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'What's the problem? I am happy that you are my customer!' African immigrant women's emotional labour and resilience in a multilingual workplace

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ABSTRACT

Recent research on multilingualism and emotions in the immigrant context indicates that negative emotions such as anxiety related to monolingual or cultural norms may prevail in immigrants' daily lives. Immigrants may respond to negative emotions with avoidance, for instance by avoiding using the language that makes them anxious. This study further examines emotion-related concepts of immigrant experience in a setting rarely researched: a highly multilingual workplace in Cape Town, South Africa. It focuses on immigrants' emotional lived experiences, emotional labour, and coping strategies such as avoidance or resilience. We report on semi-structured interviews with four African immigrant women working as shop assistants in a China Town shopping centre in the Western Cape. Noting the diversity of experiences in emotional reactions and coping, findings reveal that negative emotions African immigrant women experience are associated more with threatened life chances, than with non-standard speech forms. Although reported experiences imply a significant burden of emotional labour, these African immigrant women do not get caught in negative emotions and avoidance; rather, they demonstrate emotional resilience and active coping strategies (e.g. positive emotions, humour, gratitude) that allow them to manage conflict and negativity.

Introduction

Emotions and verbalising them play a crucial part in multilinguals' lives. The ability to regulate and express emotions, whether in face-to-face interaction or through written communication, directly or indirectly, is an important social activity that helps us maintain physical and mental health (Dewaele 2013; Weigand 2012). Noting whose feelings are acknowledged and who can freely express emotions in particular ways and in given contexts, indicates the link between emotions and power (Svasek and Skrbis 2007). Emotional labour (Hochschild 1983), managing emotions in a workplace during social interaction and conflict (e.g. in wage negotiation), is a sensitive topic, and one that needs to be investigated in multilingual workplaces.

Through semi-structured interviews, this study reports on four African immigrant women's emotions, emotional labour and coping strategies in the workplace, relating these to their journeys into South Africa. We investigate emotion-related concepts of immigrant experience, seeking to

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place the women's stories in a frame that resonates with what immigrants elsewhere, also in the Global North,[1] have reported. Besides building on recent developments in emotions and multilingualism research in educational contexts (e.g. psychology of language learning (PLL), positive psychology), we take a sociolinguistic perspective considering notions of power, inequality, xenophobic prejudice, and everyday social interactions that impact immigrants' multilingual competence and practices. Focusing specifically on a workplace setting, the following questions direct this study:

(1) What emotions do these four African immigrant women experience in relation to their immigration journey, linguistic repertoire and variation, and social dynamics in the workplace – a store in a China Town shopping centre in the larger Cape Town metropolis in South Africa?
(2) What coping strategies do the women use to deal with negative emotions (e.g. anxiety) and experiences in this workplace?
(3) What can we learn regarding emotional experiences in immigrant contexts, by comparing African immigrant women's narratives to findings related to emotions, emotional labour and resilience from studies in different (Global North) settings?

Below, we introduce the theoretical considerations and gaps in the field that prompted this study's interdisciplinary enterprise. In considering the first and second research questions, we first cover key concepts such as emotions in multilingual and immigrant contexts, negative emotions, emotional labour, and coping strategies such as avoidance and resilience (e.g. through positive emotions, humour). To properly answer the third question, we illustrate research findings from Global North settings, where emotion research has mostly been conducted. We then, comparatively, elaborate on multilingualism and African immigrant diaspora in South Africa.

Literature review

Emotions in multilingual contexts

Multilingualism and emotions are situated at the intersections of linguistics, cognitive, social, and cultural psychology, anthropology, and second language acquisition (SLA) which necessarily need to be handled through interdisciplinary approaches (e.g. Dewaele and Pavlenko 2004; Comanaru and Dewaele 2015; The Douglas Fir Group 2016). Understanding the complex and unique multilingual and socio-emotional experiences of individuals in immigrant contexts requires an interdisciplinary approach that encompasses perspectives from both PLL in SLA and sociolinguistics (Sevinç 2020).

In educational contexts, reflecting on the broaden-and-build theory in Positive Psychology (Fredrickson 2001), SLA scholars have recently highlighted the importance of exploring positive as well as negative emotions in classroom settings (MacIntyre, Gregersen, and Mercer 2017). Positive emotions enable learners to perceive the learning context creatively, and thereby build psychological resources (e.g. resilience). This theory shows how positive emotions are linked to positive attitudes, behaviour, and social processes that can powerfully motivate language learning (Gardner 2010; MacIntyre, Gregersen, and Mercer 2020a; Dewaele et al. 2018). These insights have been fundamental to improving our understanding of positive emotions' role in responding to negative conditions, such as ones prompting anxiety (e.g. Dewaele and Alfawzan 2018).

From a sociolinguistic perspective, an increased interest in emotions related to second language learning and use is evident in diverse areas of application that often converge, such as language and identity (Norton 2013), socio-cultural issues and language learning (Garrett and Young 2009), and narrative studies (Baynham and De Fina 2016; Prior 2016). Pavlenko's (2005) pioneering work on *emotions and multilingualism* sheds light on how emotions influence individual reasoning and linguistic decision making, specifically in discourse. Biographical research on discourses considering topics such as subject position, identity construction, multilingualism and emotion, fear and desire associated with language attitudes, has also proven to be particularly enlightening (e.g. Blommaert

2009; Busch 2017; Kramsch 2009). However, sociolinguistic research has limitedly attended to emotional experiences in multilingual workplaces (cf., Meyer and Apfelbaum 2010), and mostly represents Global North contexts (cf., Pavlenko 2005; Norton 2013; Baynham and De Fina 2016).

Negative emotions in immigrant contexts

Despite recent developments in PLL focusing on positive psychology, sociolinguistic research on immigrant communities still largely focuses on stereotypically negative emotions, rather than positive ones. Recent studies on Turkish immigrants in the Netherlands, i.e. in a Global North context, indicate that monolingual standard norms or cultural regulation induce negative emotions such as anxiety in immigrants' daily lives (Sevinç and Dewaele 2018; Sevinç and Backus 2019). A 26-year-old second-generation Turkish-Dutch bilingual working as a hairdresser's assistant mentions a primary source of anxiety and fear in using L2-Dutch to be the condescending way in which some so-called native Dutch clients correct trivial grammaticalities, reminding her of her outsider status, by asserting 'WE don't use this, WE use that!'. Immigrant bilinguals' negative emotions relate largely to their experience of social exclusion channelled through others' negative evaluations and direct error corrections which signal the authority and power of nativeness. Feeling minimised causes anxiety that negatively affects immigrants' language practices, language competence, and psychological well-being in a vicious circle. Sevinç and Backus (2019) define this vicious circle as the cyclical effect of a process in which negative emotions lead to avoidance (silence in interactions), avoidance leads to less language use and thus less linguistic improvement, which eventually provokes further negative emotions in the immigrant bilingual.

The human disposition to mark divisions between 'we' and 'they' based on ethnicity and the underlying psychological mechanism of xenophobia,[2] is a particularly damaging feature (Soldatova 2007). While L2-speakers of the majority community language are at times concerned about grammaticality, phonological variation, or vocabulary, the real source of their agitation might not be language itself, but rather issues of migration, social instability (cf., Machan 2009), ethnicity,[3] xenophobia or exclusion. In trying to understand multilingualism and multilingual speakers, ethnicity, along with other social variables, therefore, always matters (Ortega 2020).

The present study makes a further scholarly contribution to the field by examining the concept of negative emotions and the vicious circle link in a new immigrant setting, a highly multilingual workplace in a Global South context where high African immigrant numbers, xenophobic experiences, social instability, and insider-outsider distinctions could imply a significant emotional burden (e.g. Pithouse-Morgan et al. 2012). Following recent developments in PLL, we also consider emotional labour, emotional resilience and positive emotions as notable correlates of coping strategies to deal with negative emotions and experiences.

Emotional labour

Managing emotions in the workplace has been referred to as 'emotional labor' – a term introduced by Hochschild (1983). Although Hochschild's early work helps to conceptualise the link between emotional labour and unequal power, post-structural research has criticised it for neglecting 'larger discourses of power and everyday social interactions' (Tracy 2005, 264). SLA scholars have explored emotional labour mainly in language teaching (e.g. Benesch 2017; Haeussler 2013). Taking a similar approach, Benesch (2017) responds to Tracy (2005) by dealing with larger discourses of power and everyday social interactions that influence teachers' emotional labour. However, while focusing on English language teaching and power in institutional policies, SLA studies on emotional labour neglect the link between emotions and an essential power variable in human social interaction, namely ethnicity and its socio-emotional counterparts, such as 'xenophobia' and the 'we-they distinction'. Typical immigrant experiences, with their consequences of vulnerability, negative emotions,

and emotional labour, can have debilitating effects regarding multilingual practices and individuals' well-being, particularly when they cope only through avoidance strategies (Sevinç 2020).

Emotional resilience versus avoidance

Emotional resilience is defined as the outcome of a dynamic process by which individuals successfully adapt within a context of significant adversity (Lee et al. 2017). It is influenced by abilities and competencies that can regulate emotions and build persistence and flexibility in coping with adversity (Lee et al. 2017). Although resilience may not erase difficulties, it can enable individuals to tackle daily challenges and negative experiences while moving forward (cf., Robertson 2012). Therefore, understanding strategies and processes individuals use to enhance resilience, is essential.

Positive emotion as one kind of correlate of coping strategies has been found to increase resilience levels (Seligman 2011; MacIntyre, Ross, and Clément 2020b). Relevant to the current study, in the context of positive psychology, several studies on psychological resilience have addressed the counterbalancing effect of positive emotions on emotional resilience (e.g. Fredrickson et al. 2000; Ong et al. 2006). In addition, positive emotions such as happiness, hope, and gratitude have been linked to spirituality and/or religious conformity (Zadina 2021); Pergament (1990), e.g. finds understanding God as part of a social network emotionally supports individuals in coping with severe hardship.

Empirical evidence from a range of SLA studies also refers to positive emotions as building resilience through their ability to interrupt and overcome negative emotional experiences and negative emotions (e.g. MacIntyre and Gregersen 2012). Along with positive emotions, humour (as in eliciting laughter) is found to be a situation modification strategy that effectively promotes resilience and reduces negative emotions' effects (see Ruch and Hofmann 2017). In narrative research, Prior (2016) suggests, speakers can use humour to mitigate the severity of past events and avoid the burden of transmitting only negative content.

In contrast to active problem- and emotion-focused coping (see Lazarus and Folkman 1984), which can direct attention towards the source of negative emotional responses and foster resilience, avoidance-oriented coping directs attention away from it. In language learning situations, avoidance-oriented strategies negatively influence language competence development, by inhibiting learners' communication and sociability (MacIntyre 2017). Particularly in the workplace, managing emotions is expected as part of the work role, so that a part of employees' emotional labour is to avoid conflict with customers. Then, almost inevitably, employees' negative emotions are often manifest in their silence. This perpetuates the vicious circle of negative emotions and avoidance of dominant language use (cf., Sevinç and Backus 2019).

Multilingualism and African immigrant diaspora in South Africa

Linguistic diversity and multilingualism are long established as a social disposition in South Africa. To recognise this, the 1996 Constitution formalised a decision to accept 11 official languages (for a brief exposition of the national language policy, see Anthonissen 2010). Despite pronounced promotion of linguistic variation, monolingual norms and ideologies prevail. Coffi (2017) draws attention to English being privileged over the indigenous African languages, thereby emphasizing the enduring contradiction of policy and practice regarding social recognition and use of diverse languages in public spaces. English has in the past 27 years, since national democracy, effectively become the lingua franca of business. Government notices are explicit about English being 'the language of official business and commerce' (cf., South African Embassy in the Netherlands 2021). High levels of proficiency in English persist as 'the distributor of power' and 'upward mobility' (Nkosana 2011, 11). Some immigrant parents go to extensive effort to improve their children's life chances in English medium schools. Yet, Babane (2020) indicates language challenges still negatively influence these youngsters' relationships with themselves and others.

According to the United Nations International Organization for Migration (2020), South Africa is the largest recipient of immigrants on the African continent. Between 2010 and 2017, the immigrant community in South Africa increased from 2 million to 4 million people. The proportion of South Africa's total population that is foreign born increased from 2.8% in 2005 to 7% in 2019 (UN International Organization for Migration 2020). There has also been a rise in human rights violations against migrants since larger numbers of Africans from beyond the South African borders arrived in the early 2000s (Ferraro and Weideman 2020). For some South Africans, the visibility of foreign nationals has brought resentment and even aggression towards African migrants, also in public spaces and particularly in the marketplace where they appear to be competing unfairly with citizens. This has resulted in oppositions between who 'we' are, and who 'they' represent. Immigrants are, therefore, at times portrayed as constituting a threat to social and economic security, associated with sporadic outbreaks of xenophobic violence (Ferraro and Weideman 2020).

Very many migrants who cannot find formal employment end up as entrepreneurs or workers in the informal trading sector (cf., Thompson and Anthonissen 2019). The spaces where they operate are often in the poorer sections of black townships, where xenophobic attacks were predominant in 2008 and 2015 (Amusan and Mchunu 2017). Immigrants became victims of serious human rights abuses in which language played a distinct role in identifying the foreigners. Therefore, poignantly, xenophobia and fear of xenophobic attacks are related to elements such as language, ethnicity, and power. Local citizens recognised newcomers by their 'physical features, their bearing, their clothing styles, their inability to speak indigenous languages' and then would target them as being the cause of locals' hardships (Morris 2008, 1125). Narratives of anxiety and fear arise in very many contexts, not only in the workplace, but also at home, in schooling, and *en route* to work, as illustrated in Vromans et al. (2011) who quote: 'I realize that I am in a foreign country. All of a sudden I am scared, and I don't react freely, only because of that fear'. Ferraro and Weideman (2020) reiterate this view, referring to 'antagonism towards migrant small business and shop owners in particular'.

In many cities of the Global South, limitedly skilled newcomers have little hope of finding paid employment, thus becoming subject to harsh treatment, even at times ending up in slave labour conditions (Phipps 2019). 'Much of this, in the [G]lobal South, is unremarkable and certainly little remarked upon, as attention is focused by the world's richest countries on their fear for their property' (37). This points to the urgent need for more research from the Global South that is sensitive to life realities and experiences of those who are structurally marginalised and disempowered.

Method

Current study and research focus

Although interviews provided insight into multilinguals' language histories, their language choices, and language practices, this paper focuses on emotional lived experiences (cf., Busch 2017), emotional labour, and coping strategies such as avoidance or resilience the participants confronted during their journey to and in South Africa, as well as in the workplace. In investigating the current research questions, we reflect a post-structuralist understanding of subjectivity (cf., Tracy 2005) by highlighting emotional experiences vis-à-vis multilingualism, power, inequality, and xenophobic slights, threats, or attacks. Given the predictably unsettling experiences of (possibly) undocumented migration and xenophobia in South Africa and previous research findings from the Global North (MacIntyre 2017; Sevinç and Backus 2019), we hypothesize high levels of negative emotions (e.g. anxiety and fear) resulting in language avoidance among the four women.

Context and participants

The data for this study consists of semi-structured interviews with four African immigrant women who work as shop assistants in a China Town shopping centre in the larger Cape Town metropolis.[4]

Table 1. Participants' demographic information and language background.

	Age	Country of origin	Education	Years of stay in SA	Languages
Sandra	32	DRC (Kinshasa)	Matric[a]	5 years	Lingala, Swahili, French, English
Natalie	30	DRC (Lubumbashi)	Matric	5 years	Tshiluba, Lingala, Swahili, French, English
Gina	32	DRC (Kinshasa)	Dropped out	6 years	Lingala, French, English
Faith	42	Nigeria	BA in Political science	9 months	Edo, English

[a]Matriculation (or matric) is the qualification received on graduating from high school, and the minimum university entrance requirement.

It is a highly multilingual setting where L1 and L2-speakers of local languages English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa intermingle with L1-speakers of various foreign languages such as Mandarin, DRC-French, Shona, Ndebele (Zimbabwean L1s) and Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo or Edo (Nigerian L1s). The workplace is a hybrid of formal and informal trading stores and cubicles selling mostly goods imported from China (for further information on the China Town shopping centre and its linguistic diversity, see cf., Thompson and Anthonissen 2019).

Table 1 summarises the demographic and linguistic information of the four interviewees. At the time of the data collection in August 2018, all were employed as assistants in two shops in the China Town shopping centre. Their 'job security' in working with the stock in the store and assisting customers was largely based on their L2-English language skills. Their employers, owners of the stores, had migrated from China, and had limited communicative competence in English, the lingua franca of the area. Thus, they largely transferred the responsibility to confidently interact with customers and to act as mediators between the shop owner and customers to these assistants.

Three of the participants, Sandra (32), Natalie (30) and Gina (32), had migrated from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) five and six years previously. In the DRC, Sandra and Natalie acquired Lingala and Swahili, which have the status of national languages, and French, which is the language of education. Natalie also spoke Tshiluba as her home language. Gina spoke Lingala and French. She had dropped out of primary school due to financial problems while Natalie and Sandra had completed matric. They mentioned having had basic English lessons at school, but like Gina, they only developed communicative proficiency in English after arriving in South Africa, thus during the foregoing five years. Faith (42) had migrated from Nigeria nine months before the interviews. She had obtained a university degree in Political Science in Nigeria. Having grown up in a bilingual Edo and English home, she is the only one of the four participants who had English as her medium of school instruction and arrived in South Africa as an already documented migrant.

Interviews

We designed a semi-structured interview tool to elicit the immigrants' stories covering social and emotional lived experiences. It included questions such as 'Could you tell us about your journey to South Africa', 'How do you communicate with your employer and with the customers?' or 'Could you talk about emotions/difficulties/challenges you experience regarding your language use or ethnicity?' Interviews were conducted like everyday conversations about participants' regular social interactions and experiences (Blommaert 2006).

Each interview lasted between 40 and 50 minutes. All participants were interviewed individually in English, by two interviewers – one of South African and one of Turkish origin. The interviews were conducted with attention to ethical considerations that ensure the dignity of informants, bearing in mind that sensitive issues (even if not included in our research brief) could arise. The informants were given a clear introduction to the study, with the option to withdraw at any stage. They were assured that we were not assessing English language proficiency so that their language use would not be of concern.

Data preparation

All interviews were fully transcribed. Initially we used a grounded-theory approach (Thornberg and Charmaz 2014) to analyze the data. We did a content and thematic analysis by coding the narratives

according to emerging themes, patterns, and conceptual categories. Corresponding to the research focus and questions addressed in the introduction, the themes were divided into main categories, (i.e. participants' emotional experiences, and coping strategies for negative emotions). Procedures for 'open coding' (Strauss and Corbin 1990) were applied to provide structure and overview of the narratives. As already noted, not to ignore social challenges related to migration, we privileged the sub-categories of language, ethnicity, and power. Each interview's coded notes and central themes were compared for similarities and differences related to the research questions.

Analysis and findings

The following sections report on the interview responses, showing how each participant summarised her 'emotional lived experiences' and 'life story' to explain her linguistic repertoire, the journey that brought her to this particular workplace, and her communicative experiences in the current context. In our analysis we specifically paid attention to direct and indirect expression of emotions per interviewee. We try to give an impression of the kinds of 'emotions' these participants experienced, also to give an understanding of how the migrants value and use their linguistic resources, and which themes emerged in their narratives. In line with our hypothesis, research questions, and previous research findings from the Global North regarding emotions, we set the focus on the presence or absence of negative emotions, a vicious circle link, as well as on emotional labour and coping strategies such as avoidance or resilience, e.g. through active coping. To properly recognise the diversity of lived experiences and possible individual differences in emotional reactions and coping (Krohne 2003), we report our findings below per interviewee (Natalie, Gina, Faith, and Sandra respectively).

(1) 'They speak like that, I speak just like this'

Natalie was born in Lubumbashi and raised with three home languages, Tshiluba, Swahili and French. When asked how many languages she spoke, she needed to reflect and count to give an answer. She seemed never to have thought of this before; speaking five languages was not a big deal. At home she spoke Tshiluba and Swahili with her mother and Swahili and French with her father. Throughout the interview she referred to Tshiluba as 'my language' although she could not read and write in Tshiluba; in fact, at school using it was forbidden.

Natalie reported that speaking or writing English in a correct way mattered to her; yet, learning or using it did not make her anxious. For her, multilingualism was solely related to positivity. Asked whether negotiating various languages as a multilingual ever caused anxiety, she responded with confidence and gratitude:

> (1) Noooo! That doesn't make me anxious or stressed! It is nice, knowing so many languages! I'm happy I speak many languages, and I have a job.

Natalie had not learnt English formally. As Gina and Sandra, she learnt English from her Congolese friends and developed English communicative skills in her South African workplace. Showing positive emotions (e.g. gratitude), she noted that Congolese women took care of one another, introducing Congolese friends to the store as potential employees, and supporting one another in improving their English skills.

Natalie experienced a great deal of linguistic tolerance for their L2-English variety in the workplace. She confirmed that customers never judged them due to their ungrammatical or non-standard English. Referring to her strategy in sales interactions, Natalie said:

> (2) I listen and start speaking and if I talk wrong, they just ignore; they speak like that, and I just speak like this.

This indicates the absence of negative emotions, avoidance, or the vicious circle effect of anxiety regarding her non-native spoken English proficiency. Despite her concerns when she had to write in English, Natalie stated:

(3) I don't live with fear. Writing is difficult yeah, I am writing English but not much, I am just a little bit worried, but it is fine.

Most of her family were already in South Africa when Natalie came to visit and decided to stay with her brother in Cape Town. She has a boyfriend whom she met through her brother, who had also accepted a 'bride price' for her. Also originally from the DRC, her boyfriend had recently migrated to France where he wanted her to join him and start a family. Natalie's recall of the journey to South Africa indicated no unpleasant experiences at the border or in the country. Lubumbashi is not in a DRC warzone, therefore, she was not a refugee, and her transition to Cape Town was smooth because her family had paved the way. Natalie denied any concern about xenophobic attacks or moving from one country to another. Her life was easier than that of some colleagues as she had no children who depended on her either here or back home.

(2) 'Because they are customers, you see? Because we must sell'

Gina was raised speaking Lingala at home in Kinshasa. She learned French from her friends in the neighbourhood. When she started school, she could already speak a little French – the only medium of instruction. However, she had to drop out very soon because her family couldn't afford the school fees. She earned an income braiding hair, thus supporting her frail mother and younger sister. After her parents passed away, she migrated to South Africa, where she met her husband and now has a young daughter.

Her journey to South Africa had been fraught. In Johannesburg she lost her bag and identification documents and slept at the bus station, crying with fear at night. When two other Congolese found her and offered her better shelter, she hesitantly and fearfully heeded their warning that she was at risk of being raped or killed by locals. After a month, Gina's elder sister who lived in Cape Town sent her money to travel south and join her family.

Starting the interview, Gina seemed the most nervous of all participants. Her awareness of being an irregular immigrant may have caused suspicion about who the interviewers were. However, after hearing the research protocol and assurances of anonymity and confidentiality, she relaxed and showed trust. In answering a question about emotions related to her multilingual skills, she answered:

(4) Yeah, yes, yes. I am worried. The problem is my English. It is not good.

Gina reported that writing caused her a great deal of stress – not only in English, but also in French and Lingala, because of her limited schooling (Ex.5). She felt particularly anxious when she had to write an official letter at the police station or immigration office.

(5) Yes, I am feeling stressed with speaking, but writing also. I speak French, Lingala, English but I stopped the school, you know, I don't know how to write. It is stress[ful] at immigrant office when police tell me 'write a letter'.

Gina did not find her knowledge of many languages troublesome. Like the other participants, she was thankful for having a job. To cope with her negative emotions, rather than avoidance, she built resilience in practicing her writing skills with her husband. Texting to her friends and husband in English was one of her writing skills improvement strategies. To compensate for shaky communicative skills and to overcome negative emotions (e.g. anxiety) about English she worked hard, smiled, and demonstrated positive interactions with customers and in the workplace:

(6) I just try to make my job nicely. I don't know the language [English] so much, but I sell. My boss also loves me here […] If customers talk [say] something bad, I just say thank you and smile just like this! I must smile because they are customers, you see! Because we must sell.

Gina had greater anxieties than those related to her English language proficiency. She genuinely feared xenophobic attacks. Asked whether she had ever encountered hostility from locals,

she said it happened very often, not due to her English but rather to her foreign identity. She also expressed fear of arguing with local officials who had the power of ordering immigrants out of the country:

(7) They say 'you must go back' but not because of the language; they say 'you're foreign'. They don't like us! At home affairs, they tell me this. Even here [at the shop], customers, they say 'you must go back to your country, why you come here, you do trouble here, you will die'. But somebody must say 'this country belong[s] to God', you can't say 'I don't want you here', but I can't say [that], because I'm afraid.

(3) 'People who come to this shop, I can't argue with them'

Faith grew up in southern Nigeria where Edo is widely spoken, and English is the medium of instruction. When she was two years old, her mother died. Her father spoke English to her, and she learned Edo from her grandmother. In school, speaking Edo was strictly forbidden, and if caught speaking it, students were punished severely. Despite such negative school experiences, she did not report having negative emotions (e.g. fear or anxiety) about speaking Edo or English. At the time of the interview, she had already learned a little bit of Chinese at work and was learning Lingala and French from her Congolese housemate.

As a divorced woman, she had left three children with their father in Lagos. Her aim in coming to South Africa, she said, was to make money for her children. Besides forbidding Edo, even today, Nigerian parents are advised to speak standard English at home, and to avoid 'pidgin English'. Faith noted that in South Africa she never experienced such confrontation related to her language use:

(8) Never! Once I speak, they just ask me where I am from. Then, I tell them I am from Nigeria. Some, they say, you are from Nigeria. And I say, 'how do you know about it?' and they say, 'from your accent'. You know, but they are not offensive.

Faith was concerned about xenophobic experiences. She stayed at home during a recent xenophobic violence event in Cape Town. Although she said that nobody made her feel bad, anxious, or threatened, she had been in Cape Town only for nine months, spending most of her time working. Asked about experiencing language prejudice at work, Faith said she did not have that, also because she avoided arguments with customers, and whatever happened, she wanted to ensure sales. Positive communication and showing kindness to customers was her main strategy and strength in avoiding conflict in the workplace and retaining her job:

(9) No, no, nooo. I haven't experienced that because of the language. I don't know maybe I have just moved here and haven't been in many different places. I am always here, from work to my house. So, maybe I have not met many people. And, you know, people who come to this shop, I can't argue with them, because they will buy, and whatever happens, I want to sell. So, I will be friendly to them, and they will be friendly to me. When you are kind to them, they calm down. Whenever you are rude to them, they want to flee off or attack.

Faith often had to pacify her boss, who had a quick temper and could annoy customers:

(10) I just tell her [my boss] 'calm down!' You are selling. Even if you can't understand their language, if you are polite and you sort of respond positively, then we can actually do our business.

Even without hearing Faith talk, people recognised her as a foreigner. On her appearance she was often mistaken to be Congolese; some, she reported, even remarking 'Nigerian women are not that beautiful'. Although she found that rather offensive, to reduce possible conflict with locals and to counter negative stereotyping, she used humour as a situation modification strategy. Along with friendliness and positivity, Faith's joking was a signal of her resilience:

(11) Three days ago, I went to a shop. The lady spoke French to me. I said 'no, sorry, I am not from Congo'. She said, 'Where are you from?' I said, 'From Nigeria', she said, 'No you don't look like Nigerian'. I said, 'Who do I look like?' She said, 'You look like a Congolese'. I said, 'Why do you think that?' she said, 'Nigerian women are not that beautiful, but you are beautiful'. This is offensive; I don't like this, because I am a Nigerian, but I just laughed and said, 'Well, now you see one very beautiful, you know now'.

(4) 'You see I must know every language! Much better! To work, defend myself'

Sandra migrated to South Africa six years before we met her, leaving her 16-year-old daughter in the care of her mother in the DRC. She had been unemployed and needed an income to support her daughter's education. On her journey to South Africa, she mentioned that a friend had come before her and encouraged her to join:

> (12) My friend started to call me: 'Sandra, you must come here, it is nice, here you get a nice job, here all the ladies work, it's so nice, you must come!' So, every day when I talked to my friend, she said I am going to gym, I am driving, just come to South Africa!

Sandra's friend convinced her to come to South Africa by referring to improved life quality and job opportunities, especially for women. Sandra was granted a one-month visa to visit her sister who lived in Johannesburg but ended up staying longer and eventually moving to her friend's house in Cape Town. Her friend, however, soon moved to the USA so that Sandra remained alone in Cape Town. After a few months, she was introduced to the shop owner at the China Town store where she is currently employed. In the DRC she had learnt Lingala and Swahili as home languages, and French as language in education. In the China Town store, she elaborated on the basic knowledge of English she had acquired in school, and so developed her communicative skills in English:

> (13) When I came here, I asked my boss for a job. I didn't know how to speak English, but they just took me, because even [though] I didn't know how to speak English, I was just talking to customers. If they came, I was just: 'Hello! How are you? I can help you!'. I pretend to speak English, just smiling at customers, customers came. 'Oh, this one is nice! so nice!'. Even I was not speaking English, my boss liked me because I was selling. My boss [said]: 'Talk like that, talk like that!' they were buying stuff, and my boss liked that. That is how I learned English, just talking to customers.

By animatedly greeting and making small talk with customers in English, showing a happy demeanor, and using friendly sales strategies Sandra became an appreciated sales assistant. She achieved sales success by 'smiling at customers' and 'pretending to speak English'. As Excerpt 13 illustrates, Sandra did not avoid using English despite her low English proficiency. Responding to questions regarding emotions about minimal English skills in the workplace, Sandra was clear that she experienced no negative emotions, such as fear or anxiety. Nevertheless, she did confirm some anxiety regarding English in other contexts, particularly when having to write in public offices (e.g. the police station or at Home Affairs with migration documentation), since she feared being deported.

Despite uncertainty about her residential status, Sandra was grateful to have work in this shop and felt secure in her position. She knew that English was key to survive and defend herself in South Africa. Following up on the issue of literacy in English, and the anxiety associated with writing, Sandra answered:

> (14) See, yes, yes, because I want to learn more and want to write more in English. Nicely! I am anxious also about the language. If I was not speak[ing] English here, [I would] not work in this shop. So, me if I only know French, he is not a happy boss, you see? You see I must know every language to have a job! To work, defense myself.
>
> Interviewer: So, you have really learnt English, a little bit of Xhosa, a little bit of Chinese, a little bit of Afrikaans, but you worry about them.
>
> Sandra: Yeah! A lot, but I am happy I speak English, I work in this shop.

Sandra's anxiety was not about being shamed due to poor grammar or vocabulary. Her fear of unemployment and of losing personal living arrangements prompted her to build and exhibit her English skills to an employer who appeared to be far less adept at mastering English. She emphasised experiencing positive emotions (e.g. happiness, gratitude) in referring to satisfaction with her English proficiency and having employment. Thus, uncertainty (or any other negative emotion) did not stop Sandra from speaking English. In fact, she impressed her boss who could not assess grammaticality, but could recognise her communicative skills. She had never experienced customers

putting her down or evaluating her language knowledge according to normative standards. As with Faith, people recognised Sandra as a foreigner, even without hearing her talk. The cause of negative emotions she reported lay beyond language, and thus also beyond language ideologies: of concern were issues of ethnicity and xenophobia.

(15) You know this problem of xenophobia, I am just thinking that problem, I can't even sleep or eat. I am scared a lot! Afraid they will come one day, and they will just kill us.

Interviewer: If you keep quiet and you don't speak? They won't know?

Sandra: But, you know, I don't need to say a word, they see me outside and know that I am not from here, and [they may] beat me. You see, for example, like [friend's name], even if she doesn't talk any language, they can just see she is coloured.[5] [...] Even I didn't talk, someone gonna just look at me, this is Congolese. They're gonna catch us, you see?

Sandra made it clear that her irregular migration status caused her a great deal of fear and mentioned the limited employment opportunities for African immigrants. In addition, she expressed some regret about having come to South Africa, because many were not welcoming to African immigrants.

(16) I just regret, I miss my family. I don't like here in South Africa, it's so difficult for foreigners, because other place I [would] like to work, but I don't have ID paper. With my papers, in other place, I can't work. I am seeing the Congolese message everywhere; 'you must leave this country!' One day, one customer came here [to the shop], he asked: 'Where did you come from?' I said 'Why are you asking me?' He said 'I just wonder'. I said 'From Congo', and he said 'You must leave this country, you foreigners come here, taking our jobs, taking our stuff, this is not your country. You know, xenophobia is coming, they're gonna kill you'.

Excerpt 16 brings the issue of xenophobia and the *we-they* distinction to attention. Although the customer did not threaten Sandra directly when he said '*they*'re gonna kill you!' he emphasized the distinction with terms like 'our job', 'our stuff', 'our country'. Sandra's response to the customer (Ex.17) indicates resilience in the face of a threat. To avoid conflict with the customer, she used laughter to trivialise his passive aggression. As a situation modification, Sandra inadvertently applied a positive problem-focused coping strategy, by addressing him first as 'papa' and later as 'brother', flattering him by saying you are clever, (implying 'you should know better') and lightly drawing on a strong religious culture by reminding him that all people are 'God's children'. The power inequality between the South African customer and herself, would have contributed to Sandra's emotional control and indirect countering strategy. Alternatives to humour could have entailed angry direct opposition; however, Sandra chose a less confrontational route. She ends by relating how she corrected the customer with kindness: 'I'm happy that you're my customer!'

(17) I laughed, I said You see, papa! You can't say like this! You can't say like this. You know it! You are clever, hé! The things you say is true! This is not our country. This world, it belongs to God! It doesn't belong to anyone! You say you're gonna kill me because I am foreigner, then I am gonna call my Father [God] up to put fire everywhere! I started laughing, asked him 'Why do you want to beat me, my brother? We are all together! What's the problem? You come here, I am happy that you're my customer! So, why do you want to kill us, brother?' Then, he left.

Despite the negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, sadness and regret Sandra mentioned, she exhibited resilience and perseverance regarding xenophobic threats and experienced inequality. She does not avoid speaking English, nor does she act out negative emotions (e.g. showing anger or frustration). She keeps smiling at customers, treasures her job, while she continues to develop her English language and communicative skills.

Summary and discussion

The first research question of this study referred to the emotions four African immigrant women experience in relation to their immigration journey, linguistic variation and social dynamics in the workplace. Our findings show that although negative socio-emotional experiences (e.g. unequal

power relations, xenophobia, we-they distinction) imply a significant burden of anxiety and fear (cf., Pithouse-Morgan et al. 2012; Vromans et al. 2011), these African immigrant women very limitedly experience negative emotions about their language skills, and if so, then mostly in relation to their writing skills. They are not caught in a vicious circle of language related issues, showing considerable emotional resilience as a means of survival. They do not avoid or stop speaking any particular languages; instead, they use language as a tool, a resource to sustain and defend themselves.

In comparison to findings regarding negative emotions of Turkish migrants in the Netherlands, we have found marked Global South–North differences. None of our participants experienced confrontation regarding language variation or standard language norms. Thus, none confirmed anxiety or fear about monolingual standard speech norms, nor feelings of guilt or regret about being multilingual. The vicious circle effect does not wear them down as has been reported in a Northern context (e.g. Sevinç and Backus 2019), possibly due to their positive emotions (e.g. happiness and gratitude) about their language and language skills (e.g. MacIntyre, Gregersen, and Mercer 2020a; Dewaele et al. 2018).

Findings have also revealed individual differences in emotional reactions which can be linked to the diversity of lived experiences. One of the participants (Natalie) did not report any negative emotions nor did she have unpleasant experiences at the border or in the country. The lived experiences of fear and anxiety that the other three African women reported were essentially related to financial difficulties, limited employment opportunities, and the threat of xenophobia posed by unwelcoming local community members. There appears to be 'hierarchies of emotions' in that our participants had minimal concerns about learning and improving their knowledge of local languages in South Africa, and almost no anxiety about using any of their languages in the workplace. Rather, they lived with the more existential fear of 'Can I get by and gain/keep my employment?' and 'Will I be attacked, harassed or accosted if locals recognise me as a foreigner?' The employment concern was manifest in the workplace, while concern about being ostracised was more manifest outside of the workplace, either in confrontation with other South Africans, or in confrontation with officials, e.g. at immigration offices or a police station, regarding documentation.

As for the matter of emotional labour and the question of publicly showing emotions regarding stressful encounters in speaking English or communicating at work or beyond: our participants cannot (and mostly need not) avoid speaking English. They also dare not act out possible negative emotions in the workplace. They are obliged to suppress their negative emotions and keep smiling at customers in order not to lose their job. Yet, the study shows these women are not powerless or without agency. They are highly skilled in using English and other resources creatively to counter, resist, and reframe inequalities and threats.

In response to the second research question, concerning the participants' coping strategies for negative emotions and experiences in the workplace, we found that positive emotions such as happiness and gratitude about being safe and having a job, had a counterbalancing effect of emotional resilience (cf., Ong et al. 2006; Fredrickson et al. 2000). Communicative strategies of humour, smiles, laughter, religious beliefs, as well as practicing their writing (through texting) and speaking (at work) could counter fear and uncertainty (cf., Zadina 2021). These women accept that it is fine to feel anxious or worried about writing or speaking English. Also, they have discovered that active (problem- or emotion-focused), positive coping strategies, e.g. soft reasoning, humour, positive feedback, tolerance, friendliness, gratitude, trust in God, and even pretending to speak better English than they in fact could (as in impressing the employer with fluency, even if ungrammatical), go a long way towards successfully managing conflict and negativity. Avoidance strategies in this case are not related to speaking, but to avoiding conflict with customers. As sales assistants with an immigrant background, they are aware of power differences. Rather than avoiding speaking the language of commercial interaction, they use it as tool to positively claim their rights. When words are not enough, they simply smile and continue their work. These African immigrant women employ positive emotions to overcome negative emotions that arise from conflict in the workplace, which aligns with previous findings in positive psychology in classroom settings (e.g. MacIntyre and Gregersen 2012).

In the conclusion below, we address our third research question, focusing on a comparison between the Global North and Global South immigrant setting.

Concluding remarks

This study has investigated emotion-related concepts (emotions, emotional labour, and resilience) relevant in immigration and the possibility of a vicious circle effect of negative emotions in a highly multilingual workplace in a Global South setting, encompassing perspectives from both PLL in SLA and sociolinguistics. As such it could open a new fruitful area of emotion and multilingualism research in immigrant contexts.

Lives are on hold across the Global South (Phipps 2019). Immigrants of the Global South have bigger anxieties (e.g. threats of xenophobia) than having to speak a language according to mono-lingual norms, and yet our participants managed to build emotional resilience. Regarding emotional experiences in immigrant context, which question three addresses, we find that in con-trast to the Global North settings, even in the face of xenophobia, anxiety, fear, discrimination, min-oritised status, our participants exhibited social and emotional resilience developed in life experiences through active coping rather than avoidance coping. Additionally, they exhibited out-standing linguistic creativity that can shed light on professional, linguistic, social, and personal dis-positions among immigrants facing exceptional social hazards and emotional challenges. Future research on emotion and multilingualism in PLL/SLA should follow up the cues this study gives to include more extensive research on life realities of those who are structurally marginalised and disempowered, particularly in the Global South (cf., Phipps 2019). Understanding the complex interplay between emotional experiences of vulnerable groups requires an interdisciplinary approach that encompasses perspectives from various research areas (cf., Dewaele and Pavlenko 2004). Notions of power, we-they distinction, inequality, xenophobic prejudice, and everyday social interactions that impact immigrants' emotions, resilience and multilingual practices should not be neglected in PLL/SLA. Further investigation of social and emotion related concepts in the Global South could contribute a great deal to better understanding issues related to multilingualism and inclusion/exclusion of vulnerable groups in a time of pervasive global mobility.

To encourage further work in this field, we need to acknowledge certain limitations. Interviews of this kind rely on a degree of trust between interviewer and interviewee. Considering the fragile position of the interviewees we could not check the reliability of the information they provided. A mixed methods approach that combines and triangulates different data collection techniques (e.g. observations, naturally occurring speech recordings) would yield more reliable findings when examining the dynamic and multifaceted dimensions of emotions (e.g. anxiety and emotional labour). Future studies should draw on a multidimensional and multimethodological approach in order to account for diversity and subjectivity in immigrants' lived emotional experiences. Com-bining speech recordings and interviews could provide better insight into emotional labour explor-ing working conditions and interaction between the employees, shop owners, and customers, as well as inter-ethnic relations. Also, participants' limited English skills might have impacted how much they could share with us about their emotions, therefore, these results should be considered with caution. Finally, future studies on multilingualism in the workplace should also include a more macro focus that examines how larger social realities and discourses shape 'what' and 'how' emotions are experienced and communicated (or not) both in the micro and meso levels of immi-grants' daily lives (cf., The Douglas Fir Group 2016).

Notes

1. The Global North vs. Global South distinction is one that articulates economic divides which coincide with inequalities on various societal levels. The Global North represents the economically developed societies of Europe, North America, Australia and Israel, amongst others, the Global South represents the economically

less developed and less competitive countries of Africa, India, China, Brazil, Mexico, amongst others (see Odeh 2010).

2. Experiences of xenophobia are characterized by 'discrimination, alienation, isolation, confrontation, violence and conflicts all related to the perceived 'foreignness' or 'otherness' of certain groups of people (cf., Soldatova 2007).

3. In our context the term 'race' is largely replaced by 'ethnicity' as distinctions are often made between people of different 'ethnicities' (e.g. Nigerian, Malawian, Zulu, Xhosa) rather than simply 'race'.

4. We would like to thank Miché Thompson for introducing us to the particular setting and to the participants, as well as for negotiating permissions and suitable timing with the shop owners so that we could meet in the workplace with minimal distraction from the participants' work.

5. Racial distinctions in South Africa still follow the Apartheid terminology, thus people of colour (vs 'white', 'black', or 'Indian') are broadly (even if often objectionably) referred to as 'coloureds' or 'so-called coloureds'.

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