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Sociodemographic, Psychological and Politicocultural Correlates in Flemish Students' Attitudes towards French and English

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An analysis of 100 Flemish high-school students' attitudes towards French and English (both *foreign* languages) revealed complex links between personality factors, gender, politicocultural identity, communicative behaviour and foreign language attitudes. Attitudes towards English were found to be much more positive than those towards French, despite the fact that the participants had enjoyed a longer and more intense formal instruction in French (it being their second language). The independent variables were found to have stronger effects for French than for English, with the exception of politicocultural identity of the participant, which had a strong effect on attitudes towards French but not English. Overall, it seems that social factors, including exposure to the foreign languages, are linked with lower-level personality dimensions and thus shape attitudes towards these languages.

Keywords: individual differences, personality, communicative anxiety, attitudes, bilingualism

Introduction

In the present study, we will focus on the effect of social and individual contexts (MacIntyre *et al.*, 1998) on the attitudes of 100 Flemish high-school students towards French and English. It is thus a study on the links between attitudes, communicative behaviour and enduring influences (e.g. intergroup relations, learner personality, gender, social class) which represent 'stable, long-term properties of the environment or person that would apply to almost any situation' (MacIntyre *et al.*, 1998: 546).

Attitudes are one of the central affective variables of language learning (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994), together with personality (Dewaele & Furnham, 1999; MacIntyre, 1999) and motivation (Dörnyei, 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2003b).

A particularity of a majority of social–psychological studies on affective factors is their focus on second languages (L2s) rather than on foreign languages (FLs) (Ellinger, 2000; Oxford & Shearin, 1996). Most people in such an L2 environment communicate daily in the target language (TL) contrary to learners of a foreign language (FL) who do not usually communicate in the TL and for whom its use is generally not authentic. Moreover, those studies that do consider FLs generally consider *one* FL only, while school and university multilingualism is becoming more widespread (Lasagabaster, 1998, 2001).

Belgium, and Flanders in particular, with its history of tensions between linguistic communities, provides an excellent terrain for investigations into the effects of the social context on attitudes towards the first foreign language to be introduced, French, and the second foreign language, English.

The history of French in Flanders could be described as turbulent. French has long been spoken by members of higher social classes in Flanders and is still the first language (together with Dutch) for a dwindling minority of Flemings (Baetens Beardsmore, 1993; Dewaele, 2000; Willems, 1997). Many Flemings are still hostile towards French. This is not necessarily the result of the present – sometimes strained – relationship with the Walloons and the French speakers of Brussels within the federal kingdom of Belgium (cf. Francard, 1995), but rather the perception that French was/is socially superior and that speaking French in Flanders is interpreted as a sign of ostentation and of disregard for Dutch. Vandenbussche (2004) studied the distribution and the functions of language varieties in 19th-century Flanders and concludes that French served as a prestige marker and a tool for social exclusion in the domain of political decision making, in the presence of lower and middle class members. This may be history now, but many Flemings still bear a grudge against French.

No such history of hostility exists towards English. Francard (2001) reports that Flemings and Francophones often prefer to communicate in English. It is probably not a coincidence that Great Britain is Belgium's only neighbour never to have occupied it. Very few studies on attitudes towards foreign languages have been carried out in the Flemish context. However, studies on this subject by researchers at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (Housen *et al.*, 2001, 2004; Lochtman & Lutjeharms, 2004; Mettewie, 2004; Pierrard *et al.*, 2002) may announce a new era of research.¹

In this study we will attempt to measure to what extent individual and societal factors determine attitudes and values regarding French and the Francophone community, and English among 18-year-old Flemings.

The societal context

Researchers agree that attitudes towards the TL and the community using this language play a crucial role in the success of the language learning (Dörnyei, 2001a, 2001b; Gardner, 1985a; Oxford & Shearin, 1996). Attitudes are quite stable across situations (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993) but they can vary from language to language (Gardner & Tremblay, 1998), from region to region (Dörnyei & Clément, 2001) and period to period (Pavlenko, 2003). Two macrolevels can be distinguished: the societal context and the individual context. The societal context refers to the intergroup climate in which interlocutors evolve (MacIntyre *et al.*, 1998: 555). The authors distinguish 'two complementary dimensions concerned with the structural characteristics of the community and their perceptual and affective correlates'. The structural characteristics concern ethnolinguistic vitality and communication networks that either favour or do not favour the use of the L2. Ethnolinguistic vitality reflects the socioeconomic power of a community and the extent to which its members are represented in sociopolitical

institutions (p. 555). Most studies on language attitudes and motivation show the existence of complex interactions between societal and individual variables.

Attitudes towards foreign languages have been found to be shaped by different sociocultural and political factors, as well as by purely didactic factors.

The language teacher's personality, ideology and pedagogical approach clearly affect the learners' attitudes and motivation towards the TL (Dörnyei, 2000, 2001a), although not always in the expected direction. Pavlenko (2003) refers to her own experience in a Ukrainian school in 1975, when as a fifth grader she chose her foreign language, English, and attended her first class where their teacher welcomed them with a passionate speech explaining to them that the knowledge of English would be crucial in the event of a war with the imperialist Britain and the USA and the students would have to decode and translate intercepted messages. Pavlenko asked to be transferred to the French class where the teacher was politically more relaxed. Pavlenko (2003) further demonstrates that learners have a choice of constructing oppositional identities in foreign language education contexts. Some Soviet students, like Natasha Lvovich (1997), created alternative identities. Being unable to travel to France, the country of her dreams, she created an imaginary French identity for herself (Pavlenko, 2003). Pavlenko notes that for Lvovich, this was the only possible escape from the political reality: 'A French personality, after all, was much less confusing and safer than being a Jew in Soviet Russia' (Lvovich, 1997: 8–9).

Others refused to participate in the language classes to assert patriotic identities. This is the case of Eva Hoffman who remembers that Polish school authorities in the 1950s introduced compulsory Russian education, 'because learning the international language of Communism is something we should naturally want to do' (Hoffman, 1989: 61). Yet, both teachers of Russian and learners perceived it as the language of the oppressor and engaged in acts of passive resistance:

the teachers assigned to this task prove uniformly unenthusiastic. In the other courses, discipline is rather strict. . . . But in the Russian course this never seems to happen, and after taking us through some lackadaisical exercises, the teachers chat with us – in Polish – about other things. (Hoffman, 1989: 61–62)

Dörnyei (2001a) similarly recalls that despite his years of instruction in Russian in Hungary, he made very little progress. He also notes that the situation has changed dramatically since the fall of the Iron Curtain (Dörnyei & Clément, 2001). These authors studied the affective dispositions of 4765 Hungarian school children towards English, German, French, Italian and Russian. They found that gender and geography shape language attitudes and language learning motivation. The 2305 girls generally obtained higher scores on motivational dimensions and tended to prefer French and Italian while the boys preferred German and Russian, English being gender neutral (2001: 413). German was preferred in the west of the country, Russian in the east, and French in rural parts and in the east. The highest scores in most variables

were obtained in Budapest, the most cosmopolitan part of the country. This research shows that attitudes and motivation are linked to sociopsychological (i.e. individual) as well as macrocontextual (i.e. societal) variables.

Recent research on trilingualism has shown that the knowledge of previous languages affects attitudes towards subsequent foreign languages. Lasagabaster's (2001) study on 133 university students comprising Basque L1, Spanish L1 and bilingual speakers showed that the different mother tongues exerted a significant influence not only on Spanish and Basque (the two official languages in the Basque Autonomous Community) but also on English (the foreign language), which had been learned in instructed settings.

Ellinger (2000) analysed the relationship among identity, affective variables and achievement in English as a FL for a group of 135 native Hebrew speakers and 53 native Russian speakers in Israel. She discovered that ethnic/language identity and ethnolinguistic vitality were better predictors for achievement in final examinations in English and reading comprehension than the affective variables.

Attitudes towards TLs in multilingual countries or communities are also shaped by the position of individuals in communication networks, i.e. the groups with which there is regular communication; these can consist of L1 and L2 subnetworks. Perceptual and affective correlates determine 'attitudes and values regarding the L2 community and the motivation to adapt and reduce social distance between ethnic groups' (MacIntyre *et al.*, 1998: 556). Intergroup relations are often tense and this will affect L2 learning and communication. Prejudiced attitudes towards the L2 might demotivate L2 learners. A rejection of the culture of the TL and an explicit choice to remain outside the TL community will undoubtedly limit the likelihood of engaging in authentic interactions in the TL. Hence the danger of getting in a vicious circle where low levels of perceived competence are linked to low frequencies of communication (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996) and low levels of willingness to communicate in the TL (MacIntyre *et al.*, 1998). Similarly, parents' attitudes are highly influential on their children's language-learning attitudes (Gardner, 1985a). Yamamoto (2001), for example, reports that Japanese parents may consider the knowledge of English as being useful for their children, thus transmitting this attitude, but they tend to dismiss other languages, especially African and Asian languages. Likewise, the socioeconomic status of the parents is important in predicting attitudes towards learning and academic performance (Furnham & Heaven, 1998). Parents with high socioeconomic status have certain values and beliefs that increase the likelihood of academic success (Argyle, 1994). One could expect, by extrapolation, that attitudes towards language learning are also determined by the socioeconomic status of the parents.

The individual context

The individual context refers to personality characteristics found to be particularly relevant to communication (MacIntyre *et al.*, 1998: 555). The causes of personality traits 'have always been acknowledged to be both biological and social' (Furnham & Heaven, 1998: 32). Global personality

dimensions (among which extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism) determine to varying degrees the so-called 'language-related affect', namely foreign language anxiety, perceived competence, attitudes and motivational propensities (Lalonde & Gardner, 1984; MacIntyre & Charos, 1996). The present study will not focus on motivation as an independent variable because of the wealth of research already carried out on this topic and because motivation and attitudes cannot be considered to be orthogonal (i.e. completely independent) dimensions. Indeed, Gardner and Lambert's (1959) original proposition was that motivation to learn an L2 inherently involves language attitudes. In a more recent version of his model, Gardner (2001: 6) refers to three classes of variables: 'Integrativeness, Attitudes Towards The Learning Situation and Motivation from "Integrative Motivation"'. The latter is thus 'a complex of these three classes of variables' (p. 6). For recent work on motivational research see also Noels (2001), Dörnyei (2001b, 2003b) and Masgoret and Gardner (2003).

Extraversion–introversion

This dimension, described by Eysenck (1967), has received widespread acceptance in the psychological community over the last three decades (Furnham & Heaven, 1998). Eysenck suggested that variation on this dimension is biologically based: introverts have higher baseline levels of cortical arousal as well as more reactivity to individual stimuli than extraverts. As a consequence, extraverts tend towards more arousing tasks that involve greater sensory stimulation in order to obtain an optimal level. Extraverts tend to be sociable, outgoing, gregarious, talkative, risk-taking, underaroused individuals (Furnham & Heaven, 1998: 325), while introverts tend to be reserved, quiet and unassertive. Studies on language and extraversion are relatively few in number (Dewaele & Furnham, 1999). Dewaele and Furnham (2000) found that extravert multilinguals are more fluent than introvert multilinguals, especially in stressful interpersonal situations. The extraverts' inclination to take risks seems to extend to linguistic behaviour: extravert L2 learners were found to use significantly more colloquial vocabulary than their more introvert peers (Dewaele, 2004a).

MacIntyre and Charos (1996) used path analysis to investigate the role of global personality traits on self-reported frequency of communication in a second language. They found significant negative correlations between extraversion and language anxiety (p. 19). A negative correlation emerged between language anxiety and willingness to communicate, suggesting that introverts communicated less in their French L2 than extraverts (p. 18).

The extraverts' ease at oral communication may therefore positively affect their attitudes towards foreign languages.

Neuroticism–emotional stability

Neuroticism (N) is the second major personality domain in Eysenck's (1967) model of personality. It could be described as a minor nervous disorder. Persons scoring high on this scale tend to suffer from 'anxiety, phobia, depression and hypochondriasis' (Furnham & Heaven, 1998: 326). Those with low scores on N can be described as calm, contented and unemotional. Although there seems to be an intuitive conceptual link between neuroticism

and foreign language anxiety, research has shown that this anxiety is mostly language-specific (Dewaele, 2002; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989).

Psychoticism

Psychoticism (P) is the third major personality domain in Eysenck's model and measures tough-mindedness (Furnham & Heaven, 1998: 230). Persons scoring high on psychoticism 'tend to be hostile, cold, aggressive, and have poor interpersonal relations' (p. 327). Furnham and Medhurst (1995) found that individuals with low scores on the P scale were more likely to have good oral and written expression, were more motivated and participated more actively in seminars. Language learners with good interpersonal relations might also have more positive attitudes towards foreign languages.

Foreign language anxiety

Foreign language anxiety can be defined as 'the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning' (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994: 284). Foreign language anxiety can have detrimental effects on the language learning process. MacIntyre *et al.* (1997) found that subjects who felt more anxious in the L2 also rated their second language proficiency much lower. Bailey *et al.* (2000) examined the effect of a combination of variables on three types of foreign language anxiety (input, processing and output) using 205 college students. Foreign language anxiety was found to be positively correlated with age, and negatively correlated with expectations of their achievement in foreign language courses, with perceived global self-worth, with perceived scholastic competence, with perceived intellectual ability and with perceived job competence. Students who had taken fewer or no high school foreign language courses also reported higher levels of foreign language anxiety. This confirmed the findings of an earlier study by the same authors (Onwuegbuzie *et al.*, 1999).

Dewaele (2002) analysed the psychological and sociodemographic correlates of foreign language anxiety in the French L2 and English L3 speech production of 100 Flemish students.² The findings suggest that foreign language anxiety is not a stable personality trait among experienced language learners. Both the societal and the individual contexts were found to determine levels of communicative anxiety. The perception of French as the former prestige language in Flanders and its function as a social marker were found to be linked to the participants' social class, which was, in turn, linked to levels of anxiety in French – but not in English. This social effect appeared to be a stronger predictor of communicative anxiety in French than extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism. Psychoticism, extraversion and, to a lesser extent, neuroticism, did however significantly predict levels of communicative anxiety in English L3 production. Students who scored high on the extraversion reported significant lower levels of communicative anxiety in English: ($r = -0.23, p < 0.05$). A similar pattern emerged for psychoticism and communicative anxiety in English ($r = -0.30, p < 0.001$). Those who scored high on the neuroticism scale also reported higher levels of communicative anxiety in English ($r = 0.22, p < 0.05$). The same pattern emerged between the personality dimensions communicative anxiety in French without

reaching statistical significance: extraversion: ($r = -0.10$, $p = \text{ns}$; psychoticism ($r = -0.11$, $p = \text{ns}$); neuroticism ($r = 0.17$, $p = \text{ns}$) (Dewaele, 2002: 31).

Self-perceived competence

Self-perceived competence reflects the individual's perception of his/her competence in a foreign language. Like communicative anxiety, it has been found to be linked to willingness to communicate and to actual frequency of communication (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; MacIntyre *et al.*, 1998). Dewaele (2002) also found that self-perceived competence in French and English is strongly linked to communicative anxiety in these languages. Self-perceived competence in English appeared to be linked to the degree of extraversion which confirmed earlier findings, i.e. that introvert and anxious foreign language students tend to underestimate their competence relative to more extravert and less anxious students, who tend to overestimate their competence.

Gender

Anastasi (1985: 22) observes that 'From early childhood, girls may learn to meet problems through social communication, while boys may learn to meet problems by spatial exploration and independent action'. The increased socioemotional orientation of female language learners may affect the attitudes they develop towards other language communities (Gilligan, 1982). It could certainly explain why female language students seem to obtain higher grades than male students (Aida, 1994). Men would concentrate more on the communicative aspect of communication while women also include a metacommunicative, interpersonal and affective aspect (Dewaele, 2001; Holmes, 1997). Baker and MacIntyre (2000: 329) found that gender was linked to attitudes towards French in a group of nonimmersion Anglo-Canadian students, the female students having significantly higher scores on an attitude/motivation index than the male students. No gender difference emerged, however, from the immersion group. The female students in the nonimmersion group also obtained significantly higher orientation scores for travel to Francophone regions (p. 330). Dörnyei and Clément (2001) note that despite a long history of research into gender differences in language attitudinal/motivational data, there is relatively little systematic gender-specific research. One possible reason for this is small sample-sizes that do not allow generalisations (p. 402).

Hypotheses

Based on the findings and observations reported in the previous section, we will test the following seven hypotheses:

- (1) Attitudes towards English will be more positive than those towards French.
- (2) Participants scoring high on the extraversion scale, low on the neuroticism scale and low on the psychoticism scale will display more positive attitudes towards the TLs.
- (3) Participants with low levels of foreign anxiety will display more positive attitudes towards the TLs.

- (4) Participants with high levels of self-perceived competence will display more positive attitudes towards the TLs.
- (5) Female participants and participants from higher social classes will display more positive attitudes towards the TLs.
- (6) Frequency of use of a TL will be positively linked to attitudes towards this language.
- (7) Politicocultural identity will be linked to attitudes towards French but not English.

Method

Participants

The participants included 100 pupils in their last year of secondary education at the Koninklijk Atheneum I in Bruges, Belgium. The sample consisted of 49 males and 51 females. The ages of the participants ranged from 17 to 21 ($M = 17.8$, $sd = 0.09$). Ninety-three participants had Dutch as an L1, four had both Dutch and French as an L1, one had Chinese and Dutch as an L1, one had Tunisian Arabic as an L1 and one was a native speaker of Thai.³ All the pupils had had formal instruction in Dutch, in French (between 3 and 5 hours a week, starting at age 10), and in English (between 2 and 4 hours a week, starting at age 12 or 14). Forty-four pupils had also studied German and 15 pupils had learned Spanish.

Materials

The materials included the short version of the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQr) which contains 12 items for each personality dimension: P, E and N (Eysenck *et al.*, 1985). It yielded the following results ($n = 100$): psychoticism (P): $M = 3.96$, $sd = 2.07$, Cronbach alpha = 0.86; extraversion (E): $M = 8.39$, $sd = 3.10$, Cronbach alpha = 0.93; neuroticism (N): $M = 6.18$, $sd = 3.39$, Cronbach alpha = 0.90. Using the average score as a cut-off point, participants were categorised in 'high' and 'low' categories for the three personality dimensions. Participants also completed a questionnaire in Dutch based partly on Gardner (1985b) and Baker (1992) relating to attitudes, communicative anxiety, frequency and types of contact with the TLs, personal and parental attitudes towards the TLs and politicocultural attitudes. Our measure 'attitudes towards French' is an aggregated score based on the students' answer to five statements: (1) learning French is fun; (2) I watch francophone television regularly; (3) I read French regularly; (4) I listen to French music regularly; (5) I study French to seek contact with Francophones. The statements had to be answered in a True/False format (yes was computed as 1, no as 0). The maximum score on the measure is 5. A similar formula was used for the calculation of attitudes towards English, based on the same statements but in relation to English. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the five items of the French scale is 0.68, with corrected item-total correlation values ranging between 0.65 and 0.71. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the five items of the English scale is 0.62, with corrected item-total correlation

values ranging between 0.57 and 0.66. These alpha reliabilities are rather low, but still acceptable (Dörnyei, 2003a).

Muñoz and Tragant (2001: 212) have used a comparable approach to measure attitudes towards foreign language learning in a school context: 'This global attitude is made up of a constellation of attitudes'. Communicative anxiety in the TLs was measured with a so-called 'anxiometer', i.e. a three-point Likert response format (possible answers were 'not anxious, a little anxious, anxious'). Self-perceived competence in French and English was measured with a three-point scale (poor, fair, good). The questionnaire also contained two items about frequency of communication using a True/False format and usual language choice in answer to a question in the TL.

Other sociodemographic data comprised gender (51 females and 49 males), the parents' attitudes towards both TLs and the family's social class, which was determined through the highest level of education attained by one of the parents (Preston, 1989). Forty-one participants thus fell into category 1 (degree of secondary education or less), 40 into category 2 (degree of further education, maximum length being 3 years) and 19 into category 3 (university degree, obtained after a minimum of 4 years of study).⁴ Politicocultural identity was measured using the answers to the following statement: 'I define myself as a Belgian more than as a Fleming' (True/False format). The last part of the questionnaire contained a section reserved for comments on attitudes towards French and English. The question was formulated as follows: 'What do you think about French and English?'

Results

Percentages of positive statements about English and French are presented in Table 1. The proportion of participants agreeing with the statements relating to attitudes and amount of contact/use of the TLs is always higher for English than for French, with the exception of parental attitudes towards the TLs, where French scores marginally higher than English (98% instead of 97%).

Table 1 Percentage of participants agreeing with the statements ($n = 100$)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>French</i>	<i>English</i>
I speak the TL regularly	43	49
Learning the TL is fun	43	77
I watch TV in the TL regularly	28	84
I listen to music in the TL regularly	31	100
I read books/newspapers in the TL regularly	24	54
I study the TL to seek contact with the NS	32	55
My parents have a positive attitude towards the TL	98	97
I answer in the TL when addressed in the TL	85	97

Not surprisingly, aggregate scores for attitudes towards French turned out to be much lower than towards English ($M = 1.56$, $sd = 1.4$ for French, compared to $M = 3.7$, $sd = 1.0$ for English). A t -test showed that this difference is highly significant ($t(98) = -12.8$, $p < 0.0001$). A Pearson correlation analysis revealed a weak positive relationship between the attitudes towards both languages ($r(99) = 0.171$, $p < 0.09$).

Extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism

A number of one-way ANOVAs with personality dimensions as independent variables and attitudes as dependent variables revealed that no personality dimension has a significant effect on attitudes towards either French or English.

Extraversion did not appear to be linked to attitudes in French ($F(2, 97) = 1.69$, $p = ns$, $\eta^2 = 0.034$) or English ($F(2, 97) = 0.93$, $p = ns$, $\eta^2 = 0.018$). Psychoticism is not linked to attitudes in French ($F(2, 97) = 1.18$, $p = ns$, $\eta^2 = 0.024$) or English ($F(2, 97) = 0.28$, $p = ns$, $\eta^2 = 0.006$). A similar absence was observed for neuroticism; it was not linked to attitudes towards French ($F(2, 97) = 0.17$, $p = ns$, $\eta^2 = 0.003$) or English ($F(2, 97) = 0.27$, $p = ns$, $\eta^2 = 0.027$).

Communicative anxiety

A one-way ANOVA with communicative anxiety in French as the main independent effect (with three levels) and attitudes towards French as a dependent variable showed a highly significant difference between the three groups ($F(2, 96) = 7.65$, $p < 0.0008$, $\eta^2 = 0.14$). A LSD post-hoc test showed that the 22 participants who reported low levels of anxiety when speaking French had significantly higher scores on attitudes towards French than the 64 participants who reported intermediate levels of anxiety ($p < 0.002$) and the 14 participants with high levels of anxiety ($p < 0.0005$) (see Figure 1).

A one-way ANOVA with communicative anxiety in English as the main independent variable and attitudes towards English as a dependent variable failed to show a significant effect ($F(2, 97) = 1.44$, $p = ns$, $\eta^2 = 0.03$). A

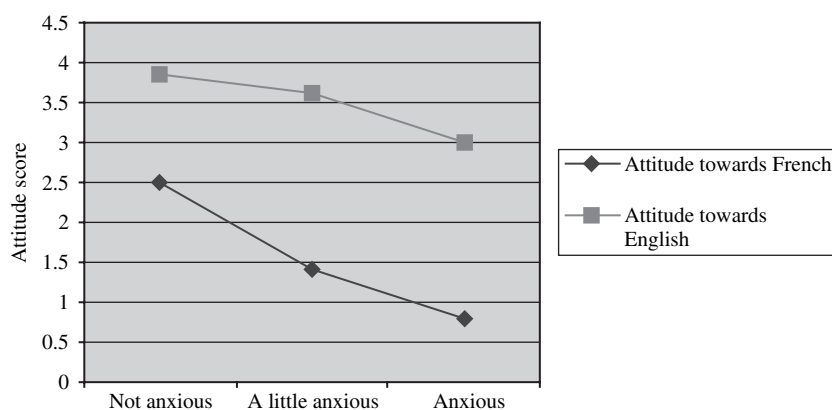


Figure 1 The effect of communicative anxiety on attitudes.

LSD post-hoc test showed no significant differences between the groups (see Figure 1). Although communicative anxiety scores were significantly higher in French than in English, there is a weak correlation between both sets ($r(99) = 0.17, p < 0.090$).

Self-perceived competence

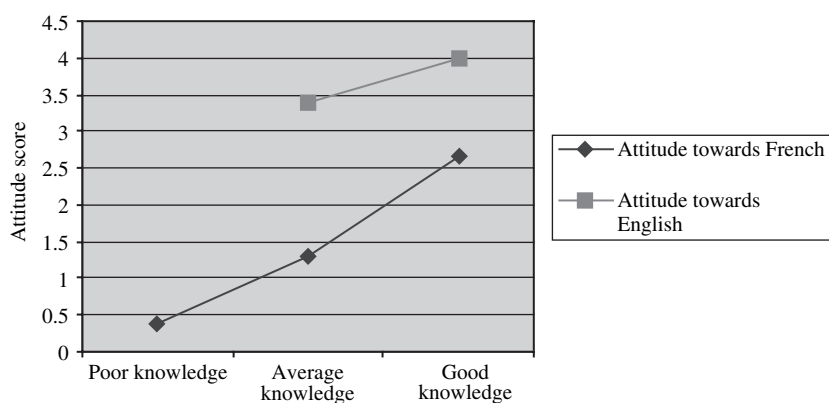


Figure 2 The effect of self-perceived competence on attitudes.

A one-way ANOVA with self-perceived competence in French as the main effect (three levels) and attitudes towards French as a dependent variable showed a highly significant difference between the three groups ($F(2, 96) = 12.8, p < 0.0001, \eta^2 = 0.21$). A LSD post-hoc test confirmed that 24 participants who rated their French as good had significantly higher scores on attitudes towards French than the 68 participants who rated their French as average ($p < 0.0001$) or the 8 participants who rated it as poor ($p < 0.0001$). A similar, marginally significant difference appeared between the 'average' and the 'poor' groups ($p < 0.061$).

A one-way ANOVA with self-perceived competence in English as the main effect (three levels) and attitudes towards English as a dependent variable showed a similar significant difference between the three groups ($F(2, 97) = 4.63, p < 0.012, \eta^2 = 0.09$). A LSD post-hoc test confirmed that the 47 participants who rated their English as very good had significantly higher scores on attitudes towards English than the 52 participants who rated their English as average ($p < 0.003$). Only one participant rated her English as poor.⁵ The effect sizes suggest that the effect is stronger in French than in English (see Figure 2).

Gender

A two-tailed t -test showed that gender was significantly linked to attitudes towards French ($t(97) = -3.25, p < 0.002$), with the female participants being much more positive than the male participants. No gender difference existed in the attitudes towards English ($t(98) = -0.24, p = ns$).

Social class

A one-way ANOVA with social class as the main independent effect and attitudes towards French as a dependent variable, revealed no significant differences in attitudes towards French ($F(2, 97) = 1.02, p = \text{ns}, \eta^2 = 0.021$). A LSD post-hoc test failed to show any significant difference between the groups. A one-way ANOVA with social class as the main effect revealed very weak differences in attitudes towards English ($F(2, 97) = 1.97, p = \text{ns}, \eta^2 = 0.040$). A LSD post-hoc test showed that the attitudes towards English of the higher social group were marginally lower than those of the middle group ($p < 0.10$), which were in turn marginally lower than those of the lower group ($p < 0.095$).

Frequency of speaking the TL

A one-way ANOVA with frequency of speaking as the main independent effect and attitudes towards French as a dependent variable, revealed a significant difference in attitudes towards French ($F(2, 97) = 35.9, p < 0.0001, \eta^2 = 0.27$) (see Figure 3).

A one-way ANOVA with frequency of speaking as the main independent effect and attitudes towards English as a dependent variable, revealed only a marginal difference in attitudes towards English ($F(2, 97) = 2.80, p < 0.097, \eta^2 = 0.028$) (see Figure 3).

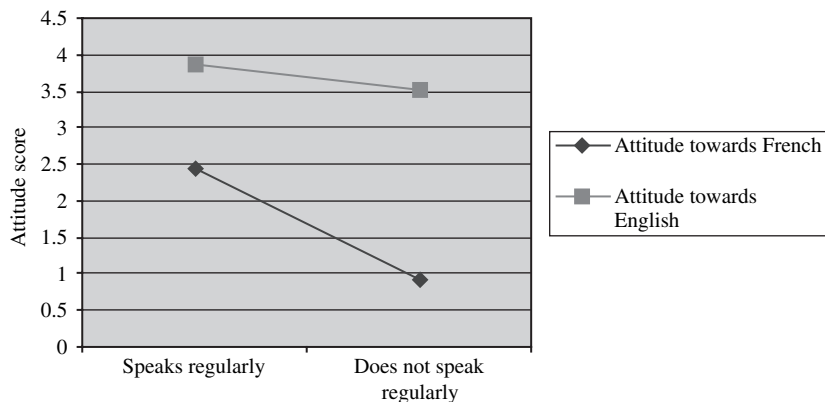


Figure 3 The effect of frequency of speaking on attitudes.

Politicocultural identity

A two-tailed t -test revealed that the 35 participants who defined themselves as Flemings before Belgians had lower scores on attitudes towards French compared to the 65 participants who rejected this statement. This difference is highly significant ($t(93) = 4.51, p < 0.0001$). The same independent variable had no effect on attitudes towards English ($t(94) = -0.73, p = \text{ns}$).

A one-way ANOVA with politicocultural identity and gender as independent variables showed a significant effect for politicocultural identity ($F(1, 93) = 20.8, p < 0.0001, \eta^2 = 0.186$); a significant effect for gender

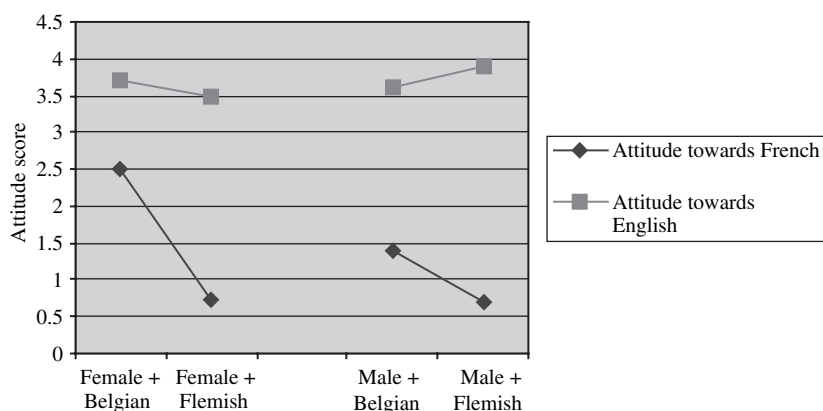


Figure 4 The effect of politicocultural identity and gender on attitudes.

($F(1, 93) = 4.84, p < 0.037, \eta^2 = 0.047$) and also an interaction effect between both variables ($F(1, 93) = 3.97, p < 0.049, \eta^2 = 0.042$). The male students identified themselves more often as Flemings rather than Belgians and had lower attitude values towards French (see Figure 4).

A similar analysis for attitudes towards English failed to uncover any effect or interaction effect. Politocultural identity ($F(1, 94) = 0.09, p = ns, \eta^2 = 0.010$) nor gender ($F(1, 94) = 0.22, p = ns, \eta^2 = 0.002$), nor the interaction were anywhere near significance ($F(1, 94) = 1.36, p = ns, \eta^2 = 0.015$ (see Figure 4).

Participants' comments

The section reserved for comments on attitudes towards French and English contained different types of comments. There were too few comments to carry out any serious analysis. They can at best be seen as an illustration of the patterns uncovered in the quantitative analysis. The comments could be categorised into roughly three types. The first category related to perceived difficulty of French: 'French is more difficult than English. English is easy. I get stuck every time I try to guess the correct gender in French, English is easier! I hate French grammar.'

The second was about fear of 'loss of face': 'I always worry about making errors in French. People laugh at my pronunciation in French but my English is OK. I feel stupid when speaking French.'

The third category was about the attraction of English compared to French: 'English is cool. Why bother with French?'

To sum up, the findings of the study fully support hypothesis 1 (attitudes towards English are more positive than towards French); reject hypothesis 2 (extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism are not linked to language attitudes); partially support hypothesis 3 (participants with low levels of foreign anxiety display more positive attitudes towards French, but not towards English); fully support hypothesis 4 (participants with high levels of self-perceived competence display more positive attitudes towards both TLs), partially support hypothesis 5 (females have more positive attitudes than males towards French but not towards English; with a very weak effect of

social class for English but not for French); partially support hypothesis 6 (frequent users of French display more positive attitudes towards French, but frequent users of English do not display more positive attitudes towards the language); and fully support hypothesis 7 (politicocultural identity is linked to attitudes towards French but not towards English).

Discussion

Attitudes towards foreign languages are multi-faceted, extremely complex and language-specific. Effect sizes (as reflected in the value of η^2) range between medium and large in French but they are small in English. Table 2 provides an overview of the main effects for French and English with the values of p and η^2 .

Politicocultural identity, frequency of communication, self-perceived competence and communicative anxiety explain between 14% and 27% of the variance in French. Only one variable in English accounts for more than 5% of the variance however, namely self-perceived competence (9%), with the other variables displaying weaker effect sizes. The relatively low alpha reliabilities for both scales may have had the effect of attenuating the η^2 estimates.

Basic personality dimensions do not appear to be significantly linked to attitudes towards French and English. Personality characteristics that are shaped by the social context, like communicative anxiety, were linked with attitudes in both foreign languages (FLs). Although anxiety levels in both languages were correlated, they were significantly different. Students reported higher levels of communicative anxiety in French than in English. Self-perceived competence was found to be strongly linked to attitudes in both languages. High self-perceived competence corresponded with more positive

Table 2 Overview of the effects of the independent variables on the attitudes towards French and English

<i>Independent variable</i>	<i>French</i>		<i>English</i>	
	<i>Value of p</i>	<i>Value of η^2</i>	<i>Value of p</i>	<i>value of η^2</i>
Extraversion	ns	0.03	ns	0.02
Psychoticism	ns	0.02	ns	0.03
Neuroticism	ns	0.00	ns	0.03
Communicative anxiety	**	0.14	ns	0.03
Self-perceived competence	***	0.21	*	0.09
Gender	*	0.05	ns	0.00
Social class	ns	0.02	ns	0.04
Frequency of use	***	0.27	ns	0.03
Politicocultural identity	***	0.18	ns	0.03

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.001$, *** $p < 0.0001$.

attitudes. Here again the average score for self-perceived competence was significantly higher for English than for French. This variable has often been presented as a negative mirror image of communicative anxiety. When a speaker judges his/her competence in a FL to be good, his/her levels of anxiety will drop. Our results, however, suggest that the strength of these two variables varies quite a lot across the two languages. Gender was found to be linked to attitudes towards French but not to English. Dörnyei and Clément (2001) reported similar patterns, with Hungarian schoolgirls preferring French while English was gender neutral. Our analysis reveals that social class was not significantly linked to attitudes to either language.

Communicative behaviour was clearly linked to attitudes towards the TLs. This is not surprising as more frequent interaction in the TL stimulates the development not only of grammatical competence (Dewaele & Véronique, 2001) but also of sociolinguistic competence (Dewaele & Mougeon, 2002, 2004) and sociopragmatic competence (Dewaele, 2004b). This creates a positive feedback loop to self-perceived competence and lowers communicative anxiety. Better communicative skills allow the speaker to encounter less frustration in interactions and may allow the speaker to appreciate the TL speakers and the TL culture more fully. This in turn will raise their willingness to communicate in the TL (Harley, 1990).

One factor that might interfere is the speaker's politicocultural beliefs or ethnic identity. We found that participants who put their regional (Flemish) identity before their national (Belgian) identity had less positive attitudes towards French while this did not affect their attitudes towards English. It thus seems that for these Flemings, the relegation of the Belgian identity to second place coincides with a certain hostility towards French. But even those who identified as Belgians more than as Flemings still harboured less favourable attitudes towards French than towards English ($M = 2.1$ versus $M = 3.7$). These politicocultural beliefs and gender interacted in attitudes towards French – with 'Belgian' females displaying more positive attitudes – but not towards English.

The lower scores for the attitudes towards French compared to English can be explained in terms of structural characteristics (MacIntyre *et al.*, 1998). Communication networks in Flanders do not favour the use of French. While the ethnolinguistic vitality of French in Flanders was much stronger than Dutch before World War 2, the balance has definitely shifted in favour of Dutch and the Flemings (Baetens Beardsmore, 1993). The socioeconomic power of the French-speaking Belgian community has decreased and although knowledge of French is generally required for prestige jobs, English is often perceived as essential to obtain a good job.

English is clearly more popular than French: it is linked to youth culture on radio (pop music), sitcoms on television, in cinemas (English-speaking films in original version with subtitles) and on the Internet. It is associated with the USA, the most powerful country in the world. The participants in the Housen *et al.* (2001) study found English to be much more trendy and hip than French. English is also the language most commonly spoken by the millions of tourists who visit Bruges every year. While contact with French and French culture is accessible in Flanders through television, libraries and music, interactions are

mostly restricted to French classes at school. Indeed, Flanders is a monolingual Dutch-speaking region, with the exception of Brussels, which is officially bilingual Dutch–French although only an estimated 12% of the population speaks Dutch (Willemys, 2002; Witte & Van Velthoven, 1997). French is also generally perceived by Flemings as being grammatically more difficult than English. Housen *et al.* (2001) found that their participants' scores on perceived language difficulty were significantly higher for French compared to English. Authentic interactions in French outside school may also happen more frequently with native speakers. This type of exolingual communication (Py, 1995) could be more stressful, especially as native speakers of French may be less relaxed than native and non-native speakers of English when hearing grammatical or sociopragmatic errors in the students' speech. It has also been suggested that learners' interest in English is not necessarily linked to a specific interest in the TL community but rather the reflection of a 'xenophilic orientation' (Clément *et al.*, 1998; Muñoz & Tragant, 2001). Our participants' more favourable attitudes towards English may therefore be the result of the perception of English as a *lingua franca*, i.e. a tool allowing communication with people from other countries. The differences in attitudes towards English and French could also be linked to teaching methods in Flanders (Housen *et al.*, 2001). Housen *et al.* (2001) compared course books used in Flemish schools for English and French. They noted that the French course books contained more material in Dutch and that they were generally less exciting than the English course-books. We argued earlier (Dewaele, 2002) that the quality of French course-books needs to improve dramatically and that the 'fun' element needs to be introduced – or strengthened – in the teaching of French if competence and attitudes towards French are to improve. This is doubly important for French as school is often the only place where students come in contact with that language. Housen *et al.* (2001) also observed that the quality of teaching had a much stronger effect on attitudes towards French than on attitudes towards English, arguably because the latter language is widely heard outside school, hence neutralising the effect of teacher and course-book. Paradoxically, English has acquired an L2-like status in Flanders, while French has become a FL.

To conclude, the qualitative analysis and the participants' comments revealed a sharp contrast between Flemish students' attitudes towards French and English. The lower score on attitudes towards French were clearly linked to the students' politicocultural identity, which has been shaped by a long history of tense sociopolitical relations between Dutch and French in Flanders. While social class was found to affect levels of communicative anxiety in French (Dewaele, 2002), it was not linked to attitudes towards either French or English. At an individual level we found that self-perceived competence, and – to a lesser degree – communicative anxiety and frequency of use of the TL were linked to attitudes. Yet, despite almost similar frequencies of use of French and English, attitudes towards English remained higher overall. It is impossible to find causal relations in this type of analysis. Attitudes towards foreign languages are clearly determined by the individual's perception of his/her capacity to sustain successful authentic – and relatively error-free – interactions in that language (i.e. without losing

face). If this succeeds, attitudes towards the language and the community improve, which in turn may lead to a stronger motivation to learn the TL and to more frequent communication, higher levels of proficiency, more self-confidence and lower levels of communicative anxiety (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; MacIntyre *et al.*, 1998).

Lasagabaster (2001) and Muñoz and Tragant (2001) conclude that early compulsory classes in foreign languages may have positive effects in the long run on students' attitudes. Early teaching of French and English in Flanders, combined with stays across the linguistic border in order to practice communication in these languages – and particularly in French – might be a first step in overcoming anxiety and in strengthening self-perceived competence in the TLs. We sincerely hope that, by doing so, ancient sociopolitical fears and animosities may be consigned to the dustbin of history.

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Notes

1. Further research from this very active research team is under way (Mettewie, 2004).
2. The present corpus.
3. The non-native speakers of Dutch had spent a minimum of seven years in Flanders. We therefore considered it to be very likely that they had acculturated into the Flemish community.
4. Although the usual classification in three groups is (a) primary education, (b) secondary education and (c) university education, we decided to delete the first category as no parents stopped their education at that level, and create an intermediate category which reflected the organisation of the Belgian education system before the introduction of the BA/MA structure with the Bologna declaration, namely a higher nonuniversity degree (typical length of study was three years).
5. The removal of that participant from the calculation improves the value of p (< 0.001), but it has no great effect of the value of η^2 (0.11).

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