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Bilingualism and Emotion: Do People Feel Differently in Different Languages?

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***Abstract* - This study aims to investigate the effects of bilingualism on emotional experiences. For many years, the role of language in how individuals experience and express their emotions has been explored by disciplines as diverse as psychology, neurology, and sociolinguistics. This study examines whether emotions are felt at different intensities in different languages in the context of bilingualism. The starting point of research is the assumption that individuals can experience the same emotion in their native language and second language in different ways. Language is not only a means of communication, but also a powerful cognitive mechanism that shapes thought and emotion processes. Therefore, it is assumed that the emotional experiences of bilingual individuals may vary depending on the language they use. The study applied a survey method to 15-20 participants and examined which language expressed the participants' emotional expressions more easily, warmly, and intensely. Acquired data shows that a significant portion of participants express their feelings more intimately in their native language, but in some cases, the second language creates emotional distance and allows individuals to express themselves more easily. Among the findings is that cultural context and language norms play a crucial role in emotional experiences. As a result, the relationship between bilingualism and emotion is formed not only by the level of linguistic competence of the individual, but also by cultural affiliation and psychological factors. By shedding light on the complex relationship between language and emotion, this study helps to understand the emotional dimension of bilingualism in both linguistics and psychology.**

Keywords*: bilingualism; emotion; language and thought; cultural context; second language*

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I. Introduction

In the modern world where we are affected by globalization, one can encounter lots of individuals who speak more than one language. Does a person experience the same thing in several languages? Can the possible application of different language make the emotional lives of the bilingual/multilingual people vary in terms of emotions? Do you use different words to express anger in the first language than in the second? In addition to serving as a communication tool, these

questions reveal the opinion that the language is concerned with the processes of the regulation of the emotion, identification, and shaping of the social context. Not only can language actively contribute in the expression and formation of the emotions. In this respect, the knowledge on the role of the language preferences of the bilingual individuals in their emotional lives can have quite substantial implications in both, the micro and sociological term.

In the contemporary world, the extensive proliferation of migration rolls, possibilities to receive education in foreign countries, and learning to use digital communication technologies made people realize that they should use the ability to devote some time to productive purposes to different languages. The experience of multilingualism does not only presuppose its important implication within the dimension of linguistic competence, it has implications within the dimensions of the cognitive, emotional and the cultural as well. In literature, it is advised that a person speaks more deeply and directly about their feelings in the first language; and speaks less, more detached, restrained, or mentally

through second language. It indicates the difference in the linguistic context, cultural context and how emotions are universal. This paper is going to elaborate a lot on the impact of language on the experience of an emotion through perception and expression of emotions in multilingualism.

Expressing feelings by means of words is a complex process that has to be discussed on linguistic and psychological dimensions. Even though there are cognitive impacts that feelings produce, the conceptions people give to them, how individuals relay such and the interpretation they make on them is majorly depending on language constructs. The entire language that a particular emotion or a set of emotions is expressed in, is constructed dependent upon the cultural values, which may make some emotions more emphatic than the others. For instance, in particular languages there exist different words describing the mood of regret or the feeling of shame but in general it appears a more general word. It also gives valuable advice on whether other people experience the same emotion at the same level when using different languages. As such, the language frame is able to influence the environment of transmission of senses, and the manner, in which these emotions are subjectively experienced.

A language itself is a very important tool that determines the intellectual and emotional world of a person. Multilingual speakers realize that the interaction between a language and an emotion is more complicated, compared to the interaction of one language. Here, the role of the issue whether bilingual language users have and express similarly colored emotions with equal intensity in the different languages and in what directions the flow of research in the area goes should be mentioned as a given one. Emotion's expression relies on the multi-layered process and involves not only the inner world of the individual, but the structural properties, culture norm, and linguistic context.

Regardless of the fact that the native language is usually the warmer and even warmer language because of an early-formed concrete often with emotions, the learned language may imply the numerically more formal, neutral tone, or cognitive one to convey the emotion. This disparity indicates that language also plays a role beyond facilitating communication; it is also a factor that influences how emotions are felt. The central question of the current research is how to find out whether bilinguals experience emotions on the equal level in both of their languages, and what cultural and linguistic circumstances the differences are dependent on. In this respect, the potentiality of transforming the form of emotions due to the language will be systematically studied.

This paper deals with how language interacts with emotion with regard to bilingualism, and this is identified on three broad axes where the primary research questions are framed. Firstly, the question arises as to whether or not bilinguals share an equivalent emotional reality across languages. This question dwells upon whether the emotion experienced by people in one language is experienced equally strong as in the other language and wants to look at the experiential topic of language influence upon emotions. The main issue here is the emotional volatility, in

particular, when the same signaling event was conveyed using another language.

Secondly, the issue of what factors serve to change the emotion transfer to language is discussed. The context considered in this factor includes means like language knowledge, course of discovery, recurrence and social background, cultural identity and emotional attachment built by the individual on language. The question that is being researched is whether these factors enable people to verbalize their feelings or lead to suppression of language.

Third, which language is most preferred when the situations being asked are emotional. Its specific challenges will be to evaluate what language is the most strongly felt on the relevant emotions, e.g., anger, love, shame, or anxiety, and how the language preferences of individuals are determined in such cases. In these questions, multilingual people will also want to understand more how the internal world of emotions is mirrored in the language.

The primary aim of this research lies in the testing of the way how emotional experiences of bilingual people vary in the context of language. It is believed that language has been significantly constructive not only as a mode of communication, but also it is involved in the development and expression of emotions. In this vein, the research will show the way that the experience differs in the course of intensity, sincerity and cognitive distance of individuals when they are expressing the same feeling in different languages. Moreover, sociocultural, personal, and contextual factors that help transfer the emotions into the language are another part of the study aims to find a systematic analysis of it.

The research will be able to make serious contributions both to the theoretical and practical spheres as it will demonstrate that the language choices of multilingual people cannot be reduced merely to pragmatic motives, but should be also considered through the lens of emotional comfort, cultural closeness, and sense of identity. It can serve to supply information that can be applied in many areas including psycholinguistics, acquisition of a second language, cross-cultural communication and studies into emotional expression.

Moreover, the study will be able to help in the formulation of even more sensitive and aware practices in the psychological counseling, education, and communication, especially of the people in the multicultural settings. In this respect research is one rich source of academic ground that will influence people to fully understand what they experience with language and emotion.

II. Literature review

The link between bilingualism and emotion has become one of the prominent fields of research in psycholinguistics and cognitive sciences in recent years. Studies reveal that when individuals use different languages, they experience emotions of different intensities and shapes. Particularly known as the foreign language effect, the phenomenon shows that people have stronger emotional reactions in their native language and can make more rational and analytical decisions by maintaining emotional distance in a second or foreign language [1], [2]. It is seen that proficiency, age of acquisition, strength of emotional association, and contextual factors are effective on the basis of this difference [3], [4].

Research into decision-making and moral decisions has shown that second-language decisions are often more consequential and rules-based because the second language provides lower emotional stimulation and activates more of a person's cognitive resources. However, this impact is not universal; individual competence, task type, and presentation style can change the severity of a foreign language influence. Some meta-analyses show that reading skills and levels of emotional stimulation determine the magnitude of this effect [5], [6]. Additionally, brain imaging studies suggest that emotion etiquette in the second language does not regulate the reaction of ambiguity in the first language as much as in the first, and that the emotional regulatory power of the second language may be limited [7].

Experimental research at the word and sentence level yields similar results. ERP and eye tracking methods show that early neural components are weakened in the processing of emotion-inducing words in the second language, and emotional impact occurs at later stages [8], [9]. This indicates that in the second language, emotions are processed at a more cognitive level, and bodily and automatic responses are more limited. Natural reading studies have a similar

pattern; although emotional effects may be observed during reading in the second language, these effects vary depending on the individual's level of authority and immediate emotional state [10].

Contextual factors also significantly impact the emotional experience. For example, a voice or written presentation of moral dilemmas may change the individual's decision-making style in the second language [1]. In addition, explaining negative or traumatic memories in the second language may weaken the individual's emotional response, and in some cases may facilitate the renewal of memories [11]. However, these effects do not occur equally to all individuals, and vary based on personal history, competence, and language usage context.

Memory research also supports this strong link between emotions and language. The language in which bilingual individuals encode their lives influences how easily and with what emotional intensity they remember later [12]. The phenomenon of language-dependent memory is seen in both episodic and semantic memory processes. Studies on autobiographical memories show that reminiscence occurs faster and more prominently when it matches language [13]. In addition, in mother-to-child interactions, the language in which memory is spoken changes the content and emotional tone of memory [14].

Inauguration, taboo words, and changing code also have a place in language usage in terms of emotional effects. Studies have shown that individuals experience high stimulation and taboo words more strongly, mainly in their native language [15]. In the second language, the influence of these words remains weaker and individuals often return to their mother tongue in moments of anger or intense emotion [16], [17]. This finding supports the preservation of the mother tongue's primary position in emotional experiences.

Individual differences are also an important factor in determining the interaction of an emotional experience. Characteristics such as proficiency, age of acquisition, level of emotional intelligence, and anxiety affect the rate of individuals' emotional response in the second language. Individuals with higher skill levels are more restricted in a lower level of emotional reflection, although they can also show strong emotional reactions in a second language [18], [19]. In addition, the individual's immediate emotional state also plays an important role; for example, emotional processing in the second language may be weakened under negative emotions [20].

Neuroscience research has found more detailed interactions of language and emotion in the brain. fMRI, ERP, and physiological measurements show that the networks of ambiguity and emotional regulation are more strongly activated during emotional processing in the native language, and in the second language this effect is more limited [3], [30]. These findings suggest that automation of emotional response can be inhibited because the second language is often processed through cognitive control processes.

There are also direct exemptions to clinical and educational practices in this field of research. In a clinical context, the emotional distance provided by a second language may offer an opportunity for some people to recall or express traumatic memories with less intensity. However, the finding that emotional tagging does not reduce the reaction to amygdala in the second language makes it necessary to carefully consider which language to use in therapeutic processes [7], [11]. The phenomenon of language-dependent memory in an educational context suggests that language adaptation in teaching and assessment processes may support learning [12], [21]. Additionally, since emotions such as anxiety and pleasure directly affect students' success in learning a second language, methods that improve the emotional climate in the classroom are gaining importance [4], [21].

Overall, research published between 2020 and 2024 provides strong but contentious evidence that people feel differently in different languages. Mother tongue is often associated with more intense emotional experiences; the second language often offers a more cognitive and distant processing style. However, this difference varies depending on factors such as individual characteristics, role types, contextual conditions, and language skills. Therefore, both in clinical practices and educational settings, a personal and situation-specific assessment should be conducted instead of a holistic approach to language selection [22]-[30].

III. Materials and Method

The purpose of this study is to understand how bilinguals experience and express emotions in different languages. The study is designed to comparatively examine the emotional experiences of individuals, both in their native language and in their second language. The study was conducted with a mixed method design and incorporated both qualitative and ethnographic approaches. This design was chosen to reveal participants' deep emotional experiences and provide a systematic comparison of emotional expressions in different languages.

A. Research Design

The research was based on semi-structured interviews and ethnographic observations. Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to express their emotional experiences in both their native language and their second language. In the interviews, participants were asked to describe both their overall emotional state and their emotional experience of certain events.

A notable feature of the research is the use of a delayed request method. In this method, participants had to first think briefly about certain events or emotional memories, then ask detailed questions. This approach allowed participants to go beyond the automatic responses they had at the first moment and make more in-depth, conscious, and detailed statements. The request-delayed method is especially important for understanding the relationship between emotional intensity and language preferences. Participants were given short waiting times between questions that allowed them to revisit their experiences.

B. Participants

Individuals involved in research consist of a group of 15-20 people who actively use two languages and have diverse cultural backgrounds. Participants were diversified in terms of age, gender, educational level, and cultural past. The age ranges from 20-35 years and both female and male participants were included in the study.

A goal-setting method was used to select participants. This method allows you to identify who will provide the most relevant information for research questions. Participants were selected from people who can use both their native language and second language well. Language proficiency is assessed by the participant's own statements and concise language tests. Thus, the comparison of emotional expressions in the native language and in the second language can be made healthier.

The variation in the number of participants from 15 to 20 was quite obvious in terms of data diversity and depth and offered an opportunity to observe differences between individuals. A listening-based approach allowed participants to express their emotional experiences more consciously and in detail, and enhanced the quality of the data.

C. Data Collection

In the data collection process, participants were asked to describe both their common emotional experiences and their feelings about specific events in their native language and in their second language. Participants created exemplary situations and were given a brief time to reflect. Detailed questions were then asked using the questioning method. This process went beyond the automatic responses of participants, allowing them to provide more informed and rich information.

The interviews lasted an average of 45-60 minutes and provided a special environment where the participants could feel comfortable expressing themselves. All interviews were recorded and then turned into transcripts. The study also observed the participants' natural social environments and systematically recorded their language usage, code modification behaviors, and non-traditional emotional expressions. These ethnographic records were compared with data from interviews using triangulation and the validity of the results was improved.

D. Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out using a thematic analysis approach. Thematic analysis allows you to identify repetitive patterns and themes in qualitative data. Interview transcripts were encoded and pertinent topics identified. Mother tongue and second language phrases were compared in terms of differences observed after the questioning process. Topics covered included

"emotional intensity in the native language", "cognitive distance in the second language", "emotional change during code modification", "cultural context effect", and "detailing survey responses". The coding process was examined among independent researchers and the credibility of the subjects was enhanced.

Additionally, comparative analysis was applied. Emotional expressions in the native language and in the second language have been systematically examined to determine the effects of language on emotional intensity and quality. This analysis allowed us to assess interpersonal differences in language proficiency, age, and cultural context.

Ethical issues are preferred in the research process. Detailed information was provided to participants about the purpose of the study, methods of data collection, duration and usage, and informed consent was obtained. Participants' names and personal information have been kept confidential and the information has been anonymized. Participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

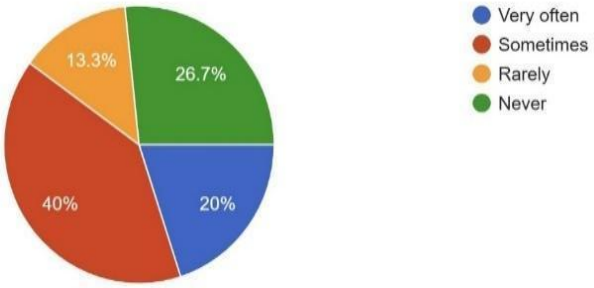


Figure 1. Frequency of Translating Thoughts before Speaking

The survey results indicate varying frequencies in participants' responses regarding the phenomenon under investigation. As shown in Figure 1, 40% of participants reported experiencing the relevant behavior or feeling "Sometimes", representing the largest portion of responses. This was followed by 26,7% of participants who indicated that they "Never" experienced it. A smaller segment, 20%, reported experiencing it "Very often", while 13,3% noted that it occurred "Rarely".

These results suggest that the experience or behavior is moderately common among the participants, with a notable proportion reporting occasional engagement. The distribution highlights that while a minority frequently encounters the phenomenon, a significant number of participants either rarely or never do so, pointing to variability in the perception or manifestation of the studied emotional or linguistic responses among bilingual individuals.

Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis and Embodiment theory were used as theoretical frameworks in the data analysis process. During the thematic analysis, the ways in which participants express their emotions in the native language and in the secondary language were evaluated in terms of the role of language in shaping the experience of emotion. The effects of language on the experience of body emotion from an embodied perspective were examined by analyzing participants' body reactions and non-traditional expressions.

The reliability and validity of the research was ensured by independent researchers coding data and reviewing topics. The data from the interviews and observations were compared with the triangulation method and the suitability of the responses obtained by the surveyed method was evaluated. This process minimized the deviations of the study based on subjective comments and increased the validity of the results.

This methodology allows us to explore the relationship between bilingualism and emotion in both individual and cultural dimensions. Having between 15 and 20 participants and using a survey-driven method increased the depth and quality of the data. The combination of qualitative and ethnographic approaches allowed comparative analyses of native language and second language emotional experiences, and made it possible to link results with theoretical frameworks (Sapir-Whorf and Embodiment Theory). The study provides a robust methodological design for understanding the impact of language on emotions in terms of both cognitive and physical and cultural dimensions.

IV. Results and Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to examine how and at what intensity bilingual individuals express the same emotion in different languages. The data revealed that there were significant differences in the way participants

expressed their emotions. Participants expressed their intensity of emotion more strongly and in detail in their native language (L1), and tried to be more neutral and distant in their second language (L2). In particular, strong emotions such as love, anger, and sadness were expressed more effectively in the native language, while the intensity of these emotions in the second language was greatly reduced. This suggests that individuals' ability to form emotional bonds is closely related to language.

When the intensity of expression of the same emotion in different languages was investigated, it was observed that the expressions made in L1 were more in terms of detail and richness. For example, responses to the grievance scenario were expressed in longer and more follow-up sentences in the native language, and shorter and simpler sentences were used in the second language. This indicates that there is a direct connection between the language acquisition process and the expression of emotion. The age of language acquisition is also a determining factor in this relationship. Individuals learning a second language at an early age were able to express their emotions more effectively and naturally in L2; individuals learning a second language expressed a limited intensity of emotion in L2.

The cultural context was also clearly observed. Participants' cultural pasts have directly influenced the context in which emotions are expressed, and in what form. For example, the Azerbaijani-English duality used more controlled and distant language when speaking English, and the Azerbaijani language expressed anger and sadness more freely. Similarly, Turkish-English-speaking individuals were found to be more intense in their native language than emotional expressions, and more limited expression was used in the second language according to social norms and context.

The strong emotional bond in the “mother tongue” and the tendency for more neutral and separate expression in the “second language” suggest that participants' emotional experiences are shaped by language. When expressing emotions in the second language, participants sometimes had difficulty finding the right words or were unable to fully communicate their feelings. This supports that emotional experience and language use are closely related, and that language is not only a means of communication, but also a formative tool of emotional experience.

In addition, in the emotion intensity questionnaires conducted among participants, the scores given by L1 were significantly higher than by L2. For example, positive emotions like love and admiration are rated 7-8 in the native language and 4-5 in the second language. Similarly, negative emotions such as anger and sadness are more intensely appreciated in the native language and expressed with more limited intensity in the second language. These results confirm the hypothesis that L1 increases emotional intensity and L2 increases distance in emotional expression.

The survey, which included 15 participants, explored whether individuals find it easier to express emotions in a second language (L2) rather than in their first language (L1). The findings reveal clear differences in responses.

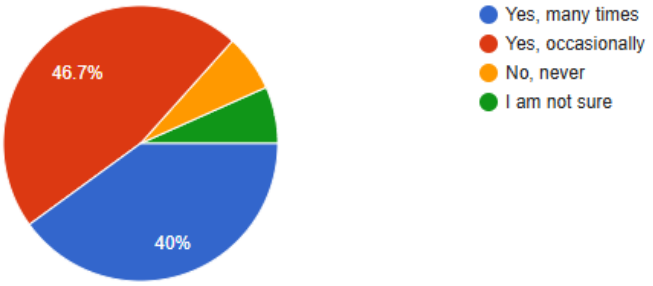


Figure 2. Ease of Expressing Emotions in L2 instead of L1

A majority of participants indicated some level of preference for using L2 in emotional expression. Specifically, 46,7% (7 participants) reported that they occasionally find it easier to express emotions in L2, while 40% (6 participants) stated that they experience this ease many times. Together, these groups account for 86,7% of all respondents, suggesting that for most bilingual individuals in the sample, L2 plays a significant role in articulating emotions.

On the other hand, very few participants resisted this trend. Only 6,7% (1 participant) reported never finding it easier to use L2 for emotional expression, and an equal 6,7% (1 participant) remained uncertain.

Overall, the data demonstrate that bilingual speakers in this study predominantly associate L2 with an increased ability to express emotional content, either frequently or occasionally. The results imply that L2 may serve as a useful medium for emotional communication, possibly due to reduced cultural constraints, emotional distancing, or enhanced lexical accessibility in certain contexts.

The findings are consistent with the basic principles predicted by the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis and Embodiment Theory when compared to existing literature. Although the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis shows that language shapes thought and perception, research findings also suggest that individuals have a more intense emotional experience in their native language. This suggests that language is not only a means of communication, but also a key element to an emotional experience.

In the context of embodiment theory, it has been observed that emotional expressions blend together with physical and cognitive processes. Participants used body language and facial expressions more effectively when expressing their emotions in their native language, and these expressions were limited to the second language. This indicates that language is developed in a way that is integrated with the emotional experience and that the native language strengthens the emotional bonds of individuals.

Cross-cultural differences also contribute significantly to the findings. Individuals with different cultural backgrounds expressed the same emotion within different norms and social expectations. For example, anger or sadness is clearly expressed in some cultures, while in other cultures, keeping emotions under control has been adopted as a social norm. This shows that a neutral or distant attitude in the expression of emotion in the second language is related not only to linguistic but also cultural influences.

Another important finding of research is that it presents results in terms of foreign language teaching and cross-cultural communication. L2 learners' limitation in emotional expression suggests that emotional bonding and expression skills should also be considered during foreign language education. The development of the ability to express emotionally should not be limited to grammar and vocabulary teaching; it is also important to communicate cultural norms and emotional experiences.

The findings are particularly important in the context of international communication and psychological counseling. Individuals who use two or more languages effectively may react differently in emotional expressions, depending on their language preferences. This should be considered to avoid misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication and to optimize the transmission of emotions.

Additionally, the study findings provide important tips for psychological and linguistic interventions. For example, methods to increase emotional awareness can be used in second language learners. Educators can use scenarios and emotion association tests to improve students' emotional expression. Such experiences can strengthen emotional expression skills in both L2 and L1 and make cross-cultural communication more effective.

As a result, this study makes it clear that the emotional experiences of bilingual individuals differ between languages and form closer emotional bonds in the native language. A trend of more neutral and distant expression was observed in L2, which was interpreted as an interactive result of the language, culture, and learning cycles. The findings make significant contributions in both theoretical and practical spheres and offer new questions and methods for further research.

V. Conclusion

The main purpose of this study was to examine how bilingual individuals experience emotional experiences in different languages. Studies have shown that participants experience emotions more intensely and in detail in their native language, while in their second language, these emotions are more neutral and distant. In particular, basic emotions such as Love, Wrath, Sadness, and Stupidity are felt more strongly in the native language, with significantly reduced levels of intensity and expression in the second language. This demonstrates that the relationship between language and emotional experience affects both psychological and cultural contexts.

Studies have shown that the way participants express their emotions in different languages correlates not only with language skills, but also

with the age of language acquisition and cultural context. Although individuals who learn a second language at a young age can express their emotions more effectively and naturally in a second language, individuals who learn a second language at an adult age are limited in their emotional expression. This finding demonstrates the impact of language acquisition at an early age on the formation of an emotional experience.

Studies have shown that the intensity and quality of emotional expressions in the second language are influenced by cultural differences. Participants' cultural pasts determined what emotions would be expressed. While anger or sadness is clearly expressed in some cultures, in other cultures it has become the norm to express these emotions in a more controlled way. This indicates that the more neutral or distant expression of emotions in the second language is not only linguistic but also related to cultural influences.

Practical contributions to research are also important. Second language teaching has been observed to ignore the emotional dimension. Students should be supported not only in terms of grammar and vocabulary, but also with activities to improve their emotional expression. For example, scenarios, role-plays, and emotion association tests can enable students to connect emotionally in a second language and express their experiences more effectively. Such experiences are great for fostering cross-cultural communication and preventing misunderstandings.

Research limitations should also be considered. The limited number of participants limits the totality of the results. In addition, learned language combinations are limited; research is focused only on specific language pairs. Differences between participants' subjective experiences and levels of emotional awareness also require careful attention when interpreting results.

Recommendations for future research are also an important part of this study. Studies with larger and more diverse language groups may increase the generalization of results. In addition, using neurological measurements (e.g. fMRI or EEG), emotional experiences in different languages may be considered to correlate with brain activities. Such studies will help us gain a deeper understanding of the biological and psychological connections between language and emotion.

The study offers new perspectives, both theoretical and practical. In theory, the findings suggest that language builds individuals' emotional experiences and increases the ability of their mother tongue to form emotional bonds. In practice, the importance of emotional dimension and cultural awareness is emphasized in second language teaching. These findings are guiding for researchers and practitioners who want to develop methods in foreign language education.

As a result, it has been clarified that the emotional experiences of bilingual individuals are closely related to language and culture. Although emotions are experienced and expressed more intensely in the native language, a more neutral and distant attitude is observed in the second language. This shows that language is not only a means of communication, but also a key element that shapes an individual's emotional life. The results of this study provide important implications for further research, both methodological and theoretical, and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of language-language relations.

The findings provide practical results in terms of intercultural communication, psychological counseling, foreign language teaching, and language acquisition processes. For example, increasing the ability to express emotionally in a second language requires grammar education, as well as developing methods based on cultural awareness and transfers of emotional experiences. In this regard, research makes a significant contribution in both academic and educational fields.

Despite the limitations of research, the results contribute greatly to the literature. This study revealed the application of common psychological and cultural principles to the relationship between language and emotion and made a significant contribution to our understanding of the emotional experiences of bilingual individuals.

Finally, this study suggests new questions and methods for further research. When studies involving more language pairs are designed to cover different cultural contexts, they will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the emotional experiences of bilingual individuals.

Additionally, research supported by neurological measures can reveal how language and emotions interact at the brain level and help us gain a deeper understanding of language-emotion interactions.

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