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'A voice from elsewhere': acculturation, personality and migrants' self-perceptions across languages and cultures

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ABSTRACT

The majority of multilinguals immersed in different cultures report feeling different when switching languages. Although the influence of personality on self-perceptions has been investigated, little attention has been paid to acculturation aspects. The present study is based on a mixed-method approach combining questionnaire and interview data. Participants are 468 Italian migrants living in English-speaking countries. Results suggest that participants' personality characteristics determined their sense of belonging to either the heritage or host cultural scenarios. Migrants reporting to feel different when using the local language scored significantly lower on Emotional Stability and Social Initiative and were less attached to the host culture compared to those who reported feeling no change. More specifically, respondents' Emotional Stability and attachment to host culture practices constrained their sense of feeling different when using the local language¹.

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Introduction

"This language is beginning to invent another me. However, I discover something odd. It seems that when I write (or, for that matter, think) in English, I am unable to use the word 'I' I do not go as far as the schizophrenic 'she' – but I am driven, as by a compulsion, to the double, the Siamese-twin 'you'" (Hoffman, 1998, p. 121)

Eva Hoffman, in her autobiography *Lost in translation* (1998), muses over the linguistic and psychological consequences of her migration from Poland to Canada and observes the emergence of a different inner voice, which she struggles to reconcile with her former self. Ultimately, her life-journey across different cultures led her to affirm her multilingual personality:

"I-one person, first-person singular -have been on both sides [...] I begin to see where the languages I've spoken have their correspondences -how I can move between them without being split by the difference" (p. 273)

Similar experiences have been described in a number of autobiographical works by bilingual and bicultural individuals (Besemeres, 2002; Parks, 1996; Pavlenko, 2001; Wierzbicka, 2004). These narratives and previous research (Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2013; Pavlenko, 2006; Wierzbicka, 2004) suggest that there is a possibility of language and culture influencing

1

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personality, transforming multilinguals' self-perceptions. Dewaele (2016) found that feelings of difference are not related to language proficiency or age of acquisition (AoA) and emphasised the diversity of multilinguals' opinions on factors affecting their self-perceptions when switching languages:

"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" (p. 13)

What emerges from the literature is the dynamic nature of migrants' sense of feeling different when switching languages, intended more as self-awareness rather than a real development of multiple personalities (Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2012, 2013). Although a small number of studies focused on the influence of personality traits on multilinguals' self-perceptions in different languages, there is yet no empirical evidence about its potential relationship with migrants' cultural attachment to host and heritage practices. In his study on bicultural bilinguals, Grosjean observed that:

"very little work has been done so far to describe the combined linguistic and cultural ensemble that is at the heart of who they are" (2015, p. 580)

The present study aims to fill this gap, through a combination of qualitative and quantitative data. After a brief literature review on the topic, research questions, methodology and instruments will be introduced. A quantitative analysis of data from 468 Italian first generation migrants in English-speaking countries (ESC) will follow. Participants' perceptions will then be presented to give voice to their unique migration experience and findings will be discussed in the final section.

Literature review

Cultural frame switching, 'linguistic schizophrenia' and personality

The systematic choice of a particular language in different contexts can lead bilinguals to a 'multiple selves' syndrome (Wierzbicka, 2004). A pioneer in this field is Koven (2001), who produced evidence for 'cultural frame switching' by eliciting stories from personal experiences of two French-Portuguese bilinguals. The informants were asked to tell the same story in both languages and subsequently interviewed. The author found that bilinguals performed quite differently, according to the language in use, suggesting that different languages allowed speakers to 'perform a variety of cultural selves' (Koven, 2001, p. 513) through a variety of interlocutory tendencies, communicative strategies, discursive forms and styles.

The Bilingualism and Emotion Questionnaire (BEQ) (Dewaele & Pavlenko, 2001/2003) was the first one assessing multilinguals' sense of feeling different when switching languages. Two thirds of participants offered an affirmative answer to the question and the analysis of 1039 responses showed that some informants jokingly used the discourse of bilingualism as linguistic schizophrenia: 'It was mostly in the form of a voice from "elsewhere" that is being mocked and resisted' (Pavlenko, 2006, p. 28). Pavlenko speculated that multilinguals might feel more authentic in their first language (L1) since it is the language in which they were most proficient. However, the perception of different selves was not restricted to late bilinguals, but was 'a more general part of bilingual and multilingual experience' (Pavlenko, 2006, p. 27). She concluded that most multilinguals sense a shift in personality and they might perceive this experience 'as a source of both anguish and creative enrichment' (2006, p. 5). Mostly, participants claimed that they felt more real in their L1 and fake in any language learned later in life, especially in emotionally charged circumstances (Dewaele, 2010; Pavlenko, 2005). The special emotional status of the L1 was confirmed in Dewaele's (2015) analysis of 1454 multilinguals' insights from the BEQ. Participants reported using the L1 most frequently for inner speech and even more so for emotional inner speech. Although all other languages (LXs) were used less frequently,

participants who had acculturated into the LX, tended to consider it a language of the heart. In other words, any LX had the potential to become a preferred inner emotional language. Still using data from the BEQ, Dewaele (2016) analysed the feedback of 1005 multilinguals, examining the connection between anxiety level, age and context of acquisition, LX frequency of use and LX self-reported proficiency to the sense of feeling different when switching languages. Findings revealed that self-perceptions are related to anxiety levels and might change over time and differ beyond linguistic aspects. Dewaele and Nakano (2013) focused on how multilinguals specifically feel in their different languages. An analysis of data of 106 respondents revealed a systematic shift across languages, with participants feeling gradually less logical, serious and emotional as well as increasingly fake when using the L2, L3 and L4. Wilson (2008, 2013) constructed a questionnaire combining the key themes of the BEQ together with the Big-Five personality test (McCrae et al., 2000). This research, conducted on 172 British adult foreign language users, revealed a negative relationship between the trait Extraversion and the sense of feeling different when using a LX. Wilson found that operating in the LX gave more introvert participants a sense of freedom: 'A foreign language can give shy people a mask to hide behind even at fairly modest levels of proficiency' (Wilson, 2013, p. 8). Following this line of research, Ożańska-Ponikwia (2013) investigated the link between bilinguals' sense of feeling different when switching languages and various personality factors, including the Big-Five personality test and the Trait Emotional Intelligence (EI) Questionnaire. Her investigation into 102 Polish immigrants in ESC revealed that the perception and expression of emotions in L1 and L2 was linked to different self-perceptions when switching languages. Gender and several personality traits, namely Extraversion, Openness and Conscientiousness as well as EI traits of Emotionality, Sociability, Emotion management, Emotion perception, Social awareness, Empathy and Emotion expression were linked to the sense of feeling different while operating in the L2. Ożańska-Ponikwia argued that socially and emotionally skilled multilinguals are more likely to notice and confidently report subtle changes in personality and behaviour while switching languages.

'Identities migrate every bit as much as bodies'

As Maines points out: 'identities migrate every bit as much as bodies' (1978, p. 242). When an individual moves from one culture to another, many aspects of the self are modified to fit in the new world (De Leersnyder, Kim, & Mesquita, 2015). This process, generally referred to as acculturation, is triggered by a continuous and direct contact between individuals having different cultural origins (Kim, 2001). Migrating implies crossing not only geographical borders, but also cultural and linguistic ones. These borders are less tangible and it seems to take longer to adapt to the local setting (Dewaele & Stavans, 2014). Becoming able to communicate in a new linguistic context is a first step towards integration in the new society. Migrants need to decode and reproduce non-verbal behaviour, tone of voice, facial expressions, attitudes and emotions (Wierzbicka, 2004) and might develop the idea of living a 'double life' or a sense of alienation Hoffmann depicted so vividly in her autobiography.

This study embraces the idea that acculturation is a bi-dimensional construct, where host culture acquisition and heritage culture retention are separate dimensions (Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000). A person can, for example, appreciate host cultural aspects while still retaining an attachment and practices, typical of the culture of origin. Combining bi-dimensionality with the use of multiple domains yields a model where heritage and host cultural streams operate simultaneously. This view is not centred on the effects of acculturative processes, but exclusively focuses on individuals' inclinations and attachment to practices and values, including behaviours such as language use, friendship orientation and media reception. In order to avoid confusion with a standard concept of acculturation, the terms 'sense of belonging', cultural 'attachment' or 'orientation' will be used to indicate migrants' liking for those domains mentioned above. Ryder et al. (2000) developed the Vancouver Index of Acculturation (VIA) to measure behavioural acculturation attitudes. According to the authors, acculturation involves changes in selfidentity resulting from the possibility to accommodate an old and a new culture:

“it does not seem to be the case that the old cultural identity necessarily diminishes while the new one grows; rather, the two identities can vary independently” (p. 63)

Research on the relationship between personality and acculturation phenomena was boosted by the publication of the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ) (van Oudenhoven & Van Der Zee, 2002). The questionnaire was developed as a multi-dimensional instrument aimed at measuring multicultural effectiveness among individuals dealing with cross-cultural contexts. Leong (2007) used the MPQ to look at the relationship between personality traits and socio-psychological adaptation of Singaporean students in an international exchange programme, compared to a control group of domestic students. He found that the exchange programme students reported significantly higher levels of intercultural competences in all MPQ dimensions but Cultural Empathy. Social Initiative was found to be a good predictor of a consistent reduction of socio-cultural difficulties, while high scores on Flexibility were correlated with depression.

Most researchers have focused on personality traits as predictors of successful cross-cultural adaptation and sociolinguistic changes. Fewer have taken the reverse perspective, looking for variation in personality due to cross-cultural contact. Indeed, assuming that personality is determined by the interplay of internal physiological factors and external social factors (Kim, 2001), the process of acculturation to a new culture represents a profound change, which is likely to shape an individual's self. Dewaele and Van Oudenhoven (2009) examined 79 teenage Londoner MPQ profiles to look whether multilingualism and multiculturalism were linked to personality. Multilinguals and participants who reported dominance in two languages (an indication of biculturalism) scored significantly higher on Open-mindedness and lower on Emotional Stability, compared to monolinguals and participants dominant in one language only. Korzilius, Hooft, Planken, and Hendriks (2011) examined the link between foreign language mastery and scores on the MPQ multicultural personality dimensions among 144 local and international employees of a Dutch multinational company. They found that the knowledge of more foreign languages correlated with more Open-mindedness and lower Emotional Stability. A lower but significant positive correlation also emerged between self-assessed knowledge of foreign languages and Cultural Empathy. In a follow-up study, Dewaele and Stavans (2014) looked whether the linguistic and cultural background of 193 residents in Israel was linked to their personality. Findings confirmed that foreign-born participants tended to score lower on Emotional Stability, compared to locally born participants. Similarly, acculturation and the shift from dominance in the L1 to dominance in Hebrew, an L2, resulted in lower levels of Emotional Stability. One of the most striking patterns emerging from this study was the fact that participants with high self-perceived competence and frequency of use in all spoken languages reported higher levels of Open-mindedness and Social Initiative. These findings suggest that a variety of social, linguistic and biographical factors affected individuals' personality profiles. Finally, a recent study reported personality changes in 58 British students who filled out the MPQ test before and after spending a year abroad (Ventura, Dewaele, Koylu, & McManus, 2016). The experience abroad was linked to a significant increase in Emotional Stability. In reflective interviews participants reported feeling more confident and independent after their year abroad. The discrepancy with previous research findings might be due to contingent aspects and participants' specifics, like age, their condition of temporary sojourners and their educational choices (they all had consciously decided to specialise in languages at university).

In summary, the literature suggests that migrants' personality profiles, cultural orientation and self-perceptions are pieces of a complex puzzle. While no researcher would disagree that migration experiences trigger changes across all aspects of an individual's psyche (Dewaele, 2016) nobody has yet – to our knowledge – investigated the cumulative effects of personality, cultural orientation and sense of feeling different. Such a research is challenging since the directionality of the relationship between the variables can never be completely established.

Research questions

This paper will answer the two following questions:

- (1) Is participants' sense of feeling different when using the local language linked to their orientation towards heritage and host culture and personality profiles?
- (2) Is participants' cultural orientation linked to their personality profiles?

Methodology

Participants

Participants were 468 Italian migrants (321 females and 147 males) residing in the United Kingdom (n = 360), Ireland (n = 48), the United States (n = 56) and English Canada (n = 4). The average age was 34, ranging from 18 to 73 years old (SD = 9). They were quite highly educated: 62 obtained a high-school diploma, 124 an Undergraduate degree, 177 a Postgraduate degree, 105 a Doctoral degree. The majority of participants was born in Italy (n = 449) and only a few were born in another country (n = 19). Participants mostly came from fully Italian families (n = 440), while a few came from a bicultural family (n = 28). The average age of migration was 27, ranging from 0 to 53 (SD = 7) and the average number of years spent in an ESC was 7, ranging from a few months up to 68 years (SD = 9). Participants reported to be highly proficient in English₁ (LX). The sample counted 170 bilinguals, 155 trilinguals, 96 quadrilinguals, 35 pentalinguals, 10 sextalinguals and 2 participants speaking seven and eight languages. The strong proportion of women and highly educated participants is typical for webquestionnaires (Wilson & Dewaele, 2010). The big advantages of this approach are its efficiency and capacity to collect large data sets.

Research instruments

The snowballing technique was used to reach participants, that is, non-probability sampling.

Bilingualism and emotion questionnaire

The first section of the survey collected socio-biographical details, while the second section was modelled on the BEQ (Dewaele & Pavlenko, 2001/2003). Participants were asked whether they felt different when using English with different interlocutors (strangers, colleagues, friends, family and partner) and about different topics (neutral, emotional and personal). An optional comment box was added to let migrants describe their self-perceptions more specifically: 'Do you feel like a different person when speaking English? Please explain your feelings'. Reliability of these items was assessed by means of Cronbach's alpha, which turned out to be very satisfactory: α : .86.

Multicultural personality questionnaire

The third section of the questionnaire contained a short version of the MPQ, consisting of 40 items (Van der Zee, van Oudenhoven, Ponterotto, & Fietzer, 2013) with a Cronbach's α of .88. The MPQ measures five dimensions, believed to be relevant in cross-cultural exchange (van Oudenhoven & Van Der Zee, 2002):

- Cultural Empathy: the ability to empathise with cultural diversity, understanding feelings, beliefs and attitudes different from heritage ones
- Open-mindedness: an open, unprejudiced attitude towards diversity
- Social Initiative: the tendency to approach social situations actively, taking the initiative and engaging in social situations
- Flexibility: the ability to learn from new experiences, adjusting behaviour according to

- contingency and enjoying novelty and change
- Emotional Stability: the tendency to remain calm in stressful situations controlling emotional reactions

Leone, Van Der Zee, van Oudenhoven, Perugini, and Ercolani (2005) correlated the MPQ dimensions with those from the traditional Big-Five questionnaires and found significant relationships among all traits. Of particular interest to the present research is that Social Initiative was positively correlated with Extraversion and negatively correlated with Neuroticism; while Emotional Stability was positively correlated with Extraversion, Agreeableness, Openness to Experience and Conscientiousness and negatively correlated with Neuroticism (p. 1457).

Vancouver index of acculturation

The last section of the questionnaire consisted of 10 items assessing migrants' heritage culture attachment and 10 items assessing their host culture attachment, modelled on the VIA (Ryder et al., 2000). Respondents were asked to consider their culture of origin as their heritage and the culture of the country they were residing as their host culture. In this way, the survey could be distributed in different ESC. Participants were asked to express their liking for typical values, traditions, practices for each culture on a 9-point Likert scale. Reliability was very good: Cronbach's α : .90.

Variables

Feeling different

Feedback on the question 'Do you feel like a different person when using English with... (strangers, colleagues, friends, family, partner)?' was coded on a Likert scale ranging from: (0) N/A, (1) never, (2) rarely, (3) sometimes, (4) frequently, (5) all the time. Participants tended to feel different mostly when using the LX with strangers ($M = 2.27$, $SD = 1.3$) and progressively less when talking to colleagues ($M = 2.11$, $SD = 1.3$), friends ($M = 2.18$, $SD = 1.3$), family ($M = 1.00$, $SD = 1.4$) and partners ($M = 1.18$, $SD = 1.3$).

The second question enquired about participants' perceptions when using the LX to discuss specific matters (neutral, personal and emotional). Responses were coded in the same way. Participants felt least different when talking about a neutral matter ($M = 2.08$, $SD = 1.1$), and progressively more so when discussing a personal matter ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 1.2$) or an emotional matter ($M = 2.68$, $SD = 1.3$).

Acculturation

The heritage culture attachment (L1 Acculturation) and the host culture attachment (LX Acculturation) were calculated as the mean of scores for respectively all L1 and LX culture-related items. Participants reported a strong attachment to both their heritage culture ($M = 6.59$, $SD = 1.59$) and their host culture ($M = 6.38$, $SD = 1.34$).

Personality

Participants reported high mean scores for Cultural Empathy ($M = 32.0$, $SD = 3.8$), Social Initiative ($M = 27.5$, $SD = 5.3$) and Open-mindedness traits ($M = 29.9$, $SD = 4$); and lower mean scores for Flexibility ($M = 23.4$, $SD = 4.8$) and Emotion Stability traits ($M = 23.8$, $SD = 5$).

Method

We combined emic and etic perspectives, collecting qualitative data in support of pre-identified quantitative trends. The purpose of qualitative insights was to dig into possible causes of statistical figures, adding unique insights to draw a more complete picture of migrants' psychological and sociolinguistic changes. Qualitative data thus allowed us to identify emerging themes and quotes permitted us to illustrate quantitative findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Correlation and regression analyses seemed the most appropriate statistical tests for measuring relationships among variables. A follow-up session of interviews was set up, selecting participants on the basis of their socio-biographical characteristics, like age, years spent in the ESC, education level, language, family and migration history. The purpose was to have diverse profiles. Participants' feeling different, personality and acculturation

scores were taken into consideration in order to select not only those who reflected the statistical trends. Each interview was an individual session, lasting between 1 and 2 hours. They all were semi-structured –as the first author engaged the conversation, letting candidates speak freely about their migration experience.

Results

Quantitative analyses

Feeling different when using the LX

With strangers

Pearson correlation analyses revealed that migrants' sense of feeling different when using the LX with strangers was negatively linked only to LX Acculturation ($r = -.127, p < .006$), Social Initiative ($r = -.170, p < .000$) and Emotional Stability ($r = -.266, p < .006$). Linear multiple regression analysis was computed to calculate how much variance in migrants' self-perceptions could be explained by LX Acculturation and the personality dimensions. The analysis revealed that LX Acculturation and Emotional Stability were the only significant predictors of migrants' sense of feeling different when talking to strangers, explaining a total of 8.6% of the variance (Table 1).

Table 1 – Multiple stepwise regression analysis on self-perceptions when using the L2 with strangers

| Predictor(s) | r^2 | F | p | β |
|--|-------|-------|------|----------------|
| Emotional Stability | .071 | 35.41 | .000 | -.266 |
| Emotional Stability and LX Acculturation | .086 | 21.85 | .000 | -.266 -.124 |

Dependent variable: FD Strangers

Predictors: LX Acculturation, Emotional Stability

With colleagues

Migrants' sense of feeling different when using the LX with colleagues was negatively related to LX Acculturation ($r = -.131, p < .004$) and Emotional Stability ($r = -.223, p < .000$). Linear stepwise multiple regression analysis indicated that LX Acculturation and Emotional Stability had a significant but small effect, explaining a total of 6.6% of the variance in migrants' self-perceptions (Table 2). L1 Acculturation and other personality dimensions were excluded from the analysis since they did not correlate with the dependent variable.

Table 2 – Multiple stepwise regression analysis on self-perceptions when using the LX with colleagues

| Predictor(s) | r^2 | F | p | β |
|--|-------|-------|------|----------------|
| Emotional Stability | .050 | 24.41 | .004 | -.233 |
| Emotional Stability and LX Acculturation | .066 | 16.49 | .000 | -.221 -.128 |

Dependent variable: FD Colleagues

Predictors: LX Acculturation, Emotional Stability

With friends

Migrants' sense of feeling different when using the LX with friends was negatively correlated with Social Initiative ($r = -.152, p < .001$) and Emotional Stability ($r = -.243, p < .000$). No link with migrants' orientation towards heritage and host culture emerged. A follow-up linear regression analysis indicated that Emotional Stability was the only predictor of migrants' self-perceptions, explaining 5.9% of the variance (Table 3).

Table 3 – Multiple stepwise regression analysis on self-perceptions when using the LX with friends

| Predictor(s) | r^2 | F | p | β |
|---------------------|-------|-------|------|---------|
| Emotional Stability | .059 | 29.23 | .000 | -.243 |

Dependent variable: FD Friends

Predictors: Emotional Stability

With family and partner

Migrants' sense of feeling different when using the LX with family was negatively correlated with Social

Initiative ($r = -.132, p < .004$). This dimension explained 1.7% of the variance on migrants' self-perceptions. Conversely, no relationship existed between the independent variables and migrants' sense of feeling different when using the LX with their partner.

Neutral conversation matter

A significant negative correlation emerged between migrants' sense of feeling different when using the LX for discussing a neutral matter and Emotional Stability ($r = -.171, p < .004$). Emotional Stability thus explained 2.9% of the variance in migrants' self-perceptions.

Personal conversation matter

Pearson correlation analyses revealed a negative link between migrants' sense of feeling different when using the LX for a personal matter and Emotional Stability ($r = -.274, p < .004$). In this instance, Emotional Stability explained 7.5% of the variance in migrants' self-perceptions.

Emotional conversation matter

Finally, migrants' sense of feeling different when using the LX to discuss an emotional matter was significantly and negatively linked to Emotional Stability ($r = -.253, p < .000$), accounting for 6.4% of the variance.

Cultural orientation

Heritage culture

L1 Acculturation was negatively correlated with Flexibility ($r = -.169, p < .000$) and Emotional Stability ($r = -.139, p < .003$). A linear stepwise multiple regression analyses showed that both personality dimensions were significant predictors of L1 Acculturation, explaining 3.7% of the variance (Table 4).

Table 4 – Multiple stepwise regression analysis on migrants' L1 culture attachment

| Predictor(s) | r^2 | F | p | β |
|-------------------------------------|-------|-------|------|----------------|
| Flexibility | .028 | 13.62 | .000 | -.169 |
| Flexibility and Emotional Stability | .037 | 8.93 | .000 | -.140 -.097 |

Dependent variable: L1 Acculturation
Predictors: Flexibility, Emotional Stability

Host culture

LX Acculturation correlated positively with Cultural Empathy ($r = .267, p < .000$), Social Initiative ($r = .181, p < .000$) and Open-mindedness ($r = .230, p < .000$). Linear multiple regression analyses revealed that Cultural Empathy and Open-mindedness explained 8.3% of the variance in migrants' orientation towards host culture (Table 5).

Table 5 – Linear stepwise regression analysis on migrants' LX culture attachment

| Predictor(s) | r^2 | F | p | β |
|-------------------------------------|-------|-------|------|--------------|
| Cultural Empathy | .071 | 35.75 | .000 | .267 |
| Cultural Empathy and Openmindedness | .083 | 21.05 | .000 | .202 .126 |

Dependent variable: L1 Acculturation
Predictors: Flexibility, Emotional Stability

Findings confirmed the existence of a link between migrants' personality, cultural orientation and self-perceptions. Overall, effects were small, but significant.

Qualitative analyses

Survey insights

The open question aimed to complement statistical data by probing the nature of migrants' 'multiple selves' perceptions. The responses of 303 participants have been categorised, according to themes, directly emerging from content analysis. We distinguished 4 main categories (Negative Emotions, Personality-Identity, Socio-cultural Aspects and Positive Emotions) and 15 sub-categories (Table 6).

Table 6 – Recurrent theme across migrants’ narrative about feeling different when using the LX

| Theme Categories | Total insights | Sub-categories | Rationale | Total insights |
|--|---|--|--|---------------------------------|
| Emotions (negative) | 202 | Emotion expression is difficult in the LX | Participants highlighted several degrees of difficulty in expressing emotions in the LX. | 66 |
| | | L1 is more emotional | L1 is pointed as having a higher emotional value, more linguistic complexity and a stronger poetic character. | 23 |
| | | Constraints in emotion expression in LX | LX makes participants feel less spontaneous, more rational and controlled in terms of emotion expression | 27 |
| | | Frustration | Participants feel frustrated when speaking the LX, as they cannot express things accurately or sense they convey a defecting image of themselves to interlocutors. | 40 |
| | | Gap - Detachment | LX lacks of something unidentified. Participants feel LX words as not theirs or experience a sense of detachment. | 37 |
| | | Unknown | Participants do not know how to explain their sense of feeling different when using the LX. | 9 |
| | | Personality- identity | 80 | Deep alienation |
| LX influences personality | Participants recognise a deep influence of the LX on their personality and cognition. | | | 23 |
| Multilingual identity as enrichment | Sense of enrichment due to multilingualism. Participants realise different perspectives are disclosed by their languages and feel they can master different identities in their LXs | | | 18 |
| Socio-cultural aspects | 66 | | | General cultural aspects |
| | | Humour | Participants feel different feeling different when humour is involved. | 9 |
| | | Cultural difference in emotions | Participants detect a difference in expressing emotions in their languages, linking it to their cultural background. | 11 |
| | | Proficiency not involved | Participants state their LX proficiency has nothing to do with their sense of feeling different when using the language. | 7 |
| Emotions (positive) | 35 | LX as a mask | LX acts as a comforting protection, preventing migrants from revealing painful memories, fears or real aspects of the self. | 18 |
| | | Emotion expression is easier in the LX | Participants enjoy expressing emotions in the LX, having found a new way of voicing their inner feelings. | 17 |

Participants often expressed their preference for the L1, experienced a sense of emotional constraint, frustration, detachment or bad feelings due to reasons they could not explain. Some responses focused on personality, most frequently highlighting a deep alienation or a general influence of the LX on their behaviour, less commonly, celebrating the enrichment of having a multilingual identity. Respondents also discussed socio-cultural aspects involved in their sense of feeling different while using the LX, often referring to humour. Finally, a less frequent theme was the positive experience of discovering new ways of voicing personal emotions, especially when the LX creates an easy protection to mask uncomfortable feelings. One facet of migrants’ difficulty of expressing emotions in the LX was the low emotional resonance of the LX, described as insufficient to express intimate feelings, due to an intrinsic lack of linguistic richness and poetic character:

"I can't always find the right words for what I actually mean to say, especially for matters of the heart [...] English tends to stay a bit more generic, there aren't many ways of expressing deep and strong concepts as there are in Italian" Yasmin (Italo-Iranian female, 23, UK)²

In other instances, participants' reported frustration or the fear of conveying an inaccurate image of themselves. Others described LX words as not belonging to them or referred to a sense of detachment, lack of authenticity or emotional attachment to the language. Indeed, another leitmotif is that LX forces participants to be more objective, constraining their emotional reactions:

"I feel that English language forces the speaker to be more direct and objective" DB (male, 42, Canada)

Thus, the LX might be seen as a practical tool to scrutinise reality, which attenuates migrants' feelings, confirming a connection with the trait Emotional Stability:

"When I speak Italian I feel more passionate and I talk loud while gesturing at the same time. When I speak English I tend to be more emotionally controlled, trying to speak more quietly and I don't move my hands as much" Irene (female, 46, US)

Some migrants considered this lack of emotional response as due to poor affective engagement with locals:

"Sometimes, I am not able to assess the shades of meaning conveyed by English language [...] I do not feel any emotional response attached to it. I do use emotions as an actor would do. I use English only for professional purposes and social exchange with people whom I do not know personally or to whom I do not feel any particular personal attachment" AB (male, 39, UK)

Indeed, many participants motivated their sense of feeling different with socio-cultural aspects. In particular, some of them commented on humour: the inability to do verbal acrobatics in the LX was a sore point:

"All my collections of jokes, and anecdotes relative to my entire life (TV programs, movies, songs, places) are lost. Same for the sense of being able to play with words...I feel like I'm a speaking a vocabulary robot, a language without fun" Vanessa (female, 45, US)

Another frequent theme was the sense of emotional freedom linked to the use of the LX. According to quantitative analyses, less sociable migrants tended to feel more different when using the LX. Some introverted participants confirmed that they experienced a sense of linguistic detachment that allowed them to feel more confident in their emotional response:

"I don't feel like I am giving away something that belongs to me, just because I am not using words that I recognize to be mine" NG (female, 28, UK)

Finally, the concept of 'multiple selves' repeatedly appeared:

"I feel absolutely different and awkward when talking...as if my voice is not coming from me" Federica (female, 35, UK)

In some instances, participants experienced a deep alienation that led them to describe a striking inner split:

"I am a different person, I have different emotions, I also use a different name when speaking English. It's like someone else is speaking this language, which is far less responsive, more neurotic, less rationale [...] it's just as if I have a different 'self' co-habiting my mind" A (female, 31, US)

Occasionally, respondents enjoyed this sense of hybridity:

“It feels like I am a different person [...] I feel free, energetic, interesting. I have the perception I got more to give to others” Irina (female, 37, Ireland)

Finally, other migrants considered the LX as having a deep influence on their personality and cognitive operations:

“We need “models” that help us practicing and feeling integrated in the environment where we live. This affects how someone’s personality is expressed as well, because language does not only relate to “expressing” feelings, concepts or ideas, but also to “creating” those same feelings and ideas. So, if we use someone else’s way to express ourselves, we may end up thinking that we are “moulding” our thoughts to them” SC (male, 35, UK)

Interviews: ‘Two faces of the same coin’

A total of 5 UK-based participants took part in the interview sessions. All participants chose to be interviewed in English. Their questionnaire scores are listed in Table 7 and a resume of their profiles follows below:

- Simone, 33, was the only male participant. He migrated to London when he was 28 to follow her Italian fiancée and seek new opportunities.
- Donata, 45, came from a village on the Austrian border and experienced multiculturalism since early age. She moved to London at 26 but also lived elsewhere. Her British husband and son spoke Italian fluently.
- Francesca, 42, lived in several countries and spoke many languages. Craving a culturally vibrant experience, she came to London, where she lived with her Egyptian-British husband and 5-year-old son for 13 years.
- Federica was a 35-year-old psychotherapist from Chester. She left Italy at 29 and considered hers an ‘emotional migration’ that led her to find her ideal habitat.
- Livia was a 28-year-old Ph.D. student in Creative Writing. She migrated to London when she was a teenager, triggered by her love for English language.

Table 7 – Interviewees’ specifics

| Participant | FD Open-question | FD Int. | FD Mat. | L1 Acc. | LX Acc. | CE | F | SI | O | ES |
|------------------|---|---------|---------|---------|---------|----|----|----|----|----|
| Simone | I don't feel it that much but I still see English as my second language | 2.2 | 1.67 | 8.9 | 8.6 | 32 | 20 | 25 | 30 | 23 |
| Donata | It's not the language of my emotions, of my unconscious, of my instinctive way of thinking [...] it's not the language of "my being myself" | 3.8 | 4.33 | 7.2 | 2.6 | 38 | 22 | 34 | 23 | 29 |
| Francesca | English is a more succinct language. This helps me rationalize and organise my thoughts | 3.6 | 3.33 | 7.0 | 7.7 | 36 | 25 | 35 | 30 | 17 |
| Federica | Feeling neither positive nor negative just different overall when talking about emotional matters [...] [when speaking L1] I feel absolutely strange and different and sort of awkward... as if my voice is not coming from me | 1.2 | 2 | 6.9 | 7.7 | 37 | 25 | 27 | 34 | 29 |
| Livia | Sometimes extra cultural context has to be provided when discussing personal matters - similarly: immediate, instinctive emotional reactions might differ due to cultural conditioning, which often requires extra explanations | 1.2 | 3 | 6.7 | 7.6 | 36 | 28 | 33 | 36 | 19 |

While interviewees initially stated that they do not feel different when speaking English, they all presented a sort of 'multiple selves' pattern, evoking all previous themes. A sense of frustration sometimes emerged with the perception of conveying a defective image outside, as Simone explains:

"I don't feel different but I think you got different idea of me for sure! [...] I'm thinking faster in Italian. It's more natural. I can feel it from within"

Livia remained silent for a year in order to avoid being spotted as a foreigner, even though her English was advanced. She suffered a mild shock when she realised her flat mates were addressing her and her friends as 'the Italians':

"We were all 'this something other' that we didn't know [...] I think you gotta work by subtractions, you hide some stuff and you silence yourself for a while"

Thus, it definitely seemed to be more a question of authenticity rather than proficiency. The LX was often reported as influencing emotional reactions. Francesca is proud of her Mediterranean emotional temper, but appreciates her ability to control it:

"I vindicate the right to be culturally different, because it doesn't really hurt anyone. I have a very roaring laugh. People make me notice that my laugh is too loud [...] I don't care! I'm Italian I want laugh the Italian way [...] It's not a shame to express our feelings, there is no shame in crying in public [...] what is missing in the Italian culture, though, is the ability to self-restrain. There are situations in which shouting, getting angry, outraging, protesting can be emotionally good, but it is not productive, it is not useful. I have noticed that Brits have more the eyes on the price [...] it reaches the target more effectively

Similarly, Federica explained how English helped her controlling her emotions:

I'm calm and more polite if I'm talking in English [...] Words like 'thank you', 'sorry', 'I love you' are much easier [...] they do feel different. If I speak English, I sound much more open and able to deal with emotions than if I talk in Italian [...] but I don't think it's as genuine"

However, the lack of pragmatic calibration of expressions in the LX can also have unwanted illocutionary effects, as Donata regrets:

"It happened that my arguing was taken as an attack or as very aggressive, while I don't think I'm an aggressive person"

Therefore, changes are most striking in emotional interactions, but personality and cognitive operations can be affected as well. Francesca explained how learning to formulate her thoughts in English led her to understand and appreciate British values:

"I have learnt to phrase, to structure my thoughts in English [...] sometimes I am even irritated by the way people talk to me in Italy, I find it really garrulous [...] In that sense I'd become a bit British"

On the other hand, Federica always felt in tune with British culture since the beginning:

"I've never felt like I had to change myself to fit in. I was not fitting as much in Italy [...] My mum says sometimes 'yeah, you're probably more British than Italian' and that's interesting cause also my British friends say 'you are more patriotic than British people'"

The idea of 'two sides of the same coin' was more popular than the concept of different selves cohabiting the same mind:

"It's a little bit kind of creating a new identity, but I think that ultimately it means that when I'm socialising I compromise in a way that is almost like creating a new 'me' for a while and then it lasts as a code for early interactions but I can let other sides of my personality through later. And that's fine...That's still me!"

Donata described her migration experience as a hard psychological process that she

endured by reconstructing her Italian identity:

“I don’t consider myself a migrant. I easily found my space here, a practical way for my life, but in my internal dimension I struggled a lot [...] I consider myself an Italian living abroad which is a ‘migrant’ but if you ask myself I’m Italian! [...] I don’t think I could have survived here without what I created around me and without being connected to the language”

Still evoking the idea of a combination of different selves, she explained that:

“The two languages...they compensate in myself. English is the functionality of my daily life, the pragmatic part of myself and Italian is more deep into myself [...] I always wanted to keep my Italian pronunciation. It’s a sign of my identity and keeping my accent is a way not to pretend to be another person [...] I think I live in an intercultural dimension here. I live in between two cultures [...] I have two integrated parts of myself now”

Finally, Simone affirmed his ability to be humorous in the LX and referred to a constant process of adaptation of his natural skills and perceptions:

“I did appreciate the English humour from the start. I have the kind of approach they have, it feels natural to me [...] but I work on my behaviour everyday, I sense that my cultural background is different [...] You have to [...] re-think all the things you’ve grown up with. I mean, you can live with both, you can have big roots and at the same time try to widen your point of view in order to get the most from the world outside [...] I think that was something I always had and I fulfilled it when I came here in UK, because I faced it [...] if I didn’t have that kind of spirit of adaptation and the curiosity of trying to go over my cultural background...I wouldn’t have succeeded”

Discussion

The statistical analyses unearthed a number of significant relationships between migrants’ personality, cultural orientation and sense of feeling different when using the LX, although effect sizes were generally small.

The first question focused on the influence that cultural orientation and personality traits might have on migrants’ self-perceptions. The analyses revealed that participants’ alienation when using the LX with less familiar interlocutors was negatively related to their sense of belonging to LX culture. Some participants emphasised the fact that their level of proficiency was unrelated to their sense of feeling different (Dewaele, 2016; Dewaele & Nakano, 2013; Pavlenko, 2006), and explained their self-perceptions as deeply linked to cultural aspects. It is possible that the understanding of host cultural typical values and the desire to integrate in host society could inevitably lead migrants to rely more on the local language to engage in interactions with locals, eventually replacing their initial perception of difference with a higher linguistic confidence.

Migrants’ self-perceptions were linked to the personality dimensions recurring in previous studies (Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2013; Wilson, 2008). Lower levels of Social Initiative and Emotional Stability were related to increased levels of alienation when speaking the LX and regression analyses indicated the latter as the best predictor of migrants’ sense of feeling different when switching languages. Indeed, some introverted migrants, having trouble voicing their emotions, suffered a lack of authenticity when speaking the LX. Many respondents described a sense of detachment affecting their feelings. Emotional constraint or difficulties seemed thus the most frequently mentioned topic across migrants’ narratives (Pavlenko, 2005; Dewaele, 2010), explaining the link with the trait Emotional Stability. This trait was often reported as being related to multilingualism (Dewaele & Stavans, 2009; Dewaele & Stavans, 2014). It thus seems that migrants who have more trouble controlling their emotions struggle more when using the LX in emotionally charged situations, eventually feeling more alienated.

Finally, we looked whether a connection existed between personality and migrants’ cultural orientation. Statistical findings revealed that different personality traits are linked to either heritage or host culture domains, suggesting that both cultural scenarios were

actively present in migrants' lives (Dewaele & Stavans, 2014; Dewaele & Van Oudenhoven, 2009). Specifically, participants showing a remarkable attachment to their roots were less flexible and less emotionally stable, whereas migrants' reporting a strong sense of belonging to the LX culture were more culturally emphatic, sociable and open-minded. Hence, some personality factors kept migrants attached to their heritage culture and some pushed them towards new cultural horizons, without necessarily implying the choice of a specific cultural frame as a substitute of the other.

To resume all findings, it could be said that the coexistence of different cultures and languages in migrants' minds might induce a sense of hybridity, especially visible in individuals' psyches. However, migrants' appreciation of local practices and their ability to regulate emotional responses have the potential to minimise the sense of alienation emerging from switching languages, possibly transforming it in a sense of enrichment.

We are aware of the limitations of the study. The expression 'feel different' could lead to a myriad of impressions and participants may have interpreted it slightly differently. Interviews partly solved the problem by encouraging subjective explanations. However, participants emphasised the difficulty in categorising responses in clear codes. We realised that choices on Likert scales did not always correspond to feedback during the interview. This is an important factor to keep in mind when interpreting quantitative data. Further research could investigate what contingent factors might affect migrants' self-perceptions when switching languages and whether the process of personality change during acculturation is effectively perceptible.

Conclusion

The subtle interaction between migrants' self-perceptions, personality and cultural orientation highlighted the complexity and dynamic nature of these factors. Migrants mentioned a range of unique reasons to explain why they feel different in their languages, linking emotions, cultural aspects and personality changes. We argue that it is crucial to consider migration experiences as affecting several aspects of migrants' psyche simultaneously, making them unique linguistic, cultural and psychological beings (Grosjean, 2015).

Notes

1. The present research addresses Italian migrants in English-speaking countries. English is here considered as an LX, other than L1, in order to avoid any reference to the number or order of acquisition of the languages spoken by participants.
2. Participants' names have been presented in full or in form of initials, according to their preference.

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