The emotional weight of *I love you* in multilinguals' languages

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Abstract

The present paper considers the perceived emotional weight of the phrase I love you in multilinguals' different languages. The sample consists of 1459 adult multilinguals speaking a total of 77 different first languages. They filled out an on-line questionnaire with open and closed questions linked to language behavior and emotions. Feedback on the open question related to perceived emotional weight of the phrase I love you in the multilinguals' different languages was recoded in three categories: it being strongest in (1) the first language (L1), (2) the first language and a foreign language, and (3) a foreign language (LX).

A majority of speakers felt I love you was strongest in their L1. Participants offered various explanations for their perception. Statistical analyses revealed that the perception of weight of the phrase I love you was associated with self-perceived language dominance, context of acquisition of the L2, age of onset of learning the L2, degree of socialization in the L2, nature of the network of interlocutors in the L2, and self-perceived oral proficiency in the L2.

Keywords: Love; Communication of emotion; Multilingualism; Emotional weight; Linguistic pragmatics; Emic perspective

1. Introduction

The one thing that nobody would wish to get wrong is a declaration of love. Yet, this is exactly what happened to Milan Kundera, the successful Czech novelist who is living in Paris and writing both in French and Czech. In his book *L'immortalité*, he reminisces about a particularly embarrassing episode where, as a young man with good ''high school'' French, but a limited grasp of sociocultural conventions and pragmatic rules in French, he mistook a standard politeness formula at the end of a letter, addressed to him by a female secretary working for the publishing house Gallimard, for a genuine declaration of love:

> Pour conclure une lettre, un Français vous écrit ''Veuillez agréer, cher Monsieur, l'assurance de mes sentiments distingués''. Quand j'ai reçu pour la première fois une telle lettre, signée par une secrétaire des Editions Gallimard, je vivais encore à Prague. De joie, j'ai sauté au plafond: à Paris, il y a une femme qui m'aime! Elle a réussi, dans les dernières lignes d'une lettre officielle, a` glisser une déclaration d'amour! Non seulement elle éprouve pour moi des sentiments, mais elle souligne expressément qu'ils sont distingués! Jamais une Tchèque ne m'a rien dit de pareil! Bien plus tard, quand je me suis installé à Paris, on m'a expliqué que la pratique épistolaire offre tout un éventail sémantique de formules de politesse; elles permettent à un Français de choisir, avec une précision de pharmacien, le sentiment qu'il veut, sans l'éprouver, exprimer au destinataire; dans ce très large choix, les ''sentiments distingués'' représentent le plus bas degré de la politesse administrative, confinant presque au mépris. Milan Kundera, 1990:242–243, *L'immortalité*.

> To conclude a letter, the French write ''Please accept, dear sir, the assurance of my distinguished feelings''. When I first received such a letter, signed by a secretary from the publisher Gallimard, I was still living in Prague. I jumped for joy: in Paris, a woman loves me! She managed to insert a declaration of love into the last lines of an official letter! Not only does she harbour feelings for me, but she states explicitly that these feelings are distinguished! Never before had any Czech woman told me anything similar! Much later, once I was settled in Paris, I was told that a whole semantic range of politeness formulas are used in correspondence; they allow the French to choose, with the precision of a pharmacist, which feeling they wish to express to the addressee—without actually experiencing it. In this vast assortment, the ''distinguished feelings'' represents the lowest degree of administrative politeness, close even to contempt. Love is one of a series of emotions that all humans share but it may resist exact linguistic translation because of the uniqueness of the specific verbal and non-verbal manifestations and expressions across languages and cultures (Altarriba, 2003; Derné, 1994).

Communicating love and recognizing an emotion script of love in a foreign language is therefore extra challenging if it has to be channeled through narrow and imperfect linguistic translations. Love is expressed very differently in Asian and Western cultures (Besemeres, 2004; Markus and Kitayama, 1991, 1994). An excellent illustration of this can be found in the study of Ye (2004), a Chinese scholar who emigrated from China to Australia in the 1990s. During her first years, Ye struggled with the easy use of endearments and affectionate gestures in Australian public life. She tried to avoid overt expression of her feelings:

> I remain fundamentally Chinese deep inside. My sense of self is Chinese. And I feel most at home when I can express myself, especially my feelings and emotions, in the Chinese way— subtle, implicit and without words (Ye, 2004:139–140).

Ye portrays her feelings as very personal and not to be shared in public. Having to talk about her feelings makes her feel ''stripped and vulnerable'' (2004:140). She is acutely aware that the difference between Chinese and English expression of emotion is so great that there is a constant danger of misinterpretation and misunderstanding, placing stress on cross-cultural relationships. She is still amazed at the ease with which Australians use ''honeyed words''; saying I love you on the phone or when parting. She understands now that these expressions are niceties for social purposes (p. 140).

We do not place so much emphasis on verbal expression of love and affection, because they can evaporate quickly. For a Chinese, love and affection are embodied in care and concern, in doing what we believe are good things for the other party (2004:140). She and her parents have never said I love you to one another. She recalls leaving them for the first time to go to Australia:

> At the airport, we fought back our tears and urged each other repeatedly to take care; we wore the biggest smiles to wave good-bye to each other, to soothe each others' worries. Just like any other Chinese parting between those who love each other—there were no hugs and no 'I love you'. Yet I have never doubted my parents' profound love for me. (Ye, 2004:141).

Interestingly, after a 2-year separation from her parents, Ye decides to give them ''a long and tight embrace'' (2004:142).

In the present study, I examine multilinguals' perception of the emotional weight of the phrase I love you in their different languages using the database on bilingualism and emotions created by Dewaele and Pavlenko (2001). My focus is thus on the linguistic expression and its culturally condoned verbal and non-verbal manifestations of love rather than on the emotion itself. I will begin by discussing some epistemological and methodological issues that arise in pragmatic analysis of emotion scripts of love by multilinguals. Then I will present a definition of ''emotion'' using Averill's (1982) socioconstructivist approach as a basis. After that I will firstly present a brief survey of the research on the organization of emotion words in the multilingual mental lexicon and on the use of emotion discourse by multilinguals. Secondly, I will refer to Pavlenko's (2008) proposed framework to analyze variation in emotion concepts in multilinguals.

This discussion will be followed by the rationale and the methodology of the present study. Next I will present participants' views on the emotional weight of the phrase I love you in their different languages and on their use of this emotion script. This will be followed by quantitative analyses to determine the association between independent variables and the dependent variable. In the following section, I will reflect on potential causes underlying the patterns that emerged from the analyses. Finally, I will consider what the findings add to the existing body of knowledge on the communication of emotion among multilinguals.

2. Epistemological and methodological issues in researching second language (L2) pragmatics

Crystal (1997) defines pragmatics as ''the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication'' (1997:301). This definition of pragmatics is often quoted (cf. Barron, 2003; Garces-Conejos Blitvich, 2006; Kasper and Rose, 2001, 2002), probably because it encompasses all the crucial aspects of pragmatic research without linking it to a particular paradigm in the field. Interestingly, the first part of the definition ''the study of language from the point of view of users'' seems to suggest that the epistemological stance in pragmatics research is the emic perspective, where the researcher aims at describing participants' behavior in terms meaningful (consciously or unconsciously) to them and where participants' voice and opinions are heard (Pike, 1967). However, most pragmatic research in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is based on the etic perspective, i.e. a description of a behavior according to the researcher's point of view (Pike, 1967). In other words, L2 learners or L2 users produce language samples that are clinically analyzed by the researcher and typically labeled according to their perceived degree of appropriateness in a given context. The views or the opinions of participants are generally ignored.

Why would SLA researchers prefer the etic perspective in their studies? The following definition of pragmatic competence proposed by Barron (2003) in her book Interlanguage Pragmatics may give us a clue: ''Knowledge of the linguistic resources available in a given language for realizing particular illocutions, knowledge of the sequential aspects of speech acts and finally, knowledge of the appropriate contextual use of the particular languages' linguistic resources'' (2003:10). The focus is on the knowledge of the L2 learner or user. A wide range of methods allow researchers to gather evidence of that knowledge, typically focusing on speech acts (apologies, compliments, complaints, expression of gratitude, etc.) and discourse ability (i.e. L2 learners' ability to structure continuous stretches of speech) (Kasper and Rose, 2002).

The presupposition of the researcher is that learners' knowledge of the target language (TL) is incomplete, and that deviations from the norm are evidence of that incompleteness. Bardovi-Harlig (2001), for example, notes that ''speech act realizations may deviate on three levels: social acceptability of the utterance, linguistic acceptability of the utterance, or pragmatic acceptability reflected in shifts of illocutionary force'' (2001:14). At a linguistic-pragmatic level, L2 learners may choose different speech acts, different semantic formulas, different content and finally different form (grammatical and lexical modification devices) (2001:14–20).

I would like to argue that there is a danger in attributing deviation from the native speaker (NS) norm (a nebulous concept in itself—see Davies, 2003) to gaps in knowledge. Researchers themselves, with the help of NS judges or NS control groups, establish base-lines for communicative actions, and categorize the performance of L2 learners in terms of appropriateness, i.e. how ''proper'' was the social behavior of the participant? (Kasper and Rose, 2001:3).

The danger with this approach is the introduction of an inevitable monolingual bias (Cook, 2002; Grosjean, 1992; Pavlenko, 2005). Since L2 users are legitimate, multicompetent users of an L2, one could argue that it is irrelevant whether or not they conform to some NS norm (Cook, 2002). L2 users' deviations from the NS norm are not necessarily examples of pragmatic failure. L2

users may intentionally violate pragmatic rules, just as L1 users do. L2 users who raise their voice to express anger in a culture where this is not done may consciously deviate from the local norm which they may know perfectly well. This deviation from the NS norm is certainly not a pragmatic failure but rather an unusual pragmatic choice. In other words, it is very difficult for pragmaticists working on L2 production data to guess what the communicative intention of the L2 user was and hence to decide whether something was an error or not, whether a deviation was intentional or not.

Accurate identification of an emotion script, and of the speaker's communicative intention can also be difficult in interactions between NS and non-native speakers (NNS). The retelling of an incident can turn out to be an apology or a complaint. The addressee might remain unaware of the exact nature of a script and of the communicative intention until the end of an exchange. An emotion script of love can stretch from a frown, a sound, a word, a single speech act, to a whole sequence of utterances and speech acts with no apparent overarching communicative intention. Judging the social appropriateness of an emotion script of love is much more difficult than that of more formulaic speech acts. These longer interactions are very difficult to classify in pragmatic terms (the addressee may not recognize the emotion script of love, especially if the addressee has a very different emotion script in mind) and it is therefore much more difficult for NS judges to decide whether there was any deviation from the NS norm. One could wonder whether there is a norm for expressing love? There is a danger that NS judges focus on different aspects or different parts of the exchange, adding unwanted variation in the measurement. It is also possible that both NNS and NS would remain unable to recognize an emotion script of love if they heard an audio-recorded one: the growing feeling of intimacy, the shared jokes and laughter, the words that preceded the recorded words, the gazes, the occasional touching, are crucial in an emotion script of love and cannot be captured. There are also individual differences to consider: Could some people, for example those with higher levels of emotional intelligence (cf. Petrides and Furnham, 2001) have different perception of the emotional weight of phrases like I love you?

On top of the methodological difficulties of recording and delineating an emotion script of love, there is an extra ethical question, namely that genuine emotion scripts of love are private matters that should not be recorded anyway, and one could wonder how role-play could come anywhere close to the real thing. Even if it did come close to authenticity, one could wonder whether it is ethical for Western foreign language teachers to impose such a role-play on a Chinese or a Japanese speaker. To sum up, for emotion scripts of love it seems that more is needed than just a judgment of the researcher or the NS control group on the perceived appropriateness of the L2 user's efforts. Such an etic perspective provides only a partial view of a complex reality and this is particularly restrictive in pragmatic research where the speaker's communicative intentions (both at a micro- and a macro-level) remain unknown to the researcher. SLA researchers looking at L2 production data only see the end-product, the tip of the iceberg, and there is a danger that they may unconsciously interpret their data to fit their hypotheses, namely that deviations from the NS norm are linked to gaps in competence, or to transfer from other languages.

The final epistemological question relates to the amount of evidence needed to draw valid conclusions (Dewaele, 2007b). In other words, how much linguistic data is needed to claim that an individual has acquired full ''pragmatic competence'' in an L2? While most researchers would agree that a vocabulary and grammar test with 20 items is insufficient to measure an L2 learner's vocabulary knowledge and grammatical competence, many researchers in interlanguage pragmatics use Discourse Completion Tests with fewer than 20 items. Can these fragmented findings elicited in a relatively artificial way be used to determine an individual's pragmatic competence? It must be said that there has been a move towards new methodologies in interlanguage pragmatics combining etic and emic perspectives, qualitative and quantitative methods (Kasper, 2004; Barron and Warga, 2007). I have argued in Dewaele (2007b) that instead of using an exclusive etic perspective and considering specific communicative actions of L2 users as reflections of their pragmatic competence in the L2, an emic perspective could be added where pragmatic competence in the L2 could be assessed using L2 users' views of their ability to communicate in a L2 and their perception of the L2 as well as emotion-laden phrases in the L2.

The L2 users' perceptions and affective states related to their life-long interactions in different languages may provide a richer, broader view of their pragmatic competence. It is equally important to have the L2 user's point of view in any research that deals with violations of ''appropriateness''. A L2 user will not always act ''appropriately'' despite having the ability to judge appropriateness accurately. L2 users may consciously or unconsciously diverge from the ''appropriate'' norm in a particular language (Dewaele, 2008). Long-term L2 users may reach an equilibrium point in the development of fluency and accuracy, and judgments of proficiency and success will probably be determined more by the relative ease with which communicative intentions are translated in the L2, especially in social interactions which require interpersonal skill and sociocultural awareness.

3. Defining emotion

Since my focus is both sociopragmatic and sociocultural (language choice for the expression of love in the social interaction of adult L2 users), I opted for the socioconstructivist framework provided by Averill (1982) to define emotions. He proposes ''to situate the emotions within the hierarchy of behavioral systems'' (1982:4). He rejects definitions of emotion that are based on some characteristic such as patterns of physiological arousal, neurological circuits, feelings or cognitive appraisals (1982:4). He sees emotions as part of broader systems of behavior. They can therefore be analyzed in relation to social systems, psychological systems and biological systems (1982:19). Averill chooses the social level of analysis and he defines emotions:

> as socially constituted syndromes2 (transitory social roles) which include an individual's appraisal of the situation and which are interpreted as passions rather than as actions (1982:6).

He distinguishes emotions from other transitory social roles on the basis of the cognitive appraisals involved: ''each emotion is based on a particular set of appraisals or evaluative judgments'' (1982:19). He also distinguishes emotions from other social roles because he interprets them as passions rather than as actions. He warns that ''an emotion is not just the sum of its parts'' (1982:19) and that, as a consequence, the grounds are never sufficient in themselves for attribution of emotion: ''The attribution of emotion also depends on the nature of the appraised object and on the meaning of the emotional role (i.e. how the emotional role relates to broader systems of behavior, primarily at the social level of analysis)'' (1982:19).

Markus and Kitayama (1991, 1994) adopt a different angle on human emotions. They argue that different sociocultural environments give rise to different emotional experiences. Whether this view is true is beyond the scope of the present study. However, Markus and Kitayama's (1991) observation that different views of the self in Western and Eastern cultures are linked to very different ways in communicating emotion is extremely relevant for our study. In the West the self is viewed as independent, self-contained, and autonomous, while it is considered interdependent in Asian, African, Latin-American and many southern European cultures (1991:225).

For those with independent selves, emotional expressions may literally ''express'' or reveal the inner feelings such as anger, sadness, and fear. For those with interdependent selves, however, an emotional expression may be more often regarded as a public instrumental action that may or may not be related directly to the inner feelings (1991:236). While in the West emotions that derive from and promote an independent view of the self can be openly displayed, in societies where the self is considered interdependent, overt expression of emotion is avoided (1991: 236). It is important to point out that this reference to ''the West'' is a generalization, as there are cultural differences in the display of emotions between the more reserved British, for example, and the more jovial Irish.

In sum, the social perspective and, to a certain extent, the cultural perspective on the linguistic expression of emotion provides an appropriate basis for a sociopragmatic and sociocultural enquiry into emotion scripts of love by multilingual and multicultural people.

4. The multilingual communication of emotion

4.1. NS/NS and NS/NNS emotional exchanges

In her edited book on the verbal communication of emotion, Fussell (2002) observes that:

> The interpersonal communication of emotional states is fundamental to both everyday and clinical interaction. One's own and others' affective experiences are frequent topics of everyday conversations, and how well these emotions are expressed and understood is important to interpersonal relationships and individual well-being (2002:1).

Fussell's insistence on the importance of expressing and understanding emotions explains why expressing emotions in a foreign language is probably the ultimate challenge for L2/LX users. In emotional exchanges the stakes are invariably extremely high: the potential of loss of face to the speaker and the interlocutor are considerable. This is true for NS/NS exchanges (i.e. two monolinguals interacting), and even more so in exchanges between NS and NNS or between NNS. If the emotion is not well expressed and is misunderstood this may affect the interpersonal relationship and make both interlocutors unhappy. Yet, how can a L2/LX user express an emotion appropriately in an LX when his/her blood is boiling? In emotional NS/NS exchanges at least participants do not have to worry about the language processing (production and reception) which is largely automatic and can therefore focus on the content of the interaction (cf. Paradis, 2004). However, in emotional NS/NNS exchanges, L2/LX users will typically rely more on controlled processing, involving searches for words, expressions, grammar rules, pragmatic rules, idioms and metaphors. This will involve a considerable demand on working memory, and limit the amount of attention L2/LX users can pay to content and to observation of the interlocutor. In this emotional juggling act, L2/LX users are much likely to stumble at some point, which might further increase the pressure.

The other challenge facing the L2/LX users is that of potentially incomplete conceptual representations of emotion words and scripts (see infra) and also of metaphor and other figures of speech that play a crucial role in emotional communication between native speakers (Gibbs et al., 2002). Gibbs et al. (2002) suggest that speakers use metaphor to convey a variety of subtle meanings, which may not always have been consciously intended at the time of production. By resorting to metaphor native speakers can describe their emotional experiences in more detail and with more nuance than would be possible using terms in the literal emotion lexicon.

I described in Dewaele (2006) how at the end of a week in Spain I discovered that I was unable to express anger in Spanish (my L4) in a service-encounter because I realized I could not translate the strength of the emotion I was experiencing quickly and accurately enough in Spanish. I also felt too unsure about the exact emotional and illocutionary force of expressions, and their potentially unwanted perlocutionary effects. In expressing my anger, I wanted to project the image of a legitimately angry customer demanding compensation, in the hope of convincing the interlocutor that I had been wrongly treated. I certainly did not want to be perceived as an abusive foreign customer, to whom all assistance would be refused and who might even end up in jail for inappropriate language and behaviour. To attain my goal, I switched to English (my L3), which was also an LX for my interlocutor, and eventually an agreement was reached.

4.2. The multilingual emotion lexicon

Recent research has shown that emotion words (''love'', ''hate'') and emotion-laden words (''kiss'', ''rape'') differ from both concrete and abstract words in the way they are represented and processed (see Pavlenko, 2008 for a complete overview).

The seminal work of Altarriba and Santiago-Rivera (1994) used the word-priming paradigm to investigate the representation that bilingual individuals have of emotion words in their two languages linking it to cross-linguistic differences and language histories. Altarriba (2003) used rating scales to uncover critical word characteristics for concrete, emotion, and abstract words in the Spanish of 21 adult Spanish–English bilinguals. Emotion words were rated as less concrete but more easily pictured than abstract words, bilinguals provided equal ratings for both word

types in terms of context-availability. Altarriba suggests that emotion words in a L1 are stored at a deeper level of representation than their L2 counterparts because the L1 emotion words have been experienced in many more contexts and have been applied in varying ways. As a consequence, multiple traces are created in memory for these words, which strengthens their semantic representation. On the other hand, emotion words learned in a L2 may not be as deeply encoded, if they are practiced much less and applied in fewer contexts. As a consequence, an emotion word in the L2 is less likely to activate as many different associations as is the same word in the more dominant language. Altarriba and Bauer (2004) found that among monolingual English speakers emotion words function as primes for other emotion words (''happy''–''sad'') but not for semantically related abstract words (''rage''–''violence''). In a follow-up study, Altarriba and Canary (2004) added a group of Spanish–English bilinguals and compared their performance with that of the English monolinguals. They discovered positive affective priming effects for both groups in high and medium arousal conditions. The bilinguals were found to be slower that the monolinguals which could be linked to the fact that they had to access information in the other language when processing emotion-related words, or because they were less susceptible to arousal in their L2.

Word association studies of bilinguals have allowed researchers to gain a better understanding of the lexical organization of emotion domains. Grabois (1999) compared word associations to a number of concepts including love. He found that associations supplied by monolingual speakers of Spanish and monolingual speakers of English differed both in terms of the type of preferred associations and in terms of which specific words were elicited. NS of English exhibited a greater preference for indirect (metaphoric and symbolic) associations with the word ''love'', while NS of Spanish showed a preference for sensory and referential associations. A group of late English–Spanish bilinguals, who had lived in Spain for three or more years, consistently achieved higher correlations with the associations provided by NS of Spanish than American L2 learners of Spanish in a study abroad program and foreign language learners enrolled in Spanish courses in an American university.

Dewaele and Pavlenko (2002) examined the frequency of use of emotion vocabulary in the speech of 29 Flemish learners of French and 34 Russian learners of English. The researchers found that the use of emotion vocabulary was linked to language proficiency, gender, extraversion, and the type of linguistic material. Language proficiency effects were found in the French interlanguage corpus where highly proficient learners used more emotion word tokens than learners with medium and low levels of proficiency. The authors speculate that this may be linked to a conscious avoidance of emotional topics by lower proficiency students because of a certain lexical handicap, or because of a lack of emotional resonance of the emotion words in French interlanguage.

Harris et al. (2003) analyzed the emotional impact of words in the L1 and L2 through their effect on autonomic reactivity. The researchers used electrodermal monitoring to compare reactivity for reprimands, taboo words, aversive, positive and neutral words presented visually and auditorily in the L1 and the L2 of 32 Turkish L1–English L2 bilinguals. Physiological reactions to taboo words and childhood reprimands presented auditorily in the L1 were found to have a much stronger impact than their translation equivalents in the L2. In a follow-up study, Harris (2004) found that reprimands presented in the L1 of early Spanish–English bilinguals elicited stronger responses than comparable expressions in the L2. Terms of endearment such as ''I love you more than anything!'' and the Spanish equivalent ''Te amo!'' did not elicit significantly different responses. Bilinguals who started learning English during middle childhood reacted similarly to reprimands in the L1 and L2. Harris concludes that age of acquisition of the L2 and proficiency modulate speakers' physiological reaction to emotional language. She argues that the reason the L1 is often experienced as more emotional than the L2 is because the L1 is learned in a context which is the most consistently emotional.

To sum up, the studies discussed here suggest that emotion words and emotion-laden words are different from abstract and concrete words, both in terms of representation, processing, and frequency of use. Emotion words have unique association patterns across languages. Bilinguals

react differently to emotion and emotion-laden words in their L1 and L2 and this variation has been linked to age of acquisition of the L2 and socialization in both languages.

4.3. Emotion discourse of multilinguals

Experimental studies on emotion words can only provide a partial view on the complex phenomenon that is the linguistic expression of emotion. A number of researchers (Marian and Kaushanskaya, 2004; Pavlenko, 2002a,b; Rintell, 1990) have therefore focused on stretches of multilinguals' emotion discourse looking more specifically at how emotion and emotion-laden words, expressions, and metaphors are deployed in various forms of discourse. These include personal narratives, oral interaction and written texts (Pavlenko and Driagina, 2007).

Rintell (1990) analyzed personal experience narratives about emotional events from six native speakers of English and eight intermediate English Second Language students. The analysis showed that both groups had produced structurally similar narratives but that the stories of the ESL students were far less elaborate. They employed more direct, explicit statements of emotional response, and references to physical sensations. However, they did not use figurative language, reported speech, epithets, or depersonalization, features present in the NS' narratives. Marian and Kaushanskaya (2004) is a major study in this area. It considered autobiographical memories in Russian and English of 47 bicultural adult Russian–English bilinguals who had emigrated to the US as teenagers. The bilinguals' language choice was found to affect their selfconstrual.

Bilinguals were also found to express more intense affect when speaking the same language at the time of retrieval that they spoke at the time when the event took place. In their recent review of research on bilingual autobiographical memory and emotion, Schrauf and Durazo-Arvizu (2006) conclude that both emotion and language are present in memories. A bilingual recalling a particular memory engages in the mental reconstruction of some event that was originally encoded into memory in a particular sociocultural and linguistic environment. Memories are tagged by language and the emotional tone of the experience is encoded as well. Building on Pavlenko's (2002a,b) finding that Russian–English bilinguals transfer the adjectival pattern from L2 English into L1 Russian to express emotion, Pavlenko and Driagina (2007) found that in the process of L2 acquisition advanced American learners of Russian shift the pattern of structural choices, replacing the preference for adjectives to describe emotional states with that for emotion verbs.

To sum up, both emic and epic approaches to emotion discourse of multilinguals conclude that individuals experience a differential language emotionality and the emotion discourse they produce may actually show structural differences in comparison with monolingual control groups.

4.4. Variation in emotion concepts of multilinguals

Emotion words are linked to particular conceptual categories. Pavlenko (1999) has argued that bilinguals' words are not grouped in a single universal conceptual store but that there is variation across languages. She has recently extended the argument to emotion concepts, defined as ''prototypical scripts that are formed as a result of repeated experiences and involve causal antecedents, appraisals, physiological reactions, consequences, and means of regulation and display'' (Pavlenko, 2008). She sees these concepts as being embedded within larger systems of beliefs about psychological and social processes. The advantage of the view of emotion concepts as scripts is that it does not imply a position in the universalist/relativist debate as the focus is not on the emotion per se, but on their conceptualization (Pavlenko, 2008). Saying that emotion concepts vary across speakers of different languages does not imply a physiological variation, it simply means that individuals evaluate and interpret their own and others' experiences from a different vantage point (Pavlenko, 2008). Pavlenko points out that cross-linguistic differences in emotion concepts have been found in causal antecedents of emotions (i.e. what causes an emotion), in appraisals (i.e. an evaluation of emotion-causing events and of their consequences), in physiological states associated with particular emotions and in consequences and means of

emotions regulation and display. A comparison of emotion concepts across languages can show either total overlap, partial overlap, or total separation. The acquisition of an emotion concept in the L2 which overlaps totally with the L1 concept will be unproblematic. More effort is needed in cases of partial overlap. Altarriba (2003), for example, showed that the Spanish concept ''carino'' has no full conceptual equivalent in English: it could be translated as a feeling between liking and affection. L2 learners faced with emotion concepts that have no equivalent in their L1 will eventually acquire the concept through secondary affective socialization, slowly developing the prototypical script for that emotion (Pavlenko, 2008). Examples of such language- and culturespecific concepts are the Russian ''perezhivat''' (to experience something keenly/to worry/to suffer things through) (Pavlenko, 2002a,b), Greek ''stenahoria'' (discomfort–sadness–suffocation) and ''ypohreosi'' (deep sense of cultural and social obligation) (Panayiotou, 2004a,b, 2006).

Pavlenko (2008) argues that emotion concepts can co-exist in bicultural speakers. However, in some cases elements of the L1 concept may be transferred to the L2 concept, typically in the case of instructed L2 learners who do not use the L2 in authentic interaction outside the classroom. Those L2 learners who become active L2 users may internalize new concepts. In cases of partially overlapping concepts, highly socialized L2 users may exhibit evidence of conceptual restructuring of their existing L1-based concept. These highly socialized L2 users may also experience convergence of their partially overlapping concepts in the L1 and the L2 to form a unique concept, different from both the L1 and the L2 concepts. Finally, a prolonged contact with the L2, coupled with infrequent use of the L1, can lead to attrition of L1 emotion concepts as well as attrition of L1 emotion vocabulary. While these speakers are still able to recognize the concept, it ceases to be central for their interpretation of the world around them (Pavlenko, 2008).

To sum up, Pavlenko's (2008) definition of emotion concepts as prototypical scripts which may overlap to a varying extent in different languages allows a fine-grained cross-linguistic analysis. Pavlenko's observation that emotion concepts are dynamic in nature is absolutely crucial. Indeed, multilinguals sharing the same L1 or L2 may have gone through invisible conceptual shifts and hence developed different emotion concepts compared to monolinguals in these languages, or compared to multilinguals with different language combinations.

To recapitulate, the existing body of research suggests that a number of interacting variables affect the organization of emotion words and emotion concepts in the multilingual mental lexicon. These in turn have an influence on both the production and reception of emotion words and discourse in an individual's different languages. The way in which multilinguals communicate emotions can shift as an effect of socialization and on-going learning of the complex conceptual representations of emotion and the associated linguistic and sociocultural constraints.

5. Rationale for the present study

The objective of the present study is to analyze the perception and potential use of the phrase I love you in multilinguals' different languages. I love you is a prototypical emotion script: it contains a very specific emotional value and a set of rules governing its use in any particular language. The script may or may not overlap in a multilingual's different languages. For many multilinguals this emotion script may be shifting in some of their languages. My aim is to identify the sociobiographical variables affecting the use and the perceived weight of the phrase I love you. To investigate this issue satisfactorily, a large corpus of quantitative and qualitative data is needed. The statistical analysis of quantitative data allows the researcher to identify patterns of variation in the data, and these patterns can, in turn, be linked to participants' own views. These views add valuable nuances and detail.

6. Method

6.1. Participants

A total of 1459 multilinguals (1040 females, 419 males) contributed to the web questionnaire database used in the present study. The participants speak a total of 77 different L1s. Anglophone native speakers represent the largest group (n = 432), followed by native speakers of Spanish (n = 165), French (n = 159), German (n = 131), Dutch (n = 97), Italian (n = 66), Finnish (n = 38), Catalan (n = 36), Russian (n = 35), Portuguese (n = 34), Swedish (n = 24), Greek (n = 21), Chinese (n = 18), Afrikaans (n = 14), Danish (n = 14), Japanese (n = 14), Welsh (n = 11), and Polish (n = 10). The remaining participants share another 58 languages.

The most frequent L2 is English (n = 609), followed by French (n = 304), Spanish (n = 146) and German (n = 97). English is also the most frequent L3 (n = 328), followed by French (n = 322), German (n = 190) and Spanish (n = 123).

There are 221 bilinguals, 362 trilinguals, 390 quadrilinguals and 486 pentalinguals. The mean age of onset of learning was 8.5 years (S.D. = 6.3) for the L2. The L2 was defined as the second language to have been acquired. Participants are generally highly educated with 161 having a high school diploma, 419 a bachelor's degree, 453 a master's degree, and 421 a doctoral degree. Age ranged from 16 to 73 (mean = 35.4; S.D. = 11.2).

I am perfectly aware that this sample of highly educated, mostly female polyglots is not representative of the general population. While this does not hinder the analysis, it does need to be kept in mind when interpreting the results.

6.2. Research design

Eight independent variables, constituted in different clusters, have been selected in the present design. The first cluster consists of three sociobiographical variables and a psychological variable, namely (1) gender, (2) education level, (3) self-perceived language dominance, and (4) trait emotional intelligence. The second cluster consists of two variables that reflect the L2 learning history, namely (4) L2 acquisition context and (5) age of onset of learning the L2. A third cluster reflects the social and linguistic context at the moment of filling out the questionnaire: (6) degree of socialization in the L2 (i.e. any language other than L1) and (7) nature/size of the L2 network of interlocutors. A fourth and final cluster consists of a single variable, (8) the individual's self-perceived oral proficiency in the L2. The decision to focus on L2-independent variables is based on fact that the LX mentioned by participants was in nearly 75% of the cases the L2. The inclusion of L3-, L4- or L5- independent variables would therefore have inflated the number of statistical analyses without actually adding much.

Variables will be presented in more detail in the following sections.

Sample sizes may vary across the analyses because some participants did not provide data for all the dependent variables.

6.2.1. Independent variables

6.2.1.1. Self-perceived language dominance. The following open question enquired about language dominance: Which do you consider to be your dominant language(s)? The feedback was coded in three categories: (1) L1 dominance when the dominant language coincided with the L1; (2) L1 + LX if more than one language including the L1 was said to be dominant; (3) LX dominance if another language but the L1 was presented as the dominant language. Of the 1459 participants, 54% perceived themselves to be L1 dominant, 35% were L1 + LX dominant, and 11% were dominant in an LX.

6.2.1.2. Trait emotional intelligence. The web-based form of the trait emotional intelligence questionnaire—short form (TEIQue-SF) was used to assess global trait EI (Petrides and Furnham,

2006). Trait EI is narrower than the higher-order personality dimensions and correlates with several of them, hence it is conceptualized as lower-order trait. It lies outside the domain of cognitive ability and concerns exclusively emotion-related self-perceptions, rather than actual abilities, competences, or skills. This is also why Petrides and Furnham (2006) have proposed the term trait emotional self-efficacy as an alternative label for this construct, emphasizing its selfevaluative nature. A banner popped up inviting those who had completed the bilingualism and emotion questionnaire to also fill out the TEIQue-SF. It comprises 30 items, responded to on a seven-point Likert scale. A total of 464 participants completed both questionnaires. Fifty-six participants with more than 1 S. D. above the mean were labeled ''high trait EI'', 69 participants with 1 S. D. below the mean were labeled ''low trait EI'' and 325 participants within 1 S. D. around the mean we labeled ''medium trait EI''.

6.2.1.3. Context of acquisition. The variable 'context of acquisition' of the L2 distinguishes between three types of contexts: (1) naturalistic context (i.e. no formal instruction, only naturalistic communication outside school), (2) mixed context (i.e. formal instruction plus authentic use outside the classroom), and (3) instructed context (only formal instruction). No further distinction was made between types of formal instruction, such as, for instance, partial or formal immersion, where the L2 serves as the medium for teaching non-language subject matter and 'non-immersion classrooms', where the L2 is the instructional target. Similarly, the notion of 'naturalistic context' as used here is a cover term for a wide range of ways in which a language can be learned without guidance from a particular teacher or program, but developed gradually or spontaneously through interaction with speakers of the L2.

The L2 was learned solely through formal instruction in 39% of the cases, through mixed instruction in 46% of cases and naturalistically in 15% of cases.

6.2.1.4. Age of onset of learning. Participants were grouped in three categories for age of onset of learning the L2: those who started learning the language between birth and age 2, those who started before puberty (ages 3–12), and those who started as teenagers (age 13+).[5] Eighteen percent of participants started learning the L2 between birth and age 2, 64% started between the age of 3 and 12, and the remaining 18% started at the age of 13 or older.

6.2.1.5. Socialization in the L2. The variable 'socialization in the L2' is a second-order variable based on the difference in the general frequency of use of the L1 and the L2. The information had been collected through the following question: How frequently do you use the L2? Possible answers on a 5 point Likert scale included: (1) yearly (or less), (2) monthly, (3) weekly, (4) daily, and (5) all day. The subtraction of the score for the L1 and the score for the L2 gives a value that reflects the difference in frequency of use of the L1 and the L2.[6] The category 'weak' socialization represents 51% of the participants; 26% fall within the ''moderate'' category; and the final 23% have strong to very strong levels of socialization in the L2.

6.2.1.6. Network of interlocutors. The questionnaire contained one question, which was formulated as follows: Who do you usually use the L2 with? Possible answers were (1) all, (2) colleagues, (3) friends, (4) family, and (5) strangers. The question thus focused on the type of interlocutor rather than the size of the social network in which a language would normally be used (which would have been a better but more difficult question to answer). Only two types of response labels can easily be translated into number of interlocutors: ''all'' refers to a maximal size of the network and ''strangers'' point to an absence of network, since they imply one-off encounters with unknown interlocutors. The latter would typically refer to conversations one may have as a tourist in a foreign country. Only 5% of participants use the L2 with ''all'' their interlocutors. Inversely, 11% of participants use the L2 only with strangers. There is also a marked difference in proportion of language use with family members: 21% of participants use the L2 with family members. Colleagues represent the largest proportion of interlocutors for use of the L2 (35%). The three middle groups were assigned the values 2, 3 and 4 on the understanding that the quantitative difference is minimal. Differences are more clearly pronounced at the extremes of the continuum: ''strangers'' have been assigned a value of 1, and ''all'' a value of 5.

6.2.1.7. Self-perceived oral proficiency. The questionnaire contained four items related to self-perceived proficiency in speaking, comprehending, reading and writing in the different languages (for a discussion on the strengths and weaknesses of this approach, see Dewaele, 2007a). The question was formulated as follows: On a scale from 1 (least proficient) to 5 (fully fluent) how do you rate yourself in speaking the L2? Answers on a five-point Likert scale included: (1) minimal, (2) low, (3) medium, (4) high, and (5) maximal. The data for oral self-perceived proficiency in the L2 were used in the present study. The proportion of participants increases gradually across proficiency categories for the L2: minimal: 4%, low: 5%, medium: 14%, high: 30%, maximal: 47%.

6.2.2. Dependent variable

The present study focuses on the feedback to the following open question: Does the phrase ''I love you'' have the same emotional weight for you in your different languages? Which language does it feel strongest in? No mention was made of potential addressees. Many participants did mention different uses, or the use of different variants in some languages, according to the interlocutor (child, spouse, lover, friend, etc.). The emotion that ''love'' refers to is multi-faceted, and many participants did explain how they had interpreted the phrase. The emotional weight of the phrase can obviously vary in many languages, and in English too, but it is typically used with people who are very close to the speaker. We assume that in their responses participants from everywhere in the world reported a kind of ''average'' emotional weight of the phrase, considering the multitude of emotional contexts in which they had used that phrase.

The answers were grouped in three nominal categories: (1) the phrase is perceived to be stronger in the L1; (2) the phrase is perceived to be equally strong in the L1 and one or more LXs; (3) the phrase is perceived to be stronger in the LX.

A number of participants (4.4% of the total) indicated that emotional weight was not language-specific but rather person-specific. Kerstin (German L1, English L2, Farsi L3) notes:

> ''As I use the phrase in all three languages to different people (partner, son, mother) the different expressions are tied to these different kinds of relationships with their respective emotional values''.

In order to avoid creating a very small fourth category, I assumed that the ability to appreciate the emotional weight of the phrase in a different language meant that for these participants the phrase could be said to be equally strong in the different languages, and they were hence categorized in group 2.

6.3. Hypotheses

Given the fact that the statistical analysis consists of cross-tabulations which allow only to establish whether or not independent variables are associated with the dependent variables, the hypothesis was kept general: namely that the perception of the emotional weight of the phrase I love you and its potential use would be linked to participants' background variables, their foreign language learning history, their current social and linguistic situation, and their self-perceived oral proficiency.

7. Results

Nearly half of the participants (n = 642) judged the sentence I love you to have a greater emotional weight in their L1; a little less than a third (n = 419) judged it to have similar weight in their L1 and an LX; and a quarter felt that the phrase has more weight in an LX (n = 354) (see Fig. 1). The categories will be illustrated with a number of narratives from the participants.

7.1. I love you has a greater emotional weight in the L1

Erica felt that despite her dominance in L1 Spanish and L2 English, the phrase somehow has more meaning in Spanish:

> Erica (Spanish L1, English L2, Italian L3, Portuguese L4, dominant in Spanish and English): It doesn't have the same emotional weight. Deep things are better expressed in L1. They seem to have more meaning.

For Guillermo, the phrase was strongest in the L1 because that is the language in which he experienced love most often:

> Guillermo (Spanish L1, English L2, French L3, dominant in Spanish): No it has not the same emotional weight. Due to the fact that my sentimental experience was mostly in Spanish I feel it stronger in this language.

Darragh, who lives in Mexico, presents a similar argument. He feels the phrase I love you is stronger in his English L1 than in his Spanish L3 hence his preference for the latter, or at least for the weaker equivalent Te quiero. He feels that the English phrase should not be used lightly:
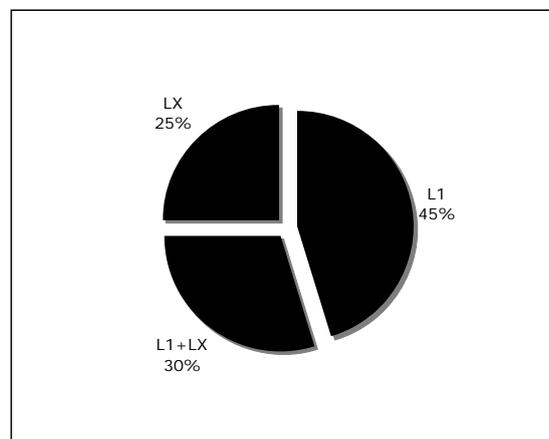

Fig. 1. Proportions of participants for whom the phrase I love you is stronger in the L1, the L1 + LX or the LX.

> Darragh (English L1, French L2, Spanish L3, Irish L4, dominant in English and Spanish): I think it has more emotional weight for me in English than in Spanish. I feel more comfortable saying it in Spanish than in English. Maybe this is because (in Latin America anyway) they have two phrases ''te quiero'' and ''te amo''. ''Te amo'' is much much stronger and I almost never say this. It has the same meaning for me as ''I love you'' in English which I feel is a phrase that shouldn't be abused!

The feedback was sometimes ambiguous and therefore difficult to classify when no distinction was made between perceived weight of the phrase and eventual use of it. For example, Halmari reports that the phrase carries too heavy an emotional load in her L1, hence her preference for using it in an L2:

> Halmari (Finnish L1, English L2, Swedish L3, Russian L4, German L5, dominant in Finnish and English): Very different emotional values. In L2 (English) it's easy to say. In L1 (Finnish) almost impossible - it is the strongest in L1 Finnish.

The case of XX, a bilingual first language user in English and Japanese, is interesting because having two L1s, he has had roughly equal exposure and experience in both languages. He argues that the phrase in Japanese is so strong because it is used less frequently than in English:

> XX (English L1, Japanese L1, Spanish L2, dominant in English and Japanese) I love you is stronger in Japanese I think. . ..it has such a strrooooong meaning that people rarely use it. On the other hand. . ..I love you in English does have a strong meaning to it but you can say I love you to your parents, friends boyfriends/girlfriend and so on. You rarely would say ''aishiteru''

to your family and friends. . .you would more likely say ''I like you''. . .which is ''suki''.

Another native speaker of Japanese, YT, a female (Japanese L1, English L2), argues that the phrase does not exist in Japanese despite some approximate translations which have more emotional connotations than the English I love you:

> YT (Japanese L1, English L2): I love you does not exist in Japanese. Even though we can translate it to ''Aishiteimasu'' ''Aishiteiru'' ''Aishiteru''. This word is translation from English word. The feeling is there. Why should we have to say that? It seems that you have a doubt in love. Even if I heard that in English the word does not move me. Sounds sweet but this is just a word. Maybe next day the word will transform into ''I hate you''. So any language does not sink in my feelings.

Another Japanese participant, Rie, insists that love needs to be communicated without words in Japan. This may also explain why he felt that the Japanese translation of I love you is rather pointless:

> Rie (Japanese L1, English L2, dominant in Japanese): In Japan we tend to avoid expression emotion direct (sic). Furthermore silence is beautiful in Japanese society.We try to read an atmosphere. In contrast, in case of English direct expressions have been regarded as logical thinking. In order to reduce misapprehensions I try to use clear expression. As a result I never say I love you. In both languages I seldom say I love you.

One female participant, VV (Estonian L1, dominant in English L2 acquired at age 2) observes that despite strong socialization in English L2 and her dominance in that language, the phrase I love you in Estonian had an unexpected strength:

> Although I first fell in love in English (and English was initially my social context) mass media and also social mores have detracted from the weight of those particular words. When I first heard ''I love you'' spoken romantically in Estonian (and also when I first said it), it had an immense emotional resonance as if an inner secret part of myself had been unlocked a part of myself that wasn't necessarily supposed to connect with the social world: it had always been a language of my 'inner circle', the family. Love in Estonian seemed riskier, less guided by what I'd learned and more by intuition. Words that had never held a promise of coming to life - when they did they caught fire in a way I hadn't known possible. For me this had everything to do with the language they were spoken in.

7.2. I love you has equal emotional weight in the L1 and an LX

Eric feels the phrase has equal weight in his L1 and L2:

> Eric (French L1, German L2, English L3, dominant in French): As far as I am concerned ''I love you'' has the same emotional weight or force in eithermyL1 or L2 as I have lived love in the context of both languages. However, I have said ''Ich liebe dich'' before and really meant it. Moreover you might say I'm a romantic but I think the concept of love prevails regardless of what language you use to express it.

Some participants observed that the emotional weight of the phrase is linked to their linguistic history, to the addressees of the phrase, and even the country in which it is uttered. The same phrase is also used with different levels of meaning:

> David (English L1, French L2, German L3, Swedish L4, Finnish L5): Strongest in L1/English (first uses; to my children!) and L4/Swedish (to spouse; cultural note: much less frequently used in deep sense in Swedish than in English); usage varies depending on whether we are in the US or (our normal residence) Sweden.

Many participants referred to the conceptual non-equivalence of the phrase in English and their other languages despite equal emotional weight (cf. Altarriba, 2003):

> Deborah (English L1, French L2, German L3, Finnish L4, Italian L5, dominant in English and Finnish): Finnish does not say 'I love you'; it uses 'I care greatly about your welfare' for the

formal phrase. Informally, the equivalent phrase for 'I love you' in Finnish has little or no sexual content. Having said that, I hold 'love you' and 'rakastan sinua' as a farewell to my partner or children to have equal weight. My mother only speaks English, so I'd never use anything else with her. And I'd never say either to anyone else.

Some participants situate the emotional weight of the English I love you in between variants of the phrase in their L1:

AP (Italian L1, English L2, French L3, dominant in Italian): Please note that there are two ''degrees'' of ''I love you'' in Italian ''Ti amo'' being very strong ''ti voglio bene'' being less sexually connotated. So: ''I love you'' is stronger than ''ti voglio bene'' and weaker I guess than ''ti amo''.

7.3. I love you has a greater emotional weight in the LX

A smaller number of participants reported that the phrase seemed stronger in the LX, which could be any language learnt after the L1.

Maggie (Cantonese Chinese L1, English L2, Japanese L3, dominant in Cantonese): I feel the strongest force of this phrase in English. This phrase sounds romantic and passionate. In Japanese it sounds awkward. It simply means ''let's register for our marriage''. Too factual and not emotional at all. Young lovers in Hong Kong seldom say this phrase in Cantonese. They say it in English instead. Perhaps Cantonese isn't a romantic language at all. Personally I feel the strongest emotional force saying it in English particularly.

AK, prefers the phrase in her French L3, but she gives no explanation for her choice:

AK (German L1, English L2, French L3, dominant in German and English): It sounds pathetic in German, a bit cheesy in English, wonderful in French!

BE, an American female, feels the Spanish phrase is more emotional. She links this to her long-time relationship with her Spanish-speaking husband:

BE (English L1, German L2, Spanish L3, Hindi L4, dominant in English): te quiero has great resonance for me because Spanish is my chosen second language and my husband's first language is Spanish. We have been language partners for 30 years: I am his English language consultant and he is my Spanish language consultant.

Maya, a Sindhi female, feels the phrase is strongest in her Hindhi L4. She links this to her viewing of romantic films in that language:

Maya (Sindhi L1, English L2, Malay L3, Hindhi L4, dominant in English): Hindhi – the language of Hindhi films where romance features quite a bit.

To sum up, it seems the emotional weight of the phrase I love you is linked to a wide range of sociocultural and linguistic factors, as well as participants' individual linguistic trajectories and frequency of use of the phrase or its variants with different interlocutors in different situations.

Participants responded to the question of perceived emotional weight and often expanded by referring to specific emotion words related to love in their different languages, to discourses of love with different interlocutors, and some compared emotion scripts of love, considering the conceptual differences of these scripts in their different languages. Participants often observed that the phrase loses its emotional weight through use, and many complained that it is overused in the media and in films. In cultures where the phrase or its closest equivalents exist but is rarely used (Finland) it seems to retain a powerful emotional resonance. In cultures where love is typically not expressed overtly (Japan, China), participants either report using the English sentence instead, or do not know the sentence and its translation equivalents. In languages where different variants of I love you exist (Italian, Spanish) participants carried out triangulations to determine the exact position of the English phrase compared to equivalent phrases in other languages. It is important to point out that these narratives merely reflect personal opinions, and that many participants with similar language and cultural combinations disagreed on the existence

of equivalent phrases in other languages and on their emotional weight. Language dominance did not always coincide with perceived emotional weight of I love you, and the language of partners or family members was not automatically the language with the strongest perceived emotional weight. The other important point is that while in most cases the categorization process was straightforward, some narratives did not fit easily in one of the three categories.

One way to gain a better understanding of the factors that might be associated with the perception of emotional weight of I love you is through statistical analyses, which will be presented in the next section.

7.4. Statistical analyses

A series of cross-tabulations (Pearson Chi[2] analyses) revealed that the perceived emotional weight of I love you is linked to a wide range of independent variables. Interestingly, neither gender, education level nor trait emotional intelligence are significantly associated with the dependent variable, but language dominance is strongly associated to perceived emotional weight of the phrase (see Table 1).

Fig. 2 shows that those who feel the phrase is strongest in the L1 consists for slightly more than 60% of multilinguals who are dominant in their L1. The proportion of L1 dominant participants drops to 55% among those who feel the phrase is strongest in the L1 and some other LX, and drops to 40% among those who feel the phrase is strongest in an LX. This is in fact still an important proportion: multilinguals who feel I love you has greater emotional weight in a language which is not their own dominant language. Inversely, the proportion of LX dominant participants is largest (20%) among multilinguals who feel that the phrase is stronger in an LX and drops to less than 10% among those who feel the phrase is stronger in the L1 + LX or the L1.

The second cluster of independent variables linked to the participants' L2 language learning history shows significant effects. Figs. 3 and 4 show that smaller proportions of instructed learners and late starters feel the phrase is strongest in the LX. Fig. 3 also shows that among those who feel the phrase is strongest in the LX there is a large proportion of mixed and naturalistic learners (65%). Fig. 4 also shows that the proportion of early starters is higher (24%) in the category of those who feel the phrase is strongest in the LX, compared to the proportion of early starters in the category of those who feel the phrase is strongest in the L1.

Table 1 Overview of the effects of the independent variables on perceived emotional weight of I love you (χ^2 tests) listed according to effect size

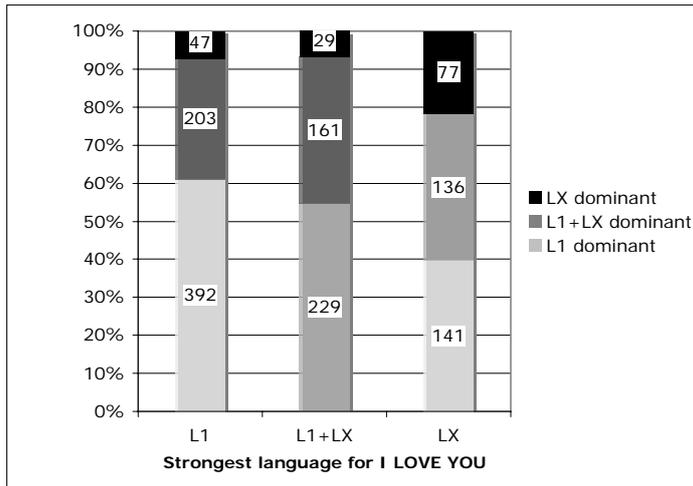| Variable	Pearson χ^2	p	Cramer's V
Gender (df = 1)	2.54	ns	0.042
Trait Emotional Intelligence (df = 2) (n = 451)	0.79	ns	0.047
Education (df = 3)	9.19	ns	0.057
Language dominance (df = 2)	76.04	0.001	0.164

Fig. 2. Proportions of L1 dominant, L1 + LX dominant and LX dominant participants within the three groups of participants for whom the phrase I love you is stronger in the L1, the L1 + LX or the LX.

The third cluster of independent variables reflecting participants' current linguistic practices in the L2 show much stronger associations with the dependent variable. The levels of socialization in the L2 are strongly linked to the perceived emotional strength of I love you. Fig. 5 shows that nearly 60% of participants who feel I love you is strongest in the LX are moderately to highly socialized in the L2. The proportion of these moderately to strongly LX socialized participants is smaller (45%) among those who felt the phrase is stronger in the L1.
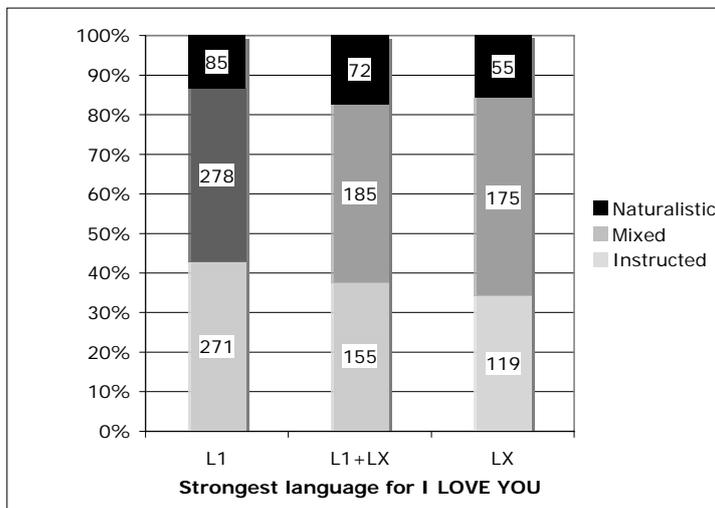

Fig. 3. Proportions of instructed, mixed and naturalistic L2 learners within the three groups of participants for whom the phrase I love you is stronger in the L1, the L1 + LX or the LX.
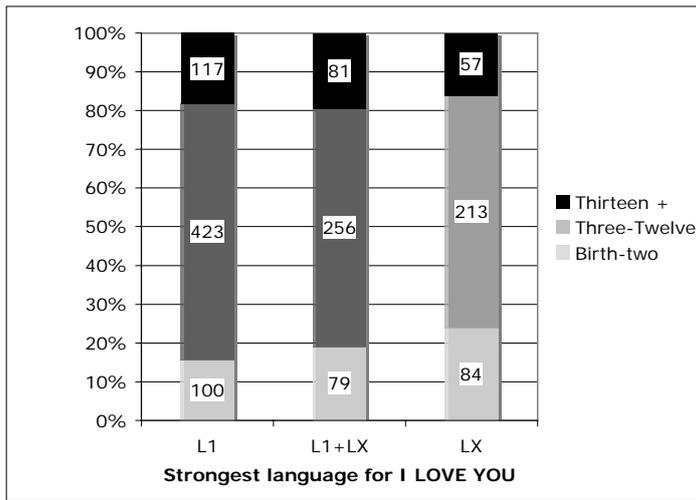
Fig. 4. Proportions of very early L2 starters, early L2 starters and later L2 starters within the three groups of participants for whom the phrase I love you is stronger in the L1, the L1 + LX or the LX.

Network size in the L2 is equally associated with the dependent variable. Fig. 6 shows that in the category of participants who feel I love you is strongest in the LX the proportion of those who only use the L2 with strangers is smaller, while the proportion of those using it with friends and family is larger (60%).

The final independent variable is self-perceived proficiency in oral production. The Pearson x2 analysis shows a strong association between self-perceived proficiency in the L2 and the dependent variable. Fig. 7 shows that nearly 60% of participants who feel I love you is strongest in the LX consider themselves to be maximally proficient, against 40% of participants in the category ''I love you is strongest in the L1''.
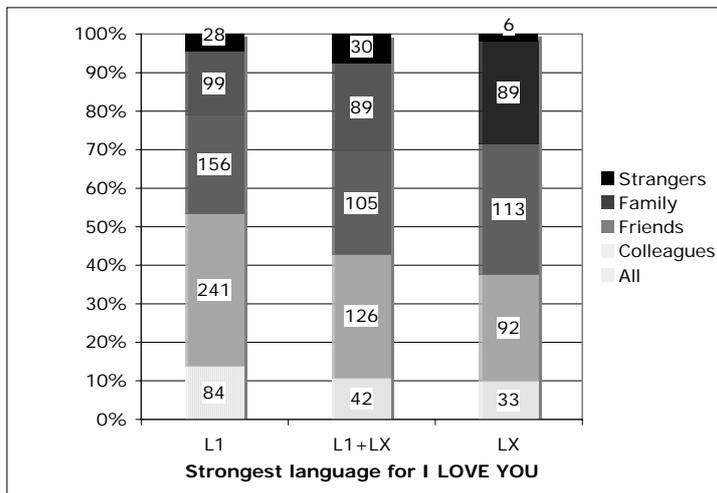

Fig. 5. Proportions of very highly, highly, medium and weakly L2 socialized participants within the three groups of participants for whom the phrase I love you is stronger in the L1, the L1 + LX or the LX.
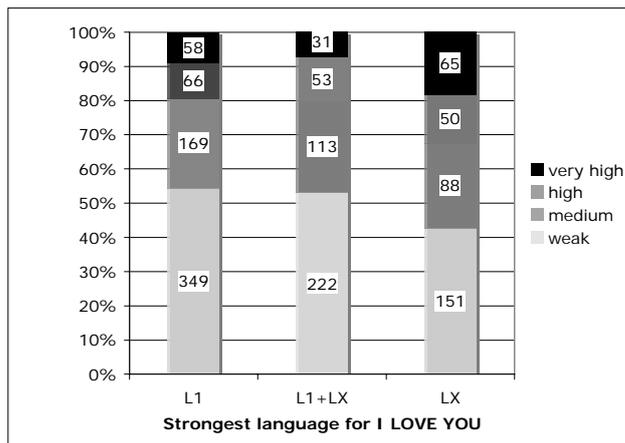
Fig. 6. Proportions of participants using the L2 with all, colleagues, friends, family and strangers within the three groups of participants for whom the phrase I love you is stronger in the L1, the L1 + LX or the LX.

Table 2 shows that although most independent variables have significant effects on the perception of emotional strength of the phrase I love you, the values for the measure of nominal association (Cramer's V) are larger for the cluster of variables reflecting current linguistic practices and self-perceived proficiency than for those reflecting participants' language learning history. This suggest that the perception of emotional force of I love you is more strongly determined by recent practice rather than the more distant past.

Table 2 Overview of the effects of the L2 independent variables on perceived emotional weight of I love you (χ^2 tests) listed according to effect size

Variable	Pearson χ^2	p	Cramer's V
Context of acquisition (df = 2)	9.47	0.050	0.058
Age of acquisition (df = 2)	10.82	0.029	0.062
Socialisation (df = 4)	34.87	0.001	0.111
Self-perceived proficiency (df = 4)	37.21	0.001	0.115
Network of interlocutors (df = 4)	44.08	0.001	0.129

8. Discussion

The starting point of the present investigation was the observation that it takes time for an L2/LX user to grasp the richness of the emotion concept of love in a foreign language. The study shows that having a complete semantic understanding of the phrase I love you, in other words, the ability to understand its exact meaning and recognize its exact illocutionary effect in a range of situations, as well as being able to react to it, and use it appropriately, is in fact only the penultimate state of acquisition. The final ''frontier'' is only crossed when that phrase has made you shiver or cry. At that point it has acquired an emotional weight of its own, which may equal or sometimes even surpass the emotionality of the phrase in the L1. One could argue that at this stage the L2 user may have developed a complete representation of the concept (cf. Pavlenko, 2005, 2008), which includes indications of emotional weight. Parallelisms are possible with

humor: an L2 user may be able to understand a joke at a semantic level but may fail to find it funny (Vaid, 2006). The finding that nearly half of the participants in the present study reported feeling that I love you had the greatest weight in their L1 could be interpreted as evidence that they may have grasped the meaning of the phrase in the LX, but that the full conceptual representation remained elusive. It thus came as no surprise that only language-specific variables would be strongly linked to the perception of emotional weight. Self-reported language dominance turned out to have a strong effect but not gender, trait emotional intelligence nor education level. Indeed strong socialization in the LX, which implies frequent use of the LX over a prolonged period with multiple interlocutors, which in turn is linked to a high level of (self-perceived) proficiency, will most likely enhance the familiarity with this particular emotion script and as a consequence, the phrase I love you or its near-equivalents will acquire strong emotional connotations. Narratives from participants illustrated this point and this was backed up in the quantitative analysis. More surprising was the finding that the foreign language learning history did affect the perception of the phrase I love you. The amount of authentic interaction during the acquisition of the LX, and, to a lesser degree, the younger age of the learning was found to still have a marginally significant effect, an average of 25 years after the onset of acquisition of the LX. The study also showed that the phrase I love you can lose its emotional weight in the L1 or in an LX. A quarter of participants felt that the phrase had acquired more emotional weight in an LX, which they typically linked to experience of love in the LX. The loss of emotional weight could be an indication of conceptual attrition in a language (Dewaele, 2004c; Pavlenko, 2008).
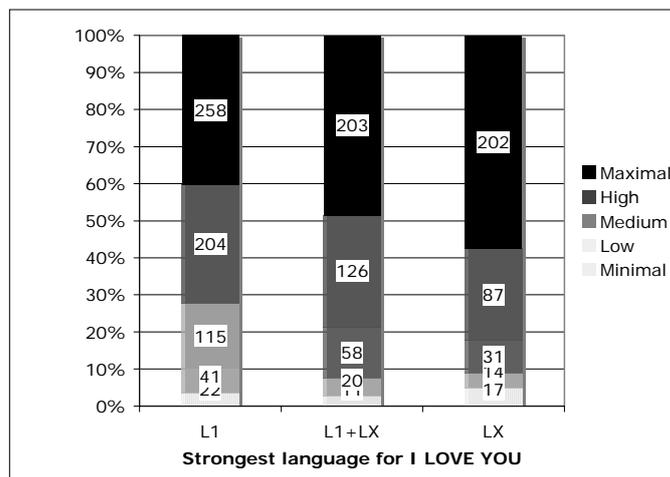

Fig. 7. Proportions of minimally, lowly, medium, highly and maximally proficient participants within the three group of participants for whom the phrase I love you is stronger in the L1, the L1 + LX or the LX.

These findings reflect patterns uncovered in previous research with the same sample on the expression of anger and swearing, and for praising and disciplining children (Dewaele, 2004a,b,c, 2005a, 2006; Pavlenko, 2004, 2005). The independent variables were found to have similar effects on perception of emotional force of swearwords, on language choice for the expression of anger, for disciplining and praising children and for swearing. Age of acquisition, context of acquisition, frequency of use of the language and self-perceived proficiency were found to have a significant effect: those who had learned a language in an instructed context used the TL less frequently for swearing and gave lower ratings on emotional force of swear words and taboo words in that language compared to mixed learners and naturalistic learners. Early learners of the L2 were found to prefer the L2 for swearing and rated the emotional force of L2 swear words and taboo words more highly. Overall, these words were considered more forceful by highly proficient and frequent users of languages (Dewaele, 2004a,b, 2005a,b).

Dewaele (2006) uncovered similar patterns for the language choice for the expression of anger. Mixed learners and early starters used that language more frequently to express anger than those

who started learning later. A clear positive link emerged also between self-perceived proficiency in a language and frequency of use of that language to express anger. Dewaele (2007b) urged researchers to consider L2 users, feelings and thoughts about their communicative experience in the L2, rather than judging their performance in terms of nativelikeness, as in the case in the current prevalent etic approach in interlanguage pragmatics. The study adopted an emic approach, namely by asking L2 users to rate their self-perceived proficiency, foreign language anxiety and perception of the characteristics of the L2. Context of acquisition of the L2 was found to have significant effect on the three variables: purely instructed L2 acquisition was linked to lower levels of self-perceived proficiency, lower rating of the emotional attributes of the L2 and higher levels of foreign language anxiety.

As was mentioned before, a lot of research has been carried out in interlanguage pragmatics on a variety of speech acts (Barron, 2003; Barron and Warga, 2007), including certain acts which could potentially be emotional like complaining, or complimenting. However, the emotional aspect of the speech act is usually ignored or underplayed. There are several potential reasons for this. Firstly, researchers may have been influenced by Gricean pragmatics, which views the speaker as a rational being, using rational means to get meaning across and to interpret communicative actions. Secondly, most researchers in interlanguage pragmatics have a background in language teaching. They are therefore used to teaching a sanitized and mildly censored version of the TL with a strong focus on the prescriptive norm (cf. Valdman, 2003).

Colloquial and taboo words and expressions, which are often highly frequent items in the TL, are banned from the curriculum. Stigmatized morphological and syntactic variants are avoided in manuals and classroom interactions (Mougeon et al., 2002). Foreign language materials typically present a rosy picture of the target culture, where everybody is friendly, polite, quite humourless and where even the occasional bad character behaves rationally, articulates clearly and produces complete and grammatical sentences. Hence a focus on non-emotional speech acts such as asking for directions, making reservations, apologizing, politely complaining. The closest one gets to emotional interactions is probably the complaint to the waiter in the restaurant about the fact that the soup is cold. Very little of this will seem relevant to the individual who falls madly in love in a foreign language and wants to express strong feelings to a potential partner. It will be equally useless to the L2 user who wants to make people laugh with his/her jokes (Vaid, 2006), or to the furious L2 user who wants to vent his anger (cf. Toya and Kodis, 1996).

Mougeon et al.'s (2002) observation that French Canadian course books destined for English learners present a very narrow view of the TL is echoed in Pavlenko and Driagina's (2007) study on Russian course books for English learners:

> The most common used Russian textbooks (. . .) did not explicitly discuss language-specific semantic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic properties of Russian emotion vocabulary, and (. . .) some did not address emotion talk at all (Pavlenko and Driagina, 2007:229).

There thus seems to be a strong case for including more emotional material in the foreign language curriculum.

9. Conclusion

The present study set out to expand current pragmatic research in foreign languages by investigating the perception and the potential use of the phrase I love you in the different languages of multilinguals. A number of possible reasons for the relative paucity of research in this area were considered, including a general preference for etic approaches in interlanguage pragmatics. I also pointed to some ethical problems that arise when exploring highly personal and intimate topics. An analysis of quantitative and qualitative data suggests that multilinguals typically perceive the phrase I love you as having more emotional weight in their L1, although a quarter of participants perceived it to be so in the LX only. Participants often showed a strong awareness of subtle differences in emotional weight of I love you in their different languages.

Many were capable of ordering the different variants according to emotional weight, and of explaining sociopragmatic and sociocultural nuances. However, only after a prolonged period of socialization in the LX did these intellectual insights start to alter participants' affective reactions to the variants. The increased emotional weight assigned to the phrase in an LX could be seen as an indication of a conceptual shift towards the LX for this particular emotion script. Many participants expanded their response concerning the perceived emotional weight of the phrase I love you, and described the degree to which this emotion script did, or did not overlap in their different languages (cf. Pavlenko, 2008). Some NS of Japanese suggested that the emotion script to express love in their L1 was in fact entirely non-verbal. Many multilinguals also reported an awareness of a conceptual shift of this emotion script in some of their languages.

Statistical analyses showed that the perception of the phrase I love you was not affected by sociobiographical variables such as gender and education nor by trait emotional intelligence, but that it was associated with the L2 learning history and recent language use of the L2, as well as with the self-perceived competence in the L2. One didactic implication of the findings is that foreign language course material should include much more authentic emotional material and that learners should get the opportunity to use the language spontaneously outside the classroom to prepare them for effective emotional communication. Just as Milan Kundera learned to recognize the lack of emotional weight in the French formula ''distinguished feelings'', the multilinguals in our corpus reported gradually expanding their grasp of the emotional range in the LX and a small proportion of participants even reached the point where they preferred expressing their love in the LX. It could be argued that these multilinguals had experienced a conceptual shift towards the LX for this specific emotion script, with a concomitant conceptual attrition of the L1 script. In that sense, the emotion script of love resembles the multicompetent users themselves, i.e. it is unique and ever-evolving.

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