

**“He fell in love with me in English”**

## **Language Negotiation in the Bilingual Couple**

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### **Declaration**

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to and quotation in this dissertation from the work or works of other people has been attributed, cited, and referenced.

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## **Abstract:**

Research has only recently begun to explore the complex nature of bilingualism outside of the formal learning setting. In the latter half of the twentieth century, interest began to grow around language and the distinct ways in which bi- and multilingual speakers utilized their linguistic resources. The discipline of sociolinguistics as well as later theories from poststructuralism ushered in new paradigms that approached language as much more multifaceted than ever before. Language is now viewed not just as an act of individual communication, but an aspect of social representation, a measure of cultural value, and an articulation of a speaker's identity and emotional associations.

This new perspective of language has contributed greatly to advancement in understanding bilingualism, particularly with language choice among bilinguals, yet research on the roles of emotions and identity in their language behavior is still underdeveloped. Too often bilingualism is studied in formal and unnatural settings, rather than daily life where language is most spontaneous and unconsciously produced. This study, therefore, aims to investigate language use in the personal lives of bilinguals. By examining the intimate setting of a romantic relationship between two bilingual speakers, a situation where language choice is a constant topic, I seek to better understand why language is used as it is.

Following the example of the few other researchers in the area of bilingual language use in everyday life, I rely on participant driven data to begin to exemplify the ways in which language choice is motivated by self-positioning and emotional factors. Through an initial questionnaire, participant reports, and semi-structured interviews of a group of women involved in bilingual relationships, I am able to uncover the impact of emotion and identity on language choice in bilingual couples. This, in turn, can help to clarify the role of both emotion and identity negotiation for bilinguals in general, as well as with language use as a whole. Namely, within my participant group, I discover the strong connection between language and emotion, in the associations they make with words and certain domains of use or communities of practice, the influence of emotional context on their language choices, as well as the effect the use of different languages can have on a sense of identity to a speaker.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### ***Motivation for Study***

In the early 1980s, nearly half the world's population was bilingual (Grosjean 1982: vii). Thirty years later, given the rate of globalization and vast amount of international mobility and communication that exists, the number is most certainly higher. Knowing and using more than one language has become the global norm while monolingual speakers outside of the English language are becoming increasingly rare (Pavlenko 2011: 3). New technologies, forms of communication, flows of capital, and migration patterns have all resulted in increased and unprecedented linguistic contact and interaction (Blommaert 2010: 13). For this reason, the study of bilingualism is increasingly important, if only to keep pace with the rapid growth and changing nature of language use in today's global society.

My own life is a clear example of recent international mobility and other global factors at play today. I have been involved in a bilingual and intercultural relationship for the past seven years of my life. My husband is Italian and I am American. We met in the United States, but have since lived in three different countries and visited countless more. Our ease of and access to travel is something previous generations never knew. Even thirty years ago, my husband would most likely not have worked on his PhD across four different countries, nor would I have found an internship in rural Italy and hence begun studying the language. After we met, our relationship would not have had a chance to establish itself as it did without email, mobile phones, and voice over Internet protocol (VOIP) technology such as Skype.

Globalization certainly had a hand in my relationship, as it did for many other international couples we have met. The growing phenomenon of bilingual couples is one instance of how language use is transforming with the increased permeability of national borders; "persons whose family communication is also cross-cultural communication are not a negligible minority but an increasingly numerous group" (Piller 2002: 5). The navigation of two or more languages within a household can be examined as one kind of microcosm of the diversifying world at large. It allows for a glimpse into the complex and intimate ways that language reveals very deep levels of cognitive, emotional, and societal processes.

While my own experiences motivated the initial stages of this investigation, it is clear that this type of study is also necessary. Bilingualism is gaining more research attention in recent years (Pavlenko 2011: 23), but there is still a great deal lacking in terms of focus and approach. Existing research has often been conducted through the lens of the monolingual, ignoring the intricacies and particularities that come into play with bilinguals and multilinguals (Pavlenko 2005: 23). Blommaert and Backus go further with this line of thinking, arguing that much of language research is not keeping pace with current language diversity:

In spite of significant advances in the field of language knowledge, and in spite of the increasing complexity of superdiverse sociolinguistic environments, dominant discourses on this topic seem to increasingly turn to entirely obsolete and conclusively discredited models of language knowledge (2011: 4).

Even when research does refer specifically to bilingualism, it often bases models on “balanced” bilinguals, or those that are equally fluent in two or more languages. Given that the majority of bilinguals in the world are “unbalanced” (they have a stronger competence in one language over another), the realistic behaviors and needs of most bilinguals continue to be unacknowledged in the literature (Grosjean 1982: 257).

Beyond the wrongful assumptions that language understanding can be generalized across monolinguals and bilinguals, and that all bilinguals are alike (whether balanced or not), an even greater gap in language theory is the neglect of the bilingual outside of the formal learning setting. Different from the second language learner, the bilingual, by definition, uses two or more languages in their daily life. Yet research “has failed to study bilinguals in the contexts in which they actually use their languages” (Grosjean 1982: 257). As Pavlenko has shown, we still know little about their private language usage:

To date, there are no studies known to this researcher that examine bi- and multilinguals’ spontaneous emotion talk and allow us to see how repertoires are selected and interpretations negotiated in interaction.  
(Pavlenko 2005: 124)

Language use is deeply tied with the personal and emotional aspects of a person; bilingualism simply compounds this fact and emphasizes the need to examine language use in personal and emotional settings. This is arguably language use at the most fundamental level.

Particularly of interest is how identification, or self-positioning, and emotion affect language usage in these settings. Pavlenko points out that as cultural and linguistic diversity increase, so too does the range of identity positions available to speakers (2004: 2). Similarly, bilingualism opens up linguistic choices in terms of emotional objectives. And while, “the interrelationship between language and identity has received enormous attention right across the social sciences in recent years,” (Piller 2002: 183) there is still often a failure to combine bilingualism, identity, and emotion together.

The implications of neglect in this case impacts many fields. As society changes, so too must its institutions, education above all, given that it is charged with the teaching of language and literacy. The lack of attention given to bilingualism leads to an insufficient and even detrimental understanding of language learning (Norton & McKinney 2011: 87). Diversity creates a unique challenge for educators, but the more we reflect on and delve into how and why language is used as it is, the greater the benefit for language education (Jessner 2008a: 357). I believe the study of bilingual couples and how they use languages in their personal lives can contribute to our understanding of multilingualism in this respect. By looking at their language usage, I will be examining identity, self-positioning, motivation and investment (Norton 1995), emotional factors, and other elemental aspects important to language learning as a whole.

### ***Research Question***

Ingrid Piller, an Australian researcher who recently began studying the dynamics of language use in bilingual couples, asked the following question:

With communication as a constitutive factor in the make-up of a modern romantic relationship, what does it mean for people to live in a relationship with a partner who has a different first language? (2002: 4)

While broader in scope, this question captures the essential research focus in this study. I will look at participants’ reflections on their language use in the everyday and most intimate settings when those settings involve two or more languages. If identity is such a defining factor in how we use language, then what happens when a person uses a new language? How does this affect their sense of identity? What emotional or other factors come into play in determining why couples use language as they do? How does a long-term relationship, a commitment assumed to

be founded on good communication, succeed in this kind of dynamic? My study specifically targets women in bilingual relationships. In effect, my study seeks to answer the question:

How do women in bilingual relationships negotiate their emotions, identity, and self-positioning through their language choices?

I aim to answer this question in the subsequent sections of my dissertation. In the following chapter, I will outline the theoretical understandings used to frame my investigation as well as the existing literature related to my research question. In chapter three, I set forth the research methods used to elicit data. In chapter four, I present my data and findings as they relate to my initial question, as well as interesting findings that came forth unexpectedly. Finally, in chapter five, I provide an overview of the study as well as my own reflections that arose throughout my research.

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## **Chapter Two: Conceptual Framework**

*This chapter refers to the foundation of sociolinguistics, or the study of language in context, as the crucial discipline underpinning the study of language in the home. This leads to a discussion of the research surrounding language and identity in social context; including linguistic relativity, linguistic capital, and the poststructuralist concept of identity as mutable and constantly changing. The next section looks at research on bilingualism, especially as distinguished from monolingual approaches to language theory. The use of code switching is also examined as an articulation of the influence of the various social and linguistic factors at play. Finally, I outline the work of two notable researchers in the area of bilingual talk; tying in language choice, identity, and emotion.*

### ***Language as a Social Practice***

While it may seem somewhat invasive to study language use in the home, especially between partners, for more than half a century language research has been shifting into natural settings such as this. In the later part of the twentieth century, the movement to recognize language as context-embedded gained momentum following the claims of diverse theorists such as Dell Hymes, Lev Vygotsky, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Pierre Bourdieu; linguists, psychologists, philosophers, and sociologists who all began to make a similar argument; language is a social practice:

Language is a social creation, the voice of a community, but it becomes a highly personal possession and a way of thinking. We cannot understand language and, by implication, learning and thinking, unless we keep both the social and the psychological factors in focus. (Whitehead 2004: 7)

This went against the likes of Noam Chomsky, one of the seminal researchers of language acquisition theory, who was rooted in a monolingual perspective and maintained an innatist approach to understanding language learning (Smith 2005: 40). However, even Chomsky, the proponent of the “universal grammar” theory (Collins 2008: 31), understood that language is affected by its social setting (we learn a specific language from those around us), though his central interest remained underlying language competence over its performance (Smith 2005: 27).

It was this shift from a cognitive-based approach towards language learning to a more usage-based approach that is foregrounded in sociolinguistics. Cognitive theory “showed little interest in communicative competence,” focusing rather on language structure as separate from language usage (Blommaert & Backus 2011: 5). This left a large gap in language research in terms of the study of language in context. Sociolinguistics requires that language be examined within the larger context of the speech community or domain in which it occurs (Mesthrie 2008: 66). A speech community is defined by the sharing of a language repertoire, or the shared knowledge of how and why to use language in a particular way (Blommaert & Backus 2011: 3). A domain, on the other hand, can be defined here as, “a sphere of activity arising from combination of specific times, settings, and role relationships, which results in a specific choice of language or style” (Mesthrie 2008: 68). The logic behind the push to study language within these contexts is that while grammatical laws appear to govern language behavior, it is the rules of the community or users dictating these laws in the first place. They determine how and why language is used (Hymes 2005: 60). Language patterns and cultural norms develop together, albeit often slowly over time, hence the need to examine the two together (Whorf 2005: 377).

Delving deeper into this idea of language and culture, what has become known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis argues that the world is experienced in a way dependent on one’s language resources, or through *linguistic relativity*. Cultural and community practices are reflected and constructed through language use; “the cultural norms and values of a group are transmitted by its language” (Appel & Muysken 1987: 11). Dell Hymes expanded on this to show that linguistic structure not only influences one’s “experience of the world” but is itself a large determinant in the cultural behaviors of a society (Duranti 2005: 15). This reiterates the point that language and cultural practice are not only correlated, but often indistinguishable.

This idea of linguistic relativity is certainly not new. In the early nineteenth century, Wilhelm Von Humboldt, a German philosopher, “permanently linked languages with world view” (Pavlenko 2011: 11). Yet, it was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s that there was a renewed interest in this theory (Pavlenko 2011: 23). Linguistic relativity supports the need for an examination of language use in everyday life to better understand the cultural norms expressed through language behavior. Depending on where a second language was learned and where

socialization took place, a bilingual speaker may have two very distinct codes of communication with each of his or her languages (Pavlenko 2005: 131). This emphasizes the importance of paying attention to the particular use of language and language strategies for second language learners, rather than assuming a standard practice of communication (Pavlenko 2005: 123).

### ***Language and Identity***

Following this line of thinking, language becomes a prominent tool through which our social base is constructed and demonstrated to others. Through language we construct who we are and how we are viewed (Norton 1995: 15). Language is a means by which we negotiate our identities, or our “sense of self in relation to the larger social world” (Norton & McKinney 2011: 73). Language becomes an indicator of our social positioning, “accordingly said to be indexical of one’s social class, status, region of origin, gender, age group, etc.” (Mesthrie 2008: 68), albeit in complex ways. Following this poststructuralist theory, identity is always in process:

An individual emerges through the processes of social interaction, not as a relatively fixed end product, but as one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which he or she participates.  
(Davies & Harré 1999: 89)

Identification is not, therefore, a single or simple process of selection. Rather, it is a site of struggle between competing discourses in which the subject plays an active role (Norton & McKinney: 194). This positioning involves both those identities that a speaker imagines for himself or herself (reflexive) as well as those enforced or assumed by the surrounding community of practice (interactive) (Davies & Harré 1999: 91).

Pierre Bourdieu’s theorizing of the relationship between language and symbolic power contributes further to the idea that our language use, filtered through the symbolic value attached to it, determines our position in society (Pavlenko 2004: 10). Highly valued linguistic resources are known as *linguistic capital*, or the recognized worth of a language in the cultural marketplace. Therefore, as mentioned above, the identity a speaker may perceive for themselves may or may not agree with the ways in which they are positioned within society. Instead language is a “transactional interaction process, in which individuals attempt to evoke, assert, define, modify, challenge, and/or support their own and others’ desired self-images” (Pavlenko 2004: 4). The tension that this process creates becomes especially significant for second

language learners who may not have full command over the semantic, grammatical, or cultural understandings necessary to portray their intended or perceived identity.

Language learning, then, cannot be a neutral undertaking. Since second language learning began to be an area of study in the 1960s, much thought pointed to the theory that second language acquisition is “an internalized, cognitive process” (Zuengler & Miller 2006: 36). In reality, learning a second language involves learning language as a system (i.e. vocabulary, syntax, word formation, semantics, phonetics) as well as learning language in use, or the social practices (what is appropriate or inappropriate) surrounding it (Norton 2000). As Norton and McKinney point out:

Language learning engages the identities of learners because language itself is not only a linguistic system of signs and symbols, but also a complex social practice through which relationships are defined, negotiated, and resisted (2011: 77).

Language and identity are dependent on multiple factors, both internal and external. This indicates that second language learners cannot truly learn another language without accepting new ways of thinking (Duranti 2005: 11). Second Language Acquisition (SLA) potentially opens doors to new worldviews and a wider range of identity positions (Norton & McKinney 2011: 74), as well as enabling a greater possibility for confusion or feelings of misrepresentation.

This explains the significance of a learner’s attitudes in language learning. One’s stance toward a language is almost always socially informed (Appel & Muysken 1987: 94). The assumption in sociolinguistics is that language has social meaning, “if language has social meaning, people will evaluate it in relation to the social status of its users. Their language attitudes will be social attitudes” (Appel & Muysken 1987: 12). These attitudes towards a language, whether negative or positive, can have profound effect on how a language is used by a speaker, especially for a bilingual who may select languages accordingly (Grosjean 1982: 123).

Norton takes this notion of attitude and motivation one step further and introduces the idea of learner *investment*, what she calls the “socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language” (Norton & McKinney 2011: 75). She ties this into Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital, in that learners will be more invested in learning a language if it

provides an opportunity to acquire a greater wealth of socially-valued resources, “thus an investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner’s own identity” (Norton & McKinney 2011: 75). One can be motivated to learn a language but not invested in the learning environment or other social areas where the target language is met (Norton & McKinney 2011: 84).

Certainly, language learning can reveal a longing to expand identity options and group associations. Piller refers to this as “language desire”. It is an area often overlooked even though, “language desire is a crucial factor in the ways in which the participants approach their L2 learning and imagine their bilingualism” (Piller 2002: 269). These variables all have a substantial effect on language learning and use (Grosjean 1982: 123). How much a speaker begins to identify with a target language and the identity that comes with it may have as much effect on their language learning success as a learner’s aptitude (Grosjean 1982: 193). Pavlenko reiterates this when she says that, “all aspects of identity can influence speakers’ emotional investments and mediate linguistic outcomes” (2005: 220).

All of these theories are supported under the umbrella of poststructuralism. As Pavlenko argues, poststructuralism, ushered in part by Bourdieu’s theory of *linguistic capital* in the 1970s, allowed for the nuances of identity and its negotiation to be examined more closely (2004: 11). From a poststructuralist perspective, as highlighted earlier, identity is something mutable rather than pre-determined, a “doing” rather than a “being” (Piller 2002: 11), with language use being central to the ‘doing’. Pavlenko outlines the advantages of a poststructuralist approach for the study of language and identity:

[a] Poststructuralist framework allows us to examine and explain negotiation of identities as situated within larger socioeconomic, sociohistoric, and sociopolitical processes, and thus in more nuanced and context-sensitive ways than approaches offered by social psychology or interactional sociolinguistics. (2004: 3)

It shows us that both language and identity are not fixed objects, but influenced and molded by the society in which they exist. More importantly, it allows for the existence of hybrid identities (Pavlenko 2004: 17); something which helped to change the way that bilingualism was viewed in language research.

## ***Bilingualism***

In the past, the theory of “linguistic schizophrenia” asserted that speakers of two languages had conflicting identities which could not coexist. Hence, the push was for immigrants in many countries to assimilate and abandon their mother tongues (Pavlenko 2006: 3). Now we know that not only can bilinguals maintain multiple identities, but monolinguals play out various personas as well, depending on the situation, audience, or objective:

Persons as speakers acquire beliefs about themselves that do not necessarily form a unified coherent whole. They shift from one to another way of thinking about themselves as the discourse shifts and as their positions within varying storylines are taken up. (Davies & Harré 1999: 102)

As stated in the section above, language is one of the most visible demonstrations of identity work, making language choice for bilinguals a strong indicator of self-positioning, “the possibility of choice in a situation in which there are contradictory requirements provides people with the possibility of acting agentically” (Davies & Harré 1999: 102). Therefore, language choice is key in beginning to understand the complexity behind bilingualism.

The turn of second language acquisition, or SLA, theory towards a socially embedded approach brought to light new and profound ways of understanding language and, from there, bilingualism. It was not until Francois Grosjean’s research in the early 1980s, though, that the bilingual began to be viewed as a distinct subject, apart from monolinguals and second language learners (Jessner 2008b: 93). Grosjean saw the bilingual as unique and, for once, a whole person rather than just a user of two languages. The holistic approach Grosjean introduced assumed that “the presence of one or more language systems influences the development not only of the second language but also the development of the overall multilingual system” (Jessner 2008b: 95). This was a revolutionary idea in comparison to past theories.

One such outdated concept behind second language learning is that languages are stored separately in the brain, but “evidence suggests the opposite - that language attributes are not separated in the cognitive system, but transfer readily and are interactive” (Baker 2006: 168). This idea is illustrated by Cummin’s analogy of the “Common Underlying Proficiency” model, in which each language has its own surface features, but is linked underneath by a unified cognitive system. There is only one thought process linked to language, the number of languages

does not change this fact (Baker 2006: 169). This theory suggests that bilingual or multilingual speakers “have a distinct compound state of mind which is not equivalent to two monolingual states” (Jarvis 2007: 17).

Not only are multiple languages part of the same cognitive domain, the two (or more) languages often influence each other as well (Mesthrie 2008: 67). This is known as *crosslinguistic influence* (CLI) - when knowledge of different languages affect one another (Jarvis 2007: 1). CLI occurs as learners navigate new languages, using the knowledge of their L1 (first language) to understand an L2 (second language). CLI can occur because of lack of proficiency in an additional language, in order to fill in gaps in knowledge, but it can also be an important learning strategy where rules are generalized and manipulated (Jarvis 2007: 9). And the influence does not go in one direction only. An L1 can be just as affected by additional languages. Contrary to past beliefs, L1 competence is mutable and dynamic.

Crosslinguistic influence is a “highly complex and cognitive phenomenon that is often affected by language users’ perceptions, conceptualizations, mental associations, and individual choices” (Jarvis 2007: 13). This highlights the complexity in understanding language usage among bilinguals. An early theory known as the *single-switch theory*, believed that bilinguals would turn one language on, effectually shutting the other off. Any speech or literacy act would ignite only one language or the other. But studies since have shown that bilinguals are fully capable of processing two languages at one time (Appel & Muysken 1987: 79).

This ability to process and utilize more than one language simultaneously creates an intriguing opportunity to look at speakers’ intent, “the key linguistic means of negotiation of identities discussed in the bilingualism literature include code-switching, or code-alteration, code-mixing, and language choice” (Pavlenko 2004: 22). Language choice, code mixing, and code switching allow for audible/visible evidence of selection, yet language alternation is not necessarily always a matter of self-positioning or choice; it can also be simply about ability or competency in a specific language (Pavlenko 2004: 9). In fact, it is most often not only one factor that determines a speaker’s use of one language versus another (Grosjean 1982: 143). Factors in language choice for bilinguals include many aspects such as the participants in a conversation, the situation in

which the conversation occurs, the function of the conversation (e.g. excluding/including, asserting status, and social acceptance), and the content of the conversation. (Grosjean 1982: 136).

Using the concept of language as a social practice, and as central to the performance and construction of identity, as well as to the discursive processes of self and other positioning, I will attempt to shed light on aspects of language choice in bilingualism. I will also be mindful of a range of influencing factors that have been outlined above, such as language competence, function, objective, attitude, motivation, and investment, all providing angles from which to examine bilingual language use.

### ***Literature Review***

Having outlined my theoretical approach, I go on now to review the work of two seminal researchers in the study of bilinguals and their personal and emotional lives; Aneta Pavlenko in her study of immigrant narratives and the negotiation of multilingual identities, as well as her examination of language and emotions among bilinguals. And Ingrid Piller in her research on bilingual couples and how language choice plays out within the dynamic setting of intimate relationships.

The theoretical framework presented above shows that research has begun to examine the dynamic relationship between language and identity, yet much of the literature is still neglecting to combine the two concepts in terms of the bilingual speaker (Pavlenko 2005: 195). However, Aneta Pavlenko's examinations of language, identity, and emotions have helped to open up the field of language learning, especially in the realm of bi- and multilingual speakers.

One of Pavlenko's studies, "The Making of an American: Negotiation of Identities at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," looks at autobiographies of immigrants to the United States and how they represented language and identity interaction in their writing. She compares these turn-of-the-century narratives to more recent immigrant narratives in order to reveal the different societal forces at play over time. This was included in the volume of work she edited, *Negotiation of Identities in Multilingual Contexts*, which compiled a number of similar studies each discussing

the relationship between language, identity, and the influences of society (including Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital). Her conclusion at the end of the work asserts that identity negotiation is both expanded and limited by language choice. While the choice of more than one language or variety gives greater range of identity options, there may also be more imposed or assumed identity positions from the social context because of the bilingual component.

Similar to Pavlenko, Ingrid Piller studied the relationship between language and identity, though she used "(linguistic) intermarriage to explore language choice and the discursive construction of identity" (2002: 6). This is where the intercultural couple becomes an optimal subject. The couple can be used to better understand intercultural communication and the relationship between language and identity on the whole. Communication within the bilingual couple is one of the few places that language choice is truly an option (Piller 2002: 133).

As with early bilingual theory, theory of linguistic intermarriage often revolved around simplistic explanation of behavior (i.e. environmental influence would determine the majority language spoken at home and result in eventual language shift). Piller's study of English- and German-speaking couples, however, revealed much more subtlety and even surprising examples in terms of why language is used as it is within couples. Piller outlines a number of different reasons, both internal and external, that lead bilingual couples to choose the language expressions they do. One of the most powerful of these, she asserts, is certainly the place where the couple lives, as originally assumed. The most prevalent language surrounding a couple is called the *dominant language*, and she agrees that this is usually thought to be the eventual language of choice as shift occurs over time (2002: 22). However, bilingual couples can outweigh such aspects with more subordinate influences.

The prestige of each partner's language within a particular context will have a secondary effect on language choice. This is relative to the surroundings, people's perception of each language, and the global market value. Often, this means that if either of the couple is a native English-speaker, the worldwide prestige of the language may override location. Otherwise, any one or other languages having more *cultural capital* will have a larger effect on language choice and use. A third influence on language choice that may, in turn, undermine prestige, is a feeling of

solidarity with a less used language. A couple, or either one of the partners may have an urge to maintain a minority language for sentimental or cultural value, despite its lack of recognition or advantage. Finally, there are theories that gender plays a role in a couple's language choice. The language of the male partner will predominate, though the "mother" tongue will resist the shift for longer, but this is only hypothesis, and not given the same probability as other predictions (Piller 2002: 22).

Pavlenko speaks of multiple influencing factors in a bilingual's language selection as well, namely "individual, contextual, and linguistic" (2005: 146). Individual factors are those specific to the speaker, such as language proficiency, the manner in which they learned the language, and their own emotions. Contextual factors are dependent on the language ability and state of emotion of other speakers involved in the interaction, and linguistic factors refer to language selection based on the language with the most appropriate vocabulary for the conversation at hand – perhaps one language has more descriptive terms or suitable repertoires for a certain situation (2005: 147). In any instance, language choice was most often a combination of two or more types of factors.

While all of these factors seem straightforward, there are many other components hidden within each. As Piller points out, "there is no single moment of choice, but language choices have to be made again and again, in different domains, different contexts, and with different interlocutors" (2002: 178). Each situation may dictate a different choice. A couple may make a choice of which language to use depending on attempts to narrow social distance (mirroring language usage of other participant, a show of solidarity), heightening social distance (to establish power), out of respect for a situation or participant (other participant may not be able to understand, may appreciate gesture), and/or depending on their own competency in a language (Pavlenko 2004: 8).

In her more extensive study of language and emotions, Pavlenko and her co-researcher Jean-Marc Dewaele conducted a web questionnaire surveying over one thousand bi- and multilinguals on such matters as how they express anger, how they do mental arithmetic, how they swear, and in what language they run inner dialogue (Pavlenko 2005: 40). Their study revealed that

dominance in an L1 usually leads individuals to use their first language for emotional speech, often “reverting spontaneously to the L1 in fights and arguments with their partners and spouses” (Pavlenko 2005: 133). In fact, the stronger the emotion was, the greater chance that it seemed to be expressed in a first language, regardless of whether the partner understood or not. Sometimes the switch to an L1 was intentionally done so that the partner did NOT understand what was being said (a distancing effect). Or, other times, the use of an L1 was simply to satisfy the emotional needs of the speaker, regardless of a partner’s comprehension. Swearwords are one example of this. In order to express anger or distress, a speaker believed that the message would be adequately expressed and understood regardless of the language because of nonverbal cues involved with many swear and taboo words (Dewaele 2004: 220). Pavlenko refers to this as the “there, I said it” phenomenon (2005: 133).

All this indicates that there are many issues at play in language choice. And it is not just a choice of one language versus another. It is a choice of L1, L2, code-switching or mixing, and also of standard or nonstandard varieties (Piller 2002: 178). About thirty-five percent of Piller’s subjects in her study of bilingual couples claimed and did use “mixed code” in their daily communication. This meant significant language switching, not just small utterances scattered about (2002: 143). There is also a specific form of language mixing unique to bilingual relationships known as *dual-linguality* (Piller 2002: 150). This is where each partner speaks his or her own first language to the other, each side comprehending both languages. They will only speak the other’s language when the situation demands (as in where other participants are involved) (Piller 2002: 24).

Regardless of the approach a couple chooses, finding predictable patterns within this micro-society is not straightforward. There is some doubt as to whether bilingual couples can even provide adequate insight into the greater bilingual community, “communication between partners in a romantic dyad may even be far too personal to be considered intercultural communication at all” (Piller 2000). Each couple seems to develop its own unique way of communicating, in the same way of any long term relationship, bilingual or not. One reason for this may be that shared values within a couple appear to be of greater importance than cultural or linguistic similarities.

Nevertheless, this does not insinuate that research should refrain from attempts to uncover any generalizable conclusions. Consistent patterns of language choice may not be possible because of the individual and context specific nature of language, but the underlying influences have begun to surface; allowing for new understandings in the field of language, identity, and emotion in bilinguals and bilingual couples. While Pavlenko and Piller have contributed a great deal, the study of the relationships between language use, identity, and emotions in bilingual couples is still a relatively new and undeveloped area of research. Qualitative research is key to furthering understanding in this field by providing more evidence and new revelations.

### ***Conclusion***

In sum, as language theory has shifted towards understanding language as a social practice, more research attention has been given to the communities of practice and domains in which language use occurs. From this perspective, social and cultural positioning, and individual identities become tied into language usage. This indicates the significant role of learner identity in second language acquisition, in that it must be addressed in order for substantial learning to take place. More importantly, this wave of theory led to the closer examination of the bilingual as distinct from monolinguals and many second language learners; allowing for a better understanding of how the daily user of more than one language processes and selects language.

In the proceeding chapters, I utilize the premise of sociolinguistics as I study language in its natural setting. I call upon concepts from poststructuralism in my examination of identity as changeable through self and social positioning. And I base my methods on both Pavlenko and Piller's work in order to uncover the link between language, identity, and emotion in bilingual couples' perceptions of their language use and choices.

## **Chapter Three: Research Methods**

*In this chapter, I will outline my research design as well as the methods with which my research was conducted. I relied on participant driven data with the purpose of eliciting self reports to best illustrate the speakers' intents and thought processes. I explain my participant selection and issues that arose in data collection, including time and access, limited feedback received, and ethical considerations. I discuss the significant use of technology in my methods and my role as a researcher in terms of an auto ethnographic study. Finally, I discuss my approach to analysis through thematic analysis of all data gathered.*

### ***Research Design***

Given the focus of sociolinguistics, language use within context, a study such as this needed to proceed with that fundamental approach in mind. What arose, however, was the issue of time and access. A true ethnographic study is not feasible in the timeframe of a Masters mini-dissertation. Yet, because of the intimate nature of the topic, language practices in the home, gathering authentic data was necessary; “since an identity approach to SLA characterizes learner identity as multiple and changing, a quantitative research paradigm relying on static and measurable variables will generally not be appropriate” (Norton & McKinney 2011: 82).

In her study of bilingual couples, Piller found that when she asked couples to record their conversations, two of the three couples she asked did not record a single conversation because they felt constrained and the third couple sent only a short recording that was staged and forced for the purpose of the research (2002: 37). Knowing this, I chose to rely almost entirely on qualitatively generated self reports, both written and verbal, from study participants. While these were not the optimal, observed examples that sociolinguistics aims for, exploring the nature of the self-reported behaviors was my intention from the beginning. It was the participants' perceptions and interpretations of their language use rather than the actual performance that most interested me. Piller similarly adjusted her expectations by asking couples to interview one another using a standard set of questions. This provided discussion of specific topics while also providing examples of couple talk (2002: 39).

My approach to data collection in this study was threefold. First, a short questionnaire was distributed to a large pool (one hundred) of possible participants, asking that they self-select for those in bilingual relationships (see *Appendix A*). The questionnaire results provided basic information regarding background and general views and behaviors relating to language use. This established a backdrop for the study and assisted in selecting participants for the next stages of the study. Of the twenty four responses, eighteen candidates volunteered to continue in the study by providing contact information in the final question of the survey. These eighteen were emailed information and consent forms, and diary instructions.

For this second stage of research, only five participants kept and returned personal diaries. Piller had a similarly low participation rate despite initial interest expressed in her study (2002: 41). This limited follow-through of participation was anticipated, though, as this is a volunteer study. Participant time and effort is always a constraint to consider in research.

The diaries that participants returned were written over a period of time (a couple of weeks). They recorded descriptions of and reflections on four significant moments of interaction with their partners, including a typical dinner conversation, an argument or difference of opinion, an affectionate exchange, and an emotional but non-conflictual discussion. The diaries averaged about five hundred words each.

Finally, in the third stage of research, the participants who had submitted diaries were interviewed using a common online communication tool called Skype. Because of the mobile nature of their lives and given that all of them use it for their own personal communications with family and friends in other countries, all participants were already familiar with and comfortable using this medium. The interviews were designed to expand on initial enquiries, discuss selected issues more in depth, and to follow up any areas left uncovered.

In her volume of studies on bilinguals, *Negotiation of Identities*, Pavlenko and other researchers included used similar combinations of complementary data collection to achieve a greater degree of validity, such as observation, recordings, interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, and written reflections (2004: 26):

The triangulation allowed the authors to highlight discontinuities and tensions in the participants' accounts and to offer complex accounts of negotiation of identities in specific contexts. (Pavlenko 2004: 26)

The information I gathered through the questionnaires was supported and illustrated through more qualitative methods, in this case the diaries and interviews. Data was then cross-referenced in order to identify patterns and contradictions. The interviews were also an opportunity to discuss and draw further upon any such discoveries, thus completing the "triangle" of data.

Language use and, through that, identity are both highly fluid and personal. To study from one perspective alone would deny the multiplicity and mutability fundamental to the theory of language as social practice:

For a truly anthropological understanding of a speech community and its members' communicative competence, we not only need to describe language use, we also need to aim at an understanding of how speakers value their own language and see it connected to their history. (Duranti 2005: 39)

To investigate speakers' perspectives of their language use, I relied on self-reporting from study participants, allowing for a "co-construction of meaning" between myself as the researcher and the participants (Pavlenko 2004: 26). I considered this important given the deeply personal nature of the data, both because it would have been far too invasive (and most likely unnatural) to ask participants to be recorded in their conversations, but also because it was their own view of language and how this relates to identity that interested me. More than what actually happened, I was intrigued by their objectives in and reflections on the matter.

Participants were identified opportunistically, through my own international networks. I participate in an online social networking group of expatriate American women, identified through a popular US based marriage and parenting website. As one half of a bilingual couple and an expatriate myself, I believed these connections appropriate in that these women were all self-selected from a focused community. While seemingly limited, this concentration of possible candidates allowed for a beneficial focus. All participants had a *comprehensive* understanding of the English language, which implies "full socialization across a lifetime in a language, including having access to any formal learning environments" (Blommaert & Backus 2011: 11). This ensured a clearer participant/researcher relationship by avoiding many potentially sabotaging

language misinterpretations or misunderstandings.

The participants were also restricted to women. Again, this was both a practical and academic decision. As before, communication and interactional understanding was thought to be more optimal when limited to subjects similar to myself. I also believed comfort levels, and therefore willingness to share, would be higher because of this similarity. Piller found that women were much more receptive to her work, gathering thirteen times more responses from women than men (2002: 39). Pavlenko as well stated that, “women are commonly believed to be more emotional than men and thus more attuned to the tasks of performing affect and interpreting others’ feelings” (2005: 71). Women seemed more likely to respond to and participate in this type of research project.

Each participant was involved in a long term, bilingual and international relationship. International was a requirement so that the dynamic of language and culture could be viewed at its fullest, as opposed to bilingual couples with more similar cultural backgrounds. The requisite bilingual relationship of each couple was defined as both partners having a speaking *proficiency* (rather than complete fluency) in the language of his or her partner. Both members of the relationship had to be able to hold extensive conversations, comfortably switch when necessary, and understand a large majority of what their partner said to them in another language in order for language choice to be an option.

The questionnaire helped to gather this basic demographic and biographical information in order to frame participants. It also included a short series of questions in an attempt to begin to uncover participants’ attitudes, motivations, and sentiments in regards to bilingualism. Not only did it give a foundation from which to initiate further exploration, this also helped to select participants to continue in the research.

Those five selected were then asked to write diary entries following four significant couple interactions (dinner, argument, affectionate exchange, and emotional discussion). The diaries were largely open to individual interpretation, though participants were directed to “describe the way you and your partner use language in this specific interaction and what you believe might be

the reasons behind these choices” (see *Appendix B*). The hope was that this would elicit reflection on the use of language, so that hidden attitudes and motivations would come forth.

The interview gave an opportunity to look back on the questionnaire and the diaries to discuss points further. It also allowed for me to ask direct, and more open-ended questions, with clarification and dialogue when necessary. The questions were developed after pooling the questionnaires and reading through participants’ diaries in order to address those issues that stood out most. Each interview followed a unique course as participants brought up their personal understandings and feelings, though a series of set questions was used to encourage discussion and expression (see *Appendix C*).

### ***Data Collection***

The first stage, the questionnaire, proceeded according to plan. Out of one hundred possible participants, twenty four completed the survey. While more may have been interested to participate, only those involved in bilingual, international relationships were asked to do so, which limited the pool. The questions were consistently answered, indicating clear and appropriate wording, and I was satisfied with the information gathered in framing my study.

The final question of the survey asked for participants to indicate their interest in continuing with the research. Eighteen out of the twenty four volunteered to continue with the study. These eighteen were then emailed with the instructions to complete the diaries for the second stage of the data collection. Only four participants initially responded with diaries (one further participant was elicited later on). This was acceptable, as it was the goal number, and not surprising since this stage required more commitment from participants.

The diary instructions were intended to elicit narratives from participants. What came out, rather, was a more generic description of each type of scenario, with a few illustrations of specific language use. Participants included examples, but mainly gave brief accounts of what *usually* happens. While this was not what was originally intended, it proved useful in outlining the situations and initiating the reflection process among the participants. Essentially, rather than narrating a situation, participants made their own observations.

Ideally, participants would have kept a diary for a period of a few weeks or a month. They would have been asked to write down specific examples, record interesting occurrences, and note any conscious decisions made in terms of language choice with their partners. While this was preferred from the beginning, I was hesitant to demand too much of participants who were volunteering their time for my study. I knew that the more commitment involved, the less likely it would be to find willing study subjects. This would be a more feasible expectation given a longer-term study with more incentives for participants.

The third stage of research was the interview process. Again, this stage did not proceed as expected. The intention was to interview participants using Adobe Connect software, which would allow for recordable video communication. Unfortunately, there were problems with the software. For this reason, the first interview was conducted using video communication, but through more widely available technology (Skype). This medium, though more accessible and easily used, did not allow the conversation to be recorded. Instead, I took notes as the participant spoke. This, of course, resulted in a less accurate transcription than was optimal.

The second interviewee did not have microphone or web cam built into her computer. The interview was therefore again conducted using Skype, though this time using only the instant message (chat) feature. While at first this seemed less than ideal, this proved to be the most advantageous means of communication. The chat setting allowed for a more relaxed dialogue (no need to fill in all silences with unnecessary words). It also seemed to encourage more articulate responses from the participant. Rather than having a casual conversation with me, she chose to describe more and offer more information in comparison with the first interview. This medium also had the benefit of ending in a word-for-word transcription of the interview, which allowed me the freedom to read through the material when needed and to have the participant's words verbatim for analysis. For this reason, I chose to conduct the next two interviews using the Skype chat feature as well.

In total, four interviews were conducted though five diaries were gathered. One participant was not able to continue with the study after the second stage due to family demands. Instead, one

new participant was elicited from my own personal networks. This final participant did complete all three stages of study. The table below provides a summary of all data collected in the study:

	<b>Stage One: Online Survey</b>	<b>Stage Two: Diaries</b>	<b>Stage Three: Interviews</b>
<b>Data Gathered</b>	Online survey administered and collected	Diaries initiated (instructions sent) and Diaries collected	Interviews conducted over Skype
<b>Number of Responses</b>	24 responses	5 diaries	4 interviews
<b>Time Period</b>	September 2012	Initiated in the start of October 2012 – Collected at end of October 2012	January and February 2013

Table 1: Overview of data collected

### ***Digital Technology in Data Collection***

Clearly web-based technology was key to my data collection. Certainly, it was the factor that allowed me access to this group of women. The pool of participants was a group in similar circumstances that found each other through social networking. While a newly defined type of community, these Internet groups are undoubtedly well established. There are rules of conduct (both spoken and unspoken), hierarchies, modes of speaking, and rhythms of daily life as in any community of practice. Online social networking groups are becoming more and more prevalent with the ever-increasing use of the Internet worldwide, “the tremendous growth and use of the Internet has inspired the emergence of new types of social interaction” (Broad & Joos 2004: 924). To ignore their presence and influence would be a disservice to the field of research.

There are many advantages to using this new medium for academic study. The first being its cost-effectiveness as Murthy has pointed out, “web questionnaires have enabled large-scale multi-site international surveys that would have exhausted the whole departmental budget in the days of postal research” (2008: 838). I was able to create a ten-question survey, complete with multiple selection methods, using a free website service (Survey Monkey). Then, using only the generated url link, I was able to pool one hundred possible participants with a single forum post at no cost. Participants could access the survey wherever and whenever they wanted, they could take as much or as little time as they needed, and the results were entirely anonymous.

This component of anonymity is significant in digital research methods. It allows both the researcher and subject to maintain privacy and boundaries. It also offers a freedom of expression in its secrecy. Online data often reveals a “greater intimacy” than other modes of collection (Murthy 2008: 842). Broad and Joos have argued that the Internet has become a safe place of interaction, “the Internet is considered a site of ‘disembodied communication’ and as such, is a space where many are willing to ‘speak’ of personal, private matters as an ‘intimate stranger’” (2004: 926). In this sense, internet chat sites have become a way for often-marginalized groups to come more out into the open.

Social networking sites provide a number of research advantages, including access to a concentrated pool of very specific social groups (Murthy 2008: 845). These communities develop to provide an outlet for and to support one another. It was in this way that I had access to so many women who, though spread all across the globe, were in the similar situation of living as expats (or had formerly lived as expats). From this group, a natural sub-community of bilingual couples came forth given that many of the women were expats because of their international relationships.

Although digital technology must certainly be recognized as providing a new and important means of information gathering, one argued disadvantage of Internet research could be the defining limitation of technological access for some communities. While a substantial portion of the world has frequent Internet access (nearly 60% of Americans, the national base for my study respondents, went online every day in 2004), there are certainly still many without (Broad & Joos 2004: 924). In this case, though, the limitation was not an issue given that my subject sample was meant to reflect my own situation (middle to upper-middle class, educated, English-bilingual speaking women).

### ***Ethics***

While a number of ethical questions arise when using digital methods in research, I was not acting as a silent or unannounced observer in this instance, even though it is something quite easy to do in the “anonymous” world online. In this study the participants were all informed volunteers. My position as a member of the social group from which I elicited these volunteers

was an advantage rather than an impediment; “all research studies are understood to be situated, and the researcher integral to the progress of a research project” (Norton & McKinney 2011: 82). Participants were familiar with me and my research interests. In fact, many of the members had assisted me before in a smaller research endeavor regarding intercultural communication. Regardless of their previous knowledge, however, all participants were newly and explicitly informed of my intentions and the process as a whole.

As already mentioned earlier, asking couples to share their intimate interactions would have been difficult, especially when asking to examine how they fight, how they relax, or even how they make love; “arguments, quarrels, and expressions of love and intimacy are among some of the most private speech acts and as such are close to impossible to capture for research purposes” (Pavlenko 2005: 131). This was one of the major factors behind my decision not to observe or record participants. The diaries, questionnaires, and interviews instead allowed participants to choose what and how much they shared. While the study dealt with, at times, extremely abstract and intimate concepts (expressions of love, anger, fear, and worries), I tried my best to maintain the integrity of what my participants told me.

I am also conscious that the information gathered through this research does not serve as a definition of any one individual, couple, language, culture, or group. Rather, the data gathered were viewed as providing snippets of very specific settings, which offer possible insight into the dynamics of bilingualism, language learning, and intercultural communication. I do not claim to be making any grand gestures of discovery, only interpretations limited to my sample. Qualitative research on such an abstract concept as identity can only be subjective. I, therefore, kept my position and biases in the forefront in order to maintain their visibility (Norton & McKinney 2011: 82).

A final consideration, in terms of ethics, is the choice of my research sample. While many would argue that research is already inundated with the typical educated, middle-class sample, I did not want to bring in more layers of complexity to this study, given its small size. Both Piller and Pavlenko’s samples were all generally white, middle-class, educated people (and, in large part, women) as is mine. Piller justifies that this is a departure from the previously, more frequently

studied subjects of bilingualism and language use (i.e. immigrants to Western nations). In this case, Piller also says it can be a good opportunity to study these phenomena in a non-threatening way, by excluding the obvious societal forces of inequality (2002: 181). It is my hope, though, that through findings here, better understandings can be developed for any bilingual or intercultural setting, even for marginal sublanguages and subcultures that exist.

### ***Auto Ethnography***

Auto ethnography is defined in the book, *Keywords in Qualitative Methods*, as the “reportage of the reporter's own personal and emotional life, that is explicitly informed by social science concepts and perspectives, by sociological introspection” (2006: 19). The idea of seeking myself in my study sample was certainly not unintended nor was it difficult. While in typical ethnographies, the researcher is attempting to immerse himself or herself into a new or different culture, in this case my research developed from the community of which I was already a part. The questions which arose were those revolving around my own daily decisions in relation to language choice and language use. I became curious as to why and how I made the decisions I did and I wanted to know what others in similar situations were doing.

I chose to include some of my own reports in this study because they not only acted as the basis for the creation of each stage of research (by contemplating what questions I wanted to ask myself and how effectively I felt aspects could be reported), but they also added another level of observation in that I completed the same tasks asked of each participant. Regardless of a researcher’s initial position in an ethnographic study, it is impossible to act as a “silent” author (May 2002: 324). Instead, I chose to put my own beliefs and ideas at the forefront by allowing my own data to be interpreted just as those of the other participants.

### ***Thematic Analysis***

The analysis of text is of “primary concern in qualitative research” (Sayre 2001: 202). Since narrative analysis was not possible, given that participants did not produce narrative responses, I chose to analyze the data using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis, a type of content analysis, refers to the coding of data in order to uncover patterns and themes (Marks & Yardley 2004: 57).

Because of the qualitative nature of the research, the focus is not on the frequency with which a specific theme appears, but rather the significance behind that theme:

It is vital to remember that numbers do not tell the whole story – that the number of times a category appears does not necessarily indicate the extent to which it is relevant to interviewees. A point that is only mentioned once, by one person, can still have great empirical relevance and conceptual importance.  
(Marks & Yardley 2004: 67)

In this respect, all themes or codes which came forth were noted for their possible meaning and implication in relation to the theory informing this study.

I came to this research with set presumptions as to what happens within bilingual couples, “existing theories drive the questions one asks and one’s understanding of the answers, so that one does not ‘reinvent the wheel’” (Marks & Yardley 2004: 58). What I did not know was the *how* and *why* that existed behind these conjectures. This is what was sought in the data. Themes were not limited to only those that supported initial hypotheses. To do this would have negated the fundamental purpose of any research project; “there would be little point in doing research if one were not simultaneously open to the data and what they might offer anew in terms of the theory’s development or refutation” (Marks & Yardley 2004: 59). Instead, both the superficial and more subtle references were sought and then categorized organically, as themes became clear.

All data was collected and then examined together to draw out common and notable patterns. However, because of the unique dynamic of each couple, and the multiple layers of cultural and personal influence present in intercultural relationships, predictability and consistency were low. What became apparent, though, were certain factors that seemed to have strong influences over a couple’s language choices, specifically in terms of emotion. Another key area of focus was the way in which these women positioned themselves in their relationships in terms of language use (how they used it, how they spoke of using it, and how they related to it). These two categories were used to map the results elicited in the analysis. Certain survey questions helped to frame and support the themes that came forth as well.

### ***Conclusion***

By utilizing new and diverse methods of research, I aimed to produce reliable, albeit subjective results. Digital technology allowed for the advantage of greater access to my desired participants as well as control over the format of responses. My use of multiple methods of data gathering contributed to the validity of those results. And, while some may negatively view subjectivity, the personal aspect of this study was appropriate given the goal of the participants' perspective of language usage and my own particular involvement as a member of the target group. Through thematic analysis, I hoped to draw forth the significant findings within the data in the most apt way possible. In the chapter that follows I present and analyse data from the study.

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## **Chapter Four: Analysis**

*This chapter presents the results of my data collection; describing study participants, illustrating questionnaire results and providing snippets from both the diary and interview stages in order to demonstrate findings. These findings have been coded into categories centered around the main topics of emotion and identity through thematic analysis. What resulted revealed intriguing findings in terms of anxiety, anger, affection, and associations, as well as feelings of identity influenced by both individual, or self, positioning and the positioning of the participants by others. Associations, or historical context, came forth notably as a reoccurring theme throughout the discussion of language and emotion.*

### ***Participant Demographics***

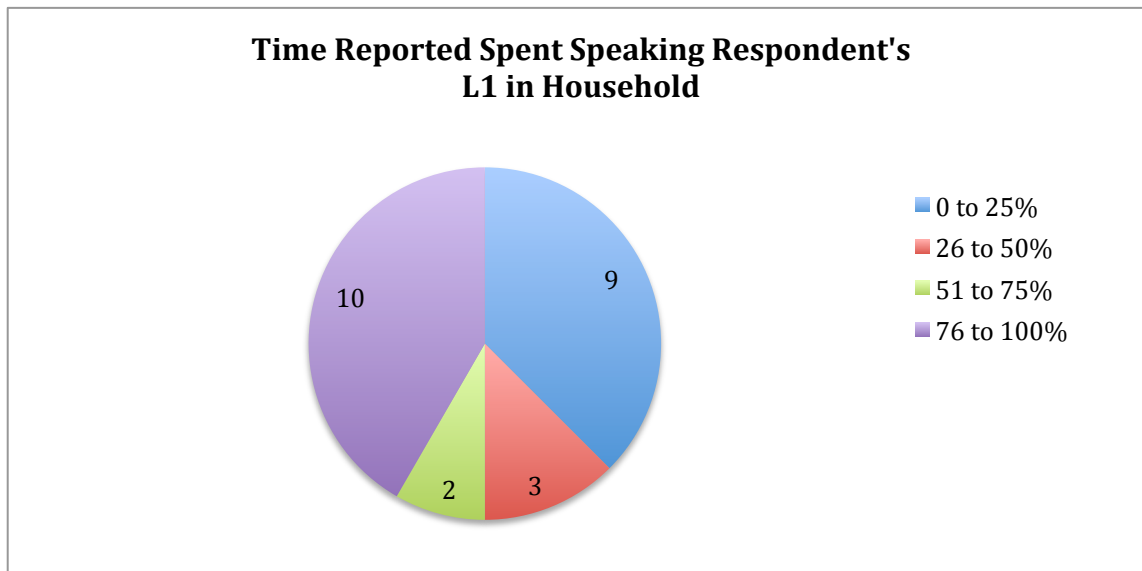
As stated in the previous chapter, the first stage of data collection was a ten-question survey sent out to a pool of one hundred people in an online group of internationally connected women. Respondents were asked to self-select if they were involved in a long-term, bilingual relationship, which culminated in twenty four responses.

Respondents ranged from twenty-two to forty-three years old. Seventeen are living in European countries, five in the United States, one in Costa Rica, and one in South Africa. All have been involved in their current relationships anywhere between two and fifteen years. All had some degree of college education (only one had not yet completed an undergraduate degree) while almost half (eleven) had earned or were in the process of earning a postgraduate degree.

Only four participants were non-native English speakers, but rated themselves as highly proficient (four or five on a scale of five – see *Appendix D*). All were active participants in the colloquial English-speaking group from which the responses were fielded, demonstrating their fluency and ease with the language. Their partners were all native English speakers and English was generally the majority language in the households except for the case of one respondent. The non-native English speakers were not used in further stages of research, however, as none of these participants returned the diary form.

Most participants gave themselves a five or four in speaking and comprehension of their L2, though some rated a little less for reading and writing (see *Appendix D*). Only four participants rated themselves less and these participants were not used for further study, again simply because they chose not to continue with the research process. Their inclusion would have skewed the results, though, given that using their partner’s first language, and therefore language choice, would not have been as viable an option as was preferred in the continuing study participants.

In terms of the language used the majority of time within the couples, the results were perfectly divided between the respondents’ first language and their partner’s first language. Contrary to popular theory, the surrounding dominant language in which the couples lived was cited by only half the respondents as an influential factor in determining their majority language. Piller too found that the dominant language was not necessarily the “natural” choice for bilingual couples, whether this meant a minority language was used or some version of code switching or code mixing was employed (2002: 133). Even when they did choose the dominant language, Piller’s couples often claimed the reason to be based on one partner’s proficiency in a language rather than environmental factors (2002: 135). This again reflected my own findings, as the language competencies of the couple were cited above the dominant language in which they lived as determinant factors of a couple’s majority language at home, though this will be discussed further in the next section.



Graph 1: Majority language used in household

Background information of the five major participants for the second and third stages of the research study follows below. All names have been changed for the privacy of the participants:

Participant One (Karen), aged thirty-years old, currently lives in Tübingen, Germany with her German husband of eight years and their two daughters. She grew up in the Midwestern United States in a monolingual English household. Though her heritage is German, like many American students, Karen studied Spanish in high school. She first traveled to Germany through a student exchange program the summer before she began university (it was her ninth choice of destinations). She studied the language for six months prior to the trip, and was then put into total immersion during her stay (her host mother spoke no English and all classes attended were conducted in German except for English and French classes). This trip inspired a German minor in her university studies and another exchange year during her tertiary career. During this stay, she met her husband. Though she returned to the United States to finish her degree, she found an internship in Berlin after graduation. She has lived in Germany ever since then.

Participant Two (Rebecca), aged thirty-one-years old, lives in Michigan, USA with her Peruvian partner of two years. Rebecca is one exception from the sample in that she is in a same-sex relationship, while the other four couples are in heterosexual relationships. She was raised in a bilingual home of English and Dutch. She later learned Spanish before meeting her partner and works quite a bit in Spain and in a Spanish-speaking environment. The two communicate the vast majority of the time in Spanish, including their social networks outside of the home, despite being in an English-speaking country. Though Rebecca completed the questionnaire and submitted a diary, she was unable to complete the third stage interview due to family issues, hence the relatively limited background information.

Participant Three (Carol), aged thirty-four-years old, lives in Cannes, France with her husband of fifteen years and their son. Carol grew up in a bilingual household in Canada with an Irish father and a French Canadian mother. French was the dominant language in the household until Carol began school. After that, their home became mainly English speaking. Carol's husband is originally from Iran, though he spent most of his life in France and later moved to Montreal, Canada, where the two met. Though she and her husband both spoke French when they met,

Carol said they started the relationship in English because her husband wanted to practice the language. Like her own childhood, their son began his life speaking one language (English) the majority of the time, but switched almost entirely to another (French) after he began school. They now speak French the majority of the time with their son, though she and her husband continue to use a mix of English and French between the two of them.

Participant Four (Denise), aged twenty-eight-years old, lives in Paris France with her French husband of five years. She is originally from Texas, USA. The first time she left the United States was for a university study abroad program. She chose Scotland because it was an English-speaking country (she had no foreign language experience at that point). It was there, however, that she began to study French as language study was a requirement during her visit. She met her husband one week after she began to study French and moved to France permanently in 2010.

Participant Five (Anne) was elicited later in the research process to replace Rebecca. She is twenty-eight-years old and currently lives in Massachusetts, USA with her German husband of four years. Anne grew up in a monolingual household in the Northeastern United States. She traveled quite a bit before meeting her husband, though her foreign language experience was limited to brief instruction of Spanish in school. For this reason, and also because they were in an English-speaking environment (India), the two communicated in English from the beginning. Anne began to study German soon after they began dating though and has since acquired a level of fluency that allows her and her husband to communicate both in German and English.

### ***Thematic Coding***

The analysis of the data was achieved using thematic analysis, as described in the previous chapter (pg 27). Once all data was gathered, material was read over multiple times to highlight common themes that emerged. With the data, I focused on points that appeared to be the most meaningful in the participants' responses. This included anything that was reiterated, emphasized with examples or extended focus, or that reflected a similar response from another participant. Those that came forth fell more or less under the broad categories of language and emotion, or language, identity and self-positioning. Beneath these two over-arching themes fell smaller

categories that illustrated the significant components of language choice for the questionnaire respondents and the five major participants.

In the end, I was left with five fairly distinct groupings: expressions or interactions of 1) anxiety, 2) anger, and 3) affection, and the roles of 4) habit (or historical association) and 5) cultural heritage in language use. Anxiety, anger, and affection easily fell under the heading of language and emotion, in that they revealed the ways in which highly emotive contexts affected language choice. On the other hand, habit, or the history of language use within a couple, appeared a more subtle connection to emotion in that it called up the associations made with language and specific domains. At the same time, however, it also represented initial positionings that eventually established themselves within the participants' various domains. Finally, cultural heritage was a clear consequence of self-positioning and identity negotiation. Participants articulated very conscious desires for certain positions as carriers of their cultural backgrounds through their language choices.

### ***Language and Emotion***

As Pavlenko has begun to bring to academic attention, language and emotion are deeply intertwined. This becomes clearer in the examination of bilinguals' perspectives on their language use in that their choices can reflect very profound emotional relationships with their languages. While "rarely does a single factor account for a bilingual's choice of one language over another" (Grosjean 1982: 143), emotion clearly has a large role in the determination of what language is used and when.

While it is thought that stronger emotions will instinctively come out in a speaker's L1 (Dewaele 2004: 207), this appears not to be always the case with my respondents. The one area that seemed to follow this rule were instances of anxiety or what was described as conversations "when anxious or upset" (though it was to be non-confrontational with partner). As one interviewee stated, "we simply have to be quite deliberate about speaking in German, and we tend to default to the most natural language medium [English] when we're discussing anything important or emotional" (Anne). Similarly, another said, "at work this summer I had to confront a client in French and it was horrible, I felt that I couldn't really get what I wanted to say out of

my mouth” (Carol). Anxious or otherwise emotional (though non-argumentative) interactions seem to be one instance where natural tendency to native language becomes strongest, perhaps in a defensive or protective manner, especially given that these scenarios may be more monologic rather than dialogic as in the example of a couple fighting.

The arguments, on the other hand, were fairly well divided in terms of using an L1 or an L2. This resembles the division of the majority language spoken in the households (see *Graph 1*), though not always in correlation to each couples’ responses (there were four examples of couples whose language choice for arguments was not the language used the majority of the time). One respondent stated, “our arguments are usually in English because that was our first language as a couple and it feels safer” (Denise). “Safer” here seems to imply more control or a greater mutual understanding, as well as the historical context of English as the couple’s more established language. For Denise, anger comes across as more aggressive in her second language of French, “because I don’t have as many degrees” of subtlety; “instead of saying ‘you’re irritating me’ it comes out as ‘shut the fuck up.’”

Similarly, Anne reported arguing only in their majority language of interaction, “we ALWAYS fight in English...even when we’re in Germany, and we’re speaking about everything else in German, we will still fight in English.” Even with the environmental influence of a German-speaking situation, Anne and her partner treat an argument separately in terms of language use. An argument becomes a uniquely regulated event, revealing one example of emotion’s distinguishing role in language choice.

Swearing and use of taboo words are another type of emotionally charged language use. Again, testifying to the different but very real ways in which emotion can affect language choice, Pavlenko points out that:

Taboo words are not an eccentric and quirky way to look at the interaction between language and emotions - rather, these words represent a unique intersection between the two realms, evoking a complex chain of feelings, affective associations, autobiographic memories, vivid imagery, and olfactory sensations. (Pavlenko 2005: 169)

In my research, respondents reported frequently mixing their L1 and L2. While the assumption may be that during outbursts or use of emotionally loaded words, participants would instinctually revert to an L1, the use of *distancing* may be at play in this case. By choosing an L2, a speaker is separating out the emotional baggage associated with specific words. Pavlenko underlines this feeling of distancing when she reports that, “the language learned later in life also allows speakers to use taboo and swearwords, avoiding the feelings of guilt and discomfort internalized in childhood with regard to L1 expletives” (2008: 159).

From a personal standpoint, I feel much more comfortable speaking about sexual matters or other taboo subjects in my L2, given that they lack the negative connotation that grew with certain words in childhood. Rather, they become words used only in the adult and committed relationship in which I am involved. One of the study participants confirmed this effect as well in her experience with the sensitive subject of abuse. Rebecca and her partner use only English when discussing their troubled pasts: “We are both survivors of abuse, and if something related to abuse topics surfaces, there is a complete switch to English.” This is despite their majority language being almost entirely Spanish. Here, the language choice allows for a separation of current and past lives, and, in her case, the positive and the negative.

Finally, terms of affection represent a fourth type of emotional setting in which language choice becomes of interest. This scenario proved the most intriguing, as participants seem to use language differently in expressing affection than when arguing or in an anxiety-inducing conversation. Respondents often reported using their L2 or a mixture of both languages for expressing terms of endearment or feelings of affection more than they did during arguments or when upset. Even those respondents who spoke predominantly in their L1 seemed to resort to new language selections when speaking affectionately with their partner:

“our terms of endearment are the most bilingual of all our exchanges...It is the one arena where [her partner] does not seem sheepish about using German, and in fact seems to believe that expressing affection in one’s own language is the right thing to do...It is also likely that he will use the German when he is affectionately reminding me of our marital status (*‘Allo, Frau A \_\_\_!’*)”(Anne).

It is interesting that Anne's partner feels that "expressing affection in one's own language is the *right thing to do*." This implies some aspect of duty or obligation to his first language and culture. It also implies that, despite his bilingualism, his first language is still seen as his "own language." As if he should only express his deepest feelings of love in his native language.

"She [Rebecca's partner] has never told me she loves in anything except her own language...she has tried to be intimate with me in English but found it impossible, because, as a writer (she's a published poet), her emotions are deeply tied to the words she uses to express them" (Rebecca).

Here Rebecca clearly articulates the connection between language and emotion, though citing it as a result of her partner's choice of career. Yet she is still aware of the motivation behind her partner's need to express affection in a specific language. The different wording, though same effect of Rebecca's partner's "need" and Anne's partner's "obligation" is notable. Both Rebecca and Anne's partners feel it important to express affection in their own language. This reflects a connection between a specific language and emotional expression, despite the fact that one partner may use an L1 while the other uses an L2 more often.

"I, on the other hand, related English to my family in the US – and my family is far from affectionate or emotional. My learning Spanish coincided with my liberation from a lot of that, so I feel more free to express my feelings in Spanish than I do in English" (Rebecca).

This demonstrates the use of different languages in different domains, especially in terms of emotional value. Though not her L1, Rebecca sees Spanish as a language of love and liberation, while English and Dutch are seen as cold and distant.

"our only language of affection is Spanish except in the case of nicknames. I am incapable of creating nicknames in Spanish" (Rebecca).

Here Rebecca comments on the unconscious effect of using pet names with a loved one. She cannot define what it is that results in her inserting English in their almost entirely Spanish affectionate talk. Perhaps it is the creative element of nicknames that comes more naturally in a native language. Or perhaps there is still a close association with pet names used or heard in childhood.

“I almost always use French for affection. To me there are more nuances in the language to express how I feel than there are in English....[while her partner] prefers English to express affection because, like I mentioned earlier, he fell in love with me in English and that still holds sentimental value for him” (Denise).

Denise addresses here the issue of language diversity, claiming the subtlety of French (or range of vocabulary) as a reason to use it over English in certain contexts. Her partner’s connection of language with their early relationship is especially interesting in that it reveals the deep associations language and emotion can have, referring again to the history of a relationship and the way in which language was acquired and used between the couple. Similar to Rebecca and Spanish, Denise’s partner associates his love with one language.

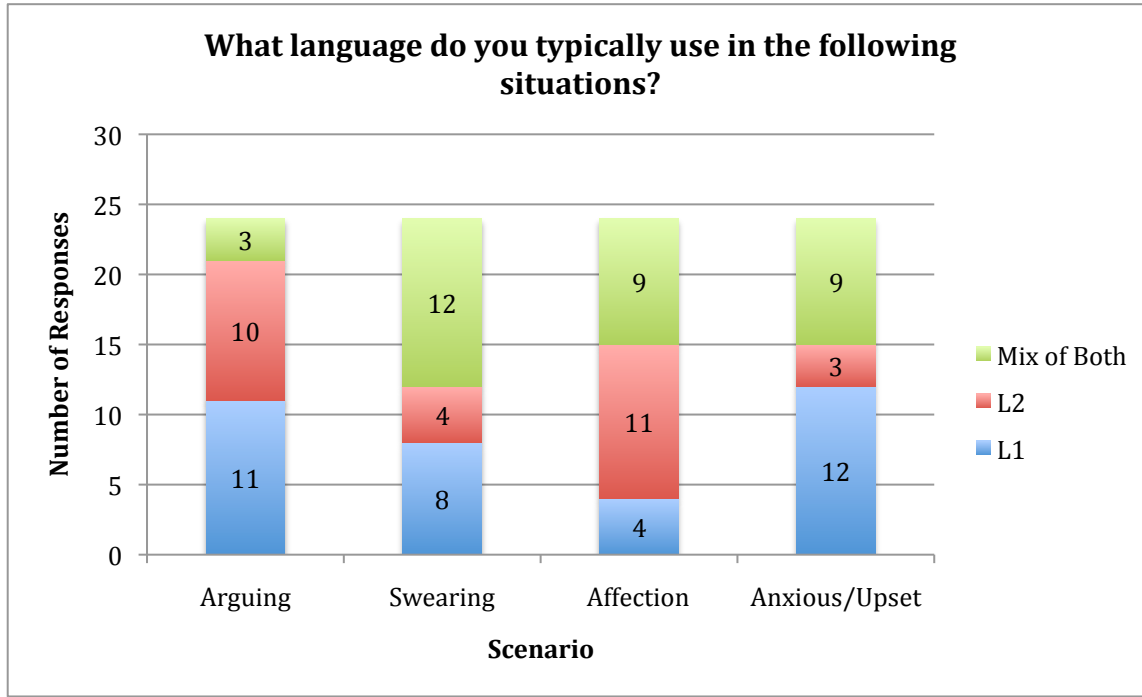
In two cases of affectionate speech, a third language was even introduced, seemingly only for the emotional and historical value. Rebecca reported using Dutch for terms of affection, while Carol’s partner uses only Farsi when telling her that he loves her. Carol said it was “from our early dating days, I would ask him how to say stuff in Persian, I guess it just stuck”. Both Dutch and Farsi are third languages not used in each of these couple’s daily life, nor are they languages understood by both partners, yet they become primary modes of expressing love. In this case, the strong associations between a language and emotion override proficiency and understanding on behalf of the partner.

In all instances, expression of affection unmistakably brought out a high-degree of emotional connotation. Each of the five major study participants reported strong parallels between this type of emotional interaction and language choice. Pavlenko saw this same effect in her own studies as well:

Their narratives suggest that emotional vocabulary - expressive forms, emotion concepts, terms for emotional behavior - give a certain distinctive shape to a speaker’s feeling. In particular, the emotion concepts that are available to us contribute to how we interpret what we feel, how we experience it, even how we act on it. The perspective of bilinguals like these suggests that the problem of which comes first, the person’s feeling or the emotional freight of the word, might be, if not a chicken and egg proposition, practically irresolvable. (2006: 55)

Though it may not be possible to immediately identify whether it is the impulsive need to express love in one language versus another, or the associations we make with certain words and domains, the powerful relationship between language and emotion is evident.

The selections of all twenty four respondents in terms of what language is used in each scenario are illustrated in the graph on the below:



Graph 2: Language choice in scenarios

In each scenario, code switching, or using more than one language or variety within one interaction (Grosjean 1982: 145), is prevalent, whether it is switching languages dependent on the type of conversation, or mixing both languages into one sentence. According to Pavlenko, “code-switching is not necessarily a compound of social-indexical values of the two languages in use” (2004: 9). Sometimes it is simply a matter of ability or competency in a specific language. In the end, though, both contextual and linguistic factors are at play alongside emotional decisions in terms of language use (Pavlenko 2005: 147).

This influence of both contextual and linguistic factors may easily be the result of the emotional attachment developed during language acquisition; exemplifying the role of history and association in language use. This reoccurring idea of emotional associations, known as *affective linguistic conditioning* - where “words and phrases acquire affective connotations and personal meanings through association and integration through emotionally charged memories and experiences” is in contrast to the *conceptual development* of learning words and their denotative

meanings (Pavlenko 2005:154). As Pavlenko's earlier quote reiterated, it becomes quite difficult to separate the emotional and the conceptual, the connotative and the denotative, when discussing bilinguals who have learned a language in personal and emotional surroundings, as the bilinguals in my study have.

The concept of association is key in terms of emotional decision making in language use. The language in which an event took place will more likely elicit the memory of that event. Details are clearer when a memory is told in its own language (Pavlenko 2005: 179). Language becomes tied to specific situations and emotions. The respondents confirmed this significance in their descriptions of how they most often interact with their partners:

“that's just not 'our' language” (Karen) [on why they do not use English much]

“I associate her with Spanish” (Rebecca)

“It doesn't feel natural to speak in French with him” (Carol)

“our love developed in English, not French, which is why H speaks English during arguments and when expressing love” (Denise)

Referring back to evidence from earlier, Denise spoke of only arguing in English because “that was our first language as a couple and it feels safer” (Denise). Rebecca and her partner switch to English to distance themselves from the memory of abuse. Carol's partner uses only Farsi to say he loves her because it was something they did in the beginning of their relationship. And, one of the most interesting phrasings, Denise wrote that her husband “fell in love with me in English.” She firmly links one, very provocative, emotion with one language. As if the language and the feelings of love are inseparable. All this supports the effect of language association on bilingual language choice.

In the survey results, almost all of the respondents (twenty one) cited “the habits established in our relationship” as one of the major factors that influences language choice in their relationship. While “habits” seems a mundane word, it represents the established foundation, the associations that couples make at the start of a relationship; a formation with continues to hold sway despite situational changes:

It is extremely difficult to change the language (or languages) in which you communicate with someone once a habit is established. The language used becomes, as it were, a definition of the relationship and the receptacle of all the common knowledge and experience which is shared.

(Harding & Riley 1986: 78)

Following the habits of a relationship, the second and third choices for factors influencing language choice were respondents' own competencies in a language or the competencies of their partners. Situational factors (i.e. the country in which they live) was fourth in line.

<b>8. What factors influence the percentage of time spent speaking each language with your partner?</b>			
		Response Percent	Response Count
My competence in my partner's L1.		70.8%	17
Partner's competence in my L1.		62.5%	15
The city or country where we currently live.		54.2%	13
The habits established in our relationship.		87.5%	21
My preferences or wishes.		20.8%	5
Partner's preferences or wishes.		16.7%	4
The presence of family member(s) in our home.		20.8%	5
The needs of or goals for our children.		12.5%	3
Other (please specify)			
"My competence in my partner's L1" used to be the major problem, now it's mostly out of habit."			4
"Not city or country but nearly all our friends here speak her L1 rather than mine, even though technically we live in the US."			
"It was the language we decided to use when we met (I was trying to improve my Spanish at the time) and now it feels odd trying to speak any other language together."			
"When we met my partner didn't speak my L1 at all so we got comfortable in his L1. Now I associate affection with his L1 even"			

Table 2: Factors influencing language spoken

The intimate relationships of these women essentially require an emotional association with a language. Even if they speak their L1 the majority of the time, there are holidays spent with the in-laws or other familiar situations of L2 usage. In no instance of this study was a household without any type of multiple language use, even if only in affection speech, thus creating contexts in which these emotional associations would develop.

One unexpected discovery made through my findings was the association that participants felt with language use on the topic of food; again, reiterating the significance of associations in language choice among bilinguals. My fluency when speaking of food in Italian, my second language, certainly recalls the many lessons and conversations held in the kitchen of my mother-in-law. I will most often use the Italian word for a food item even when speaking in English with my husband. For us, food features more strongly in Italian than it does in English. Other participants gave similar accounts of code mixing and switching more than usual when food was involved:

“Our grocery list is a weird mix of Spanish and English....Peruvians say ‘culantro,’ and I have noticed myself saying it instead of ‘cilantro’ even when I am speaking English.” (Rebecca)

(Elena) “What about your grocery lists, are those in English or German?”

(Karen) “Ha – DH [her partner] always laughs at them if he sees them. They’re a mix.” *Gives the example of* “grated käse’ (cheese).....it really just depends on which word pops into my mind when I’m writing the list”

Karen laughs at the written use of code mixing, though most study respondents claimed to utilize verbal code mixing with their partners. Code mixing, especially in past theory, was often seen as lazy or “impure” by monolinguals, even though it is a natural and useful language practice for bilinguals (Grosjean 1982: 146). Denise also said that their grocery lists come out in both languages. She said it depended on whether she was “thinking” in English or French. Like Karen, she did not seem to account for the switching of languages, nor give it much consideration. I believe, though, that it testifies again to the impact that the specific context of acquisition can have on language use (where and when a word is learned), as well as the emotional associations that develop through this context-embedded process.

### ***Identity & Self-Positioning***

Although most of the participants did not explicitly discuss their language motivations, their emotional investments in particular language choices are clearly illustrated in a number of the quotations presented above. Both Denise and Anne did not speak their partner’s language at all at the time of meeting, but within five and four years respectively, they report achieving high levels

of fluency (four out of five on self-reported scale). They both insisted on learning and practicing their second languages, “there was a mutual sense that we should be practicing together” (Anne). Their everyday and very personal communications depend on their grasp of a second language. Their increased language resources give them access to a more complete involvement in their intercultural lives. In fact, “use with family and friends” was rated the highest (twenty out of twenty four respondents rated it “extremely beneficial) among the responses to the question concerning in which contexts it is beneficial to know a partner’s first language (see *Graph 3*). As Piller points out, “all the prestige of English in the world does not buy an English-speaking spouse in Germany access to extended family and friendship networks, nor to institutions and workplaces” (2002: 273). The respondents seemed to recognize the significance of language in its cultural, societal, and emotional attachments. Clearly, for them, the use of their partner’s L1 is not a matter of basic communication alone.

While the other three stage 2 and 3 participants had some proficiency or understanding of their L2 before meeting their partners, their advanced fluency in the language certainly was a result of what Piller refers to as “language desire” (2002: 100). This “desire” refers to the incentive behind language learning. It can refer to a romantic incentive, but also to the extended use and advantages, or the increased linguistic capital, that speakers acquire as bilinguals. This “desire” for another language may be brought on by an initial desire for new identity options, but the role of emotional motivation certainly comes into play as well. As one participant stated: “I started learning German right away, even before we started dating I began jotting down a few words basically because I had a crush, and also because I have always been interested in German as a language” (Anne). This data supports Pavlenko’s observation that there is a legitimate place for desire as a motivating factor in the study of bilingualism (2005: 211).

Whether consciously sought or not, new identities are a consequence of language acquisition. This begins to raise again the idea of *linguistic relativity*, the concept of language use changing a speaker’s perspective: “some bilinguals report that when they change language they feel they are changing their attitudes and behaviors” (Grosjean 1982: 279). Ten out of the twenty four survey respondents replied that they noticed slight or significant differences in their attitudes and

behaviors when speaking or interacting in their L2. Only a total of four said that they notice no differences whatsoever (the others indicated “maybe” or “not really”).

<b>9. Do you feel that your attitudes or behaviors change when speaking or writing (interacting) in your partner's language?</b>		
	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
No, I feel I am the same person in either language.	16.7%	4
Not really, I do not notice any difference when I interact in my partner's language.	16.7%	4
Maybe if I thought about it more I would notice some differences.	20.8%	5
Yes, I notice slight changes when I interact in my partner's language.	29.2%	7
Yes definitely, I notice significant changes when I interact in my partner's language.	16.7%	4

Table 3: Identity Changes

All five respondents in the second and third stages revealed some degree of personality adjustment when using their L2. It is easy, as monolinguals to assume that a person’s identity is static, though this is not true for monolinguals and certainly not true for bilinguals:

Because of the social/grammatical construction of the person as a unitary knowable identity, we tend to assume it is possible to have made a set of consistent choices located within only one discourse. (Davies & Harré 1999: 103)

The added layer of a second language both opens up new opportunities for identity positioning and also adds the complication of possible misinterpretations by the surrounding community or feelings of misrepresentation on the speaker’s behalf.

Karen in particular discussed the differences she experienced when interacting in her L2: “He [her partner] used to say he didn’t like me as well when I spoke English! He said I sounded more arrogant and not as nice as I do in German.” Her personal theory is that she was more confident and assertive when on her “home turf” in an English-speaking setting, or when dealing with her family and friends, with whom she was more direct (because of familiarity). She also suggests that softening her language and being more polite was a way she used her L2 as she attempted to fit into her new environment:

“I think it started more as an effort to be a really nice person so I could find friends!....so I went out of my way to be really accommodating, polite, and, well, kind of passive about my needs/wants....I think part of it was trying to fight the stereotype of the aggressive, loud American.”

Even after many years of complete fluency, Karen still feels herself to be more passive in her L2. She did say, though, that both she and her husband view the differences “less and less over the years.”

Karen’s experience demonstrates the struggle of identity positioning for bilinguals. Her own perceived personality was in conflict with what her husband perceived (her interactive positioning). And when with other Germans, she felt limited in her ability to position herself (her reflexive positioning) the way she wanted to because of her language limitations. Norton also commented on this conflict in regards to second language learners, in that: “the conditions under which language learners speak are often highly challenging, engaging their identities in complex and often contradictory ways” (2001: 312). She argued for the necessary recognition of the power relations between speakers of a second language and target language speakers. A second language learner is not always able to position themselves as desired if they cannot meet the expectations and demands of native speakers (Norton 2001: 312).

The other participants gave similar accounts when asked whether they notice differences in their attitudes and/or behaviors when speaking their second language:

“I am far more aggressive in those languages [English and Dutch, her first languages]...Spanish is not my power language” (Rebecca).

Rebecca feels she can be more powerful in her first languages. Whether this is the association of more authority in her early language experiences or her resources in that realm of emotion, she understands that her presented/perceived behavior changes with language. This again calls up the notion of power relations in identity positioning in that Rebecca feels she is able to be more aggressive in her first language, whereas she may lack the resources required by her second (target) language speakers to act in this way.

“I find that I am less funny, witty and expressive in French. Sometimes I try to tell a story to my French friends and it just doesn’t come out as it would have in English” (Carol).

“Normally, I’m very outgoing, but because I couldn’t follow the conversation enough to participate... a distinct change in personality, difficult to deal with” (Denise).

Both Carol and Denise recognize their lack of fluency in their second languages as a significant factor in their positioning as well and they express frustration with this reality. In these cases, they imagine how they are being perceived by others, which then affects their own self-positioning.

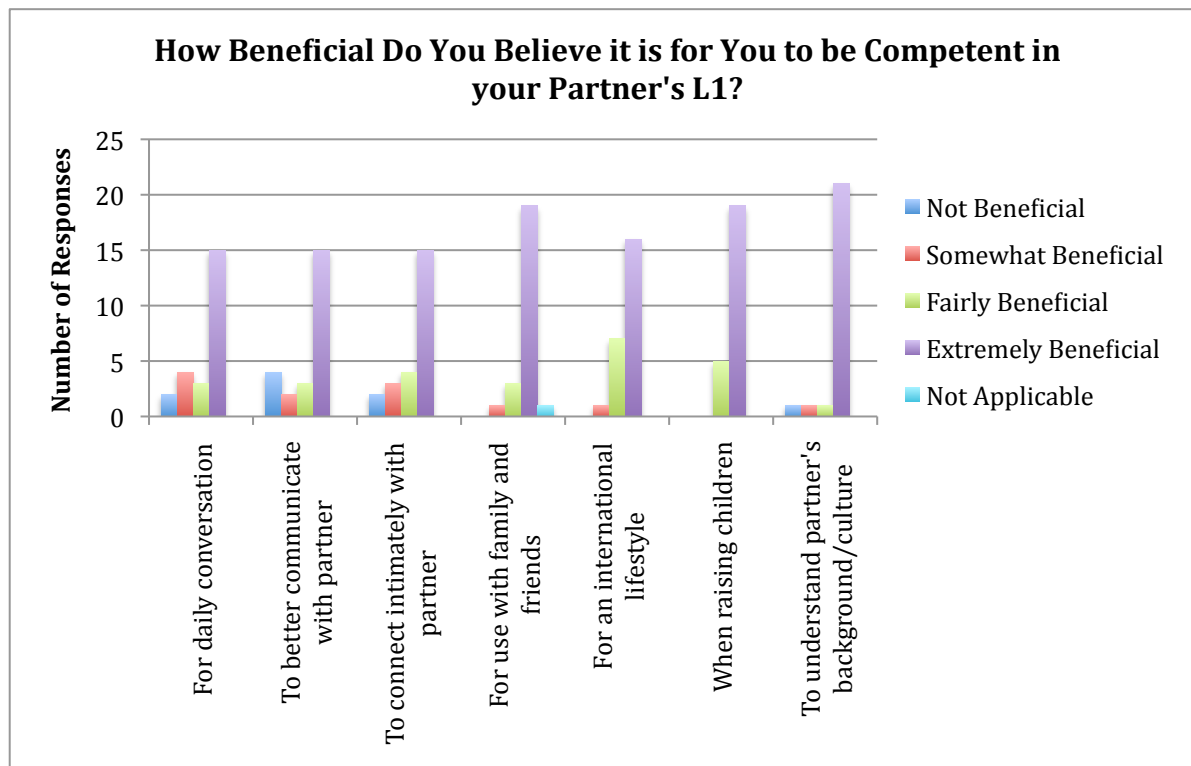
“I really do, though probably slightly less now that I’m better, but still I think I am much gentler and need to be a much more deliberate speaker, which makes me a bit more thoughtful about what I say, which is NOT how I am in English... and I suspect that my tone is very different. While in English I’m not terribly feminine, I think in German I have a much softer accent than most so it changes how I come across” (Anne).

Anne too understands the change of role she takes from one language to another, again citing her lack of linguistic resources as the reason. For all five of the participants, the play between self-positioning and the perception of how other perceive them leaves them to struggle with their own contradictory feelings of identities.

Past bilingual theory maintained a “split personality” hypothesis. In many bilinguals’ lives, however, the feelings of personality/identity differences could be explained by the fact that they often use each language in specific situations or with specific people (communities of practice), hence the behavior change (Grosjean 1982: 283). Even as monolinguals, people maneuver through various discourses and ways of being; this is not a phenomenon unique to bilinguals (Pavlenko 2006: 1). The added layer of bilingualism, however, increases the visibility of and possibly the difficulty with any shift in identity. The use of code switching and language choice by the respondents is evidence in part of the negotiation of their identities in that speakers may select languages dependent on the position they want to take (Pavlenko 2004: 22). Yet they are required to confront the multiplicity of identity roles as well as their lack of control over their own reflexive or self-positioning and the interactive positioning others may give to them.

Another layer of identity negotiation with bilingual couples is the effect of cultural heritage associated with language. Often language is seen as, “intrinsic to, and inseparable from, cultural identity” (Anderson 1999: 16). Indeed, survey respondents cited “understanding your partner’s background and culture” as one of the most beneficial aspects of knowing a partner’s first

language. Raising children was another highly rated factor. Both of these selections reflect an acknowledgement of the cultural component with language.



Graph 3: Beneficial aspects of language competency

The five diaries and interviews also revealed the importance of cultural heritage attached to language use. Karen feels it important for her children to speak English in order to have the “connection to my family”. She elaborated in saying, “I would love for my children to be just as comfortable in English as they are in German. If I feel like I have to force them to speak English, it would be like a little piece of my cultural heritage dying.” Three of the other subjects cited communication with family as key in their motivation to encourage their L1 with their children. In fact, as stated in the section above, “use with family and friends” was the factor most selected as “extremely beneficial” in knowing a partner’s L1 and this seems to come through especially so when discussing a couple’s children, either real or imagined.

Clearly, views of identity and emotion are expressed when it comes to one’s children and the language they speak and relate to; Carol admitted that it was “also sentimental that he [her son]

can read books that I loved”. The concept of *one person, one language* in reference to bilingual families (now often referred to as *one parent, one language*) was first written about at the turn of the twentieth century: “It allowed each parent to communicate with the child in his or her native language, thereby ensuring naturalness in communication while making the child bilingual” (Grosjean 1982: 173). All five respondents referred to this as their chosen method of raising a bilingual family. In the case of children, at least, a more conscientious and permanent decision seems to be made from the very beginning in regards to language. Unlike language choice in some of the more daily interactions, this is a premeditated decision. It is a decision demonstrating an awareness of the cultural, personal, and emotional aspects of language use.

### ***Conclusion***

The data discussed above suggest that there is a great deal of subtlety to be found in the realm of language practices and language choice in the bilingual couple. The differences in language behavior in relation to various emotional situations such as an argument or a moment of intimacy reveal that there are many deciding factors in bilingual language choice. Association and historical context, that is the manner in which language was acquired or established within the relationship, appeared as particularly strong variables in terms of emotional language use. Similarly, the discussion of identity exposes a much more cognizant engagement with self-positioning than previously believed. Finally, throughout all of the results, most significantly when discussing future generations, it is clear that language choice is frequently not an unconscious act, however seamless bilinguals may make it appear.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusion**

*Much early theory surrounding multiple language use was based on formulaic approaches to second language learning and a generalization of monolingual linguistic behavior. Given that bilingual and multilingual speakers are increasing worldwide due to globalization from technology, migration, and continuously shifting cultural capital, the lack of attention given to this field is unacceptable. This section outlines the significance of the type of qualitative research conducted in this study in its contribution to the better understanding of bilingualism; the significant roles emotion, association and identity positioning play in language use, and how these findings can be useful to bilinguals and second language learners overall.*

### ***Overview of the Study***

As Piller suggests, drawing any consistent conclusions from the unique dynamic of a romantic relationship can be difficult. Certain patterns and “tendencies” do not make language choice predictable (Pavlenko 2004: 9). What is clear, however, is that even limited research in this area has proven past theories of bilingual behavior to be incorrect or misguided. For instance, the assumption that language selection is most often based on the surrounding dominant language was discounted in my findings. Language choice is more often based on initial acquisition and emotional associations in the early stages of the relationship as well as the competencies of those involved:

It has become clear that the language choice of bilingual couples is by no means a simple choice between two languages, but that it is played out against a host of issues that relate to language knowledge and language ideologies within a complex macro-linguistic context. (Piller 2002: 131)

The negotiation of two or more languages becomes an interplay of multiple influencing factors hidden beneath the surface of the words we speak.

In answer to the original question of “how do women in bilingual relationships negotiate their emotions, identity, and self-positioning through their language choices?” the issue of identity and therefore the influence of culture and society are a major contributing factor, whether conscious or not. Identities are structured through all the various variables of a person’s life; gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and profession as examples. While only one aspect of this, language is crucial in that these other roles are reflected and constructed in our language use (Grosjean 1982:

157). The language we use reveals a great deal of who we are attempting to be, or our reflexive positioning; while at the same time, provides those around us with a component from which to categorize and define or interactively position us. For the bilingual, this is a profound realization in that, for them, positioning is not as straightforward given the use of more than one language. There is greater room for interpretation, use of linguistic or cultural norms, and representation on the part of the speaker or community at large. Identity, therefore, often becomes more actively negotiated in bilinguals in comparison to monolinguals because they may use language more deliberately or visibly in the negotiation process.

Emotion is just as significant a factor as identity positioning in regard to the language behavior of bilinguals. The tendencies to use one language or another depending on the emotional context reveal the direct link between language and emotion. Participants confirmed that the language choices they make are determined by the emotional context of a conversation; whether it is a fight with their partner, an emotionally-charged discussion, or an expression of love. Their reports also reveal the strong associations we make with language as a result of our historical acquisition process and experiences, sometimes making it almost impossible for them to express certain ideas in one language versus another.

This study has confirmed the substantial impact of both emotion and identity on language use, language choice, and language learning. In fact, the two are intricately combined in the process of language selection and identity negotiation; it involves both aspects at once:

A complex weaving together of the positions (and the cultural/social/political meanings that are attached to those positions) that are available within any number of discourses [as well as] the emotional meaning attached to each of those positions, which has developed as a result of personal experiences of being located in each position, or of relating to someone in that position.  
(Davies & Harré 1999: 102)

The dynamic nature of our identities and the role of language in the construction thereof as well as the highly influential role of emotions are made clear. The fact that these two aspects interact together is all the more significant. Davies and Harré give the example of the concept of a mother in any society. Everyone “knows” what a mother is and has certain expectations for someone who takes on the role of a mother:

but everyone does not know each of our personal understandings and sets of emotions connected to our idea of mother, developed out of experience of our own mothers in the first instance....we bring to each new encounter with someone positioned as mother a subjective history with its attendant emotions and beliefs *as well as* a knowledge of social structures (including roles) with their attendants rights, obligations, and expectations.  
(1999: 95)

It is the working of both identity and emotion *together* that makes our daily language use something both fascinating and complex. The complicated negotiation process between self and other positioning through language use as well as language selection dependent on contextual factors and conversation objectives is a daily reality for bilinguals. All this underlines the need to continue to address these factors of language use in study.

### ***Reflections on the Findings***

Language is wrapped up in our sense of being. It signifies who we are, who we want to be, what we believe, and what we value. My husband and I are certainly aware of the more superficial aspects of our communication habits; we question rules, uncover origins, find patterns, and play with words in our two languages. We examine our language use daily when we try to find the best and most comfortable ways to communicate with the person we share our lives with – a practice many monolinguals would never engage in simply because they are not as deliberately learning a second language. We have a more conscious perspective of our language use because of our bilingual interactions:

To say that emotion concepts vary does not imply that speakers of different languages have distinct physiological experiences. Rather, it means that they may have somewhat different vantage points from which to evaluate and interpret their own and others' emotional experience. (Pavlenko 2008: 150)

We had not, however, given much *critical* thought to the meaning behind our language choices. It was our discussions of beginning a family that truly brought the subject into the foreground. Deciding in what language or languages we will raise our children became an important issue to consider. We want what is best for our children, but we are also considering what is best for us. This led me to recognize that language has much more of a purpose than is apparent at first glance.

Now, on the brink of the birth of our first child, I feel empowered with a better grasp of why we use language in the way that we do. It is vindication for the feelings of loss or confusion or pride we may feel in our decisions to and practices of using one language or another, and a recognition of why we make the seemingly instinctual choices we do. I can more confidently decide how language will be used in our home as we develop in our marriage and as a family. Yet, there are still some unanswered questions that I know are likely to become more apparent as our child grows. The idea of our children as the carriers of cultural identity is especially interesting given this study. If we, as parents who have learned a second language later in life, are faced with multi-layered identity issues surrounding language use, what happens to our children who will be raised in a bilingual and intercultural home?

These questions beg further study into the realm of bilingual families; “the bicultural family home is made up not only of culturally different pasts and histories, but also of potentially competing and conflictual ones” (Anderson 1999: 22). While bilingual children have been the focus of a number of research studies, this research most often centers on language and cognitive development rather than the emotional or social aspects that may come with multiple language usage. This study and others of its kind, however, can hopefully contribute to our understanding of language choice in intimate relationships and to the study of language use in bilingual families.

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**Initial description in pooling potential participants:**

*Hello Ladies,*

*As some of you know, I am working on a Masters degree in the field of Education. My dissertation topic is on bilingual couples and how they use language in their relationships. Since many of us our in bilingual/intercultural couples ourselves, I thought the International Living forum would be an excellent source of information.*

*Below is a link to a short (10 question - no writing) questionnaire. Please only take it if you are in a long term, bilingual relationship (i.e. you were raised speaking two different languages). You and your partner must both be able to speak each other’s languages at a reasonable level, even if you are not fluent or use another language the majority of the time.*

*Unfortunately, I can’t display the results because I ask for an email address (seen only by me!) if you are willing to go further with the study. But I’m happy to answer any questions or concerns either in this thread or through a private message.*

*Thanks in advance!*

**1. Please provide the following background information about yourself:**

Age	
Nationality	
partner’s nationality	
current location [city, country]	
level of education	
years with partner	

**2. What languages do you know? Please list in order of fluency, your first language would be your mother tongue.**

First Language (L1)	
Second Language (L2)	
Third Language (L3)	
Fourth Language (L4)	
Fifth Language (L5)	

**3. What languages does your partner know? Please list in order of fluency.**

First Language (L1)	
Second Language (L2)	
Third Language (L3)	
Fourth Language (L4)	
Fifth Language (L5)	

**4. On a scale from 1 (least proficient) to 5 (fully fluent), how do you rate yourself in speaking, understanding, reading, and writing in each of your languages?**

	Speaking	Comprehension	Reading	Writing
L1				
L2				
L3				
L4				
L5				

**5. How beneficial do you believe it is for you to be competent in your partner's first language?**

	Not beneficial at all	Somewhat beneficial	Fairly beneficial	Extremely beneficial	N/A
For our daily conversations together					
To better communicate with my partner					
To connect more intimately with my partner					
For use with family and friends					
For our international lifestyle					
For raising our (also future) children					
For understanding my partner's background and culture					

**6. What language do you typically use in each of the following situations?**

	My L1	Partner's L1	Mix of both	Common L3
when arguing with your partner				
when swearing or using taboo words				
when speaking affectionately				
when anxious or upset				

**7. Please assign a percentage to the overall amount of time you spend speaking each language with your partner.**

	0-25%	26-50%	51-75%	76-100%	NA
My L1					
Partner's L1					
Common L3					

**8. What factors influence the percentages above?**

- My competence in my partner's L1.
- Partner's competence in my L1.
- The city or country where we currently live.
- The habits established in our relationship.
- My preferences or wishes.
- Partner's preferences or wishes.
- The presence of family member(s) in our home.
- The needs of or goals for our children.
- Other (please specify)

**9. Do you feel that your attitudes or behaviors change when speaking or writing (interacting) in your partner's language?**

- No, I feel I am the same person in either language.
- Not really, I do not notice any difference when I interact in my partner's language.
- Maybe if I thought about it more I would notice some differences.
- Yes, I notice slight changes when I interact in my partner's language.
- Yes definitely, I notice significant changes when I interact in my partner's language.

**10. Would you be willing to participate further in this study? You would be asked to write about the use of language in your relationship following a number of instances such as a dinner conversation, a fight, an affectionate moment, or an emotional discussion. You would also be interviewed by Elena to further discuss language in terms of your use, your attitudes, and your objectives. [If so, please provide your name and email address here. Results will not be displayed to anyone but Elena].**

**Information Sheet – Phase Two**

**Title of Research Project:**

Language Negotiation in the Bilingual Couple

**Name of Researcher:**

Elena Bartzén

**Researcher Contact Information:**

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+27 21 650 2769 or 650 2772 (international)

[hum-education@uct.ac.za](mailto:hum-education@uct.ac.za)

**Aim of Research:**

Through this research I aim to examine the use of language within multicultural settings, particularly in terms of how emotions, attitudes, and objectives affect and influence language usage. The idea of the project is to better understand how bi- and multilinguals use language at an emotional level in order to better accommodate their needs in the classroom setting.

**Your Involvement:**

This stage involves keeping short diary entries (a couple paragraphs each) describing four instances of bilingual communication with your partner. The four describable moments will be loosely based on the following: a routine event such as dinner, an affectionate exchange, an argument, and an emotional discussion; but will be open to your interpretation (you may choose to record another notable event if you feel it is appropriate). After you have completed the diary entries, I ask that you return them to me. Any information that is not strictly related to the study will not be included and will be kept confidential.

**Risks Involved:**

While you will be asked to speak about very intimate and personal interactions with your partner, you will not be discussing content of any conversation (besides a brief description of the topic at hand if needed to establish setting). The focus will remain on how and why language choices are made during the interaction. Privacy will be respected at all times.

**Benefits:**

The hoped for benefits of this project are that you will have a chance to think reflectively about how you use language in very significant ways. Perhaps giving insight into certain decisions and behaviors of your daily life. In the long term, the benefits will be a contribution to the understanding of how bilinguals and multilinguals learn and use language.

**Costs/Payments:**

There will be no cost or payment involved in this study. All research will be conducted electronically and only at your convenience.

**Consent Form – Phase Two**

- I agree to participate in this research project; to keep a diary over a two week period, and to submit it afterwards.
- I have read this consent form and the information sheet it contains and had the opportunity to ask questions about each.
- I agree to my responses being used for education and research on condition my privacy is respected.
- I understand that I am under no obligation to take part in this project.
- I understand I have the right to withdraw from this project at any stage.

**Please print your name below and save this document to return to Elena Bartzen (elena.bartzen@gmail.com). In doing so, you have agreed to the above statements.**

Electronic Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_

**Information Sheet – Phase Three**

**Title of Research Project:**  
Language Negotiation in the Bilingual Couple

**Name of Researcher:**  
Elena Bartzen

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**Aim of Research:**

Through this research I aim to examine the use of language within multicultural settings, particularly in terms of how emotions, attitudes, and objectives affect and influence language usage. The idea of the project is to better understand how bi- and multilinguals use language at an emotional level in order to better accommodate their needs in the classroom setting.

**Your Involvement:**

This stage involves a one-on-one interview between you and Elena. The interview will be conducted using Adobe Connect software from Elena's end (you do not need the software). The interview will consist of some set questions expanding on the topics already introduced. It will also be an opportunity to discuss further information included in your questionnaire and diary responses. The interview will last roughly 30-45 minutes and can be divided up over shorter periods of time if that is convenient to you. The interview will be recorded but no one except Elena will have access to the recordings, only transcripts will be used in the paper.

**Risks Involved:**

While you will be asked to speak about very intimate and personal interactions with your partner, you will not be discussing content of any conversation (besides a brief description of the topic at hand if needed to establish setting). The focus will remain on how and why language choices are made during the interaction. Privacy will be respected at all times.

**Benefits:**

The hoped for benefits of this project are that you will have a chance to think reflectively about how you use language in very significant ways. Perhaps giving insight into certain decisions and behaviors of your daily life. In the long term, the benefits will be a contribution to the understanding of how bilinguals and multilinguals learn and use language.

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There will be no cost or payment involved in this study. All research will be conducted electronically and only at your convenience.

**Consent Form – Phase Three**

- I agree to participate in this research project; to be interviewed and have the interview recorded.
- I have read this consent form and the information sheet it contains and had the opportunity to ask questions about each.
- I agree to my responses being used for education and research on condition my privacy is respected.
- I understand that I am under no obligation to take part in this project.
- I understand I have the right to withdraw from this project at any stage.

**Please print your name below and save this document to return to Elena Bartzen (elena.bartzen@uct.ac.za). In doing so, you have agreed to the above statements.**

Electronic Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_

### Interview Questions

Tell me a bit about your background (Where did you grow up? What was your family like, early experiences... etc.).

Did you have a lot of international experience before you met your partner?

How did you two meet?

How was the language difference handled in the beginning? Can you give me an example?

Do you think there are any inconveniences to being in a bilingual relationship?

Any benefits to being in one [a bilingual relationship]?

Tell me a bit about how your identity has changed with learning a new language.

Do you feel your cultural heritage is attached to the language at all? In what way?

How does it [cultural heritage] change when you switch between languages?

Which of your languages would you say is your “power” language? Which do you feel more assertive using? Which do you feel more vulnerable using? Why?

Which of your languages do you find more subtle/refined? (My Italian is not perfect, but I still like the distinctions I can make, like saying “*ti voglio bene*” versus “*ti amo*”).

Tell me about how you use language when talking about food: when you grocery shop, recipes, describing a meal...etc.

What are your triggers to switch languages? (Ours are privacy, or when I tire or trying to speak Italian, usually if I am emotional or excited).

If your partner suddenly changed his/her speaking habits with you, how would that make you feel?

When/if you have children, how will you handle language then?

What does your second language represent for you? (Italian has meant good friends, wonderful study abroad experience, my partner, and my second home).

Why do you think your terms of affection are more mixed in your language choice?

How do you say “I love you” to each other? Why do you think that is? How would you feel if that changed? (My partner reacts differently when I say “*ti amo*” versus “I love you”).

Anything else you want to add? Anything you feel I should know or something that might be interesting?

Any questions for me?

<b>4. On a scale from 1 (least proficient) to 5 (fully fluent), how do you rate yourself in speaking, understanding, reading, and writing in each of your languages?</b>						
<b>Speaking</b>						
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
L1	4.2% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	4.2% (1)	91.7% (22)	24
L2	0.0% (0)	8.7% (2)	8.7% (2)	39.1% (9)	43.5% (10)	23
L3	0.0% (0)	53.8% (7)	30.8% (4)	7.7% (1)	7.7% (1)	13
L4	25.0% (2)	37.5% (3)	25.0% (2)	0.0% (0)	12.5% (1)	8
L5	50.0% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	50.0% (1)	2
<b>Comprehension</b>						
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
L1	4.2% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	4.2% (1)	91.7% (22)	24
L2	4.3% (1)	0.0% (0)	13.0% (3)	26.1% (6)	56.5% (13)	23
L3	0.0% (0)	15.4% (2)	46.2% (6)	23.1% (3)	15.4% (2)	13
L4	25.0% (2)	12.5% (1)	50.0% (4)	0.0% (0)	12.5% (1)	8
L5	50.0% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	50.0% (1)	2
<b>Reading</b>						
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
L1	4.2% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	4.2% (1)	91.7% (22)	24
L2	0.0% (0)	4.5% (1)	18.2% (4)	22.7% (5)	54.5% (12)	22
L3	7.1% (1)	14.3% (2)	21.4% (3)	42.9% (6)	14.3% (2)	14
L4	0.0% (0)	25.0% (2)	50.0% (4)	12.5% (1)	12.5% (1)	8
L5	0.0% (0)	100.0% (2)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	2
<b>Writing</b>						
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
L1	4.2% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	12.5% (3)	83.3% (20)	24
L2	4.5% (1)	13.6% (3)	22.7% (5)	31.8% (7)	27.3% (6)	22
L3	7.1% (1)	42.9% (6)	35.7% (5)	7.1% (1)	7.1% (1)	14
L4	50.0% (4)	25.0% (2)	12.5% (1)	12.5% (1)	0.0% (0)	8
L5	100.0% (2)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	2