Communicating emotions in a foreign language

Jean-Marc Dewaele
Birkbeck, University of London
Definition of multilingualism & LX users

**Multilingual** “people who use more than one language in everyday life, whether they are learning a foreign or second language in school, or speaking two or more languages in daily transactions, or writing or publishing in a language that is not the one they grew up with” (Kramsch, 2009: 17)

From **native/non-native speaker** to **L1/LX user** (Dewaele 2017)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional dichotomy:</th>
<th>native speaker</th>
<th>non-native speaker</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cook’s 2002 innovation:</td>
<td>native speaker</td>
<td>L2 user</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dewaele 2017</td>
<td>L1 user</td>
<td>LX user</td>
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Variation in proficiency can exist within both L1(s) & LX(s) & **all** individuals can be multicompetent users of multiple languages.
Sociopragmatic / pragmatic competence

Sociopragmatic competence:
“the social perceptions underlying participants’ interpretation & performance of communicative action” (Kasper & Rose 2001)

Pragmatic competence:
“Knowledge of the linguistic resources available in a given language for realizing particular illocutions, knowledge of the sequential aspects of speech acts & finally, knowledge of the appropriate contextual use of the particular languages’ linguistic resources” (Barron 2003)
Definitions

• **Emotion concepts:** biological & sociocultural elements: “prototypical scripts that are formed as a result of repeated experiences and involve causal antecedents, appraisals, physiological reactions, consequences, and means of regulation and display” (Pavlenko 2008: 150)

• => Embedded within larger systems of beliefs about psychological & social processes

• **Emotions:** “interpersonal and dynamic processes that are enabled and constrained by the relationships in which they occur” (De Leersnyder, 2014: 219) => cultural psychology
“Objective” & “Subjective” data

- Wierzbicka (2004): I am not saying that every opinion of every bilingual person should be regarded as authoritative (…). Rather, I am saying that such testimonies need to be taken into account, and that they complement semantic (& other) objective approaches (p. 95).

- Besemer (2011): I would argue that we can learn at least as much about the relationship of bilingualism to emotions from personal reflections by articulate bilingual writers as from standard methods of research used in disciplines like psychology and psycholinguistics, such as tests or rating and categorization tasks (p. 479).
How do bilinguals experience emotions? Do they perceive and express emotions similarly or differently in their respective languages? Does the first language remain forever the language of the heart? What role do emotions play in second language learning and in language acquisition? Why do some writers prefer to write in their second language?

In this provocative and ground-breaking book, Pavlenko challenges the monolingual bias of modern linguistics and psychology and uses the lens of bi- and multilingualism to offer a fresh perspective on the relationship between language and emotions. Bringing together insights from the fields of linguistics, neurolinguistics, psychology, anthropology, psychoanalysis, and literary theory, Pavlenko offers a unique and comprehensive introduction to this cross-disciplinary movement. This is a highly readable and thought-provoking book that draws on empirical data and first-hand accounts and offers invaluable advice for future researchers. It will appeal to scholars and researchers across many disciplines.

Dr. Aneta Pavlenko is Associate Professor of TESOL at the College of Education, Temple University, Philadelphia. She is the author of many articles and co-editor of Multilingualism, Second Language Learning and Gender (2001), Negotiation of Identities in Multilingual Context (2004), and Gender and English Language Learning (2004).

Emotions and Multilingualism

Aneta Pavlenko
Communicating emotions

• “The interpersonal communication of emotional states is fundamental to both everyday and clinical interaction. One’s own and others’ affective experiences are frequent topics of everyday conversations, and how well these emotions are expressed and understood is important to interpersonal relationships & individual well-being” (Fussell 2002)
Talking about complex emotions

Can be hard in a 1st language, & even harder in a 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th... language!
Processing language, and emotions...

- **Emotional endolingual exchanges (Native speaker-Native speaker):** largely automatic language processing $\Rightarrow$ focus on content of interaction (Paradis 2004)

- **Emotional exolingual exchanges (NS-NNS):** more *controlled* processing for NNS, searches for words, expressions, grammar rules, pragmatic rules, idioms & metaphors

- $\Rightarrow$ less attention on content & interlocutor, more risk of stumbling // trying to get hold of a bar of soap in a bathtub (Dewaele 2010)
Emotions: a sociopragmatic challenge

• How to express emotion “appropriately”? (Dewaele 2008) => Linked to place (country, region, pub), interlocutors (age, gender, social distance), topic...

• Zhengdao Ye (2003), Chinese immigrant in Australia, struggled with easy use of endearments, avoided overt expression of feelings: “My sense of self is Chinese. And I feel most at home when I can express myself, especially my feelings & emotions, in the Chinese way – subtle, implicit & without words”
Emotions as cultural products

- To Europeans, Americans talk in an up-beat tone of voice and when asked how they are doing, they would say "awesome" => the American way of having emotions can seem exaggerated and unnatural to us.
- Consequence at job talks, in judging letters of reference…
Cultural differences in emotional patterns
(Markus & Kitayama, 2001; Kitayama et al., 1997; Kitayama, Mesquita, & Karasawa, 2006)

Disengaged emotions emphasize autonomy

Engaged emotions emphasize relatedness
Cultural differences

*anger* promoted in **US** and *shame* in **Japan**.

+ opposite: in **US** situations that elicit *shame* would be avoided, since shame is an emotion that violates the very core of American culture: to have positive feelings about the self.

In **Japan** situations of *anger* would be avoided, because anger interferes with relational harmony.

Research design: Participants asked to describe emotional event in the previous week in some detail.

Rate list of emotions experienced as this happened.
Emotional acculturation (De Leersnyder, Mesquita, & Kim, 2011)

• “the changes in people’s patterns of emotional experience after they have migrated to another culture”

• As emotions are psychological constructions of cultural meaning, then there may be a misfit between emotions & social context when individuals change cultural contexts or live two cultural models (i.e., biculturals)

• People from mainstream groups fit better to the prevalent patterns of emotional experience in their own culture than do people from migrant groups

• The more migrants are exposed to a cultural context & the more they have social contact with members of that culture, the higher their emotional fit to that culture; this is true for emotional fit to both their host culture & their heritage culture (De Leersnyder, Mesquita & Kim, 2013)
Experiment: “boss of a Belgian company failed to give his employees tenure as promised, Turkish immigrant to Belgium + Belgian teammates feel very angry”
- Emotional Patterns Questionnaire
- 83 Belgians: ‘extremely unfair’, go to their boss to vent their anger // Belgian cultural mandate for autonomy
- 59 first generation Turkish immigrants, 85 2nd generation: no need to discuss issue with boss; anger + shame – did s/he fall short? + still respectful, instantiating an emotional pattern that may help her to realize the Turkish cultural mandate for respect, social harmony & hierarchy
=> Similar anger in this situation, but patterns of emotional experience differed from one another in culturally systematic ways
EMOTIONAL ACCULTURATION

Emotional fit with culture

Typical Belgian pattern

Ayşe

angry
ashamed
happy
proud
respectful
etc.

Not at all A bit Extremely

r = 0.33

Anne

angry
ashamed
happy
proud
respectful
etc.

Not at all A bit Extremely

r = 0.78
The learning of a FL affects all the languages in the mind of the user (cf. Vivian Cook’s Linguistic multi-competence)

The FL words might not fit the L1 equivalents: (conceptual non-equivalence) => issues of re-calibration of emotional strength, of acquisition of new scripts

Different grammatical means may be used to express emotions (cf. Pavlenko 2005: verbs in Russian, adjectives in English)

Facial expression of emotion might be different in FL

FL learning implies acquisition of cultural knowledge: cultural hybridity inevitable, includes non-verbal behaviour => emotional multicompentence? (Dewaele 2016a)
Language, emotions & cognition (Pavlenko 2012)

• Findings of clinical, introspective, cognitive, psychophysiological, & neuroimaging studies of affective processing in bilingual speakers reveal differential **embodiment** of the L1 and languages acquired later in life.

• L1(s): increased automaticity of affective processing and heightened electrodermal reactivity to L1 emotion-laden words.

• Languages learned later in life (LX): decreased automaticity of affective processing, which reduces interference effects & lowers electrodermal reactivity to negative emotional stimuli.

• Strong secondary **socialisation** can dislodge L1 from its emotionally dominant position
Language preferences & perceptions of multilinguals (Pavlenko 2005, Dewaele 2010)

• 1564 multilinguals (Bilingualism & Emotion Questionnaire), Dewaele & Pavlenko 2001-2003, language perception & language choice for communication of feelings, anger & swearing, self-perceived proficiency & Foreign Language Anxiety

• L1 typically preferred for communication of emotion

• L1 typically felt to have most emotional resonance
Sources of individual variation (Dewaele 2010/2013)

- 1) Linguistic history, 2) present language use, 3) socio-biographical variables
- **Later starters** use LX less frequently for emotions; rate positive characteristics of LX lower, more Foreign Language Anxiety
- LXs acquired only through **formal classroom instruction** used less frequently for emotions; instructed learners more anxious
- **Frequent users** of LX gained confidence & stopped worrying about accent or possible grammatical errors
- **LX socialization** linked to more frequent LX use for emotions
- **Larger LX networks**: more use of LX for communication of emotions, perceptions & FLA evolved towards that of NS interlocutors
- **Trait Emotional intelligence**: only linked to Language Anxiety (Dewaele, Petrides & Furnham 2008)
Effect of Age of onset of acquisition of LX on frequency of use for inner speech and for inner emotional speech (Dewaele 2015)
Dewaele (2008) *I LOVE YOU IS STRONGEST IN:*
Loving a partner in a Foreign Language
(Dewaele & Salomidou 2017)

• Do language & cultural differences within cross-cultural couples make emotional communication more difficult?
• Total 429 participants
• Wide range of opinions: 1/3: no difficulty! ½: limitations & lack of emotional resonance of LX
• Minority: lack of genuineness at start of relationship => faded in months
• Females: more difficulties in communicating emotions & feeling less authentic at start of relationship (faded)
• Females more likely to adopt partner’s language
• Interviews: 50% mentioned constraints of LX while 25% reported emotional liberation in LX
Loving a partner in a Foreign Language
(Dewaele & Salomidou 2017)
## Loving a partner in a Foreign Language
(Dewaele & Salomidou 2017)

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<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Conceptual problems</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited vocabulary</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>25.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy LX user</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constraining effect of LX</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varia</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberating effect of the LX</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5.6</td>
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</table>
Loving a partner in a Foreign Language  (Dewaele & Salomidou 2017)

**Conceptual problems:** “I love you” is a lot less meaningful and serious than "Ich liebe dich" (exact translation in German). The former is easily said, the latter is hardly used, even in German relationships”.

**Limited vocabulary:** “Romantic feelings I spoke more in Japanese but it was more difficult at times because of lack of vocabulary rather than emotional connection”

**Happy LX user:** “Lingua franca was English, sex was more important than language”.

**Constraining:** “When you start using an LX, things sound less serious to you. They sound like a joke that you don't take seriously & sometimes it doesn't feel natural to speak words of love in LX

**Liberating:** “It's definitely easier to say "I love you" in English than in Swedish. Seems not to carry as much meaning as "Jag älskar dig"."
Perceived emotional force of swearwords

t-tests: all $p < .0001$ except pair 4 (Dewaele 2004a)
Self-reported perception of emotional strength of swearwords maximally proficient L1/L2 users $t(354) = 8.6, p < 0.0001$ (Dewaele, 2011)
Real life consequence of the power of swearwords: Publicity campaign in UK

Toyota Aygo
Sales in Japan
Reprimands & Taboo Words Elicit Greater Reactivity in L1

Harris, Ayçiçegi, Gleason (2003, *Applied Psycholinguistics*)
Thirty shades of offensiveness: L1 & LX English users’ understanding, perception & self-reported use of negative emotion-laden words (Dewaele 2016)

30 emotion-laden words extracted from British National Corpus that range in emotional valence from mildly negative to extremely negative
1159 English L1 users & 1165 English LX users

daft
dolloks
bugger
damn
fucking hell
lost your mind
fool
maniac
stupid
wacko
silly
wanker
thick
bonkers
bitch
lunatic
slut
shit
arsehole
cunt
fruitcake
jerk
moron
nutter
Idiot
bastard
prick
loser
weird
comedian
Dewaele (2016) Perceived offensiveness

30 emotion-laden words extracted from British National Corpus that range in emotional valence from mildly negative to extremely negative
1159 English L1 users & 1165 English LX users
Self-reported frequency of use L1 & LX users (Dewaele 2016)
Direction of code-switching: typically LX => L1 in emotional situations (Dewaele, 2010a)

Evy (Dutch L1, English L2, French L3, dominant in L1):
My partner's L1 is Berber but he's also good at Dutch (his L2). So we argue in Dutch. However he sometimes switches to Berber without being aware of it.

Cristina (Catalan L1, Spanish L2, English L3, Italian L4, German L5, living in UK for nearly 20 years):
If it’s a very critical situation (...) then I would swear in in Catalan, my mother tongue.
Code-switching in psychotherapy (Dewaele, 2010a)

V., Greek L1, English L2: “..I think when I talk about emotional topics I tend to code-switch to English a lot. I remember when I was seeing a psychologist in Greece for a while I kept code-switching from Greek to English. We never really talked about this ... To my mind it may have been some distancing strategy....”

Altarriba & Santiago-Rivera, 1994; Santiago-Rivera, Altarriba, 2002; Amati-Mehler, Argientieri & Canestri 1993

- 101 therapists (of which 19 monolingual), Mixed-methods
- Multilingual therapists better able to **attune**; Monolingual therapists more likely to collude (=> wanting to please)

Dewaele & Costa (2013) 182 multilingual former clients

- 1) Multilingualism of therapist linked to greater empathic understanding;
- 2) Clients viewed their multilingualism as an important aspect of their sense of self & of their therapy;
- 3) **Language switches** in therapy are more frequent when the **emotional tone** is **raised**: strategic use when discussing episodes of trauma & shame => gain **proximity** or **distance** according to the need
• 109 multilingual clients with mono/multilingual therapists
• **59 clients had never discussed their languages with their therapist:** It left some inhibited.
• Others mentioned it straight away: ‘I told her from the start that I wanted therapy to be in English – but that I consider her knowledge of Russian very helpful’ (ID28).
• Reasons for switching: *I refer to my maternal grandmother as my “Mormor” in therapy (this means mother's mother in Danish). It feels good to be able to use what is, for me, the right word. It would be strange and alienating to refer to her as my grandmother or maternal grandmother. To me, she is my Mormor (ID95)*
• => exhort therapists to make room for code-switching
Conclusions

- Communicating emotions in LX is not easy => important aspect of sociopragmatic competence!
- Combination of linguistic and cultural aspects
- Serious real world consequences
- Fun topic! Lots more to investigate!
Some references


• __ (2013) *Emotions in Multiple Languages*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacM.


