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A Constellation of Voices: How the Network of Languages in Migrants' Minds, Hearts, and Interactions Shape Their Sense of Self

Alex Panicacci

Abstract: Multilinguals often report having different perceptions of themselves when switching languages, typically indicating their first language (L1) as the one in which they feel more authentic and describing a sense of detachment when using any foreign language (LX). This phenomenon amplifies in migration contexts, where the LX is the language of the host society. The present study approaches the topic in a holistic way, by interconnecting the L1 and LX dimensions and investigating their joint influence on migrants' self-perceptions. Data from 468 Italian migrants living in English-speaking countries, supported by 5 in-depth interviews, revealed that the maintenance of an emotional and cognitive bond with the L1 anticipated stronger perceptions of self-change when speaking the LX. Conversely, higher levels of dominance in the LX and its use in social interactions predicted milder feelings of difference. Participants described their identity shifting as a reflexive sociolinguistic practice in response to their emotional and cognitive needs.

Key words: self-perceptions, language dominance, emotion, language socialisation, migrants' identities

Introduction

Narratives of life across language and culture have become increasingly popular in recent years. American novelist of Bengali heritage Jhumpa Lahiri vividly documents her immersion in a new linguistic context. In her essay *In Other Words* (2015), written entirely in Italian – her new language, she depicts the arduous and stimulating task of finding a voice in it: "I don't recognise the person who is writing in this diary, in this new, approximate language. But I know that it's the most genuine, most vulnerable part of me" (p. 57). In her experience, Italian elicits conflicting feelings of alienation and excitement, depicting the psychological split defined by Pavlenko (2006) as "a source of both anguish and creative enrichment" (p. 5):

When you live without your own language you feel weightless and, at the same time, overloaded. You breathe another type of air, at a different altitude. You are always aware of the difference [...] Oddly, I feel more protected when I write in Italian, even though I'm also more exposed. It's true that a new language covers me [...] I have a permeable covering, I'm almost without a skin (Lahiri, 2015, pp. 127–173).

Lahiri was born in London and migrated to the United States with her parents when she was two. With regret, she recognises how poorly defined her linguistic identity is in Bengali, her heritage language:

In a sense, I'm used to a kind of linguistic exile. My mother tongue, Bengali, is foreign in America. When you live in a country where your own language is considered foreign, you can feel a continuous sense of estrangement. You speak a secret, unknown language, lacking any correspondence to the environment. An absence that creates a distance within you [...]. I don't know Bengali perfectly. I don't know how to read it, or even write it. I have an accent, I speak without authority, and so I've always perceived a disjunction between it and me. As a result, I consider my mother tongue, paradoxically, a foreign language, too (p. 19).

Lahiri feels like a foreigner in her home country because her mother tongue is, supposedly, Bengali. Still, because she has not developed a full self or articulated a 'grownup voice' in it, she also feels like a stranger when speaking it. The double-sided sense of displacement emerging from Lahiri's linguistic experience brings the attention to how contextual factors, such as the subjective connection with a language, can help explain the kaleidoscopic variation in speakers' reflexivity. The phenomenon of reflexivity is at the heart of many discursive processes and is relevant for understanding language use, social and contextual practices, but also for analyses of subjectivity (Zienkowski, 2017), which will be the main framework of this paper.

Like Lahiri, multilinguals often report perceiving changes in their self-concepts when speaking different languages (Dewaele, 2016; Pavlenko, 2006).

This occurrence has been studied under numerous aspects. Yet, it seems quite hard to capture the way these feelings surface, develop, or dissolve. What we know is that the L1 emerged as having an unconditionally stronger emotional resonance compared to any other language learned later in life[1] (LX), making it challenging for LX users to feel authentic when expressing emotions (Dewaele, 2010; Dewaele & Nakano, 2013; Pavlenko, 2006 ; Panicacci, 2021). On the contrary, the age of acquisition and proficiency in the target language do not seem to have a defined effect on multilinguals' self-concept alterations (Dewaele, 2016).

Sociolinguistic theories emphasised the importance of understanding the context when exploring multilingualism (cf. e.g., Giles & Coupland, 1991). Research conducted in migration contexts, for example, evidenced how the sociocultural integration into the new society is related to immigrants' attitudes towards the local language (Panicacci, 2019, 2020, 2021), prompting them to perceive it as a language in which they feel more 'themselves' (Hammer, 2016; Zhang et al., 2017) and thus reducing their sense of alienation when using it (Panicacci & Dewaele, 2017). In addition, personality traits, situational changes, and intergroup relations explained part of the variation in multilinguals' self-perceptions when switching languages (Gangi & Soliz, 2016; Giles, 1977, 2012; Hammer, 2017; Koven, 1998; Mijatović & Tytus, 2016; Panicacci & Dewaele, 2018; Wilson, 2013).

Overall, literature suggests that multilinguals' self-perceptions are connected to the way they use their languages, with whom they use them, and how they feel about them (Giles & Coupland, 1991; Grosjean, 2001). When theorising the Complementarity Principle, Grosjean (2010) states that bilinguals "use their languages for different purposes, in different domains of life, with different people and that different aspects of life often require different languages" (p. 574). Following this framework, the originality of the present research lies in the attempt of interconnecting the role of different languages actively present in multilinguals' minds. The purpose is to investigate how the relationship between multiple linguistic dimensions

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[1]   Regardless of the chronological order of acquisition we will use 'LX' to refer to any language other than the L1 (cf. Dewaele, 2 0 1 8).

regulates the speaker's reflexivity when using an LX. According to Cook (2016) "languages must be an interconnected whole within a single mind, an eco-system of mutual interdependence" (p. 7). If the knowledge of each language is neither static nor compartmentalised, it is crucial to approach the investigation in a holistic way, considering multilinguals as linguistically integrated entities with a multi-vocal self (Choi, 2017; Resnik, 2018).

This research has been carried out in the context of migration in English-speaking countries (ESC) where participants are 468 migrants L1 speakers of Italian and LX speakers of English. The analysis was conducted by paralleling the L1 (Italian) and the LX (English) dimensions. We investigated how the presence of both languages in participants' minds, hearts, and social interactions regulated their self-perceptions when speaking the LX. With reference to both languages (Italian and English), the variables examined were the perceived levels of emotional resonance, cognitive dominance, and frequency of use with different social networks.

Literature Review

Language is an important identity marker (Chen, 2015; Kanno, 2003) that can act as a proxy to convey one's social identity through practices and choices (Stoicheva, 2016; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In the case of multilinguals, identity formation becomes more complex (Choi, 2017). Social psychology suggests that identity is contingent on the interactions individuals have (Bourhis et al., 2012; Clément & Noels, 1992; Vega, 2008). This fosters the idea that one has multiple self-representations which may vary depending on the settings, types of engagement, and focus of the interaction (De Fina, 2007; Gangi & Soliz, 2016; Grosjean, 2001; Koven, 1998; Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985; Noels et al., 2010; Noels, 2013). In other words, identity, language, and context are deeply interrelated and individuals' multilingualism has a direct effect on their behaviour (Giles, 1977; Giles & Johnson, 1981; Kanno, 2003; Zhang & Imamura, 2017; Zhang et al., 2017). The sociocultural linguistic framework adopted here, as defined by Bucholtz and Hall (2005), synthesizes different approaches on identity from all

these traditions to offer a broad and holistic perspective, "one that focuses on both the details of language and the workings of culture and society" (p. 586). A multidisciplinary overview of the self, accounting for the intersection of language, culture, and society, is the best way to develop an analytical model that coherently incorporates all facets of reflexivity, such as language use, discourse, social practice, context, interaction, and more (Zienkowski, 2017).

It's not until relatively recently that linguistic research started analysing multilinguals' perceptions of themselves in different languages. The attention to this topic originated with the Bilingualism and Emotions Questionnaire (BEQ) (Dewaele & Pavlenko, 2001–2003), which was the first survey assessing multilinguals' self-perceptions in different languages. Two thirds of the BEQ participants reported feeling different when using different languages. The analysis of 1039 responses to the open question "do you feel like a different person sometimes when you use your different languages?" showed that perceptions varied extensively across individuals, who often struggled to identify the source of their feelings. One common theme was the high emotional engagement they felt when using their L1, the language in which they reported feeling 'more themselves' (Dewaele, 2010; Pavlenko, 2005). Since then, several studies have been conducted, either on the BEQ database or inspired by it, with the purpose of capturing the reasons behind this occurrence. The following paragraphs will illustrate the most relevant scholarship emerging from the BEQ.

Some of the most significant variables included in analyses of multilinguals' identity shifting when switching languages were the perceived emotionality of the target language, intended as the emotional intensity the language can evoke (Dewaele, 2015), and its perceived dominance, intended as the prominence of the language in one's daily life and cognitive operations (Dewaele, 2016; Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2013; Panicacci, 2021). To deepen the analysis of the BEQ, Dewaele (2010) explored 485 pentalinguals' perceptions of their languages in terms of usefulness, emotionality, richness, colourfulness, and poetic character, registering a gradual decline from the L2 to the L5[2]. Regardless of

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[2]   The numbers stand for the chronological order of acquisition.

their proficiency levels, participants considered the languages they acquired earlier in life as more emotional, rich, poetic, useful, and colourful. The L1 was also considered as the most suitable to express emotions, to swear, or perform cognitive operations (Dewaele, 2010, 2017; Pavlenko, 2005). Dewaele (2010) concluded that an emotional shift towards an LX can emerge when informants socialise into the LX cultural context, developing meaningful relationships with LX speakers. Supplementary studies confirmed that the emotional weight of L1 words or sentences, such as 'I love you', is indeed rated as stronger compared to LX words, but that socialising in the target language can change this trajectory (Dewaele, 2004, 2008, 2017; Dewaele & Salomidou, 2017). Researchers started considering the possibility that the perception speakers have of the target language could be transferred to the perception they have of themselves when using it (Dewaele & Nakano, 2013). Following this assumption, in the attempt of giving more nuances to the sense of change described by many participants when switching languages, Dewaele and Nakano (2013) questioned 106 multilinguals about their feelings when using different languages. The authors presented five scales of feelings to better define people's perceptions: logical, serious, emotional, fake, and different. Respondents reported feeling gradually less logical, serious, emotional, and increasingly fake and different, respectively when using their L2, L3, and L4. In this instance, self-reported proficiency emerged as a significant predictor of changes in all these feelings in the L2 and in feeling fake in the L3. Multilinguals felt that their rational and emotional range was more limited when proficiency levels were lower. In contrast, the age of acquisition predicted only participants' sense of feeling different in the L2, where a lower age of acquisition anticipated milder feelings of difference. Despite having consolidated that the speakers' self-perceptions align with their perceptions of the languages in use, great part of the variance in multilinguals' reported feelings of difference remained unexplained.

Dewaele (2016) continued the analysis of 1005 multilinguals' insights from the BEQ database to verify if some linguistic practices and contextual factors could better explain multilinguals' self-perceptions when switching languages. The analyses revealed that the LX age of onset, level of proficiency, frequency of use, and perceived dominance were not linked to respondents' feelings of

difference when using it. Many participants blamed their lack of confidence and fluency in the LX as responsible for their perceived self-concept alterations when speaking it, but statistical analysis did not confirm this trend. The relationship between proficiency and feelings of difference remained unclear and only detectable through qualitative insights. Also, no difference was found between the self-perceptions of early and late multilinguals, substantiating Pavlenko's (2006) observation. The context of acquisition of the LX, its frequency of use, perceived dominance, and the number of languages known were also unrelated to informants' self-perceptions. Dewaele (2016) argued that the change in context in which the LX is used might cause perceived self-concept variations, rather than just language switching itself, retracing Grosjean's (2010) Complementarity Principle.

To clarify the relationship between the domain of use, socio-cultural aspects, and feelings of difference, Hammer (2016) examined the perceptions of 149 Polish immigrants when speaking English in the UK. The researcher phrased the research question in a different way, asking people whether they 'felt themselves' when speaking English. She found that the psychological integration in the new society was related to a more frequent use of English also in intimate domains. As a consequence, informants with higher acculturation levels, who developed social relationships in English, and considered it their dominant language, reported feeling 'more themselves' when speaking it. Following the steps of Pavlenko's (2013), who claimed that socialisation in a language can translate into a greater emotionality when using it, Hammer concluded that the cognitive prominence of English helped participants develop a deeper identification with that language. This finding was supported by Panicacci & Dewaele's (2017) study of 468 Italian migrants living in ESC. The researchers showed that a strong psychological affiliation with the receiving culture inhibited participants' feelings of difference when using the local language.

Although not directly investigating multilinguals' self-perceptions, there is another study which is worth mentioning. Dewaele (2004) investigated the effects of perceived L1 attrition, using the BEQ database of 1039 multilinguals. The author distinguished between participants who listed the L1 as their dominant language, those who listed the LX as their dominant

language, and those who reported being multidominant. Language dominance emerged as affecting the speaker's perceptions of certain characteristics of the L1, such as usefulness, colourfulness, but not its emotional and poetic character, or the intensity of L1 swearwords. The L1 retained its emotional strength also among LX dominants. Dewaele concluded that "L1 attriters adopt new languages to express themselves and to project their adult personalities" (p. 101) without necessarily losing the emotional resonance of the L1. These results align with Hammer's (2016) observation that the cognitive relevance of a language affects the way people perceive themselves when speaking it: when a language prevails in one's mind and daily life the speaker feels more authentic in it. Dewaele's (2004) study also evidenced that the emotionality of the L1 stays intact regardless of speakers' sociolinguistic practices. This, in turn, might explain why multilinguals have different self-perceptions when using an LX, especially if considering that they mostly mention emotional changes when describing this occurrence.

When analysing the qualitative feedback from 1414 BEQ participants that answered the question about feeling like a different person, Wilson (2008) identified crucial themes related to emotions, such as Control/Lack of control (19%) and Emotionality (14%). Additionally, a negative relationship emerged between feelings of difference and the personality trait Extraversion (Wilson, 2013). Introverted participants portrayed a sense of "emotional liberation" (p. 8) when speaking an LX. The empowerment unleashed by the language was due to the possibility of overcoming the emotional intensity entailed by the L1. Following this path, Ożańska-Ponikwia (2013) analysed the self-perceptions of 102 Polish migrants in ESC when using English. In contrast to Wilson (2013), informants who were more extraverted and emotionally skilled were also more likely to mention changes in themselves when using English. Connecting Wilson's (2013) and Ożańska-Ponikwia's (2013) research, Panicacci & Dewaele (2017) evidenced how, when using the local language, emotionally stressed migrants described either a sense of self-constraint or emotional freedom. Qualitative insights from the same sample evidenced how contextual factors interacted with psychological ones. Specifically, participants' feelings of change peaked when discussing emotional topics or when speaking with

less familiar interlocutors (Panicacci & Dewaele, 2018). The longer and more established the relationship, the more the LX tended to become an emotional language for most users (cf. also Dewaele, 2008; Dewaele & Salomidou, 2017).

Overall, research showed that socialising and experiencing emotions in the LX have an impact on multilinguals' perceptions of their languages (Dewaele, 2010), leading towards a deeper cognitive embodiment of the language (Hammer, 2016; Pavlenko, 2013). In this framework, contextual and socio-psychological factors explained this phenomenon better than linguistic ones (Dewaele, 2016).

Objectives and Hypotheses

Literature showed that multilinguals' self-perceptions when switching languages are related to their emotional experiences and several socio-contextual factors (Dewaele, 2010; Dewaele & Salomidou, 2017; Grosjean, 2001, 2015; Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2013; Panicacci & Dewaele, 2017, 2018; Wilson, 2008, 2013). Higher levels of affective socialisation in the LX and the cognitive dominance of the language make it function as an identity marker (Giles & Johnson, 1981; Pavlenko, 2013), giving LX speakers the perception of 'being themselves' (Hammer, 2016). In this picture, linguistic aspects, such as the age of acquisition, proficiency, and frequency of use mostly failed to consistently explain the variation in multilinguals' feelings (Dewaele, 2016; Dewaele & Nakano, 2013). To our knowledge, research has yet to consider the joint impact of multiple linguistic dimensions on multilinguals' self-perceptions. The literature presented above and social psychology theories (Chen, 2015; Chen et al., 2008; Cheng et al., 2014; Clément & Noels, 1992; Noels et al., 2010) suggest the possibility of a link between multilinguals' emotional and cognitive embracement of the L1 and their perceived changes in their self-concept when speaking other languages. This study aims to fill this gap and explore these perceptions of change, incorporating all linguistic dimensions at play. Considering a sample of Italians living in ESC, where English is their LX, we will answer the following questions: is participants' sense of feeling like a different person when using the LX linked to:

1) the perceived level of emotional resonance of the L1 and of the LX?
2) the perceived level of cognitive dominance of the L1 and of the LX?
3) the frequency of use of the L1 and of the LX with different social networks?

Each of the factors presented in the questions (emotional resonance, dominance, frequency of use with social networks) will be investigated for each linguistic dimension separately.

The analysis follows the trends of previous investigations and centres on participants' perceived changes in their self-concepts when using the LX. No other form of perceived variation, other than reflexive self-awareness, is examined here. Testing will be conducted by paralleling the L1 and LX dimensions using mixed methods. High scores on perceived L1 emotional resonance, dominance, and use with different social networks, together with low scores on perceived LX emotional resonance, dominance, and use with different social network are expected to predict stronger feelings of change when using the LX. Conversely, high levels of perceived LX emotional resonance, dominance, and use with different social network, along with low L1 scores on the same dimensions are expected to predict milder feelings of difference when using it. In this context, we also aim to identify the factor that explains the most variance in participants' feelings of difference when using the LX.

Method

Demographics

Given that subjective experiences are crucial when examining reflexivity, a demographically diverse sample was selected to explore all facets of speakers' self-perceptions. This criterion proved valid in all preceding studies (cf. Dewaele, 2016; Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2013; Panicacci & Dewaele, 2017, 2018).

Participants are 468 Italian migrants (321 females and 147 males) living in the UK (n = 360), the USA (n = 56), Ireland (n = 48), and the English provinces

of Canada (n = 4). Respondents are all L1 speakers of Italian and LX speakers of English. The vast majority were born in Italy (n = 449), whereas 19 participants were born abroad and migrated to Italy in their childhood. The average age is 34 (SD = 9), ranging from 18 to 73 years old. The average number of years spent in an ESC is 7, ranging from a few months to 68 years (SD = 9). The average age of migration is 27 and varies from 0 to 53 (SD = 7). According to the research design, it was imperative to control for a distinction between the L1 and LX dimensions. In order to have a linguistically and culturally homogeneous sample of people of Italian heritage, only participants whose up-bringing took place in Italy were selected. Respondents who were also L1 speakers of English or had connections with the LX culture from early ages were excluded.

The sample is highly educated: 62 completed high school, 124 an undergraduate degree, 177 a postgraduate degree, and 105 a doctoral degree. Self-reported LX proficiency levels, based on a 5-Likert scale were: M Speaking = 4.19, M Listening = 4.31, M Reading = 4.56, M Writing = 4.20.

Procedure

Research proved that perceptions of change in the self vary extensively across subjects, leading to positive or negative experiences, which can have vastly different outcomes on people's functioning and well-being. In order to detect the subtle nuances of these feelings, a mixed-method approach, combining survey questions, open-ended questions, and interviews has been selected, following analogous studies (Dewaele, 2016; Hammer, 2017; Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2013; Pavlenko, 2006).

At first, data have been gathered using a web-questionnaire, inspired by the BEQ, distributed by means of non-probability sampling (convenience sampling, and snowball sampling). The shortcoming of this approach is that it leads to individuals with similar social statuses. However, it is considered the most efficient fast option to collect large datasets from different areas (Dewaele & Wilson, 2010; Dörnyei, 2007).

Five UK residents who completed the questionnaire were selected to take part in an interview session, based on diverse socio-biographical indicators:

age, years spent abroad, status in the country, migration history, social status (Table 1). Interviews were conducted in English, according to participants' preferences, with rare occurrences of code-switching to Italian, and lasted between 1 and 2 hours. The scripts were unstructured and loosely based on initial statistical trends. Immigrants were asked to freely talk about their self-perceptions and their language use with different social networks in various domains. The purpose of qualitative data was to provide patterns of interpretation for the statistical findings (Creswell, 2015).

Table 1. Interviewees' profiles

Participant	Gen	Edu	Status	Age	Age of Mig	Years Abroad	Notes
Simon	M	BA	Perm. Resident	33	28	5	Migrated together with his Italian girlfriend to gain work experience.
Dana	F	MSc	Perm. Resident	45	27	18	Strong Italian identity. Her migration to the UK was accidental. She is married to a British and has a son and speaks Italian with them.
Bia	F	MA	Citizen	42	24	13	Also lived in Belgium and Spain. She migrated to London to experience a culturally vibrant environment. Has an Egyptian-British husband and a son.
Frances	F	MSc	Citizen	35	29	6	She defines her experience an "emotional migration" that led her to find her ideal habitat. She lives in Chester with her Welsh partner.
Olivia	F	PhD	Temp. Resident	28	19	8.5	She always loved the English language and migrated to immerse herself in it.

Variables

Feelings of difference (FD). Feedback on the question 'do you feel like a different person when using English to talk about [neutral/personal/ emotional] matters?' was coded on a Likert scale: (1) never, (2) rarely, (3) sometimes, (4) frequently, (5) all the time. The question has been extracted from the BEQ and includes different topics of conversations to better focus on situational changes, eliciting more reliable answers. In order to give a general indication of participants' self-perceptions, a composite measure was computed by calculating the mean of all single scores, generating the variable FD, following the steps of Panicacci and Dewaele (2017). Reliability analysis showed a high level of internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .889).

Participants had the option to describe their feelings in more detail in a following open question: 'if you feel like a different person when speaking English please, explain your feelings'.

L1/LX Emotional resonance (ER) and L1/LX Dominance. Answers to the questions whether Italian and English were considered emotional or dominant languages were coded as following: (1) not at all, (2) somehow, (3) more or less, (4) to a large extent, (5) absolutely. This generated the variables: L1 ER, LX ER, L1 Dominance, and LX Dominance. These questions were inspired by the BEQ.

The sample was then divided into three groups according to their language dominance scores. Group 1 indicated the L1 as their dominant language (n = 337), Group 2 indicated the LX as their dominant language (n = 51), and Group 3 reported to be multidominant and assigned equal dominance scores to Italian and English (n = 80). This procedure was inspired by Dewaele (2004).

L1/LX Frequency of use (FoU). Lastly, following the steps of the BEQ, the questionnaire enquired about the FoU of the L1 and the LX with different social networks: 'how often do you use [Italian/English] when speaking with [strangers, colleagues, friends, family, partner]?'. Feedback on both questions was coded on a Likert scale: (0) N/A, (1) never, (2) rarely, (3) sometimes, (4) frequently, (5) all the time.

Two composite variables, giving indication of participants' levels of L1 and LX socialisation, were computed by calculating the mean respectively of all L1 and all LX interlocutor scores: L1 FoU, LX FoU.

Descriptive statistics for all variables are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

	M	SD		M	SD
Feeling Different (FD)	2.41	1.12			
L1 FoU	3.04	.780	LX FoU	3.70	.769
L1ER	4.27	1.19	LX ER	3.22	1.26
L1 Dominance	4.41	.857	LX Dominance	3.19	1.06

Results

Quantitative Analyses

Histograms showed that FD and L1 ER were the only ones to present a less homogeneous distribution. Parametric analysis, supported by resampling technique, was preferred, as more statistically robust (Field, 2014). Bonferroni correction was applied, lowering the threshold of significance to $p < 0.008$ (Loewen & Plonsky, 2015). Pearson's tests revealed statistically significant positive correlations between migrants' FD scores and L1 ER ($r = .212$, $p < .001$, CI: .127, .293), L1 Dominance ($r = .136$, $p = .003$, CI: .042, .238), LX Dominance ($r = -.133$, $p = .004$, CI: $-.225$, $-.045$), and LX FoU ($r = -.144$, $p = .002$, CI: $-.235$, $-.048$) scores. No statistically significant correlation emerged with LX ER ($p = .084$) scores and L1 FoU scores ($p = .656$) (Table 3).

Table 3. Correlation Analyses

|	FD	p	CI		FD	p	CI
L1 ER	**.212****	.000	.127 .293	LX ER	.080	.084	-.019 .119
L1 Dominance	**.136****	.003	.042 .238	LX Dominance	**-.133****	.004	-.225 -.045
L1 FoU	-.021	.656	-.116 .076	LX FoU	**-.144****	.002	-.235 -.048

The analysis indicated language dominance as significantly linked with migrants' FD scores for both dimensions (the L1 and the LX). Hence, a one-way ANOVA test was computed to verify whether the difference in FD scores across L1 dominants (Group 1), LX dominants (Group 2), and multidominants (Group 3) was statistically significant. Parametric and bootstrapping analyses were selected, as histogram charts revealed dissimilarly shaped distributions of FD scores across Group 1, 2, and 3 (figures 1 a, b, c). The assumption of homogeneity of variances was verified, using Levene's test (p = .295). A small statistically significant difference between groups emerged: $F(2, 465)$ = 8.813, p < .000. LSD post-hoc tests revealed that participants who indicated the L1 as their dominant language were more likely to feel different when using the LX (M = 2.54, SD = .060, p = .002; CI: .197, .846), compared to those who reported being multidominant (M = 2.10, SD = .123, p = .002; CI: – .709, – .173), or LX dominant (M = 2.02, SD = .154, p = .002; CI: – .846, – .197) (Figure 2).
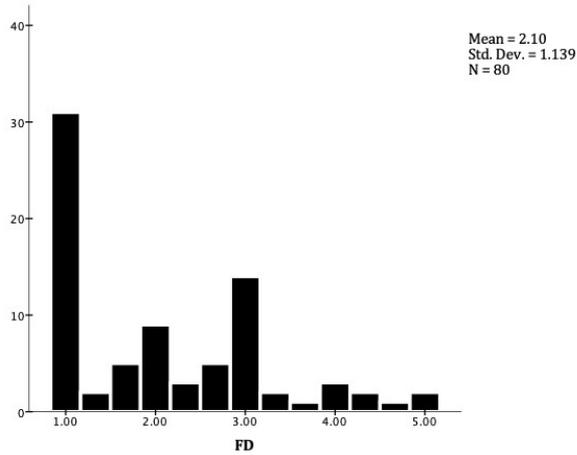
Figure 1.

a) L1 dominant migrants

Mean = 2.54
Std. Dev. = 1.071
N = 337

FD
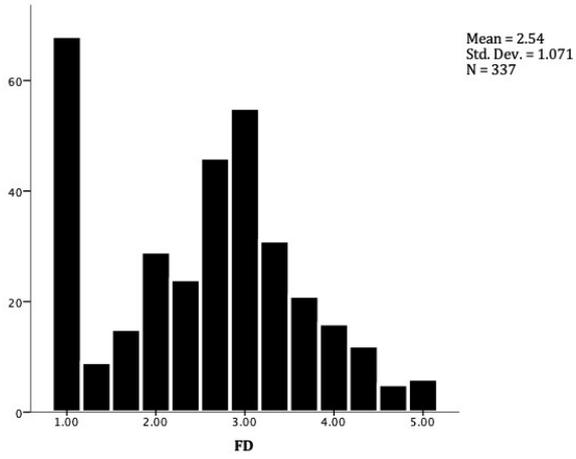
b) Multidominant migrants

Mean = 2.02
Std. Dev. = 1.204
N = 51

FD
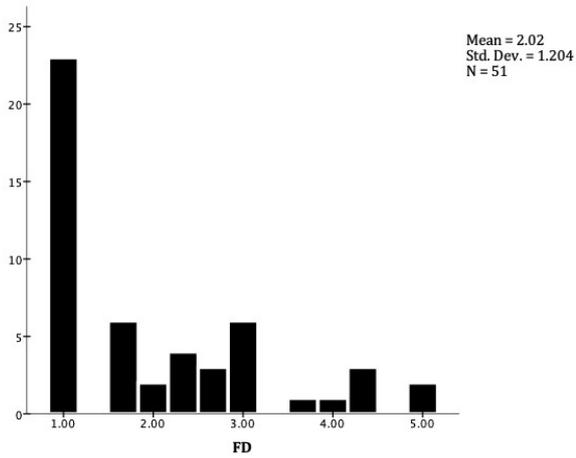
c) LX Dominant migrants

Mean = 2.10
Std. Dev. = 1.139
N = 80

Lastly, a regression model, based on the jointed contribution of L1 and LX variables, was computed to investigate the variance in migrants' self-perceptions (Table 4). The analysis indicated L1 ER (β = .226, $t(467)$ = 5.046, p < .001), LX Dominance (β = − .129, $t(467)$ = − 2.797, p = .005), and LX FoU (β = − .116, $t(467)$ = − 2.546, p = .011) as reliable predictors of migrants' FD scores, accounting for a total variance of 8.2% (Plonsky & Ghanbar, 2018): $F(3, 467)$ = 13.761, p < .001 (Table 4). L1 Dominance was excluded from the model. In other words, a high L1 emotional resonance, together with weak LX dominance and lack of use with different interlocutors, predicted stronger feelings of difference when using the LX. The Q-Q plot and regression line are illustrated respectively in Figure 3 and 4.

**Table 4. Multiple regression analysis conducted on migrants' sense of feeling different when using the LX**

Model	r²	F	p	β	Durbin Watson	Collinearity diagnostics Tolerance	BCa 95%	
							Lower	Upper
L1 Emotional Resonance	.045	21.88	.000	.212	2.100	.990	.120	.274
L1 Emotional Resonance LX Dominance	.069	17.20	.000	.227 -.156		.937	-.230	-.027
L1 ER LX Dominance LX Socialisation	.082	13.76	.000	.226 -.129 -.116		.946	-.276	-.022

Dependent variable: FD

Excluded variables: L1 Dominance

Figure 3. Normal Q-Q plot of FD variable

Normal Q-Q Plot of FDTopic
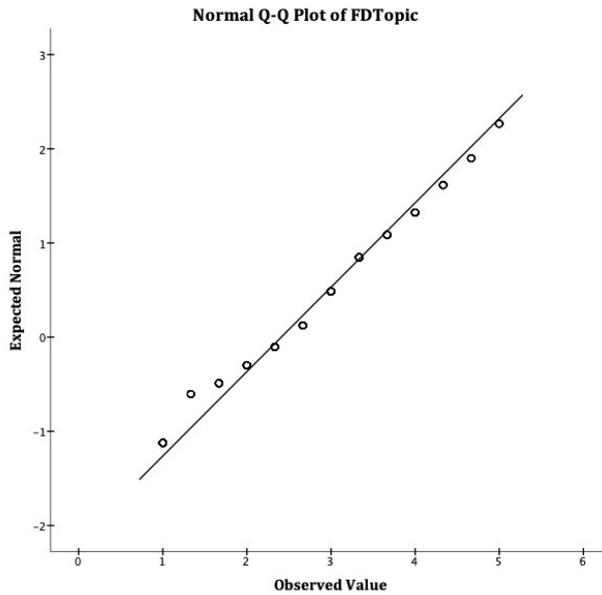
Figure 4. Scatter plot of regression line
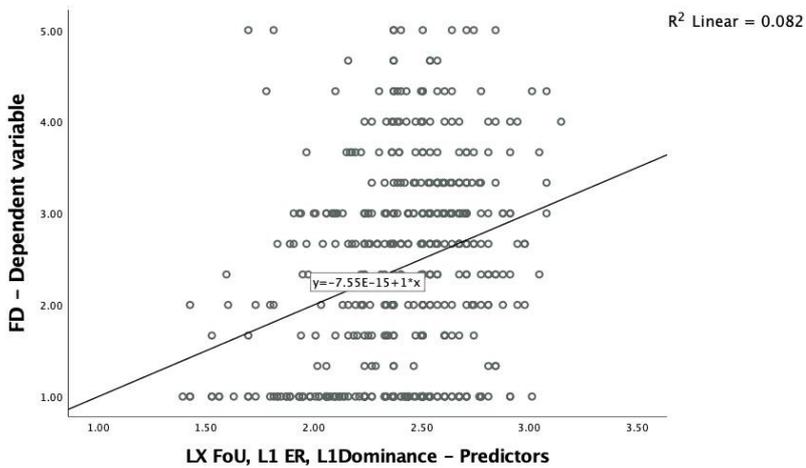
Data from the interviewees and from 303 survey participants that answered the open-ended question were coded and tested for inter-reliability with reference to the variables of this study (Table 5). In order of decreasing frequency, the themes were: language emotional resonance (324)[3], language dominance (140), and language use with social networks (63).

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[3]   Number of observations (see Table 5).

Table 5. Qualitative data frequency of themes

Theme Categories	Total observations	Sub-categories	Total observations
Language emotional resonance	324	L1 ER in general	146
		Difficulty when expressing emotions in the LX	131
		LX creates detachment	28
		L1 objectively more emotional	25
		LX ER in general	19
		Detachments gives a sense of empowerment	15
Language dominance	140	L1 Dominance in general	75
		LX Dominance in general	48
		Difficulty in restructuring thinking	38
		Multidominance	17
		LX not part of inner self	10
		Feeling different when using L1	8
Language use with social networks	63	L1 Use with social networks	42
		LX General use	40
		LX Use in affective interactions	23
		LX Use with social networks	21

In discussing their self-alterations when speaking English, respondents mainly referred to emotions. The emotional resonance of the L1 was repeatedly mentioned (146) in relation to the challenges of expressing emotions in the LX (131), which were the two most frequent sub-codes in migrants' narratives. Occasionally, when answering the open question about feeling like a different person, participants considered the stronger emotional resonance of the L1 as objectively due to the language being more expressive itself (25):

> When I have to talk about love I prefer to talk in Italian because the Italian language is the language of love. (female, 37, UK, L1 ER: 5, L1 Dominance: 5, LX Dominance: 5, LX FoU: 4.20)[4]

> Italian seems to have lots more different shades and metaphoric expressions especially when is used to talk about emotions and feelings. (female, 40, UK, L1 ER: 5, L1 Dominance: 5, LX Dominance: 3, LX FoU: 5)

Implicitly, these respondents linked their perceived alterations to their preference for a more intense way of voicing intimate feelings, which they consider a characteristic of the Italian language. Yet, the vast majority of these mentions were more generally focusing on the fact that Italian words felt more evocative than English ones. In his interview, Simon attributed the sense of estrangement he experiences when voicing strong emotions in English to the special affective bond he feels with his mother tongue:

> I'm more linked to the Italian language [...] It is my own language, so I've got some sort of attachment that is more... emotional [...] because sometimes a word is just a word, but that word can convey lots of different micro-meanings... some kind of words, because they're related to more important feelings as '*ti amo*' [I love you]. (L1 ER: 5, L1 Dominance: 5, LX Dominance: 4, LX FoU: 3.60)

In his words, the emotionality disclosed by Italian is not to be found in the language itself, but in the heartfelt connection the speaker maintains with it when voicing his attachment to the language: "it's my own language". This aspect also emerged in circumstances when people were to voice anger or discomfort. Frances described how she resorts to inserting Italian words in her speech to vent severe irritation whenever the need for authenticity is more pressing:

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4   Participants' scores for all variables that revealed statistically significant results accompany each extract. Also, participants have been anonymised.

The real me the… the emotional me is still Italian […] I do change sometimes… depending on the language that I speak […] if it is a situation that frustrates me… that requires an action […] then I speak to myself and I swear to myself and I say *oh maremma maiala*! [swearing in Italian] I have to use Italian. (L1 ER: 5, L1 Dominance: 5, LX Dominance: 5, LX FoU: 3.80) (Panicacci, 2021)

Likewise, Dana explains how, for emotional reasons, she intentionally expresses certain emotions only in Italian:

I probably feel a bit colder in English or a bit… less emotional […] There are words that are untranslatable as we know, also they are deeply associated with your feelings and even if you have the equivalent in the other language you don't want to use it, so sometimes I don't – which is interesting, I don't want to use an English word […] I'd rather describe my emotions. (L1 ER: 5, L1 Dominance: 5, LX Dominance: 2, LX FoU: 4.6) (Panicacci, 2021)

In recalling a tragic event when she found herself unable to voice her pain, Dana explained that having psychotherapy sessions in Italian represented a unique way to emotionally reconnect with herself and elaborate her trauma:

I was struggling with the language I guess… to express what I was feeling […] Language-wise I think I was reverting more to Italian […] my emotional language is Italian.

Therefore, whether it was seen as a linguistic feature or a subjective inner matter, the emotional resonance of the L1 was widely appointed by participants as explaining their sense of feeling different when speaking the LX, especially if intimacy was involved or when voicing intense emotions. In doing this, respondents did not always feel frustration. Still portraying changes in themselves, some seemed more inquisitive in their reflexivity, describing a sense of detachment, which was another recurrent theme in the analysis (28):

> Emotionally, I don't find a proper correspondence in the English words, I've tried to widen my vocabulary but still it feels somehow different. (female, 51, USA, L1 ER: 5, L1 Dominance: 5, LX Dominance: 2, LX FoU: 4.60)

The emotional gap arising from the use of the LX was at times described as a positive experience (15):

> I actually feel very positive about speaking in English about personal or emotional matters. It comes a lot easier to me than if I were to do that in Italian […] I feel more detached and therefore less embarrassed. Certain topics (expressing feelings, love, sex) become extremely easy to discuss when speaking in English. (female, 34, UK, L1 ER: 5, L1 Dominance: 5, LX Dominance: 4, LX FoU: 3.80)

> Because English is not my native language, I somehow feel 'safer' to express my feelings […] It's as if I'd expose myself more when speaking Italian than when speaking English. (female, 24, UK, L1 ER: 3, L1 Dominance: 4, LX Dominance: 3, LX FoU: 3.20) (Panicacci, 2021)

The lack of emotional engagement empowered some migrants, prompting them to feel self-confident when discussing intimate matters. Bia accurately illustrates this theme in her interview:

> Words are emotions […] words like 'thank you', 'sorry', 'I love you'… are much more easy for me in English because I don't think that they've got the same meaning they've got in Italian […] If I do speak English, I sound much more open and able to deal with emotions […] it's easier but I don't think it's as genuine. (L1 ER: 5, L1 Dominance: 4, LX Dominance: 4, LX FoU: 3.2) (Panicacci, 2021)

In support, she defines her migration as a liberating experience that led her to release her deep emotions:

> Since I came here, I sort of found my kind of emotional place like 'oh this is like things can be'... I'm behaving in this way; I'm giving out these emotions [...] I sometimes do perceive me more... yeah maybe more calm when I talk in English Yeah... maybe sometimes I feel more myself.

Only a few participants discussed emotional aspects in relation to English (19), generally pairing the lack of emotionality disclosed by the language with the lack of affective connections with English speakers:

> Sometimes, I do not feel any emotional response attached to English [...] I do use emotions as an actor would do: I direct the emotional flow, in order to convey information and meanings [...] I do use English almost 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. (male, 38, UK, L1 ER: 3, L1 Dominance: 4, LX Dominance: 3, LX FoU: 2.8)

In contrast, language dominance was repeatedly mentioned by migrants (123) in terms of active presence of both languages in several domains of life and in their minds. In particular, dominance in the L1 was mentioned slightly more frequently (75) than dominance in the LX (48). Some L1 dominants described the difficulty of having to morph their *cogito* to the new language (38):

> Because I'm not using my native language I have to 'restructure' my way of thinking to find a way round. (female, 28, UK, L1 ER: 4, L1 Dominance: 4, LX Dominance: 3, LX FoU: 4.20)

This aspect inevitably led them to a sense of lack of authenticity when using the LX.

Other participants explained their feelings of change by stating that English is not part of their identity (10):

It's not the language of my emotion, of my unconscious, of my instinctive way of thinking [...] it's not the language of 'my being myself'. (female, 45, UK, L1 ER: 5, L1 Dominance: 5, LX Dominance: 2, LX FoU: 4.6) (Panicacci, 2021)

This led to some respondents openly regretting the fact that their 'real self' is only accessible to Italian speakers:

I feel negative because sometimes I realize that a person who doesn't speak Italian can't know me 100%, but only a part of me. (female, 26, UK, L1 ER: 5, L1 Dominance: 5, LX Dominance: 2, LX FoU: 3)

Accounts from multidominants (17) portrayed a more complex reflexivity, which entailed emotions and general language use all at once:

When I speak in English I feel that I can be more direct, I deal with difficult matters better, maybe because I have lived a long time here. Emotionally, I related to my children in Italian and this feels more real. Emotionally, I relate to my husband in English and this feels more real. (female, 41, UK, L1 ER: 5, L1 Dominance: 3, LX Dominance: 3, LX FoU: 4.20)

These participants generally talked about both languages, explaining how their self-perceptions shift according to the language used in their stream of thoughts:

It depends on what language I am thinking in. (male, 49, UK, L1 ER: 4, L1 Dominance: 5, LX Dominance: 5, LX FoU: 3.40)

A couple of survey respondents explained that their feelings of difference when using English dissolved when the language acquired a more prominent presence in their lives:

I now feel like the same person speaking in English as it has become my main language. (female, 29, UK, L1 ER: 5, L1 Dominance: 4, LX Dominance: 4, LX FoU: 4.40)

In support, when English fully permeated their life, LX dominants started detecting a sense of estrangement when using Italian (8):

I feel like a stranger when I speak Italian nowadays. (female, 48, UK, L1 ER: 5, L1 Dominance: 4, LX Dominance: 5, LX FoU: 4)

In her interview, Frances explained this occurrence in detail:

I have learnt to phrase er… to structure my thoughts the English way and sometimes I find it difficult to speak in Italian. Not because I don't remember the language… I tend to construct phrases the English way so… I am irritated by the way uh people talk to me in Italy. I find it really logorrheic, in that sense I'd become a bit British myself (Panicacci, 2021).

The act of cognitively embracing the new language guided Frances in developing new cultural affiliations with the host culture, providing her with a brand-new self-concept.

The frequency of use of either language was by far the least mentioned topic (68). Participants talked more generally about their social interactions with different social networks, mentioning L1 interlocutors (42) more than LX interlocutors (21). Survey participants emphasised the presence of English in their daily life (40), lamenting the lack of meaningful interactions in it:

I tend to use a narrower range of words in English [...] you should know that I don't have proper friends with which speaking English, but just flatmates, acquaintances and colleagues. (30, male, UK, L1 ER: 5, L1 Dominance: 5, LX Dominance: 4, LX FoU: 3.20)

The use of the L1 and the LX in different social contexts seemed to connect to their reflexivity:

I feel I can express my views, especially with strangers and sometimes with friends, more openly in Italian. I feel more freedom to say things which could be considered rude or politically incorrect. This may be arising from the fact that I use Italian and English in different contexts, and with people who have different backgrounds. (male, 22, UK, L1 ER: 5, L1 Dominance: 4, LX Dominance: 5, LX FoU: 1.4)

This was more evident when participants had the chance to use the LX to develop more intimate connections:

I feel very confident in English nowadays, I feel almost more confident talking about emotional matters in English, since I usually share my feelings with my partner. (female, 25, Ireland, L1 ER: 5, L1 Dominance: 4, LX Dominance: 4, LX FoU: 5)

What seemed to make the trick was affection, which was also openly mentioned inn some insights (23). In her interview, Olivia explained how she felt terrified of conveying a foolish image herself when speaking the language, until she befriended some good people:

When I moved over, I was terrified of not fitting in, of my, you know, my English not being good enough […] I couldn't handle like people looking at me and mean like 'oh she is foreign' […] I worked by subtraction […] in order to do that you hide some stuff… and you silence yourself […] I think it took a year of like being really lonely and then I met some really good friends and that kind of like happen organically I was much happier […] Now most of my friends are English […] or people who come from a mixed cultural background, who speak very good English […] this is the kind of people I can interact with as a grown up and insofar I speak English to them cause my life is in English. (L1 ER: 5, L1 Dominance: 4, LX Dominance: 5, LX FoU: 3.6)

Across all data, the development of affective connections with LX speakers emerged as a poignant factor more than the simple use of the language as such.

Discussion

Literature highlights that multilinguals use their languages differently according to the scopes, domains of life, and interlocutors (Giles, 1977, 2012; Giles & Coupland, 1991; Grosjean, 2010, 2015; Vega, 2008), suggesting that every linguistic dimension in migrants' minds can affect their 'sense of self' when using them. This study focused on the impact of the L1 and the LX on migrants' self-perceptions, where the LX was the language of the host society. The analysis centred on the perceived emotional resonance and cognitive dominance of the languages as well as on their use with different social networks. The findings showed that migrants' perceived alterations in their self-concepts when using the LX significantly weakened according to whether they considered themselves respectively L1 dominants, multidominants, or LX dominants. Furthermore, high levels of perceived emotional resonance of the L1, together with lower levels of LX socialisation and LX dominance predicted stronger feelings of difference in migrants' self-concepts when using the LX. The FoU of the L1 with different interlocutors, which can be interpreted as participants' social engagement with Italian-speaking peers, and the reported level of L1 dominance were excluded from the regression model as an unreliable predictor of migrants' feelings of difference. The emotional connection migrants retained with the L1 was the key factor explaining their sense of feeling different when using the LX more than the L1 use as such. This validates all preceding considerations on multilingualism, self-perceptions, and emotion (Dewaele, 2010, 2015; Pavlenko, 2005).

Qualitative insights confirmed these findings, emphasising the crucial role of the emotional significance of the L1 in shaping participants' feelings of difference, making it an exciting or negative experience. The fact that the sample is predominantly composed of late migrants, might explain, at least

from a statistical point of view, why L1 Dominance, L1 FoU, and LX ER did not consistently reveal significant findings. The maintenance of a deep connection with their heritage, both from a psychological and a socio-cultural point of view, could in fact have skewed participants' responses in favour of a high L1 dominance and low LX emotional resonance. In other words, the majority of the sample considered the L1 as a predominant language in their cognitive and social life, regardless of their perceived self-concept alteration when using the LX. In previous research, participants' qualitative insights often deviated from statistical findings (Dewaele & Nakano, 2013; Dewaele, 2016), providing a more nuanced picture of this phenomenon.

The findings are now discussed in relation to the research questions.

Are migrants' self-perceptions when using the LX linked to their perceived levels of L1 and LX emotional resonance?

The large majority of participants linked their feelings of difference to a higher emotional weight of Italian words. The emotional significance of the L1 could be due to the special affective bond individuals maintain with it (Pavlenko, 2005, 2006), even when the language is attrited (Dewaele, 2004). Previous literature highlighted how the feelings of difference mostly emerge in relation to an emotional mismatch perceived by the speakers (Dewaele, 2010, 2015; Dewaele & Nakano, 2013; Panicacci & Dewaele, 2018; Pavlenko, 2005, 2006). In support, participants' insights vastly focused on voicing intimate feelings in the LX, such as deep irritation (cf. Frances), pain (cf. Dana), or love (cf. Bia, Simon) as the typical circumstances altering their perceptions at a more intense level. The lack of emotional engagement when using English was often described as frustrating (cf. Simon) to the measure which it relates to a lack of authenticity. However, this detachment from the 'real self' sometimes enabled participants to cope with personal self-limits and emotional stress, as observable in Bia's narrative. Analogous research highlighted how personality attributes interact with this type of reflexivity, intended as self-awareness or regulation (Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2013; Panicacci & Dewaele, 2017; Wilson, 2008, 2013). The LX can in fact act as a shell that 'reveals and protects', echoing Lahiri's (2015) words. Some

respondents, such as Frances, attached a cultural meaning to this emotional disengagement, interpreting it as a way of breaking free from the heritage traits, creating a new sense of belonging.

This finding aligns with a large body of research in sociolinguistics and cultural psychology (Clément & Noels, 1992; Giles & Johnson, 1981; Mijatović & Tytus, 2016; Noels et al., 2010; Panicacci, 2021; Wilson, 2013; Zhang et al., 2017).

Are migrants' self-perceptions when using the LX linked to their perceived levels of L1 and LX dominance?

L1 dominant participants explained how the LX could not translate their inner mindset, voicing a sense of alienation when using English (cf. Dana). On the contrary, multidominants described a sense of enrichment coming from their multilingualism (cf. Frances), viewing these alternations in their self-perceptions as a positive and exciting experience, in line with Pavlenko's intuition (2006). Lastly, LX dominants talked about the discovery of a 'new identity' (cf. Olivia), something that also emerged in previous studies focusing on the cognitive embodiment of a language (Dewaele, 2016; Hammer, 2016; Pavlenko, 2013). Migrants who more consciously instilled the new language into their minds (cf. Frances) also embraced a novel cultural identity and developed a stronger sense of belonging to the host society (cf. Hammer, 2017; Kanno, 2003; Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2013; Panicacci & Dewaele, 2017), consequently feeling more 'at home' within their new linguistic identity (Chen, 2015; Chen et al., 2008; Choi, 2017; Hammer, 2016; Pavlenko, 2013).

Are migrants' self-perceptions when using the LX linked to the frequency of use of the L1 and the LX with different social networks?

Migrants sometimes mentioned how implementing the use of English helped them feel more confident when using it. The contact with LX users determined a shift in both the cultural and linguistic repertoire, as research often illustrated (Bourhis et al., 2012; Hammer, 2017; Panicacci, 2019, 2020). However, participants' reports mostly centred on their efforts in allowing the language

in their thoughts, private lives, intimate conversations with friends, and not on mere frequency of use. Research evidenced how personality traits and emotions crucially interfere in this process, explaining the discrepancy between cultural assimilation and the maintenance of heritage linguistic practices (Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2013; Panicacci & Dewaele, 2017), as observable in Frances's experience with Italian swearwords. What seemed to weaken these feelings of difference, also emphasised by Panicacci and Dewaele (2018) and Dewaele and Salomidou (2017), especially if perceived as an alienating experience, was the use of the language in affective relationships with familiar interlocutors. In other words, the fact that the new language became a 'language of attachment' (Hammer, 2017). Socialising in the LX and, above all, bringing emotions into the picture, changes the way multilinguals perceive their languages (Bourhis et al., 2012; De Fina, 2007; Dewaele, 2008, 2010, 2017; Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2013), and this, in turns, affects their perceptions of themselves when using those languages (Dewaele & Nakano, 2013; Lahiri, 2015; Pavlenko, 2013).

Limitations

In response to research design constraints, the distinction between the heritage and host dimensions has been controlled for. However, studies based on less homogenous samples, such as the BEQ, highlight how these perceptions of difference seem to be unrelated to the types of LXs (Dewaele, 2010; Pavlenko, 2006). Multilinguals typically report feeling more authentic when speaking the L1, regardless of their degree of multilingualism (Dewaele & Nakano, 2013) or level of dominance and socialisation in the target language (Dewaele, 2004, 2008). Previous literature showed how affective socialisation can challenge this inclination (Hammer, 2017). In the light of these considerations, relying on a sample of late migrants might have affected results. Further research should address these limitations, by focusing on less linguistically and culturally homogeneous populations to investigate individuals' self-perceptions when using any LX known, including the L1 (cf. Venturin, 2020). Likewise, new studies should investigate the impact of factors such as social status or migration history on self-concept changes when switching languages. Research confirmed that

exposure to host culture as well as migrants' affiliation with their heritage do not automatically predict any shift towards the dominant culture (Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2013; Panicacci, 2019). Yet, this could differ when focusing on different generations of migrants (cf. Venturin, 2020), migrants from marginalized backgrounds, or ethnic minorities (cf. Rzepnikowska, 2019; Schroedler et al., 2022; Wang & Dovchin, 2022; Yağmur, 2017). Clearly, the complexity of multilinguals' self-perceptions makes it an exciting and still relatively unexplored area of research.

Conclusion

This research explores multilinguals' reflexivity intended as self-awareness and regulation specifically in relation to language use. The analysis highlights how different linguistic dimensions are interacting in migrants' minds from an emotional, cognitive, and social perspective, and how this regulates their subjectivity when using the language of the host society. The analysis evidenced that migrants' attitudes towards all of their languages deeply intersect with the way they perceive themselves when using them. In this context, the emotional significance of the L1 vividly emerged as the main ingredient influencing migrants' feelings of difference when speaking the LX. Participants seemed aware of how their languages can prime their feelings and alter their identity, reporting a strategic use of them, according to what they may or may not be willing to reveal or experience, being it estrangement, excitement, or emotional liberation. Demographic aspects, such as social status or degree of multilingualism, might have contributed to make this experience more unique and subjective.

The findings have pedagogical and social relevance as they can inform researchers, instructors, and members of multicultural societies about the dynamics of multilinguals' identities, potentially inspiring better policies regulating language teaching, education, language use, or integration, specifically orientated to improve multilinguals' well-being.

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