

# **What are the success factors of multilingual families?**

**Relationships between linguistic attitudes and community dynamics**

## **Abstract**

The research focuses on the influence of emotional, cognitive, and social climate on the language choices of multilingual families, and the impact they can have on their general well-being, intergenerational relationships, and the community context. The methodological framework of reference is Grounded Theory. Collected data concern language practices, attitudes, emotions, and generational, trigenational, and social interactive dynamics of multilingual families. The results include key insights into the variables underlying the linguistic attitudes of multicultural families. Two Network Views suggest that linguistic attitudes, such as the conscious management of specific and complex dynamics activated in a multilingual family, can stimulate well-being.

*Keywords:* linguistic attitudes; emotional climate; multilingual family; migration; family well-being.

## **1. Introduction**

The encounter between people of different cultures is a well-known social phenomenon in Europe. Recently, the stabilization of migrants and the opportunities to establish more lasting bonds between populations of different origins have been increasing (Novara et al. 2019). As Berry (2011) points out, increased mobility generates new processes of mutual acculturation and modifies the original cultural context of the social groups interacting with each other. Furthermore, in the last four and a half decades international mobility increased all over the world, as evidenced in the changing configuration of the European population. Such change is significant compared to the homogeneity of the past, in countries of both old and recent immigration. That consolidates entirely new human geographies (IOM, 2018).

Recent intercultural processes include multilingualism, which is an aspect of socio-cultural diversity with important symbolic and practical implications (Zabrodska, 2015). These involve both migrant families and couples from different countries in which one of the two partners is not from the country where the couple resides.

The literature on multilingual families tends to apply linguistic-didactic approaches that focus on adults' linguistic erosion following migration (Wong Fillmore, 1991) or language learning difficulties in migrant children and second-generation bilingual

children (Cummins, 2000; Liddicoat, & Taylor-Leech, 2014). However, little has been written on the emotional climate in which linguistic choices are made and therefore on the impact that such choices can have on the general well-being of families, in terms of intergenerational relationships and the wider community context. Attitudes and emotions filter the complex relationship between the minority language and the dominant language, which has an impact both on family and on social relationships (Crippen & Brew, 2013).

That was the central theme developed by the project entitled “Tales@Home - *Talking About Language and Emotions at Home With Multilingual Families*”, which is at the basis of the research within the Erasmus + program 2014-2020, KA2 (<https://www.talesathome.eu/>). The project aimed at promoting the well-being and social inclusion of multilingual families (Di Giovanni, Di Napoli & Allegra, 2019).

In general, multilingualism is the ability of an individual to use two or more languages effectively in addition to their first language (Grosjean, 2008). Individual bilingualism and multilingualism are, i.e., the ability of an individual to speak at least two languages. When multiple members of a community have such an ability and the entire community uses two languages, we speak of social or collective bilingualism (Hamers & Blanc, 2000).

Based on these categorizations we can speak of 'cross-native language family' or 'shared-native language family' depending on whether the parents have the same native linguistic background or not, and of 'community language family' depending on whether the parents' native language is that of the dominant community or not (Yamamoto, 2001). The parental configurations of a multilingual family can be as many as its challenges; for instance, two migrants partners who, despite having families of different origin, find themselves living in a third country; a single-partner family from a different country giving birth and raising children abroad; and even families whose partners *and* children were born in bilingual countries (such as India, Switzerland, etc.) but reside in a country whose dominant language is yet another one. Language choices of parents can be taken more or less consciously: the “one parent, one language” method (each parent speaks his or her language of origin with their children); the delayed introduction of the second language after the children have learned the basic elements of the first language; the (less adaptive) usage of mother tongue(s) only and avoidance of the dominant language in family discussions. Despite such multiplicity of possible configurations, these families can simultaneously maintain relationships with

both their community of origin and that of residence thanks their flexibility, openness, effective communicative climate, and ability to overcome the symbolic-territorial frontiers of diversity (Bryceson, 2002). The process of intergenerational transmission of linguistic knowledge is dynamic, dialectical (Kheirkhah & Cekaite, 2015; Duranti 2012; Goodwin, 2006), and requires accurate linguistic planning by the parents (Spolsky, 2008), and an effective educational environment: it should be noted that ‘effective’ does not mean devoid of difficulties in maintaining the parents’ linguistic identity within the family (Fogle, 2012).

Rather, the multi-ethnic partners, parents, and/or the family as a whole manages ambivalent dynamics from multiple points of view. In addition to changes, both preceding and following their settlement, their circumstances may depend on social or economic opportunities and constraints, norms, and regulations. They might be unable to maintain the multiplicity of their values of origin, including their linguistic code, in order to keep the family united.

Despite the impact that these circumstances have on the general well-being of these families, many authors (Cunningham-Andersson & Andersson, 2004; Kinzler, 2016; Kharkhurin, 2012) underline the positive role of multilingualism (Choi, 2019). The implications that multilingual practices have on the emotions and relationships of family members may also depend on positive or negative attitudes that, over time, structure the family dynamics. These are explored in the following section.

## **2. Multilingualism between emotional climate and social attitudes**

Learning more than one language from an early age improves cognitive abilities and neuronal and functional plasticity, increases the ability to multitask and concentrate, and strengthens memorization (Merritt, 2013). Bilingual children are especially skilled at understanding the mechanism and structure of languages, they can distinguish between ‘signifier’ and ‘signified’, and tend to communicate adequately and effectively. For Kinzler (2016) these children’s greater capacity for divergent thinking and empathic competence reinforces their understanding of the interlocutor's discursive intentions. At the same time, children exhibit excellent abstraction skills, complex information analysis, and problem-solving skills (Baker, 2001; Contento, 2004).

Along with their cognitive skills, also social skills and creative thinking are enhanced (Kharkhurin, 2012), and so are adaptability and flexibility to circumstances, changes,

and their ability to feel at ease in different contexts (Cunningham- Andersson & Andersson, 2004). They have better communication skills (Boysson-Bardies, 1999), empathic tuning skills (Kinzler, 2016), and more effective management of different situations thanks to their expressive abilities (Cunningham-Andersson & Andersson, 2004).

Although the literature cited above suggests indisputable advantages, numerous factors prevent easy generalizations about the effects of multilingualism.

The members of these families sometimes find the coexistence of several languages within their family unit and the culturally different elements between its members difficult to manage. Small and large conflicts within and outside the family may erupt, which suggests the following questions: what is the role of intra- and extra-family relationships in the well-being of multilingual families? The wider emotional climate and social environment of one or more linguistic codes should be considered as success factors or obstacles?

Certainly, emotions constitute an indicator of well-being (D'Amico & Mejia Diaz, 2014). The language of emotions encourages authentic communication and reduces the number of linguistic inputs that the subject has to decode, for it filters the content and facilitates mutual understanding. On the other hand, the relational and dynamic functioning of a family depends on the field of interdependencies that include thoughts, feelings, emotions, fantasies, free associations, as well as pre-existing individual and collective bonds (Bowen, 2013). Emotional reactions are transferred from generation to generation and link the past and the future of the family (*ibid*). Thus, if multilingual family members can become aware of and process the psychosocial attitudes and emotions underlying the learning and usage of the new language, their family dynamics, language skills, and opportunities for social inclusion in the host communities, i.e. their family well-being, may improve (Noone, & Papero, 2015).

However, the positive or negative disposition to take part in a rich and diverse linguistic environment does not depend solely on emotions, although they are undoubtedly a fundamental ingredient. In general, linguistic attitudes too influence the disposition towards new challenges.

By “linguistic attitudes” we mean representational schemes towards the linguistic background of the family that can manifest themselves more or less explicitly through emotions, behaviors, and actions of an individual. *An attitude is a hypothetical construct, that is to say, it is not directly observable but can be inferred from observable*

*responses* (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993: 2). Furthermore, attitudes are considered to be sufficiently stable through time, hence they can more easily be identified and measured. In the language of psychology, evaluated entities are known as attitudinal objects and encompass attitudes towards objects, individuals, institutions, events, and ideas (McKenzie, 2010).

In this research, we consider linguistic representations that emerge from stories of migrant families whose members had to learn at least one foreign language. We examined the emotional responses to their learning experience and the usage of one or more linguistic repertoires in intra- and extra-family relationships. Furthermore, we analyzed their educational decisions vis-à-vis the usage and maintenance of the original language or languages of the family or one of its members.

### **3. Research**

The purpose of the research was to investigate the linguistic attitudes emerging from the narratives of multilingual families. With an inductive approach, we asked which factors could be considered as the most influential on the well-being of multilingual families. We paid particular attention to the influence of cognitive, emotional, educational, and social aspects.

Data collection included semi-structured interviews lasting 90 minutes on average, about: migratory path, life history of the couple, childrearing choices, management of intra-family cultural differences, the multicultural and multilingual education of the children, and the main aspects of the daily life of the family.

The research involved 44 parents (41 females and 3 males) with an average age of 42.5 years ( $sd = 5.75$ ) and 44 children aged between 6 and 15 ( $\mu = 10.8$ ;  $sd = 2.18$ ), mostly girls ( $N = 30$ ). The parents came from 25 different countries, especially Africa, Russia, and Eastern Europe.

Recruitment started with the publication of an announcement on the website of each project partner. Among the families that responded, we recruited those residing in the country of arrival for no less than 5 years and with children under the age of 15. Anonymity was guaranteed and their information was processed in compliance with research ethics.

The analysis of the transcribed interviews was conducted with the ATLAS.TI software, with an inductive approach (Milesi & Catellani, 2002). Labels (Codes) have been created to [OBJ:OBJ:OBJ:OBJ] [OBJ:OBJ]group[OBJ] and indicate the most significant statements in the

interviews (Chiarolanza & De Gregorio, 2007). An in-depth illustration of the methodology of this research has been published in the original version of this article (Novara et al., 2020).

#### 4. Results

The results of the analysis of the interviews are illustrated in two Network Views, i.e. graphic maps in which several codes with similar meanings were grouped into Code Groups. In turn, Code Groups have been aggregated into Super Code Families that identify semantic areas with a higher order of abstraction. Network Views quote directly from the most significant parts of the interviews. One advantage of such a presentation of data is the readability of each network of codes. Furthermore, codes have been translated into English to ensure maximum dissemination of research results.

In particular, the codes enabled us to construct two Super Code Families (SCF):

1. Positive Language Attitudes, comprising three Code Groups, namely Cognitive Attitudes, Positive Emotions, and Linguistic Education;
2. Negative Language Attitudes, comprising four Code Groups, namely Social-cognition Border, Negative Emotions, Structured Difficulties, and Linguistic Education (see *Table 1*).

**Table 1. Super Family Code and Codes Groups**

Super Code Family (SCF)	Code Groups (CG)
1. SCF: <i>Positive Language Attitudes</i>	CG: <i>Cognitive Attitude</i> CG: <i>Positive Emotions</i> CG: <i>Linguistic Education</i>
2. SCF: <i>Negative Language Attitudes</i>	CG: <i>Social Cognition Border</i> CG: <i>Negative Emotions</i> CG: <i>Structured Difficulties</i> CG: <i>Linguistic Education</i>

The two SCF include codes that describe “linguistic attitudes” according to three levels of analysis (McKenzie, 2010):

- cognitive-emotional level: beliefs and considerations about one's own ability and emotions in relation to linguistic experience and family history;
- language education and educational choices of family members: the choices of the multicultural family, especially parental choices about the use and maintenance of the language of origin and transmission to children;
- social correlations: relational aspects in the community of residence that influence representations and linguistic attitudes.

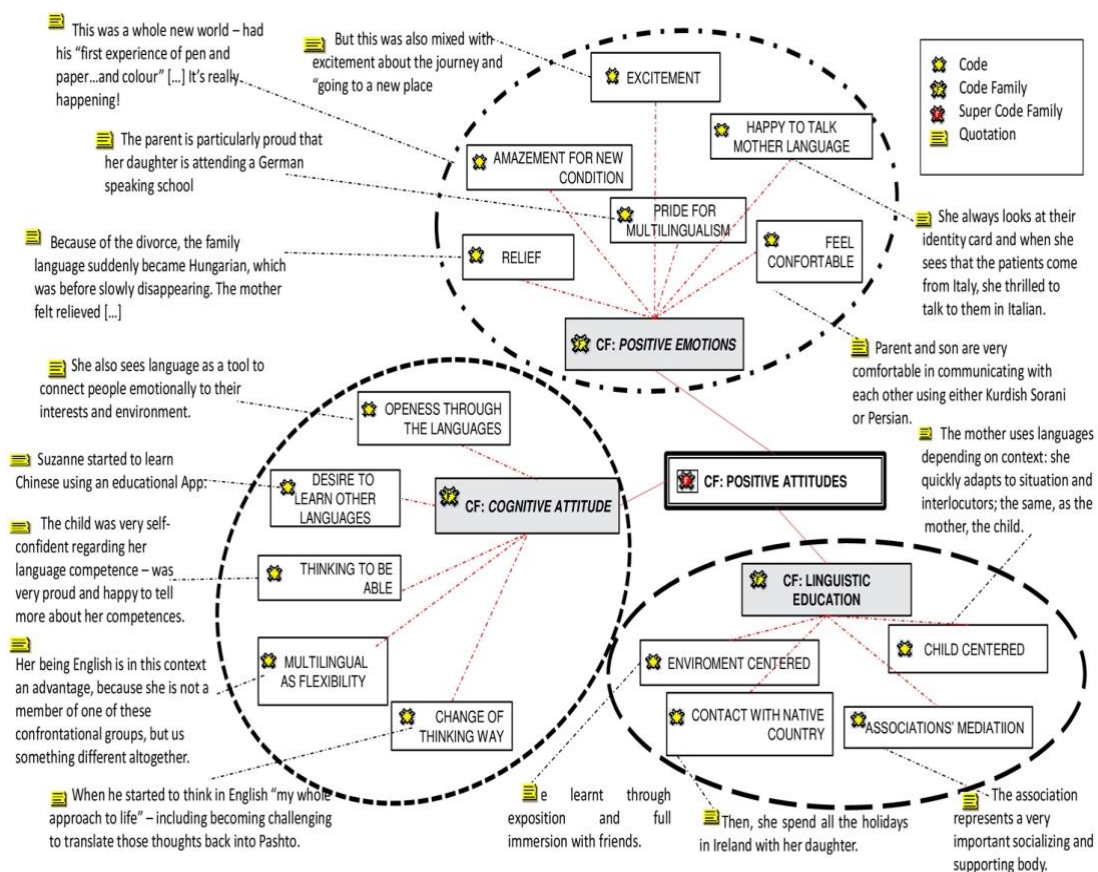
Results suggest that the success of a multilingual family depends on how family, identity, social, and linguistic challenges are intertwined and contribute in a complex and complementary way to the construction of a climate of well-being for the whole multilingual family.

#### **4.1. Positive language attitudes (Positive Attitudes)**

Linguistic attitudes are mental predispositions, thoughts, ways of seeing, emotions, and action plans regarding new and acquired languages. Codes with positive characteristics (N = 16) have been collected in the “Positive Attitudes” Super Code Family (Figure 1).

[Insert Figure 1]





**Figure 1.** Positive linguistic attitudes

In the *Cognitive Attitudes* CG, the “change of thinking way” code emerges. It refers to a change in the way of thinking and perceiving reality following the use of a new language. The following quotations from the interviews show how a change in the linguistic code can generate a more general change in one's own existence:

[ UNIPA-09, 42:19]: Catherine explains that when she arrived in Italy, everything seemed chaotic but now she feels more Italian than Polish and this is also due to all the changes occurring in the language and in the way of thinking.

[DHR-01, 1: 105]: When he started to think in English “my whole approach to life changed” - including becoming difficult to translate those thoughts back into Pashto.

Furthermore, multilingualism represents the possibility of being flexible (“multilingual as flexibility”), going beyond cultural and group barriers, and

overcoming the need for exclusive roots. The focus shifts to a perspective of transnational belonging.

*[EURAC 12, 18:64]: The mother detects a big rift between the Italian-speaking and the German-speaking group in South Tyrol with hardly any contact between the groups. Especially concerning school, the mother is disappointed that the bilingual potential is not being used. Her being English is in this context an advantage, because she is not a member of one of these confrontational groups, but something different altogether.*

The openness towards languages (“openness through the languages”) is connected to openness towards the languages of the family background, the country of arrival, and, more generally, to a relational dimension. Languages are, in fact, instruments of contact with people and occasions beyond one's own habits.

*[DHR-02, 2:57]: Her vision has always been to “make the language experience part of their lives in whatever way it works for an individual ...” [...] She also sees language as a tool to connect people emotionally to their interests and environment.*

However, it is clear that parental and family attitudes greatly influence the circumstances described above. Growing up in a multilingual environment, in which the majority of the people one interacts with on a daily basis speak a variety of languages, encourages learning more languages (Wei, 2012).

It is therefore not surprising that, among the positive attitudes, we also find the "desire" to deepen the study of a language in its linguistic, as well as cultural and anthropological, aspects:

*[FOY- 04, 22:42]: Giovanni came to my Italian class and he was a very motivated student; he was very interested in all the aspects of the Italian culture.*

*[UNIPA 14, 14:09]: Suzanne started to learn Chinese (her 4<sup>th</sup> language) using an educational App.*

Such openness (which, as we will see, is subordinated to parental educational decisions) stimulates both the desire to learn new languages and the degree of awareness of one's own language skills (“thinking to be able”). These are cognitive aspects that are directly linked to pleasant emotions, as can be seen in the *Positive Emotions* CG (Fig. 1). Here we find the “pride for family multilingualism” code and the feeling

of being completely at ease in multilingual circumstances (“feel comfortable”), a condition in which one feels to be “special”:

*[EURAC 01, 7:23]: the child was very self-confident regarding her language competence - was very proud and happy to tell more about her competences.*

*[EURAC 06, 12:70]: explained that he only began to realize that he was actually plurilingual and what that meant at the age of 13! Before, he didn't really think of it or consciously realize that he was speaking several languages - that was normal. Only as he started to learn Ladin, he realized that he already knew so many languages, and that was something special.*

The *Positive Emotions* CG includes the “relief” code, which indicates a relief for what one has left behind: here the trauma of the past is left in the background while the opportunity to use the native language is brought to the forefront. Emotions such as “excitement” also emerge among those who expect a dignified life from their migratory journey, i.e. distancing themselves from inadequate socio-political and economic conditions.

*[EURAC 03, 9:53] Because of the divorce, the family language suddenly became Hungarian, which before was slowly disappearing.*

*[DHR 01, 1:15] But this was also mixed with excitement about the journey and “going to a new place... my first time on an airplane ... I was overwhelmed by excitement”. [...] He was also going to be reunited with his father [...] in London and with other members of his father's family" It was about leaving behind the safety of what you knew ... and an amalgamation of excitement, [...]*

Their happiness results from the possibility to use their native language in the country of residence (“happy to talk mother language”). The active search for such situations suggests the benefit of practicing the language in the daily context and its repercussions in terms of individual well-being.

*[FOY 09, 27:16] The mother works in a medical center in the center of Brussels; the public is very diverse and she is very happy when she can address the people in their mother language. She does the registration of the patients and she always looks at their identity card*

*and when she sees that the patients come from Italy, she is very happy to talk to them in Italian.*

The “amazement for the new condition” code concludes the *Positive Emotions* CG. It indicates the enthusiasm and surprise for a new world. For many interviewees, that means breaking away from the negative experiences they had in their countries of origin.

[DHR 01, 1:30] *This was a whole new world - had his "first experience of pen and paper ... and color " on the plane journey to London - "in Pakistan it had been clay and a bamboo pen" and "Was preoccupied with the lifejackets ... I tried to take one with me" [...] It's really happening! He spoke about his "first encounter with the etiquette" was "holding the door open for other people ... because there were doors!"*

In the *Linguistic Education* CG (Fig. 1) the “child-centered” code indicates a parenting educational decision that takes the needs of the child into account. Such reciprocal emotional tuning has positive effects on the children's willingness to meet new languages, with beneficial effects on the whole family.

[SIH 01, 31:12] *There is a very close connection between the mother and son: they spend a lot of time together, discuss many issues. Both like to learn new languages and are planning to start learning some new ones. The mother puts both her 'homeland' languages (LT and UKR) straight into her heart. The same did the son. The mother uses languages depending on context: she easily adapts to situations and interlocutors. The same as the mother for the child.*

The “child-centered” strategy is not applied without taking the context into account. On the contrary, the parent's sensitivity can mediate between the needs of the child and the different contexts, encouraging specific attitudes and preferences. Such active learning, therefore, takes emotions into account too. In multilingual education, often parents are overwhelmed by doubts and criticism and take on the role of mediator or coach, that is, they listen, help to overcome obstacles, and can make changes when necessary.

The parent can also be supported in their educational task by “ethnic associations” where people with the same ethnic origin can meet and keep their common language and traditions alive. That implies relationships with ethnic groups in the host country,

contacts with organizations of the second level (the first level is that of the family network) that provide formal education services in their native language.

[EURAC 08, 14:12] *At the same time, she started attending language courses and social services where she encountered persons from different cultures and she thus had the possibility to practice her Italian.*

[UNIPA 05, 6: 1] *In Palermo she met other Polish women; actually, they are focused on a Polish social school, which is an association sponsored by Polish Embassy, with the aim to teach Polish as L2 to Italian / Polish children living in Palermo .*

On the other hand, it is not possible to ignore the role played by the living environment (the “environment centered” code) that naturally transforms the language of the country of residence into a language of socialization in the everyday life. In this case, learning takes place without stress. Indeed it seems that the “full immersion” mode, especially with friends, reinforces individual motivation and, thus, a positive linguistic attitude.

[UNIPA 09, 49: 5] *She learned through exposition and full immersion with friends.*

[ EURAC 01, 7: 9] *The family is living in a lively community of migrants from Ex-Yugoslavia and feels welcome in South Tyrol. Asked as to where they belong and where they feel at home, they unanimously say: South Tyrol [...] The child and the parent made a point that they also knew German dialect. Which is very different in South Tyrol from standard German and can only be learned from the environment, because it's not taught at school.*

Another language education strategy consists of maintaining contact with the country during holidays and festivities when people make short trips to visit their relatives.

[UNIPA 04, 44: 5] *My daughters were born in Ireland, and I spent there the first months. Then, I spend all the holidays in Ireland with my daughter.*

These educational strategies are based on a positive, warm, and non-stressful emotional climate, despite focusing on different aspects: a creative dance where the movement of a part of the game follows and, at the same time, anticipates and changes the course of

learning. A harmonious movement which, as we will see, can be compromised by family pressure on linguistic decisions.

## 4.2 Negative linguistic Attitudes (Negative Attitudes )

As for linguistic attitudes with negative characteristics, 22 codes were selected for the “Negative Attitudes” SCF (Figure 2) and categorized into 4 distinct Codes Groups: *Social- Cognition Border*, *Negative Emotions*, *Linguistic Education*, and *Structured Difficulties*.

[Insert Figure 2]

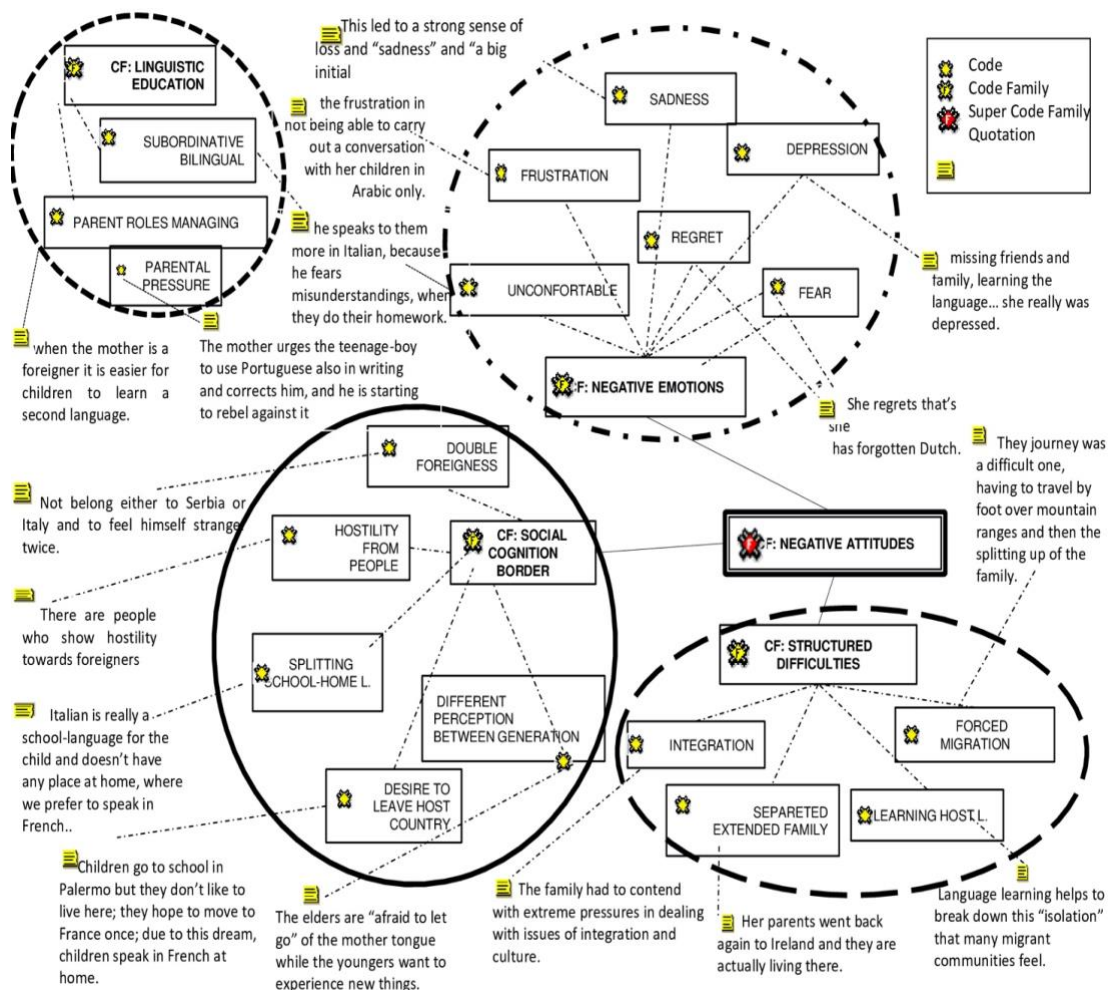


Figure 2. Negative linguistic attitudes

Regarding the *Social-Cognition Border* CG (Fig. 2), the cognitive elements that emerged relate to processes of categorization (inside-outside, foreign-non-foreign, intimate-external, etc.) through which information is organized to understand and act in the social world (Baeyens et al., 2005; Howell & Ratliff, 2019). In this way, attitudes "to and from" the community of residence create limits of meaning: the "Double foreignness" code indicates the absence of a sense of belonging to both the place of origin and the arrival city, "... *and to feel stranger twice because the people living here do not see him as an Italian but when he goes there, do not consider him as a Serb*" (UNIPA 08, 44:51). In summary, feeling "double" not only describes a particular way of thinking about oneself but also classifies the other. That is an example of social cognition: this experience is traced back to people's hostile attitudes towards foreigners ("Hostility from people") and can lead to perceiving oneself as an *outsider* in both the country of origin and destination.

The following quotations from the interviews exemplify the social cognition processes reported above:

[EURAC 06, 12:41] *in the minds of the people, he is always "the other": e.g. for Italians, he is "the German"; for Germans, he is "the Italian" or "the Portuguese" or someone strange, because of their mulatto appearance; and for the Portuguese, he is also "the Italian", because the family lives in Italy and they don't understand that the family is actually more German than Italian .*

[EURAC 08, 14:28] *he pointed out the difficulties he had when he moved back to Calabria and also his disappointment in discovering that while in Switzerland he was the "Italian", in Italy he was the "Swiss".*

[EURAC 03, 9:44] *the mother perceives herself to be Hungarian, also because she felt it rather hard to get in touch with the local people in South Tyrol who still treat her as an outsider or as the former (Hungarian) wife of a member of their group.*

Interpersonal relations play an important role in the development of "ethnolinguistic identity", however residence in a hostile environment may discourage inter-group contact. As a consequence, environmental language learning opportunities decrease and feelings of solitude increase.

[UNIPA 09, 42:] *Other aspects, that have affected her sense of belonging, concern the relationships with people: some people show hostility towards foreigners.*

[SIH 03, 33: 3] *In the beginning, she felt isolated, as she came alone, all her relatives left in Azerbaijan. It was especially difficult after their children were born, because she felt lonely.*

Furthermore, when the language used at school (or work) is different from the language used at home only, or when the first and second-generation use different languages (as it happens for parents and children), conflict may erupt (“different perception between generation”). As a consequence, some family members may feel the need to escape from the new context (“desire to leave host country”). Thus, the split with the host community may be a reflection of a split between the new language and the language of origin.

[UNIPA 02, 42: 2] *Children go to school in Palermo but they don't like to live here; they hope to move to France; due to this dream, children speak French at home.*

[EURAC 12, 18:21] *My daughter, on the contrary, only has German-speaking friends. Even Italian-German bilingual friends would speak German with her, i.e. standard German, not dialect. My daughter seems to define her identity via standard German.*

[DHR 01, 1:99] *The elders are “afraid to let go” the mother tongue while the youngsters want to experience new things.*

The separation of linguistic environments (“splitting school-home L.”) might “mutilate” one's multilingual identity. One's own ethnolinguistic identity never feels fully realized. The following quotations illustrate such a feeling:

[FOY 09, 27:32] [...] *The mother would like to use more Italian in her family life. Her child is happy with French and some Arabic and she totally ignores the Italian identity of her mother.*

[FOY 06, 24:12] *Now she has a good level in Dutch and found a job in a Dutch library. Also, the husband had a job but he changes easily. Still, she doesn't feel good.*



The “Negative Emotions” CG (Figure 2) indicates emotions associated with unpleasant feelings in different situations. For example, the “regret” code indicates the experiences of losing one’s mother tongue over time. However, in this case, the experience of loss is also emotional: it results from the “frustration” of being unable to transfer one’s own linguistic heritage to the children, for fear of not being understood by them. Furthermore, it results from the discomfort (“uncomfortable”) in not being able to help them when they have to do their schoolwork. Finally, there is a fear (“fear”) of not being able to bridge the generational gap due to the use of different linguistic codes, which amplifies the physiological divergences between adults and young people, between parents and children.

[FOY 02, 20: 5] *She regrets that she has forgotten Dutch.*

[UNIPA 08, 44:11] *he spoke to them in Serbian when they were young, and now he speaks to them more in Italian because he fears misunderstandings.*

[FOY 06, 24:37] *mother's strongest language is Albanian and her second language Dutch but the children have French as the strongest language. [...] The situation that mother and child have different 'strongest' languages makes it often difficult. They make efforts to understand each other and to help but it is frustrating.*

Negative emotions include the sadness (“sadness”) that often accompanies the experience of “cultural shock”, the feelings of confusion and loss that occur with sudden changes in lifestyle after migration. At this point, the sense of “fear” and loss can turn into depressive states (“depression”) due to the separation from the family of origin, friends, and important people in general. A potentially dangerous combination of emotions for the well-being of the person and the family as a whole.

[DHR 01, 1: 106] *the family were separated in this transition, with his father moving on to the UK (London) ahead of the rest of the family and the grandmother (“who had raised me”) left behind - this led to a strong sense of loss and “sadness” and “a big initial shock” that was “not considered that much at the time [...] a killer emotionally.*

[DHR 01, 1:15] *He was also going to be reunited with his father - who had left him behind - in London and with other members of his father's family who he had not met before - adding*

*to this confusing mix of emotions - leaving loved ones behind but also connecting and reconnecting with family members. [...]*

The Linguistic education CG (Figure 2) includes the “subordinative bilingual” code which describes cases in which languages do not have the same status but one is subordinate to the other in its structure in the cognitive process and everyday use (Wei, 2012). In particular, the differences between the majority group and the minority group reflect power relations that might influence linguistic decisions: learning the language of the dominant country is thus linked to a state of necessity rather than desire.

*EURAC 08, 14: 8] Once she arrived, she felt the need of learning neither Italian nor German, because she started living within the Moroccan community already settled in the town and having thus almost no contact with any other language apart from Arabic, and because she got pregnant so she preferred staying at home. The situation changed when her husband got a serious illness, which brought him to death. She had then the feeling that she needs to learn at least one language of the Province and she chose Italian.*

Situations of "subordinative bilingualism" can also occur in relation to parental roles “parent roles managing”), as shown in the words of an interviewed father:

*[UNIPA 08, 44:11] when the mother is a foreigner it is easier for children to learn a second language.*

In this case, the power difference between languages is reflected in couple dynamics in which the mother figure has an advantage in the education of the offspring. It is worth remembering that it is no coincidence that we continue to call it "mother tongue". The emotional load is implicit in the mother-child dyadic relationship.

The parental couple might involuntarily pressure the child ("parental pressure"), as it happens when they encourage the child to learn the native language of the family despite the child's preference for the language of the country of residence (the host language).

*[EURAC 06, 12:46] He does not like to speak Dutch. He is obliged to go to a Dutch-speaking school from his parents but he does not like it.*

*[EURAC 06, 12:71] The mother urges the teenage-boy to use Portuguese also in writing and corrects him, and he is starting to rebel against it.*

In the last CG, *Structural Difficulties* (Fig. 2) we find the codes that can exacerbate all the negative attitudes encountered.

First, the permeability of the culture of the country of arrival. That indicates the level of "integration" that both cultural parts are willing to achieve. That activates -as Berry (2011) puts it- a process of mutual acculturation between different groups that results from a negotiation between the parties and the desire to establish contact.

*[DHR 05, 5: 8] The family has endured immense difficulties in the integration process around the issues of gender and religion.*

*[EURAC 08, 14: 8] The family had to contend with extreme pressures in dealing with issues of integration and culture when living in the UK and this may undoubtedly influence the choices behind language use. [...] The cultural pressures led to the breakup of the family with the father leaving the family home.*

We have already seen that the migratory journey involved the loss of friends, family, and language, leading to depressive experiences. Besides, some survived wars, political conflicts, and risked their lives.

*[DHR 05, 5: 3] The journey was a difficult one, having to travel by foot over mountain ranges and then the splitting up of the family.*

*[FOY 11, 29:02] The family originated in Kurdistan and left the country attempting to escape the troubles there.*

Traveling through the territories means crossing completely divergent family structures with abrupt changes from tribal family organizations typical of rural contexts to nuclear family models, typical of industrialized countries. Being deprived of the extended family does not help to overcome communication difficulties, as can be seen from the following quotation:

[DHR 06, 6: 3] *This led to initial isolation and a significant impact of cultural differences on the development of the use of language and communication. They moved from an extended family environment into a situation where they had to function as a nuclear family. The extended family was split up, having to settle in different parts of the UK.*

Here, learning the language of the country of residence can be a solution to the isolation and loneliness. However, that does not always turn into an authentic desire to realize one's own multicultural identity. This aspect, on the contrary, may motivate one to learn the language and to integrate the different narratives of one's personal history originally and harmoniously.

[DHR 02, 22:30] *Language learning helps to break down this “isolation” that many migrant communities feel.*

[FOY- 04, 22:43]: *Eva is still attending my classes but she is not so motivated; she is very shy and she doesn't speak a lot.*

[EURAC-12, 18:60]: *She feels that she would need to improve her German, but is too lazy to do so.*

## **5. Results and recommendations**

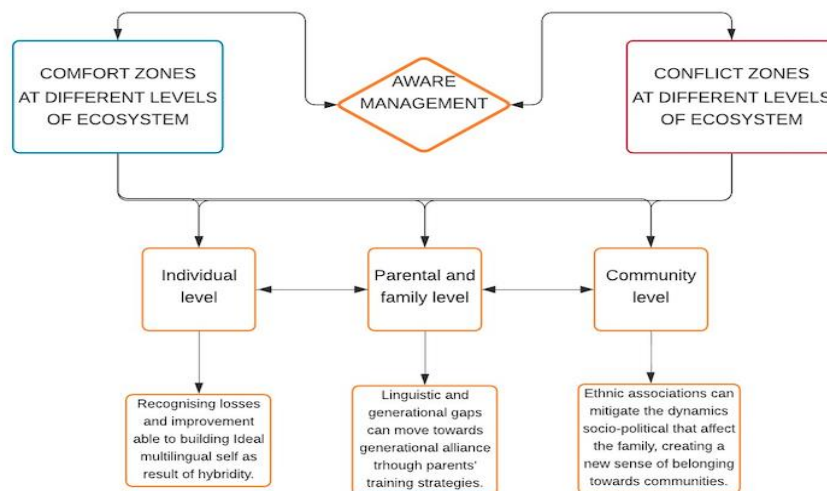
Linguistic attitudes contribute in various ways to the well-being of multilingual families. It is interesting to note that interviewees tended to refer to the emotional aspects (whether positive or negative) of others rather than their own. 'Emotion', from its etymological meaning (*e-movere*), indicates precisely a movement that starts from the self to meet the other. That explains the importance of social relationships in supporting a multilingual family identity: work, school, and friends spontaneously take the form of a community that legitimizes the family configuration. As evidenced in other studies (Foner & Dreby, 2011; Kheirkhah & Cekaite, 2015), parents' linguistic and educational decisions, when not pressing and constricting, can activate desire, pride, and appreciation towards the new context and learning of the host language.

The family is, in fact, the place of transmission of the parental language but also the basis of a linguistic exchange between generations and contexts (Abdelilah-Bauer, 2013).

The decision of multilingual families to lose or maintain the background languages are influenced by psychosocial factors (Dornyei, Csizer, & Nemeth, 2006) and may generate stress, tension, and cognitive and emotional strain for children. members (Mora, 2005; Stevens, 1992; Tubergen, 2004). For that reason, situations that can support family well-being depend on the ‘conscious management’ of the various emotional, social, and educational aspects examined above.

Overall, the results show that linguistic attitudes can stimulate both conflict and success, as emerged in the Network Views (Negative/Positive Attitudes). The former defines the difficulties connected to multilingualism, the latter indicates multilingualism as a resource. Together they configure a potential area of well-being. That is the 'conscious management' of a specific dynamic in a multilingual family. Conflict zones are indicated on the right side of Figure 3, comfort zones on the left side. Each is declined on several levels, from the individual to the community; the category 'conscious management' is in between. Conflict zones, like comfort zones, can be found at different levels of ecosystem complexity (Novara et al. 2019), as described below (Figure 3).

[Insert Figure 3]



**Figure 3.** Conscious management of conflict zones

- Individual level: perceiving oneself - or being perceived - as split between two linguistic and cultural worlds, and narrating one’s own history of migration

requires good introspective and narrative abilities. Furthermore, as Aronin noted, “*a multilingual identity is holistic, including 'perceptions, attitudes and personal life scenarios, both real and possible'*” (2016, p. 145). Recognizing the improvements in one's existence along with the inevitable losses, which explain the unpleasant emotions that personal narration is often accompanied by, reflects the concept of *ideal multilingual self* in which hybridity and existential relativity can be profoundly enriching (Pavlenko, 2006; Henry, 2017).

- Parental level: concerning linguistic transmission and socialization, sometimes a parent might feel excluded from the rest of the family if he or she is the only one who speaks a minority language. This tug of war, especially evident in our research, between maternal and paternal role could be overcome if parents cooperate and an alliance is forged between generations, as suggested by recent parent training strategies (Bellingreri, 2017a, Bellingreri, 2017b). At a generational level, that would bridge the linguistic gap between the first and second generation. Simultaneously, the relationship with the extended family -though maintained elsewhere- could mitigate the 'sense of genealogical disorientation' that might occur when one's deepest origins fade with time (Novara et al., 2018);
- Community level: the multilingual family is a dynamic social unit undergoing socio-political dynamics (Van Mensel, 2018). Therefore, as emerged from this research, the hostile attitudes of the host country discourage healthy and authentic confrontations with other languages, especially with the majority language. Inclusive policies, such as ethnic associations for minority groups, can mitigate and even change conflict zones at the community level and, through multilingualism, generate a new and broader sense of belonging to humanity and the global community ([DHR-02, 2:57]: [...] *She also sees language as a tool to connect people emotionally to their interests and environment* ).

In summary, the well-being of multilingual families does not coincide with the absence of conflict but with a conscious management of the process: it is a construction more than a result, a development more than a state. That is confirmed in studies on family repertoire (Van Mensel, 2018). It follows that dynamics in multilingual families can be quite complex and it is not always possible, or even desirable, to reduce this complexity. Families have specificities. In conclusion, in order to support the conscious

management of the family, some brief recommendations emerge from our considerations:

- It is important to support the construction of interactive tools (e.g. electronic apps) that help families to speak their languages and metacommunicate about the many languages of the family background. That means dealing with their cultural past in a "light" and pleasant way.
- In education and training, all levels must be kept into consideration: from identity and language to social and educational circumstances. As we have seen, when combined these can be success factors (Novara et al., 2017).
- In terms of community intervention, it is possible to support second-level associations that naturally mediate between two or more cultures and intervention networks linking formal and informal resources (Novara et al., 2016).
- Reducing the parent's pressure means reducing the burden of expectations on the children and encourage the construction of an authentic educational relationship, based on the evolutionary and dynamic needs of the whole family.

These proposals should be explored in their applicative potential. Some examples from this research have been published on the T@les project website.

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