses them but unfortunately she cannot sponsor them. Her ----- had sponsorship rights and so he sponsored Jenny and her family. However she feels that her life is better than it was at home. Jenny thought that the weather is better here and generally she thought that

‘Irish people very good ’

She would not consider returning to Vietnam as her child was born here

“I got the baby in here ”

She has friends from the Vietnamese community who live nearby and who come from the Saigon area. She thought that she knew a mix of people some Vietnamese and some Chinese. Jenny did not really mix with Irish people any longer though she had done so while attending school. However even then she did not really go out with them. Her comment was that

‘Everybody nice just a little not much ’

Even though she had attended school in Ireland Jenny considered that her English was

‘not really good

She had gone to school for two years and then left at the minimum age without any qualifications. At primary school she had received help with her English 3 days a week. However, things had fallen apart at secondary school. She said

“O K like, very hard. You don’t have enough English. Have to learn history, everything. I don’t know Irish history ”

Jenny had it found it difficult to cope and did not consider that teachers understood her needs. She gave up. Later she tried a computer course but said

“If you don’t have enough English you can’t do it ’

She gave it up Jenny considered that her lack of English was a hindrance

“Stops you doing things nobody can understand you like when you sick and you go to the doctor don t know how to say ’

At home she speaks Chinese and Vietnamese though Vietnamese would be the dominant language She reads and writes Vietnamese As her husband is Chinese she has to speak it and it is of importance to her

“My husband Chinese so have to speak Chinese with him ’

As he was born in China he cannot speak Vietnamese Chinese identity is important for her as her children will grow up speaking Chinese and English with a little Vietnamese She is not specifically interested in speaking English to her children as they would learn it in school Her worry would be that they would grow up unable to speak Chinese or Vietnamese

She considers herself to be a Buddhist and back in Vietnam she went regularly to the temple There is no temple near where she lives and she was unaware of the existence of any temple in Dublin Finally, she thought that it was difficult to acquire Vietnamese material such as magazines or music However, it was possible to buy Chinese magazines Her family would buy CD’s from the USA and France

Interview 11 with Dave – A thoughtful young man

26 October 2001

There was an initial conversation with Dave – he uses an Irish name – as he was worried about his wife and her lack of English. He explained that he was looking for someone to teach her or to recommend a class as she came from Vietnam and did not speak English when she arrived in Ireland. As she was not able to express herself he had to accompany her if she was involved with any dealings with bureaucracy or if she needed to visit the doctor. She had no adult independence in these matters. He also thought that his own English was not very good despite the fact that he had lived in Ireland since his early twenties. However, the English-speaking people that he worked with disagreed with this assessment as he was able to express himself comfortably in his second language.

His mother and a sister had left Vietnam in 1979 and had arrived in Hong Kong where at first they were stationed in a hotel. Afterwards they moved to a camp where they were interviewed about possibilities of going to the USA, France or Ireland. As they were from what was North Vietnam they were not sure about going to the USA and so chose to come to Ireland. They left the camp in 1980 for their journey to Ireland. Other family members remained behind in _____ where they still look after his father who is now getting on. Dave and his brother and sister contribute towards his care. Dave would like some other family members to come and live in Ireland and says that this is a hope for the future though it is not at all easy to get visas for them. He had no difficulties when he applied to be naturalized and is now an Irish citizen.

Before coming to Ireland he was employed in Vietnam and worked in a television and video shop where he was employed in sales. He says that when he came to Ireland he was lonely.

“First time feeling lonely, no friend, no English first time I came here ”

When he was asked if he thought he was better off in Vietnam or in Ireland he said

“I love living here ”

However, he now has friends and commented on the size of the community here

“Not so many we know each other ”

He has friends in the Vietnamese community as well as some other friends

“[Friends are] mostly Vietnamese some Irish as well Make friends at work

we met before at the party then we make friend[s] ”

He does not have time really to socialize but he has made Irish friends at work as he works at the Centre

Dave was asked whether he considered Ireland or Vietnam to be his home and he replied

“Both my home!”

He explained this by saying that he was born in Vietnam and

“That’s my country and my language as well ”

He explained further by saying

“When I came to Ireland feeling lonely I have friend[s], I know well everything

I feel great now, it’s good now It’s my second home

He was very happy about it all

When he was asked to assess his level of English, Dave considered it to be poor He said that it was “not very good ’ and explained further saying that he did not think it had developed significantly

“I never changed it enough I need to learn, learn, learn I need to learn from Irish people when I have the opportunity I haven t had a long time to learn in English class I d love to learn more It’s never enough

He was asked what the language of the home was and he said that he spoke Vietnamese He stressed again that he would like is wife to learn more English because if she

“go[es] to hospital or something like that it’s difficult for her ”

However, he was keen for his children to know both Vietnamese and English and he had some compelling reasons for thinking this About his child he said

“Wish to keep Vietnamese with him He [was] born in Ireland he can go to school should speak English

At home he was speaking Vietnamese and his children would learn English with no difficulty as they lived in Ireland He pointed out that many children born in Ireland used English to speak to each other

“I know a lot of people born in Ireland When they meet together they speak English ’

He says quite categorically

‘I want to keep my language as well ’

Furthermore, he was concerned that his children should not forget the first language of the home as there were still family ties with Vietnam so

“One day they may go back to visit Vietnam I hope they can speak Vietnamese well ’

He also noted that if English only was used with his children then

“If nobody teach them Vietnamese they forget it I don’t want it, to forget Vietnamese When he go to school he can speak English ”

He thought that most Vietnamese parents felt that way and so they let their children learn English once they started school Dave was asked if he would try to teach his children to read and write Vietnamese He thought it was important

“I hope to teach him really how to write I wish I can do it ”

Finally, he was asked what if his child ended up speaking no Vietnamese and Dave answered

“I wouldn’t be happy for him If he go[es] to Vietnam, if he see[s] grandfather, they can’t understand it all they can’t talk ’

Dave then told of a young girl he knew in -----, a Dublin suburb He said that her English was perfect and was only slightly better than her Vietnamese However, her Vietnamese was also very good and she was also able to read and write the language as well The result was that between the two languages there was

“Very little difference With his hands he indicated how close the two languages were and he was told that there was a word in English for this ability bilingual He admired this as when older people talked with her she could communicate with them and it was a very nice thing to see

“Lovely with [the] old Vietnamese when they talk with her [They are] very happy she can understand what they say ’

He considered this a very good thing and noted that some people who had been born here did not speak Vietnamese though he stressed that this was the case with only a

few families. In his opinion such a situation arose because there was little time to talk as a family because of work pressures,

“Some people [who were] born in Ireland, they don’t speak Vietnamese. Nobody teach[es] them, nobody talk[s] with them. [The children] when they back home, parent[s] work. When they back home, very little time to speak together.”

In general he thought that most families try to keep the Vietnamese language

When the questioning turned to differences in customs Dave was reluctant to say much but he did say that the family was very important

“Family really, really important. Family look[s] after you, care[s] for you.”

For example he said that it would be a family concern if business good or otherwise *and they would help with that*. He was asked if he had travelled to other countries and he said he had been to England. He noted that the Vietnamese community in Ireland was small and that it was difficult to buy magazines or tapes. He said

“In England, France, Canada, America, so many Vietnamese people live there. Also handy [if you are] looking for something

Finally, he declined to answer a question about his religion which would have terminated the interview. However, Dave picked up the theme of language and tried to clarify his thoughts further on the matter. He gave the hypothetical example of both of us being Vietnamese and talking together. He indicated that we could certainly hold a conversation in English as both of us spoke it. Then he said that I, as the imaginary Vietnamese-speaker, would then be at a total disadvantage once he spoke to me in Vietnamese. I would not be able to communicate in ‘my’ language because I wouldn’t know it. He said that where people of Vietnamese origin found themselves in such a situation then they regretted not being able to speak the language

Interview 12 with Laura – A recently arrived young woman

26 October 2001

Laura arrived about two years ago and her children were able to join her a year later. She was sponsored by a close family member and said that it was easy to come to Ireland. At present she is learning English and she also visits the Centre where she meets both Irish and Vietnamese people. Laura left most of her family behind in Vietnam, including her mother and father, but she has plenty of siblings who can look after them. She keeps in touch by phone and says that her brother would like to come to Ireland but it is

“Very hard to get a visa.”

Her family here has plenty to cope with as she thinks at the moment life for them is

“Go to school and go to work – only my sister to look after --- children.”

She has two children, both of whom are attending national school and she says the following about their language learning

“Beginning very slowly – When they live[d] in Vietnam they didn’t know English.”

She was asked what language they spoke at home and replied

“They speak Vietnamese when they are at home because all my family, my sister, my nephew, my niece, they speak Vietnamese.”

She considered that her children would speak Vietnamese as it was spoken at home but she was rather worried about their English

“English language is important – I don’t mind Vietnamese language, they speak Vietnamese – then I worry about English.”

Her children also went to the Vietnamese language Saturday School in _____

“At the weekend they go to school [to] learn Vietnamese – [The] school [is] near my house.”

In Vietnam Laura used to work as a seamstress

“I make the clothes – I work at home – Sometime[s] I work with my sister because she has a shop

She considered her life to be better here and said

‘ In Vietnam, when I want to do something it s very, very difficult such as a job
Easier here ’

When she first arrived she felt lonely because she couldn’t speak English

“I have no any friend, very, very sad Better now ”

She has some Irish friends whom she has met at the Centre as well as her language teachers At her school she has met people from other countries She has Vietnamese friends who she has met through her family and at the Centre ‘Laura’ considered that she was making a better life for herself and it was the reason she had left Vietnam with her children

‘Because I think when we live in Vietnam in my life poor I want to change in my life and then I want to come here ’

She considered Ireland to be her home as she liked living here

When asked what she thought of her English Laura answered

“Very hard for me when we [are] talking problem about pronunciation always wrong words ’

She considered that her children spoke a little English

“They just speak English, just a little bit ”

However, she considered that they would improve and gave her reasons as the following

“because they’re younger than me It’s easier to learn ”

She was asked if it was easy to buy Vietnamese magazines or books here ‘Laura’ thought no and said that it was difficult and she couldn’t see why

“I don’t know If I want to buy Vietnamese magazine[s], [I d have to] buy in America and send to Ireland Very, very difficult ’

She was asked if she had done this and she replied yes Laura was then asked if she had any relatives in the USA and she replied that she had an uncle in Texas She was then asked if such difficulties in obtaining cultural material arose because of the size of the community and she thought yes Questioned further about her relatives in the USA she said that she wanted to visit them but it would be difficult to live there

Finally, when asked about religious practices Laura said that she sometimes went to the Buddhist temple in _____ but her sister went regularly. Questioning her about family she said

“family looks after you ”

She then added

“I want my children [to] get more and more language. I don't want them to forget my language. Every language [is] very, very important ”

Interview 13 with Michael – Caught between two cultures

27 November 2001

V That should record us reasonably well, OK, em, and you were saying that you don't have anybody to teach them to read or write Vietnamese, [uhum], aren't there some classes up in Clondalkin?

M Clondalkin? That I don't know anything about that in that area, just know in this area probably they are teaching more Chinese, [aha], in Clondalkin, than Vietnamese I'm not too sure about that, what they teaching there at the moment So, here we do need actually, we need financial support, in order to teach all our children to have ah, better you know, Vietnamese reading and writing skills and we also need qualified teachers as well, you know ,, qualified ones That's why we haven't got a chance to ask for support, you know

V Yeah Would there be anybody in the community

M I think there should be somebody who is capable of teaching Vietnamese but they have their time of doing their own business or they have no time to come over here and teach us all So in that way we have to look, somehow to apply for a teacher

V OK, yes So, I mean, that's quite difficult when it's so small

M Yes

V What I was going to do then was just talk a little bit about you because I think you probably have quite an interesting history, er, because again it gives a nice background to the whole community Anything you don't like, you can turn it off, if you don't like, that's the way to turn it off

M Aha

V OK

M OK, Yes

V Right, so that's the one

M Nothing personal is it?

V No, No

M OK then

V Em, yeah When did you come to Ireland? So how long have you been here?

M I came here in October 79

V Really?

M Yes

V So you're one of the first

M Yes, first few of the people, refugees arrived here in Ireland yes

V And how old were you?

M I were 14 at the time

V So you can remember quite a lot about everything that happened before you came?

M Er, no, not very much

V So, did you come, you came with some of your family?

M I came with my two uncles and, em, his family, one of his families, one of my uncle's is married

V So you presumably the family group paid somebody so that you could get a place on a boat?

M No actually my uncle was an organizer, so he get me a place, he just dealing with that, I don't know is he [?] or not because he an organizer, [that] I know

V So he got all of you a place on a boat

M Yes, yes

V So how long did it take?

M Oh, it took quite a while, as I can remember it, it took me ah, oh, quite a dramatic, ah, you know, escaping, can't remember much but we On the way from Vietnam to Malaysia we met a storm, yes, a really big storm and Thai pirates as well

And our boat was damaged by the Thai and our engines were broke down We were drifting on the sea for, for three days and three nights, yeah three days and four nights Probably I remember like that and we were saved by the, em, American oil rig in the middle of the sea, you know, in the China sea, you know where it is

V What did you do for water?

M Water? We just brought enough water but food we a little bit, you know, just about, but we were saved by the boat so we, we stayed in the oilrig for two days I think and then we got to the land, to Malaysia, by the navy, by the boat there

V So you stayed in a camp in Malaysia, there

M Yes, first we came to the reception camp in, em, in Kuala Lumpar Stayed there for a month, where we stayed in a football camp Just a field, a football field which was overcrowded and waiting for to be called or to be arranged to coming to the camp, refugee camp itself

V You must have felt quite terrified?

M Oh, still, oh, everything so strange, everything was you know, very frightened When you first come there they put you into the football field, and overcrowded and they have the and at the time, when new arrival on the boat, being pulled out to sea again, you know, yes, by the local authorities there It doesn't matter if you were accepted in the reception camp or not, if your name called up you will report into one boat with enough water and food, with one a compass and then they maybe will pull you out to the sea, towards the sea to, I don't know how long and then jump off the rope and leave you floating there and say that you are not allowed to come back But a lot have go back and then [they have come back], yes, yes [and then come back, I mean], yes, and then they return to the area, come back They have nowhere to go, just come back, and finally, you know, they got accepted to stay at the refugee camp with the interfering of course probably by the UNHCR or by, you know, humanitarian organizations Something like that

V But, I mean it must have been just so so scary

M Of course, I frightened my death because if my name or my family's name were called we were pulled out to sea again and my experience with the sea is peril I got seasick and everything I got pirates, you know, and we got storms Our boats were broke down and damaged, water were coming in, we had to get it out by hand All the engines were broke down, you know a lot of things that your life would be terrible Probably was feeding the fish

V So how long did you stay in the Malaysian camp?

M Stayed there for, I arrived in May so arrived in May, I arrived here in October, it's 5 months, yes

V OK so you were there May 79 and then October, you went to, you came to Ireland Why did your family leave? If you don't mind my asking

M Ah you know, they have to, to organize the whole family to go First, you have to get the finances to pay for the place and the boat also small when you are escaping, just enough people You need money to buy food and water, oil, and for the escaping, for the journey

V Uhum, (mobile rings), that s OK You can answer it if you like And, em, let's see You arrived then in October, (mobile rings) and how did you Do you want to answer?

M No, it's alright I ll switch it off

V OK Was it UNHCR or was it a religious organization that contacted you or your family to, kind of, bring you to Ireland?

M No, no, no, not at all When I arrived here in Ireland I made the application for family reunification and they joined me ten years later

V OK, so it was ten years later OK, and, em, you've still got family back in Vietnam? Do you still keep in touch?

M Yes, I do have relatives I have an aunt, an uncle still living in Vietnam We stay in touch by letter or by phone

V So you have some link? [Yes] And, but they're obviously going to stay there, they're not going to join you here

M Oh, very difficult you know because they're old, married, have children and they become, you know, grandparents themselves If the Irish government will accept them, then it would be nice Yes, I think it's very hard I hope that the Irish government will open their hearts and accept my family over because they're feeling lonely Because my grandparents are here and both sides, my maternal grandparents, my paternal grandparents are here, my father, and uncle and aunts are here as well

V Yes, so I mean really, it's like

M It's all my family, so The only two left in Vietnam are really, very small members so I hope that if the Irish government, you know, would do me a favour, consider this area, you know for me, for us here it's very gratefully if they can join us here

V But that's a very tricky question because they said, it was a couple of years ago it was supposed to be the final round, wasn't it?

M That's right, yes, and we got only the youngest family came over which were _____ person, yes

V Yes, is there a limit, something like the age of 18 or, [yes], or something about family groups

M Yes, they were qualified, all as independent children, you know

V So, I mean, you think you were lucky last time around?

M Ah, yes Well, most Vietnamese community here able to bring some members of their family over in the last final decision by the Irish government You know what I mean They issue around two hundred visa and that is their final grant, final decision
[Tape turned off at this point by Vera]

V Let's carry on a little bit there. So then you said a little bit, you applied for family reunification and your family came ten years later. Was that difficulties from here or difficulties organizing everything in Vietnam?

M What did you mean by that question? Is that by the visa or the waiting here?

V Well, just getting the visas but then also maybe, you know, back in Vietnam you have things to do. I don't know. But, you know, ten years is a long time.

M It is. Ten years quite a long time. I only applied when I was able to speak a little bit of English. Then I applied. Five years later and when the decision was agreed I was granted visa for my families. Five years, you know, making a decision by the Irish government and as soon as I got it granted, got the visa granted to my family to join me here in Ireland, I send it home to my parents. I've been told in Vietnam they went through the medical check-ups by the, em, you know, by the IOA, which is the international organization for migrants or something like that for migration.

V They had to do, they did a medical check-up, [yes], over there, why?

M And they arrange flight tickets and all that. I don't know who can pay, the Irish government pay for all the organization, or that organization pay for that, but I guess that the Irish government must have paid. Yes, that is their end of doing. In here, it took five years to get the decision done.

V So, you actually, you applied in a certain year and then five years later you actually got the decision. That is a very long time.

M That some time before I, yes, quite a long time. First they answered me that, you know, because I was too young, and I was unable to support them if they coming over. That's why the length have been there. So a few years later I don't know how, must be pushed, or, must be a humanitarian, so maybe the application form was so long, they looked into the points and finally, I was delighted anyway.

V Well, yes that was a good end to that, to that story. Of course, you weren't working in Vietnam were you?

M No, no, no. Not at all. I was too young. I was at school before the Viet, before Saigon. After the fall of Saigon, my family's my _____ was in a reeducation camp for a while, to, to because he served in the South Vietnamese Army, and my families were oppressed. I was off from school, because I had to stay home to support, to do some work, hard work and all that, helping the families. Haven't enough money to send all of us to school. So, I'm the oldest in the family so I have to stay home.

V So, I mean your education really then was interrupted

M Interrupted for three years until I escaped in 79 In Ireland I started to go to Christian Brothers School, in _____ Firstly, when I arrived in 1979 here, the government bring us a group of about 200 people, to a monastery in Swords where we stayed there I stayed there for 3 months and we got the, em, very kind Irish family that sponsored us to _____ city to _____ county And there my two uncles and families and myself went, to _____ to stay there and I went to a Christian Brothers School there

V Did you get any special help?

M Yes, yes, in school I have special treatment from the Principal, the teachers I have a special, an hour, a private English class in school and the rest, I had to do exactly what I heard like the Irish kids did

V Did you have a good time or a bad time at school?

M First I got a very bad time because I couldn't communicate with the children there I got a very strange look from the local kids They thought that I might be an alien coming down from somewhere, you know They looked at me I feel very very embarrassed I feel very scared but the teachers there have helped me through a lot of it by talking to the kids, do not look at me and treat me nicely and all that and I get very good treatment from the kids afterwards They offered me sweets and at lunchtime they offered to share with me their sandwiches and all, like this I joined, I played football in school, yeah, and after school I played football, I even played some Gaelic football and I joined the school Gaelic team And I travelled to, you know, playing against all the schools, having great fun

V So, I mean, that was quite good then because you got support from your teachers So so they tried to help the other kids to, to develop a reasonable attitude to you

M Yes, yes, yes Thanks to the teachers there, you know, and they helped people a lot

V And this was a secondary school?

M This was a, no, because I was, because I arrived, I was sent into the first, you know, not the secondary, primary school to get me a little bit of English first before I can go to the secondary school, you know

V So you spent a year in sixth class?

M Yes

V And then you went to secondary?

M Yes

V So, did you do all the secondary education?

M Yes, I did, until when we moved to Dublin here I can't remember it was 86 or something and I went to I continued my secondary school in _____ school here in _____, where my English is so bad I couldn't cope with the subjects and the homework was a lot so I quit when I doing my Leaving Cert I haven't finished my Leaving Cert but during the year of the Leaving Cert I left and I joined FAS a year later

V So, what FAS training did you do?

M I went to Finglas It called ANCO at the time It wasn't called FAS and I did a computer course, electronics, for nine months

V Did you get a certificate?

M Yes City and Guilds Certificate

V Oh that's a good one

M And then I worked in Dun Laoghaire electronic company, for a German firm, it's called _____, for three years After that I left and I joined UNHCR

V Oh really! Is that because of your experiences?

M Ah, well, I just applied I don't know, I just heard that they needed interpreters in Hong Kong in the Vietnamese refugee camps, so I just, I don't know if I'm qualified or not, I just wrote to them and somehow I got an answer

V So, what year was that?

M This was the end of 1990

V So, were you quite excited by this?

M I was nervous, actually

V What have I done?

M Yes! You know, going away again, you know, my first time again to go living abroad, no assistance no knowledge of any Chinese Luckily, I have some Vietnamese there so I settled down quite soon afterwards

V That was quite a difficult time to go out there because if I remember rightly, in the '90s there were lots of issues coming up in the camps because people were being kept there or they weren't being moved, there were fights

M Yes that's right, yes, em, that they have a bad life, for boat people who arrived If you come alone, if they arrived in Hong Kong before, em, oh, what's that time, for,

let's see what year was that um, I don't know some time in August 1988, they were automatically refugees

V Ah, OK

M After that time they have to go through a screening procedure So if you passed that screening procedure you become political refugees All the economic refugees are now asylum seekers You will be refused for the first time and if you're refused for the first time you have a right to appeal

V OK So, this is where the tension was created? [Yes] because it depended on this decision?

M Yes, that's right

V And if you appeal failed?

M You have a third appeal, the mandate by UNHCR And UNHCR will look into your claim and see that you are a genuine refugee or not If not then still you've failed and you will be sent home either voluntarily or by deportation

V Because I can remember quite late in the nineties when there was forced deportation

M That's right, yes, which means that a lot of people are against that decision and there were a lot of fighting, disturbing, everyone in the camps

[Tape turned off]

V I, didn't come here as a refugee We went to Britain We went from Hungary You know, Hungary was a Communist country then but there was a revolution in 1956 and before the revolution my family had been in a bad situation because we were thought of being, you know we weren't peasants and so my grandfather had a business, so we had a lot of problems, you know, and they kind of followed family

M Yes

V So my mother left and, she left by herself, then she paid a man to go back in to bring me out

M Oh, yes So she left you behind?

V Yeah with my grandparents because she went very late, the border had been closed so at that time she had no idea, you know, was she going to get across, was she not She was very lucky She managed it So [mutual laughter] so I stayed in two camps a small one first, just inside the border in Austria, then we were moved further in to a big camp called Traiskirchen which I didn't like

M Aah?

V: Big. And then we went to England, and then we stayed in a camp there, but not for too long.

M: So you automatically went as refugees anyway.

V: Yeah, well, at that time it was easier.

M: As Conventions?

V: Yes, exactly.

M: The Convention's only in 67 isn't it? [Em] The Protocol's 54?

V: Eh, they, they still did us under the 51. *(These are references to the Geneva Conventions of 1951 and 1954 and the New York Protocol of 1967)*

M: Ah, yes.

V: I, I don't know how they did it but that's how it happened. Em, anyhow, back to you. So, how long did you work in Hong Kong?

M: I worked there for five years.

V: Five years.

M: Five years

V: So, em, from ninety, nineteen ...?

M: From early 91, yes, early 91 till ... late 95.

V: And then, and you worked for UNHCR all the time?

M: All the time, yes.

V: Interpreting?

M: Interpreting. All in the refugee camps. I worked in both, various camps: detention camps, open camps and repatriation camps, you know, yes, and in drugs[?] camps, prisons, I guess prisons as well ... amongst other things, yes.

V: So, I mean, you saw all of it?

M: Yes, yes. I saw most of it but I don't remember that much, I try not to remember, [laughter].

V: Yeah.

M: It's quite horrible.

V: I know. I mean, when we used to see all the news. Sometimes, it was quite horrible to be honest.

M: Yes, you facing people with all their problems, with all their claims, you know, complaints to the management, camp management and all that, the way they treat people there. And day in day in you will see that people complained to us and we tried to solve their, UNHCR tried to interfere into that situation. But still it's not that

much, you know it's because the camp management have their way of ruling them. They get the big brothers, Vietnamese big brother within the camps to control the population inside the camp. So UNHCR cannot, you know, say anything if the camp management do something to the people. Then there will be human rights and all that. They will, you know, do for the people, but they use the, em, the inside, the people against the people itself and it's very difficult for the UNHCR to intervene into that.

[Some interference]

V Um, yeah

M You know, very sad seeing that happen day after day, and you know, badly treated. Food were bad as well, you know. It wasn't, you get the same routine of food, day after day, like Monday, for example. Monday you have chicken wings for your lunch, and you know, Tuesday, you have veg, a little veg and all that because and so the routine goes, all towards the rights of food, you know. As the days and weeks and years go by so people are kind of [?] the food sometimes. If anyone who have a chance the right to go overseas sometimes they have relatives. Then they're able to buy some food in the canteen.

V So family support is always important?

M Oh yes, to us yes. [Mutual laughter]

V OK. Coming back to here, you came back here in 19--, you came back here did you when you finished in Hong Kong?

M Yes, I em, because I, I kind of put my job [?] I resigned and came back here to Ireland and here I am. [Mutual laughter]

V Here you are. You didn't think, you didn't want to go back to Vietnam?

M No. I went back again last, last year, just a few months ago, the beginning of this year, yes.

V What was it like?

M I've seen a lot of changes since I left. Well you know, it's a lot of changes. It's [?] and more open a little bit to foreigners, to tourists and it's no more strict like before. Like before, if you go back there, if you are a foreigner or you are a Vietnamese visitor going back there, you have to register with the local authority where you're staying, how long you're going to stay for. But now you can move around without involving the local authorities. Unless when you move to some place that local authority and officers want you to give some money and want you to bribe

them, and they make difficulties for you and then you know what the story is,
There must be a lot of corruption over there it's the facts

V We have it here too [Mutual laughter] That seems to be everywhere OK, you saw quite a lot of change but you, you prefer to stay, to live here rather than there?

M Since my family, most of them are here, I get used to the way of living here in Ireland

V And so really because your family's here, and you think you have a better standard of living here?

M I think, yes in the social way The people here been looked after, than in Vietnam But anywhere else, if you've got a job, to work, then you might be, you know, safe, but here it's a freedom country you can do whatever you can, talk whatever you feel like, and go wherever you want to go and in Vietnam you don't have that chance, no chance Of course life here is a lot better To me anyway, and I don't know about the others but to me it is better Probably, I grew up here, get used to it, I have friends here, Irish friends, and that's all I go back to Vietnam, sometimes Of course, I can make friends in Vietnam but the weather is also a little bit too hot for me probably In here maybe too cold but I don't say it's cold, you know I get used to it and it's OK but hot I cannot bear

V [Laugh] OK, so you, that's gone, you've lost that [mutual laughter]

M Yeah but not too hot like hot, but warm is OK, you know, 20 degrees is OK but over than that In Vietnam it's 30 something degrees Celsius so it really tore you apart in the middle of the day [laughter]

V And you have Irish friends, do you?

M Yes, yes, I have Irish friends

V So what's the mix? You got more Vietnamese, more Irish or kind of half and half?

M Of course I'm here in the Centre so I know a lot of people, so yes but cannot say it's a friend I only have a few Vietnamese friends about my own age and all that And going out together, around, you know, thirty to fifty friends But a lot, I know a lot of Vietnamese people, the elderlies, the youngs and all that Compared to Irish friends I have more Vietnamese friends

V And, your Irish friends, are they friends from school or?

M Very few from school but from neighbours, friends making social friends keeping in touch School friends, I have two school friends getting in touch, is often difficult, seeing each other, going out

V So you've kinda got a mixture of friends What about, say you were going to get married?

M Aha First I've got to meet the right one! [Mutual laughter]

V Does it matter if it's an Irish girl or a Vietnamese girl?

M Doesn't matter! It doesn't matter to me but to my parents and elderly's generation The older generation, they might object to that They are not racist but because of the culture, the way they want to teach me especially to Asian people and the elderly's, the majority of the family, so I have to keep in the cultural way, you know They would prefer me to get a Vietnamese girl so that I can be looking after my parents when they get older because that's the way, you know, [laughter] but I'm looking for a lady [laughter] But to the Irish people, a woman, they will not agree to that point so it's my conflict, between I'm caught in the middle It's senseless It's hard So if I met the right one, it doesn't matter I would marry whoever it was, you know

V But, I mean, there's always a little bit of pressure there, because your parents and you respect them, so

M But of course love is a different story [Mutual laughter]

T I have to please them all I will have to please myself also I will not be selfish but it's the way it is Life is misery, um!

V Do you think many young many people who've kind of, really grown up here have this kind of, you know, you said it was a conflict, have this feeling that they're really torn

M Yes, I have seen, between the younger generations now don't speak fluent Vietnamese They speak very, very well English because they've grown up here and all that And the way they live, they've adapted to the Irish culture and Irish life so they, most of them, have their Irish friends in school Asking the young one here, who grown up, to get married to a Vietnamese girl, that's quite difficult because first, you have There's not much Vietnamese girls around anyway And most of the Vietnamese girls will be kept at home by their parents and they're not allowed to go out so late at night so they haven't really a chance to meet each other So I guess that most of them are meet the Irish friends and they, they, you know, they just meet I

know that some of my friends marry Irish, Irish women, yes, and have kids and all that. They will be OK. No problem at all.

V: And your friends who've married Irish girls, obviously the children, they're not going to speak Vietnamese.

M: No. The children speak very, very little because the mother is very close to them and the father is talking to the mother in the English language so the children got lost. That's why I would like to have some financial support to get some, a qualified Vietnamese teacher to teach the children if I could arrange that. I don't know what their status would be and I hope that the children would turn up for their classes. Otherwise, you know, something stop ... the children, because they go to school here five days a week. They have their homework to do. They have three languages at school to learn already: English, Irish and some foreign language in order to qualify for university. And now, forcing them to learn another language which they have only Saturday and Sunday, they need a break. I don't know if they turn up or not. That cannot, their parents to force them to do that. To force them, the parents have to bring them to the classes otherwise they cannot on their own, going by their own. And the parents have their own business. Still, they're too busy and they haven't got time to bring them at weekends. So that is my problems.

V: It's a dilemma.

M: And a problem in fact.

V: To make the time and everything else ... and, um, what about you? I mean, do you read Vietnamese books or listen to music, is it easy to get?

M: Yes, I do read Vietnamese books, em, and listen to music. I can get them from America, or from France, yes.

V: Is that because you have family there or because you know where to write?

M: Yes, I know where to write. I write to them and order, you know, a list of songs or CDs. So I can look and see what CDs to buy and pay them by cheques and send them the money. Within a little bit of time they will send back the CDs or videos. About reading books, I sometimes go into the internet looking at the news from the internet. That's why I need to do, you know, go in twice a week. If I have time I go then and have a look or having a little chat with all the Vietnamese around the world in the internet I'm also thinking that I try to get much of the ... issuing a weekly bulletin, you know, to distribute to the Vietnamese around here because, in general the older generation of people, they don't read any English at all. They don't know

what's going on so I'm thinking here it's quite, if I got a chance to answer for them as well. I can issue a weekly magazine or bulletin to send to the people. I of course I need a computer and a printer with paper, ink and stamps and finances to pay a part-time worker, you know, to edit, editing of the bulletin to change it around. Yes I feel I think it's a good idea because the older ones don't know what's going on, like the war here that happened, and I meet a lot of older people and they say 'What's going on at the moment in Afghanistan?'

V There must be some kind of government money, especially if it's for a local group. I don't know where you source it. I can always try to find out if you want me to [oh, yes], I don't know who to contact but I'd find some way, em, because there are some people that help local groups and then you can get finance. You know, you'd have to keep financial records if you got a grant.

M Probably I have to do one copy first and give them a general idea of what I'm going to do. And when I see the sources of where to apply to I can send a copy at that time of what I'm going to do.

V Because, you know, I'm sure for older people. You know in some families I visited the grandmother, you know, because now there are grandchildren, I mean you know, we smile at each other and then, maybe they say 'hello, and that's it finished. There's no support. How do they know what's going on in the world?'

M Yes, that's right, know what's going on around them because they also need to know what's going on in Vietnam as well. Maybe in the internet when I see there's a lot of names from one area or other I can gather a little bit, not very detailed but still there's some information for them to know what's going on. I think that's a good idea but the financial [inaudible interruption] it's only a small grant because it's a small community here.

V About 800

M No, a thousand, a thousand. Well I think a thousand. So half of them are the younger generation and half the older. Still the older ones feel very lonely, very sad and they have no English. Imagine, they're just sitting there in their corner at home. I can see that in my grandparents. I can see that, actually I can see that myself and that is very sad. To go out is too cold for them, so I think, to talk to the neighbours but they're unable, language barrier. Going shopping, doesn't know what to buy, you know doesn't know how to question where can I find this and that. OK, they just happen to know. Oh, that's stationery. OK go buy some paper. Go to the stationery,

look around you know go into a big supermarket, they don't know where to put their stuff or buy some, you know cups. They don't know where to go and so they have to walk all around the supermarket in order to find the places. It's quite odd.

V Because they can't read the signs.

M Yes, so they're shy going out. They are lock themselves up in the corner at home. At least they have ease of mind by getting some information in Vietnamese.

V It keeps the contact as well. So you keep the contact with the world. I think that's quite important, actually. OK, we can finish off slowly. In terms of culture, what's important to you? Do you celebrate Chinese New Year, Vietnamese New Year?

M Yes, we still keep in touch with Vietnamese New Year for some time at the end of January or [February] February, yes, something like that in-between that time. And every year we celebrate Chinese New Year and we organize a party, a small party either in the Centre here or in a hotel so that means the Vietnamese people come here and celebrate.

V So it's pretty much a community celebration.

M Yes. Compared to all the countries where the Vietnamese are, the celebrations are more important but in here it's a small group and we are eventually lost that kind of thing we do. But still, anyway we still keep that the greatest day of all our culture.

V What about things like religion? I know some people are Catholic, some people are Buddhist, some people tell me they're nothing [mutual laughter].

M If they are not they are ancestor worshipper. And Catholics, very few Catholics are here. Buddhism, yes, that's right.

V Because there's a Buddhist temple out in Clondalkin, isn't there?

M Yes, that's what I heard also. There's a Buddhist temple, a little Buddhist temple there and you know most people are ancestor worshippers they worship their ancestors.

V So you have a traditional altar in the home.

M Yes, for Catholics they have an altar with a sign of the cross or Mary, mother of Jesus pictures. In Buddhism you have different kinds of pictures and statues of the Buddha, an altar. Ancestors you have the urn and some incense with a picture of the dead, of your ancestor you worship and they worship them every single night, burn incense and they pay their respects.

V What about young people? Do they keep up things like that or is it no longer important?

M For some families, I do know that they don't keep that at all. They go to school here and of course Irish is the Catholic country and most Irish school kids when they're in third class, in fact, go through First Communion and then... What is it? [Confirmation], Confirmation, yes, and the children also in that class they also sometimes join in as well. It doesn't matter they're Catholic or not and their parents doesn't mind either [incomprehensible interference] really in their own, we can do that, it doesn't really matter. Maybe they just follow all their classmates, I don't know if they understand what they are doing or not but I think they do learn religion in school. So they might know something about that and they don't keep the Sunday [mutual laughter]

V OK. So they might learn religion but it's probably not that important. What about things like food? I mean, obviously grandparents, parents they're going to stick to traditional cooking but are things changing again with youngsters?

M Yes, of course it's changed as well. We cook our own Vietnamese food at home to eat... it's traditional. We're used to that kind, we have rice and meat or poultry cooking, or we... I myself, I don't know how to cook anyway, Irish food or Vietnamese food [mutual laughter]. I don't know but that's how I am [mutual laughter]. Whatever I'm given at home I eat them. And my parents sometimes make Irish food like beefsteak, boiled potatoes or mashed potatoes with soup and gravy. And at Christmas we try to have turkey, dinner, like the Irish traditional one [mutual laughter], lamb and all that, yes, it changes once a week or twice a week at least we have Irish food.

V So there's a little bit of a mixture going on.

M A mixture, yes, as to the older ones. But the younger ones, they prefer what they have like pizza, chips or, you know, mashed potatoes, boiled potatoes. If the parents are willing to cook it then they're happy to eat them but they do prefer that than Vietnamese food. If for those who are very easy to eat then it's OK, they don't mind what food they eat. But for some, they still have to, at least four a week, four Irish food a week or they have every day because at school time they can go to the chipper to buy some cheap food and all the time bringing their sandwiches.

V Yeah, they need to be like their friends. Em, if you have children what you would like to know about the Vietnamese way of life? What do you think would be important?

M I'd teach them as much as I know about Vietnamese culture because I myself will eventually lost it I don't know how to teach them I think what's best for them is to leave them free to adapt to all the peoples around them Of course I will teach them whatever I know of my experience of my culture to give them a little bit of advice, to honour the elderly people, respect their parents and remember the most important cultural days like the Moon festival, the Vietnamese New Year and some other Vietnamese cultural celebrations If I can remember [Mutual laughter]

V what do you think will happen in the future? Do you think more of the younger generation will marry Irish people and do you think the community's going to disintegrate? Do you think there's enough to keep it together?

M Oh, that I cannot predict but I would imagine that the younger generation, eventually, they probably will lost their culture and they kind of, you know, mixed with the Irish people In here in the Vietnamese Centre we try to, try to stick together until the younger are grown up Then we can hand over to the younger ones so that they can mix but they still have, or they can bring in their Irish friends That's exactly where the place for them to keep in touch with, and if someone is good enough or is very interested in Vietnamese culture, of course they can make something happen They can invite people from Vietnam and with the help of them to bring cultural [events] in here, to show them what culture is like and to show a bit interesting if that's going to happen, and I hope that's going to happen

V We don't really know, it's a matter of wait and see What about the language? [Mutual laughter]

M The English language or Vietnamese?

V Vietnamese and Chinese Do you think that's under pressure?

M Yes, as I told you now we need financial [assistance] to get a qualified teacher or get someone that free in their own time And of course we will pay that teacher with the support of the government here, the Education Department to teach Vietnamese to the younger ones so they can read and write to their relatives or friends in Vietnam if they can make friends Or they can go into the internet and chat with Vietnamese friends after work It is very hard to set up, to set up the school, the class is OK but the willingness of the students, I don't know how the percentage would be, what percentage So that issue will go to next year and we'll talk about that because [inaudible] so we leave everything until next year and try to organize that to see [V

to see what comes of it] or even if the children would come to Vietnamese class during the summertime

V And just going back to the language, just probably one of my last questions now Say you've got a family situation where children have pretty much grown up here, do they speak Vietnamese to their parents or English to parents, Vietnamese to each other, English to each other? What have you seen?

M What I have seen is yes, they do speak Vietnamese to their parents with broken Vietnamese to their parents They sometimes put in the English word And to each other if they are brother and sister at home there without their parents present or without the elderly people present, they're chatting in English They're fighting in English, they're talking in English You know, if something is a secret between them they're coming to English so their parents won't understand it And if the children think that their parents might understand some English then they will talk about it in slang English! [Mutual laughter] They are quite good in that way and you know they're more Irish themselves so that's how I see that And they're getting influenced at school they're talking English, going home in their spare time they're watching television, children go back to English Their parents are busy working at night time and they have no time to talk to their children so that way the children are talking to each other in English It's the parent's responsibility to tell their children to speak Vietnamese to each other

V But difficult

M That's the family's, yeah, to keep an eye on them because they can be upstairs talking it can be all in English There's no way to keep an eye on them unless you have 24 hours with them which can't be done

V What about employment? A lot of people work in the restaurants and take-aways What about the children now, the ones who've gone to school here? Are they going on to college or university, moving on to other jobs? What's kind of happening?

M That, in a general view I cannot answer personally because each child, each children, their point of view, or they have the willingness to go to school or not

V What have you seen kind of happening from your own experience?

M From my own experience I have seen my friend's children, my older people that I know and their children that have grown up here and go to school until they are doing their Leaving Cert and after that they can pick their own career Some like school, some actually still continue with their schooling but I have some Of course here in

Ireland it's very difficult to tell Vietnamese children keeping their school or not, studying or not because of the atmosphere. If they adapt into the Irish life then they will have fun at school. Then they will continue. If those who are more sided to their Asian culture and parents, a little you know, a bit less, they can go out looking for a job but their job will be labourer, no qualified. That generation, that my generation. Wait until another five to ten years time you will see then what will happen.

V And you think more people will end up going to college and kind of moving out of restaurant work?

M I think that's. If they're thinking enough, yes, they will move out from the restaurant. The younger ones, I hope the younger ones will go to school, get some certificates and get an easy, just a day job, 'cos it's a more social life. Working in a restaurant, from experience I don't work there at all, I don't have to cook but I see a lot of people, cooking six days a week. They've got no social life at all because in a restaurant you need to work night-time and weekends. So they're only off one day, whatever they pick but cannot be off at weekends so their social life with other people very, very difficult. So I hope that the younger ones will see that as a difficulty and back up, try to do, learn in school, that's better. They should do that.

V OK. Well, I think that's all the questions I have to ask you unless there's anything else you want to say?

M That's everything I can say. [Mutual laughter]

Interview 14 with Judy – Family life in transition

18 January 2002

This interview took place on the eighth anniversary of Judy's arrival with members of her family as part of the family reunification scheme. She said "All my family come over – only some relatives in Vietnam". Contact with her relatives was still maintained mainly by phone or by sending over a gift if the family knew of somebody going to Vietnam on holiday. 'Judy' said that this contact was "sometimes on the phone twice or three times a year". She had been working in Vietnam and described her working life

"I'm working in a sewing company for export to England. Sometimes I work overtime to make the order". She said that overtime did not mean extra pay as they were only given tea or coffee but piecework was paid for

"They just pay you if you're working more – they only pay you for the meal – not the same as over here so even if you work on Sunday you still paid the same. Very strict. She considered that her life in Ireland was far better than back in Vietnam as it was less stressful with regard to everyday living

'Better than over there – you don't have to think today, tomorrow what you are going to do, so you feel comfortable

In her new life in Ireland she has made some Vietnamese, some Irish and some Chinese friends mainly from her work, her workplace is where she has learnt some Mandarin and she also speaks Cantonese, Vietnamese and English. 'Judy' uses all these languages at work and she said that there are times when a mixture of all of them is spoken as she tries to communicate with some of her workmates who do not speak Vietnamese and have minimal English. As she has a young family she does not go out much because of family commitments though she might go to the occasional party. Judy was not sure if her English had improved over the eight years that she had been in Ireland but she was assured that it had considerably from the days when she was learning English as part of the reunification programme. However, she speaks English at work as she is a lively and chatty person and so at her workplace she says

"I'm working at the counter. I have to talk to the customer."

In her three years of work she has only encountered one difficult individual

"From the day I'm working there, only one very rude

Life is focused around her young family as she has two daughters, Aisling and Eimer and her family also includes her husband, Simon, a younger brother and her mother. The two girls speak both English and Vietnamese. The eldest daughter, Aisling, spoke Vietnamese as her first language and when she went to national school she learnt to speak English so that she is bilingual and becoming literate in English. Her younger sister does not go to school yet but still speaks some English as she uses some English words in conversation with her sister and other family members. Aisling also speaks Cantonese as well as a little *Chaozhou* and both of these languages occupy a special place in the home. Cantonese is important as Simon, Judy's husband, grew up in China where he spoke Cantonese as well as learning Mandarin from his education and speaking Vietnamese at home. He is not confident about his English although he understands a great deal and does watch MTV for songs as well as other tv programmes, there is a great deal of passive knowledge. Simon does use some set phrases in English with his children such as 'what's the matter'. He speaks in Cantonese to his daughters and they have learnt some from him. *Chaozhou* is a Chinese dialect spoken between mother and daughter as 'Judy' is bilingual like her mother. *Chaozhou* was the spoken language of the family home back in Vietnam where Judy was educated thus becoming literate in Vietnamese. Aisling, born in Ireland, speaks English, Vietnamese, which everyone can speak in the home and in which some family members are literate, as well as a little Cantonese, her father's main language, and a very little *Chaozhou*, a language spoken by her grandmother and her mother. As far as Judy is aware *Chaozhou* is only spoken by her family here in Ireland.

In discussing her children's future, Judy was asked if she would teach her daughters to read and write Vietnamese and she thought that it could be a possibility but then equally not. Her attitude is one of wait and see and she said:

"Let her decide when she growing up" ~

She also considered that as her children's lives were here in Ireland she thought:

"I don't think Vietnamese important. If she not learn Vietnamese she can learn Irish, Spanish, whatever she like."

She considered that she would not worry if her children lost Vietnamese but then she is a confident English speaker. However, she considered that her husband would be worried as then he would not be able to communicate with his children

“because he can’t speak English. Because he come over so old.”

He was almost in his mid-twenties when he arrived. Judy thought that Vietnamese people found it easier to learn English, as the alphabets were the same in both languages so that it was easier for them to read words when they were learning. There was some connection with a European language but everything was completely different for a Chinese speaker.

Judy did not use a mixture of languages such as English and Vietnamese with other Vietnamese people either old or young and she noted that so far everybody spoke Vietnamese in the community. She said that even in situations where someone had an Irish partner then there was still the possibility of a baby learning Vietnamese.

“I know they [Vietnamese boys], they going out with Irish girl. The baby stay with the [Vietnamese] family so speak Vietnamese at home!”

However, Judy was well aware of the linguistic developments in her family and she realised that things would change as her children grew older. She said that she was already noting such developments in her eldest child.

“When she home with me, when she want something she say in English, not Vietnamese or Chinese either.”

She also said that when her daughter came home from school then she would continue to speak in English for a while. It was pointed out that Aisling might lose quite a lot of her Vietnamese and Judy agreed but then added

“But I hope not.”

Such awareness of the linguistic issues comes from Judy being bilingual and from the fact that she has learnt Cantonese since she came to Ireland.

“I m Vietnamese, I haven’t got any Cantonese. That’s my family group. It’s easy catching the Cantonese.”

As her husband is a Cantonese speaker it is an important issue for her to speak this language. Judy said that it was easy to access Cantonese as there was a Chinese channel which was available from satellite tv and they were willing to pay for this. Both Cantonese and Mandarin was available though most Chinese tv that they

watched was in Cantonese and from Hong Kong television so that they could also watch the news. This facility was not available in Vietnamese. Such a satellite channel was also useful for older family members. They were watching a Vietnamese pop video, which had been made in the USA, and such videos were borrowed from and lent to friends. They were available from France as well. The particular one that we were watching had a karaoke section with words written clearly on the screen and were highlighted as sung so that one could accompany the video or learn to read the Vietnamese that was already a familiar, spoken language.

When she was asked how did she feel in terms of her identity Judy was not sure what to say and after a pause said

“I don’t know.” After a further pause she elaborated by saying

“But I feel Irish more than Vietnamese.”

In her opinion the children were Irish but her husband remained Chinese so that experience of coming to and living in or being born in Ireland was certainly not the same experience for all the members of a family. She spoke of her brother

“Like my brother, he more Irish than Vietnamese. Doesn’t understand everything in Vietnamese.”

Judy said that everyday Vietnamese conversation was not a problem but outside that range difficulties did arise for her brother who was eleven when he came to Ireland. He was Irish as he complained about Vietnamese things including Vietnamese cooking at times.

Her brother had not finished his education yet as at first he had studied English with the rest of the family at the VELC [Vietnamese English Language Centre] for a few weeks. Afterwards he had begun his primary education in Second Class in national school which the family had requested that he repeat as then he would be in a better position to cope with his schooling. He also had a special teacher, which she thought most Vietnamese children had had if they were in a similar situation. Judy also considered that her English lessons at the VELC had been useful.

‘When we came over we have no English, only Vietnamese and the *Chaozhou*’

Irish life meant that they went on holiday like Irish people and Judy had travelled to Spain as well as Italy for a family holiday last year. She had also travelled to Sweden

where she had relatives who had gone there as part of a family reunification programme in 19-- as well as England where some relatives had gone from the first waves of boat people in 1978 and 1979. She had also been able to visit Denmark. However, her family had been split further as an auntie had gone to the USA in 1979 and her mother had been able to visit her eldest sister last year. Judy remarked that 'My mum's sister's are all over

Judy then added that they had gone to Hong Kong, Australia and Canada so that in 1979 her mother's family had broken up and her _____ had arrived in Ireland in 1979. So Judy had been able to come later with the rest of her family. When asked if she was going to talk about the family history Judy said that she hadn't yet, given the age of her children but she would do so in the future and the language she chose for the telling would depend on her daughters. So far she had not taught them Vietnamese children's songs or stories or given them Vietnamese books.

When considering their futures she did not mind at all who they were going to marry. "I don't mind"

Furthermore, she did not think it was necessary for her to find them a marriage partner. She thought it would be nice if they listened to her but that otherwise she did not mind as long as the individual was 'a good person'. She said that her mother had been able to choose her husband and that attitudes to traditional ideas such as an arranged marriage had not been as strict as in China in her mother's day. Finally, when asked about food she said that at home it was Vietnamese and Chinese food but "Irish food when we going out."

Interview 15 with Jane – Living in two worlds

26 January 2002

Jane arrived in 199- at the age of 27 to join her brother as part of the family reunification programme and has recently got married to a young man she has known since childhood. She still has brothers and sisters living in Vietnam with whom she keeps in touch regularly by phone every two weeks or so. At the moment she is hoping that her sister will be able to join her here in Ireland. Family is important to her.

“because if you have a big family you can do anything, if you live alone [it’s] difficult for you. The language or the customs are very strange for us.”

When she was asked about what which customs in particular Jane found it difficult to put her feelings or impressions into words particularly as some time has elapsed since her early impressions of coming to live in Ireland. She explained that things were not so strange now but that there were still differences.

“not so strange now because we get used to that but, like, I can’t explain. I think it’s OK now. But the language, if you want to do business you have to know the language, you have to know the law. If you want to live in this country you have to know everything, the history and the law.

The biggest obstacle for her was language and she said

“I thought we have to know how to speak English because we live here for ever. I saw Irish people talking together and I said ‘oh, my God, I have to understand what they say because I’m going to live here!’ That time I had some friends who helped me. [When we went out] I listened to them in the shops so could tell them [the shop assistants] what we want.

Before we came here I didn’t have any English.”

In Vietnam Jane worked as a sales assistant in a shoe shop and she thought that it was hard work as the hours were very long.

“I was working in a shoe shop, I told you before, you remember!”

We discussed her hours and she clarified her working hours.

“Seven o’clock until one o’clock, until midnight, seven days a week for three years. That was in Saigon but before I lived in _____ but we did that ourselves, our family business, a newsagent’s.”

Jane was asked about her perception of her life here in comparison to Vietnam and she made some interesting observations about socialising and friendship

“If I m honest, I worked in Vietnam very hard but I have time that our country, [I can] meet people [after work], go somewhere at night I work here, it hard as well but not too much friend, I don’t go out too much We don’t know why If we out [with] Irish people it s a strange language, different customs I can’t explain it But if we work here, we work hard and then we get good money In Vietnam you can work hard but you don t get much money ”

When we discussed the issue of not going out a lot ‘Jane’ remarked

“The first time, maybe I was shy, but now, at the moment I don’t know why but still I don’t want to go out too much Some Irish people, when I worked in _____, they told me ‘you have to go out you have to enjoy your life Don’t stay at home ’ They said, ‘you poor girl ’ When I was in _____, the people were friendly and said, ‘don’t work too much,’ and ‘you have to go out , I don t know why, I don t like it Now, I live in [another EU country] with my husband but I don’t want to live over there, I want to live over here I get used to here ”

Jane’s dilemma recurs during the interview

When we returned to the subject of differences between her new country of residence and Ireland she thought the following two things were the most important

‘The first thing, that’s the language I have to learn it The second thing, that’s the people, they re not so friendly The Vietnamese people have lived there since 1954 and they’re not too friendly ”

The difference in the size of the communities was discussed and ‘Jane’ thought that in her new country there were “a lot of Vietnamese people! Too many! she was considering the number of Vietnamese businesses in the capital as she thought that the restaurant business was reaching saturation point over there which would make it difficult for her if she and her husband wanted to be self-employed in catering She was not sure if the greater size of the community there would make life easier for her in other ways as she thought she had not lived there long enough yet to find out Her pressing concern was about making a living

‘I don’t know yet But I think difficult if we want a business, [it’s] difficult as there are too many I want to work in a factory or an office but I have to learn [the language] ’

Jane was asked if she knew about a Vietnamese community association that could help her particularly in looking for language lessons but again she not sure as she had not lived in the country long enough

“First, I have to learn [the language] from my husband Maybe I have to go into the community I have to learn [the language] over there

She was not relishing the task of having to learn another new language so soon after having made such an effort to become so very competent in English

While discussing returning to Vietnam Jane explained that she had joined her brother and now she would not return to live in Vietnam as she had made a choice Her choice had consequences as she now had no Vietnamese qualifications

“No, I don t think so because now I don’t have any certificate[s] You can’t work in a factory or an office[without a certificate] ’

She now considered Ireland to be a “second home ’ which was a major achievement as she had had no idea what it would be like when she came She thought back to when she was still living in Vietnam and said

“No idea before [I] came It s really funny When I was in Vietnam I watched the tele I saw the snow and I saw the very nice streets and I thought ‘oh, I would like to live over there ’ That s what I thought when I was in Vietnam [that it was] lovely! Fantastic! ’

When considering her first impressions of what was strange or different Jane said

“The weather, the language, the people is OK, the customs! We never hug some people if they are not your boyfriend or husband Single mothers, we don’t have that in Vietnam If you are pregnant, it’s a shame if you are without a husband ”

She also thought that personal freedom was an issue as

“You can do everything you want, not like in Vietnam You have freedom, you can go anywhere It’s quite important because in Vietnam some things we can t do because they say you are a traitor ’

The subject of English recurred and Jane was asked what she thought about her English

“The first time, I think I [will] never learn English, it s too difficult But then I say I have to learn it [as] I have to know how to speak English and now it’s a lot better ”

It took her about three years to really the language and she also thought that the language lessons provided as part of the family reunification programme were a great help. With the lessons she was able to progress.

‘Then I can understand the grammar, the vocabulary, the tapes and then I can make a sentence.’

As there are young children in her _____’s house she was asked what languages were spoken in the home and at first Jane replied that it was Vietnamese. However, she was asked if she code-switched or rather if she mixed English and Vietnamese at times. Her answer was interesting as she identified two specific types of interaction within the family when both languages were mixed, the first being with one of the children who spoke both languages as she went to school.

‘Sometimes like now, Laura, if she don’t understand she can ask what it means in Vietnamese,[or] what it means in English. You can speak that to her.’

Laura had learnt Vietnamese in the home and then English when she went to school.

Jane also said that adult conversation between herself and her brother, for example, also created a mixing of languages.

‘Some words. If we can’t explain in Vietnamese then we speak in English. Some words, if we can’t explain or sometimes if you don’t want anyone to listen then we speak English!’

This would be a reference to other family members who were less at home in English. Furthermore, she said that granny’s grandson could not speak Vietnamese well ‘so we speak English to him – he’s from England’. The family accommodated his lack of linguistic skills in Vietnamese when he visited. However, this was a difficulty for the grandmother who, though she spoke both Vietnamese and Cantonese, did not speak any English and so was thus unable to communicate with her grandson as they had no language in common.

On talking about religion Jane said that she was Buddhist but that she did not go to the temple in _____ regularly though she had been once or twice. This was not a change in practice as she had not gone often in Vietnam either. She remarked:

‘I believe in Buddha but I don’t want to go to the temple.’

The discussion returned to the subject of language and the children in the household as well as Jane’s plans. She was asked if they were teaching Vietnamese to the

children and she said yes “but not in writing, just talking.” When asked why Jane ‘continued:

“We want to keep our mother tongue. Maybe some day if they go to Vietnam they can’t speak English to their aunties or uncles. We are not afraid that they can’t speak English because they go to school and all that. We are just afraid that they can’t speak Vietnamese ... Like Irish people now. They learn Irish again.” She was asked about making an attempt to teach them to read and write Vietnamese and she said:

“We try to teach them writing.”

The question of sourcing cultural materials such as books, magazines, tapes or cassettes came up and Jane said:

“No book here. Now we have newspapers here in the Asia Market and magazines and tapes and CDs and videotapes.”

She said that she had a lot of Vietnamese books with her here in Ireland and described how they were obtained:

“Maybe we get [them] from Vietnam. If somebody go to Vietnam then we ask them to buy them for us, or France, or America, or England or Germany. I have a lot of Vietnamese books here but translations [rather than Vietnamese writers].

Finally, while talking about children’s names Jane was asked whether she would use Vietnamese or English names for her children as well as about the use of English names for children in the family. She said that both Vietnamese and English language names were used with good reason:

“Because that English name, then they go to school that easier for them, for their teachers.” She thought that it would be a matter of custom to provide the children with a Vietnamese name as well:

“We want to keep the name. Maybe it has [a special] meaning, it depends. Like that ... always, we always remember our country, one thing or one person, ... it depends.”

The interview moved to a discussion about doing new things, taking part in new cultural forms such as celebrating Christmas, which Jane said they did:

“Yes, we had a party on Christmas Day.”

She said they naturally celebrated Vietnamese New Year and it was a very special occasion as we have to remember our ancestors and then for the New Year we want to have good luck.” Vietnamese New Year was usually celebrated at home but with friends as well.”

We also discussed going on holiday such as many Irish people did every year and Jane said

‘ We go to Vietnam, England some people go to America, Canada to visit friends, relations ’

At this stage the interview returned to language issues and ‘Jane’ was asked what she would like to tell her children about the Vietnamese way of life. She thought about this seriously for a moment and then replied

“Maybe we have to tell them why we live over here. We [have] to tell them the story of why we came to Ireland maybe that. Maybe tell them about the history, the government, to make them understand, if when they grow up they’re interested in knowing about Vietnam. ’

She was then asked in what language such a telling would take place and she thought “If they can understand Vietnamese or English or both

Finally she was asked how

“Little time, not [all at] once, day by day and month by month. ”

She was asked if the children in the family were taught children’s stories and songs in Vietnamese and if there were any Vietnamese children’s books at home for this

“Yes, we do children’s stories, fairy tales, Vietnamese children’s songs because we have a lot of VCDs. We teach them how to sing Vietnamese songs. No children’s books, just videos. ’

When asked if she would like bilingual Vietnamese and English books for children she said that she would be very interested as

“Yes, make them understand both languages. ’

Marriage was talked about and the question was put to Jane whether she had any preference for a marriage partner for her children. Would she prefer a Vietnamese or Chinese or Irish person? Jane felt that the real issue lay elsewhere and stated

‘It depends on their education. Well-educated but I think if I have children they will get married to an Irish-Vietnamese person because they live here. We don’t know yet, it depends. ’

Some people have got married to Irish people but Jane said that they were ‘not too many’ and ‘many men [are] marrying Irish girls. Where people returned to Vietnam for a marriage partner Jane thought it was a question of language

“The main thing is the language because they don’t speak English well Or the custom, maybe if you get married to an Irish girl they want to have the same right as a man they want to go out Vietnamese girls don’t have to have the same rights We want to work but we have to look after the children as well It’s not an obligation, just custom We don’t go out in the evening too many times I’m not meaning that [an] Irish man or girl not good but it depends on the customs If you live in a European country it’s different from an Asian country” I asked Jane about having a Vietnamese husband and she replied

“We understand each other In love or marriage language is more important In romantic life that means if we say it in words, a poem, a proverb, we can understand it”

Jane was then asked further questions on the theme of marriage but this in relation to children Would she try to find her children a husband or wife? She became quite animated regarding the matter

“Depends on them It’s up to them We just advise them If they grow up here we don’t have to tell them to go to Vietnam to get married It [is a] different life here to Vietnam They grow up here [so] they [are] like Irish people we don’t have to tell them to go back to Vietnam Maybe it’s a mistake That’s difficult for them

The conversation turned to food and Jane said that the family ate Vietnamese food and she was also asked if someone in the family grew Vietnamese vegetables She said that they grew both Irish and Vietnamese vegetables

“The first thing[s] we grow is that we have vegetables The second time it made us happy that we can go to the garden and watch them grow every day It makes us happy!”

I asked if it made her feel at home and she thought that perhaps it did

The final few questions concerned her children’s future as I asked about work As so many people were working in restaurant or take-away businesses I wanted to know if she envisaged the same future for her family and she said quite strongly

“I don’t want them [to] work in the restaurant I want them well-educated and work in an office or a factory

A future for the children centred around education and good job prospects

“We want them to work hard in school, go to university and then have a good job”

How did she feel about herself after these few years spent in Ireland?

Vietnamese Always”

Iane elaborated on this

“I wasn’t young when I came here so I always keep that feeling I don’t think that Irish people think that I am Irish, only Asian When I worked in _____ the children do this [she gestured about making her eyes narrower] and sing about Chinese I say ‘what’s wrong with that?’ Then they run away ’

Interview 16 Interview with John – Studying at secondary school

29 April 2002

John arrived in the mid-1990s when he was about 12 years old with other family members as part of the family reunification programme. He still has cousins and uncles back in Vietnam but his family is scattered all over the world. Family left in boats in 1979/80 with some finally ending up in the USA and Australia as well as in Ireland. When I asked if he still kept in touch with family in Vietnam he replied 'Not me but my mother!' and he also said

'My sister keeps in touch with friends. I forgot all my friends.'

Back in Vietnam he went to school from the ages of 7-12 and became literate in Vietnamese but has forgotten it. On his arrival here he also learnt to speak Chinese as he stayed with Cantonese-speaking relatives at first who spoke Cantonese at home. John found it "easy to pick up" and it is an additional language in the home as his sister's children speak Vietnamese, Chinese and English. Everybody speaks Vietnamese at home as well as Chinese though not quite everybody speaks English. John speaks English most of the time because he says

"I hang around with my friends and stuff like that."

He feels that English will eventually take over in his life. He feels no embarrassment at not being literate in Chinese and no longer being so in Vietnamese as he sees no reason to do so. His point of view is

'I don't see myself as going back over there.'

He also pointed out that English is more important in Vietnamese and that is also the case back in Vietnam where it is an important language to learn in terms of job prospects particularly in the tourist industry. However, 'John' considered Ireland to be home.

Most of John's friends are Irish. He said

"I know a good few Vietnamese people but don't really hang around with them."

However, as the evenings are longer he'll be playing football during the summer with them. In general he says

"I hang around with school friends."

When we talked about going to school at first without any knowledge of English he said that he picked it up and thinking back over his experience said:

“It was kind of weird when you go into class. You say to yourself: you have to get to know the language, otherwise you can’t talk.”

He made a tremendous effort with this and received help in national school:

“We got a teacher. She comes twice a week. She helped me and my ----- out.”

He went into 3rd class and spent 3 years in national school:

“Normally, I should’ve been in 5th or 6th because of my age but I didn’t know any English so I stayed back.”

I asked if the other children were friendly and ‘John’ commented that was:

“kind of weird when they don’t know you. It was difficult”

However, things improved once they got to know each other.

We then discussed going to secondary school which is an enormous change for anyone. John stated that the transition was indeed difficult:

“That was tough, that was kind of tough ... there’s all different kinds of people from different schools ... you don’t really talk to anyone until a few months in ... What got me to get to know people was sports ... after that I got to know people better.”

From his experience he said:

“I think sport is important just to get to know people.”

We talked a little about family and he said that when he was younger he still spent a lot of time at home:

“When I was 16 or 17 I don’t really go out much ... I didn’t really go out drinking ... I was spoilt.”

He receives support at home in many ways but schoolwork presents a difficulty:

“All the subjects, that’s up to me, I got no help at all.”

When I asked if this put him at a disadvantage ‘John’ replied emphatically:

“Big time!”

He pointed out that he was the only one at secondary school and that his family could not help with the systems of knowledge required for school subjects as their education had been different;

“In my family no one goes to secondary school.”

John also commented

But the teachers don't expect a lot from me that helps '

I asked if that was good or bad

"It's bad in a way because they don't push you to do the work the good part is you don't have to do much work "

John commented further

"In the evening like, I've got my exams next month I don't do much work at all '

Then I asked if he was alone in this situation and he agreed

'Only me, the boy with all the girls I hang around on my own '

We discussed being different at school and John said

"People look on me as Chinese but I feel like I'm Vietnamese and Irish Most people think I'm Chinese but they don't really know I'm from Vietnam

We talked about school and 'John' commented

"I'm the only Asian, the only foreigner in the group like '

When I questioned further about other students from other countries he thought and then said

"One or two from Albania, Italy and a Russian I think in my school I'm the only one from Asia '

Finally, I asked why he felt Vietnamese and Irish

'Because most of the time I hang around with Irish friends '

I also asked if his education was pulling him away from family and he thought not

"No, not really I leave at eight and come back at five so they understand "

We talked about whether it was easy or difficult to get to know people and John said

"While you get to know people, that's difficult When they get to know you it's OK

I just mess basically I get on well with people, they understand me '

Then I asked if it was more difficult for other members of his family and language seemed to be the main obstacle John felt

"It's easier when you go to school and speak English '

We discussed the young children in the family who had been born in Ireland and who were different again as they spoke home languages and then learnt English John commented

"It's best for the kids when they gradually understand the language "

I questioned John about his future

“I don't have a clue! Whatever comes. At the moment I'm in school. Hopefully next year I'll be going to college and doing a course or something. I'll see how I get on in my Leaving

Then I asked if he had applied to college and he said

“I have the form filled out. I'm going to send it this Saturday. So hopefully they take me in.”

I asked if he wanted to work in a takeaway and we was most emphatic about not doing so as he had tried it

No, you miss, basically, your life. When everyone's going out on Friday and Saturday you'll be stuck in a take-away working. I tried one in ----- and one in ----- but it's a boring job.”

In the final part of the interview we talked speculatively about the future and I asked if he was going to marry a Chinese, Vietnamese or Irish girl! John said

“I don't know. You can't really say! Whoever you like and that's it.”

When I asked if there might be pressure put on him by family regarding who he might marry he said

“That's nothing to do with my family! There's no pressure. I'll marry whoever I love not who my sister says. I'm not going to marry who my ma says and ruin my life!”

We then talked about how going to school makes a difference. John commented

“I'm going to school with Irish people. They [family] hang around with Asian people. I hang around with Irish people.”

As we finished I asked what he would have thought if I had brought a translator along,

“I'd still be answering in English. English right now is kind of my first language, well, I consider as my first language anyway.”

I then asked what about using a translator to talk to his sister and he wondered why

“She'd be able to speak in English. She'd be able to answer your questions.”

We both agreed it would be strange. Finally, I checked if he had learnt any Chinese in Vietnam and John said that he had gone to a Chinese school to learn Mandarin but hadn't gone for long enough.

17 Interview with Wendy – Struggling with three identities

6 May 2002

Wendy arrived about 8 years ago as part of family reunification. This was the second major upheaval in her life as she went to China as a refugee at the age of 4 in 1978. Her family fled the situation in Vietnam which came about because of the short war between the two countries and internal politics in Vietnam.

V So, how old were you when you went to China?

W I was four.

V And why did you go?

W Because Vietnam and China have the war, you know, so we are go back to China.

V How many people in your family who went?

W Eleven.

V Eleven? OK.

W Parents and granddaddy, grandmother and one aunty and brothers and sisters and me as well.

V How did you get there? Did you walk?

W By train and boat as well.

V OK, and were there lots of people leaving the same time as you?

W Yeah, quite a lot of people.

V Were they very frightened? Were you frightened?

W Because I just four I can't remember that but I heard my mum and my daddy say it was very frightened, you know, the boat and the train. Sometimes in the journey a lot [of] people were sick, sometimes they were dead in the coach.

V So, do you know? Because you say you went by boat. Where did you go from?

W Haiphong to Beihai.

V To Beihai in China?

W Beihai to Quangninh and Quangninh by train to Guangdong.

V And that's where you lived wasn't it? OK, so the boat journey was difficult and dangerous?

W Yeah. The boat was overcrowded, you know, too many people in the boat. Some people sick in the boat and they have no medicine, so some young baby they are dead in the boat, they just thrown in the sea, that's very sad.

V Yeah So your parents there was a big group of you, a big family group your parents must have been worried about you?

W Yeah! [Laughs]

V And when you all went to China what was life like for your parents?

W It was bad, you know, very hard My mummy and my daddy, they have too many people, too many children and other parents, eating, food and clothes and education For that, they only have 72 Yen for the month so we need European relations for some money to help there

V So your relatives in Europe sent you money?

W Yeah

V So, some of your family in 1978, did they go to Europe?

W Yeah

V Where did they go?

W They go to London, Ireland and America

V So really your family was completely scattered?

W Yeah

V And everyone left by boat?

W Yes, by boat It was a horrible journey so they say

V And everyone left from Haiphong, did they?

W No We lived in _____ but my relations, they lived in a different city in Vietnam

V Everybody from North Vietnam or South?

W North

So your family lived through the American War and when the American war was finished then there was the war with China

W Yeah! [Laughter]

V They were difficult times for your family So, you were 4 years old when you went to China What was it like growing up

Well, when we went back to china, that time there was the Mao Tse Tung What do you call in English?

V The Cultural Revolution was just finished

W So we had a very hard life in China

V But you were lucky because you had some family who could send you a little bit of money

W We are luckier than neighbours, they have no relations in Europe or in foreign They have a very, very hard life They have just rice for cooking, no [other] food nothing no clothes

V It was really difficult for everybody and difficult for you because you began with nothing When you went to school, how old were you when you went to school?

W 6

V You learnt to read and write Mandarin? You spoke Cantonese?

W Yeah [Conversation aside in Chinese and V thanking the family for dinner]

W You learnt Mandarin and you speak Cantonese but you don't really speak Vietnamese?

W No, just learning from home, just a bit We are speak [dialect] as well In Guangdong they speak *Kejia*

V Oh, I think in English we call it Hakka

W Yeah, Hakka

V So you speak Hakka I think quite a lot of people speak Hakka, also in Hong Kong And your parents speak Hakka? And you brother?

W Everyone speaks Hakka We are learning Hakka very quickly not like in here We are [not] learning English quickly That means we are Chinese [Mutual laughter]

V So you went to school What was it like growing up? You came from Vietnam so did people think you were Chinese or did they think you were Vietnamese?

W They are thinking we are Vietnamese They are always nice Just sometimes they say we are Vietnamese We are very difficult in Vietnam they say we are Chinese and in China they say we are Vietnamese I don't know who am I [laughter] Sometimes we've got this mix, you know Now in here they say we are Chinese but we have an Irish passport

V Now you've got an Irish passport, does that make you Chinese and something else? How do you feel now?

W Just feel OK

V But do you feel Irish or what d'you feel? Do you feel Vietnamese? Chinese? Irish?

W I think I m I still thinking I am Chinese because they [work colleagues] ask me if China and Ireland have the you know, World Cup Who you want?

V Oh, who you re going to be up for? [Mutual laughter]

W I say China! [Laughter] They say 'you are bad, you are Irish now!' [Laughter]

V Is that people talking to you in the take-away?

W Yeah

V So you re voting for China! [Mutual laughter] So, you feel Chinese?

W Yeah, because I have the Chinese education, you know

V Do you think your brothers feel the same or are they a little bit different from you?

W I don't think so I think they feel the same

V does it make it difficult for them to learn English or become Irish because they feel Chinese?

W Yeah That's the way which we are

V Let's move on a little bit You grew up in China Were you happy?

W Yeah, I was happy

V How?

W I was learning a lot of Chinese culture You know China is powerful, they have a long history I am Chinese My mum always don t like it when I say it this way! She says China is very poor She doesn t like China! [Mutual laughter]

V but you think that's an important part of your life You learnt Chinese history, you learnt Chinese culture What about here because you're here now Did you get, was it possible to learn Irish culture, Irish history?

W No I know nothing about Ireland because, you know in here we are need working really hard and difficult to find out something different to do Like, it depends, this Saturday I have a day off When I wake up I say 'can I find someone go with me for the day' but I think today I can't find anyone because today s a busy day for the Chinese take-away Everyone's working! So I just stay at home all days

V But you prefer to go out and do something [agreement and short silence] So you feel a little bit lonely?

W Yeah because it s very difficult to have friends If I want Irish friends I'm afraid I can't They can't understand me

V So you find it difficult to make Irish friends? [agreement] Do you feel it's difficult to even try?

W Yeah I think it's the difficult of the beginning to make friends I think if I can go amusement, it's OK because the Irish are very friendly but sometimes you know if I say something wrong I feel very embarrassed Like in the take-away where I have some work, some friends there, they're Irish they say 'your speaking is OK, I can understand you, we can be friends, don't worry about it,

V But you still feel embarrassed You feel shy?

W If I [don't] know the new friends I feel very uncomfortable If I know the words, how to say but I am too embarrassed, so I can forget, so it makes it more difficult so I can't open myself sometimes I know how to say the words but suddenly I forget [mutual laughter]

V So you have some friends, Irish friends in the take-away but most of the people you know are Chinese [Agreement] You have your family, where are your Chinese friends from? Because you have got friends in your family, any girlfriends who are Chinese?

W Before I have a few but now they are all get married They have their own life, you know In here some live far, some live too far, so they are working so we are very difficult to make the time to have a chat or visit each other Not like when we are single so we are just get the phone and we are go out, have fun Now they have children, they are needed by their family In Chinese culture friends not important, family is important

V And most people here who are Chinese would feel this family is important and not friends And what about you, what do you feel?

W I think both is important Family you need look after and with possibility of the family but friends if you have some problems you talk to your friends You need friends to help you Sometimes some things you can't talk to your family except to friends

V but usually most people would look to family first Do you think you've changed a little bit since you've been here, since you've come to Ireland?

W Yeah, I appreciate it a lot

V How?

W: In China I'm most happy and with no responsibility. In here my family to be ... And everyone has no English so I feel very tired and I'm sick of doing sometimes. You know they think of something and everything I need to look after ...

V: Because you have the best English?

W: No! [Laughter]. I think that's my responsibility so I have to do [it]. {It's} not that I'm good at English. Like my _____. She got pregnant. I need to take her to visit the doctor in Holles Street for a check-up, my mum and dad, they get sick, I need to bring them to a doctor and everything.

V: This is just your responsibility to your family and not because you have the best English? So you have lots of things to do to look after family and nobody else in your family can do this just you. [Yes]. Is this because you're single and you can go with everybody?

W: You know in here so many people change themselves. I feel family's very important to me, that's all ... it's my responsibility.

V: So it's really your responsibility?

W: Yes. I think my family [if] everyone happy, I am happy. My mum and my daddy, before they're working very hard and now they're retired. I want them to get a good life in the future, go for holidays, just relax, enjoy life.

V: Do you prefer to be here or would you like to go back to China?

W: No, I prefer here because in here, anyway you're working hard but you still have your good life. In China ... now China's changing a lot and you still have a good life but you know the Chinese government, they're very, they always change the things and you don't know what happen[s] tomorrow, even now you're very good. Now in Ireland if you're working you can still have your good life ... everything's not changed.

V: So you feel more free?

W: Free and ... First, we are Chinese people, they're always thinking of family, if sometimes you want to do something different you can do you know ... like it depends, now I want to go on holiday, I have a boyfriend, not what means a boyfriend just a man friend. If I want to go on holiday with him I can't because in China that's not allowed [laughter], they will say something bad about you.

V: OK, so it's not a good thing to do. So, how are you going to go on holiday?

W Go with my daddy! Sometime[s] I go with my friends, only girlfriends but I can't do anything I want. It depends [on] the friends when their holiday follow her you know. I can't have my own ideas, like if I want to go to Cyprus but they say 'I want to go to Spain' so I change my mind, I go to Spain so it's not free I think.

V So it's your family which is really important and you have to think about everything you do. Do you have any family back in Vietnam or back in China?

W No, just go back for holidays.

V When you first came to Ireland how did you feel? And how do you feel now?

W When I first came [to] Ireland I feel a little disappointed because I think Europe is very big country, everything is new.

V So it wasn't what you thought?

W Yeah, but when I stay in Ireland I feel changed because Ireland is a very safe place for life, that means I grow up [here].

V OK so it's a safe place to grow up. You feel happier now about being here than before or is it mixed?

W Mixed, you know, because when I first come here I [was] still young, not thinking too much, just working, and with my friends. Every day is very easy, but you grow up, you have more responsibility and more things to do. Like, you think of your future so that's changed.

V So you think about the future. If you get married [laughter] what do you feel about getting married? Would you marry an Irish boy? A Chinese boy? What would your family feel?

W If I marry I want a Chinese boy, first choice.

V Why?

W Because I think language is very important. You need very, very. I think marriage is two live[s] together not like here if you want marriage so young marriage, that's the important thing. First important thing in my life is to be married. Everyone say[s] I am fussy [mutual laughter].

V Well, that's not a bad thing.

W Some want to get married, they want the husband to have money or good working or something. That's not my first thing. First thing I think is to be well, get on very well, that's the first important thing.

V You're really talking about someone you love isn't it? [Yeah] So, supposing your parents said why don't you marry this one, he's good?

W Last time there's one boy, he's very good, he's not drinking, not smoking not gambling. It's very good to be a husband. But when I stayed with him I feel not very comfortable and he's very quiet, he doesn't understand me. I don't want you to say you love me. We are not talking but he doesn't know what I want. So we just go out for a month. I can't get on with him. My mum's, every day charging me. Who do you want to be? You want to be the king? Everyone says you are very good, you know, a very good couple. I say you are not me. You don't know how I'm feeling. You know, in home my mum say anything if she want do anything, I can do anything for her except this one. I want [to be] free on this. My mum and dad, you know, they're Chinese. They have no education, [V that doesn't matter] they doesn't know what I'm feeling. I just say you don't worry about me. Here I'm good, that's my responsibility. But now I am grow up so let me do something I want. But my mum, she's annoy me for nearly a month she's make me quite crazy! [Laughter] But my daddy, he know[s] me more, he say[s] it depend[s] on me, and being good that's [the] important thing. He says money or something, that doesn't matter. To be happy, can be poor.

V Your mother and father, when they got married, did they choose or was it the family that chose for them?

W No, they choose, on their own. That's the thing the point I say to my mum. I say when you married you can choose for yourself. Now it's changed. 50 years, 40 years ago you can't choose, now it's changed. 2,000 years. Why I can't change. I have grown up. [Laughter] She says I'm too fussy.

V Maybe, maybe not. But if you want to get married here, are there lots of Chinese boys that you can choose from?

W No, no I think it's very difficult to find a boyfriend. Now so many Chinese people come here but they're very young. They're between 22-25. Some Hong Kong people, they are living here for a long time but they always get married so it's very difficult to find a partner here.

V The Hong Kong people who've lived here a long time, they marry other people from Hong Kong?

W Yeah, and others as well.

V And Irish people?

W Yeah.

V So in fact there's not very many people that you can choose from. So some Chinese people marry Irish girls, Irish boys.

W Yeah. My cousin's married an Irish boy. She got one children.

V Are her parents quite happy?

W Um, they are not really happy [laughter] but it's OK.

V Because she didn't marry a Chinese boy?

W Yeah. But she's a different case because she was living here for 22 years and she's like Irish now. That's different completely.

V Was she born here or did she come here when she was very young?

W She came here when she was 8.

V So it's different. When something like that happens do you think the family gets a little bit worried because it's breaking the family a little bit?

W Yes, I think so. I have one friend, Irish, he's very like me [V Really?], and I really like him but I let, I let it go. I just stop it quickly because some time I'm thinking too much about my family. I don't want them upset.

V So you stopped going with this boy. The Chinese family is very strong so if you get married outside that breaks the family a little bit [W Yeah} so you think that would worry most mothers and fathers [W Yeah] That's the feeling I have, I think, because the Chinese family is very strong [W Yeah] so if you go outside it's quite difficult, isn't it? [W Yeah] But your cousin, it's different because she's grown up here so much [W Yeah] it's a different thing. In your family when people have got married, your brothers.

W My brothers got married.

V They married Irish girls? Chinese girls?

W Chinese girls.

V Were the Chinese girls living here or did they get married from China?

W One's living here.

V And the other one?

W Lived in China.

V The girl living in China, did she come from Guangdong?

W Yeah, Guangdong.

V And is she Chinese-Chinese or Vietnamese-Chinese?

W I think she's Vietnamese-Chinese because her granny is Vietnamese.

V So did your family know her family?

W Yeah because she is my relation Her aunty is my uncle's wife

V So your sister-in-law, did she try to learn English before she came?

W No, she's learning English in here

V Does she feel lonely?

W Yeah

V What about your parents? Do they feel lonely here or is everything better for them or are some things different?

W My mum's the same here I think My mum's very, very like Ireland but my daddy he's OK but it's different for him You know, he got education from China, he's more, he's Chinese, unlike my mum He knows Chinese, he knows China, he love[s] the history, he loves the culture Now in here he's lonely, he stay at home all the time, no friends [His] friend is that television

V So your father, he went to school in Vietnam?

W Yeah, but he learning Chinese

V He went to Chinese school in Vietnam

W Both And Vietnamese

V He learnt Chinese and Vietnamese

W Yeah

V But he went to Chinese school And your mother?

W My mum, she no been to school She very simple woman

V Was that usual, that a young man went to school but a young woman didn't?

W Yes, in that time

V So your father is quite educated and your mother, she's the home person

W Yeah Her life is her husband, her children [she] doesn't know what the country is and something different from home

V So that makes life quite different for her?

W Yeah Sometimes we're talking, she doesn't understand it

V But she's happy here

W Yeah

V Just thinking about the future, say you get married, say you get married to a nice Chinese boy because you find the right boy and you have children What languages are the children going to speak at home? Their first language?

W Their first language I think is Cantonese

V Why?

W: That's because we speak Cantonese at home.

V: It's important that they have the family language?

W: Yeah. Even when they go to school when they are 5 I'm teaching them Cantonese .. and I will teaching her Chinese words and Chinese culture and Chinese history and let her know about China. I think even we are ... I am still Chinese, you know.

V: And that's important to you?

W: Um.

V: And would you teach your children to write Chinese, teach them Mandarin?

W: Yeah.

V: So really you children would speak two languages, have two cultures?

W: Yeah.

V: And do you hope they would be comfortable with both cultures?

W: Yeah, I think they will, like _____'s children. They know both languages now. But that's [because] they're young. When they're in Irish school I think they change, they're not speak Cantonese very much at all.

V: So if you're not careful the language can disappear.

W: Yeah. So we have to look after.

V: In some families maybe Cantonese will disappear.

W: Yeah, it will. My boss, he's from Hong Kong, his first child speaks Cantonese OK but his second's never talking Chinese, they're speaking English and for everything he says 'Why in Chinese.'

V: He's really speaking English, not Chinese anymore.

W: Yeah.

V: If you have children you want them to keep both languages?

W: Yeah.

V: If you want them to keep both languages do you think you have to work a little bit?

W: Yeah. Like in Sunday we have the Chinese school in Dublin. We bring them to the school to learning Chinese.

V: There's a Chinese school in Clondalkin, isn't there?

W: One's in Clondalkin and one's in Tallaght. So, I will recommend they watching Chinese tv [laughter]. My friends in the office, their boy is the same age as my boss's

boy but he s very likes Chinese He speaks very good Chinese because he loves Chinese and China so he just is good at Chinese

V So you can use the tv to keep the language? That s a good idea isn't it?

W Yeah He likes the programmes so he learn[s] from the programmes

V Is that the same channels that you can get? So do quite a lot of people get the same channels as you?

W Yeah One is a free channel, *feng kuang tai* [*Hong Kong channel which translates as Phoenix Channel*], but is [on] the Sky movie digital but my one is different *Feng kuang tai*, they have four language[s], they have Taiwan movies, and Singapore as well

V So Taiwan Chinese, and Singapore

W And Malaysia

V And Hong Kong

W They have different movies Not the same as my one I get this one, it s only Hong Kong Maybe next year I change to China

V To *feng kuang tai*?

W Yeah, that s the free channel and it s 24 hours You can recommend someone to use this channel!

V And you can get it from Sky digital?

W Yeah That's a free channel

V That's pretty good! Because the one you've got is only Hong Kong and then you have to pay for that OK, so you've got tv, what other Chinese things do you have? Do you get Chinese books, Chinese newspapers, magazines, music?

W No, only Chinese tv

V Do you buy newspapers, Chinese tapes?

W Not here

V Not here Why not here?

W We have [get] a lot of tape[s] and cassette[s] in China because every year my mum and my daddy, they go back to China They get in that way It's more cheap

V OK so your parents go back to China every year and then they can buy quite a lot and bring it back What about if you wanted to buy something here, if you wanted to buy Chinese tapes, magazines, easy or difficult?

W It's quite difficult, only in the Asia Market but it s very expensive in here In china 1 euro and in here 20 euro [for] one CD

V: That's a big difference. It makes sense then to go back to China and buy everything there.

V: Have you been to other countries and seen Chinese communities in other countries?

W: Yeah.

V: Where?

W: For holiday.

V: And where did you go?

W: Germany. To visit my _____.

V: Are there lots of Chinese people in Germany?

W: No. Very small community. I go to my _____ only a few neighbours [are] Chinese.

V: So it's a little bit like here?

W: Yeah. Now Ireland's changed ... very, too much Chinese people here.

V: You think so? Why?

W: Everywhere we can see Chinese people now. You know now I think most, a lot of Chinese people is not a bad thing but some people is very bad. They go here, gambling all the time, do nothing ...

V: Have you been to London?

W: I was in London [for] 10 months.

V: Did you like it?

W: No, I don't like London.

V: Why not?

W: Too noisy city, pollution and too many different country people. They are not friendly.

V: It was too strange and too different?

W: Yeah!

V: You prefer here?

W: Yeah.

V: Have you been to America?

W: Yeah! I like America! It's like a small China. Everywhere is Chinese. Everywhere is Chinese food, real Chinese food and the streets are like in China, it's like a China town. They not use English very much because they have a Chinese lawyer, a Chinese doctor, everyone [from] China.

V Do you think that s a good thing or a bad thing?

W I think it s a good thing for Chinese people in a foreign country

V Why?

W Because they feel more comfortable sometime[s] in Ireland we have something they do but which I can't do so we are forget If in that way you can do everything you want

V So you mean sometimes because you don t know how to do something you just don't do it

W Yeah

V And you don't know how to do it

W Yeah

V And you can't ask anybody

W Yeah

V Ah! So then you can't ask, you don't know so you can t do

W Yeah

V So if you have a Chinese person you could ask, it would be much easier

W Yeah Like [if] I want to do my own business If in America you can find a Chinese lawyer

V A Chinese lawyer

W Like the, sell the things

V Eh?

W Like I have a house, I sell to you The people, what's it called? The o

V Oh, the owners OK, so if you wanted to open your own business then you could find some place that you could buy from other Chinese Yeah?

W Yeah

V Yeah And that makes everything much easier

W Yeah And you can go to the, they have the bank, a Chinese bank, you can borrow money from there to buy your own business

V And you feel happier borrowing from a Chinese bank?

W Yeah

V Because you know it?

W Yeah [laughs]

V How is a Chinese bank different?

W [Laughs] I think that it's not different but we know the language, we know the law we know everything, we can use. Sometimes they are thought, in the bank like we don't know in English you know. That's the biggest difference, it's difficult that way.

V Ok so you feel because you can speak Chinese you feel much more comfortable. So English becomes a big problem then?

W A very big problem.

V Is it the biggest?

W Yeah.

V You think so?

W In your life it's OK but if you want to do sometimes professional you need very, very good English.

V If you want to have a different kind of job. So you think for someone like you it's made things a little bit difficult?

W Yeah, yeah.

V But for your children, hopefully not.

W No, I don't think so. They will have a life more than me.

V That's important. Would you like to go back to school to learn more English or to learn something?

W Yeah, but you know it's very difficult.

V Because you have to go out to work as well.

W You know in Chinese we are thinking life is important, you have your money for your life, that's the first important thing. They want to buy a car, they want to buy a house, something, you know.

V So you have to work hard really.

W There's too much work.

V Too much work. So now we've talked a lot. How do you feel? Do you feel Vietnamese? Do you feel Chinese? Do you feel Irish? Do you feel all of them?

W Yeah, all of them [laughs].

V Do you kind of feel a little bit all of everything or you feel more Chinese? What do you think?

W I still feel I am Chinese.

V OK that's it!

Interview 18 with Aisling – Doing the Leaving

14 December 2002

Aisling chose to be interviewed in her own home in _____, a Dublin suburb. As is customary I took off my shoes before entering a cosy and comfortable house where we talked for a while in the living room before settling down to the interview proper. Some of her family looked in briefly before going off to work in the family take-away. There was time for a quick hello over tea and biscuits which Aisling's thoughtful mother supplied throughout the interview. I noted how tired one of the family was before the little group set off to work again during the busy weekend period with its long hours.

The family had come to Ireland as part of family reunification in the mid-nineties when Aisling was in her early teens. I asked her if she still had family back in Vietnam and she answered:

“No, relatives. But I have no family there – uncles, aunts and cousins. But mum does. When she talks about them, who they are, I'm not really sure.”

All her immediate family are here with her, the wider family had begun to break up at the end of the war in Vietnam when some relatives went to the USA. She mentioned that the family had enjoyed a good standard of living back in Vietnam prior to the fall of Saigon. However, her parents suffered afterwards as her father was taken to a reeducation camp and her mother had to struggle to look after the family on her own. Consequently, Aisling considered their life to be better in Dublin and she said:

“Yes, definitely, the living conditions are better. It's not as hard for my family.”

I asked her if she could remember how she had felt on arrival in Ireland and after considering the question for a moment Aisling replied:

‘It was in the summer and I thought ‘the day is so long’ but in winter I thought ‘it's only 3 and it's dark already,’ – houses, the outside is not so nice here – outside is nice over there [in Vietnam] but not so nice inside. I was kind of bored. I didn't know anybody, I didn't have any English. I didn't hang around with anybody.’”

When asked if she had been lonely she said:

‘Kind of – yes. It gets better if you go to school. You get friends there.’”

What about learning English? She did not speak it before she came to Ireland or before starting primary school 'Aisling' reflected for a moment before saying "It was kind of hard I got to pick it up a lot with my friends Not very good with my tenses and things my grammar's so bad I got a teacher who helped me a lot She explained a lot of words which you couldn't know if you just hang out with your friends She came at first 3 times a week, then 2, then just once a week "

When questioned about making friends, Aisling answered

It was easy because everybody was nice well, not everybody, most people and they still are '

We discussed the children who had not been as nice and 'Aisling' said about them

"Most of the people who annoyed me then have trouble outside school now They were always messers '

We spoke about secondary school and learning English and she thought that help came

"mostly from my friends If I didn't understand anything I asked them to explain it to me later I don't really need that much help '

As for teachers

"They are really nice with me all the teachers know me by now I got on well with my teachers and everything "

Her parents were very encouraging with regard to school and were pleased that she was able to have the opportunity of an education and they encouraged her

"very encouraging If you want to learn they encourage you to learn more "

We discussed school and I asked Aisling about her Junior Certificate and whether she had taken Honours or Pass subjects In fact she had taken Honours and had achieved an impressive result in maths She told me her results

"I did grand I got 6 Bs and an A in Maths and a C in English I was kind of pleased I got a C in English because only 2 people got Bs '

I told her that was an excellent result and I was further impressed as she was taking Honours Maths in her Leaving Cert and was coping well Outside of academic interests she was not inclined to participate in sports activities outside school though she had sung in the school choir

“I’m not in teams or anything There’s the Christmas liturgy yesterday and I was in the choir I’m not really a sporty person ”

What had helped Aisling to adapt to life in Ireland? She said

“School helps a lot, friends as well I don’t know ”

It would have been for her to assess her own outgoing, lively personality and her self-confidence so I asked if her parents helped

‘I don’t know usually they want me to know about the lifestyle in Vietnam so I won’t forget At Christmas we eat stuff that’s traditional in Vietnam ’

In order to understand her answer fully I asked if her parents tried to keep Vietnamese traditions alive

“They’re not strict if you want to find out about the Irish lifestyle you’ve got to go and learn yourself ”

I asked who had found it easiest to adapt

“Easiest for me to adapt Maybe harder for them ”

Who had benefited the most?

“I know the lifestyle here well enough You know more than if you stay in one place If I didn’t come here I wouldn’t know English, Irish and stuff like that You know more ”

We talked about the language spoken in the home and Aisling said that she spoke Vietnamese

“because of my parents They don’t speak English much so we have to speak Vietnamese to them

Did she consider herself to be bilingual? After a pause she thought probably so and then commented on the process of language learning

‘It’s so much harder to take up English now [when] you’re young you should learn it ’

Were her parents lonely?

Aisling felt that their situation had changed as other relatives had come to live in Ireland This was particularly important for her mother

“Before she didn’t really have other people’s houses to visit Don’t really have that much place to go It’s harder for them, yeah, but they like it here [and because it is] so much better they don’t really mind it ”

What about visits or going out?

“We didn’t have a car. It’s the weather as well. Since we got the car we know a bit more. My mum doesn’t go out. My dad is different. He likes to go out more.”

Did she consider language to be a barrier for her parents?

“I guess it still does [is].”

We agreed that language was a central concern for so many people and Aisling thought that it was certainly an important consideration for her parents though there were other issues as well.

“They don’t have as much Irish people as friends because of the language. First, you can’t communicate. I guess a different perspective on life as well. Around here, if like girls, say they smoke and drank. Irish people accept it. Over in Vietnam it’s difficult to accept. Over there you’re seen as a bad girl. If you go out with people who drink and smoke and you don’t do it you wouldn’t really fit in. Most of the time, say friends around my brother’s age, they’d be hanging around pubs and things. We’re only allowed to drink on special occasions but that’s only for the boys really. It’s kind of sexist like.”

Would parents be happy about girls going out to the pub?

“It’s like tradition. Girls don’t go out and do these things. It’s a tradition. It’s a medical thing as well as there’s loads of smoke as well. I can’t breathe.”

What was the reaction of school friends to this difference between her and them?

“My friends say ‘what are you doing at the weekend? Don’t you go out? You’re wasting being 18 [legally being permitted to drink alcohol]. Most of my friends have a drink, they’re 17 or 16, they have a drink, I wouldn’t say every week. They like drinking. hanging out.’

Was there any pressure on her to join in?

“Not really. If my friends go out for a drink and if I don’t go it’s OK, they don’t put pressure on me to go out with them. I don’t go with my friends outside of school.

What they do I don’t really know. They tell you stuff but I don’t go out with them after school. I wouldn’t feel any pressure.”

Did she feel caught between two worlds?

“I don’t know. As I don’t really go out with friends after school they wouldn’t really have that much influence over me.”

At this point I asked Aisling about her future plans, whether she intended to go to college and who influenced her decisions

‘ Well, family My parents really want me to go For myself, if you don t go to college and get a degree you wouldn’t get a good job or position You have to study, get a degree to get a job here It’s a necessity My family as well there’s always something stopping my brothers and sisters I’ll be the first in my family I like school anyway in school you don’t feel much pressure ’

The conversation then turned to opportunities for family members in Irish society and Aisling answered simply

“Yes

We spoke about her brothers and sisters and she said of an older sister

“My sister, she went to Irish [secondary] school I don t know what year she was in She didn’t have any English She found it hard and she didn’t want to go ”

This sister had received no special tuition in secondary school and Aisling said

“When she was over there [in Vietnam] she would have been in 5th year When she came over here catching up, it would have been impossible She did other courses with FAS to get a job ”

Did she get a job?

“She was a receptionist ”

At the moment her sister was working at the counter in the family business and I said that she needed a good level of English for such a job as it was similar to a receptionist s role

We talked about the future and I asked some questions about getting married

“Haven’t got a clue! Don’t go out here so I don t have a boyfriend I myself would like to see how I’m going to get married here! ’

I suggested that it might be tricky and Aisling added

“Funny too! ’

Would her parents want her to marry someone Vietnamese?

“My dad said he doesn t mind if it’s Vietnamese or Irish My mam would like me to marry someone Vietnamese more but she wouldn’t mmd If it’s Vietnamese she’d know how to talk to him ”

If she were to marry someone Irish then that person might not understand her parents?

Aisling answered this by saying

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‘If [it s] someone [Vietnamese] from over here that s grand because they know the lifestyle If someone from over there [Vietnam] then they don t know I might marry someone from England like my _____

I commented that there was a larger Vietnamese community in England which implied the possibility of choice with regard to a marriage partner, and Aisling said

‘Yeah, you never know ’

Had she been to England?

“A few times The last time you rang I went and then I forgot to ring you back!

Where had she visited?

“London Manchester ’

Which did she prefer?

‘I guess I like London more It has more places to go and see if you are a tourist ’

Which place did she prefer to be in the most?

“In London We have a church over there, a Vietnamese church My sister wanted me to go over this Christmas and meet people ”

Would it make a difference having a bigger community here in Ireland?

“I don t know I don t really know many Vietnamese here I m like my mother I don t like to go out to other people s houses Just to my relatives and that s it

So it would make no difference then?

If there s more people around it wouldn t make a difference to me But if there s more relatives that live over there [Vietnam] and they re here That would be great ’

Family then was the most important thing of all?

“Yeah I don t mind where I am If my family s there then that s OK ”

Now we discussed some hypothetical questions and I asked Aisling if she would teach her children Vietnamese

“Absolutely It s always better to know more If they want to find out about their heritage they can find it out It s better than if you make them

At this point we talked about life, language and cultural experiences as I spoke about my own background and my family s life in a communist state which finally led to our own splintering across several countries I asked if Aisling had family members elsewhere

“Yeah, my uncle in America and my _____ in London Got married a couple of years ago My cousin lives somewhere in France I only saw my uncle because he came over for the wedding ’

Would she like to go and visit him?

“Yeah, I would One of my wishes is to go and travel around and see what different countries are like before I settle down I want to see what life over there is like ’

And France?

“I’ve been to France Paris, once with my school! The trip was fun because it was with my friends and with the school so we got to see monuments I d like to stay more!”

Had she visited her relatives?

“No I only know I have a cousin He doesn’t speak Vietnamese that much He speaks French a lot more My dad s cousins they live over in America but I haven t seen them and they’re really old My dad says one of his cousins in his late twenties he just doesn’t speak Vietnamese because he s been in America so long so when he speaks it’s just funny He says it himself but the way he says that, it’s wrong”

‘Aisling’ spoke about the past when the exodus from Vietnam began with the ‘boat people’ as she knew a *little family history*

“My sister went on a boat a few times My mum let her go She went a few times She got caught and they wouldn’t let her go It was lucky in a way She was going to go but then she didn’t go and that boat sank She was lucky I saw a documentary on it It was a miracle like how they got over the sea The boat was so tiny

We looked back at the past and I asked Aisling if she had gone to school in Vietnam before coming to Ireland and she said

“Yes

She had learnt to read and write Vietnamese and she still read in Vietnamese and listened to Vietnamese music

“My spelling is just horrible now When I write out a song and I read it back that’s not how to write!”

Was she forgetting her Vietnamese?

“Yes Even the words as well When I m talking to my parents as well You re just completely blank in Vietnamese comprehension, blank in English what word is it?

Did this bother her?

‘No, not really When it happens I just burst out laughing!

Was it happening more and more?

“I don’t know I guess if I don’t speak much of it I’ll forget more and more Before I just didn’t like reading newspapers in Vietnamese or in English if I didn’t do that I’d forget it more ’

How did she access books and music?

‘Internet [Since] a year ago or something And I’ve only been reading a couple of months Vietnamese news You can get CDs and things from England and countries that have lots of Vietnamese My sister sends over some videos My brother, when he goes to Vietnam he brings home DVDs, videos, CDs In America there’s loads my sister tells me but I haven’t been there ’

What about tv channels?

“There’s a Vietnamese channel but you have to get a satellite for that It’s only 8 hours I don’t really watch it But I like Chinese films you can rent these kind of films and they’re dubbed in Vietnamese You forget it’s Chinese Plus Chinese films are really good ’

Had she seen *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* when it came out?

“I liked the way that it was shot It was serious I found that the series is better 20 something hours The one in the cinema, the fight is much better they have so much money I saw *Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* I liked the *Lord of the Rings* It was so much better ’

Aisling was looking forward to seeing the *Two Towers* which was due for release soon

As we finished another round of hot drinks I asked Aisling if she preferred Vietnamese food

“Yes It’s just like at home you eat with your family I probably like Vietnamese food better than Irish food I eat Irish food but I’ll always like Vietnamese food better There’s different things in it Here it’s just chicken It’s easier to cook as well, chicken nuggets When I cook for my nieces and nephews I cook Irish food but I prefer Vietnamese food