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Language as Identity

By Bronwen Elisabeth Roberts

English is not just a national language it is a unique global passport.

The sameness of language can overcome any identity crisis, sometimes inconveniently. When I arrived in London, fresh from South Africa and desperate to immerse myself in a foreign culture, language became an issue. If I opened my mouth to speak and there was a South African nearby (and there usually was...) they would inevitably gravitate toward me and want to bond. This was not what I had in mind; I have nothing against my fellow citizens but I had spent a lot of money, and come a long way to have a 'foreign' experience. The concept of a bunch of us hanging out together in London was beyond me.

Just as there is safety in numbers, there is safety in a shared language. Our voice quality, accent, vocabulary, and particular idiom all denote who we are and where we come from. Language articulates our identity. Others recognise this identity and either there is a synchronicity (you're part of the group) or there is not. Friends feel the same about things; have similar interests; and will often express themselves in a common language.

The British government's Kingman report in 1988 on the teaching of English firmly endorsed the importance of language education as an instrument of personal development, and the promotion of a sense of personal identity: the 'shaping of personality and the exploration of self are inextricably bound up with language development." But the report also recognised the role of language teaching to develop wider identities. "From childhood," it says, "we learn to use language not only to identify with certain groups but also to exclude others."

To belong to a particular 'nation' is a sense of identity. We reside in a certain geographical area and are as a result, a certain race. South Africa is a good example of people of many different races trying to develop a sense of patriotic identity in respect of the nation. This, of course is only happening now, and South Africa was a prime example of how certain groups who do not talk the same, look the same, or act the same are excluded from the 'greater' group. However, given the importance of communication in fostering links between people, it is not surprising that language is high on the list. South Africa has eleven official languages but English is the one you need in order to get a worthwhile job; in fact, there are few countries in the world where English is not used in the course of a day.

English has become our global common ground.

Language helps to articulate cross-national identities that would otherwise be difficult to sustain. Therefore, the Kingman report emphasised the need for children to widen their horizons and prepare themselves to enter a 'public world' to which the passport is language. International conferences are usually held in English; our cross-national youth culture currently converse mostly over the Internet in English; popular music is often sung in English and so it goes. Language is seen as opening pathways not only to careers but also to fulfilment in identifying with the global community at large – and which you may seek to identify with as well.

The

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passionate and multilingual with 20 years experience in the language arena. Providing professional translation and interpreting services around the globe means more than just solid translation at

competitive prices - understanding different cultures and the use of language is essential too.

Fighting Identity Theft

By James H. Dimmitt

Chances are good that you know someone who has been victimized by the fastest growing crime – identity theft. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) reported that there were 10 million cases of identity theft in 2002 alone. It's estimated that someone's identity is stolen every 79 seconds.

The bad news is with increasing amounts of personal information available to an experienced identity thief, it shows few signs of slowing down. The good news is that identity fraud is now a federal crime with stiff penalties for those who perpetrate these crimes.

Here are a few simple steps you can take now to minimize your risk:

- 1) Check your credit report annually, if not more often. Most victims of identity theft don't realize they've been victimized until 14 months after the crime. By then the damage is done and you will spend a significant amount of time and money trying to correct it.
- 2) Keep your Social Security number private. Do not have it printed on your personal checks or drivers license. Do not share it with anyone, including merchants, unless they can provide a good reason for having it. Once someone has your Social Security number they have the key to unlocking your identity and using it fraudulently.

3) Shred offers for pre-approved credit cards that you receive by mail. Do the same with any receipts that contain account numbers or your Social Security number. Identity thieves are not afraid to go "dumpster diving" in order to obtain your personal information.

Identity theft has become the fastest growing crime because it is the most profitable crime. On average, the loss from identity theft is about \$18,000.00. Taking these precautions now can you save you from becoming another statistic in the fight against identity theft.

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James H. Dimmitt

James is editor of "TO YOUR CREDIT", a weekly free newsletter. Subscribe to the newsletter by visiting

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Fighting Identity Theft

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