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CHANGING LANGUAGE, CHANGING PERSONALITY: SWEDISH BILINGUALS ON THE EFFECTS OF SPEAKING ENGLISH

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Abstract

Language influences not only the world-view but also the self-perceived personality of its users. One explanation for this is that the language used functions as a cue activating different sets of cultural frames within its users – a phenomenon known as Cultural Frame Shifting (CFS). Limited previous research on language and personality warrants exploring this topic further. The current study employed a qualitative design and semi-structured interviews to explore the views and experiences of 12 Swedish-English bilinguals. Results showed self-perceived changes in personality and extraversion, but also the sentiment of emotions being easier to express in English than in Swedish. Possible practical applications could include therapeutic work and treatment of social anxiety and public speaking anxiety.

Keywords: language, personality, extraversion, cultural frame shifting

Abstrakt

Språk påverkar inte bara världsbilden utan också den självupplevda personligheten hos dess användare. En förklaring till detta är att det språk som används fungerar som en signal som aktiverar olika uppsättningar av kulturella ramverk – ett fenomen känt som Cultural Frame Shifting (CFS). Begränsad tidigare forskning om språk och personlighet gör att detta ämne bör utforskas vidare. För den aktuella studien användes en kvalitativ design och halvstrukturerade intervjuer för att utforska resonemangen och upplevelserna hos 12 svensk-engelska tvåspråkiga individer. Resultaten visade på självupplevda förändringar i personlighet och extraversion, men också upplevelsen att känslor är lättare att uttrycka på engelska än på svenska. Potentiella praktiska tillämpningar skulle kunna inkludera terapeutiskt arbete och behandling av social fobi och talängslan.

Nyckelord: språk, personlighet, extraversion, cultural frame shifting

Changing language, changing personality:
Swedish bilinguals on the effects of speaking English

"The limits of my language mean the limits of my world", Wittgenstein famously stated in his Tractatus logico-philosophicus (Wittgenstein, 1992 [1921], p. 101), suggesting that one's perception of the world is dependent on one's language. The notion that language influences or determines thought was later popularized by psychologists Roger Brown and Eric Lenneberg with the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, named after the work of linguists Edward Sapir (1921) and Benjamin Lee Whorf (1956). The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis was not formulated as a single hypothesis but rather as two: the *strong* hypothesis suggesting that language shapes and determines thought, and the *weak* hypothesis suggesting that language merely influences thought (Brown, 1958; Brown, 1976; Brown & Lenneberg, 1954). The strong Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, as well as the implications of Wittgenstein's statement, has all but been rejected by the psycholinguistic research community over the years (Ahearn, 2012; Pinker, 2007), but subtler effects supporting the weak hypothesis have been documented in as wide-spread areas as the perception of colors (Athanasopoulos, 2009; Winawer, Witthoft, Frank, Wu, Wade, & Boroditsky, 2007), the perception of space (Majid, Bowerman, Kita, Haun, & Levinson, 2004), the perception of time (Boroditsky, 2001; Casasanto, 2008), and the perception of novel nouns (Barner, Inagaki, & Li, 2009).

Language, emotions and self-perception

The influence of language is not limited to the perception of objects and phenomena in the outside world, there is also evidence to suggest that the language used influences how its users view themselves and the way they experience and express emotions. Language switching has been shown to be a useful tool in therapeutic treatment when therapist and client share the same bilingual setup - for instance, switching to a client's second language may create distance to emotionally charged topics, allowing these topics to be discussed in a more detached and relaxed way (Javier, 1989; Kokaliari, Catanzarite, & Berzoff, 2013; Pitta, Marcos, & Alpert, 1978). Language switching in therapy has also been shown to benefit the alliance between therapist and client and increase the clients self-disclosure (Kapasi & Melluish, 2015). The notion of creating an emotional distance by using a second language has been corroborated by neurological research (Opitz & Degner, 2012) and a review of research findings by Pavlenko (2012). However, a study by Oganian, Korn and Heekeren (2016) suggests that the emotional distance created is due to the language switching itself, regardless of whether the switch is made from second language to first language or from first to second. Research by Dewaele has shown that bilinguals tend to prefer their first language for expressing anger (Dewaele, 2004) and that the emotional weight of certain phrases, such as "I love you", differ in the languages of bilinguals, suggesting that bilinguals may be more emotionally connected to their first language (Dewaele, 2008).

Pavlenko (2006) showed that bilingual speakers can experience a change in self-perception when switching language. She distributed a questionnaire to 1039 bilinguals and analyzed their responses to the question "Do you feel like a different person sometimes when you use your different languages?". Affirmative responses were given by 65% of the participants: some participants attributed this feeling to behavioral norms and cultural perspectives associated with language; some attributed it to feeling less like yourself or acting a part when speaking a foreign language, like putting on a mask or a persona. The notion of feeling different when using different languages has been further studied the last decade,

reaching similar results and showing how wide-spread the phenomenon is amongst bilinguals (Dewaele, 2015; Dewaele & Nakano, 2012; Ozanska-Ponikwia, 2012; Wilson, 2013). Pinpointing what exactly it means to "feel different" is a difficult task since the same question elicits very different responses depending on the person asked. Participants in Dewaele's study (2015) described a wide variety of perceived differences in themselves when switching language, including changes in posture, body language, voice pitch, facial expressions, thought structures, assertiveness and humor. One common theme, however, is the perceived change of personality that comes with changing language. One of the multilingual participants in Pavlenkos study (2006) put it like this:

> I feel like I have a different personality in French. I learned most of my French on exchange and I feel like I was 'brought up' in French differently than I was 'brought up' in English. I notice that when I try to use English with my French-speaking friends in Quebec often the nature of the communication totally changes because I just don't speak the same way in English.

Further examples are given by psycholinguist Francois Grosjean (2011), including this response from a Spanish-English bilingual:

> When I'm around Anglo-Americans, I find myself awkward and unable to choose my words quickly enough. When I'm amongst Latinos/Spanish-speakers, I don't feel shy at all. I'm witty, friendly... and I become very out-going.

Despite many examples of people reporting self-perceived changes in personality when switching language, there has not been much research on the effects of language on personality. Ervin (1964) did a study where she let 64 French-English bilinguals take the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), a psychological test where subjects are presented with ambiguous pictures of people and are asked to tell a story about what is going on in the picture, once in French and once in English for every picture, and analyzed the resulting stories. She concluded that themes of achievement were more common in the English stories, while themes of autonomy, withdrawal from others and verbal aggression against people the same age were more common in the French stories, which she posited was an indicator that bilinguals in fact have two personalities. A more recent study by Hull (1996), using the California Psychological Inventory (CPI) as a measure of personality, showed that bilinguals scored differently depending on which language they took the CPI in. Hull concluded that these findings "leave little doubt that the expression of personality is dependent on linguistic context." (p. 122).

Cultural Frame Shifting

One way to understand these perceived changes in personality is by employing the concept of Cultural Frame Shifting (CFS), which is described by Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martinez (2000) as an effect in bicultural individuals who have internalized two cultures and switch between them as a response to certain cues, such as social context or language used. CFS helps explain why a bilingual would score differently on personality tests or feel like a different person when using different languages. Different languages cue different internalized cultural norms, which could lead to changes in behavior or self-perception. This effect has been demonstrated in research by Hong et al. (2000), later

replicated by Benet-Martinez, Leu, Lee and Morris (2002), where bicultural Chinese-English students were primed by sets of cultural icons, either American, such as the American flag or the Capitol Building, or Chinese, such as a Chinese dragon or the Great Wall. The results of an attribution task that followed showed that participants primed with American icons tended to give more individualistic answers whereas participants primed with Chinese icons tended to give more collectivistic answers, as was predicted by the researchers based on differences in cultural norms. Marian and Kaushanskaya (2004) showed that language could function as a cultural primer as well. In a study comparing autobiographical memories retrieved by Russian-English bilinguals in their two languages, it was found that a more individualistic narrative was produced when a language associated with an individualistic culture was spoken, and a more collectivistic narrative was produced when a language associated with a collectivistic culture was spoken.

      The theory of *cultural accommodation* is in the current study, as well as in previous research (Chen & Bond, 2010; Ramirez-Esparza, Gosling, Benet-Martinez, Potter, & Pennebaker, 2006), considered to be synonymous to CFS, and CFS will be the term used throughout the current study. Koven (1998, 2001, 2007) observed CFS effects in French-Portuguese bilingual Luso-descendants, second generation immigrants from Portugal, when she compared narratives from participants in their different languages. The same stories were given different emphases, and the participants both presented themselves and were perceived by others differently depending on whether the stories were told in French or Portuguese. Guttfreund (1990) explored how 80 Spanish-English bilinguals scored on measures for anxiety, depression and social desirability. The participants were divided into four groups: (a) participants with Spanish mother tongue given tests in Spanish; (b) participants with Spanish mother tongue given tests in English; (c) participants with English mother tongue given tests in English; and (d) participants with English mother tongue given tests in Spanish. The results showed that regardless of whether Spanish was the mother tongue or second language, the expressed affection was significantly higher in tests in Spanish, which suggests, in Guttfreunds own words, "that it is not the mother tongue but rather the qualities of the specific language being used together with the role that language plays in the individual's life that will have an impact on a bilingual's emotional experience" (p. 606). Chen and Bond (2010) explored the CFS effect on personality in Hong Kong Chinese-English bilinguals using behavioral observations and self-reports on the Big Five Inventory (BFI), plotting personality across the five dimensions extraversion, openness, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticiscm. Chen and Bond concluded that the perceived cultural norms of the group most associated with the used language had a significant effect on various personality traits, for example participants being perceived as more extroverted, open and assertive when conversing in English. Ramirez-Esparza et. al. (2006) conducted a series of studies to answer the question of whether Spanish-English bilinguals show differences in personality when using different languages. Personality was measured within the Big-Five framework, again using the BFI. Participants were asked to complete the BFI on two occasions, once in English and once in Spanish, and the results revealed cross-language differences. Extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness scores were all higher in English than in Spanish while neuroticism and openness scores were higher in Spanish, which provides support for language functioning as a cue for CFS affecting personality. Further evidence was provided by Veltkamp, Recio, Jacobs and Conrad (2012) who administered the Neuroticism Extraversion Openness-Five-factor Inventory (NEO-FFI) to German-Spanish bilinguals and noted higher scores on extraversion and neuroticism when giving the test in Spanish, and higher scores on agreeableness when giving the test in

German.

Purpose

According to Special Eurobarometer (2006), 89% of Swedes are proficient enough in English to be able to have a conversation in it – the highest percentage among non-English countries
in the European Union. Given previous research showing that bilinguals tend to feel different when using different languages as well as research showing CFS effects on personality primed by language, the question arises of what effect speaking English has on the personality of Swedish people. A phenomenological study by Heinz (2001) gave some insight in the matter when a Swedish-English bilingual described how speaking English was different from speaking Swedish: "I think I'm more outgoing when I speak, when I'm speaking English ... I think this thing about being Swedish, I mean, you're more shy or whatever, well, you're not supposed to, you're supposed to be more humble" (p. 96). Wilson (2013) found a negative relationship between extraversion and "feeling different", and suggested that people who are less outgoing in their first language may find their second language to function as a mask allowing them to be more comfortable in social interactions. Ozanska-Ponikwia (2012) also found extraversion to be of significance, arguing that an above-average social skill is required to notice changes in oneself when switching language.

The current study explores Swedish-English bilinguals' perceived changes in themselves, specifically changes in personality and extraversion, when speaking their second language English. Considering previous research using the Big-Five framework, together with it being a widely used model of personality traits (John, Naumann, & Soto, 2008), this framework is employed in the current study as well. The current study addresses the following research question: Do Swedish-English bilinguals report changes in personality or extraversion when speaking English, and, if so, how do they characterize and explain these changes?

Method

In consideration of the limited literature on the subject of spoken language and perceived personality changes, a qualitative research design was used for the current study. Such a design is especially suited for understanding the participants' perspective and is flexible enough to allow for the discovery of unanticipated phenomena (Maxwell, 2005). A constructivist approach was chosen, focusing on the studied phenomenon (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2014). Semi-structured individual interviews were used for collecting data; structured by an interview guide but allowing deviations from the guide in order to explore each participant's unique experiences (Beitin, 2014). Purposive sampling (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009), as opposed to random sampling, was employed to increase the chances of finding participants with experiences relevant to the subject, i.e. participants proficient in Swedish and English and using both languages on a daily basis.

Participants

Twelve participants were recruited through an online community for Swedish people in Dublin; 7 female, 5 male ranging from 24 to 63 in age (M_{age}=35). The rationale for selecting Swedish people living in Dublin was that this group of people would (a) likely be proficient enough in English not to be experiencing language nervousness; (b) have recent

salient experiences of speaking English; (c) likely be using both Swedish and English in their daily lives given the amount of job opportunities requiring proficiency in the Swedish language and the large Swedish community.

Most of the participants reported using Swedish to some degree in their daily lives – as a part of their job, as a part of their social life or both. Only one participant reported not to be using Swedish at all in her daily life in Dublin, but did report calling her friends and family in Sweden from time to time whenever she felt the need to speak Swedish. All of the participants reported themselves to be bilingual, being fluent in Swedish and English, although some reported themselves to be proficient to some degree in a third, fourth or fifth language, though not proficient enough to call themselves fluent speakers, except for one participant who was fluent in polish. Primary school was mentioned as a source to their English proficiency, but all participants reported media, movies, music, reading, Internet or video-games to be more influential in their language learning.

Interview guide

The interview questions were grouped into three sections. The first section consisted of background questions regarding the participants' language skills and their use of languages in their daily lives, such as "Do you use mostly Swedish or English in your daily life here in Dublin?" and "Could you tell me what you think in general about speaking English?". The second section consisted of questions regarding general self-perceived changes when switching spoken language, such as "Do you sometimes feel different when speaking English?", adopted from Pavlenko (2006), and "Do you think others perceive you any differently when you speak English?". Questions in this section were deliberately broad in order to elicit as varied responses as possible. Finally, the third section consisted of questions specific to personality and extraversion in relation to language spoken in general and in certain given situations. These questions were constructed from items pertaining to extraversion and introversion in the 44-item inventory of the Big Five Inventory (John, Naumann, & Soto, 2008). For example "Have you ever felt more reserved when speaking English?" and "Imagine yourself doing a verbal presentation in English, and then the same presentation in Swedish. What would the differences between these two presentations be?". Follow up questions were used whenever an answer needed clarification or elaboration, or when a question was misunderstood by the participant.

Data collection

Information about the study was kept brief at the onset of recruiting participants from the online community. The recruitment message stated that participants were needed for interviews for a master's thesis in psychology having to do with how Swedish people perceive themselves when speaking English. The purpose of the study was not specified in any greater detail considering that: (a) it was possible that the exact research question would change somewhat during the course of the data collection; (b) it could potentially be detrimental to the study should the participants know from the beginning exactly what research question the interviewer was exploring; (c) a too lengthy and detailed recruitment message could potentially deter people from reading it and ultimately declining to participate.

Two pilot interviews were conducted in Stockholm prior to traveling to Dublin in order to test the interview questions beforehand and assess how much time each interview would require. The two participants were female university students, 25 and 30 years old

respectively. These interviews resulted in some questions being reordered or rephrased for clarity and better structure of the interview. Since the two people being interviewed were living in Sweden - and always had been - any questions pertaining to living abroad were omitted during the pilot interviews.

All later interviews were held in Swedish, lasted from 25 to 61 minutes and took place over a period of five days. Each participant was given the choice of location for their interview in order for it to be as comfortable for them as possible. The interviews were predominantly conducted in public places in central Dublin: restaurants, pubs, cafés and, on two occasions, in public parks. One interview was not held in a public place but in a secluded meeting room at the participant's office. Regardless of where the interviews took place, care was taken to avoid noisy surroundings as best possible. On two occasions the location had to be changed before starting the interview because of too much noise in the area, mainly from loud music being played in the vicinity.

Each interview session was recorded using a portable digital recorder. Prior to starting the recording, each participant was informed that all personal information would be handled confidentially, meaning that nobody but the interviewer would be able to link the identity of the participants with the specific interview. Furthermore, each participant was informed that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from the interview and the study at any point should they feel the need to. Finally, it was pointed out that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions asked in the interview, and the participant was encouraged to give as detailed accounts of their experiences and thoughts as possible – even in the cases when a question could be answered with a simple yes or no. During the interviews, the answers given by each participant were interpreted by the interviewer, and the interpretations were to a great extent verified during the course of each interview in accordance with interview guidelines by Kvale (2007). This verification was achieved by offering a summary of the participant's view of the topic at the end of the interview, giving the participant the opportunity to correct any misunderstandings. Each interview ended with the question "Do you wish to add anything before we finish?". After each interview, after stopping the recording, an informal debriefing ensued before interviewer and participant parted ways, allowing the participant to ask questions about the interview and the study in general and to add anything that for any reason had not been shared during the interview.

Analysis

The recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim and the transcripts were subjected to qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2013) following the three phases described by Roulston (2013): (a) data reduction; (b) data reorganization; (c) interpretation and representation. Data reduction was achieved by going through the transcripts one by one, categorizing the data in successive steps and removing irrelevant data. Broad categories were formed by breaking down each transcript into its constituent parts, coding text passages pertaining to emotions and personality. These main categories were then further broken down, establishing subcategories consisting of references to specific emotions (anger, love, nervousness, sadness) and specific personality traits (assertiveness, talkativeness, sociability). Direct quotations from the transcripts were used to represent findings in each category. Quotes were translated from Swedish to English by the author, and then back-translated into Swedish in order to increase the accuracy of the translation as recommended by Chen & Boore (2009). The final translated quotes were edited by the author for added brevity and clarity, omitting non-word utterances such as "um", "uh", "hm".

Results

Background

When asked about their general view on speaking English, two out of the 12 participants responded by describing what they saw as lacking in their English speech. Participant six (P6) mentioned that it had been more fun speaking English back in Sweden and that speaking English among native speakers in Ireland was more stressful as it made him more aware of his lack of fluency and potential grammatical errors. P12 described a lack of nuances when speaking English as a second language:

> I only have Swedish as reference, and the possibility to express oneself is sort of equal in both languages. It mostly has to do with nuances, nuances of a language that... I have many nuances that I can use in Swedish, while English is pretty nuanceless... nuances that are formed by having spoken one's mother tongue for 32 years, making you sort of a master of that language and enabling you to choose your wording on an advanced level.

The remaining ten participants all described their views on speaking English in positive or neutral terms. P2 described speaking English, in comparison to speaking Swedish, as easier: "It's easier to express yourself in English, there are more possibilities, more ways to describe [things]". The notion that it's easier to express oneself in English was also touched upon by P3 and P4 who both made the same claim. P1 expressed a preference for having conversations in English over Swedish when it comes to specific topics, especially work-related, intellectual and philosophical topics. P7 found it easier to speak professionally and with technical terms in English. P8 and P10 mentioned how they enjoyed speaking English in general; P9 reported feeling natural speaking English but not having reflected much upon it; and P5 and P11 reported having no problems speaking English.

Personality

When asked if they ever feel different when speaking English, P10 and P12 responded in the affirmative. P10 made a distinction between herself in a young age versus now, explaining that she earlier in life had used the English language as an instrument to explore different aspects of her personality and to become more extroverted, resulting in what she described as two separate personas that later in her adulthood merged into one.

> I think [the English language] helped me experiment with things I found sort of interesting. You know, that person that I was in English was maybe a little more daring, was more out there [...] more outgoing. . . . It was fun to get to be this lovely, happy person, separate from this other person who was very contemplating and had more control. Now these two have sort of married, but they hadn't back then.

When asked whether she thought others perceived her differently in the two languages, she responded:

> That's a very hard question, because it's such a... I have no idea what people think. But

from what I can tell I don't think it's that big a difference. . . . I think the biggest difference has been to myself, that I've been allowed to live out some sort of fantasy - well, not fantasy since I am like this as a person - it's just that I've been able to squeeze out more of a certain kind of personality through the English language than I could before. . . . I canalized it into this English personality, and that person was more daring, more fun and carefree.

P12, on the other hand, described feeling unable to express his personality fully when speaking English.

It was more obvious in the beginning when I moved here – I felt almost stupid when I spoke English. […] it was like every time I switched on my English I had to struggle a little bit, sort of like someone with a bad eye-vision squinting to see things clearly, using lots of [mental] resources just to talk, which comes effortlessly in Swedish. . . . I think I'm less witty in English. . . . I think that's where the biggest difference lies, because if you sit and talk more concretely about technical things having to do with just a large vocabulary you can express whatever you want. The same goes for philosophical things, expressing your opinions […], it's more humor and personality that requires these nuances that I'm missing.

Some of the other participants, who answered no to feeling any different when speaking English, later in the interview did still bring up differences in their personality or behavior when switching spoken language. P5 reported it being easier to engage in small-talk with strangers when speaking English, as did P8 who expressed it as she could "be more sociable with practically anybody in English" and made the distinction between feeling more like herself when speaking Swedish and finding it easier to take on a character when speaking English. P4 reported himself becoming more outgoing when speaking English, and found it easier to approach people and start conversations. P11 posited that although she did not feel different when speaking English she was perceived differently by others depending on which language she spoke, appearing more calm and composed when speaking Swedish and more loud and outgoing when speaking English. Finally, P3 suggested that her openness, positivity and joy came out better in English than in Swedish, and attributed this mainly to differences in culture rather than language itself.

When asked about potential differences between giving an oral presentation in Swedish and in English, P10 described how she had experienced it as less stressful to give a presentation in English, saying:

I used to think it was much easier to give a presentation in English. . . . It's stressful to go and stand in front of people […] and I think that when I could speak English in front of people it was like it wasn't really me standing there. . . . I used to do lots of presentations. We had this oral presentation class in one of my educations, and it was always like 'God, why do I get so extremely nervous when I have to speak Swedish but not at all as nervous when I get to speak English?', it was really a clear, very clear, difference. . . . I think it had to do with this sort of English persona having more self-confidence while the Swedish personality maybe didn't have quite as much, I'd say.

A similar account was given by P12 saying he would be more nervous giving a presentation in Swedish than in English due to him feeling "more naked in Swedish". P2 argued that she

would "be more nervous in Swedish, because it feels closer". P7 also claimed to get less nervous when doing presentations in English, but cited the reason to be that he would get preoccupied with finding the right words and getting the grammar right and that this would distract him from being nervous. The rest of the participants were either indifferent to which language they gave presentations in or preferred Swedish due to them being more fluent, relaxed or confident speaking it.

Emotion

Even though the interview guide did not include any questions pertaining directly to emotions, many participants brought the topic up on their own accord. All participants except P9 reported that emotions – either one specific emotion or emotions in general - are easier to express when speaking English than when speaking Swedish. P9 did, however, conclude that even though he did not experience it to be easier to express emotions in either language, he did note a difference in how the two languages represent emotions, saying: "There are some differences in how certain words describe an emotion. . . . Where the Swedish word for an emotion can cover a certain spectrum, the English equivalent might be divided into two, or vice versa." A similar response was given by P5: "That scale of emotion-words [in English] seems more detailed than it does in Swedish. . . . In Swedish it feels like you move in discrete steps, while in English it's more of a sliding scale."; and P2: "In English I feel there are more different steps of... or a larger emotional width of emotions. In Swedish I feel like there is 'I love you', 'I hate you', and then... well, there are more expressions to choose between in English."

The most common emotion to be reported as easier to express in English was love. Five of the participants (P1, P2, P5, P8, P12) brought up the subject of how the English phrase "I love you" differs from its Swedish equivalence "jag älskar dig" - the latter being reported by participants as coming across as more genuine or true; and the former being more casual and not carrying the same emotional weight. When asked if he thought there are any differences between talking about or expressing emotions in English and in Swedish, P12 gave the following response:

> It feels like you get closer to the truth sometimes in Swedish since you are sort of sculpted in that language while in English it doesn't feel like... it doesn't carry the same weight. Like saying *jag älskar dig* or I love you, it's not the same, I think. . . . It might have something to do with pop culture; there are so many sitcoms and references to people saying it, blurting it out in a pretty casual way making it more conventional. . . . So in Swedish it's more sacred.

P5 gave the following response:

> […] emotions are easier in English, also with the argument that it's sort of make-believe so I can resort to stronger positive emotions in English than I'd be comfortable with in Swedish. Saying you like someone, or saying you love someone feels really big in Swedish but in English it's nothing, it's just something you can say, it sounds nice. So I find it easier to express myself in English regarding those things. . . . Talking about emotions is easier since they are more distanced from myself when I talk about them in English, it doesn't feel as personal.

P6 reported it to be generally easier to talk about love in English than in Swedish, and also argued that it might have to do with the English language media - mainly movies - being popular in Sweden, saying: "How many romantic movies haven't you watched in English describing emotions, where it always is about those things... so I think a lot of that influences how you learn how to express yourself". P10 and P2 both argued that their consumption of English language movies and TV-series during their upbringing was a leading cause to them finding it easier to express emotions in English later in life.

The participants were more divided when it came to anger. Anger was reported by some participants to be easier to express in English, while others reported it to be easier in Swedish. P2 and P10 reported it being easier to blurt out angry emotions in English. P4 and P12 argued that curse words in English were superior and more forceful than curse words in Swedish. P11 argued that all emotions are easier to express in English due to a greater richness of nuance in comparison with Swedish. When asked to elaborate, she responded:

> It's actually easier to fight with people in English since it's so much richer, there's so much more than in Swedish. And sometimes it's actually... Swedish feels a bit limited, and if I'm really, really pissed off I can't get it out with just [Swedish curse words], I'm going to need like a big... a big vocabulary to be able to express what I want to say, and I think English helps a lot there.

P5, on the other hand, reported a preference for expressing anger in Swedish. She argued that expressing anger requires a preciseness and a careful choice of words, which she felt could be harder in English. P8 found it easier to curse in English, but preferred expressing anger in Swedish:

> Lets say I'm really disappointed and angry at someone... then I'd rather express it in Swedish because it would feel more genuine to me somehow... and it would feel like I could express myself better than if I were to do it in English because it feels more real when I say it in Swedish.

Finally, P6 gave the following response: "[expressing anger] feels sort of better in Swedish in some way because... that means you're really angry; that's when the real meaning is conveyed".

Discussion

The present study explored how Swedish-English bilinguals perceive changes in themselves - changes in personality in general and extraversion specifically - when speaking their second language English. The results showed that participants did perceive changes in themselves when speaking English in comparison to when speaking Swedish. The changes described ranged from changes in personality to changes in the expression of emotions.

In accordance with previous research (Dewaele, 2012; Dewaele & Nakano, 2012; Ozanska-Ponikwia, 2012; Pavlenko, 2006; Wilson, 2013), a majority of participants reported feeling different when speaking another language. Furthermore, extraversion was the dimension in the Big-Five framework most commonly referred to by participants when describing their self-perceived changes in their personality. Participants reported themselves becoming more outgoing and sociable, and finding it easier to approach people and engage in small-talk when speaking English. Two of the participants reported more negative views on

speaking English, finding it to be more stressful and requiring more effort than speaking Swedish. A possible reason for this could be a lack of proficiency or lower degree of confidence in English.

All but one participants reported it being easier to express emotions in English than in Swedish. The notion of Swedes finding it easier to express emotions in English has previously been mentioned in Heinz's research (2001) regarding a Swedish participant's second language experiences: "She also noted that it is easier for her to discuss emotions in English, due to cultural constraints on the discussion of feelings." (p. 96). Heinz does not elaborate on these cultural constraints, but this together with the results of the current study does suggest that there is a perceived cultural constraint on expressing emotions in Swedish, a perceived cultural facilitation of expressing emotions in English, or both. Participants in the current study never attributed the added ease of expressing emotions in English to Swedish cultural constraints. Rather, most of the attempts to explain this phenomenon had to do with a consumption of English language media in Sweden, which was described as facilitating the expression of emotions in English. This could be understood as an example of Cultural Frame Shifting (Hong et al., 2000). The English language movies and TV-shows aired in Sweden arguably construct and convey a separate culture, showing how emotions are expressed with ease in English – naturally not just because the language is English but perhaps mainly because of dramatic reasons: watching emotional outbursts simply adds to the entertainment. In effect, this could mean that Swedish people who consume much English language media are to a degree bicultural, and when the opportunity to speak English arises the cultural framework shifts to the perceived culture of the group most associated with the language, i.e. characters from movies and TV-shows. Hong et al. (2000) made a similar argument when describing their Hong Kong residing Chinese participants as bicultural in part due to an extensive presence of English language television and films in Hong Kong.

Another possible explanation was proposed by P5, describing feelings as having a greater emotional weight in Swedish, which makes emotions – especially love - easier to express in a second language due to it being more "make-believe", as she phrased it. Participants were more divided on which language they preferred for expressing anger. This may seem counter-intuitive: one emotion being easier to express in English and one emotion easier to express in Swedish. However, finding it easier to express feelings of love in English and feelings of anger in Swedish could be understood if considering that expressing love comes with a risk of rejection, a risk that could feel less threatening if it is all perceived as "make-believe", while expressing anger on the other hand would lose some of its point if the emotional weight of the words used is lowered. This is corroborated by previous research on emotions in bilinguals (Dewaele, 2006, 2008), showing anger as being preferably expressed in the first language while expressions of love easier in a second language. The divided opinion on anger in the present study could be because of a discrepancy between what is perceived to be easier and what is preferred. An individual may perhaps consider it to be easier to express anger in English if the words carry a lower emotional weight, but still prefer to express it in Swedish in order to feel like he or she is getting the anger out fully. The same could potentially hold true for expressing love as well: saying "I love you" for that trembling first time when it is not certain whether your love interest will respond the same is arguably quite different from saying it in a relationship where reciprocity is certain and you wish to express the grandeur of your love without nervous reservation.

A comparison of the phrase "I love you" with the Swedish equivalent, "jag älskar dig", was readily made by five of the participants. There is no explanation as to how these five participants, independent from each other and without priming from the interviewer,

could resort to the very same comparison. Participants described the phrase as more genuine, true or sacred in Swedish, whilst being less personal, more casual, easier to express in English. These findings are in line with previous research by Dewaele (2008), suggesting that the emotional weight of the phrase "I love you" tend to be perceived by bilinguals as lower in their second language.

Several participants reported that giving oral presentations in English is easier than in Swedish, explaining how it feels like being another person when giving a presentation in English, or feeling more naked when doing it in Swedish. Again, here are exhibited the notions of taking on a role or your actions not mattering as much or feeling as real when speaking English. One question that arises when faced with these results is whether all of the reports from the participants in this study, pertaining to personality and emotion, are part of the same phenomenon. Is it easier to express emotions, give presentations and be more outgoing in English due to the CFS effect or because it feels like "make-believe" when speaking English, or both? More data would be needed to be able to answer these questions.

It is hard to draw a line between culture and language, and some of the participants touched upon this difficulty in their responses. Specifically, the difficulty lies in determining whether acting or feeling different when switching spoken language has to do with the perceived culture of the people speaking that language or the specifics of the actual language itself, its morphology, syntax, vocabulary etc. Another aspect is the notion of feeling distanced to oneself when speaking a second language. Some change could be attributed to this perceived distance, as in the case of P10 who saw the English language as a means to develop new personality traits and not having to be bound by her Swedish speaking personality.

Limitations

One limitation with this study is that the interview guide was designed solely for exploring the participants' view on how language affects personality. During the interview process it became apparent that how one expresses emotions in the two languages was of greater interest to most participants. The interview guide was not designed for this topic from the beginning, which in turn resulted in the interviews not being as in-depth and grounded in previous research as they could have been regarding the topic of emotion. The topic of the interviews was in effect split into two sub-topics, one pertaining to personality and one pertaining to emotion, each of which warranting its own separate study. On the other hand, the fact that the topic of emotion was never part of the design of the study could also arguably give strength to the results, alleviating the subject expectancy effect (Harris & Rosenthal, 1985). The study was designed specifically to allow for the discovery of unanticipated phenomena such as these. The participants were not asked to elaborate on the topic of emotion, yet most of them did so out of their own accord. This may be interpreted as a sign that the topic of emotion - specifically the notion that expressing emotions is easier in English than in Swedish – is readily available in the minds of these participants, which in turn may be because they have already reflected on the matter due to it being of importance in their daily lives.

The translation of the participants' answers from Swedish to English poses as both a reliability and validity problem. Ideally, as recommended by van Nes, Abma, Jonsson and Deeg (2010), a professional translator would have been employed to translate the participants' answers in concord with the author. However, due to a limited scope and funding, the answers were translated by the author of this study, who is not a native speaker of English nor a

professional translator, and the answers would most likely be translated somewhat differently by anybody else. Certain phrasings and wordings would differ depending on the translator, which in turn would lead to slightly different results. These differences would be limited to subtle nuances and would not be likely to affect the results to any significant degree, especially after employing the procedure of back-translation; and therefore, the benefits of being able to present the findings of the study in an accessible way for non-Swedish speaking readers outweigh the potential cost. The alternative to present quoted passages from the interviews in Swedish together with the English translation was decided against in favor of added brevity.

Since all participants recruited for the study were found in the same online community for Swedish people in Dublin, there is reason to believe that they share certain characteristics. For one, all chose to leave Sweden and move to Dublin, Ireland, which in itself would require a high level of openness to experience; secondly, joining an online community to be able to socialize with kindred Swedish people in Dublin would require a certain level of extraversion; and, thirdly, deciding to respond to a post calling for participants for a study involving in-depth interviews would also require a certain degree of extraversion and openness. This could be an alternative explanation to the participants providing similar reports on several questions. Swedish people in Dublin who are not members in the online community, as well as community members who chose not to respond to the post calling for participants, would possibly give very different answers. However, seeing that purposive sampling as described by Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) was used, and that random sampling and generalizability was not part of the research design, this is considered to be a minor issue.

Applications and further research

Possible practical applications could include therapeutic work, for instance facilitating speaking with a bilingual client about his or her emotions by switching language. Discussing traumas or sensitive topics may be easier if the client feels that changing language gives emotional distance, lightens the emotional weight of the words used or allows the expression of personality traits not salient in the first language, for example extraversion and talkativeness. This benefit of strategically switching language in psychotherapy with bilinguals has been corroborated in a study by Pitta, Marcos, and Alpert (1978), where it was concluded that a patient "may benefit from verbalizing experience in his second learned, less emotional language, moderating the emotional tone and the impulse to flee from charged areas and making this material more accessible to rational consideration" (p. 255). A similar rationale could be used for applying the results of the current study to the treatment of social anxiety or, specifically, public speaking anxiety. When treating social anxiety using cognitive-behavior therapy (CBT), gradually exposing the client to the situations causing distress is a key element (Rodebaugh, Holaway, & Heimberg, 2004), and using a second language as a means to weaken the client's emotional response could potentially act as a stepping stone to full exposure. This would, however, need to be corroborated by further research exploring in detail how and if speaking a second language makes it easier to give oral presentations or engage in other social situations, and whether or not the effect is large enough to be applied to treatment.

Out of the 12 participants, 11 claimed emotions to be easier to express in English; but one question that needs to be answered is how this result would hold on a greater scale, with a greater and more generalizable sample. Also, further qualitative studies are warranted for exploring deeper how the expression of emotions is perceived and handled by bilinguals, and

what separates and unites the experiences and phenomena described by the participants in this study regarding their use of English. If it is true that English language media creates an internalized cultural framework in Swedish people which is activated when speaking English and makes expressing emotions easier, does this mean that this is not the case when Swedish people speak another second language than English? Doing a similar study with for instance Swedish-French bilinguals living in France would be interesting as they would not be able to attribute perceived changes when speaking French to an ubiquity of French language media in Sweden, and this could give valuable insight into the mechanisms behind these phenomena. Further debate and research is also needed on the cultural effect media has on its consumers and whether or not the Swedish people could be considered to be Swedish-English bicultural due to its English language media consumption.

The current study has shown that the language spoken can have self-perceived effects on personality and extraversion. For Swedish-English bilinguals, speaking English can be perceived as making it easier to engage in small-talk, be more sociable, give oral presentations, or to express emotions. "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world", Wittgenstein stated (1992 [1921], p. 101). Perhaps for some individuals, speaking a second language allows you to move past those limits.

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