



# **Lost in Translation: A look into Multilingualism's Effect on Personality and Identity**

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# **Do people have different personalities when speaking different languages?**

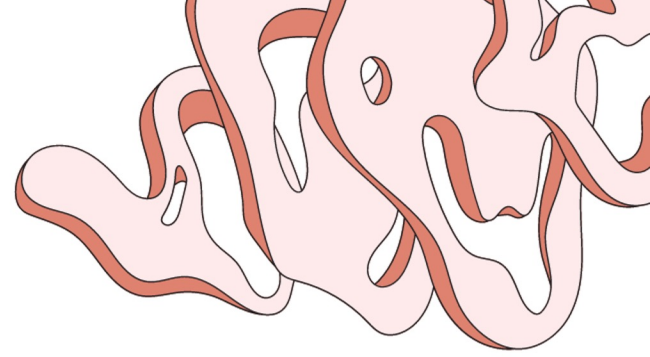
Personality Shifts

Emotional Expressiveness

Acculturation and Stress

# Methodology

- The first languages of my participants include Hindi, Italian, Hebrew, Korean and Spanish.
- Bicultural individuals have a deep understanding of the culture that coincides with the language allowing us to investigate the effects of Cultural Frame Switching
- America's unique history of immigrants and current uptick in anti-immigrant rhetoric has interesting possible ramifications for the effects of acculturation.





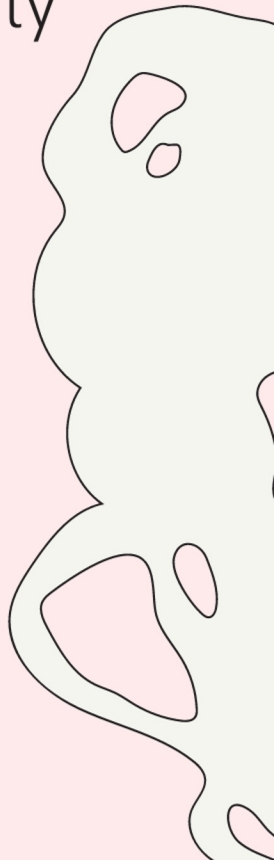
# Sapir Whorf Hypothesis

Language creates or constructs reality

## Linguistic Relativity

- Language shapes our perception of reality
- Influences us but not as deterministic

## Linguistic Determinism

- Language determines the way we think
  - We are locked into perceptions of the world
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# Cultural Frame Switching

- Bond and Yang (1982), Bilinguals responded to a survey in a way that favors the culture associated with the language they were using.
- Language primes individuals with culture specific values, attitudes and memories. These then influence their behavior to correspond to that culture.
- In order for CFS to extend to personality, language has to be a strong enough cue and personality has to be malleable enough

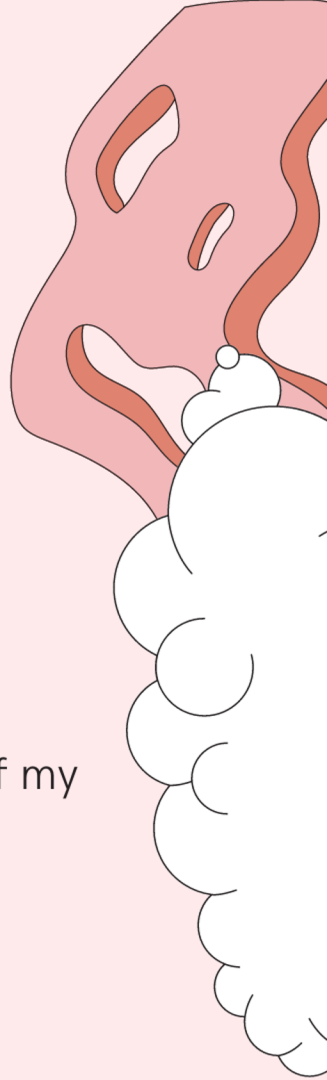
# Cultural Frame Switching

Connection between language and culture

- The stronger the connection perceived between language and culture, the stronger the effect of cultural frame switching should be

**How much do you think language and culture are connected?**

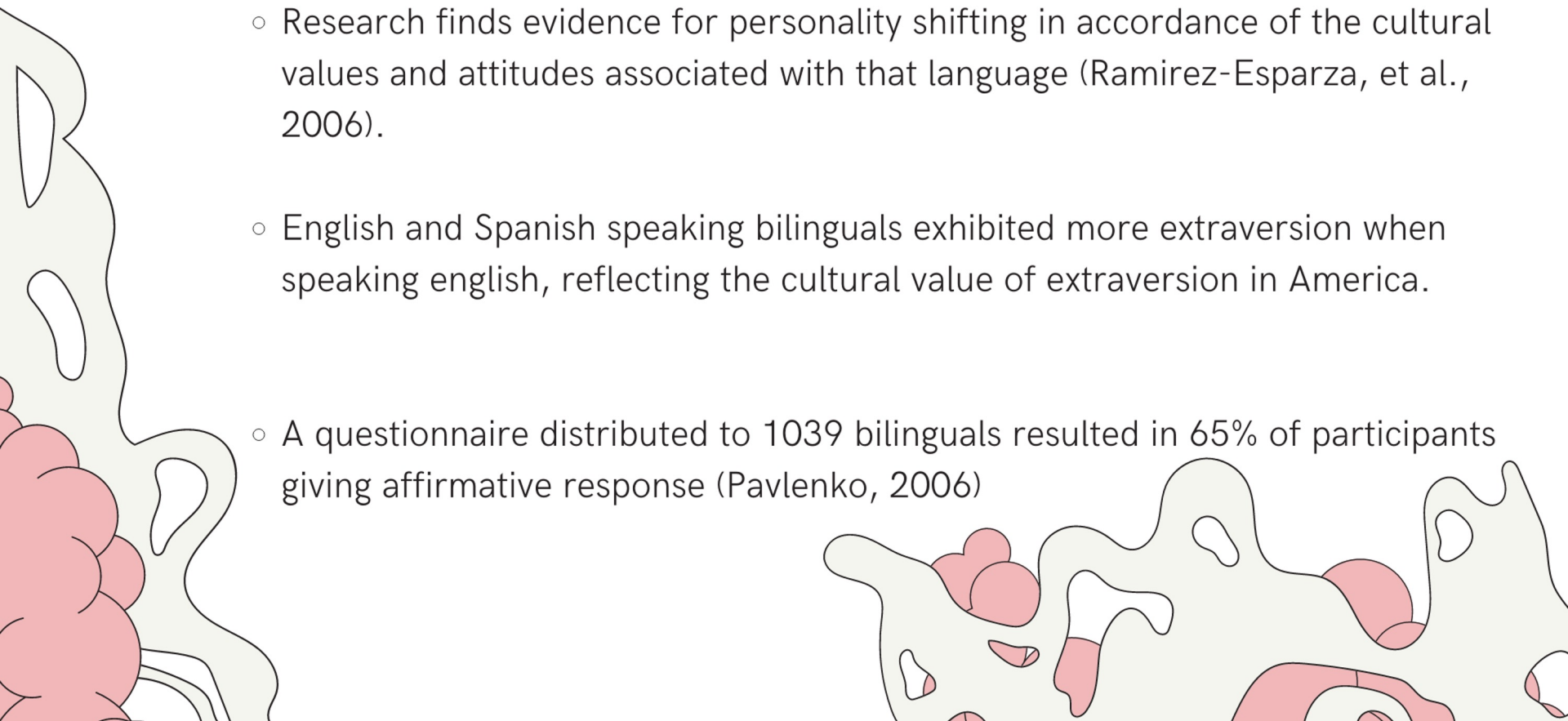
- "I think there is not one without the other. One of the biggest elements of my culture is my language" - Nitzan



# Personality Shifts

# Personality Shifts

- Research finds evidence for personality shifting in accordance of the cultural values and attitudes associated with that language (Ramirez-Esparza, et al., 2006).
- English and Spanish speaking bilinguals exhibited more extraversion when speaking english, reflecting the cultural value of extraversion in America.
- A questionnaire distributed to 1039 bilinguals resulted in 65% of participants giving affirmative response (Pavlenko, 2006)





# **Do you feel like a different person when speaking different languages?**

"Yeah, yeah, absolutely. I guess it just transports me to a different place. When I'm speaking Hindi it feels like a different part of my brain is active now. Different memories and different connections. So yeah."

- Siddhant



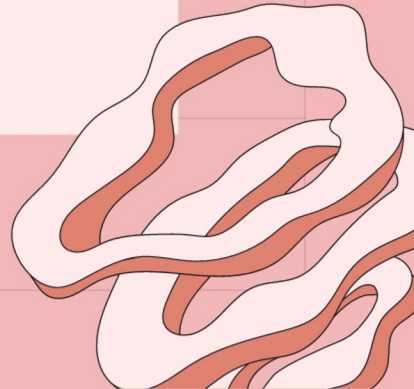
# **Emotional Expressiveness**

# Emotional Expression

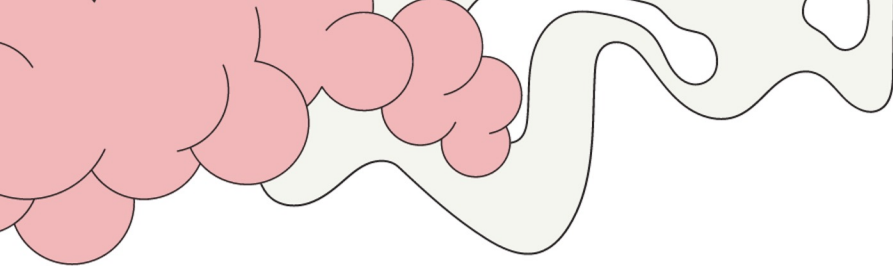
language of emotions

Bilinguals may be more emotionally connected to their first language (wederus 2017)

"I think it's because it's my primary native language. So I think a Spanish come over when I'm emotional. I am super happy I express myself in Spanish. If I'm super sad I express myself in Spanish because emotions are completely different than how I'm thinking in English. So if your super upset you don't even have time to think in English just go into Spanish when its your native language"- Mariela







## Language of detachment

Creating an emotional distance by using a second language has been corroborated by neurological research (Opitz & Degner, 2012)

"I think with English I'm more able to explain like my vulnerabilities to people. Like with much more depth than Korean"-  
Semin



**What does this mean for people  
who feel they can't express  
themselves fully because they  
can't express themselves in their  
first language?**

# **Acculturation and Stress**

# Have you ever felt split between different language and cultures?

"Um, yeah. And I think a lot of people do. I can't obviously speak to everyone's experiences, but I know I've heard this a lot from my multinational and multilingual friends. Where if you especially if you grow up outside of your country of origin it's conflicting because you're like, not American enough for American people. And you're not Israeli enough for the Israeli people. So if I go back to Israel, everyone's like, Oh, she's American." - Nitzan



# Pressure to conform

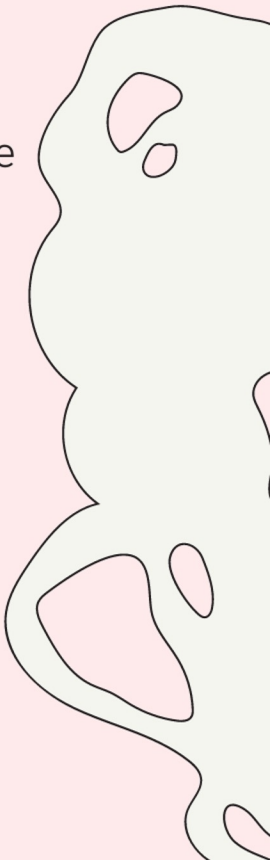


- Challenge to normalize bilingual experiences without trivializing them or underscoring their uniqueness
- The more normalized bilingualism and multiculturalism is, the less pressure to conform to one identity and acculturate to the dominate culture.
- So far my participants reflect the notion that the more normal they think bilingualism is the less stress they report in identity negotiation and switching between languages.

**Greater levels of identity negotiation leads to greater stress (Lustig, 2021)**



# Psychologically taxing

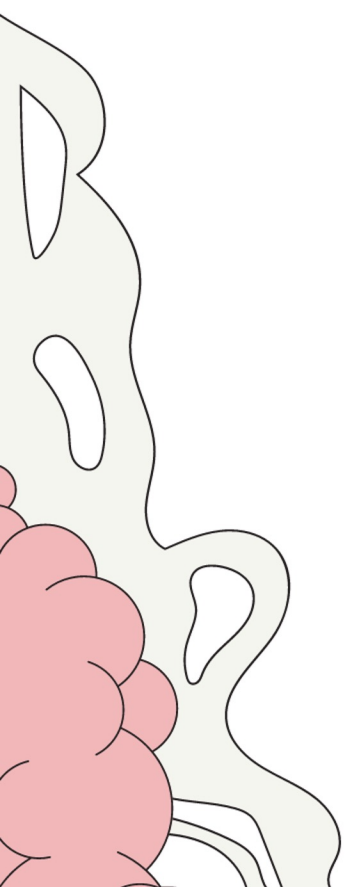
- Research shows that a pressure to learn a new language can lead to a negative relationships with that language and increase the stress identified when switching between different languages.
  - So far the participants have supported the idea of switching between languages as being psychologically taxing or at times “mentally draining, or stressful”.
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# Do you think switching between different languages can be psychologically taxing?

"Yeah. If I'm not in like my most optimal states, mentally, it becomes really difficult. Especially when I'm tired, or if I'm upset and it's like something else is taking up that cognitive space. It is taxing and that's when a lot of the overlap or the accidental slippage is happen."- Nitzan



# Acculturation effects on health

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- English speaking latinos face greater stress related health issues than Spanish speaking latinos living in America (Harding, 2008)
  - More likely to have chronic fatigue
  - Supports evidence by Myers and Rodriguez 2003 that as latinos become more acculturated they may be prone to more negative changes in physical health
  - Language status is correlated to acculturation
  - Suggests that those more acculturated have greater stress

- The more normalized bilingualism is the less pressure to conform to only one identity, this helps lessen the stress of identity negotiation and stress associated between switching languages
- Acculturation can have negative health effects, and immigrants are especially vulnerable
- Identity negotiation is an ongoing process
- People often feel more emotionally connected to their first language
  - this can lead to detachment in their second language
- The stronger people view the relationship between culture and language, the stronger the perceived shift in personality when speaking different languages.
- America has a unique culture with interesting implications
- The majority of bilingual individuals do perceive a shift in personality when speaking different languages.