

Investigating learners' affective relationships with their foreign languages: From amotivation to love

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Abstract

This study explores the emotional relationships that 16 first-year university students at a Catalan university display towards English (and Spanish in one case) in order to understand how these relationships have been constructed and are being constructed based on their language learning and using experiences. Data were collected by means of individual and group interviews, and a qualitative analysis of their narratives has been carried out by using Georgakopoulou's (2006) concept of 'small stories'. The analysis of the participants' stories reveals five different types of emotional relationships with the languages in a gradient that goes from those who have no emotional connection towards the language whatsoever to those who feel a deep passion, or love, for it. Findings indicate that: (a) external/internal circumstances play a key role in the way students' relate, use and feel towards the languages; (b) these circumstances are dynamic and therefore the emotional relationship with these languages might change over time (as the experiences of two participants show); and (c) there is an important distinction between feeling motivated (even if intrinsically) to feeling passionate about a language. In this sense, passion, or love, appears to be a much more powerful driving force than motivation because passionate learners' conceive such language as a fundamental part of their Self.

Keywords: affect; emotions; motivation; love; narratives

1. Introduction

In most parts of the world, multilingualism is the rule rather than the exception. Catalonia is one such part. Most people in Catalonia are bilingual in Catalan and Spanish and have learned a third language, typically English, at school. But Catalonia today is also the product of the arrival over the past two decades of more than a million people from other parts of the world. The percentage of foreign population in Catalonia went from 1% in 1991 to over 15.3% in 2013 (Barrieras & Angàs, 2013, p. 3), reaching 16.20% in the year 2020 (IDESCAT, n.d.). Barrieras i Angàs (2013, p. 11) indicates that about 10% of the current Catalan population has neither Catalan nor Spanish as their mother tongue and wonders whether Catalonia can still be considered a bilingual country. More than 300 languages have been identified by the *Grup d'Estudis de Llengües Amenaçades* as being spoken in Catalonia (GELA, 2019), a fact that sometimes remains hidden by the misguided 'one country, one language' equation.

Individuals construct and develop emotions towards the different languages that they use, speak and learn, that is, towards the languages in their linguistic repertoires (Pavelescu & Petrić, 2018). The aim of this article is to explore how several young adults with different linguistic repertoires and backgrounds describe their experiences learning foreign languages and how these experiences appear to have played a role in the construction of their emotional connection with such languages. In the present study, emotions are regarded as sociocultural constructions which are multifaceted, contextual and dynamic (Boiger & Mesquita, 2012), instead of natural, fixed and innate mental phenomena. In their dynamism, emotions can change and be co- and re-constructed through the ongoing interplay between the individual and the social world. These 'constructions' will be qualitatively analyzed by means of individual and group interviews with university students by focusing on the language learning small stories which they tell (Georgakopoulou, 2006) and the way they position themselves (and also others) in such narratives (Bamberg, 1997).

2. Motivation *in* and emotions *towards* languages

The social turn in second language acquisition (SLA) (Block, 2003; Firth & Wagner, 1997) was marked by studies that showed that language learning occurs in the real, social world as much as in the heads of the learners. The social turn also created opportunities for conceptualizing identities and related constructs such as beliefs, emotions or motivation from more complex lenses (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008) and for acknowledging their dynamic, constructed, and contextual nature in the social environment.

Although emotions research has only recently started to be more predominant in SLA, motivation research has been quite fruitful as a way to delve into affective aspects of learning. L2 motivation can be defined as the effort (to learn the language), the desire (wanting to reach a goal) and the positive affect (enjoying the task of learning) that move a person to engage in language learning (Gardner, 2001). The “positive affect” dimension of motivation is closely connected to the emotional bond that the students might create with a certain foreign language and, therefore, motivational aspects will be taken into account in the participants’ narratives in order to gain a deeper understanding of their relationship(s) with foreign languages. Models on motivation, such as Dörnyei’s (2009) L2 Motivational Self System, tend to take into account both internalized/intrinsic motives (the ideal L2 self) and less internalized/extrinsic reasons (the ought-to L2 self) in a dynamic way to understand factors that drive additional language learning. Moreover, this framework also includes situated factors related to the learning environment and experience (L2 learning experience), which provide key information to understand the participants’ emotional connection with the learning of foreign languages.

Apart from studies dealing with language learning motivation, most of the studies adopting affective lenses delve into the emotions that students experience in the foreign language classroom or during their learning processes in general (e.g., Aragão, 2011; Diert-Boté & Martin-Rubió, 2018; Dewaele & Dewaele, 2020; Garrett & Young, 2009; Horwitz et al., 1986; Pawlak et al., 2021). However, there are few studies that focus on the emotions that learners develop *towards* the foreign languages in their linguistic repertoires based on their language learning experiences. This is probably because a similar type of research has traditionally been conducted under the umbrella of language attitudes, which can be defined as “a disposition to react favorably or unfavorably to a class of objects [. . .] [which] is often taken to comprise three components: feelings (affective element), thoughts (cognitive element) and [. . .] predispositions to act in a certain way (behavioral element)” (Edwards, 1994, pp. 97-98). Nevertheless, although language *attitude* is generally conceived as having an affective component, it is closely related to language ideology, discourse, stereotypes and even to political orientations (see Garrett, 2010); furthermore, the analysis of attitudes towards languages has also been carried out regarding languages or varieties which do not belong to the individual’s linguistic repertoire (e.g., Pilus, 2013). These emotions towards languages could also be conceptualized as “sentiments,” which are “attitudes one cares about” (Frijda & Mesquita, 2000, p. 56). Sentiments are relatively long-lasting affective states, mainly towards other people but also towards objects, and differ from attitudes, even from “strong” attitudes, in that they involve personal or value-related relevance and have a powerful emotional

force. Sentiments sometimes engender “passions,” that is, “long-term goals with a highly emotional content, such as love or desire” (Frijda & Mesquita, 2000, p. 56).

The scant empirical evidence in this area shows that these sentiments towards languages appear to be highly dependent on the learners’ learning trajectories and experiences with the languages involved and that positive emotions (or *strong affinity*) allow learners to become more proactive and to respond flexibly to the possibilities of the environment (Miyahara, 2015). Nevertheless, not only the emotional quality of “valence” (i.e., pleasure/displeasure – or positive or negative) appears to be important, but also the level of emotional intensity seems to make a difference in language experiences. Emotional intensity is related to the strength or centrality of “concern,” which is understood as “a disposition to desire occurrence or non-occurrence of a given kind of situation” (Frijda, 1986, p. 335) and includes motives, major goals, attachments, personal sensitivities and values. Therefore, as Pavelescu and Petrić (2018) show, although love and enjoyment are both positive emotions, their degree of intensity is different, and hence there are variations in how learners relate to that language and in how they experience learning. Love, or “a deep emotional connection to English” (ibid, p. 89), was found to be an enduring and stable emotion that helped learners develop coping mechanisms to maintain engagement even when enjoyment was not present in certain lessons (e.g. lack of enjoyment in certain tasks or noisy atmosphere). On the other hand, enjoyment, despite being a positive emotion as well, was less intense and stable, and, unlike love, it was not the driving force in the students’ language learning processes. Similarly, Tashma Baum (2015) explored the narratives of two student teachers, and one of them, Shanit, described herself as someone with “deep and abiding love for English” (2015, p. 281). Thanks to her own will power and love for the language and her parents’ help, she was able to overcome certain obstacles with the language, so she eventually learnt English particularly fast and became a passionate English teacher.

Pavelescu and Petrić (2018) and Tashma Baum (2015) show that as people interact with their environment, they develop certain preferences for some activities (Vallerand, 2012), in this case the learning of certain languages. For some of their participants, this activity was particularly meaningful and, therefore, a special bond was created with it to the point that it became a passion (Vallerand, 2012). In order to provide a deeper understanding of how an emotional connection with a language is constructed and of how such emotional bond might influence or condition the learning and/or use of that language, this study will attempt to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What emotional involvement and relationship have learners developed towards their FL(s) based on their language learning experiences?

RO2: What role might this emotional involvement or relationship towards the language play in the learner's behavior when learning/using said language?

3. The study

3.1. Participants and context

The data for this study come from a larger data-set collected as part of a funded project whose main aim was to compare two English language teaching approaches in a Business English for Specific Purposes subject (BESP henceforth). For group 1 (G1), there was an English-only policy approach, so the teacher instructed to use English at all times and was told to encourage the same behavior in her students. The materials were also entirely in English and adopted the 'native speaker' as the model to follow. For group 2 (G2), the policy was a planned translanguaging approach in which the languages in the students' repertoires were acknowledged and used, so the teacher spoke Catalan, Spanish and English at different moments in the class, although English was the most used language. The activities in this group included these three languages and also other L1s of the students (e.g., Chinese or Romanian). Furthermore, this group adopted an English as a Lingua Franca pedagogy instead of focusing on the idealized English native speaker model. The two teachers of this subject were also members of the research group. Four more researchers were involved in the qualitative data collection: two of them are the authors of this paper (referred to henceforth as R1 and R2); the other two researchers will be referred to as R3 and R4.

There were 138 students enrolled in the BESP course: 116 local students and 22 international students (4 were Erasmus students and the remaining 18 were Chinese students who were in their third year of a Spanish degree at home but were spending their third year at a Spanish university). The course took place between February and June 2017, and the Chinese students had been in the Catalan city since September 2016. They took all the subjects in Spanish except for two, one in each semester, and in the BESP course in particular they were sharing a classroom with a great number of local students.

3.2. Data collection

The two teachers of the course chose the students for the qualitative data set based on their willingness to participate in the interviews and on their class attendance. Although 35 students were interviewed individually and in groups, the stories and experiences from only 16 students are illustrated in this paper due to space constraints (see Table 1).

Table 1 Types of interviews, group, participants (pseudonyms) and length

Type of interview and group	Participants and length
Individual interviews with locals (G1)	Alma (12m59s), Ivan (30m34s), Pol (23m54s)
Individual interviews with locals (G2)	Annabel (19m32s), Lara (24m58s), Pere (33m34s), Vera (23m56s)
Group interviews with locals (G1)	Aitor (52m42s)
Group interviews with locals (G2)	Andreu, Gala, Mar, Tatiana (55m20s)
Group interviews with internationals (G2)	Abel, Celeste, Leo, Sákura (42m20s)

The group interviews were audio and video-recorded (two cameras capturing different angles were employed); R1 and R2 moderated three of the four group interviews, whereas R1, R3 and R4, moderated the group discussion with the local students in the translanguaging group. The group interviews with the local students in the translanguaging and English-only groups took place on the 22nd and 24th of March respectively, whereas the two group interviews with international students took place on the same day (April 21st 2017). Catalan was used in the focus groups and interviews with the local students, except Lara's interview, which was conducted in Spanish. The focus groups and individual interviews with the international students were mostly in Spanish, although English, and Chinese – among participants – were also used. In the interviews, students were asked about previous experiences learning English, trips and stays abroad, their relationship with English and other foreign languages (if any), their beliefs in relation to English language learning, and, finally, about their experience in the course analyzed (e.g. teaching materials, assessment, difficulty of the subject).

3.3. Data analysis

Using narratives to explore emotional aspects of language learning is not unusual (Garrett & Young, 2009; Mercer, 2006; Miyahara, 2015). As our aim is to explore the participants' personal experiences regarding their emotional relationship with languages, an analysis of their narratives in the form of "small stories" was deemed suitable. Small stories are "underrepresented narrative activities, such as tellings of ongoing events, future of hypothetical events, shared (known) events, but also allusions to tellings, deferrals of tellings, and refusals to tell" (Georgakopoulou, 2006, p. 129). Small stories are subjectivity spaces in which one's sense of Self emerges not only through the telling of experiences, but also through how the individual understands these experiences and the meanings ascribed to those actions (Clandinin, 2007). In this sense, these narratives are not regarded simply as an individual creation, but also as a social production which is grounded in the light of the participants' bigger sociocultural context and also in the here-and-now context of the situated talk and interaction

(Bamberg, 1997). As Miyahara (2015) points out, the amount of data from the interviews is the product resulted from the interaction between the participant(s) and the interviewer(s). These stories, however, should not be regarded as isolated narratives by a few individuals, but they can be "iterative" (Georgakopoulou, 2013), which can be understood as the repetition of a "type of story" by several tellers in a similar context. Therefore, the notion of iterativity has been particularly useful in the present study to identify shared emotional involvement towards FLs across the participants' stories.

The analytical process followed three steps. The first step involved broadly transcribing the interviews following VOICE (2007) transcription conventions. In step two, relevant episodes in which learners told their 'small stories' in relation to their language learning experiences were singled out and their transcription was polished by listening again to the excerpts selected. Ultimately, the third step consisted of finding patterns and connections across the participants' stories, which led to the identification of five different types of emotional connections towards the FL. It has to be noted that due to space constraints, only some episodes involving some of the participants will be employed by way of illustration. Since the interviews and focus groups were conducted in Catalan and Spanish, excerpts have been translated by us for the occasion.

It is also worth mentioning that the participants were not just interviewed. Seven sessions of the subject in both groups were video and audio-recorded in order to gain insights into the learners' behaviors in class, and several informal interactions with them took place throughout the 5 months of the data collection process. Therefore, beyond the micro-level analysis of the episodes selected, the authors also gathered ethnographic-like knowledge at a meso-level (Day, 2008), understood as all those contextual information (e.g. one's profession, one's own experiences in a local setting, or in a particular observed group – like BESP) that helps analysts make sense of the specific excerpts under analysis (Day, 2008).

4. Findings

The five types of emotional connections towards FL identified in the analyses are displayed from less to more involvement with the language in question. Some of the profiles include the story of just one participant, whereas most of them reunite the stories of various students.

4.1. "I don't know English so I don't like it:" Struggling with the language

Students like Alma and Vera argue that the reason why they do not like English is that they do not know English. Alma explains: "when I was little I went to a private

language academy and I learnt quite a lot and I was ahead of what we were doing in the school (.) but then I stopped going and I did feel the difference" (25s), so now she has a private tutor. When asked if she likes English or if she studies it because she has to, she replies: "I'd like to know it (.) I don't like it that much now because I don't know it much but if I knew it more, I would like it" (1m 50s).

Vera's story is different: she is six years older than most of her BESP classmates, and she studied French in primary education, as she comes from Val d'Aran, a Catalan region near the French border, and she started studying English aged 12: "In primary school I studied French, not English (.) and now they start when they are very little (.) I started with English when I was 12 or 13" (50s). Vera compares frequently with her classmates, assuming that they have a much higher English level than her, which appears to contribute to her low self-confidence in the language. In fact, she states: "I'm rubbish with English haha I'm very bad" (21s), a self-belief that she repeats several times in the interview, not only in relation to English but to languages in general. Despite her different background, Vera's relationship and emotional connection with the English language is very similar to Alma's: "I don't like it because I don't know it" (2m 12s). In this sense, when the interviewer asks her what her relationship with English is, she answers: "none" (17s).

Annabel, Andreu, and Gala mention having needed extra tuition after school ("*repastos*" in Catalan). Rather than sending their children to an academy to improve their level and pass prestigious tests, these students' parents have to hire a person to help their children pass the subject. Annabel pointed out: "my experience with English is not very good (.) I've always needed extra lessons because at school we only did basic things (.) and in the first semester it was like OH! I fell short" (20s). She also believes that she is not good at English, but she is not terrible either, although speaking is her weakest skill. Andreu and Gala are part of a group interview, in which this question is addressed at the very beginning. All the participants answer the question one after the other in the order they are sitting. The two of them come after Mar (see the fifth profile below) whose English level is very high. When Andreu mentions that he has always needed extra English lessons, everyone laughs. Afterwards he mentions traveling to places like Washington and London, but concludes that he traveled for a week or two, but "learning English – not so much." Next is Gala, and she just says: "m: same here (.) in primary and secondary school, well... (.) extra tuition and so" (2m 55s) and turns her head to her left, looking at the following participant, indicating she has nothing else to add.

These are students who have spent several years struggling with English, and who feel their efforts have been to a great extent in vain. On the one hand, Annabel, Andreu and Gala appear to show sheer indifference towards English and, on the other, frustration can be perceived specifically in two of these

students, Alma and Vera, who wish they had a better level and think that if they achieved it, they would like the language. Thus, the general narrative indicates lack of motivation during the English language learning process, and, except for Vera—who mentions that she is planning to move abroad to improve her English level—the rest of the learners do not seem to show a determination to change their current absence of motivation or to enhance their English skills. Most of these students appear to be amotivated, meaning that they are in “the state of lacking an intention to act” (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 61).

4.2. “Lucky to be able to travel abroad:” Investment pays off

When analyzing the learners' stories, we realized that the relationship that most of the participants of this study have developed towards English is instrumental. These are local students, bilingual in Catalan and Spanish, and born within families in which parents can afford to invest in travels abroad and language academies where their children can prepare for official exams. Investment here is understood as the act of devoting time and effort in learning a language with the understanding that, by investing in such language, a wider range of material and symbolic resources in the future will be acquired.

We will mostly focus on the story of Ivan to illustrate this type of relationship. When asked about his experience as English user/learner, Ivan believes that he is “better in English than the rest of the class” (6m 20s) and that he has “always had a good level” (7m). This is due, on the one hand, to the fact that he has attended language schools although not for extra tuition to review what he did in school, but in order to move forward with his English and pass official language exams: “when I was in the last course of secondary education I prepared for the First Certificate” (1m 15s). Pol and Aitor fall within the same profile. Pol also has this perceived above-average skills in the language because “the classmates' level is very low” (45s), and both he and Aitor obtained the B2 certificate in English: “last summer I got the First Certificate Exam, and next year I want to enroll in an academy to get the Advanced” (Pol, 50s); “I went to an academy and I got the First Certificate, but then I failed the Advanced only for seven points” (Aitor, 6m 35s).

Apart from attending language schools, Ivan and Aitor point out the fact that they have been able to travel abroad, both with the school and with their families. Ivan explains that he has practiced and improved his English because of this: “I was lucky that I could travel abroad and so on (.) with the school and with my family and there, want it or not, you have to (.) use it” (50s). For Ivan, having an exceptional command of English is fundamental, because he reports having a really bad time when he is unable to express himself efficiently while being abroad: “when I'm speaking and so I have a feeling of embarrassment

when at some points I can't explain myself (.) I hate it. I feel awful. then the thought of going to these kind of places [where English is the native language] and not being able to explain myself makes me very angry" (4m 58s). He explains a particular small story when he traveled to London and had to talk to the man selling train tickets; the man was of Pakistani origin, and it was really hard for Ivan to understand what he said, and for the other person to understand him. Therefore, Ivan aspires to have a native-like level so he does not have to live embarrassing moments like this one; if he could choose, he would prefer to have a native teacher and to sound like a native "to make sure that I have the level (.) because if I have to move abroad then I'll know I'll be able to live without problems, at least language-wise" (4m 30s).

Ivan takes English very seriously precisely because of the instrumental value he attaches to it (like needing it for working abroad), and in fact he believes that the BESE course is one of the most important of the degree and criticizes the classmates who do not understand its usefulness: "people don't consider English as a first-degree subject, so to speak (.) people here in Spain give very little importance to English (.) they don't respect it" (8m 26s). Afterwards, he adds: "I don't know how else I can explain that this subject is important for the degree and for the future (.) people keep thinking that with Spanish they can go somewhere" (9m 30s). Once more, Ivan emphasizes the need to learn English for a practical motivation, rather than for other types of reasons such as affective, recreational or even identitarian. In fact, to the question: "would you say English (.) that studying English is something you like? or you do it because you have to?," he remains silent for 2.5 seconds and replies "I do it because I have to, because I know it's the most important language but I don't dislike it as many people do (.) I don't want to be a doctor in English (.) but I like to learn it because I know I'll have to use it" (3m 20s).

Ivan's story reveals that he is not passionate about English because, although he does not have an aversion towards it, he does not appear to show any emotional connection to it either. He mainly regards English in practical and utilitarian terms, because he believes that, if mastered successfully, this language will open many doors for him in the future. Despite his satisfactory level in the language, the importance he places to a good English command as a facilitating characteristic for a future job sometimes makes him feel as insecure and embarrassed when holding a conversation, as sometimes he cannot explain himself properly. In the end, the combination of instrumental extrinsic motivation and an investment of money, time and effort in English has made it possible for his level to be above average, to the point that he has passed the FCE test.

4.3. "I had to start liking languages:" From struggle to enjoyment

Within this type of profile, we find two students: Lara and Pere. Both have undergone a similar emotional and motivational evolution with the English language: from not liking the language and struggling with it, circumstances forced them to start learning it and improving over time until they ended up liking it.

Lara was born in the Dominican Republic. At the beginning of the interview, Lara is asked what her relationship with English has been throughout her life. She starts by describing how she felt when she was little: she found English difficult and did not pay attention to it. Back then, her parents would enroll her in English courses and she would not finish them because she was not interested, and with the excuse that she did not understand anything, she quit. Lara was at the time amotivated, as she was neither intrinsically nor extrinsically motivated to learn the language. In her own words, she was not aware of how important or even beautiful English was. At that point in her life, she "had to move" to Europe ("*me tocó venir a Europa*" 1m 2s), a lexical choice which suggests that this move was not her decision and that must have upset her at the time. Her first stop was Switzerland, where she could not understand people, so she regretted not knowing English. Motivated by extrinsic factors, she said: "I had to start liking languages out of necessity and now I like them and, well, now I have a good relationship with English" (1m 6s).

When Lara arrived in Catalonia, she started attending, and continues to attend, a language academy, which is responsible for her current good English level: her receptive skills are good but she complains that there are not many opportunities to speak, and that makes it hard for learners like her to acquire the necessary fluency. Nevertheless, Lara takes every opportunity she has to practice speaking in class, and, in fact, she is, by far, the most participative student of the BESP course (both groups included). The interviewer finally asks about the BESP course and whether being in the translanguaging group has broken any preconceptions, to what she replies that it has not, and that she finds the subject very easy. However, Lara brings forward an aspect she does not like: the fact that so much Spanish, or even Catalan, are used in class. The reason why she disapproves is that the foreign students in class cannot understand these languages, and they probably feel bad. As for employing one's mother tongue(s) to understand better a language aspect, Lara expresses that it is something she actually misses in her language academy, and something she finds acceptable. However, the use of languages other than English for purposes like translating short texts from English is, she feels, a primary-education kind of task and probably makes foreign students feel bad. She brings forward a small story: when she started to study in Catalonia, she did not master Catalan well, so she

asked things in Spanish; however, the teacher answered in Catalan and she could not understand her (7m 8s). This anecdote reflects the frustration she felt on those occasions, which is similar to the frustration she thinks foreign students probably feel in the subject when these language practices are used by the teacher.

Pere, the second teller belonging to this group, was born in Romania and moved to Catalonia aged 11. He had never studied English in Romania because there they studied French. When he arrived in Catalonia, he had to focus on Catalan and Spanish, the two official languages of his adoptive land, and therefore he could only take a few English lessons because the teachers “made [him] take remedial classes” in order to learn Catalan and Spanish (1m 6s). A year later he started learning English with the rest of his classmates; nevertheless, they had a much higher level than him and that was the point when he started to feel helpless: “I started studying at home on my own and halfway through the course I gave up (2) in the exams I didn’t get more than a 1 because a didn’t understand a thing” (2m 02s). He then asked his mum to enroll him in private lessons, but they could not afford them. He then asked one of his English teachers to give him private lessons, but that was not allowed. She would, though, teach him during the breaks, and thanks to that he improved a little, but the following year this teacher retired and he was left without the help he needed, so he gave English up (“*ho vaig deixar, l’anglès*” 2m 58s).

Pere eventually made amends with English. This happened a year before the interview, when he had started working and could afford attending a language academy twice a week. Pere says “now I do want to learn English and I need it (.) before maybe I neither wanted it, nor needed it either” 3m 10s). In this statement it can be perceived how Pere, similar to Lara, points out that, forced by the need of commanding English, he is now much more motivated to continue learning the language: “every time I understand something and I start getting things I like it even more, and I want more and more” (30m 40s). In fact, he is now able to follow films and series in English, although subtitled in Spanish, something that he could not do in the past. He adds that although some people blame the teachers, or other factors, for their failure in learning English, it is one’s responsibility to learn it, and that despite not feeling attracted to it from the outset, you can still learn it.

Both Lara and Pere started struggling with English, mostly because they did not find it important, or useful, for their lives at that moment. There is a difference, however, in their narratives: Lara seemed to be feeling amotivated to learn English because although her parents could afford paying for extra lessons, she lacked an intention, or interest to learn it. On the contrary, Pere appeared to be initially motivated to learn the language, an in fact he felt frustrated when he had to put it aside to focus on Catalan and Spanish; this factor

and other adverse circumstances such as not being able to afford a language academy made him become demotivated with the language. Either way, both learners eventually became more engaged with the language forced by necessity, and both like it a lot nowadays.

4.4. "I liked it a lot, so I learnt on my own:" Motivation despite the odds

Despite the difficult circumstances, Tatiana has never given up on English and has always attempted to learn it, even if on her own. This student, similar to Pere, arrived in the province of Lleida from Romania aged 9. In her story, she explains that she also had to put English on hold while she focused on learning Catalan and Spanish. Contrary to Pere, who stated that he was forced to learn the local languages, Tatiana describes this learning as a decision on her part: "I focused on Catalan in order to learn it" (33s).

In her story, Tatiana tells that she had never studied English before arriving in Catalonia, whereas the rest of her classmates had been studying it for a few years. Since she could not afford private language academies, she decided to learn the language on her own: "I liked [English] a lot (.) I always watch subtitled films (.) and things like that, because want it or not you always learn something" (3m 22s). Due to economic factors, Tatiana did not have the opportunity to travel much either, but regarding her only (short) stay abroad in Sweden she claimed: "I think I have learnt more in that week in Sweden than during all my life." Despite not having been able to receive extra English lessons or to travel abroad, she closes her turn saying: "but well, here I am," laughing nervously. This closing remark generates laughter from most of the participants. This excerpt needs to be analyzed with a special focus on the interactive context: this was the round that opened the focus group, and Tatiana was one of the last to speak, having heard that several students before her had been to academies and had a high level of English.

Later on (18m 34s), Tatiana mentions language academies, as she argues that "all the people who have attended language academies and the like" have had more opportunities to speak in English, so for them activities like speaking publicly in English might be easier than for her, who finds it "very hard." Indeed, this learner mentions several times that speaking in English is anxiety-provoking and particularly difficult for her, especially doing oral presentations, and she even tells a small story of a negative past experience presenting: "I suffered a lot. . . the flash drive didn't work and I started to get nervous haha the words wouldn't come out, then I started talking and when I looked at the teacher I went blank. . . I thought shit, here we go again. . . the paper was two tables away. I don't know where to start or how to start, but this is my problem" (10m 9s).

Despite the negative emotions she experiences in such situations, Tatiana shows a determination not to give up, and she finishes her turn with “I’ll get by” (10m 40s), as she remains resilient in face of hardship: “practicing little by little is good for me, and I know I will do the oral presentation anyway, so. . .” (18m 55s).

Tatiana explains that during secondary school she worked a lot in the English language subject and that she achieved quite good grades (“I have always done well and in high school I had quite good marks” 14m 30s). Despite the odds, she has been quite successful as an English language learner, and her interest for the language was positive from the start. The driving force in Tatiana’s case seems to have been her intense liking for English, and because of such connection with the language, she found an alternative way to learn it, to succeed in it and to confront adverse learning situations (like oral presentations). Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning that instead of feeling proud of everything she has achieved language-wise, Tatiana appears to be self-conscious and perhaps even a little bit ashamed of her situation and background, which is different from the rest of the classmates, particular those sitting with her in the focus group discussion.

4.5. “A new language:” True love for the language

Sákura and Mar are students whose involvement with Spanish and English respectively has transcended any practical interests. Sákura uses every chance she has to practice Spanish, and this is surely one of the reasons why she has a much higher level than the other Chinese students. English, however, has suffered the consequences of this infatuation: she cannot deal with English at the moment, she admits, because she is too involved in learning and practicing Spanish (14m 27s). As for Mar, she mentions several times in the pre- and post- focus groups that she works as a teacher of English in a private academy because she adores that language, an achievement that she shares with satisfaction and pride.

Starting with Sákura, in 11m 34s of her focus group, the two moderators (R1 and R2) ask the four students about what they remember from the English lessons back in China. Sákura describes those lessons as involving mostly reading, writing, and memorizing vocabulary. In terms of speaking, they would read aloud but there would be little time for improvisation. At this point, R1 asks them whether they like English; Sákura replies that she does and laughs, and the rest look hesitant and just laugh. R2 then (13m 54s) decides to ask them to put Spanish, English and Chinese in decreasing order of importance. The students smile, and R2 asks which language they would put at the top. That is when Sákura replies, in Spanish: “Spanish! Hahaha,” thus putting Spanish above Chinese. She immediately lowers her head, while shrugging her shoulders, turning right to Leo, and laughing: she is aware that this order may result controversial.

And controversial it is: Celeste reacts by covering her mouth in shock; R2 says "Spanish before Chinese!" in surprise; and Leo says "*Chino*" (Chinese). Sákura justifies her decision by arguing that she has been coexisting with Chinese "many years" and that she wants "a new language;" Chinese and English are languages she already knows, but Spanish is something new. Sákura has heard Leo say 'Chinese,' so she brings his previous answer to the fore. Leo confirms that he would put Chinese on top, and establishes a comparison with Catalan people for whom the Catalan language is an important part of their identity. The four students had lived in Lleida for a few months then, and they had come to realize that for many Catalan people the Catalan language has a symbolic value; it serves not just a communicative or instrumental function, but also a sense of shared belonging or identity. Leo understands this, because he also strongly identifies with his mother tongue, and English and Spanish are basically foreign languages he is investing in.

When Celeste switches into English to answer a direct question from R2, he uses the opportunity to move to English as well, and it is Sákura who switches back to Spanish mid-sentence. Sákura's high emotional involvement with Spanish could also be perceived throughout the class observations as well. In this sense, she was very vocal to the teacher about her frustration at the presence of Catalan in the lessons. Although this presence was never really high, she saw it as a distraction from her main goal: learning Spanish. As a matter of fact, she saw the proximity between Catalan and Spanish as a problem rather than an advantage, because it was often hard for her to identify whether a word she had learned was Catalan or Spanish. Sákura has the highest level of all the Chinese students in the course, but she continues to use every opportunity she has to use (and thus practice) Spanish. In this sense, she also mentions that, despite having studied Spanish for only two years (and English for more than ten), she preferred speaking Spanish than English nowadays, and that every day she invests in "learning more Spanish and less English" (8m 33s).

Moving to Mar's story, she attended state-funded and private language academies since she was four, spent two summers abroad (a month in England and one in Ireland) and at the time of the interview she was working as an English language teacher in one of those private academies. Afterwards, R3 asks all the participants of the focus group what they like about English and she brings to the fore, once more, her role of English teacher: "well I like everything because well I work as an English teacher, I've always liked it, so I don't conceive the idea of 'I don't like it'" (12m 05s). Similarly, in the post-focus group, she mentions yet again: "I love English, I work as an English teacher." Mar explains that in her lessons she only uses English because she believes that the best way to learn English is by being immersed in it and by making an effort to understand it, even when she is handling the kids back to her parents. She also believes that

it would be better to provide explanations or to use synonyms or gestures than to resort to Catalan (“I mean, not using Catalan at all” 25m 14s).

Mar’s devotion for English is such that she even wanted to be a native of English until a certain episode during a stay abroad in Ireland somehow challenged her views. This small story comes after R3 asks them whether they would like to speak like native speakers “I went to Ireland and I was asked a question that made me change completely what I thought (.) because I’d always thought that I’d love to be English, because English is important everywhere (.) and all the students, Spanish, Italian, Chinese said that they’d want to be English (.) and then the English teacher said well I’d like to be Spanish, for instance (.) because if you’re Catalan or Spanish you have to learn English to communicate, but then you have Spanish plus English (.) but if you’re English you’re already comfortable to make yourself understood so you don’t have the need to learn another language (41m 50s). Mar explains that this reflection “*shocked*” her, so from that moment on she claims to like being Spanish because she has her own language, and then she also has English to speak with people from other places. Despite this change of perspective, Mar closes her turn with: “I would however like to speak and have the level they have and the fluency they have.” In a way, she values multilingualism, but only for as long as she can reach the fluency and proficiency of an English native speaker.

Although their stories are different, Sákura and Mar have a profound emotional connection with Spanish/English, respectively, which goes beyond simply liking or enjoying it, to become a part of their identity. In this vein, Spanish is Sákura’s most important language at the moment, even before Chinese, her mother tongue, and before English, which she has studied for more than ten years, to the point that other languages (like English or Catalan) are mere distractions from her goal of learning Spanish. As for Mar, being an English teacher is an integral part of who she is, an aspect of her Self that she shares several times in the interviews, and, similar to Sákura, the use of languages other than English in the lessons is conceived as a drawback rather than as a helpful resource.

5. Discussion

In this study, the aim was to explore how several multilingual students have discursively portrayed their relationship(s) with (some of) their foreign languages by focusing on motivational and emotional aspects of language learning and use. These subjective accounts of the students provide insightful information about the amount of investment they choose to make in the learning of these foreign languages, and about how such investment is intimately connected to external/social and internal/individual circumstances, as well as to the emotional

and motivational aspects of the learning process. In relation to emotional and motivational aspects, findings have focused on Dörnyei's (2009) oft-overlooked L2 learning experience of the self system theory (Dörnyei, 2019), which entails taking into consideration the main components of the language learning classroom such as teachers, peers and curriculum; yet, in the narratives analyzed, the motivation and the emotional bond with a certain language in some cases appear to transcend the barriers of the classroom and other social-individual elements are brought to the fore, such as the family's economic possibilities, migration stories, and the simultaneous learning of other foreign languages.

The first RQ revolved around the type of emotional involvement and relationship that the participants have developed towards their FL(s) over time. Findings indicate that there exist different types of affective relationships towards a language which fall into a dynamic continuum ranging from dislike to love. Data reveal that many students who appear to feel neither a deep emotional bond nor motivation (extrinsic or intrinsic) towards such languages are those who have not invested much effort in it and whose level is generally low (like students belonging to the first profile). It is true, however, that some students achieve a satisfactory level in the language like Ivan (from the second profile) without feeling a strong emotional connection with the language, as although they were not intrinsically motivated, their motivation was driven by external factors such as the need to study English because of its global importance and its long-term benefits. However, as data indicate, some learners might also develop intrinsic motivation and a stronger emotional connection with the language as they invest in it for extrinsic motives. For instance, Lara and Pere started to like English over time and nowadays the more they study it, the more they like it. Some other learners, on the contrary, were intrinsically motivated from the very beginning of their learning journey, like Tatiana, Mar and Sákura, and their positive emotional bond with English (Tatiana and Mar) and Spanish (Sákura) is clear, although the difference lies in emotional intensity. Tatiana mentions that she "likes English a lot," in a way that she finds it enjoyable, similarly to Lara and Pere. Nonetheless, compared to Mar and Sákura, the emotion she feels towards the language does not seem to be so intense. Indeed, whereas Tatiana finds English engaging, Mar and Sákura feel sheer passion, or love, for a foreign language – English and Spanish, respectively.

The difference between Mar and Sákura, and Tatiana (and of course the rest of the participants) is that the first two feel a special, strong relationship with the learning and use of the language to the point that such activity is meaningful and a part of their own identity. Therefore, what differentiates passion or love for something from intrinsic motivation is that passion would entail that "the activity is part of one's life and is engaged in on a regular basis" (Vallerand, 2012,

p. 47), whereas being intrinsically motivated would imply for instance engaging in occasional language learning and using, but not regarding such activity as an fundamental part of one's Self. Although research in SLA have long demonstrated the importance of motivation for foreign language learning, this study also highlights the nuances between being motivated and being passionate about such learning. And it is precisely this passion what appears to make a difference in terms of investment and engagement in the language learning processes.

The second RQ aimed to investigate the role that the aforementioned emotional relationship with a language might play in the learner's behavior when learning and/or using such language. In this regard, the study suggests that emotions mediate the students' language learning processes as well as their behaviors when using or learning a foreign language, and that such emotions towards a language are developed and constructed with the accumulation of experiences in and with the languages, depending on the particular social and individual circumstances. We found that both external circumstances (e.g., having moved with your family to another country or not having high purchasing power to pay for private academies) and internal ones (like feeling a strong emotional connection to the language, or feeling amotivated and stuck with the low level in that language) have an impact on how the learning of this foreign language progresses, the motivational level of the student and the emotional bond with a certain language. For instance, Pere gave up when the teacher who was helping him during the breaks retired; Tatiana started to watch subtitled films to compensate for the lack of external support; and Lara experienced first-hand that English had instrumental value and made the effort, and then realized that it was actually a "beautiful language" which she liked. The analysis also shows nevertheless that social and individual contexts are dynamic and therefore the emotional relationship with a language as well as the amount of investment in it are subject to change over time (like in the case of Pere and Lara).

Despite forwarding some compelling insights, this work has been undermined by some limitations. Firstly, the project in which this study is embedded was not designed to explore the language learners' emotionality in depth, given that its main objective was to implement and compare two English teaching methodologies, as explained in the context section. This subsequently affected the tenor and the composition of the interview, as only a small part was devoted to inquiring about the participants' emotional relationships towards languages. Secondly, it is also important to underline that this study was not longitudinal, and therefore it was not possible to thoroughly analyze the dynamics of such relationships over time. Despite these shortcomings, stories told by participants were sound enough to identify different types of emotional bonds towards languages and

to pinpoint fluctuations and changes in the ways they related to them as both external and internal factors came into play.

6. Conclusion

This study has shown that while researchers have typically focused on language learning in terms of linguistic/communicative development and competence, attention also needs to be paid to emotional development and how L2 users and learners navigate that emotionality. On the whole, the implications that can be drawn from this study are that emotional relationships towards additional languages appear to be influential in the learners' willingness to learn and use such language and in their readiness to continue endeavoring in order to improve their knowledge and abilities in it. In this sense, results indicate that additional language learning and love, or passion, are closely related (see Barcelos & Coelho, 2016), because love and passion seem to be the driving forces when learning languages, as they are much more powerful than other more moderate emotions like liking or enjoyment, as also shown by Pavelescu and Petrić (2018) and Tashma Baum (2015). Following Vallerand's (2012) line of thought, findings from this research indicate that motivation might be important in helping students make the most of the additional language learning process, but passion and love for it might lead students not only to improve and evolve in their learning, but also to thrive in their lives, as they are so emotionally involved in the performance of such activity that it becomes a fundamental part of their own Self-realization.

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