

Connectors: A Cross-Cultural Marriage

**READING
TEXT**

The Weekly News Editorial by Roberto Keskin

Our world is shrinking. Countries which once seemed a galaxy away are inching closer and closer to us. Cities, which we only once dreamed of visiting, are now becoming our hometowns. Languages we once only read about in books or listened to in the movie theatres are now becoming part of our daily life. Even though our grandparents may have married their hometown sweethearts, and our parents may have married the person with whom they fell in love in university, times have changed dramatically. Now, your spouse is likely to have been born and raised in a different country or have learned a different language than you have. The 21st century is truly becoming a century of bridges. It is no longer unique for a marriage to cross cultures and languages. In fact, the number of cross-cultural couples is increasing. The case of Canadian couple Eric and Marina Pye is not untypical.

Eric was born in the United States and his wife Marina was born in the former Soviet Union. He grew up speaking English and her mother tongue was Russian. Neither one could have imagined that they would marry a person from another country. It is even more ironic when one considers that for the entire second half of the Twentieth Century, the United States and the Soviet Union were politically at war with one another. Both Bob and Marina had been educated with the idea that the other country was their enemy. Now their son, who proudly boasts of being Russian, American and Canadian, typifies the new, modern Canadian family. In their home, they speak Russian and English and, from time to time, French. The couple met in Toronto. Their friends include couples from Hong Kong, Russia, Japan, Canada, Serbia, America, Korea, and Saudi Arabia.

“Everyone has an opinion about integration these days. But how can you expect to create a harmonious multicultural environment without integrating the cultures? Cross-cultural families are the cornerstone of a multicultural society,” Marina argues. “If we aren’t representatives of this new, frenzied and mixed society, then who is?”

The Pyes offer some interesting insights into the dynamics of a culturally mixed marriage. One of the remarkable things about their relationship is that, even though they come from vastly different cultures, their problems are not usually created by “cultural differences.” “Of course there is a certain problem and pressure reconciling and grappling with the differences between our different backgrounds,” suggests Eric, “but all couples face that. I would argue that having to reconcile our differences has strengthened

Intermediate 3 – Reading Exercise 1 – Connectors: A Cross-Cultural Marriage

our relationship.” He even suggests that the differences have helped them to learn and re-think their own cultural backgrounds and their own pre-conceptions about people and life.

“We are conditioned to believe things were fed from birth, whether that is religion or history or politics or philosophy. It is, really, a remarkable thing, when you have to listen to a different point of view or opinion and then you begin to realize that there is more than one way to understand something. What food to eat, what holidays to celebrate, what language to teach your children or even how to interpret history.”

At first, Eric and Marina felt isolated. However, over time they have met more and more couples like them in Canada. “It’s the proverbial milk and cake scenario. You can have both. I feel that I have grown as a person. I have learned profoundly from my wife. It is easy to sequester yourself in the comfort of familiarity. Imagine, however, when you have to talk to in-laws in a different language from your own, or share enthusiasm for holidays and sports and activities that your spouse hasn’t had any familiarity with. Imagine, also, the joy of discovery when you realize that your partner has so much to teach you about another way of living or way of thinking. It is a remarkable way to live, frankly,” Eric told us.

When your grandparents were once probably horrified if you mentioned marrying someone from another country or culture or religion, it is now becoming more of the norm. Cross-cultural marriages provide an energy and synergy to a society that a homogeneous society might lack. “Difference, of course, provides tension and the possibility of conflict,” Marina adds. “However, it also provides the catalyst for change and re-examination. We learn the most from exposing and discovering new things, from re-learning and challenging what we thought we knew or expected. A cross-cultural family has really added levels to the experience of our lives. In spite of the challenges, I wouldn’t trade Eric in for a different man...even if he were Russian.”

Find all the examples of connectors in the reading.

Write a sentence with each of the following words and expressions.

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|----|--------------------------|-------|
| 1. | TO SHRINK | _____ |
| 2. | A GALAXY | _____ |
| 3. | IRONIC | _____ |
| 4. | TO INCH CLOSER TO | _____ |
| 5. | TO BOAST | _____ |

- 6. **INTEGRATION** _____
- 7. **HARMONIOUS** _____
- 8. **FRENZIED** _____
- 9. **TO RECONCILE** _____
- 10. **TO TYPIFY** _____
- 11. **THE CORNERSTONE** _____
- OF** _____
- 12. **THE DYNAMICS OF** _____
- 13. **REMARKABLE** _____
- 14. **PRE-CONCEPTION** _____
- 15. **TO INTERPRET** _____
- 16. **PROVERBIAL** _____
- 17. **SYNERGY** _____
- 18. **A CATALYST** _____

Answer the following questions.

- 1. How are today's marriages different from those of previous generations?

- 2. What are some of the disadvantages of a cross-cultural marriage?

- 3. What are some of the disadvantages of a cross-cultural marriage?

- 4. What are some of the advantages of a cross-cultural marriage?

