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# Why do so many bi- and multilinguals feel different when switching languages?<sup>1</sup>

Jean-Marc Dewaele

Is the feeling of difference experienced by many bi- and multilinguals linked to a later age of onset (AoA) and a lower level of proficiency in the foreign language (LX)? This empirical study, based on the qualitative and quantitative data from 1005 bi- and multilinguals, suggests AoA is unrelated to feelings of difference. While several participants mentioned the fact that limited proficiency in the LX made them feel different, no statistically significant relationship emerged between the amount of difference experienced when shifting languages and self-reported proficiency in speaking the LX, nor in frequency of use of the LX. The only independent variables to be linked to feeling different were education level, age and anxiety in speaking with colleagues and speaking on the phone in the second language and third language, with higher levels of the latter being linked to a stronger feeling of difference. Some participants presented unique explanations, linking feelings of difference to conscious or unconscious shifts in behaviour and to unique contexts of language use. Several participants also reported these feelings of difference to change over time.

## Introduction

John McWhorter, in his excellent 2014 ‘manifesto’ (p. ix) on myths surrounding language and the relationship with thought, makes a relatively off-the-cuff comment towards the end attributing the fact that many bi- and multilinguals feel different in their different languages to the fact that they started learning the foreign language (LX) later in life and that a lack of proficiency in the LX limits their ability to express their full emotional and pragmatic range.

For example, one hears often that ‘When I speak (language X), I’m a different person!’ Yet it isn’t an accident that people who say this almost always learned that language as adults. The reason they are ‘different’ in the second language is that they don’t speak it natively! It follows naturally that if you probe a bit and ask the person how they are different in the second language, they usually say they aren’t as witty or are more blunt – that is, just what one expects from someone who is fluent but not native (McWhorter, 2014, p. 163).

While this explanation sounds plausible, McWhorter provides no evidence -but then, his book is not empirical- nor any references to back it up. To answer this question it is thus crucial to consider the research on feelings of difference experienced by bilinguals and multilinguals, which - to be fair to McWhorter – has not looked specifically into the relationship between age of onset (AoA), proficiency level and feelings of difference. It seems therefore crucial to explore whether AoA and proficiency have an effect of feeling of difference. In order to fill this gap, the present study will use the data collected through the Bilingualism and Emotion Questionnaire (BEQ) (Dewaele & Pavlenko, 2001-2003). After presentation of the methodology, a range of extracts will be presented to give voice to participants,

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according to the degree of agreement or disagreement with the question of feeling different when switching languages. The aim being an exploration of some of the reasons put forward to explain their view about different selves in different languages. This will be followed by a quantitative analysis of the database to which more than 1000 multilinguals contributed, in order to identify independent variables linked to feelings of difference. The findings will be linked to the existing literature in the discussion section, after which some tentative conclusions will be presented.

## Literature review

A classical work among researchers interested in bilinguals' different selves is the autobiography of the Polish-American-British writer Eva Hoffman *Lost in Translation* (1989). Eva realised that she had developed a different persona after a couple of months in Canada, where she had settled down with her family. Secondary socialisation had distanced her from her parents and their Polish emotional world:

My mother says I'm becoming 'English.' This hurts me, because I know she means I'm becoming cold. I'm no colder than I've ever been, but I'm learning to be less demonstrative (p. 146).

This quote shows some of the complex issues at play for bilinguals: being perceived to be different by loved ones, does not necessarily mean that one does actually feel different. In Hoffman's case, she obviously felt she still was the warm-hearted Pole she always was, but she had adapted her behaviour to conform to local sociopragmatic norms. The question is whether repeated behaviour of immigrants that diverges from behaviour in the country of origin leads to a shift in the sense of self in the long-term. Or is the shift merely instantaneous and reversible? Do bilinguals become chameleons, shifting their selves according to the linguistic and cultural context?

Ilan Stavans, the Mexican-American author of Jewish origin, has produced another classic in the genre, *On Borrowed Words. A Memoir of Language* (2001), where he discusses his hybrid multilingual self:

Changing languages is like imposing another role on oneself, like being someone else temporarily. My English-language persona is the one that superimposes itself on all previous others. In it are the seeds of Yiddish and Hebrew, but mostly Spanish...But is the person really the same?...You know, sometimes I have the feeling I'm not one but two, three, four people. Is there an original person? An essence? I'm not altogether sure, for without language I am nobody. (Stavans, 2001, p. 251)

Research has shown that bilingual and bicultural individuals describe themselves differently and report different values and self-descriptions when presented with stimuli in their first (L1) or second language (L2) (Koven, 1998, 2001, 2007). The phenomenon has been called 'Cultural Frame Switching'. It does not suggest that bilinguals have totally different personalities in their different languages, simply that they show a slightly different face in one language compared to another. Koven found that her two French-Portuguese bilinguals put a very different emphasis on similar personal stories to a social peer in French and Portuguese. Koven's participants presented themselves as hip, angry Parisians in French, while they appear frustrated but patient and well-mannered in the Portuguese version of the story Koven (1998, p. 435). The interlocutors also judged the women to be more assertive in French than in Portuguese. An analysis of the speech styles used in both languages revealed that they used more young and aggressive registers in French than in

Portuguese. Koven concluded that her participants ‘perform a variety of cultural selves’ (Koven, 2001, p. 513) depending on the language they use.

Pavlenko (2006) carried out one of the main studies on feelings of difference linked to switching languages. Pavlenko used data collected through the BEQ (Dewaele & Pavlenko, 2001-2003) with 1039 participants answering the open-ended question: ‘Do you feel like a different person sometimes when you use your different languages?’<sup>i</sup>. She found that 65% of participants had answered ‘yes’ to the question, 26% of participants had said ‘no’, with the remaining 9% of participants giving an ambiguous response or leaving the question unanswered (p. 10). Many participants observed that when using their L1 they felt more “real” and “natural” than in the L2 or third language (L3) in which they typically felt more “fake” and “artificial” and “performative” (p. 18).

One participant stated:

I feel more at ease speaking in my mother tongue. It’s like being at home with all the usual familiar worn and comfortable clutter around you. Speaking the second language is like being you but in someone else’s house. (Elen, 47, Welsh–English) (p. 19)

Pavlenko speculated that participants might have felt more authentic and comfortable in their L1 because it was the language in which they were most proficient, ‘whereas the perception of artificiality stems from the need to manipulate less familiar repertoires of languages learned later in life’ (p. 19). This observation is not unlike what McWorther (2014) suggested, but Pavlenko does not claim that this is only one of two possible causes for feeling different.

Another participant stated:

I feel less myself when speaking any language other than German but not in a bad sense. I feel more like I am acting a persona which can be good or bad. At the same time I tend to be more polite and self-conscious when speaking L2 to L5 I don’t tend to consider as much what I say when speaking L1. But very often I feel like a better person when speaking L2 or L3. (Stefanie, 31, German–English–Spanish) (p. 18).

Pavlenko also found that participants who felt different when switching languages were not just late or immigrant bilinguals, they also included early bi- and multilinguals (p. 27). She observed that comparable changes in verbal and non-verbal behaviours when switching languages were interpreted differently by participants and that it was linked to ‘different discourses of bi/multilingualism and self’ (p. 27). Some participants referred to the discourse of bilingualism as linguistic schizophrenia ‘in the form of a voice from “elsewhere” that is being mocked and resisted’ (p. 28). Many participants referred to counter-discourses, ‘including the discourse of integrated identities and that of personae’. Some participants flatly rejected the need to reframe and justify their experiences (p. 28).

Referring to Grosjean’s (1982) saying that bilinguals are not two monolinguals in one person, Pavlenko concluded that bi- and multilinguals are not like single monolinguals either. Indeed, some ‘may perceive the world differently, and change perspectives, ways of thinking, and verbal and non-verbal behaviours when switching languages’ (p. 29). Others may enjoy their hybridity and the relativity of their existence, where others still ‘may feel that they inhabit distinct and at times incommensurable lifeworlds and experience pain and anguish over this condition. Yet this is not an aberration on their part but a part of what makes us human’. (p. 29).

Wilson (2008, 2013) carried out a two-stage investigation into the relationship between personality and feelings when using French as an LX. She constructed a

questionnaire based on a selection of statements reflecting the key themes in the BEQ corpus. She noticed an abundance of positive adjectives: ‘confident, sure of myself, self-assured, intelligent, intellectual, bold, sure, secure, competent. The one exception was ‘insecure’ but this occurred only six times in contrast to over 50 uses of the positive terms’ (2013, p. 4).

Wilson developed a new questionnaire which she administered together with a Big-Five personality test (OCEAN) to 172 adult L1 English speakers learning French for pleasure or using it in a social setting with other L1 English speakers. She found that operating in the French LX gave many participants a sense of freedom and enabled them to speak and behave in ways that were different from their usual modes. Feelings of difference were significantly negatively correlated with Extraversion ( $r = -.53$ ,  $R^2 = .28$ ) (2008, p. 138). In other words, introverts were more likely to feel different when operating in a L2: (it) ‘can give shy people a mask to hide behind even at fairly modest levels of proficiency’ (Wilson, 2013, p. 8). She also found that less educated participants and participants who had learned their L2 later in life were less likely to feel different (Wilson, 2008).

Ożańska-Ponikwia (2012, 2013) has focused specifically on the psychological correlates of feelings of difference. Her participants were 102 Polish-English bilinguals who had been living in an English-speaking country for some time. She found that participants who felt more different when switching language scored significantly higher on Extraversion, Agreeableness and Openness. They also scored higher on a number of traits linked to Emotional Intelligence, such as Emotion expression, Empathy, Social awareness, Emotion perception, Emotion management, Emotionality and Sociability. It must be said that none of the correlations exceeded 9% of shared variance, which is considered a small effect size<sup>ii</sup>. Ożańska-Ponikwia argued that all bilinguals experience a shift when switching languages, but that only those with specific personality profiles notice and report the subtle changes.

Feelings of difference in different languages do not automatically imply variation on various personality dimensions, although some studies have pointed that this could be the case (Ramirez-Esparza et al., 2006; Veltkamp et al., 2013).

Focusing on perceived shifts on five scales of feelings (feeling logical, serious, emotional, fake and different) among 106 adult multilinguals, Dewaele and Nakano (2012) carried out pair-wise comparisons between languages (L1/L2, L2/L3 and L3/L4). Significant differences emerged on most scales across the language pairs. Participants felt gradually less logical, less serious, less emotional and increasingly fake when using languages learnt later in life. One trilingual participant (Swedish L1, English L2, Spanish L3), stated:

More confident switching into English. Switching into Spanish I feel more ‘theatrical’, like I’m stepping into a character knowingly. Swedish like it’s very familiar but hard to communicate, lost for words (p. 9).

Regression analyses showed that self-perceived proficiency was a significant predictor of shift on all the feelings scales in the L2, but only on feeling fake in the L3 and on no dimension in the L4. AoA was not a significant predictor for any dimension in the L2 and L3 and only predicted the dimension of “feeling different” in the L4. Gender, age and education levels were unrelated to the dependent variables. The most remarkable finding was the parallel effect on feeling logical and emotional.

What this literature review shows is that a majority of multilinguals who participated in previous studies reported feeling different when switching languages. Interestingly, although some multilinguals attribute a different sense of self when they

switch languages to AoA and lower proficiency in the LX, there is only partial support so far by larger-scale statistical analyses of the data. Some psychological and socio-biographical variables seem to be linked to feelings of difference, but they do not seem to explain much variance. This is why the present study will include other possible independent variables linked to current and past language use, sociobiographical variables (gender, age, education), a psychological variable (foreign language anxiety), in addition to early versus late bi- and multilingualism and levels of proficiency in the LX.

## **Method**

### ***The instrument***

The BEQ (Dewaele & Pavlenko, 2001-2003) generated a large ( $N=1579$ ) database based on feedback from closed and open questions on self-reported language choices for cognitive operations, the communication of emotion, the experience of anxiety and reports on feelings of difference when using different languages from adult multilinguals from all over the world.

The BEQ contained questions relating to participants' gender, age, education level, ethnic group, occupation, languages known, dominant language(s), chronological order of language acquisition, context of acquisition, AoA, frequency of use, typical interlocutors and self-rated proficiency scores for speaking, comprehending, reading and writing in the languages in question. The second part of the BEQ consisted of 13 Likert-type questions on language choice for the expression of various emotions with various interlocutors, on code-switching behaviour in inner and articulated speech, on the use and perception of swearwords, on attitudes towards the different languages and, finally on Communicative Anxiety and Foreign Language Anxiety in the different languages. The last part of the BEQ presented nine open-ended questions including one asking participants how they felt in their different languages. Languages were labelled L1, L2, L3, L4 and L5 according to their order of acquisition. The complete BEQ has been incorporated as an appendix in Dewaele (2010) and Pavlenko (2005).

### ***The participants***

For the present study, 1005 participants were selected who had answered the question on feeling different and most of the other relevant variables. This group consisted of 710 females and 295 males with an average age of 35 years ( $SD = 11$ ), ranging from 16 to 70. Participants were generally highly educated with 107 having a high school diploma, 265 a bachelor's degree, 300 a master's degree and 329 a doctoral degree.

L1 users of English represent the largest group ( $n = 297$ ), followed by NS of Spanish ( $n = 112$ ), French ( $n = 98$ ), German ( $n = 98$ ), Dutch ( $n = 70$ ), Italian ( $n = 52$ ) and smaller groups of 59 other languages. The most frequent L2 was English ( $n = 420$ ), followed by French ( $n = 206$ ), Spanish ( $n = 97$ ), German ( $n = 71$ ) and 44 other languages. The most frequent L3 was French ( $n = 235$ ), followed by English ( $n = 218$ ), German ( $n = 130$ ), Spanish ( $n = 85$ ) and 36 other languages.

German was the most frequent L4 ( $n = 137$ ), followed by French ( $n = 117$ ), Spanish ( $n = 85$ ), English ( $n = 53$ ), Italian ( $n = 52$ ) and 43 other languages. The most frequent L5 was Spanish ( $n = 58$ ), German ( $n = 50$ ) and Italian ( $n = 49$ ), with another 57 languages.

The participants consisted of 133 self-reported bilinguals, 255 trilinguals, 272 quadrilinguals and 345 participants with five or more languages. The 181 participants

who acquired an L2 or L3 between birth and age 2 were labelled 'early' bi- and multilinguals. Those who had acquired an L2 or L3 after the age of three were labelled 'late' bi- and multilinguals. Mean AoA was 8.4 years for the L2, 13.6 years for the L3, 17.7 years for the L4 and 22 years for the L5.

Over half of participants reported being dominant in their L1 ( $n = 542$ ), over a third ( $n = 362$ ) reported being dominant in at least two languages, including their L1; the final 101 reported dominance in a language that was not their L1.

Information about participants' context of LX learning was also gathered, distinguishing those who had acquired their LX only through classroom instruction, from those who had acquired the LX in a mixed context of acquisition (i.e. learning the language at school but also using it for authentic interactions outside school), or naturalistically (i.e. without any formal instruction).

Participants reported the frequency with which they used the LXs on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from: 1) yearly (or less), 2) monthly, 3) weekly, 4) daily, 5) all day. Mean frequencies of use declined for languages acquired later in life and stabilised after the L4:  $M L2 = 3.7$ ;  $M L3 = 2.4$ ;  $M L4 = 1.9$ ;  $M L5 = 1.9$ .

Self-perceived proficiency in speaking the LX was measured through a 5-point Likert scale which was formulated as follows: 'On a scale from 1 (least proficient) to 5 (fully fluent) how do you rate yourself in speaking your LX?' Possible answers included: 1) Minimal, 2) Low, 3) Medium, 4) High, 5) Maximal. Means for self-perceived oral proficiency also declined for languages acquired later in life:  $M L2 = 4.1$ ;  $M L3 = 3.0$ ;  $M L4 = 2.5$ ;  $M L5 = 2.3$ .

Information on Foreign Language Anxiety in the LX was elicited through the following question 'How anxious are you when speaking your LX on the phone? when speaking with colleagues?' (1 = not at all, 2 = a little, 3 = quite anxious, 4 = very anxious, 5 = extremely anxious). Mean Foreign Language Anxiety scores increase gradually for languages acquired later in life:  $M L2$  phone = 1.9,  $M L2$  colleagues = 1.7;  $M L3$  phone = 2.7,  $M L3$  colleagues = 2.3;  $M L4$  phone = 3.0,  $M L4$  colleagues = 2.6;  $M L5$  phone = 3.0,  $M L5$  colleagues = 2.7.

The sample is not a representative sample of the general population, considering the strong proportion of women and highly educated participants. However, this is a typical outcome of snowball data gathering using on-line web questionnaire on language issues (Wilson & Dewaele, 2010). The crucial aspect is that participants are motivated to fill out the questionnaire, which requires a fair amount of metalinguistic and metapragmatic competence. The advantages of using an on-line web questionnaire are that it allowed efficient and economical data collection from a very large sample of learners and long-time users of multiple languages from across the world and from a wide age range (Wilson & Dewaele, 2010).

### ***The dependent variable***

Feedback on the open question 'Do you feel like a different person sometimes when you use your different languages?' was coded according to the degree of agreement with the question. Participants' responses were coded on a 5-point scale with a value of 1 attributed to those who said they did not feel different at all, a value of 2 for those who answered 'no but', a value of 3 for those who were unsure, a value of 4 for those who answer 'yes but' and a value of 5 for those who answered 'yes' without hesitation. An analysis of the distribution of responses (see figure 1) show a U-shaped pattern with close to half of the participants responding 'absolutely yes', and over a quarter responding 'absolutely no'.

After converting the statements about feeling different to numerical values, the mean score was calculated, which is 3.46 ( $SD = 1.75$ ), ranging from 1 to 5. A one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test confirmed that the distribution is not normal ( $KS Z = 9.6, p < .0001$ ). Therefore, non-parametric statistics were used. In reporting the results below, the probability level has been adjusted using Bonferroni's correction to reduce the risk of type I error.

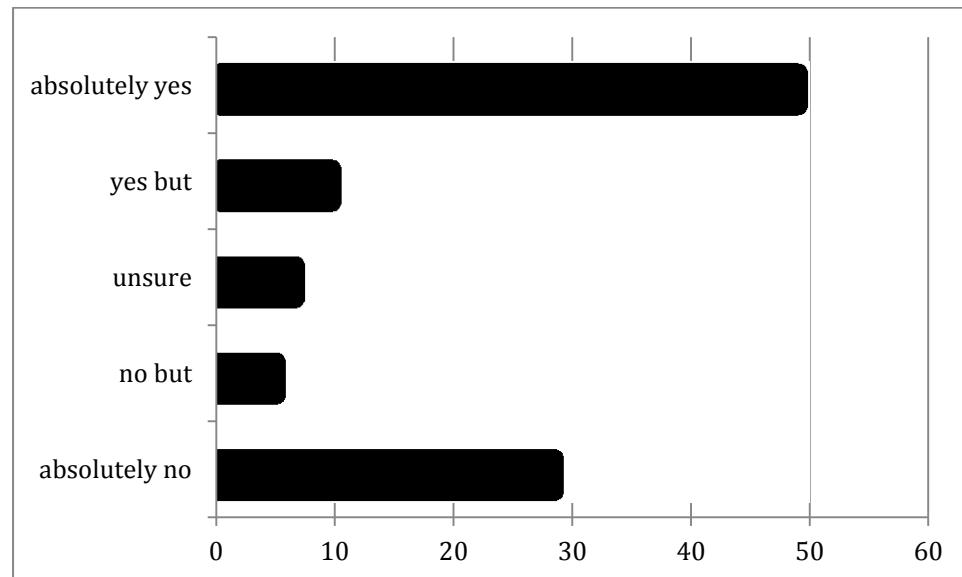


Figure 1: Proportion of answers to the question of feeling different in a different language.

## Research questions

- (1) What kind of responses do bi- and multilinguals give when answering the question about feeling different when switching languages?
- (2) Is the feeling of difference experienced by multilinguals when switching to a different language linked to:
  - a) early versus late bilingualism?
  - b) later AoA of the LX?
  - c) lower levels of oral proficiency in the LX?
  - d) current language practices (frequency of use of the LX)?
  - e) sociobiographical variables (age, gender, education)?
  - f) linguistic history (context of acquisition of the LX, number of languages known, language dominance)?
  - g) foreign language anxiety in the LX?

## Results

### *Participants' words*

Most participants answered with an unambiguous 'yes' when responding to the question whether they felt different in their different languages (see figure 1). The answer of Angelika belongs in this category.

Angelika (Female, 24, Swedish L1, English L2, Japanese L3, French L4): Yes! When speaking in Japanese I adapt to the Japanese culture very much. My voice becomes higher (more feminine) and I speak with a light voice just like a Japanese woman. I make sure to cover my mouth with my right hand and I do



not look people in the eyes (especially not men). When I speak Swedish or English I am much more straightforward. I make sure to look people in the eyes and I try to behave like a normal European woman.

AW's<sup>iii</sup> answer suggests that a more limited proficiency in her L2 may contribute to a feeling of difference, especially her more limited ability in being verbally funny.

AW (Female, 46, English L1, Spanish L2): Absolutely!!! I feel totally different when I speak Spanish. Because I have to use facial expressions and body language to communicate effectively, I feel very vibrant and outgoing. Also my sense of humor is totally different. I use humor a lot in English; but my humor in Spanish is often limited by language. I'm still funny but the humor is not based on language as much as it is in English (e.g. puns or plays on words). I think before I speak in Spanish and am slow and thoughtful (I compose my sentences before I speak) - even when trying to be funny - and in English I'm more spontaneous.

Zelideth is one of the few participants to suggest that age may be indirectly linked to how she feels when using her Spanish L1, a language she used with her father and which has strong emotional connotations.

Zelideth (Female, 24, Spanish L1, English L2, French L3, Japanese L4, Portuguese L5): Definitely. With English I have power to be an intellectual but I realize that people see me by my physical appearance usually and so I tend to be more assertive and emphasize an accentless English. With Spanish I sometimes still feel like Daddy's little girl probably just because that was when I usually used it when I was young to ask for something from my father. With Japanese I still feel meek and almost as though I retreat into a different role. Portuguese makes me feel more flamboyant as though I'm out there living whenever I use it.

Ten percent of participants presented an answer that was categorised as a qualified 'yes', such as Deborah's who suggests she may feel different 'sometimes'.

Deborah (Female, 53, Finnish L1, English L2, French L3, German L4): Yes. Sometimes when dealing in Finnish with Finns I find myself becoming much more taciturn than I would be in the same situation dealing in English with either an American or a Brit.

Fewer than 10% of participants indicated that they were unsure of any difference when switching languages. Alex opposes her personal view to that of her friends' perceptions of her. This seems to leave her wondering whether she might adapt her behaviour to a specific language.

Alex (Female, 37, French L1, English L2, Swedish L3, German L4, Russian L5): No, but I am told by my friends that my personality seems to change. This observation is made by Anglophones especially when they see me speak French and adopt the body language that goes with it. I think the Anglophones make this observation - unlike the Germans or Swedes - because they are unused to other languages and feel threatened by them.

Alison, who moved to France with her family as a teenager, also mentions the fact that she liked to be different, and that other people may notice differences, but that her personal feeling of difference has ebbed away.

Alison (Female, 48, English L1, French L2): I used to feel very different but obviously liked that, as I would read French novels and smoke Gauloises in England and English novels and smoke Marlboro in France, so I was exotic in

both places. Now I don't smoke and read both (...) Other people have noticed differences like Eva Hoffman's mother. Apparently when I first came here I started moving my arms around a lot and my youngest sister who was 16 at the time said 'Oh my God she's turning into one of them!' I think I was attracted to the more flamboyant nature of the French language which suited my personality better. However the third place can be very uncomfortable sometimes.

A similar proportion of participants leaned more clearly towards a 'no' answer. Forty-seven participants in this category, such as Colleen, mentioned a lack of confidence when using the LX.

Colleen (Female, 25, English L1, Spanish L2, French L3, Italian L4): Not really, just maybe a little less confident.

Another participant, DKB, explained that her answer to the question would have been different when she was younger.

DKB (Female, 38, French L1, English L2, Spanish L3): I used to at first, several years ago. Now I feel that the two cultures (i.e. French vs American) are so different that the language is just a way to express these cultural differences but using a different language doesn't change the core of who I am.

Finally, Edith, explains that she may feel different when switching language, but that this does not affect her personality.

Edith (Female, 38, German L1, English L2): Different languages allow me different thought structures and possibly different ways of feeling too. But these changes do not affect me deep within where I remain the same person.

Over a quarter of participants opted for the final category, the definite 'no'. Didi, for example, explains that language switches do not affect his sense of self.

Didi (Male, 36, Sundanese L1, Bahasa Indonesian L2, English L3): No, I feel I am the same person. Using the language as appropriate (sic) is the art of living as bilingual.

Maguelone starts with a categorical statement that she does not feel different in English compared to French. She then attenuates that statement by adding that using German, she may not feel completely different but just a little awkward due to more limited proficiency.

Maguelone (Female, 24, French L1, English L2, German L3, Spanish L4): Not at all. To me it seems very natural to speak another language because I have not lived in France for several years. I am used to speaking English every day and it does not make any difference to me. When I speak German it is a little different: I do not feel like "a different person" but I am probably less natural and I feel a little awkward: I speak slower and probably not in a very natural way.

### ***Participants' quantitative data***

The feelings of difference when switching languages of the 819 late bi- and multilinguals were not significantly different from the 181 early bi- and multilinguals (Mann-Whitney  $U = 71447$ ,  $Z = -.082$ ,  $p = .41$ ).

In reporting the results below, only values significant at  $p < 0.008$  will be considered significant, which is the value of the Bonferroni correction when using 6 independent variables. Feelings of difference were not significantly correlated to either AoA in the LXs, nor to self-perceived levels of oral proficiency in the various LXs (see table 1). There was no relationship between feelings of difference and frequency of use of a language, with a marginally significant relationship for the L3,

where those who used the L3 more tended to be less likely to feel different when using a different language.

A Spearman rank correlation revealed a significant positive link between age and feelings of difference ( $Rho = .086, p < .007, N = 999$ ).

The feelings of difference when switching languages of the 710 females were not significantly different from those of the 295 males (Mann-Whitney  $U = 99608, Z = -1.32, p = .19$ ).

Table 1: Spearman Rho correlations between feelings of difference, AoA in the LX, oral proficiency in the LX and frequency of use of the LX

Age of Onset	L2	L3	L4	L5
<i>Rho</i>	0.058	0.046	0.013	-0.03
<i>p</i>	0.068	0.178	0.743	0.581
<i>N</i>	1000	865	613	336
Oral proficiency				
<i>Rho</i>	-0.028	-0.034	-0.017	0.098
<i>p</i>	0.376	0.324	0.679	0.075
<i>N</i>	998	864	609	334
Frequency of use				
<i>Rho</i>	0.003	-.082	-0.041	-0.022
<i>p</i>	0.937	0.018	0.313	0.693
<i>N</i>	995	847	602	335

Table 2: Context of acquisition and feelings of difference in the LXs

	L2	L3	L4	L5
$Chi^2$	0.87	2.77	1.23	5.72
<i>df</i>	2	2	2	2
<i>p</i>	0.647	0.25	0.539	0.057

A Kruskal-Wallis test showed a significant effect of level of education on feelings of difference ( $Chi^2 = 11.9, df = 3, p < .008, N = 1001$ ), with more educated participants reporting feeling more different when switching languages.

A series of Kruskal-Wallis tests showed that Context of acquisition of the LX is not significantly related to feelings of difference in the various languages (table 2)

A Kruskal-Wallis test showed no significant effect of number of languages known on feelings of difference ( $Chi^2 = 1.1, df = 3, p = .079, N = 1001$ ). A complete absence of effect emerged for language dominance ( $Chi^2 = 0.1, df = 2, p = .99, N = 1005$ ).

Feelings of difference were significantly positively correlated with Foreign Language Anxiety in oral interactions with colleagues and in phone conversations in the L2 and L3, but not in the L4 and L5. In other words, participants who felt more anxious in their L2 and L3 also felt more different when switching language (see table 3).

Table 3: Foreign Language Anxiety and feelings of difference in the LXs

	L2		L3		L4		L5	
	colleagues	phone	colleagues	phone	colleagues	phone	colleagues	phone
<i>Rho</i>	0.101	0.098	0.104	0.104	0.023	0.004	0.74	0.071
<i>p</i>	0.002	0.002	0.006	0.005	0.65	0.93	0.28	0.29
<i>N</i>	917	958	684	717	402	445	213	224

## Discussion

Participants' views on their feelings of difference when switching languages were rich and varied. It included statements on their own self-perceptions and also that of people around them, sometimes with a mismatch between the two perceptions. It showed that these perceptions can vary over time, can differ between switches to specific languages and can be the result of conscious or unconscious behaviour.

Participants mentioned variation in both verbal and non-verbal behaviour: feeling less funny in the LX because of lack of proficiency, being more taciturn in one language, raising voice pitch, covering the mouth, avoiding looking interlocutors in the eye, adopting a different body language, sticking to linguistic or cultural norms of the L1 to stand out in the L2 or vice versa. Some participants reported possessing different persona in their different languages, which their friends confirmed, a fact highlighted by Pavlenko (2006) and Koven (1998, 2001, 2007).

One participant reported that switching language allowed her to pursue an alternative set of thought structures and possibly different ways of feeling.

Had the analysis been limited to the qualitative data, an argument could have been made that McWhorter (2014) was right in attributing feeling of difference to lower levels of proficiency in the LX. Indeed, several participants referred to their lack of confidence and fluency when using the LX. However, no participant mentioned AoA as a possible cause for feeling different when using an LX.

Any doubts about McWhorter's hypothesis were dissipated when the statistical analysis showed that no significant relationships exist between feelings of difference, AoA and levels of oral proficiency. The lack of an AoA effect is similar to the results reported in Dewaele and Nakano (2012), but differs for the effect of proficiency, as a modest relationship was found between proficiency and feelings of difference in the L3 (but not the L2 nor L4) (Dewaele & Nakano, 2012). Also, no difference was found in the present study between the group of early and late bi- and multilinguals.

Frequency of use of the LX was not clearly linked to feelings of difference either. While gender was unrelated to feelings of difference (confirming the findings of Dewaele & Nakano, 2012 but in contradiction with Wilson, 2008), education levels were linked to higher levels of feelings of difference (confirming Wilson, 2008). Age correlated positively, suggesting that older bi- and multilinguals are more likely to feel different when switching languages. One could wonder whether this could be linked to generational differences in code-switching practices (cf. Dewaele & Li Wei, 2014). Younger bi- and multilinguals were found to report more code-switching with friends and colleagues (but not family members) than older peers, which could account for a weakening of feelings of difference when switching.

Context of acquisition of the LX, the degree of multilingualism and the type of language dominance were unrelated to feelings of difference when switching. This is somewhat surprising, as one might expect regular users of multiple languages to feel more the same in their various languages. Just as in Dewaele and Nakano (2012), many participants who reported feeling different when switching also reported a

change in the context (environment, interlocutors) in which they use their languages. These changes in environment and interlocutors might cause the difference in feeling, rather than the language switch itself (Grosjean, 2010). Indeed, participants belonging to a community of regular code-switchers reported switching languages within the same context and not feeling any difference (Dewaele & Nakano, 2012).

A final interesting finding was that feelings of difference were positively linked with levels of anxiety when using the L2 and L3 with colleagues or on the phone. This suggests that feelings of difference are indeed directly or indirectly linked to personality traits (Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2012, 2013; Wilson, 2008, 2013). As introverts tend to be more anxious, and report suffering more from Foreign Language Anxiety (Dewaele, 2013), it is not surprising to find a relationship between Foreign Language Anxiety and feelings of difference. It is not clear why the correlation between feelings of difference and Foreign Language Anxiety disappears in the L4 and L5. One possibility is that levels of proficiency and frequency of use of these languages were simply too low for participants to be able to reliably report on them.

Looking at the participants' own words highlighted the difficulty in organising responses in clear-cut categories on a continuum. Except for those who answered with a simple 'yes' or 'no', it was tricky to assign statements that started with one opinion, which was modified or altered towards the end of the statement. This is an important factor to keep in mind when analysing the quantitative data. In looking at the BEQ corpus, Pavlenko (2006) found many instances of heteroglossia and polyphony, i.e. 'the presence of several distinct, and sometimes irreconcilable, discourses within a single text' (p. 9). Also, participants' statements should not necessarily be taken at face value. As Koven (2007) pointed out, participants' responses are mediated by language ideologies that constrain their interpretations of how and why language works. This is illustrated by participants' comments on reported differences by constructing monolithic social types (Japanese woman, European, etc.). Pavlenko (2006) used a Bakhtinian approach 'to identify discourses of bilingualism and self the participants drew on' (p. 8). She concludes that cultural boundaries and entities may be permeable and porous but that they are 'real phenomena to be counted with' (p. 28).

Another issue is how participants interpreted the sequence 'feel like a different person'. The feedback suggests that some focused on the first part of the statement, and talked about how they felt different when switching languages – at a relatively superficial and transient level -, others focused on the second part and considered whether or not they adopted a different personality when switching language – still transient, but at a much deeper level. This raises interesting questions about the nature of personality. Indeed, personality questionnaires typically include many items probing specific behaviour. One could thus wonder whether repeated behaviour in an LX that diverges from typical behaviour in the L1 could lead to a long-term shift of the self? Could the bi- and multilinguals, like chameleons, shift instantaneously between their selves according to the linguistic and cultural context? Is it possible that the sense of shift fades as some "intermediate" behaviour sets in? Could that individual, like Alison, inhabit some third space (cf. Kramsch, 2009)?

An intriguing question is whether monolinguals feel different when they shift between registers. How different would they feel when speaking with peers versus superiors? In other words, our participants talked about named standard languages, but these contain another huge range of sociolects and dialects which could elicit specific feelings.

Finally, providing feedback online may lead to less developed responses. Ideally, this questionnaire study should be complemented by in-depth interviews with a number of participants.

## Conclusion

The impetus for the present study was a throwaway remark by McWhorter (2014) that bi- and multilinguals feel different when switching to an LX because of a later AoA and a lower level of proficiency. While some bi- and multilinguals may share this view, a systematic statistical analysis of data collected from 1005 bi- and multilinguals showed this claim to be unfounded. Age, education levels and foreign language anxiety in the L2 and L3 turned out to be the only independent variables to be significantly positively linked to feelings of difference.

The distribution of the answers to the question of feelings of difference showed a striking U-shaped pattern, with a majority of participants either agreeing or disagreeing, and fewer participants with more nuanced views. A look at the qualitative data highlighted the rich diversity in participants' views. It also raised some methodological issues, such as the accurate categorisation of participants' ambiguous statements and the individual interpretation of the question.

So why do so many bi- and multilinguals feel different when switching languages? It seems that they do not always know. Many participants did present their own unique explanations, linking feelings of difference to conscious or unconscious behaviour and to the unique contexts in which they use their languages. Moreover, several participants reported these feelings to be dynamic in nature.

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<sup>i</sup> This is the same database the current study is based on.

<sup>ii</sup> Cohen (1992) suggests that a "small" effect size is .20, a "medium" effect size is .50, and a "large" effect size is .80.

<sup>iii</sup> Participants who expressed a wish to remain completely anonymous were given a letter code.