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**The role of language and culture in shaping
our self-perception and worldview**

Through bilingual lenses

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Abstract

Starting from the definitions of language and culture provided by key figures such as Aristotle, De Saussure, Chomsky, Tylor, and Geertz, this thesis explores the complex relationship between language and culture, and their role in shaping the perception and interpretation of the world. Drawing on the studies of Hofstede, Mariani, Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz, this work highlights the reciprocal influence of language and culture, demonstrating how cultural practices are manifested and conveyed through language. Additionally, it reflects on the influence of culture in the expression of paralinguistic and emotions, based on the studies of Matsumoto, Delmonico, Dewaele, and Jean-Marc, and Ożańska-Ponikwia. With a particular focus on bilingualism and biculturalism, this study analyzes a sample of bilingual individuals through a questionnaire that combines open-ended and closed-ended questions. The aim is to show how these individuals, immersed in two or more linguistic and cultural contexts, interpret the world, and perceive themselves. The results reveal the linguistic dynamics of the participants, the contexts of language use, and the impact of culture in their lives. Furthermore, the influence of bilingualism on self-perception is investigated. This study emphasizes the importance of cultural awareness as an essential tool for enhancing intercultural communication, avoiding stereotypes, and breaking down cultural barriers. It highlights the value of the intersection between language and culture in defining our view of the world and of ourselves.

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Introduction

This thesis explores the intricate relationship between language, culture, and the perception of the world. Starting from a broader perspective, the first chapter delves into the relationship between language and culture. It provides definitions of these concepts from some key figures, like De Saussure, Chomsky, and Tylor, and then it examines how language and culture influence each other reciprocally, how culture is expressed in language, and vice versa. A specific focus is also given to verbal, non-verbal and emotional language. The second chapter focuses on the trinomial relationship between language, culture, and cognition. Indeed, the linguistic relativism and the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis are explored. Bilingualism and biculturalism are then introduced, providing definitions, benefits, and implications of being bilingual and bicultural. The third chapter centers on identity and personality, exploring how these two are related to language and culture. Specifically, it aims at discovering whether and how people change, perceive, or express themselves differently according to the situation, and the language or culture activated. Building on this, a study involving bilingual individuals was conducted utilizing a questionnaire that was spread via social media platforms. The results provide insights into how bilingual people's cultures and languages influence their behaviors, with whom and in what context they use their languages, how their personalities change according to the language spoken (their first language, L1, or their second one, L2), and how they perceive cultural differences. Given that participants in the study claimed that cultural differences might influence intercultural communication both positively and negatively, the last chapter explores the concept of cultural awareness and how to integrate it into language teaching. Promoting cultural awareness and teaching cultural differences can reduce prejudices, stereotypes, and misunderstandings thereby enhancing intercultural communication.

Capitolo 1

Definizione dei termini “linguaggio” e “cultura”

Al fine di esplorare in modo esaustivo il concetto di "linguaggio", presenterò le riflessioni di alcuni dei maggiori pensatori e studiosi che hanno contribuito alla sua analisi e teorizzazione, seguendo un approccio cronologico.

Nel IV secolo a.C. Platone, nel suo dialogo intitolato *Cratilo*, esplora la relazione tra i nomi e gli oggetti della realtà. In questo dialogo complicato, Socrate, Ermogene e Cratilo discutono sulla correttezza dei nomi e riflettono sulle teorie da loro sostenute. Cratilo appoggia la teoria naturalistica, che stabilisce una corrispondenza naturale tra i nomi e le cose, dove i primi non hanno significato arbitrario ma “riproducono naturalmente la φύση o ουσία delle cose” (Disputationes, 2019) ovvero la loro natura, la loro sostanza. La teoria convenzionalista, supportata da Ermogene, sostiene che i nomi sono l’esito di una convenzione, un accordo fra gli uomini che concordano sul significato dei termini linguistici rispetto alle cose. I nomi risulterebbero così arbitrari e il loro significato ed uso dipenderebbe dalle persone, piuttosto che da una corrispondenza naturale. La teoria convenzionalista, dunque, vede il linguaggio e la denominazione degli oggetti come un fenomeno sociale e culturale, soggetti a variazione nel tempo a seconda degli accordi collettivi e dalle convenzioni. L’intento di Platone nella sua opera non è quello di valorizzare una teoria piuttosto che l’altra, ma egli enfatizza la complessità e le diverse sfaccettature che sono implicate nel linguaggio. Inoltre, nel contesto platonico, i nomi (ὄνομα, *onoma*) possono essere icone delle cose che designano, agendo sia come rivelazioni che come riproduzioni delle essenze a cui si riferiscono. Questo suggerisce che attraverso il linguaggio, in particolare attraverso l’atto di nominare, ci avviciniamo alla comprensione delle forme vere o idee delle cose. Tuttavia, quando ci imbattiamo in entità per cui non esiste un corrispettivo reale nel mondo delle forme ideali, come l’esempio citato da Fronterotta (2019), ci troviamo di fronte all’assenza di riferimento. Dunque, se un nome non ha un riferimento chiaro nel mondo delle idee, può essere ancora considerato valido? O universale e convenzionale per tutti?

Nel discutere il linguaggio, è essenziale menzionare Aristotele, discepolo di Platone, e uno dei pilastri filosofici sul tema. Il suo trattato *De Interpretatione*, scritto nel IV secolo a.C. e incentrato sul *logos*, rimane fondamentale per gli studi linguistici contemporanei. Secondo il rinomato professore di Storia della Filosofia presso l'Università di Padova, Enrico Berti (2020), il *logos*, linguaggio in greco, non è riferito ad una lingua in particolare (detta altresì *glossa*), ma significa la capacità di comunicare e di esprimersi che è propria degli esseri umani. A quest'opera si deve l'inizio di una sempre maggiore attenzione alle forme linguistiche, il che portò Aristotele a formulare una dottrina generale della lingua, gettando le basi della filosofia del linguaggio. Come prima cosa, egli definisce che cosa sono il nome, il verbo, l'enunciazione e il discorso, ovvero gli elementi che costituiscono il linguaggio. Successivamente, secondo Berti (2020), vi è il passo più celebre del *De Interpretatione*:

Pertanto i suoni sono i simboli delle affezioni dell'anima e i segni scritti sono i simboli dei suoni; e come le lettere scritte non sono le stesse per tutti, neanche i suoni sono gli stessi; tuttavia i suoni e le lettere sono principalmente segni delle affezioni dell'anima, che sono le stesse per tutti, e le realtà di cui queste sono immagini, sono già le stesse.

(Aristotle et al., 2016, p. 162)

I suoni, cioè le parole emesse, diventano simboli delle affezioni dell'anima, ovvero i sentimenti, i pensieri, e i "contenuti psichici" (*Disputationes*, 2020). Di conseguenza, secondo l'accezione di "simbolo" in greco al tempo di Aristotele, il linguaggio e le parole formano un unico incastro con il pensiero e i contenuti dell'anima. Questo passo esprime inoltre la natura convenzionale del linguaggio: mentre i segni linguistici (siano essi suoni vocali o lettere scritte) sono arbitrari e culturalmente specifici, le affezioni dell'anima e i contenuti mentali, di cui le parole sono simboli, sono universali e identiche per tutti. Ciò implica un accordo sociale su ciò che i suoni rappresentano, sottolineando il principio che il significato dei suoni linguistici è determinato da convenzioni sociali anziché da legami intrinseci con gli oggetti che rappresentano. Aristotele introduce nel linguaggio una tripartizione che inizia dall'elaborazione di un concetto, che per prima nasce da un'immagine

sensibile interpretata dal pensiero. Successivamente, si crea un segno verbale (un suono) che viene associato a tale concetto mediante convenzione sociale. Questo segno, pur variando nella forma linguistica rappresenta lo stesso concetto universale e richiama l'esperienza o immagine mentale uguale. Ad esempio, mentre noi in italiano usiamo la parola *cavallo*, in inglese si usa *horse* e in spagnolo *caballo*, l'immagine che la nostra mente richiama è tuttavia la stessa. Questo potrebbe risultare più semplice con oggetti concreti e tangibili, ma qualora venissero presi in considerazione concetti più astratti? Ad esempio emozioni o pensieri?

Secondo Berti (2020), la visione aristotelica potrebbe essere interpretata come un "rapporto intrinseco tra il linguaggio, i contenuti dell'anima e le cose", individuando uno stretto collegamento tra linguaggio, conoscenze della nostra anima e gli oggetti di cui facciamo esperienza.

Nel primo libro della Fisica, Aristotele afferma che "l'essere si dice in molti sensi" (Disputationes, 2020, 27:20). Il professor Berti enfatizza in quest'affermazione il ruolo del predicato "si dice", richiamando la relativa traduzione in greco λέγεται (légetai). Dal momento che *logos*, ovvero linguaggio, deriva da *légo*, il professore conclude che il linguaggio è uno strumento attraverso cui l'essere, e l'uomo si esprime e si manifesta. La differenza tra la lingua umana e i suoni emessi dagli animali è la capacità di articolare unità foniche per creare significati diversi.

Proseguendo sulla linea del tempo, ci fermiamo ora nel '900 con Ferdinand De Saussure. Il linguista svizzero nella sua opera *Cours de Linguistique Général* del 1916, distingue i concetti di *langue* (lingua), *language* (linguaggio) e *parole* (parola). Il linguaggio è la capacità di parlare dell'essere umano e la lingua ne è espressione di tale capacità. Ma soprattutto, il linguaggio viene considerato come qualcosa di vivo e mai statico, il risultato di un processo sociale e un insieme di regole e convenzioni adottate dalla società:

le langage a été le plus formidable engin d'action collective d'une part, et d'éducation individuelle de l'autre, l'instrument sans lequel en fait l'individu ou l'espèce n'auraient jamais pu même aspirer à développer dans aucun sens ses facultés natives.¹

(Bondi, 2010, p. 42).

Bondi nel suo articolo *Il linguaggio come «fenomeno». L'esperienza linguistica tra Saussure e la fenomenologia* interpreta la *langue* come uno “strumento di pratica culturale, un sapere mobile, uno sfondo (o orizzonte) in divenire, che il parlante mobilita durante l'atto linguistico” (Bondi, 2010, p. 46). Quest'interpretazione indica una visione dinamica della lingua: infatti, essa non risulta solamente un insieme di regole fisse, ma un sapere in continua evoluzione, qualcosa di dinamico che si trasforma con l'uso. Il parlante risulta avere un ruolo chiave ed attivo nella costruzione del significato e nella pratica linguistica, poiché attingendo da questo “sfondo in divenire” in fase comunicativa, mobilita la lingua. Ecco che dunque si afferma la stretta connessione tra parlante, linguaggio, società e cultura, intesi come protagonisti di un processo dinamico e mutabile nel tempo.

Spostandoci nel XX secolo, incontriamo Noam Chomsky, considerato il contributo più rilevante alla linguistica di quel secolo. Fondatore della grammatica generativa-trasformativa, egli sostiene idee razionaliste, basando la sua teoria sul concetto di una conoscenza a priori. Infatti, Chomsky sosteneva l'innatismo per spiegare l'acquisizione del linguaggio:

language is a natural object, a component of the human mind, physically represented in the brain and part of the biological endowment of the species.²

(Barman, 2014, p. 111)

Gli uomini nascono dunque provvisti di una Grammatica Universale, ovvero una collezione di regole linguistiche, di principi e condizioni che sono comuni a tutte le lingue. Servendosi di questa collezione, egli cerca di spiegare la relativamente veloce acquisizione della lingua madre. Quando i

¹ Personal translation: Il linguaggio è stato il più formidabile d'azione collettiva da una parte, e di educazione individuale dall'altra, lo strumento senza il quale di fatto l'individuo o la specie non avrebbero mai potuto nemmeno aspirare a sviluppare in alcun senso le proprie capacità innate.

² Personal translation: La lingua è un oggetto naturale, una componente della mente umana, fisicamente rappresentata nel cervello e parte del talento biologico delle specie.

bambini nascono e si avvicinano alla lingua che i loro genitori parlano, grazie alla loro Grammatica Universale, sono in grado di capire intuitivamente di che lingua si tratta e che certe parole fungono da verbo e altre da nome. Nonostante questa grammatica differisce a seconda della lingua, le loro strutture più interne sono universali, suggerendo l'idea che esista un archetipo di grammatica da cui tutte le grammatiche delle lingue si sono successivamente sviluppate. Altro nodo fondamentale della teoria chomskiana, è il rifiuto dell'idea che il linguaggio sia determinato dall'ambiente culturale. Egli distingue tra E-language, legata a corpora linguistici esterni alla mente, e I-language, riferendosi al linguaggio internalizzato, ovvero le proprietà mentali degli individui che lo conoscono. Rifiutando lo studio dell'E-language, egli favorisce lo studio dell'I-language isolato dall'ambiente esterno. Quest'idea pone Chomsky in contrasto con i non-essenzialisti, i quali vedono il linguaggio come un fenomeno sociale, funzionale o esterno. L'universalismo di Chomsky, tuttavia, è stato oggetto di critica per numerosi studiosi, i quali accusano il linguista statunitense di ridurre la complessità delle diverse lingue a un insieme ristretto di principi universali, minimizzando così la varietà delle esperienze linguistiche umane.

Dunque, avendo analizzato le teorie di figure chiave della storia, quale potrebbe essere una definizione odierna di linguaggio? L'enciclopedia Treccani, che vede il linguaggio come uno strumento per la condivisione di informazioni e per l'interazione sociale mediante simboli condivisi, sottolinea il suo essenziale ruolo comunicativo e di ponte tra individui. Inoltre, richiamando Aristotele e Chomsky, dal Treccani ricaviamo l'idea che il linguaggio è ciò che ci contraddistingue in quanto esseri umani. Altro aspetto che viene messo in evidenza da questa definizione è il ruolo influente della società e della cultura sul linguaggio, il che rievoca la teoria saussuriana e le posizioni non essenzialiste. La definizione del Devoto-Oli del 2024 amplia ulteriormente questa comprensione, presentando il linguaggio come: “modo particolare esprimersi, uso della lingua caratteristico di un singolo individuo, di un autore, di una categoria o di un gruppo di individui, di un determinato ambiente sociale o professionale” (Devoto-Oli, 2024). Il linguaggio risulta così un mezzo per esprimere esprimersi attraverso la lingua, in linea con l'argomentazione di Aristotele, “l'essere si dice

in molti sensi” (Berti, 2020). Un modo di esprimersi particolare, dunque proprio di un singolo individuo o di un gruppo, oppure con caratteristiche proprie, che si contraddistingue dagli altri. Insomma, qualcosa che vale la pena di essere indagato. Ma ciò che risulta ancor più interessante è una seconda definizione che il Devoto-Oli dà di “linguaggio”: “facoltà di esprimersi attraverso particolari gesti, segni o simboli: linguaggio gestuale, mimico; il linguaggio dei sordomuti; il linguaggio degli occhi” (Devoto-Oli, 2024). L’essere umano non ha solamente il linguaggio verbale per potersi esprimere, bensì può usufruire di una vasta gamma di altri linguaggi, come ad esempio il linguaggio non verbale, ugualmente capaci di trasmettere significati.

La derivazione del termine “cultura” dal latino *colĕre*, che significa “coltivare”, offre a parer mio un’immagine significativa del concetto di cultura. Questa etimologia sottolinea come la cultura, simile a un campo che viene coltivato, sia un insieme vivente di saperi, tradizioni, usanze ed esperienze che richiedono attenzione e cura. Proprio come la coltivazione della terra, la cultura richiede impegno attivo per preservare, arricchire e trasmettere il patrimonio di conoscenze e pratiche che definiscono una comunità. Il Devoto-Oli (2024) infatti, definisce “cultura” come:

il complesso delle esperienze spirituali, delle realizzazioni artistiche e scientifiche, delle istituzioni sociali, politiche, economiche e religiose che caratterizzano la vita di una società in un determinato momento storico.

(Devoto-Oli, 2024)

Inoltre, ciò che ho trovato maggiormente interessante, è stata la definizione di “lingua di cultura”, sempre fornita dallo stesso dizionario: “lingua che, per la propria tradizione e il proprio prestigio, è strumento di diffusione della cultura non solo tra i parlanti di una stessa nazione ma anche negli scambi con altri popoli” (Devoto-Oli, 2024). La lingua possiede un ruolo significativo nel veicolare e nel condividere un patrimonio culturale, un insieme di idee, valori e conoscenze, non solo all’interno dei confini nazionali tra parlanti nativi, ma anche a livello internazionale, ovvero tra parlanti di diverse lingue e appartenenti a culture differenti. Ciò implica che la lingua agisce come ponte culturale tra i vari popoli, promuovendo l’interazione e l’arricchimento reciproco e trascendendo le

barriere culturali e geografiche. I parlanti hanno un ruolo attivo nel modellare la cultura, poiché attraverso l'educazione, l'arte, la religione, le pratiche sociali e le interazioni quotidiane, essi "coltivano" la cultura contribuendone alla crescita. Anna Chiara Cimoli, storica dell'arte e consulente museale, in un'intervista del 2019 offre la sua personale concezione di "cultura". Secondo lei, cultura e società sono due cose inseparabili, una non può esistere senza l'altra. Ma soprattutto, la cultura ci appartiene e ci definisce in profondità, stabilendo il "modo in cui ci relazioniamo con l'altro" (Feltrinelli, 2019).

Viaggiando a ritroso nella nostra linea del tempo, andrò ora a menzionare alcune delle teorie principali sul concetto di "cultura".

Il britannico Edward Tylor, considerato uno dei padri fondatori dell'antropologia culturale, fornisce nel suo saggio *Primitive Culture* del 1871, una delle prime definizioni di cultura:

Culture or Civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.³

(Tylor, 1920)

In questa definizione di Tylor il focus cade su "acquisita" che rispecchia la sua idea di separazione tra natura e cultura: la cultura, secondo la sua visione, non si trasmette geneticamente, non è già insita in noi alla nascita, ma viene appunto appresa dalle persone durante la loro vita, attraverso l'interazione sociale, l'imitazione e l'influenza dell'ambiente circostante (in antropologia questo viene definito come processo di inculturazione). Dalla visione di Tylor, dunque, emerge che la cultura sia propria e caratteristica degli esseri umani, in cui l'interazione con l'altro risulta fondamentale. Se l'ambiente esterno esercita un'influenza significativa su di noi, da cui acquisiamo elementi culturali, ciò implica che siamo, in una certa misura, specchio del contesto in cui siamo maturati. Di conseguenza, le

³ Personal translation: La cultura o la civiltà, presa nel suo ampio senso etnografico, è quell'insieme complesso che include conoscenze, credenze, arte, principi morali, leggi, costumi, e qualsiasi altra capacità e abitudine acquisita dall'uomo in quanto membro della società.

caratteristiche del luogo in cui cresciamo si riflettono sul modo in cui pensiamo, agiamo ed esprimiamo noi stessi.

Anche Clifford Geertz è stato un antropologo influente sul campo dell'antropologia culturale. Nel suo *Interpretation of Cultures* del 1973, egli ha proposto una sua visione di cultura, definendola come sistema di simboli ereditati che le persone utilizzano per comunicare e sviluppare le loro conoscenze. Geertz sosteneva che per decifrare il vero significato di una cultura, è essenziale analizzare i simboli e significati attribuiti dalle persone alle proprie azioni. Questo approccio sottolinea l'importanza di considerare le pratiche culturali come testi ricchi di significato, i quali, una volta interpretati, rivelano profonde convinzioni che gli individui nutrono nei confronti della loro esistenza sociale e culturale. Ma queste convinzioni sono universali per tutti gli individui? O variano da cultura a cultura?

1.1 Il binomio lingua e cultura

Nel capitolo precedente, le definizioni e le teorie più impattanti sui concetti di linguaggio e di cultura sono state fornite, a partire da Aristotele, fino ad arrivare ai giorni nostri. In questo paragrafo, verrà esaminata l'intersezione tra lingua e cultura e la loro reciproca influenza. L'idea principale è che lingua e cultura formano un binomio (come lo definisce il professor Serragiotto) inscindibile che modella la nostra percezione del mondo.

Negli anni '90, emerse una nuova branca della linguistica, la "linguoculturology" (Xasanova Sitora, 2023), che vede le sue radici nelle teorie di Von Humboldt, Whorf e Boas. Alla base di questa disciplina vi è lo studio della lingua in quanto fenomeno culturale, esaminando come la cultura sia integrata della lingua. Secondo V.A. Maslova (citato in Xasanova Sitora, 2023), la "linguoculturology" permette di spiegare una delle principali funzioni della lingua, ovvero quello di creare, sviluppare e trasmettere cultura. In questo modo, la disciplina della linguistica viene a contatto con altre discipline quali, storia, psicologia, etnografia e gli studi sulla cultura (*culturology*). Vedendo

gli individui come “carriers” (Xasanova Sitora, 2023), ovvero trasportatori di lingua e cultura, la “linguoculturology” approfondisce il ruolo della lingua e cultura nel modellare la nostra conoscenza del mondo.

Numerosi studiosi hanno sottolineato l’intreccio indissolubile tra lingua e cultura. Come abbiamo visto con De Saussure, la definizione di *langue* già otteneva un’accezione sociale e dinamica, in quanto risultava parte integrante della comunità e dotata di un insieme di regole e convenzioni che permettevano la comunicazione e che mutavano a seconda dell’ambiente.

Wardhaugh (citato in Elmes David, 2013) sostiene che la lingua funge da specchio, riflettendo la cultura di un popolo, i loro valori e comportamenti. Secondo Turner e Hudson (citati in Elmes David, 2013) inoltre, le persone utilizzano degli schemi cognitivi che facilitano il riconoscimento e la classificazione delle situazioni che vivono, basandosi sulla propria lingua e la loro cultura. Ciò enfatizza come la nostra interpretazione delle esperienze sia profondamente radicata nei contesti linguistici e specifici.

Thanasoulas (citato in Elmes David, 2013) sostiene che la lingua non può esistere senza la cultura, che è vista come un insieme di pratiche e credenze fondamentali per la struttura della nostra vita quotidiana. Similarmente, Enfield e Sidnell affermarono che “[l]anguage is a part of culture and culture is a part of language” (Hollington, 2022, p. 1), sottolineando la reciproca influenza tra lingua e cultura e l’idea che la lingua rifletta le pratiche culturali, mentre la cultura influisce profondamente sullo sviluppo e sull’uso della lingua. Essendo due entità dinamiche e sempre soggette a cambiamento, le possibili relazioni e reciproche influenze tra lingua e cultura sono infinite, modificando con esse i comportamenti linguistici e culturali. In una società globalizzata come quella contemporanea, persone provenienti da diversi paesi e culture si trovano a vivere in uno stesso luogo, modificando e talvolta adattando le loro identità linguistiche e culturali. Questo legame lingua-cultura sottolinea dunque l’importanza di considerare entrambi gli aspetti per una piena comprensione dell’esperienza degli uomini e della loro comunicazione, rivelando l’impossibilità dell’esistenza di uno senza l’altro.

Un esempio della lingua in quanto trasmettitore di cultura sono a parer mio i dialetti. Il Devoto-Oli (2024) definisce “dialetto” come:

sistema linguistico di ambito geografico limitato, appartenente a un gruppo di sistemi geneticamente affini (per es. i dialetti italiani nel loro complesso) e contrapposto a quella che storicamente si è imposta come lingua nazionale o di cultura.

Da questa definizione evince il legame stretto tra dialetto e ambiente in cui esso viene parlato. Ogni dialetto incarna le peculiarità culturali, storiche e sociali di una comunità, riflettendo usanze, valori e la visione del mondo di quella specifica area geografica e di quello specifico gruppo di parlanti. In contesti globalizzati, l'interazione tra dialetti diversi e lingue standard mette in atto processi di modellamento e di preservazione di identità, dimostrando come lingua e cultura, in continua evoluzione, si modifichino attraverso incontri e scambi interculturali. I dialetti, infatti, si adattano e cambiano in risposta alle influenze esterne e ai cambiamenti sociali, mantenendo al contempo elementi unici che li distinguono dalle lingue nazionali. Gianfranco Siega, docente di filosofia nativo di Venezia, ha pubblicato una serie di tre volumi intitolati *Il Dialetto Perduto* nel 2007, in cui vi sono elencati parole, storie, modi di dire, curiosità e canzoni popolari del dialetto veneto veneziano. Come evince dal titolo, nei tre volumi sono contenute espressioni e parole che ad oggi non sono più comuni.

Alcuni esempi sono:

broca = “chiodino a testa larga”; oggi viene usata maggiormente la parola *ciodo*.

grima = “vecchia grinzosa”; oggi sostituito con *vecia*

bruta come la peste = espressione legata alla peste del 1630

Inoltre, essendo originaria veneta, mi permetto di citare qualche vocabolo ed espressione che i miei nonni sono riusciti a ricordare:

oppa = oggi comunemente chiamato *muschio*.

gaeozze = zoccoli in legno che utilizzavano, in mancanza di scarpe.

andare a fio' = andare a trovare le fidanzate. Il nonno racconta di quando era usanza ritrovarsi in stalla alla sera. Chi chiacchierava, chi raccontava storie, chi lavorava e chi “faceva finta”.

Kramersch (2014) considera la lingua non solo uno strumento di comunicazione ma anche un mezzo essenziale per l'interazione sociale. Attraverso la lingua, le persone esprimono la propria identità, riflettendo valori, tradizioni e la struttura sociale della comunità in cui vivono. Questa visione sottolinea il ruolo della lingua come specchio della realtà e della cultura umana, fondamentale per comprendere sia l'individuo che la società in cui vive. Nel 1980, studi condotti da Hofstede (citato in Bozorboeva Ominakhon, 2023) dimostrarono come dimensioni culturali, ad esempio individualismo o collettivismo, si riflettono sull'uso della lingua. L'individualismo e il suo opposto collettivismo descrivono il grado di integrazione delle persone all'interno della società. Nelle culture individualiste, i legami tra le persone sono allentati: ognuno è responsabile di sé stesso e della propria famiglia. Al contrario, nelle culture collettiviste, le persone fin dalla nascita sono integrate in gruppi coesi, spesso famiglie estese (comprendenti zii, zie, nonni), in cui il senso di appartenenza al gruppo è molto forte (Hofstede, 2011). Le culture individualiste valorizzano la privacy personale e l'espressione aperta delle proprie opinioni, con l'idea che ognuno abbia diritto ad affermarsi in quanto entità distinta dal gruppo. Le culture collettiviste, invece, enfatizzano l'importanza dell'appartenenza al gruppo, cercando di mantenere l'armonia sociale. Gli individui sono classificati come membri del gruppo, che spesso predetermina le opinioni. Di conseguenza, le lingue parlate in culture collettiviste tendono ad includere maggiormente pronomi che indicano una gerarchia e a prediligere l'utilizzo del pronome “noi” (We-consciousness), al posto del pronome “io” (I-consciousness), utilizzato invece maggiormente da culture individualiste (Hofstede, 2011). La figura 1 sottostante mostra i punteggi che misurano l'individualismo dei vari paesi.

United States	91	Lithuania	60	Bulgaria	30
United Kingdom	91	Poland	60	Mexico	30
Australia	90	Malta	59	Romania	30
Netherlands	80	Czech Republic	58	Portugal	27
Canada	80	Austria	55	Slovenia	27
Hungary	80	Slovak Republic	52	Malaysia	26
New Zealand	79	Spain	51	Hong Kong SAR	25
Italy	76	India	48	Serbia	25
Belgium	75	Japan	46	Chile	23
Denmark	74	Morocco	46	Singapore	20
Sweden	71	Argentina	46	China	20
France	71	Iran, Islamic Rep.	41	Thailand	20
Ireland	70	Russian Federation	39	Vietnam	20
Latvia	70	Qatar	38	Bangladesh	20
Norway	69	United Arab Emirates	38	El Salvador	19
Switzerland	68	Brazil	38	Korea, Rep.	18
Germany	67	Turkey	37	Peru	16
South Africa	65	Uruguay	36	Trinidad and Tobago	16
Finland	63	Greece	35	Indonesia	14
Luxembourg	60	Croatia	33	Pakistan	14
Estonia	60	Philippines	32	Colombia	13
				Venezuela	12

Figura 1 - Načinović Braje et al., 2019

Gumperz e Cook-Gumperz (citati in Bozorboeva Ominakhon, 2023), con i loro studi del 2008, sottolinearono come anche la lingua influenzi le pratiche culturali. Certe funzionalità linguistiche, come ad esempio le forme di cortesia (*Sie* in tedesco, *Lei* in italiano) e l'uso formale della lingua, sono espressioni delle convenzioni e delle aspettative culturali, che di conseguenza influenzano le interazioni sociali. Ad esempio, uno studente giapponese (appartenente a una cultura collettivista) potrebbe interpretare l'inglese come una lingua che promuove l'uguaglianza e la democrazia, portandolo a ignorare le sottigliezze delle relazioni di potere nelle interazioni. Di conseguenza, l'utilizzo di un linguaggio troppo diretto in una forma di richiesta, come "I want you to read my essay" (Mariani, 2015, p. 115), che sebbene sia accettabile in giapponese, in inglese potrebbe risultare scortese poiché le dinamiche di potere e di rispetto sono diverse. Durante la mia esperienza a San Diego, in California, ho interagito numerose volte con i professori. Essendo italiana, ero abituata a rivolgermi ai docenti usando il formale *Lei*, quindi, mi sembrava insolito e quasi troppo familiare usare il *you* con i professori americani, come se stessi parlando con degli amici. Con il passare del tempo, però, mi sono abituata.

Queste norme linguistiche possono rappresentare una sfida per chi impara una lingua con radici culturali diverse dalle proprie, come evidenziato da Luciano Mariani (2015) nel suo studio *Tra*

Lingua e Cultura: la Competenza Pragmatica Interculturale. Mariani (2015) illustra come le incomprensioni derivanti da queste differenze possano influenzare l'apprendimento e la comunicazione, sottolineando l'importanza di integrare la consapevolezza culturale nello studio delle lingue. Egli fornisce numerosi esempi interessanti tra cui:

Un insegnante inglese in Cina è particolarmente soddisfatto del lavoro di uno studente, e gli fa molti complimenti in classe. Sia lo studente che i suoi compagni sembrano a disagio.

Anne, americana, e Juanita, messicana, sono colleghe.

Juanita: Anne, faccio una festicciola domenica. Ci vieni?

Anne: Ehm... no, mi spiace, ho un altro impegno.

Juanita: Oh... (sembra molto sorpresa e delusa)

(Mariani, 2015, p. 111)

Nel primo esempio, gli studenti riflettono l'importanza del senso di appartenenza a un gruppo e alla comunità, che esiste in diverse culture orientali, tra cui quella cinese (culture collettiviste). L'elogiare apertamente un individuo può generare disagio e imbarazzo, in quanto solitamente si predilige la valorizzazione del collettivo rispetto al singolo.

Nel secondo esempio, spiega Mariani, la reazione di Juanita all'invito rifiutato da Anne potrebbe essere influenzata non solo dalla loro relazione personale, ma anche da aspettative culturali specifiche. Nella cultura messicana, è comune che un invito venga accettato inizialmente, anche senza intenzione reale di partecipare. Questo contesto culturale potrebbe rendere il rifiuto diretto di Anne particolarmente sorprendente o deludente per Juanita.

Gli esempi riportati da Mariani (2015) evidenziano come gli stereotipi linguistici e culturali possano causare incomprensioni, sottolineando l'importanza dell'apprendimento delle convenzioni specifiche delle culture, al fine di promuovere una comunicazione interculturale efficace. Inoltre, Kramsch (2014) sottolinea che il linguaggio comprende anche elementi non verbali, come gesti ed espressioni facciali, che riflettono abitudini e valori culturali unici. Questi aspetti non verbali, essenziali quanto quelli verbali, possono facilitare o complicare scambi comunicativi, enfatizzando

così l'importanza di conoscere approfonditamente le diverse modalità espressive, siano esse verbali e non, per superare barriere culturali.

1.2 Il paralinguaggio e la cultura

Delmonico (2023) definisce il paralinguaggio come una forma di comunicazione non verbale che comprende alcuni aspetti del discorso come intonazione, vocalizzazione, gesti, movimenti del corpo, contatto visivo, velocità, tono ed espressioni facciali. Il paralinguaggio lavora complementariamente al linguaggio verbale, rinforzandone o accentuandone il significato. Infatti, esso è parte integrante della comunicazione, tant'è che esperti affermano che gli individui trasmettono il 65% dei loro messaggi comunicativi in maniera non verbale. Questo aspetto della comunicazione non verbale rivela molto di più di ciò che le parole possono dire, offrendo una finestra unica sulle convenzioni sociali, sui valori e sul modo di esprimere emozioni propri di una comunità. Esplorare il rapporto tra paralinguaggio e cultura ci permette di decifrare i codici nascosti dietro il modo in cui parliamo e ci comportiamo, aprendo la strada a una comprensione più profonda delle diverse identità culturali.

Fin dal 1976, emersero differenze culturali nell'utilizzo del paralinguaggio durante le interazioni sociali. Hall (citato in Wurtz, 2005) propose infatti una distinzione tra culture "high-context" e culture "low-context" (Wurtz, 2005), sostenendo che per comprendere appieno la comunicazione, è necessario considerare insieme il significato, il contesto e il codice (ovvero le parole). Le culture *high-context* (tra cui Italia, Spagna, Giappone) trasmettono significati maggiormente attraverso la comunicazione non verbale, come gesti, silenzi e comportamenti simbolici. Le culture *low-context* invece (tra cui Stati Uniti, Germania e Scandinavia) si basano maggiormente sulla comunicazione verbale, trasmettendo significati attraverso le parole.

David Efron (citato in Matsumoto, 2006) approfondì come il modo di gesticolare dei parlanti viene influenzato dalla cultura. In particolare, egli esaminò i gesti di immigrati siciliani ed ebrei

lituani a New York, rivelando come questi gesti tradizionali variavano tra i gruppi e pian piano poi sparivano con l'assimilazione della cultura americana. Anche Morris e colleghi (citati in Matsumoto, 2006) studiarono le differenze culturali nei gesti. Ad esempio, il segno "A-OK" (Matsumoto, 2006) è considerato un segno osceno e con accezione sessuale per molte culture europee. Altro esempio è il gesto di mettere entrambe le mani sul lato della testa e puntando verso l'alto con gli indici, segno di arrabbiatura in alcune culture, in altre, invece di accezione sessuale. Delmonico (2023) osservò che nell'Africa orientale vi sono sette modi di stringere la mano che variano a seconda dell'età, del rispetto e del livello di amicizia tra i due interlocutori. Le culture occidentali tipicamente percepiscono una forte stretta di mano come segno di autorità e sicurezza, mentre per le culture orientali (in particolare le nazioni uzbeke) è segno di aggressività (Rakhimovna, 2023). In alcune parti dell'Europa settentrionale utilizzano maggiormente una stretta di mano veloce e decisa; in Europa meridionale, America centrale e meridionale prediligono una stretta di mano più lunga e calorosa, con la mano sinistra che tocca il gomito.

Le diverse culture stabiliscono norme specifiche anche per lo sguardo e l'attenzione visuale. Nella maggior parte delle culture occidentali, il contatto visivo è segno di sicurezza e attenzione, concludendo che se una persona distoglie lo sguardo mentre l'altro sta parlando, questo è segno di disinteresse. In molti paesi mediorientali, come l'Uzbekistan, il contatto visivo che si prolunga oltre una rapida occhiata, è considerato inappropriato. In diversi contesti asiatici, dove prevale una forte nozione di gerarchia sociale, evitare il contatto visivo viene interpretato come segno di rispetto verso tale ordine gerarchico. Di conseguenza, i bambini non guardano gli adulti mentre parlano, e nemmeno gli impiegati verso i loro capi. Nel 1970, Watson (citato in Matsumoto, 2006) ha categorizzato 30 paesi in culture di "contatto" (quelli che facilitavano il contatto fisico durante le interazioni) e di "non contatto", notando che le prime rispetto alle seconde, quando interagivano con altre persone, favoriscono il contatto fisico, un uso intensivo dello sguardo, e una minore distanza interpersonale. Le culture di "contatto" includono quelle dell'Europa Meridionale (come Italia e Spagna), dell'America Latina (come Brasile e Messico) e del mondo arabo (come Arabia Saudita ed Egitto),

mentre tra le culture di “non contatto” vi sono quelle del Nord America (ad esempio Stati Uniti e Canada), del Nord Europa (come Germania e Norvegia) e dell’Asia (come Giappone e Cina) (Sorokowska et al., 2017). Hall (citato in Matsumoto, 2006) identificò quattro livelli diversi di utilizzo di spazio interpersonale a seconda del tipo di relazione sociale: intima, personale, sociale o pubblica. Sebbene queste distinzioni siano riconosciute da tutte le culture, la dimensione dello spazio assegnato varia culturalmente. Gli uomini arabi, ad esempio, tendono a sedersi più vicino l’uno all’altro rispetto agli americani, con orientamento del corpo più diretto, toni di voce più alti e maggior utilizzo del contatto visivo. Questo rispecchia il fatto che in passato gli arabi imparavano a interagire l’uno con l’altro a una distanza abbastanza vicina per sentire il respiro dell’altro. Anche gli italiani interagiscono più da vicino rispetto ai tedeschi o agli americani. Altro esempio è il Nord Europa, che è stato classificato come cultura del “non contatto”. Nel 2009, Michelle Obama innocentemente ruppe il protocollo reale e creò scandalo, per aver abbracciato la regina durante una visita in Gran Bretagna. In Uzbekistan, tra donne ci si può tenere per mano e scambiarsi baci per salutarsi, ma ciò non potrebbe mai avvenire tra un uomo e una donna. In Thailandia e Laos è proibito toccare la testa di qualcuno, anche quella dei bambini.

Il silenzio, elemento chiave della comunicazione, assume significati culturalmente diversi. Le culture occidentali, soprattutto in Nord America e Regno Unito, tendono a percepire il silenzio nelle interazioni sociali (ad esempio a scuola o a lavoro) come segnale di disagio o disinteresse. In altre culture, però, il silenzio viene valorizzato: ad esempio in Cina, esso è simbolo di accordo e ricettività; in Giappone, le donne utilizzano il silenzio come forma di femminilità; in molte culture aborigene le persone rispondono a una domanda solo dopo aver contemplato in silenzio.

Numerosi studi hanno messo in luce come le norme culturali influenzino anche i comportamenti non verbali, enfatizzando il ruolo della cultura nel modellare questi comportamenti. Gran parte della ricerca in questo campo si concentra sulle emozioni e sulle espressioni facciali, evidenziando ancora una volta la necessità di comprendere questi aspetti per migliorare la comunicazione interculturale.

1.3 Il linguaggio delle emozioni e la cultura

Le emozioni, sebbene universali nella loro essenza, esse sono uniche nella loro modalità di espressione. Anch'esse sono influenzate dalle norme culturali. Infatti, le diverse culture interpretano e valorizzano le emozioni in modi distinti, modellando non solo il nostro vissuto interiore ma anche le nostre interazioni sociali. Esplorare il legame tra emozioni e cultura offre una chiave di lettura profonda sui valori, le credenze e le norme che definiscono una società.

Charles Darwin nel suo *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* suggerì che tutte le emozioni, biologicamente innate, si sono evolute con la specie. Inoltre, tutti gli umani, a prescindere dalla cultura, possiedono l'abilità di esprimere le emozioni nello stesso modo, principalmente attraverso le espressioni facciali. Questa visione solleva alcuni interrogativi: le emozioni sono veramente esprimibili in maniera uniforme attraverso diverse culture, o esistono sfumature culturali che modellano l'espressione emotiva?

Nel corso degli anni '60, Tomkins, Ekman e Izard (citati in Matsumoto, 2006) condussero uno dei primi studi sull'universalità delle espressioni emotive, osservando come persone di diverse culture identificassero le stesse emozioni nelle espressioni facciali. Questa ricerca rivoluzionaria confermò l'esistenza di sei emozioni fondamentali, ovvero rabbia, disgusto, paura, felicità, tristezza e sorpresa, universalmente riconosciute attraverso le espressioni facciali. Ciò sottolineò l'esistenza di un linguaggio emotivo comune a tutta l'umanità. Questi risultati hanno gettato le basi per ulteriori esplorazioni nell'ambito delle emozioni universali.

Nonostante l'esistenza delle espressioni facciali universali, le persone di diverse culture possono esprimere le emozioni in modi diversi.

Secondo Panayiotou (2004) il concetto di emozione può essere definito come:

a biologically manifested element, bounded by a bodily experience, understood as a cognitive appraisal of a situation, created and learned within a particular cultural meaning-making system, constituted in context and located within a cultural categorization system.⁴

(Panayiotou, 2004, p. 125)

Da questa definizione evince come le emozioni siano strettamente legate al contesto e apprese all'interno di specifica cultura, la quale, con le sue regole, ne influenza l'espressione e il significato. Inoltre, ogni cultura offre non solo una griglia concettuale per la comprensione delle emozioni, ma anche una serie di *scripts*, ovvero copioni, che suggeriscono il modo in cui le persone dovrebbero sentirsi, esprimere le proprie emozioni, e concettualizzare le proprie emozioni e quelle degli altri (Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2013).

Il primo esperimento sulle differenze culturali nell'espressione delle emozioni fu condotto da Friesen (citato in Matsumoto, 2006) nel 1972. Egli analizzò le espressioni che partecipanti americani e giapponesi esprimevano spontaneamente mentre guardavano uno spezzone di film stressante in due condizioni: prima da soli, e poi in presenza di uno sperimentatore uomo più vecchio. Nella prima condizione, entrambe le categorie di partecipanti, americani e giapponesi, espressero le emozioni di disgusto, paura, rabbia e tristezza similmente. Nella seconda condizione, però, le prime differenze culturali emersero: mentre gli americani continuarono ad esprimere le emozioni negative, i giapponesi invece tendevano a sorridere. Questo esperimento è spiegato dal concetto che Ekman e Friesen coniarono nel 1969 per considerare le differenze culturali nell'espressione delle emozioni: "cultural display rules" (Matsumoto, 2006, p. 225), ovvero delle regole che imparano da bambini che li aiutano a regolare e modificare le loro espressioni facciali in base alle circostanze sociali. I due ricercatori spiegano che nella prima condizione dell'esperimento, dal momento che i partecipanti erano soli, non vi era alcuna ragione per regolare le loro espressioni. In presenza dello sperimentatore, invece, i giapponesi mascheravano le loro emozioni negative, attuando le "display rules" (Matsumoto, 2006).

⁴ Personal translation: un elemento biologicamente manifestato, delimitato da un'esperienza corporea, inteso come una valutazione cognitiva della situazione, creato e imparato all'interno di un particolare sistema culturale di significati, costituito nel contesto e situato all'interno di un sistema di categorizzazione culturale.

Markus e Kitayama (citati in Dewaele, Jean-Marc, 2014) illustrarono come le differenze culturali influenzano l'espressione delle emozioni, legandole a diverse visioni del sé e della società in cui vive. Le persone provenienti da culture occidentali sono considerate individualista, autonome, e indipendenti. Avendo l'obiettivo di battersi per i propri obiettivi, gli individualisti hanno maggior libertà di espressione di sé stessi e delle loro emozioni. D'altro canto, persone provenienti da culture collettiviste (come Cina e Giappone) sono viste come interdipendenti l'una con l'altra, che lottano per mantenere armonia e coesione sociale. Di conseguenza, il freno emotivo è nella norma ed è considerato un segno di maturità.

Nel 2008, Pavlenko (citato in Dewaele, Jean-Marc, 2014) affermò che i concetti che le parole emozionali esprimono variano tra le lingue, e dunque tra le culture. Una conferma di questa tesi la si può vedere nello studio di Sachs e Coley con bilingui russi-inglesi e due gruppi monolingui. Gli autori si focalizzarono sui concetti di *envy* ("invidia") e *jealousy* ("gelosia") in entrambe le lingue. Mentre in russo la parola *revnuet* è utilizzata per riferirsi all'emozione della gelosia, e la parola *zaviduet* per l'emozione dell'invidia, in inglese, la parola *jealous* è applicata sia per gelosia che per invidia. Nello studio, i partecipanti dovevano scegliere una parola per descrivere una storia di gelosia o di invidia che avevano ascoltato. Mentre i monolingui russi scelsero il termine più appropriato, i monolingui inglesi consideravano entrambi i termini adatti per descrivere una storia di invidia. Ciò dimostrava che la lingua dei partecipanti influenzava le rappresentazioni concettuali di tali emozioni.

Nel 2008, Dewaele (Dewaele, Jean-Marc, 2014) esaminò l'esperienza di parlanti bilingui di diverse lingue e culture. Questo studio illustra l'interazione dinamica tra lingua, emozioni e cultura, mostrando come i bilingui adattano l'uso linguistico in base alla situazione emotiva o sociale, riflettendo la complessa relazione tra le diverse lingue che parlano e le loro identità culturali. Gli esempi interessanti che citerò sono tratti da *Culture and Emotional Language* (Dewaele, Jean-Marc, 2014).

Il primo esempio riguarda un partecipante giapponese con inglese come lingua seconda, e l'espressione *I love you* in inglese. Il partecipante afferma che in giapponese non esiste un

corrispettivo per l'espressione inglese. Vi sono delle possibili traduzioni, come le parole *Aishiteimasu*, *Aishiteiru* o *Aishiteru*, ma i giapponesi non sentono la necessità di tradurre il sentimento in parole. Infatti, il partecipante sostiene: "The feeling is there. Why should we have to say that? It seems that you have a doubt in love" (Dewaele, Jean-Marc, 2014, p. 10). Similarmente, in un altro esempio, con un partecipante bilingue giapponese-inglese, si osserva la tendenza a sopprimere l'uso di parole emotive, questa volta legate all'imprecazione. Il partecipante dichiara di utilizzare l'inglese per esprimere la propria rabbia, poiché nella cultura giapponese non è solito imprecare, e, come abbiamo visto precedentemente, è fondamentale mantenere l'armonia del gruppo.

La complessa interazione tra linguaggio, emozioni e cultura svela l'influenza reciproca tra queste sfere, evidenziando come le differenze nelle espressioni linguistiche e culturali riflettano visioni del mondo uniche e modi di esprimersi differenti.

Chapter 2

The trinomial language, culture, and cognition

What is the relation between language and cognition? How does our brain operate to create and articulate language? Does culture have a role in shaping these cognitive processes?

In this chapter I will focus on the tangled triad made up of language, cognition, and culture, by firstly recognizing the cerebral zones which are pivotal for the development of language. This journey into the brain's linguistic realms will reveal the profound interconnectedness of our cognitive processes with the cultural and linguistic environments that nurture them.

The philosophical debates on the relationship between thought and language have evolved into a scientific inquiry thanks to the groundbreaking work of Pierre Paul Broca and Carl Wernicke. Their study has decisively shown that language seems to be processed within specific regions of the brain. This discovery has marked a significant milestone in our understanding of how language and cognition are interconnected within our brains. According to Cataldo (2021), the brain starts every mechanism that leads to the act of communicating, including the formulation of words and sentences. Moreover, it gives a linguistic shape to our thoughts. Anatomically speaking, the brain is divided into two hemispheres, the right one, which is more creative, and the left one, which is more rational. The left hemisphere, indeed, appears to be more involved in the production of language. Every hemisphere has four lobes: the frontal lobe (responsible for personality and empathy), the parietal lobe (which handles with senses, space and position, and language interpretation), the occipital lobe (responsible for the visual information and language, both written and oral, comprehension) and the temporal lobe (which decodes the linguistic information, by interpreting the sounds, the visual stimuli, oral and written language). But among these, the three major agents that play a crucial role in language processing are: the Broca's area, the Wernicke's area, and the Geschwind's area (Fadiga et al., 2009). Nestled in the brain's frontal lobe, the Broca's area is named after the French physician Paul Broca, who first identified its significance in the 1860s. Broca discovered its critical function in speech

production after studying a patient who could comprehend language yet struggled to speak, pinpointing the frontal lobe's role in articulating words and forming sentences. The Wernicke area, located in the temporal lobe, handles with language comprehension. Its explorer, the German neurologist and psychiatric Carl Wernicke, studied a patient who was able to talk but produced senseless words. Both patients, observed by Broca and Wernicke, suffered from two different types of aphasia, one affecting speech production and the other the comprehension of it. The third agent, the Geschwind's area facilitates the integration of heard and read language, playing a key role in understanding, and producing coherent speech.

Having established the relation between brain and language, we need to clarify which of these two elements dictates the rules. To make myself clear, does the brain (alongside with thoughts and cognition) give birth to language, or is it the other way round, meaning that language shapes thought? "Do we think with words, or do we use words to communicate made-up decisions?" (Perlovsky, 2009). This investigation leads to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, challenging us to discover whether language is a product of the human mind or if it is strongly shaped by cognition.

2.1 Cultural and Linguistic relativism

Why are women not allowed to show certain body parts according to the rules of some cultures? Or why is polygamy socially accepted in some cultures while in others it is considered immoral? Why do speakers in English address their interlocutors with "you," whatever degree of relationship they share?

The term *cultural relativism* first appeared in an *American Anthropologist* article in 1947, when the anthropologist Melville Herskovitz, a student of Franz Boas, began to observe and study the variety of lifestyles and practices of different peoples. The idea of cultural relativism holds that each culture must be understood on its own terms, without judgments based on external standards or belonging to our cultural vision. Every culture cannot and should not be judged, as it is valid in its

uniqueness and deserves respect, since it reflects internal values and norms. Individuals, through the processes of enculturation and socialization, adopt criteria dictated by their culture, which allows them to judge what is "good/bad, good/bad, right/wrong" (Biscaldi, 2022). According to Biscaldi (2022), cultural relativism urges us to suspend our judgment in the face of cultural diversity, inviting us to explore and understand traditions that are deeply embedded in individuals.

Picking up on Geertz, he encouraged to understand what we cannot accept (Biscaldi, 2022). When we can't explain some practices, such as female genital mutilation or death penalty, we are called to delve into the contexts that give rise to these practices. The Devoto-Oli (2024) offers a definition of *cultural relativism* as "tesi per cui culture diverse presentano costumi e valori diversi, su cui nessuna scienza può pronunciare giudizi di valore" (Devoto-Oli, 2024). But is this really the case? What are the critics of cultural relativism about? Since, according to cultural relativism, every cultural practice is peculiar to that culture and therefore cannot be judged as wrong or immoral, this could lead to the act of tolerating ethically dangerous practices just because they are accepted by a particular culture, e.g. the female genital mutilation mentioned earlier. Moreover, the relativist idea of the absence of shared moral and universal values across cultures could complicate difficult cross-cultural dialogue, especially when cultural practices or values are in stark contrast to each other.

Just as cultural relativism has been criticized, the theory of *linguistic relativism* has also not been immune to controversy. Indeed, the latter has provoked heated debates, stimulating reflections on the impact of language on our perception of reality.

The idea behind linguistic relativism is that language shapes the way we think and alters our perception of the reality around us. As a result, people who speak different languages perceive distinct realities, each shaped by the specific language they use. More commonly identified as the *Sapir-Whorf hypothesis*, linguistic relativism owes its name to the two scholars J.G. Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf who defined its principles. It is also crucial to acknowledge the contribution of Prussian philosopher and linguist Wilhelm von Humboldt, whose pioneering work provided fertile ground for the development of this theory.

According to Humboldt's view, language and thought are to be considered inseparable, as the latter is completely determined by language. Indeed, he defined language as a manifestation of people's minds, thoughts, and spirits, thus establishing an inseparable link between language and thought. Reformulating Humboldt's words, the structure of language, which is an integral part of our essence, expresses our interiority and is transformed depending on our flow of thoughts and by the sociocultural context in which we are immersed.

Edward Sapir was an American anthropologist and linguist and a student of Franz Boas. In his 1921 work *An introduction to the study of speech*, he theorized his view of language: unlike the act of walking, language is not a biologically inherited function, but it is culturally acquired through social interaction. A definition which, recalling the figures mentioned earlier, agrees with Tylor's theory of cultural acquisition (of which language is a means) through the social environment, and which contrasts with the Chomskian idea of innatism of language.

The two pioneers of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis first met during their time at Yale University. Whorf, after spending years studying the Hopi language, proposed that language acts as a lens through which humans view reality, profoundly affecting the way they think and perceive the reality around them. In the famous essay addressed to his colleague, Whorf described what he observed in the Hopi language and culture, a Native American people of Arizona. He, in fact, discovered that the Hopi language reflected unique patterns and concepts of time, space and reality. Whorf studied their grammatical structures and categories and observed that the verbs were timeless, meaning that they did not express present, past or future tenses. Unlike English and other European languages, which categorize time in a linear, segmented way (marked by past, present, future), the Hopi language treated time as a continuous process, an uninterrupted flow rather than a series of events. In the collection of some of his writings *Language, thought, and reality; selected writings* (1956), and more specifically in the excerpt *An American Indian Model of the Universe* (Whorf & University of California Libraries, 1956), Whorf affirmed that the Hopi language works perfectly even without the use of distinct verb tenses, words, expressions, or metaphors referring to the concept of time,

concluding that the Hopi people handled the concepts of time, space, and reality differently from the Western view. This new perspective, in which events were not seen as isolated or independent, but as interconnected, was dictated by the linguistic structure of the Hopi language. All of this led the U.S. linguist to conclude that language is not only a means of communication, but also a lens through which individuals view and construct their understanding of the world. Through learning a specific language, therefore, it is possible to access a diverse and deep understanding of another culture's world. Examples of differences between English and Hopi languages in expressing different temporal actions can be seen in the figure below.



OBJECTIVE FIELD	SPEAKER (SENDER)	HEARER (RECEIVER)	HANDLING OF TOPIC, RUNNING OF THIRD PERSON
SITUATION 1 a. 			ENGLISH... "HE IS RUNNING" HOPI... "WARI" (RUNNING, STATEMENT OF FACT)
SITUATION 1 b. OBJECTIVE FIELD BLANK DEVOID OF RUNNING			ENGLISH... "HE RAN" HOPI... "WARI" (RUNNING, STATEMENT OF FACT)
SITUATION 2 			ENGLISH... "HE IS RUNNING" HOPI... "WARI" (RUNNING, STATEMENT OF FACT)
SITUATION 3 OBJECTIVE FIELD BLANK			ENGLISH... "HE RAN" HOPI... "ERA WARI" (RUNNING, STATEMENT OF FACT FROM MEMORY)
SITUATION 4 OBJECTIVE FIELD BLANK			ENGLISH... "HE WILL RUN" HOPI... "WARIKNI" (RUNNING, STATEMENT OF EXPECTATION)
SITUATION 5 OBJECTIVE FIELD BLANK			ENGLISH... "HE RUNS" (E.G. ON THE TRACK TEAM) HOPI... "WARIKNGWE" (RUNNING, STATEMENT OF LAW)

Figure 2 - Whorf & University of California Libraries, 1956

Whorf believed that thought is something mysterious: "thinking is most mysterious, and by far the greatest light upon it that we have is thrown by the study of language" (Subbiondo, 2005, p. 157). Given the role of language as a light that illuminates and clarifies otherwise obscure thinking, the role of linguists is emphasized as interpreters of different worldviews.

In sum, Whorf and Sapir's studies have made fundamental contributions to understanding the link between language, thought and culture, highlighting how language structures can influence our interpretation of reality.

2.1.1 Major critics

Although the work of the two linguists is still a source of inspiration for contemporary studies on the language-culture-thought trinomial, Sapir-Whorf's hypothesis has been the subject of debate and revision over the years.

When talking about linguistic relativism, it is also crucial to mention its stronger and more criticized version, namely *linguistic determinism*. This version asserts a much closer relationship between language and thought than linguistic relativism, since it states that language completely determines how one person thinks. According to this perspective, speakers are limited in their thoughts by the grammatical and lexical constraints of their language, suggesting that thinking in ways that are not predicted by language is essentially impossible. Linguistic determinism, then, sees language as the main determinant of the structure of thought. A classic example of linguistic determinism is the idea that if a language does not have words to distinguish blue from green, speakers of that language will not perceive the difference between the two colors.

Research in the field of cognitive science has suggested a closer relationship between thought and the world than the relationship between language and thought. These studies reveal that variations in meanings of words across different languages are more frequent than differences in the underlying concepts of those words. To give a concrete example of this phenomenon, I am going to cite the Whorf studies on the concept of "snow" in English and Eskimo languages. The linguist has identified the multiple words that the Eskimo language uses to describe snow: *aput* for "snow on the ground," *gana* for "falling snow," *piqsirpoq* "drifting snow," and *qimuqsuq* "a snow drift" (Pullum, 1991, p. 163), unlike the single English word *snow*. This lexical difference might suggest, according to a deterministic interpretation, that Eskimos perceive snow in radically different ways from English speakers. Whorf, indeed, in his article *Science and Linguistics*, states that the word snow would be "all-inclusive" (Pullum, 1991, p. 163) for an Eskimo, as the term would be reductive in encompassing different sensations and ways of operating different types of snow. However, if we were to look at this phenomenon from the perspective of interlinguistic studies, we would see that despite these

linguistic differences, both cultures share similar basic concepts about snow, such as its physical properties and its role in the environment. Then again, we are still talking about snow; it is just a different way of expressing the same concept.

The American linguist Geoffrey K. Pullum in his article *The Great Eskimo Vocabulary Hoax and Other Irreverent Essays on the Study of Language* (1991), examines Whorf's studies on the Eskimo language, calling them unfounded urban stories. The author describes his work as a critique of the popular and academic narrative that has formed around this example, demonstrating the unfoundedness and superficiality of Whorf's alleged knowledge of the Eskimo language. Although the Eskimo language has several words for describing the concept of snow, according to the author, the number is neither extraordinarily large nor unique compared to other cultures. The English language has numerous adjectives to describe different types of snow, such as "slush," or "sleet" (Pullum, 1991, p. 163), which people, like snowboarders, certainly use and know. This would lead to the conclusion that although Eskimos have more terminologies for "snow," or the fact that they do not have verb tenses, they perceive the two concepts of "snow" and "time" differently from the SAE (Standard Average European) view.

Steven Pinker, a Canadian linguist, cognitive scientist, and professor of psychology at Harvard University, has repeatedly criticize the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. Pinker, supporting the Chomskian theory of language innatism, argues that all humans share an instinct that allows them to acquire any language easily during the first few years of life. This innate ability is rooted in specific brain mechanisms and universal principles of grammar (recalling the Chomsky's Universal Grammar). The author also argues against the Whofian idea that sees thought and language as one, affirming its absurdity and falsity: "The famous Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic determinism [...] is wrong, all wrong" (Casasanto, 2008, p. 64). According to Pinker, our ability to think is not limited or determined by the language we speak. Instead, the latter is a powerful tool through which we express and shape our thoughts, but it is not the source of the thoughts themselves. In one of his latest books, *The Stuff of Thought* (2008), Pinker again positions himself against linguistic determinism and

relativism. He acknowledges that language can significantly influence our thinking, especially in the form in which we categorize the world and how we interpret the actions of others. This, however, is not the same as saying that we are imprisoned and limited by the boundaries of our language. In order to support his thoughts, Pinker provides various examples of how thinking can occur even without the presence of language. Children, aphasic people or even animals, who lack the use of language, can still perform actions that involve thinking, such as establishing social relationships, building shelters, cooperating, or using tools. In addition, Pinker criticizes the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis by pointing out that although language may have limitations in expressing concepts, maybe more abstract ones, individuals are not bound by these language restrictions. People overcome these limitations by seeking new ways of expression, making up new terms or using metaphors, thus demonstrating the adaptability of human thought beyond linguistic structures. Pinker illustrates how our use of language directly reflects the deep workings of the human mind and the fundamental traits of human nature, that is, it acts as a "Window Into Human Nature" (Pinker, 2008, p. 148).

2.1.2 Neo-Whorfism

The Neo-Whorfism represents a reevaluation of linguistic relativity and of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. This new version, called "weak" (Štrkalj Despot, 2021, p. 374), argues that language does not determine our thinking, but influences and shapes it. It is interesting to mention Fishman (cited in Štrkalj Despot, 2021) who proposed a third kind of Whorfism, which involved a triad formed by culture, language and thought (instead of the binomial language-thought). In recent years, many experiments have been conducted to test linguistic relativity. These experiments brought evidence that language influences our nonlinguistic cognition by studying certain domains such as space, time, color, and numbers.

Regarding the conceptualization of space, Boroditsky (cited in Štrkalj Despot, 2021) found that the small Kuuk Thaayorre Aboriginal community in northern Australia uses cardinal directions (north, south, east, west) to define space, rather than relative references (such as left, right, forward,

back), like most languages in the world. For example, when asked "where are you going?" their answer might be "toward the southwest." This practice implies that the Aboriginal community must have a constant orientation, highlighting a significant influence of language on spatial perception and cognition.

The cognitive neuroscientist Casasanto (2008) studied the ways of expressing time and the relative perception that native English and native Greek speakers have. He concluded that people who speak differently about the concept of time also possess different ways of seeing it. This underscores the significant role of language in shaping and influencing our mental representations. Since the concept of time can be expressed through spatial metaphors, as pointed out by Casasanto (2008), and these metaphors differ across languages, it is possible that speakers of different languages develop distinct conceptual repertoires.

In Wolff and Holmes' (2011) study *Linguistic Relativity*, they examine the various versions that the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis encompasses, rejecting the one of linguistic determinism and instead supporting the other five: "thinking for speaking," "language as meddler," "language as augments," "language as spotlight," and "language as an inducer" (Wolff & Holmes, 2011, p. 254). This study, therefore, does not completely deny the influence of language on thinking, but rather, provides examples that support this theory.

When people produce language, they are involved in a mental process that Slobin (cited in Wolff & Holmes, 2011) defined as *thinking for speaking*, that is, they have to focus on certain aspects of the experience they are about to describe verbally. For example, the English language involves the use of verb tenses, unlike Indonesian or Mandarin, so presumably, English speakers have to pay attention to when the event occurred. In Turkish, on the other hand, speakers must specify whether they witnessed the past event they describe.

The concept of "language as meddler" (Wolff & Holmes, 2011, p. 256) highlights how linguistic aspects can interfere with nonlinguistic aspects during decision making. When linguistic and nonlinguistic aspects agree with each other, speed and accuracy in making a decision are higher.

Conversely, when these conflict, both speed and accuracy can be compromised. An example that clarifies this concept can be seen in the studies conducted on color discrimination, which that language might influence color recognition. Roberson and colleagues (cited in Wolff & Holmes, 2011) studied the five terms to describe colors in the language of the Berinmo, a small tribe in New Guinea, a comparison with the 11 terms of the English language. They found that the recognition memory of the tribe was better for the focal colors of their own language than for those of English. Winawer et al. (cited in Štrkalj Despot, 2021) compared the ability of Russian and English speakers to distinguish shades of blue. Since Russian uses two different words to distinguish dark blue (*синий*) from light blue (*голубой*), unlike English which uses one word, it was seen that Russians were faster in distinguishing the two shades of blue. This example demonstrates how language can act as a meddler, and thus interfere with cognition through the interaction of linguistic and nonlinguistic codes, modulating our decision making.

The "language as augments" (Wolff & Holmes, 2011, p. 257) view suggests that language can extend and increase nonlinguistic representations, making certain concepts clearer that would otherwise remain vague. Studies conducted by Frank, Gordon et al. (cited in Wolff & Holmes, 2011) on the Pirahã language of a small tribe in Brazil may elucidate this view. The Pirahã language uses numbers only from 1 to 6, calling *hói* a quantity ranging from 1 to 6, *hoi* for 4 to 10 quantities, and *baagi* from 7 to 10. There are no words in this language that express the exact quantity of something. When some native Pirahã speakers were asked to rearrange some objects in an orthogonal axis, it was seen that they used an approximate numerical system, highlighting how gaps at the cognitive level were a consequence of gaps at the linguistic level. This is the same concept that underlies linguistic and numerical acquisition in children: only by learning and recognizing the concept of specific numbers and their associated quantities, children are able to attribute meaning to them. According to the linguist Daniel Everett (cited in Pinker, 2008), however, the Pirahã's limitations in numbering precisely is to be attributed to their cultural practices.

The view of "language as spotlight" (Wolff & Holmes, 2011, p. 259) proposes that the use of a certain language in the long run might influence the way we think and pay attention to the things around us, as if language functions precisely as a 'spotlight'. Wolff and Holmes' study exemplifies this view by mentioning grammatical genres, suggesting how they are specific to each language. For example, while in Spanish the word 'bridge' (*el puente*) is masculine, in German *die Brücke* is feminine. The presence or absence (as in the case of English) of these grammatical gender categories could therefore influence speakers' conceptions of certain objects, whether feminine, masculine or neutral (in the case of German for example). This conclusion was reached by Boroditsky et al. (cited in Štrkalj Despot, 2021), who asked native German and Spanish speakers to describe some objects having different genders in the two languages. To describe a bridge, German speakers (whose term for bridge is feminine) used adjectives such as "beautiful, elegant, fragile, peaceful, pretty" (Štrkalj Despot, 2021, p. 337), while Spanish speakers (bridge is masculine) used "big, dangerous, long, strong, sturdy, and towering" (Štrkalj Despot, 2021, p. 337).

The last view discussed in Wolff and Holmes' (2011) study is the so-called "language as inducer" (Wolff & Holmes, 2011, p. 260). According to this idea, language can induce a way of processing information that continues to be active even after language use has ended. The experiment conducted by Wolff and Holmes (2011) explored the mental simulation of motion in static scenes, showing how verbal descriptions of an image can induce a mental simulation of gravity, thus influencing the way objects are conceptualized and perceived, regardless of the specific scene being described.

In conclusion, as Casasanto (2008) suggests, we do not have to fear the effects of Whorfism. Claiming that language influences thinking does not imply that we think in language, but rather this means, in Whorf's view, that individuals assume concepts from the surrounding reality differently depending on the language they speak. Moreover, Boroditsky (cited in Štrkalj Despot, 2021), after the series of experiments collecting data around the world, concluded that:

What we have learned is that people who speak different languages do indeed think differently and that even flukes of grammar can profoundly affect how we see the world. Language is a uniquely human gift, central to our experience of being human. Appreciating its role in constructing our mental lives brings us one step closer to understanding the very nature of humanity.

(Štrkalj Despot, 2021, p. 376)

This suggests that language affects our perception of the world, without confining us to a single way of thinking or acting. We can go beyond the limits imposed by our linguistic culture. Casasanto (2008) proposes that further study of Sapir and Whorf's linguistic relativism could help identifying cognitive variations among languages, thereby helping to delineate human biological and cultural diversity.

2.2 Bilingualism

After having established the link between language and brain, we need to face the dynamics of our multicultural world. In an era where global movement and interaction are commonplace, individuals are constantly forming connections, evolving their identities, and absorbing new knowledge. This raises intriguing questions about the effects of multilingualism and bilingualism on people. What occurs in the brains of those who navigate multiple languages? And what unique challenges do bilingual individuals encounter as they balance diverse language and cultural perspectives? This paragraph starts with some definitions of this complex yet fascinating phenomenon.

The Devoto-Oli Dictionary (2024) provides a basic understanding of bilingualism by defining bilingual individuals as those people who can correctly talk and use two different languages. However, this might seem narrow and simplistic, as it does not fully encompass the depth of what being bilingual entails. Bilingualism involves more than just the ability to “correctly talk and use” two languages. Colin Baker offers a definition of bilingualism in *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* (2011), as the ability of individuals or members of a community to switch between

languages, dialects, or language varieties according to a specific context and conversation (Baker, 2011). This more comprehensive definition emphasizes the functional and adaptive aspects of language use within bilingual individuals or communities. It highlights not just the capability to use multiple languages, but the flexibility and cognitive ability to switch between them based on the context or conversational needs. This perspective broadens the understanding of bilingualism beyond mere proficiency levels in two languages because it includes the dynamic use of language in real-world situations, acknowledging that bilingualism is not just a static skill but an active and context-dependent process.

One can become bilingual by being raised in an environment where two languages are commonly used, like countries where multiple languages are recognized as official, or places where immigrants establish their new homes. Another possibility of becoming bilingual is “by learning languages in two different social settings” (Britannica, 2020), for example Mexican children who learn English at school but still speak Spanish at home. According to a European Commission report in 2006, 56% of the European population spoke a second language fluently enough to converse with it. But this phenomenon doesn’t stop. Statistics on bilingualism within populations mentioned in Byers-Heinlein et al. (2019), such as 67% in Europe, 55% in Canada, 25% in India, and 20% in the U.S., demonstrate the widespread and increasing presence of bilingual individuals. The prevalence among bilingual youth is notably higher, for instance, in the United States 26% of children aged 5-17, and in California specifically (44%), are bilingual, as reported by Kids count Data Center in 2018. Furthermore, in Texas, nearly half (49%) of children aged 0-8 years are bilingual (Byers-Heinlein et al., 2019). Given that the number of languages exceeds that of countries, it’s common for multiple languages to be spoken within a single nation. Consequently, interactions across different linguistic groups occur. Furthermore, factors like migration propelled by various motives including education, employment, and relationships, contribute to the complexity of accurately delineating the boundaries of bilingualism.

Throughout their lives, bilinguals may experience varying levels of proficiency in the languages they speak, since they are influenced by how frequently or in what contexts (at school, at home, with friends, for sport, etc.) they use each language. Indeed, this is stated by the Complementary Principle formulated by Grosjean (1997):

Bilinguals usually acquire and use their languages for different purposes, in different domains of life, with different people. Different aspects of life often require different languages.

(Grosjean & Li, 2013, p. 12).

This principle illustrates the strategic way bilinguals navigate the languages they command, tailoring their use to suit the context at hand. Albarillo's (2018) study at Brooklyn College examined students' language use across different contexts. Almost all participants were bilingual. The findings revealed a prevalent use of English (their L2) for academic purposes or at school. Conversely, participants tended to switch languages more frequently at home. One participant noted this situation in her personal experience:

So in school I speak in English. And I live with my aunt. And she works 14 hours a day, so I hardly see her. Whenever I see her for half an hour or an hour, we're going to talk in Bangla [Bengali], but we don't like mix stuff. Some of the words are in English. Like we don't have a word for chair that's in Bangla. So some of the words has to be in English. But um, most of the cases we don't mix two languages. And even when I'm talking to my parents I'll be talking Bangla.

(Albarillo, 2018, p. 638)

By assigning each language to distinct areas of their lives, such as work, school, or home, bilinguals effectively compartmentalize their linguistic skills. This can make it challenging for them to switch languages within a given domain. Apart from the level of fluency bilinguals have in each language, their dominant language can also change over time.

2.2.1 Bilingual brains

Prior to the 1960s, the prevailing belief was that bilingualism could hinder children's development by requiring them to distinguish between two languages, which was seen as potentially confusing and

slowing their learning process. However, recent research has proved instead the several benefits a bilingual brain has.

In the last 20 years, research has increasingly shown that bilingualism influences more than just language skills. It impacts various developmental aspects such as cognitive abilities, brain growth, social development, and educational achievements. According to Nacamulli (2015), monolingual and bilingual brains may look and operate in a different manner.

The most evident benefit of a bilingual brain is language development. Indeed, as stated by Byers-Heinlein et al. (2019), bilingualism impacts language development beyond simply knowing two languages. It implies that bilingual children divide their experiences across languages, enhancing cognitive skills and affecting how language is represented and processed. To put into the researchers' words, they "grow to know and use multiple languages" (Byers-Heinlein et al., 2019, p. 4), by constantly balancing between two systems of languages. Since bilingual individuals can't decide to switch off one language whenever they want, Kroll et al. (2012) defined bilinguals as "mental jugglers", who navigate the simultaneous activation of both languages. This constant navigation promotes a higher level of cognitive control, allowing bilinguals to shift from one language to the other with minimal error.

Bilingualism is linked to improved early cognitive capabilities. Both infants and children who are bilingual show enhanced cognitive control abilities. Depending on how and when bilinguals learnt the second language, they can be classified into three categories. Nacamulli (2015) in her TED Talk, takes as an example a Peruvian family who migrated to the U.S., when the youngest child was 2 years old. Therefore, the youngest, developing two linguistic codes at the same time and forming one set of concepts, is a "compound bilingual"; her teenage brother, learning English at school while using Spanish at home, may develop separate concept sets for each language, and therefore is a "coordinate bilingual"; their parents, "subordinate bilinguals" likely learn a second language through the lens of their native one, filtering new linguistic elements based on their primary language understanding (TED-Ed, 2015). But acquiring multiple languages at any stage offers your brain noteworthy benefits.

These advantages can even be physically observed, such as an increase in grey matter density, which houses the brain's neurons and synapses, and heightened activity in specific brain areas when using a second language. In the BBC video *Why being bilingual is good for your brain* (2023), the cognitive neuroscientist Liégeois explains the results of their last 2023-study at Great Ormond Street in London. The study involved three groups of children aged 8 to 10: monolinguals, early bilinguals exposed to Greek and English from birth, and later bilinguals introduced to English between ages 2 and 5. Participants were asked to rest and stare at a cross, while examiners scanned their brain activity. Early bilinguals showed the strongest connectivity in their resting brain network, and the regions of the brain that lighted up, were the one we use when “we’re doing nothing and just mind-wandering” (BBC Ideas, 2023, 3:36). The continuous exercise provided to a bilingual brain throughout life can also postpone the onset of diseases, like Alzheimer's (Liu & Wu, 2021). In 2007, Canadian psychologist and professor Ellen Bialystock and her team discovered that bilingualism could delay dementia by approximately four to four and a half years.

Furthermore, bilingualism significantly influences how children engage with others and perceive social interactions. Bilingual children, compared to their monolingual counterparts, are more open to forming friendships with fellow bilinguals, they possess a deeper understanding of social dynamics and stronger social competencies. In addition, being bilingual often implies being bicultural, navigating through two systems of cultural expectations and fostering complex cultural identities. This can help them understand that there might be different points of views and, consequently, better comprehend different perspectives.

Since bilingual individuals can't completely deactivate one language while using the other, how do they choose which language to use? Regardless of whether they're listening, reading, or speaking in one language, the other is present and active, and have an impact on their performance.

According to Grosjean (2013), bilinguals ask themselves two questions before picking one language: “Which language should be used?”, and “should the other language be brought in?” (Grosjean & Li, 2013, p. 14). This decision-making process is referred to as *language choice*, whereas

the language selected is called the *base language*. This base language remains on standby and is not activated until chosen for use. Afterwards, in response to the second question, if no other language is introduced, the language mode is called *monolingual*, for example talking to a monolingual person, or reading in a single language. Conversely, if another language is also activated alongside with the base language, the language mode is *bilingual*. In this scenario, a speaker could incorporate elements from both languages, particularly if the audience knows the other language as well. Bilinguals who live in communities where two languages are both commonly used, may never find themselves in the monolingual mode, whereas those who live in close contact with only monolinguals, may never bring in the other language in interactions.

The process of language selection for bilinguals, who have more than one language available, is not always straightforward. The factors that determine this process include the individuals involved, the context, the subject matter, and the purpose of the interaction (Grosjean et al., 2013), including personal preference for a particular language in familiar interactions. Other determinants such as the age of the speakers, the degree of closeness between them, their levels of language proficiency, and their socio-economic backgrounds can also play significant roles in language choice. The context in which speakers find themselves, along with its degree extent of formality, can significantly influence the language choice. For example, in Paraguay, one language is used in the countryside and the other in the city. Furthermore, certain languages may not be considered appropriate for formal situations and are thus avoided in such contexts, highlighting the role of social and environmental factors in guiding language choice. An example might be dialects, which are considered informal and consequently rarely used in formal situations.

To wrap up the introductory paragraph on bilingualism, it is clear that being bilingual is not merely about speaking two languages, it is something that deeply influences one's way of speaking and interacting with others, cultural perception, and cognitive processes. As we move to the next paragraph, we delve into how bilingual individuals skillfully alternate between languages, showing their capacity to adapt their linguistic and cultural identities to different contexts. The next paragraph,

therefore, will highlight the complexities and nuances of bilingual communication, and its impact on social interaction.

2.2.2 Code-switching and borrowing

Having recognized the global presence of bilingualism across the world, it is increasingly common to witness language switching within a single conversation. This linguistic phenomenon, where speakers blend two languages in the same sentence or interaction, is called *code-switching*, and it has often been object of study in the last 30 years. It refers to the process where a speaker alternates between two languages, transitioning fully to the other language before returning to the base language, to communicate linguistic and social information. It also involves changing in dialects or accents. *Code-switching* can manifest through the use of a single word, a phrase or an entire sentence. This is clarified by Grosjean et al. (2013) in his *Psycholinguistics of Bilingualism* who writes the following examples, where the base language is French, and it hosts the “guest language”, that is English:

- Va chercher Marc and *bribe him* avec un chocolat chaud *with cream on top*.
- Des *wild guys* à cheval.

(Grosjean et al., 2013, p. 19)

Bilingual individuals engage in code-switching for various motives, as outlined by Grosjean et al. in 2013. These include selecting the most appropriate word or expression, addressing a specific linguistic requirement (remember the Complementary Principle discussed above), signifying membership within a particular group, either excluding or incorporating someone into a conversation, or enhancing one’s social standing. When individuals alternate between languages, they are not only navigating linguistic landscapes but are also actively engaging in the construction and expression of their social identities. This process can manifest in delineating group boundaries, where the choice of language or dialect marks one’s belonging to certain social or ethnic groups. Moreover, Worthy et al. (2021) stated that, according to cross-cultural research, an accent can trigger stereotypes and alter

perceptions. For example, in the United States, individuals with a Southern accent are judged as less intelligent and considered to have a lower socioeconomic status. If someone perceives that their accent is causing others to have negative views of them, people adapt their choice of language or accent according to the conversation.

The other way of recalling the other language in bilingual mode conversations is through *borrowing*. This phenomenon, as opposed to *code-switching*, involves the “integration of one language into another” (Grosjean et al., 2013, p. 18). There are two types of *borrowing*. The first one involves borrowing the form and content of a word (a *loanword*), for example Portuguese-Americans use the word “humoroso” to denote for “humorous” when the original meaning is “capricious”; the second type involves adopting a word from the base language and expanding its meaning to match the one of a word in the second language, or reorganizing words in the base language according to a structure inspired by the second language, thereby generating a new meaning (*loanshift*). An illustration of the second type can be seen in the literal translation of idiomatic phrases from one language to another, like when a Spanish-English bilingual says, “I put myself to think about it” drawing directly from the Spanish phrase “Me puse a pensarlo” (Grosjean et al., 2013, p. 20). The reasons beyond the phenomenon of *borrowing* are similar to the ones of *code-switching*, namely using the most appropriate word or a word from another domain that is usually covered by the other language. In a study conducted by Nguyen (2018) with Vietnamese-English bilinguals, interesting results were found concerning the reasons beyond their use of *code-switching* and *borrowing*. Participants reported that they have difficulties in finding suitable English terms to accurately convey the nature of interpersonal relationship, judging the use of the form *you* with everybody no matter their social standings, and therefore lacking respect (Nguyen, 2018). Here I quote from Nguyen (2018) some of the participants’ words that explain this difficulty for bilinguals:

My kids aren't just anyone to me and I'm not just anybody to them. I don't like I and you, English shows a lack of respect. How can they call their mother the same as they call their friends? Australian values are about equality and liberty, but that's not how a Vietnamese family works. I want to show respect. Choosing the right Vietnamese kin words is the least I could do to show respect to people. It makes me more Vietnamese.

(Nguyen, 2018, p. 22)

These quotations encapsulate the challenges faced by bilingual individuals navigating between two different sets of cultures, each expressed by the corresponding language. The speakers express a deep discomfort with the English language, which, from their perspective, flatten the differences of familial and social hierarchies inherent in the Vietnamese culture, in trying to promoting equality and liberty. The speakers' struggle to reconcile the values characteristic of both cultures highlights a common experience among bicultural individuals: navigating the complexities of living between two cultures, trying to honor and integrate aspects of both without feeling forced to choose one over the other.

2.3 Biculturalism

Since in the first chapter we illustrated the deep bond between language and culture, where the first is essentially the expression of the second, likewise bilingualism and biculturalism are correlated. Interestingly, Grosjean et al. (2013) considers biculturalism as a subset within the broader scope of bilingualism, a domain that, however, remains relatively underexplored in existing literature.

The Cambridge Dictionary (2023) defines biculturalism as “the fact or practice of including or representing two different cultures” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). To put into other words, biculturalism involves internalizing two cultures to the extent that they are both alive in the individual, and the latter feels comfortable with both (Schwartz & Unger, 2010). Hence, possessing a bicultural identity profoundly influences individuals on both psychological and cultural levels, affecting their cognition, linguistic knowledge, and language processing.

Grosjean et al. (2013) made a list of the bicultural individuals' characteristics in *The Psycholinguistics of Bilingualism*: they engage, to differing extents, with the life of two or more cultures; they adjust their perspectives, behaviors, principles, language, and so forth to align with these cultures; they integrate and blend elements from the involved cultures. However, some aspects can't be adapted easily to the situation and context.

Biculturalism extends beyond just immigrants arriving from other nations, but it also involves the children of immigrants who remain closely connected to their ancestral culture within their family environments. Additionally, bicultural individuals could be found in ethnic enclaves where cultural traditions are preserved across generations. But being bilingual doesn't necessarily mean being bicultural. According to Soffietti (1960) you may encounter *bicultural-bilingual* individuals, *bicultural-monolingual* individuals, *monocultural-bilingual* individuals, and *monocultural-monolingual* individuals (Soffietti, 1960). The *bicultural-bilingual* person is the one that Soffietti (1960) considers as the authentic bilingual, meaning that s/he has two sets of cultures that are both constantly preserved, like a child of immigrant parents speaking their native language at home. An example of a *bicultural-monolingual* scenario involves people ceasing to talk their mother tongue for various reasons, or as Grosjean et al. (2013) suggest, British people migrating to the United States. Nevertheless, they continue to stick to their original customs, beliefs, and values. An instance of a *monocultural-bilingual* situation is a child immersed in a single culture who has learned a second language, through education or family interaction. This may happen when one or both parents are bilingual and choose to communicate with the child in a non-native language, while still following the cultural norms prevalent in their surrounding society. The last type, the *monocultural-monolingual* individual faces no challenges associated with navigating between different languages and cultures, since only one cultural set and one language set is present.

Other researchers identify bicultural people if they are fluent in both the language of their ancestral culture and that of their current cultural environment, if they have friendships across these cultures, and read and watch television from both cultural contexts. From this perspective, once again,

the close relation between culture and language is established. Benet-Martínez et al. (2002) suggested that bicultural individuals are able to amalgamate both the “heritage” culture as well as the “receiving” cultures into a blended and personalized new one, that can’t be completely attributed to one or another. This is why a Chinese American person might combine hamburgers with traditional Chinese vegetables or might use a combination of English and Chinese or might socialize within groups made up of Chinese and American friends. Following this perspective, bicultural individuals are guided by both cultures’ norms, values, and behaviors, since they’re both internalized within them. For example, Chinese American people might integrate Asian values, such as the respect of authority and the honor for elders, together with the American values, that are typically individualistic, like striving for personal achievement and recognition. Given this dual cultural presence, these people might feel connected to both communities, identifying themselves as Chinese when among American peers, and as American among Chinese peers. Yet, they can navigate both cultural settings with ease.

As claimed by Grosjean et al. (2013), in daily life, bicultural-bilingual people find themselves in two distinct cultural modes, similar to the language modes outlined in the section on bilingualism: *monocultural* and *bicultural*. In the monocultural mode, these individuals may have to temporarily set aside their own culture when interacting with those who don’t share it. Conversely, in the bicultural mode these people can navigate across their own cultures, without necessarily deactivating one, and bringing in elements from one or another when it is needed. However, there are some aspects of cultures, such as the expression of emotions, interpersonal distance, and body language, that bicultural individuals might not easily adjust or suppress even when the monocultural situation demands it. This difficulty can lead to challenges in cross-cultural communication and potentially give rise to cultural misunderstanding.

2.3.1 Cultural Frame Switching

Cultural Frame Switching refers to the mechanism of cultural adaptation that bicultural individuals experience in their everyday lives. This concept will help us understand how individuals immersed in multiple cultures adapt their behavior and thinking according to the cultural context they find themselves in (Kreitler & Dyson, 2016). Indeed, it describes how bicultural or multicultural people switch between distinct culture-related mental frameworks or alter their worldview based on the language being spoken.

Hong et al. (2000) reported that the cultures internalized within bicultural individuals are not melded, but instead they alternate in guiding their thoughts and feelings, implicating that the integration of a new culture doesn't mean replacing the original one. Drawing on from multiple cultures, people can skillfully switch their cognitive, behavioral, and linguistic approaches to navigate various social contexts and interactions. Such dynamic cultural navigation may lead to development and experience of dual personalities or identities, each deeply rooted in one culture. This phenomenon underscores the humans' need of belonging to a "cultural group", and once the "cultural group" is created, "members can share values, rituals and behavior of the group" (Burlakovsky, 2011, p. 6). Further expanding this topic, Burlakovsky (2011) defines cultural identities as "networks of cultural meanings and associations organized into lenses or *frames* through which individuals view the world" (Burlakovsky, 2011, p. 11). These lenses or *frames* are recurrent and systematic interpretations which become instilled through being part of a cultural group. Therefore, membership to a cultural group is fundamental in shaping how individuals interpret and navigate the reality. There are different types of *mental frames*: *context-based* frames depend on the immediate environment and social situation. They can change quickly with different topics or interactions but may not invoke specific cultural responses. On the other hand, *identity-based* frames are deeply instilled and consistent from childhood, reflecting stable traits that are similar across members of a specific cultural group.

Research with bicultural people have demonstrated that culture-specific prompts can trigger distinct cultural attributions, values, and variations in personality traits.

Hong et al. (2000) in their study suggest that bilingual bicultural individuals perceive themselves differently when exposed to one context or language rather than another. This is one of the examples they provide:

At home with my parents and grandparents the only acceptable language was Spanish; actually that's all they really understood. Everything was really Mexican, but at the same time they wanted me to speak good English.... But at school, I felt really different because everyone was American, including me. Then I would go home in the afternoon and be Mexican again.

(Hong et al., 2000, p. 3)

The example shows that individuals might switch between cultural frameworks based on environmental cues or symbols, like the setting (be it home or school) or language, which are linked to one culture or another in their minds. The researchers proposed a *dynamic constructivist approach* to understand culture and cognition, emphasizing the idea that identity and personality are always transforming by constantly integrating new cultural experience. This approach also holds that specific cultural knowledge becomes relevant and influences thought processes. The authors demonstrate that bicultural individuals can switch between cultural frames when exposed to relevant cultural icons (or *stimuli*) affecting their interpretations and judgements. Specifically, Hong et al. (2000) conducted some experiments in which Chinese American participants were exposed to cultural icons (such as the American flag or the Chinese dragon), defined as “magnets of meaning” (Hong et al., 2000). They suggested that bicultural individuals, being immersed in two distinct cultures – referred to as A and B – harbor two separate systems of cultural meanings, constructs, and values, labeled as A’ and B’. Thus, when these individuals are exposed to stimuli from Culture A, activation of the A’ network is triggered. Similarly, exposure to stimuli from Culture B activates the B’ network. Afterwards, Hong et al. (2000) adapted an attribution task from Morris and Peng (1994) and gave participants a realistic image depicting a single fish swimming ahead of a gathering of fish. Participants were asked to rate on a 12-point scale the reason why the fish was standing ahead the group. Rating of 1 indicated strong belief that the lone fish was leading the others (internal cause), while a rating of 12 suggested that the lone fish was being chased (external cause). Consistent with previous research, the expectation was

that American-primed participants would favor internal causes over external ones, compared to Chinese-primed participants. This hypothesis was confirmed. These results can be read in lights of the different type of society that America and China have: the first is considered more individualistic and the second one has collectivist orientation.

Likewise, Luna et al. (2008) demonstrated that culture shapes an individual's perspective, behavior, and thoughts. Specifically, bicultural individuals access different culture-specific cognitive frames depending on the language. The authors' research on Hispanic Americans, who typically navigate between English at work or school and Spanish at home, revealed that language serves as a key to unlocking the cultural identity associated with it. Bilingual and bicultural Hispanic American women were shown fictional advertisements featuring a woman, in either Spanish or English. Following the advertisement, interviews were conducted in the ad's language to gather participants' perceptions of the woman depicted. The study found that participants' impressions aligned with the prevalent gender roles of the language used: in Spanish, the woman was seen as independent, while in English she was viewed as more reliant on others, illustrating how language can influence cultural identity perceptions in bilingual individuals and can bring to the forefront the cultural context it is linked with.

Besides cultural icons, language can also trigger the activation of cultural constructs. As a matter of fact, research has demonstrated that bilingual individuals exhibit language-dependent variations in their responses across diverse psychological assessments, including measures of personality, values, self-concepts evaluations, expression of emotions, and descriptions of others. The possible reason why this happens is that the two languages spoken by bilingual individuals are linked to two distinct cultural systems. For example, studies demonstrated that bilingual Chinese participants showed more Westernized responses when answering an original English questionnaire compared to its Chinese translation. These findings were interpreted through a dynamic constructionist perspective. The bilingual participants developed two distinct cultural frameworks with each language – Chinese learnt at home and English at school – each reflecting the two languages' cultures.

The Chinese version of the questionnaire triggered the Chinese culture, whereas the English version triggered the English culture, demonstrating the influence of linguistic context on cultural identity and perception.

Grosjean et al. (2013) provided illustrative examples that elucidate the role of language in activating cultural constructs. They examined how the English term *bread*, and the French term *pain* might convey distinct meanings to French-English bicultural bilingual individuals, in contrast to monocultural-bilingual individuals. This may happen because *pain* in French evoke images of a baguette-style bread for many bicultural bilinguals, whereas *bread* is associated with a broader category of baked loaf bread. Similarly, bicultural-bilingual individuals interpret the French word *café* and the English *coffee* very differently than monocultural-bilinguals. This distinction underscores how bicultural individuals might possess unique, culturally nuanced understanding of seemingly straightforward terms, differentiating their perception from those with a monocultural background.

This chapter has explored the challenges and the complexities of being a bilingual-bicultural individual. However, another critical aspect remains: the impact of bilingualism and biculturalism on individuals' identity, personality, and self-perception. Do bilingual-bicultural people have two identities? Do they feel differently according to the linguistic and culture context they find themselves in?

Chapter 3

Language, culture, and the self

Humans have always felt the need to belong to a group for various reasons, like being more powerful or socially accepted. This desire not only shapes our social interactions but also fosters a sense of community, influencing our identities, values, behaviors, and how we perceive the world.

According to Burlakowsky (2011), the concept of *cultural identity* stems exactly from this need for belonging. It refers to the recognition with “a particular group based on various cultural categories, including nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, and religion” (Chen, 2014, p. 1). Within these groups, *cultural identities* emerge as a powerful force, crafting a shared language, a set of meanings, beliefs, practices, and norms that unite individuals and are preserved through them.

Given the expanding the phenomenon of bilingualism, as we have established in the previous chapter, many individuals now identify themselves with multiple cultural groups. Consequently, the concept of cultural identity has evolved into a many sided and complex construct, that is constantly “enacted, negotiated, maintained, and challenged” (Chen, 2014, p. 1) through intercultural communication in a globalized world. Cultural identities are formed through the recognition of the existence of different cultural practices of the people around us. This acknowledgement encourages people to identify both commonalities and distinctions with others, and it helps them defining their own identity. Intercultural dialogue, therefore, has a pivotal role in shaping who we are and our own cultural identities.

According to Christopher and Bickhard (2007), culture and the self can't be considered two separate things. Cultural meanings, values and assumptions are embedded throughout all aspects of human behaviors. As individuals develop, they become more deeply integrated into social practices that are rich with cultural significance. Echoing Warnke's perspective in 1987, humans are always influenced by “prejudices and elements of their traditions over which they have no control”

(Christopher & Bickhard, 2007, p. 281). This pervasive influence of culture ensures that all human actions, emotions, and thoughts are inherently shaped by cultural contexts.

3.1 Self-perception, language, and culture

Do language and culture influence our self-perceptions? This section explores the influence of culture on self-perception, exploring how it may affect our identity, behaviors, emotional and self-expression.

In their study, Markus and Kitayama (1991) suggest that individuals from different cultures possess distinct perceptions of themselves and of others. These perceptions can significantly shape, and often dictate, the essence of personal experiences, impacting on how individuals react to external stimuli. More specifically, they investigated an *independent* view of the self, compared to an *interdependent* one. The first, called “Independent Construal of the self” (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 225) emphasizes the separateness and uniqueness of individuals, as the name itself suggests, encouraging people to become independent and to discover their unique characteristics. Therefore, this perspective promotes processes such as self-actualization, where individuals strive to realize and express their potentials, needs and rights. It is typically associated with individualistic cultures, recalling Hofstede’s cultural dimensions (Bozorboeva Ominakhon, 2023), such as American and Western European cultures. This is why these cultures are often labeled as “individualistic, egocentric, separate, autonomous, and self-contained” (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 224). Despite the emphasis on independence, the social environment and social interactions are important because they provide a means to reflect, verify, and affirm one’s inner qualities. The other type of construal is the “Interdependent Construal” (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 227), typically observed in non-Western and Asian cultures, especially in the Japanese one. It is characterized by a strong emphasis on the interdependence of individuals, seeing them as fundamentally connected to one another. This perspective views oneself not as an isolated entity but as part of a larger social network, with

behaviors significantly shaped by the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others. People in interdependent cultures strive to fit in and fulfill duties within their community, often placing collective goals and social harmony in the first place. Essentially, the interdependent self molds its behaviors according to social contexts, given the strong belief in social harmony and respect for others, which contrasts with the preference for self-expression by the independent self.

The consequences of being either *interdependent* or *independent* are several and the study by Markus and Kitayama (1991) highlights some.

An interdependent self, compared to an independent one, doesn't see social interactions and relationships as purely a means to realize personal goals, but rather as fundamental expressions of a deeply rooted connection among individuals. This results in a higher awareness of the others' needs, desires, and goals. Such interdependence requires an empathetic engagement, where people need to have the ability to take the role of the other, to understand what the other is feeling or thinking, and to prioritize the collective viewpoint over the perspective of the single individual (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Giving such an importance to the others, leads to more detailed understanding of people. This is crucial for maintaining relationships and ensuring harmonious interactions. Moreover, given this more detailed knowledge of the others, interdependent selves might perceive themselves as more similar to others, compared to independent individuals.

For what it concerns emotions, in the first chapter we have seen that emotional language and expression are influenced by culture. Markus and Kitayama (1991) distinguish two types of emotions: *ego-focused* emotions and *other focused* emotions. According to them, *ego-focused* emotions, such as anger, frustration, and pride, are centered in one's personal achievement or frustrations. Therefore, they suggested that independent selves might express more *ego-focused* emotions, which assert individuality. *Other-focused* emotions, like sympathy or shame, are related to one's connections with others. Cultures with interdependent selves emphasize *other-focused* emotions, which maintain social harmony and imply being sensitive to others. With this purpose of keeping harmony, in these cultures,

the expression of emotions, especially anger, is often moderated. In Tahiti for example, people fear anger and various anthropological studies claim that it's never expressed in this culture.

Ross et al. (2002) highlighted relevant findings on self-perception, language, and culture in bilinguals. Chinese-born Canadians, Canada-born individuals with European heritage, and Canada-born individuals with Chinese heritage were given a questionnaire to answer either in English or in Chinese. Their responses showed significant differences in self-perception influenced by the language used during the experiment. Those who responded in Chinese aligned more with traditional Chinese perspectives and tended to describe themselves in ways that emphasized collective identity. Chinese language differs from English in the structure, since the "I am..." in English leads to descriptions using adjectives that describe traits, like "I am shy" or "I am happy" (Ross et al., 2002, p. 1042), while in Chinese this phrase is more commonly followed by a noun. Given this linguistic and the cultural difference (collectivist versus individualistic), Chinese-born participants' responses in Chinese showed greater reference to others (like family and friends) and more collective aspects of the self, like group membership, presenting less aspects of the personal self. In contrast, those writing in English showed a tendency similar to native Canadian participants, focusing more on positive self-descriptions, less aligning with Chinese cultural norms despite their background. These findings suggest that the language used by participants can significantly influence how they access and express cultural identities and self-perceptions. Writing in Chinese seemed to activate a more traditionally East Asian perspective of the self, therefore a more collectivist view, while writing in English prompted responses that were more aligned with Western norms of self-presentation, a more individualistic view. However, this study also highlighted that while language had a profound effect on self-perception and cultural alignment, the overall influence of cultural background was minimal. This supports the hypothesis proposed by Hong et al. (2000) that bicultural individuals may hold distinct cultural identities that are activated specifically by language, and therefore internalized cultures are not necessarily blended. Bicultural individuals might navigate their dual identities more

smoothly by switching between cultural frameworks depending on the social context. They might use this flexibility as a mechanism to cope with in culturally diverse environments.

3.2 Self-perception and personality

Having explored the diverse types of selves and how language and culture influence self-perceptions, the questions now are: do bilinguals feel differently when speaking a language or another? Do they perceive any changes in their personality? In the second chapter, we briefly touched on this topic with a quotation taken from the study by Hong et al. (2000), which highlighted a participant's altered experience when exposed to different contexts or languages. Child (cited in Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2013), defines personality as the quite stable "organization of a person's character, temperament, intellect, and physique" (Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2013), which shapes his/her peculiar adaptation to the surroundings. This definition implies that there is a relationship between personality and the environment in which individuals find themselves in. Research indicates that personality is influenced by culture. Moreover, bilingualism can impact personality, and switching languages can lead to substantial changes in self-perception and how one views the world. This paragraph aims to dig deeper into how personality and self-perception might be impacted by language and culture.

Wilson (2008, as cited in Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2012) pioneered the study of how individuals might feel different or perceive themselves as different when using a foreign language, specifically in relation to personality traits. She identified several factors, including personality traits, that affected how individuals felt about using a foreign language. Building on this, Ożańska-Ponikwia (2012) think that switching languages often results visibly in behavior, and they illustrate this idea with an example from Wilson's (2008, as cited in Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2012) study:

One day, I was talking on the telephone in Italian while my mother, who was visiting me from England, was sitting nearby. When I finished the call, she commented, “I only know it’s you when you laugh.” Did I really sound so different in another language? I was aware that I must look different because my right hand had been gesturing and waving of its own volition while I talked. Speaking English felt different from speaking Italian, but surely that was because I was talking to my Mother.

(Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2012, p. 218)

This description highlights the intriguing phenomenon of how using a different language can alter one’s behavior and even one’s perceived identity to others. Wilson’s mother notices a distinct change when her daughter speaks Italian, a change that is not just audible in her voice, but also visible in her unconscious gestures. The fact of speaking Italian engages different aspects of her identity. In fact, her mother notices her animated use of hand movements, typically seen in Italians, that are less pronounced when she speaks English, her native language. This example illustrates how individuals can cultivate multiple identities through immersion in two cultures.

Ożańska-Ponikwia (2012) provide another interesting perspective on the feeling or being different when using another language. Translingual writers, who write in more than one language, like Green and Tzvetan Todorov demonstrate that a narrative can transform significantly when expressed and told in two different languages.

Ramírez-Esparza et al. (2006) conducted a sequence of studies involving highly proficient Spanish-English bilinguals using the Big Five Inventory. This personality test assesses five personality dimensions: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness, in both English and Spanish versions. Initially, they distributed this test online to a large sample of Spanish speakers in Mexico and English speakers in the USA, to identify any personality variances across these cultures. Results indicated that participants from the USA exhibited higher levels of Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness compared to their Mexican counterparts, who scored higher on Neuroticism. In subsequent studies, bilingual individuals from both the USA and Mexico completed the Big Five Inventory twice, once in each language. Findings

revealed that bilinguals presented themselves as more extraverted, agreeable, and conscientious when responding in English compared to Spanish, with smaller differences observed in Neuroticism and Openness.

Dewaele and Oudenhoven (2009) studied the relationship between multilingualism and personality in a group of 79 teenagers in London, half of whom were born abroad. They used the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire, in which multilingual individuals scored higher on Cultural Empathy and Open mindedness, and lower in Emotional Stability than participants who were dominant in one language only. This signifies that language use outside school might have an influence on the people's personality.

The psychological tool, known as the Big Five Personality Model, is widely recognized and utilized in many studies. It categorizes human personality into five broad domains, each representing personality at the highest level of abstraction. These traits are conceptualized as bipolar dimensions, such Extraversion versus Introversion, with each encompassing various sides. This model posits that these five domains effectively capture the significant variance in personality traits observed across individuals. The dimensions it assesses are comprehensively explained by Goldberg (cited in Larsen & Buss, 2021) who identified key adjectives for each dimension:

1. *Extraversion: "talkative, extraverted, assertive, forward, outspoken versus shy, quiet, introverted, bashful, inhibited"* (Larsen & Buss, 2021, p. 75); this trait features qualities like sociability, enthusiasm, and assertiveness. People who score high in Extraversion love social interaction, they often energize from gatherings and assume leadership roles, contrasting with introverts who are more reserved. This positive nature of extraverts often translates into greater happiness, especially when interacting with others.
2. *Agreeableness: "sympathetic, kind, warm, understanding, sincere versus unsympathetic, unkind, harsh, cruel"* (Larsen & Buss, 2021, p. 75); this trait reflects a person's inclination towards altruism, kindness, and affection, highlighting their cooperative and social harmony-driven nature. People who score high in Agreeableness like peaceful and harmonious interactions and

desire to get along all together. They are more likely to avoid conflicts, but when they have one, they prefer to solve it negotiation rather than coercion. They are empathetic and possess a strong ability to understand other's feelings, they enjoy helping others and value prosocial behaviors.

3. *Conscientiousness*: “*organized, neat, orderly, practical, prompt, meticulous versus disorganized, disorderly, careless, sloppy, impractical*” (Larsen & Buss, 2021, p. 75); it measures meticulousness, reliability, and the ability to organize, pointing to a person's level of discipline and management of responsibilities. Conscientious individuals exhibit hard work, punctuality, and reliability, showing dedication also for long-term goals.
4. *Emotional Stability/Neuroticism*: “*calm, relaxed, stable versus moody, anxious, insecure*” (Larsen & Buss, 2021, p. 76); this dimension measures emotional stability and the tendency to experience negative emotions like anxiety and depression. Neurotic people have difficulties in coping with stress and are more likely to experience greater mood swings. In social interactions, neurotic individuals have more “ups and downs” (Larsen & Buss, 2021, p. 80).
5. *Imagination/Openness to Experience*: “*creative, imaginative, intellectual versus uncreative, unimaginative, unintellectual*” (Larsen & Buss, 2021, p. 76); this trait features characteristics like imagination, creativity, curiosity, and preference for new things. People who score high in Openness like to vary in their lives and engage in new experiences. They tend to be more creative and open-minded towards diverse culture and ideas, resulting in a lower tendency for prejudices and negative stereotypes.

Research utilizing the Big Five Model has shown an influence of culture and language on personality. Specifically, Allik and McCrae (2004) found notable differences from Asian and African cultures with Europeans, in terms of Extraversion and Openness to Experience. Europeans scored higher in these traits. Furthermore, their research indicated that cultures in Southern Europe displayed higher levels of Neuroticism compared to those in Northern Europe. Cultures with high levels of Extraversion tend to value democracy and exhibit traits of individualism, such as self-expression.

These traits, according to McCrae (2004), are typical of Western values and high scores of Extraversion were most prevalent in Europe and the USA. Similarly, cultures that scored high in Openness and Agreeableness had stronger individualistic tendencies.

3.2.1 Personality and emotional expression

In chapter one the influence of culture on emotional expression was explored. In this paragraph, however, the role of personality in how individuals regulate emotions is going to be investigated. According to Matsumoto (2006), indeed, personality significantly affects how emotions are controlled and perceived, and emotions are linked with “mood, temperament, personality and disposition, and motivation” (Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2013).

Hull (1987, cited in Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2012) studied 76 Chinese-English and Korean-English bilinguals using the California Psychological Inventory (CPI). Participants completed the CPI twice, once in their native language and once in English, showing different personality traits depending on the language used during the test. In further research with Spanish-English bilinguals, Hull (1996, cited in Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2012) observed that scores on the Good Impression factor were higher in Spanish than in English. This may be because Spanish-speaking countries are considered collectivist cultures, which emphasize interpersonal harmony and group affiliation. Additionally, responses in English tended to reflect higher Intellectual Efficiency, which the author of the study suggested could be due to the individualistic values of American-English culture. This indicates that a shift in language might cause a shift in behavior to align with the cultural norms associated with each culture.

Pavlenko (2006) expanded on Dewaele and Pavlenko’s (2001-2003, cited in Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2012) findings, using introspective data from a web questionnaire where 1039 bilingual individuals responded to how their self-perception changes with the language used. The results suggested that the perception of multiple selves among bilinguals is influenced by linguistic, cultural, and contextual differences. This phenomenon is observed not only in immigrant or late bilinguals but

is a common aspect of the bilingual experience, affecting how individuals are perceived and perform in different languages. Among all the participants, 675 (65%) bilinguals responded affirmatively to the question “Do you feel like a different person sometimes when you use your different languages?” (Pavlenko, 2006, p. 6), 266 (26%) responded negatively, 64 (6%) gave an ambiguous response, and the remaining 34 (3%) didn’t answer. Participants provided interesting responses, noting that using a different language often necessitates adopting the cultural norms and behaviors associated with that language. This identifies language and culture as a “unified package that defines the way the native speakers talk” (Pavlenko, 2006), and that is consequently linked with personality, as exemplified by two responses taken from Pavlenko (2006):

Yes; it is difficult to explain but it's like you conform yourself to the way the native speakers talk and express themselves which is not necessarily the same as yours. For example the way the Greek people speak is very lively and very expressive. If I were to speak in the same way in English (or even German & French) people would misunderstand me and misinterpret my intentions - as it has happened many times. (Anna, 24, Greek-German-English-French)

Yes because the use of a certain language demands that you act according to the behavioral norms of the corresponding culture. (Anastasia, 25, Greek-English-French-Italian-Chinese)

(Pavlenko, 2006, p. 11)

Participants’ answers suggest having one language corresponding to one personality. Mastering one language requires adopting its cultural norms, certain cultural viewpoints, behave according to the cultural standards, and speak in a manner that aligns with the way native speakers communicate. This recalls the concept of language socialization, which posits that communication within a community serves as an important means for individuals to acquire the specific ways of thinking, behaving, and feeling that are characteristic of that community (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2011).

Other examples taken from (Pavlenko, 2006) show that participants are aware of a shift in personality when changing language:

Yes. L1 is associated with all that I can't change in my life anymore for the better or for the worse: family childhood memories professional history up to a certain point etc. L2 (English) mostly and L3 (Spanish) are associated with my present and my dreamed future so they are kind of a bridge to this other person I might become. (Karen, 34, Brazilian-Portuguese-English-Spanish-French-Italian)

Yes of course. I feel much more sophisticated when I speak English probably because I learnt it from sophisticated people in a private college in York some time ago. When I speak Dutch I feel like a more precise person. I learned to use it in a very precise and accurate way and for example never to mix up one word with another. (Clement, 18, French-Dutch-Italian-English)

(Pavlenko, 2006, p. 12)

These responses highlight how a language can be tied to a certain context and time in one's life. For example, Karen associates her first language (L1) with her past, and her other languages (L2, L3) with present and future. Clement underscores the impact of learning environments and the consequent association with personality. Having learnt English in a private college in York gives the participant a sense of sophistication, and having studied Dutch in an accurate way makes the participant feel "more precise" when speaking this language. The notion that each language equates to a distinct personality and the concept of language socialization suggest that speakers are somewhat passive in their language use, who are shaped by the language rather than actively shape it themselves. This idea recalls the theory of linguistic relativity, also known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, as explained in the second chapter. The topic of bilingualism has been used to challenge this hypothesis. Some critics, indeed, argued that if linguistic relativity were true, and consequently bilinguals would have to think differently according to the language in use, they would struggle with internal communication and translation between one language and another in order to convey the same meaning. However, more recent arguments assert that languages are not incompatible, since translation is possible, and that bilinguals do not perceive the world differently when switching languages. Yet, the experiences shared by participants in Pavlenko's (2006) study contradict this statement by affirming that their thoughts, behaviors, and perception of the self and the world do indeed shift with their language use.

Respondents in Pavlenko's (2006) study also attribute a sense of artificiality to their second languages, while their first one is perceived as more natural. Some of them also mentioned to wear a mask when speaking other languages than their first one:

Yes and I think it is natural because when you use your first language you are yourself with all of your acquired habits but using another language need to have a Mask and it may give you a sense of being another Person. (Karim, 35, Farsi-English-German)

Absolutely. I feel I can hide my emotions and myself a lot better in English. In Spanish I feel a lot more 'naked'. (Dolores, 31, Spanish- English-German-French)

(Pavlenko, 2006, p. 18, 20)

Pavlenko (2006) analyzed these responses noting that the perceiving artificiality when using secondary languages could arise from the challenges of navigating less familiar linguistic "repertoires" learnt later in life. Conversely, the comfort reported by some participants in using their first language, could be due to the fact that they master it better and are more familiar with it. However, according to Keely (2018), speaking a foreign language can provide a sense of liberation or freedom, especially when one has a high level of proficiency and has developed a new linguistic and cultural identity. This feeling might appear because in your native culture, you are bound by norms, values, and behaviors that your culture expects from you. It allows you to express yourself without the weight of cultural connotations that might inhibit your thoughts or speech, offering a way to communicate without self-censorship.

The participants who responded negatively to the question of Pavlenko's (2006) study "Do you feel like a different person sometimes when you use your different languages?", see themselves as rather one single unit and consistent, even if they recognize that they change their way of thinking or cultural perspective:

I used to at first several years ago. Now I feel that the two cultures (i.e. French vs American) are so different that the language is just a way to express these cultural differences but using a different language doesn't change the core of who I am. I am americanized to a certain extent but only to fit North American cultural situations. I 'act French' so to speak as soon as I am back in France or speaking in French with French people. (Diane, 38, French-English-Spanish)

(Pavlenko, 2006, p. 24)

Interestingly, some respondents view bilingualism or multilingualism as a richness, appreciating how it allows them to express different aspects of their personality in distinct ways. However, for others, this duality can lead to anxiety or discomfort stemming from a sense of incompleteness in each language or a lack of a clear and unified identity.

3.3 Language choice and emotional expression

According to the cultural theory of emotions, “emotions are learned behaviors, transmitted culturally, much like languages” (Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2013). If this theory proves right, people from different cultures should experience emotions differently. Research by Pavlenko (2008) indicates that while people experience the same emotions, different languages might provide various ways to access and express those feelings, thus influencing how we articulate them.

Since bilinguals possess two distinct linguistic systems and two different ways of expressing themselves, they may face challenges in selecting which language to use when expressing emotions, either positive or negative. Additionally, they might also struggle to convey concepts in their second language (L2) that have the same meaning in their first language (L1).

The study by Kheirzadeh and Hajiabed (2016) explored differences in emotional expressivity between Persian monolinguals and Persian-English bilinguals. The results contradicted the idea proposed by Marian and Kaushanskava (2004), stating that the first language is more “emotion laden” (Kheirzadeh & Hajiabed, 2016, p. 56) than the second language, and consequently it is most selected for expressing positive emotions. In their study, however, no significant differences were found

between monolinguals and bilinguals in expressing happy memories. While it is commonly believed that the first language is deeply connected to emotional expression, research indicates that people might opt to express emotions in their second language to avoid the stress and anxiety associated with certain words and feelings. For instance, Ayçiçeğ'i and Harris (2004) suggested that bilingual individuals might use their second language as a protective measure, distancing themselves from the intense emotions tied to sad experiences. Indeed, the second language is considered as “the language of emotional distance” (Ayçiçeğ'i & Harris, 2004, p. 978) and therefore bilinguals, using their second language, might feel freer to talk about topics that might be sensitive or uncomfortable in their first language. Moreover, bilinguals process negative words in a deeper way in their second language because emotional weight and impact is typically less intense than in their first language. This lighter emotional weight in a second language can make it more comfortable for them to use and handle emotionally charged words.

Wilson (2008, cited in Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2013), who was the first to study the notion of “feeling different” while speaking another language, noted that more introverted individuals, described as “reserved”, “quiet”, and “shy” (Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2013) often acknowledge that speaking in a foreign language not only alters their vocal expression and behavior, but also helps them to free from their inhibitions.

Pavlenko (2008) outlines three potential relationships between concepts when compared and expressed in two languages: first similar or identical concepts that are present in both languages, that allows for a full overlap of these concepts in the two languages. Second, a concept in one language may lack a direct equivalent in the other, requiring speakers to create other structures to express these concepts. Third, there may be partial overlap where concepts in the two languages only somewhat correspond, with one concept perhaps being represented differently both lexically and conceptually. Moreover, the proficiency and exposure bilinguals have in their second language (L2) can significantly influence how they interpret and express emotions. Bilinguals may struggle with articulating their feelings because of the limited vocabulary in their L2. They may lack the precise

words needed to express complex emotional states. Given these difficulties, bilinguals might utilize strategies like code-switching and borrowing to express themselves, as discussed in the previous chapter.

The study by Ożańska-Ponikwia (2013) involved 137 Polish-English participants, who answered an online questionnaire to investigate the perception and expression of emotions in a foreign language. It focused also on personality changes according to the language spoken. The results showed that some participants had difficulties in expressing emotions in their L2. Interestingly, one participant claimed she always has difficulties in expressing emotions in English, since her emotions can't be translated and they don't make any sense in this language, while they find full expression in Polish (her L1). This confirmed Wierzbicka's (2004) theory, which stated that since emotions are culture-specific and provide unique emotional vocabularies and scripts, they can't be translated from one language to another. Some participants claimed they never have difficulties in expressing emotions, and this may be due to their level of proficiency in their second language. Concerning intimate situations, some participants claimed to encounter difficulties in finding the right words to express what they feel, even though they know English well. This is one of the participant's answers:

When I want to express very intimate emotions I seem to try to translate them from Polish and I'm usually unsuccessful. It's so hard to talk about so important feelings in English.

(Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2013)

When expressing negative emotions, participants declared their L2 as inappropriate or senseless, or not too weak in meaning (Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2013), confirming Dewaele's (2004) idea that individuals swear more in their L1 than in their L2, since it has more emotional force. Even in stressful situations, participants claimed to use more their L1. According to Dewaele (2010, mentioned in Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2013) when individuals find themselves in emotional interactions, they need to quickly access their most dominant linguistic repertoire, which usually belongs to their L1, and they also need to choose a language in which they feel comfortable.

Expressing positive emotions was also a problem, since a simple translation from one language to another doesn't convey the same meanings, as one participant said:

In those rare moments of happiness when your emotions are so intense and you feel like dancing on the street or kissing a person who passes by, all attempts to find an English word to explain this mixture of feelings seems to ruin the moment. Saying that 'I'm happy' makes me feel kind of weird as I feel so much more than that. How to express that if there's no vocabulary in English that is corresponding to my Polish emotions? Well, I simply don't.

(Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2013)

This response indicates that when participants are unable to express themselves in their L2, they prefer to code-switch to their L1. Additionally, it was found that the English language tends to require a suppression of emotions, whereas Polish culture actively encourages the verbal and non-verbal expression of emotions. This makes it hard for Polish-English bilinguals to decide which cultural-script apply.

Chapter 4

Study: The role of language and culture in shaping the world

4.1 Introduction

The present research stems from the desire to explore how language and culture shape our perception of the world. Specifically, it focuses on bilingual individuals, who, recalling the definition by Baker (2011), are able to switch between languages, dialects, or language varieties according to the context and conversation. In the current research, the first language is defined as L1, often considered as the native language. The second language referred to as L2, is typically any language learned after the native one. This ability to navigate between languages allow bilinguals to access unique cultural perspectives, potentially influencing their worldviews and thinking.

Given this scenario, the current study aims at investigating deeper into these dynamics by analyzing how bilingual individuals perceive themselves and interact across different linguistic contexts. It examines the influence of language and culture on emotional and social experiences, investigating variations in how bilinguals feel different, how they express emotions, or relate to others when they switch languages.

To explore these dynamics, a study employing the Big Five Personality Inventory was conducted, which is a tool designed to measure personality traits and self-perception. This study is intended to provide insights into the complex relation between language, culture, and the world, contributing to a broader understanding of bilingualism not just as a linguistic ability, but as a cultural phenomenon that shapes the individuals' experiences and reality.

4.2 Research questions

The data collected through the questionnaire was used to answer the following questions:

1. Do language and culture influence our perception of the world? How?
2. Does our culture influence the way we use and interpret language?

3. In what way does bilingualism influence people's perception of the world?
4. Do bilinguals perceive themselves differently when speaking their second language? How?
5. Do bilinguals perceive cultural differences? Do they influence cross-cultural communication?

4.3 Methods

4.3.1 Participants

The current study investigates bilingual individuals, collecting 58 responses totally. 31 participants completed the English version of the questionnaire, while 27 the Italian one. Approximately 30 responses were anticipated given the challenge of locating bilinguals who are also willing to participate. Age distribution among participants is as follows: 48,3% (28) participants are aged 19-24 years old, 27,6% (16) are aged 25-30 years old, 6,9% (4) participants are aged 30-35 years old and 17,2% (10) are aged 35 or more years old. Among these participants, 40 (69%) identified themselves as females, 17 as males (29,3%) and one (1,7%) as non-binary. Participants came from all over the world. Specifically, as table 1 shows, 18 (31%) participants came from Italy, 7 (12,1%) from the United States, 6 (10,3%) from Mexico, 3 (5,2%) from Brazil, 3 (5,2%) from Canada, 2 (3,4%) from Germany, 2 (3,4%) from Kosovo, 2 (3,4%) from Romania, 2 (3,4%) from Morocco, one (1,7%) from Uruguay, one (1,7%) from Japan, one (1,7%) from Australia, one (1,7%) from Sri Lanka, one (1,7%) from Saudi Arabia, one (1,7%) from Serbia, one (1,7%) from Albania, one (1,7%) from Bulgaria, one (1,7%) from San Marino, one (1,7%) from Turkey, one (1,7%) from Trinidad and Tobago, and one (1,7%) from Puerto Rico.

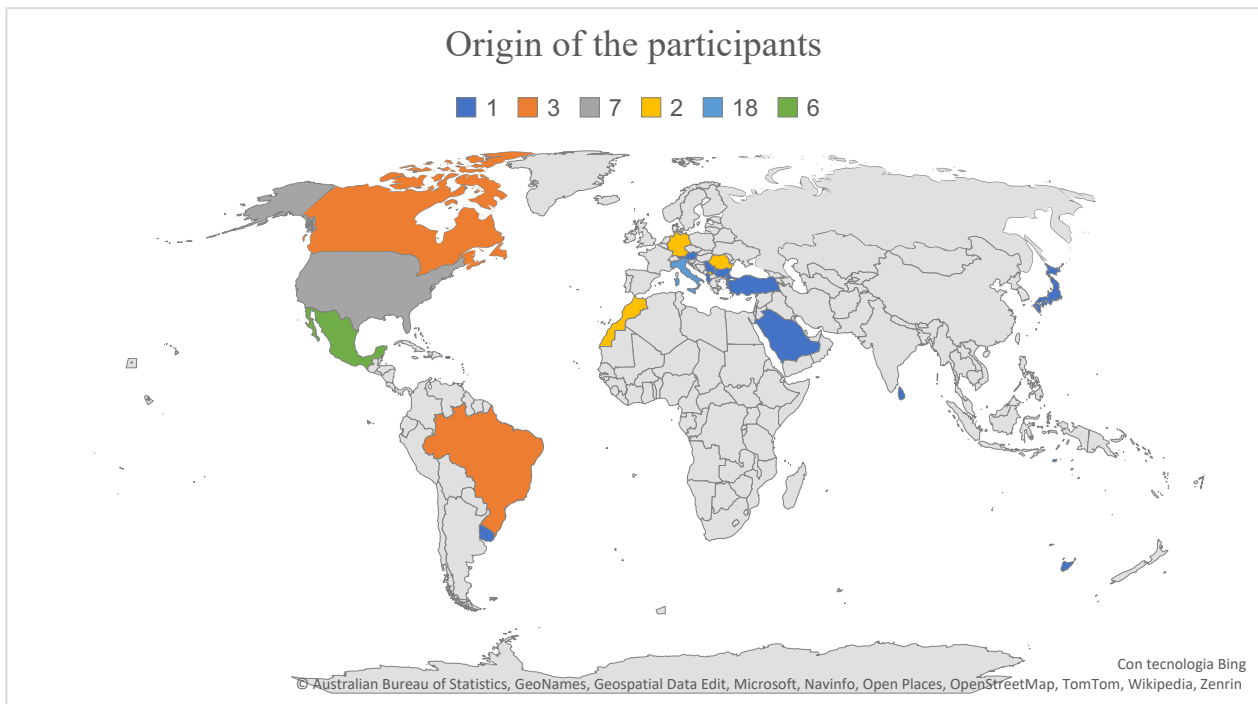


Table 1

34 (58,6%) participants spoke 2 languages fluently, 18 (31%) spoke 3 languages fluently, and 6 (10,3%) 4 or more languages. Among these languages, 22 (37,9%) participants claimed that their L1 (first language) is Italian, 12 (20,7%) Spanish, 7 (12,1%) English, 4 (6,9%) Arabic, 3 (5,2%) German, 2 (3,4%) Albanian, 2 (3,4%) Romanian, 2 (3,4%) Portuguese, one (1,7%) Japanese, and one (1,7%) Serbian. Interestingly, 2 (3,4%) participants identified the Venetian dialect as their L1.

4.3.2 Instruments and questions

For this study a questionnaire was designed and distributed using Google Form. Two versions of the questionnaires were created, one in English and one in Italian, to allow participants to select their preferred language. It was spread via social media platforms (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp) via a shared link. The questionnaire included both closed and open-ended questions, organized into five distinct sections, each aimed at exploring different aspects of the participants' experiences and perceptions.

First, general questions were asked to collect demographic information about the participants: their age, gender, origin, languages spoken, which one they consider their L1, and how often they use

their L2 (*daily; regularly; sometimes; rarely; never*). Moreover, their cultural and linguistic background was investigated, asking the way they became bilingual.

The next section assessed the perceived influence of language and culture on participants' worldview and interactions. The first two questions were: *how often do you think your language influences the way you perceive the world and interact with it?* and the second one had the same format but with culture as object. Participants had to answer one option among *never; rarely; sometimes; always*. For both above questions, participants were prompted to provide an explanation to clarify their choices. Afterwards, participants were asked about the aspects of their lives that are mostly influenced by their cultural background. They could choose more than one option among: *values and beliefs; non-verbal language (gestures, facial expressions, body posture, eye contact); behavioral rules (in public, with family and friends, at school, at work); expression of emotions; social roles (respect for authority, social hierarchy); communication style (greetings, degree of formality); interpersonal space; presence of silence in conversation; others;* and through an open question, they were asked to provide an example or a situation that could explain their above responses.

The third section explored how participants use their languages across different contexts and various individuals. Seven questions had the same format, in which participants had to select the language they use in the specific situation described in the statements:

- *When I am angry I express myself in...*
- *When I am happy I express myself in...*
- *When I am angry I think in...*
- *When I am happy I think in...*
- *At home I speak...*
- *With my friends I speak...*
- *At school or work I speak...*

Participants could select one of the following options: *my L1; my L2; mostly in my L1 but also in my L2; mostly in my L2 but also in my L1; my L3, L4,...; none of the above*. Then, respondents had to say whether they experience or not or sometimes the following scenarios:

- *When I am speaking my L1, I borrow words from other languages to express what I want to say;*
- *When I am speaking my L1, I switch to another language and then I go back to the first language;*
- *Have you ever experienced challenges in expressing a concept in one language that seems to lose its essence or feels different when translated into another language?*

The fourth section aimed at discovering participants' self-perception in relation to culture and language. For this part of the questionnaire the Ten Item Personality Inventory (TIPI) of the Big Five Model was employed. It is a concise tool developed to evaluate the five-factor model (FFM) of personality traits. It was designed to provide a quick evaluation in studies when using more extensive measures would be impractical. This instrument is widely utilized and has been translated into various languages. For this study, the English and the Italian versions were utilized to understand how participants view themselves when speaking their L1 and their L2. With the TIPI, each dimension of the Big Five Model is measured through four adjectives that participants have to rate using a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Extraversion is measured through the adjectives *extraverted, enthusiastic, reserved, quiet*; Agreeableness with *sympathetic, warm, critical, quarrelsome*; Conscientiousness with *dependable, self-disciplined, disorganized, carelessness*; Emotional Stability with *calm, emotionally stable, anxious, easily upset*; Openness to Experiences with *open to new experiences, complex, conventional, uncreative* (Gosling et al., 2003). In the present study, participants were asked to use the TIPI twice, once for describing themselves while speaking their L1, and the other for their L2.

The final section investigated participants' interactions with individuals from different cultural backgrounds, to determine if they observed any differences concerning non-verbal behavior

(interpersonal space, eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, or no differences noticed) or emotional expression between the two cultures.

4.4 Results

Participants were asked about how they became bilinguals, with the possibility to select more than one option. The bar chart below illustrates the distribution of responses. The most selected option, “Regular interaction with friends, partners, or colleagues who speak a different language”, was chosen 26 times. Close behind, 24 participants reported learning a second language through formal language courses. 23 participants grew up in bilingual families where two languages were spoken from childhood. Additionally, 16 respondents claimed to have lived abroad for a period in a country where the second language is spoken. 11 participants attended a bilingual school or a language immersion program during primary or secondary education, and 8 were self-taught using online resources, language learning apps, or other multimedia resources. Six participants chose the “other” option to describe their own background: “at home they have always spoken a language and then when I started the nursery school I started to learn my second language”, “my family migrated to a different country where my second language is spoken”, “born in Italy but my parents are from Romania”, “they taught me the language from childhood and then I learnt Italian at school”, “I’m an immigrant”, and “born in Uruguay and learnt the language from childhood”.

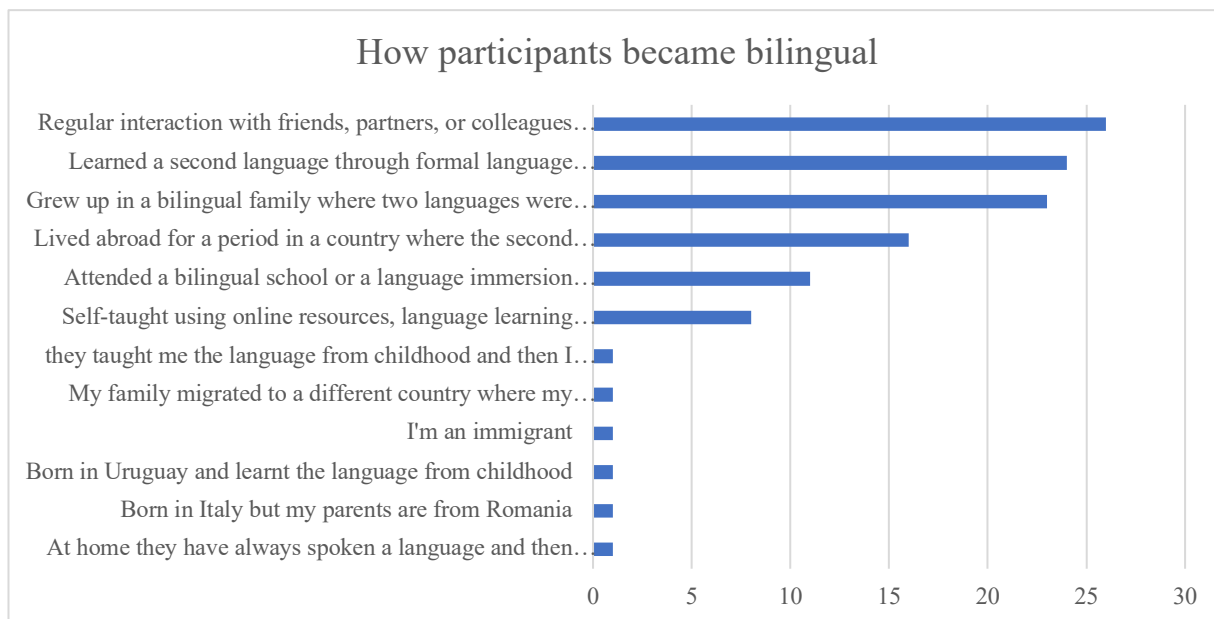


Table 2

Among the participants, 45 (77,6%) reported using their L2 (second language) daily. 8 (13,8%) use it regularly, 4 (6,9%) sometimes and one (1,7%) rarely.

When asked about the extent to which language influences their perception of the world and interaction with it, the majority, 33 (56,9%) participants, answered “sometimes”. Meanwhile, 19 (32,8%) answered “always”, 4 (6,9%) “rarely”, and 2 (3,4%) believe language “never” has an effect. A similar question regarding the influence of culture was proposed, and half of participants (29; 50%) responded that it “always” has an influence. 25 (43,1%) participants selected “sometimes”, 3 (5,2%) “rarely”, and one (1,7%) “never”. Afterwards, participants were given the opportunity to select (with multiple selections allowed) which aspects of their lives are most influenced by culture. As illustrated in the bar chart below, the most frequently selected option was “behavioral rules (in public, with family and friends, at school, at work)”, chosen by 48 participants, closely followed by 45 participants selecting “communication style (greetings, degree of formality)”. Afterwards, 43 participants selected “values and beliefs”, while “non verbal language (gestures, facial expressions, body gestures)” was selected by 34 participants. The option “social roles (respect for authority, social hierarchy)” was chosen by 32 participants, “expression of emotions” by 25, and “interpersonal space” by 13. Two

participants utilized the “other” option to add “diet” and “expectancies” as aspects influenced by culture. Participants were then asked to provide an example through an open question.

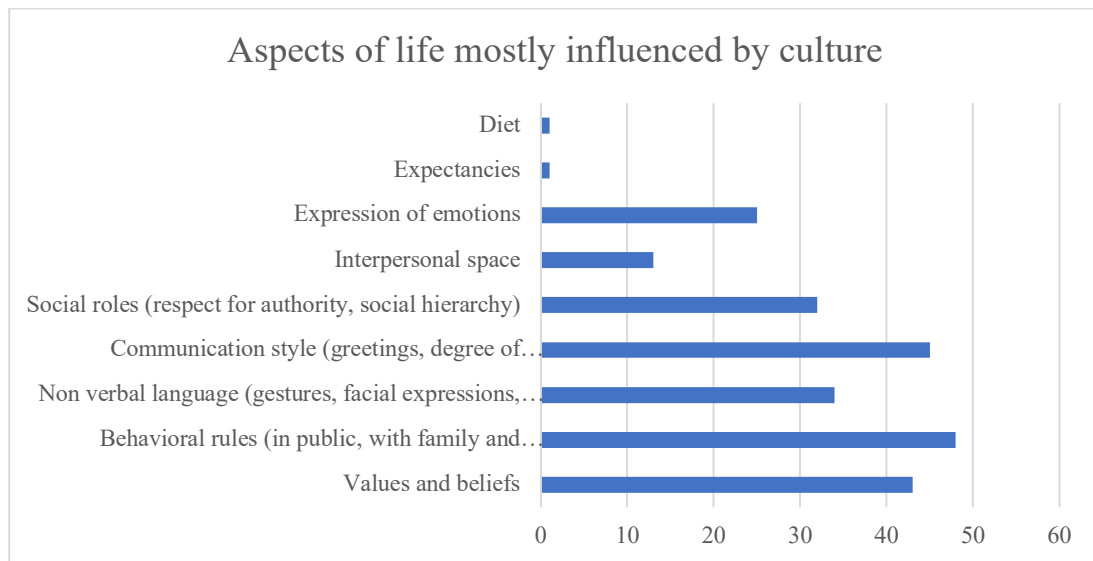


Table 3

When examining how bilinguals express emotions linguistically, the data revealed nuanced preferences. When angry, 23 (39,7%) participants typically express themselves primarily in their L1, while an equivalent percentage also reported using mostly their L1 but also their L2. A smaller group, 7 (12,1%) participants claimed to express anger mostly in their L2, but also in their L1. Only 3 (5,2%) participants reported using exclusively their L2, and 2 (3,4%) did not relate to any of the provided options. Conversely, when happy, a slightly larger number of participants (26; 44,8%), claimed to use mostly their L1, but also their L2. Additionally, 11 (19%) participants expressed happiness mostly in their L2 but also in their L1.

At home, half of the participants (29; 50%) reported primarily using their L1, and a small number (2; 3.4%) opting for their L2. In contrast, at school or work, the second language was more prevalent, with 22 (37,9%) participants favoring it. When interacting with friends, the majority of participants (23; 39,7%) indicated they predominantly use their L1, but also their L2.

When discussing the phenomenon of language *borrowing*, more than half of the participants (32; 55,2%) participants reported borrowing words from other languages to express themselves in

their L1. Additionally, 23 (39,7%) participants claimed they sometimes use *code-switching* when speaking their L1, 21 (36,2%) said they use it, and 14 (24,1%) participants don't use it at all. Almost all participants (47; 84,5%) declared to experience challenges in expressing a concept in one language that seems to lose its essence or feels different when translated into another language.

For what it concerns the fourth section of questions, participants were asked if their personality changes when speaking another language. Almost half of the participants (27; 46,6%) answered positively, 15 (25,9%) negatively, and the remaining 16 (27,6%) didn't know. Participants were then asked to provide an example through an open question. Afterwards, the question utilizing the TIPI collected information on how participants see themselves when speaking their L1 and their L2. In the Italian version of the questionnaire, when speaking their L1, participants described themselves mainly as dependable and self-disciplined, open to new experiences and complex, sympathetic and warm, and calm and emotionally stable. These results align with high levels of Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, Openness to Experiences, and lower levels of Neuroticism. Similar traits were observed in the English version of the questionnaire with the addition of being extraverted and enthusiastic, indicating also elevated levels of Extraversion. The trait of Agreeableness showed variability, with participants also acknowledging critical and quarrelsome tendencies. When speaking their L2, shifts in personality were noted in both versions of the questionnaire. Respondents to the Italian version rated themselves as more extraverted, slightly more critical and quarrelsome, slightly less dependable and self-disciplined, more reserved and quieter, more sympathetic and warmer, and more emotionally stable and calmer. Respondents to the English version rated themselves as more extraverted and enthusiastic, significantly less critical and quarrelsome, more reserved and quieter, slightly less sympathetic and warm, and more emotionally stable and calmer.

The final section of the questionnaire concerned participants' exposure to cultural differences, revealing that a small fraction, only 3 (5,2%) out of 58 participants, reported never having been exposed to a different culture. When asked about specific aspects of cultural differences they had experienced, the responses varied significantly, as highlighted in the graph below (table 4): "gestures"

were the most frequently noted aspect, with 30 (51,7%) participants, “interpersonal space” was highlighted by 23 (39,7%) participants, “facial expression” by 18 (31%) participants, and “eye contact” by 10 (17,2%) participants. Unique responses included one participant (1,7%) noting differences in “how they think and talk”, another one (1,7%) recognizing differences in all mentioned aspects, and one (1,7%) observed no differences.

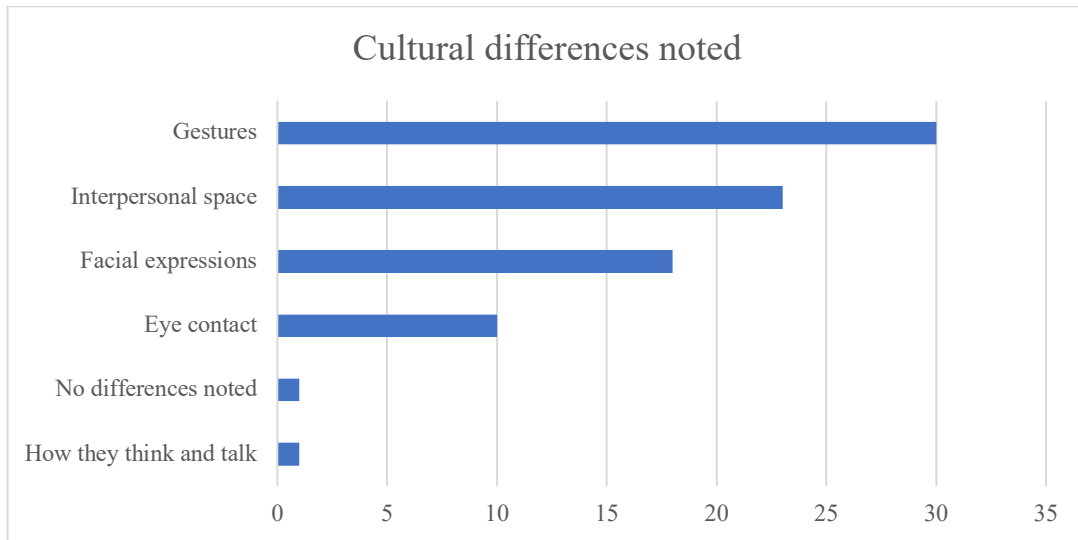


Table 4

When asked about differences in expressing emotions, more than half of participants (37; 64,9% responded positively, 3 (5,3%) negatively, and 17 (29,8%) didn't know.

4.5 Discussion

The present study aimed at exploring the influence of language and culture in the perception of the world, with a specific focus on bilingual individuals. The data collected answered the questions below.

1. *Does language and culture influence our perception of the world? How?*

In examining the influence of language, the majority of participants noted that language sometimes impacts their perception of the world, while cultural influences are perceived as constant. These findings align with the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, also known as linguistic relativity, which posits that language shapes thought and, consequently, our interpretation of the world. More precisely, these results resonate with the modern interpretations of this theory, referred to as Neo-Whorfian theories. These theories suggest that influence of language on thought and perception is more flexible and context-dependent than originally theorized. The Neo-Whorfian perspective acknowledges that while language affects thought, individuals are not limited within rigid cognitive boundaries. Instead, linguistic structures can guide but not completely dictate what we think (Casasanto, 2008). This is why the majority of participants may have answered that language *sometimes* has an influence on their perception of the world.

Moreover, Neo-Whorfian theories consider the role of cultural context, positing that cultural norms and values, embedded within language use, significantly contribute to molding our thought and perception. One participant, indeed, manifested her awareness of the social rules and that she knows how to behave in different contexts and situations (for example at work, or how to interrupt a conversation). From the participants' responses to the open questions, it emerged that many aspects of their lives are influenced by culture. Interestingly, many participants mentioned the cultural influence on family values. For example, a participant from Canada wrote:

Family values. Growing up the importance of family was always present. Big Sunday dinners and celebrations of birthdays. This instilled family values that have stayed with me throughout my life.

Another participant with Taiwanese origins, which is considered by Ali et al. (2005) a collectivistic country, compared American traditions with Taiwan:

Always respecting your elders in America and Taiwan. Taiwanese people like to eat dinner together more often than Americans. Taiwanese people are more family oriented.

Collectivistic cultures, indeed, prioritize the community, emphasizing harmony and cohesion. To achieve collective harmony, collectivistic societies tend to inhibit the I-perspective, giving less space to self-expression and open-mindedness (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). This aspect was highlighted by two participants:

People in the US (L2 country) are more open minded.

Sento di avere un'apertura mentale diversa rispetto alle persone del mio paese di origine (che non è lo stesso del paese in cui sono cresciuto e sto vivendo).

The first participant was from Germany. According to Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Načinović Braje et al., 2019), Germany scored lower on individualism compared to the United States. Similarly, the second participant was from Bulgaria but grew up in Italy. Bulgaria, indeed, scored lower in individualism than Italy (Načinović Braje et al., 2019).

Regarding interpersonal space, a participant from Mexico noted that the interpersonal distance in interactions is "smaller compared to the Americans". Another participant mentioned that in Morocco people greet each other with kisses even if they do not know each other, highlighting a practice that is not common in Italy. This resonates the classification of contact and non-contact cultures, where Mexico and Morocco are considered contact cultures (Sorokowska et al., 2017).

2. Does our culture influence the way we use and interpret language?

To answer this question, both verbal and non-verbal language will be considered. As Delmonico (2023) stated, paralinguistic is a fundamental aspect of communication, encompassing "intonation, vocalization, gestures, body movements, eye-contact, speed, pitch, and facial expressions" (Delmonico, 2023, p.1). Just as verbal language is profoundly shaped by culture, so too is paralinguistic. Three participants highlighted how their ways of using gestures and facial expressions could talk about their cultural background:

Mi viene spesso detto che “si vede che sono italiana”, dal modo di parlare e gesticolare, anche quando parlo in altre lingue.

With my Italian friends I tend to use more hand gestures and facial expressions than I would do with my English-speaking friends. I also tend to joke a lot more with my Italian-speaking friends. In my home country, Japan, the amount of physical contact used as greetings, such as handshakes and hugs, is significantly less than in American culture. However, I was exposed to such American culture during my time in Japan.

Sicuramente il gesticolare fa parte dell’essere italiana, così come ad esempio il silenzio nelle conversazioni che spesso viene percepito come imbarazzo.

Recalling Hall (cited in Wurtz, 2005), Italy is considered a high-context culture, and therefore, it uses a lot of non-verbal language to convey meanings in communication, compared to English-speaking countries.

Another aspect of language influenced by culture that emerged in the study is the degree of formality used in interactions. Collectivistic cultures, given the value of the community and the great respect for others, tend to include words and pronouns that indicate a hierarchy (Hofstede, 2011). Certain linguistic rules and the formal use of the language are determined by cultural expectations that influences social interactions (Bozorboeva Ominakhon, 2023). A participant from Mexico, considered as a collectivistic country, recalled the findings from Nguyen (2018), where participants evaluated the use of the form *you* with everyone, regardless of their social status:

Informal language in English is normal (speaking with elders) follows the same structure of any other person, without showing any “respect”.

Similarly, another participant from Japan and with Korean and Latin origins, also considered as collectivistic cultures, noted:

In my home country, Japan, we have a culture of respecting and valuing others. In particular, we have a strong tendency to use honorific language when speaking to people older than us.

Culturally, in Korean and most Latino cultures there is this hierarchy when it comes to age and how we speak to people of different ages. Using formal or informal speech is a big part of the culture and can be perceived from others if a person has manners or not.

Another participant claimed that people in Turkey use the word *abla* (which means aunt) with everyone even if they don't know them to show respect.

3. *In what way does bilingualism influence people's perception of the world?*

According to Grosjean (2013), bilingual individuals typically learn and use their languages for various purposes, across different areas of life and with different groups of people. Different aspects of their daily lives often necessitate the use of different languages. In this way, bilinguals assign each language they know to distinct domains of their lives, such as work or school, home or with friends. In this study, most of participants reported using their L1 or mostly their L1 but also their L2, suggesting that they associate their first language with the "home" domain. Moreover, findings revealed that at school or work participants mainly used their L2, while with friends they predominantly use their L1, but also their L2. Indeed, when participants were asked about the way they became bilinguals, the three mostly chosen options were "Regular interaction with friends, partners, or colleagues who speak a different language", "Grew up in a bilingual family where two languages were spoken from childhood", and "Learned a second language through formal language courses (e.g., language schools, university)". As Albarillo (2018) highlighted with his study, the second language (L2) is mainly used for school or academic purposes. This was noted by one participant, who used her L1 at home and her L2 at work:

quando parlo nella mia L2 mi sento più professionale ed intelligente.

Similarly, another participant who mainly used his L2 at school or work, claimed to be "more specifically referring" while using his L2. The participants statements suggest a conscious distinction between their language uses based on different contexts. The fact that participants use primarily their L2 in academic or professional environments indicates a functional categorization where the L2 is preferred for formal interactions, while the L1 is reserved for informal and familial contexts.

By assigning distinct language to different areas of their lives, bilinguals compartmentalize their linguistic skills (Grosjean et al., 2013). This can make it challenging for them to switch languages across various domains and contexts, as vocabulary and language use are often context specific. For example, a bilingual individual might be fluent in academic or professional vocabulary in their L2 but lack informal or familial vocabulary in that language. This contextual specialization can promote language switching, as each language may be tied to experiences and settings.

In this study, participants often borrow words from their other languages or code-switch, highlighting the interplay between their languages. Moreover, the findings underscored how bilinguals navigate linguistic challenges by integrating elements from both languages to fully express themselves, especially when certain concepts or emotions lack direct translations. This was remarked by three participants:

Molte parole in portoghese non hanno una vera e propria traduzione. Posso esprimere determinate espressioni ed emozioni solo attraverso la seconda lingua.

My language and culture (Arabic) uses a lot of phrases that cannot be translated into English.

When speaking about emotions/feelings in English (his L2) I find it harder than in Spanish.

This is also testified by the responses given to the question “Have you ever experienced challenges in expressing a concept in one language that seems to lose its essence or feels different when translated into another language?”, where almost all participants (49; 84,5%) responded affirmatively.

Regarding the expression of emotions, bilinguals might struggle with selecting the appropriate language to convey their feelings. In this study, participants reported using their L1 primarily to express positive emotions (happiness in this case). These findings align with Marian and Kaushanskava (2004), who identified the L1 as more “emotion laden” than the L2, and therefore preferred for positive emotions. In terms of negative emotions (anger in this case), participants also tended to use their L1, contradicting Ayçiçeğ̃i and Harris (2004), who suggested that bilinguals might use their L2 as a protective measure, considering it as the emotionally distanced language.

4. *Do bilinguals perceive themselves differently when speaking their second language? How?*

Almost half of the participants noted that their personality changes when speaking another language. These findings align with Pavlenko (2006), where a similar proportion of participants reported changes in personality. Many participants provided examples to support their responses, highlighting two distinct ways in which their personality change. Some participants claimed that speaking their L2, gives them a sense of freedom and self-confidence:

Quando mi esprimo in inglese credo di essere più sicura di me, più chiara e “trasparente” nel trasmettere i miei pensieri e le mie emozioni. Credo di essere un po’ più vivace del solito e generalmente mi sento più libera.

Quando mi esprimo nella mia L1 (italiano in questo caso) tendo ad essere più timida e riservata; invece, quando comunico in inglese mi ritrovo ad essere molto più aperta al dialogo e in un certo senso più estroversa.

Con gli spagnoli mi sento molto più “relax” e mi sento più libera di dire ciò che voglio. Mentre con gli italiani devo sempre stare attenta a cosa dico e a come dico le cose.

I am more extroverted and outgoing in my L2.

These statements reflect Keely’s (2018) thoughts, which suggest that speaking a foreign language provides a sense of freedom, especially when one has developed a new linguistic and cultural identity. This may occur because, in one’s native language and culture, there are norms, values, and behaviors that are expected. Consequently, one’s thoughts may be inhibited by these cultural norms, limiting the ability to express freely.

Other participants, conversely, noted being “more introvert”, “more shy” and “più insicura” when speaking their L2. This could be due to their lower linguistic proficiency compared to their L1 (Pavlenko, 2008). Without the same level of fluency, they may feel less confident and more hesitant to express themselves fully. This was also highlighted when the majority of participants claimed to be more confident when speaking their L1.

Participants who responded negatively recalled Pavlenko's (2006) results as well. Specifically, one participant claimed to recognize a change in perspective, but not in personality:

Core personality stays the same, but switching between L1 and L2 feels like putting on different glasses through which I see the world.

Responses to the TIPI in this study reveal shifts in personality traits when bilingual individuals switch between their L1 and L2. In their L1, participants described themselves as dependable, self-disciplined, open to new experiences, and emotionally stable, indicating high levels of Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, and Openness to Experiences. However, in their L2, they reported increased Extraversion and variability in Agreeableness. These findings align with Ramírez-Esparza et al. (2006), who noted higher levels of Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness when participants responded in English (their L2) compared to Spanish. English, often associated with individualistic and expressive cultures, encourages traits such as Extraversion and Openness, aligning with the higher Extraversion reported by the participants of this study. Allik and McCrae's (2004) research further supports these observations by highlighting how European cultures score higher on Extraversion and Openness compared to Asian and African cultures. This contextualizes why participants using English might align more with traits valued in Western cultures. Moreover, participants noted higher levels of Emotional Stability in their L2, as suggested by these statements:

I just feel happier and less depressed when speaking English, I guess (German as L1).

I speak almost more positive and cheerful (Spanish as L1).

People say I sound more "cheerish" and that I act nicer when I am speaking English (Spanish as L1)

5. *How are cultural differences perceived? Do they influence cross-cultural communication?*

Cultural differences are perceived through various lenses, including gestures, communication styles, interpersonal space, and behavioral norms. For example, some participants highlighted differences between high-context and low-context cultures:

In Chinese culture, they're not big on any kind of physical contact. However, in Hispanic culture this is different.

They smile less and rarely use gestures (Germans).

Italian culture is fairly similar to Mexican, use of gestures, kisses etc. While American culture relies on individualism and emotions aren't expressed as often, not as warm.

Dutch people don't express feelings as Italians do (no gestures, more quite, not so many facial expressions).

Concerning emotional expression participants could also notice some differences. Cultures with mainly interdependent selves (Markus and Kitayama, 1991) tend to express mainly *other-focused* emotions which aim at maintaining social harmony. Conversely, more independent cultures tend to express *ego-focused* emotions, which assert individuality. This is highlighted by some participants' statements:

Italians tend to express their emotions more freely.

In the Chinese culture the topic of mental health and expressing your emotions seems taboo.

Controlled and neutral – Japanese.

Americans fully expressed themselves as they feel more freedom.

Le culture orientali non permettono un'espressione troppo trasparente delle proprie emozioni.

Other participants noted differences some individualistic and collectivistic aspects in cultures they had contact with:

Members of a social group with a more individualistic culture, (i.e. Germany / United States) tend to experience less socialist decision making. Meaning, the decisions in these social groups are generally not determined by the community as a whole.

Sometimes my Asian friends will not accept a compliment. They will deny it strongly.

Japanese people are much less confident and show off their skills than Americans. I feel that Americans tend to be bold and dynamic in their gestures and self-promotion.

However, when asked how these differences influence communication, participants mainly answered that they influence it both positively and negatively, as highlighted in these participants' statements:

I was often reprimanded for being too loud in the US (Italian origins).

People in the Netherlands are generally quiet, not invasive. However, this represents a problem when trying to find some friends.

American culture, where "small talk" is very common and for years was useless for me. I think that people don't care on what you reply, even if they ask you "how are you" is very common to see them walk away when they ask.

Interestingly, two participants showed their ability to navigate various social contexts effectively, highlighting the necessity to be aware of the cultural norms to know how to behave:

Se conosco le regole, so come comportarmi.

Tendo a gesticolare molto quando parlo (specialmente se sto spiegando qualcosa); sono consapevole e seguo l'etichetta dettata da diversi contesti situazionali (es. come comportarsi con gli altri al lavoro, come portare rispetto verso gli altri in diverse situazioni, come interrompere una conversazione per chiedere o dare un'informazione ecc.).

4.6 Conclusions

Considering the results obtained from this study, it can be stated that language and culture significantly influence bilinguals' perception of themselves and of the world. These influences manifest differently according to the context and the language being spoken. The findings indicate that while language sometimes influences how participants see the world, culture does it more constantly. This aligns with the Neo-Whorfian theories, which suggest that language influences

thought in a flexible and context-dependent manner. Cultural norms that are embedded within language play a significant role in shaping perception of the world. Participants highlighted that many aspects of their lives, such as family values, behavioral norms, and communication styles, are significantly shaped by culture.

This study shed light into bilinguals' language use, supporting Grosjean et al. (2013), who suggested the compartmentalization of languages. Indeed, participants reported using different languages according to the context, such as home, work, or social interactions. This can make it challenging to switch across various domains, as vocabulary and language use are often context-specific. This is why participants also claimed to code-switch and borrow words from other languages. Moreover, participants primarily used their L1 to express positive emotions, consistent with Marian and Kaushanskava's (2004) findings that L1 is more "emotion-laden". However, contrary to Ayçiçeğ'i and Harris (2004), participants also tended to use their L1 to express negative emotions.

The study also revealed that bilinguals often experience shifts in personality when switching between languages, supporting Ramírez-Esparza et al. (2006). In their L1, participants described themselves as dependable, self-disciplined, open to new experiences, and emotionally stable. When speaking their L2, they reported higher scores on Extraversion and variability on Agreeableness.

The study highlighted significant cultural differences in non-verbal language, interpersonal space, and behavioral norms, influencing cross-cultural communication and sometimes leading to challenges. Participants noted variations between high-context and low-context cultures, differences in expressing emotions, and the impact of collectivistic and individualistic cultural values.

4.7 Limitations

This study has two main limits. Firstly, the sample size is relatively small and the self-reporting of participants suggests paying attention in generalizing these findings. Secondly, the study

did not ask for participants' levels of proficiency in their L1 and L2, nor whether they were bicultural. Future research should include these aspects to provide further insights into the relationship between language, culture, and perception, and into how bilinguals navigate their linguistic and cultural identities. Future research should also include investigating if these shifts in personality are stable over time and consistent across different linguistic groups.

Capitolo 5

La consapevolezza culturale

Dallo studio esaminato nel capitolo precedente, è emerso che, secondo la maggior parte dei partecipanti, le differenze culturali influenzano la comunicazione interculturale sia in maniera negativa che positiva. Levine e Adelman (1982, citati in Ghorbani Shemshadsara, 2012) sostengono che i conflitti culturali avvengono a causa di stereotipi, pregiudizi, etnocentrismo ed errate interpretazioni. Ciò evidenzia come sia fondamentale possedere una certa *consapevolezza culturale* (*cultural awareness*), che può facilitare una comprensione più profonda e rispettosa delle diverse culture e prevenire questi conflitti culturali.

5.1 Che cos'è la consapevolezza culturale

Tomlinson (2001, citato in Ghorbani Shemshadsara, 2012) sostiene che la consapevolezza culturale implica lo sviluppo di un senso di equità tra le culture, una maggiore comprensione della propria cultura e di quella degli altri, e un interesse verso le connessioni e le differenze tra culture. Inoltre, le persone che sviluppano questa sensibilità avranno una maggiore apertura mentale, tolleranza e acquisiranno empatia culturale. La consapevolezza culturale comprende tre qualità fondamentali: consapevolezza del proprio comportamento indotto culturalmente, consapevolezza del comportamento degli altri indotto culturalmente, e la capacità di spiegare il punto di vista culturale di qualcuno (Ghorbani Shemshadsara, 2012).

A supporto di questo, Pederson (1998, citato in Altay, 2005) afferma che lo sviluppo della consapevolezza culturale non è fine a sé stesso, ma è un mezzo per incrementare il potere, l'energia e la libertà di scelta di una persona in un mondo multiculturale. La consapevolezza culturale accresce la capacità di prendere decisioni, tenendo conto dei molteplici modi in cui la cultura influenza le

diverse percezioni di una stessa situazione. Secondo Pederson, dunque, la consapevolezza culturale è uno strumento per migliorare la vita delle persone. Riconoscendo e comprendendo le differenze culturali, le persone possono affrontare in maniera più efficace diverse situazioni culturali e migliorare la loro comunicazione anche con persone provenienti da culture diverse.

5.2 Perché sviluppare consapevolezza culturale a scuola

Dopo aver fornito una definizione di consapevolezza culturale, in questo paragrafo vengono illustrati i motivi per cui è necessario sviluppare sensibilità e consapevolezza culturale in ambito scolastico.

Secondo Knutson (2006, citato in Ghorbani Shemshadsara, 2012), lo sviluppo di consapevolezza culturale deve partire dal riconoscimento della propria identità culturale in relazione agli altri. Come spiegato nel secondo capitolo, le identità culturali sono espressione di valori, lingue, significati, pratiche e norme condivise che identificano un gruppo di persone. Infatti, Woolward (1997, citato in Ghorbani Shemshadsara, 2012) sostiene che l'identità offre un'idea di chi siamo, come ci rapportiamo con gli altri e con il mondo circostante.

Attorno al 1980, si è cominciato ad indagare sul ruolo fondamentale della cultura per un apprendimento linguistico di successo. Vi sono due visioni sulla consapevolezza culturale: una statica e una dinamica. La visione statica non vede la cultura come strettamente legata al linguaggio, e dunque trasmette solamente informazioni culturali agli studenti ignorando la natura dinamica della cultura. La visione dinamica, invece, tiene conto di questo aspetto, e richiede una partecipazione attiva degli studenti nell'apprendimento culturale, incoraggiandoli a vedere i fatti culturali come situati nel tempo e nello spazio, e perciò variabili. Questa visione richiede anche una conoscenza della propria cultura e dell'influenza che essa ha nei comportamenti.

Kramersch (1993, citato in Ghorbani Shemshadsara, 2012) sostiene che la cultura non deve semplicemente essere presentata agli studenti, ma loro stessi devono scoprire la propria cultura e porla in relazione con le altre, con un ruolo passivo dell'insegnante. Il crescente multiculturalismo nelle società moderne richiede che gli studenti siano consapevoli di vari fattori culturali, come età, genere e classe sociale. Spesso, gli studenti possiedono una conoscenza limitata o nulla riguardo alla loro appartenenza culturale e sociale, e non hanno una comprensione adeguata della cultura che stanno studiando, tale da poter interpretare e comprendere i fenomeni culturali presentati. Di conseguenza, l'insegnamento della cultura dovrebbe essere visto come un mezzo per sviluppare una maggiore consapevolezza e sensibilità verso i valori e le tradizioni della lingua che stanno apprendendo, preparandoli a vivere in maniera armoniosa nella comunità della lingua target. A sostegno di ciò, Stern (1992, citato in Ghorbani Shemshadsara, 2012) afferma "one of the most important aims of culture teaching is to help the learner gain an understanding of the native speaker's perspective"⁵ (Ghorbani Shemshadsara, 2012, p. 95) e l'allievo ha come compito quello di sensibilizzarsi allo stato d'animo delle persone appartenenti alla comunità target. Insegnare cultura, e dunque acquisire competenze culturali, è stato definito parte del "hidden curriculum" ("curriculum nascosto"), come definito da Micheal Byram (1989, citato in Ghorbani Shemshadsara, 2012), che mira a sviluppare indirettamente empatia, exotopia (ovvero la capacità di riconoscersi diversi dagli altri e di riconoscere la loro diversità) e apprezzamento verso la comunità linguistica in studio. Inoltre, Baltes (1998, citato in Baltes et al., 2015) afferma che gli studenti sono maggiormente aperti a instaurare relazioni con persone di diverse razze e culture se imparano a comprendere diverse prospettive.

Tre componenti sono state individuate all'interno dell'insegnamento della cultura: una cognitiva, che comprende diverse forme di conoscenza (geografica, differenze nei modi di vivere e comprensione dei valori e attitudini della comunità in studio); una componente affettiva (che comprende il livello di curiosità ed empatia dello studente nei confronti della cultura target); e la

⁵ Traduzione personale: "uno degli obiettivi più importanti dell'insegnamento della cultura è aiutare lo studente a comprendere il punto di vista del parlante nativo".

componente comportamentale (comprende l'abilità dello studente di leggere ed interpretare comportamenti dettati dalla cultura).

Secondo Kramersch, la classe della L2, è il luogo dove gli studenti mettono in dubbio i significati a loro familiari e propri della loro cultura, attraverso la scoperta di nuovi significati, propri invece della lingua straniera in studio. Da questo scontro di significati, nasce l'idea di una "terza cultura" nella classe della L2, che diventa perciò sito di intersezione di valori e di credenze propri di diverse culture. Questo contribuisce all'idea che nessuna cultura possa rappresentare tutte le esperienze umane, siano esse positive o negative.

5.3 Come sviluppare consapevolezza culturale a scuola

Avendo stabilito l'importanza di sviluppare consapevolezza culturale in concomitanza con l'insegnamento della lingua straniera, questo paragrafo analizza alcuni modi per far sì che ciò avvenga.

Innanzitutto, Rivers (1981, citato in Altay, 2005) propone una lista di sette obiettivi che l'insegnamento della cultura dovrebbe adempiere, conducendo gli studenti ad acquisire determinate abilità e conoscenze (Altay, 2005):

1. Capire che le persone agiscono in determinati modi per soddisfare i bisogni psicologici di base perché seguono le opzioni che la società offre, sottolineando l'importanza di comprendere le motivazioni che guidano il comportamento delle persone.
2. Riconoscere l'influenza dei fattori sociali come età, sesso, classe sociale e luogo di residenza sul modo in cui le persone comunicano e si comportano.
3. Illustrare come le persone si comportano nelle situazioni quotidiane e di crisi nella cultura in studio, aiutando gli studenti ad avere un quadro realistico della cultura in studio.
4. Comprendere connotazioni culturali ed essere consapevoli che immagini e significati culturalmente determinati sono associati anche a parole e a frasi più comuni della lingua di

destinazione. Talvolta, come evidenziato nei capitoli precedenti, immagini e significati associati a termini comuni possono variare tra le culture.

5. Valutare le generalità dell'affermazione riguardante la cultura di destinazione, basandosi sulla quantità di prove che supportano tale affermazione. Questo obiettivo aiuta gli studenti a sviluppare un approccio critico, al fine di non accettare passivamente le generalizzazioni.
6. Sviluppare le abilità necessarie per trovare e organizzare informazioni sulla cultura in studio utilizzando biblioteche, mass media e osservazioni personali, aiutando gli studenti a divenire ricercatori attivi.
7. Coltivare una certa curiosità verso la cultura in studio e mostrare empatia verso le persone di tale cultura, al fine di comprendere e accettare maggiormente le differenze culturali, facilitando la comunicazione interculturale.

Galloway (1981, citato in Ghorbani Shemshadsara, 2012) propose di organizzare l'istruzione della consapevolezza culturale in quattro categorie principali di comprensione:

1. **Convezioni:** l'obiettivo è aiutare gli studenti a riconoscere e a comprendere come le persone di una determinata cultura si comportano tipicamente nelle situazioni comuni. Le convezioni possono essere determinate dal contesto (che comprendono comportamenti extra-linguistici tipici di certe situazioni) e determinate dalle funzioni (formule sociolinguistiche o espressioni utilizzate per svolgere compiti in un certo contesto). Ad esempio: fare una prenotazione al ristorante, accettare o declinare inviti.
2. **Connotazioni:** tratta di significati culturali impregnati nelle parole. Gli studenti, esaminando le loro reti di associazioni, cominciano a comprendere che il significato sottostante alle parole sono determinati dal quadro culturale di riferimento (*cultural frame*).
3. **Condizionamento:** le persone agiscono in maniera coerente con il loro quadro culturale di riferimento e, nell'agire, sono condizionate dalla loro cultura. Gli studenti devono imparare ad interpretare questi comportamenti, al fine di comprendere le differenze culturali e iniziare a sviluppare empatia verso le altre culture.
4. **Comprensione:** sviluppare abilità come analisi, formazione di ipotesi e tolleranza dell'ambiguità, che possono essere ottenute prestando attenzione alla fonte dell'informazione, esaminando gli stereotipi ed evitando generalizzazioni.

Vi sono diversi modi per sviluppare sensibilità culturale all'interno dell'ambiente classe e questi sono illustrati in Altay (2005):

1. *Descrizione e spiegazione della cultura*: metodo utilizzato soprattutto in passato, si basa sulla spiegazione della cultura in questione da parte dell'insegnante, supportata anche da materiale visivo. Tuttavia, questo approccio può risultare passivo per gli studenti.
2. *Sperimentare la cultura attraverso l'utilizzo del linguaggio*: attraverso l'uso del linguaggio, gli studenti apprendono l'uso corretto dei discorsi e dei comportamenti, come i parlanti utilizzano la forma di cortesia e con chi, l'appropriatezza del linguaggio e il prendere turni. Inoltre, vengono gradualmente apprese le aspettative che la società richiede e i valori di essa.
3. *Dialoghi, sketch, giochi teatrali e role-play*: i dialoghi costruiti sono utili per mettere in atto situazioni comuni e tipiche di una cultura. I giochi teatrali coinvolgono elementi di recitazione per sviluppare competenze comunicative, creative e sociali. Questi risultano motivanti ed efficaci nello sviluppare abilità e sensibilità culturale. Attraverso attività di role-play, gli studenti possono apprendere come i parlanti nativi comunicano tra di loro e come si comportano in determinate situazioni. Facilmente applicabili in qualsiasi classe, le attività di role-play richiedono allo studente di immedesimarsi in situazioni immaginarie che possono avvenire all'interno della comunità in studio, offrendo agli studenti un momento di svago e di apprendimento contemporaneamente. Un esempio di attività di role-play viene proposto in Altin et al. (2014), in cui gli studenti simulano di essere in gita scolastica e di incontrare persone del luogo.
4. *Canzoni e danze*: fondamentali per sviluppare sensibilità e affetto nei confronti della cultura in studio. Infatti, canzoni e danze nascondono elementi culturali tra le righe, che vengono appresi in modo coinvolgente e divertente, permettendo agli studenti anche di sperimentare diverse visioni del mondo.
5. *Presenza di parlanti nativi in classe*: qualora fosse possibile, avere l'opportunità di interagire con nativi permette agli studenti di apprendere cultura e lingua in maniera diretta. Inoltre, utilizzano le loro competenze linguistiche e culturali.
6. *Utilizzo di bacheche e di notizie*: con l'aiuto di notizie, eventi culturali e altri avvenimenti, gli studenti si mantengono al passo con quanto succede nel paese o nei paesi in cui la lingua in studio viene parlata. Le notizie del giorno sono ricche di informazioni culturali e possono essere interessanti per gli studenti. Inoltre, possono essere spunto di discussioni in classe.

7. *Utilizzo di immagini, film e video*: permettono di vedere visivamente le comunità parlanti la lingua in studio in azione e in determinate situazioni. In questo modo, alcuni concetti che diventano più concreti e più facilmente assimilabili per gli studenti.

Altay (2005) propone anche metodi per sviluppare sensibilità culturale al di fuori dell'ambiente classe, in quanto il tempo in classe potrebbe non essere abbastanza:

1. *Pen pals* (amici di penna): interagire e tenersi in contatto con persone native della loro età permette agli studenti di fare domande, condividere interessi e conoscersi da un punto di vista personale.
2. *Studio all'estero e scambi culturali*: sono opportunità preziose per mettere in pratica le abilità linguistiche e culturali, instaurando un rapporto diretto con la comunità parlante la lingua in studio.
3. *Campi estivi e festival in lingua*: gli studenti possono tenere in allenamento la lingua straniera durante il periodo estivo ed entrare in contatto con le comunità parlanti la lingua.

5.4 Implicazioni e possibili difficoltà

Nonostante i numerosi vantaggi dello sviluppare consapevolezza culturale a scuola, Ho (2009, citato in Ghorbani Shemshadsara, 2012) evidenzia che alcuni vincoli possono influenzare tale processo. Questi vincoli includono la conoscenza culturale dell'insegnante, la disponibilità di avere parlanti nativi in classe, la quantità di tempo dedicata all'insegnamento della cultura, e il sistema educativo in sé.

L'insegnante, considerato/a come l'esperto della lingua, è una fonte primaria di conoscenza culturale per gli studenti. Pertanto, è cruciale che gli insegnanti scelgano accuratamente con cura i loro metodi di insegnamento, i materiali e le attività da proporre, evitando pregiudizi o convinzioni errate. Poiché la lingua è strettamente legata alla cultura, come discusso nel primo capitolo, e che insegnare una lingua straniera significa anche insegnare una cultura straniera (Ghorbani Shemshadsara, 2012), gli insegnanti devono quindi conoscere e rispettare i valori della cultura

studiata. Inoltre, gli insegnanti devono essere consapevoli che persone provenienti da culture diverse utilizzano metodi di studio differenti. Ad esempio, in Cina, gli studenti apprendono la lingua prevalentemente attraverso la memorizzazione, un metodo meno comune nei paesi occidentali. Di conseguenza, gli insegnanti devono tenere in considerazione che i materiali didattici presentati alla classe possono essere interpretati diversamente a seconda delle percezioni culturali degli studenti. Il materiale didattico deve essere presentato in modo che gli studenti lo comprendano e possano relazionarsi con esso, collegandolo alle loro esperienze personali. Per conseguire tale obiettivo, è necessario utilizzare materiale didattico che includa visualizzazione e drammatizzazione.

Tuttavia, l'insegnante di lingua può non avere le capacità e le conoscenze adeguate a insegnare cultura. Il rischio è quello di presentare la cultura e selezionare materiali didattici in modo sbagliato, incrementando pregiudizi e stereotipi. Per questo motivo, gli insegnanti necessitano di assistenza da parte di esperti nel colmare le loro lacune in studi culturali. Gli esperti possono aiutarli nell'identificare le caratteristiche di base della cultura target e nel selezionare materiali adatti a ciò che vogliono insegnare. Il contributo dell'insegnante in queste circostanze può consistere nel concentrarsi sulle differenze culturali tra le culture piuttosto che sull'intero quadro di ogni singolo segmento culturale, per evitare incomprensioni o fraintendimenti.

Un altro possibile problema è trovare il tempo necessario in classe per insegnare cultura, dal momento che le lezioni in lingua sono spesso già cariche di lavoro. L'insegnante deve perciò avere le capacità di integrare efficacemente l'uso delle competenze linguistiche, comunicative e culturali degli studenti.

Da non sottovalutare è il problema dell'etnocentrismo, ovvero la tendenza a ritenere la propria cultura come centro del mondo e a giudicare le altre culture secondo i propri schemi, ritenuti validi in assoluto, ma che in realtà sono legati alla propria cultura. Ciò è pericoloso poiché questi schemi sono rafforzati implicitamente sin dall'infanzia, in quanto l'educazione non valorizza la dimensione culturale. Per uscire da questa situazione occorre mettere in crisi tali schemi e aprirsi ad altre prospettive e alla conoscenza di nuove culture.

Tuttavia, mentre gli studenti stanno conoscendo una cultura diversa dalla propria, essi possono trovarsi completamente in disaccordo con essa, rifiutandone usanze e stili di vita. Uno dei pericoli è che si sviluppino stereotipi o pregiudizi. I primi consistono nell'esagerazione di alcuni aspetti o caratteristiche di una cultura o delle persone appartenenti a quella cultura, mentre i secondi costituiscono credenze negative su un determinato gruppo o categoria sociale. Probabilmente l'origine di questi due concetti risiede nell'atto della nostra mente di semplificare l'enorme quantità di informazioni e di stimoli provenienti dall'esterno, inserendoli in categorie preesistenti. Infatti, un altro pericolo è cadere nella banalità di ridurre le peculiarità e le varietà culturali a qualcosa di "silly", (sciocco) o "out of date" (datato) (Ghorbani Shemshadsara, 2012, p. 97), presentando così elementi culturali distaccati dal significato del loro contesto. Altro pericolo dell'etnocentrismo è quello dell'incompletezza, ovvero l'omissione di alcune informazioni cruciali quando si seleziona il materiale culturale da presentare. Ad esempio, un corso che si concentra solo sulla cultura islamica e non tiene in considerazione le minoranze, commette incompletezza.

In conclusione, riprendendo la metafora dell'iceberg culturale di Weaver (1993, citato in Ghorbani Shemshadsara, 2012), gran parte della nostra conoscenza culturale è invisibile e viene applicata inconsciamente durante le interazioni quotidiane. Come un iceberg, la maggior parte dei valori, credenze e norme culturali è nascosta sotto la superficie, ma influisce profondamente sui comportamenti e sulle percezioni delle persone. Pertanto, comprendere veramente una cultura significa studiarla in profondità, acquisendo una comprensione completa e autentica delle sue sfumature al fine migliorare la comunicazione interculturale.

Conclusions

The aim of this thesis was to explore the relationship between language and culture and how their interplay influence people's lives, perceptions, and personalities, with a specific focus on bilingualism and its impact. Through a review of the present literature and research, various aspects have been examined to provide a comprehensive understanding of these dynamics.

The first and second chapters introduced the topic, by defining the concepts of language and culture, highlighting their reciprocal influence. It was established that language is not merely a tool for communication but a carrier of culture, encapsulating values, beliefs, and norms. This relationship was further explored through the lens of bilingualism, emphasizing how speaking multiple languages offers diverse perspectives of seeing the world.

Afterwards, a study was conducted involving bilingual participants, utilizing a questionnaire to gather data on their linguistic and cultural backgrounds, on how their lifestyles, behaviors, personalities, and way of interacting with people are influenced by culture. The findings revealed that bilinguals are often influenced by their cultural norms, especially on their behaviors, non verbal language, values and beliefs, and communication styles. It was found that bilinguals often switch languages based on context, aligning with the concept of code-switching. Additionally, the study shed light on how bilinguals perceive themselves and their personalities when speaking different languages, indicating that language and culture can indeed shape and change one's self-perception. Moreover, the perception of cultural differences was explored, highlighting differences mainly in gestures and in interpersonal space.

This thesis also investigated the importance of cultural awareness in language teaching. It was argued that effective language instruction must go beyond linguistic competence to include cultural awareness. This approach not only enhances language acquisition but also promotes empathy, reduces stereotypes, prejudices, and misunderstandings. In this way, cultural competence is crucial for respectful intercultural communication, and therefore encouraged.

Appendix

Questionnaire “The relation between culture, language and the understanding of the world”

General questions

How old are you?

- 19-24
- 25-30
- 30-35
- 35+

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to say

Where are you from?

- [Open-ended response]

How many languages do you speak fluently?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4 or more

Which language(s)?

- [Open-ended response]

Which language do you consider your L1 (first language)?

- [Open-ended response]

How often do you use your L2 (second language)?

- Daily
- Regularly
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

How did you become bilingual? (Select all that apply)

- Grew up in a bilingual family where two languages were spoken from childhood.
- Attended a bilingual school or a language immersion program during primary or secondary education.

- Learned a second language through formal language courses (e.g., language schools, university).
- Lived abroad for a period in a country where the second language is spoken.
- Regular interaction with friends, partners, or colleagues who speak a different language.
- Self-taught using online resources, language learning apps, or other multimedia resources
- Other: [Open-ended response]

Language, culture and worldview

How often do you think your language influences the way you perceive the world and interact with it?

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Always

How often do you think your culture influences the way you perceive the world and interact with it?

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Always

Which aspects of your life are most significantly influenced by your cultural background? (Select all that apply)

- Values and beliefs
- Non-verbal language: gestures, facial expressions, body posture, eye contact
- Behavioral rules (in public, with family and friends, at school, at work)
- Expression of emotions
- Social roles (respect for authority, social hierarchy)
- Communication style (greetings, degree of formality)
- Interpersonal space
- Presence of silence in conversation
- Other: [Open-ended response]

Can you mention an example/situation that explains your previous answers?

- [Open-ended response]

Behavioral questions

When I am angry I express myself in:

- my L1 (first language)
- my L2 (second language)

- mostly in my L1 but also in my L2
- mostly in my L2 but also in my L1
- my L3, L4,...
- none of the above

When I am happy I express myself in:

- my L1 (first language)
- my L2 (second language)
- mostly in my L1 but also in my L2
- mostly in my L2 but also in my L1
- my L3, L4,...
- none of the above

When I am angry I think in:

- my L1 (first language)
- my L2 (second language)
- mostly in my L1 but also in my L2
- mostly in my L2 but also in my L1
- my L3, L4,...
- none of the above

When I am happy I think in:

- my L1 (first language)
- my L2 (second language)
- mostly in my L1 but also in my L2
- mostly in my L2 but also in my L1
- my L3, L4,...
- none of the above

At home I speak:

- my L1 (first language)
- my L2 (second language)
- mostly in my L1 but also in my L2
- mostly in my L2 but also in my L1
- my L3, L4,...
- none of the above

With my friends I speak:

- my L1 (first language)
- my L2 (second language)
- mostly in my L1 but also in my L2

- mostly in my L2 but also in my L1
- my L3, L4,...
- none of the above

At school or work I speak:

- my L1 (first language)
- my L2 (second language)
- mostly in my L1 but also in my L2
- mostly in my L2 but also in my L1
- my L3, L4,...
- none of the above

If you have to ask your friend to go out, how do you ask?

- "Where do you want to go tonight?"
- "Where do we want to go tonight?"
- Both

When I'm speaking my L1, I borrow words from other languages to express what I want to say

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

When I'm speaking my L1, I switch to another language and then I go back to the first language

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

Have you ever experienced challenges in expressing a concept in one language that seems to lose its essence or feels different when translated into another language?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

Culture and identity

Does your personality change when speaking another language?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

If you answered yes to the previous question, in what way do you feel different?

- [Open-ended response]

When I speak my L1 I perceive myself as (for each of these questions select an answer from: Disagree strongly, Disagree moderately, Disagree a little, Neither agree nor disagree, Agree a little, Agree moderately, Agree strongly):

- Extraverted, enthusiastic
- Critical, quarrelsome
- Dependable, self-disciplined
- Anxious, easily upset
- Open to new experiences, complex
- Reserved, quiet
- Sympathetic, warm
- Disorganized, careless
- Calm, emotionally stable
- Conventional, uncreative

When I speak my L2 (second language) I perceive myself as (for each of these questions select an answer from: Disagree strongly, Disagree moderately, Disagree a little, Neither agree nor disagree, Agree a little, Agree moderately, Agree strongly):

- Extraverted, enthusiastic
- Critical, quarrelsome
- Dependable, self-disciplined
- Anxious, easily upset
- Open to new experiences, complex
- Reserved, quiet
- Sympathetic, warm
- Disorganized, careless
- Calm, emotionally stable
- Conventional, uncreative

I feel more comfortable discussing personal topics when I express myself in my first language (L1).

- Strongly disagree
- 1
- 2
- 3 (neither disagree nor agree)
- 4
- 5
- Strongly agree

Cultural differences

Have you ever been exposed to a new culture? (e.g. relationships, school, travels,..)

- Yes
- No

If you answered yes to the previous question, have you noticed any behavioral differences in any contexts? Can you name one? Please, don't forget to mention the culture you're referring to.

- [Open-ended response]

Have you noticed any differences in their non-verbal language and behavior (gestures, body language, facial expressions, eye-contact,..)?

- Interpersonal space
- Eye contact
- Facial expressions
- Gestures
- No differences noticed
- Other: [Open-ended response]

Have you noticed any differences in the way the other language/culture expresses emotions?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

If you answered yes to the previous question, can you write an example and the culture/language you're referring to?

- [Open-ended response]

Do you think cultural differences influence the communication between people from different countries?

- Yes, positively
- Yes, negatively
- Yes, both positively and negatively
- No, there is no influence

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