



## The Emotional Value of the Phrase ‘I love you’ for Iranian Bilinguals

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### Abstract

Misunderstanding the emotionality of a word or an emotion-laden word used inaccurately or inappropriately might lead to pragmatically unwanted and embarrassing effects. The present study’s objective was to analyze the perception and use of the phrase ‘I love you’ in Iranian bi/multilingual’s different languages. The aim was to identify if variables of sociobiographical, learning history, and social and linguistic context of L2 use affect the perceived weight and use of this phrase. The research was conducted using both quantitative (statistical correlation) analysis and qualitative (open-ended questions) to investigate the research question. Twenty Iranian bi/multilingual participants answered an emotional language valuation questionnaire derived from a subsection of the Bilingualism and Emotion Questionnaire (BEQ) database. Our research found that there was no statistical association with the variables except language dominance. Furthermore, seventy percent of the participants reported feeling that ‘I love you’ had the greatest weight in their L1 regardless of their age, gender, education level, whether they learned the L2 in a natural, instructed or mixed environment, the onset age of learning, even if they had a high degree of socialization and an extensive network of interlocutors in their L2.

*Keywords:* Emotion words, Emotional word weight, Communication of emotion, Bilingualism, EFL learning material.

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## **Introduction**

The occasion of language relies as much on emotions as it does on cognition. This fact has long been acknowledged but somehow gets lost in the actual study of most languages. Pavlenko (2008) makes a case that knowledge of the emotionality of a word is as important as understanding of its grammatical and gender valuation. Misunderstanding the emotionality of the word or an emotion-laden word used inaccurately or inappropriately might lead to pragmatically unwanted and embarrassing effects. Emotions are a key component in human mental and social life but are noticeably absent in most foreign language teaching materials. In most if not all English as a Foreign Language (EFL) course books, we are presented with sanitized, sterile situations where all dialogue is happy and life is without conflict; these books do not prepare L2 learners to become proficient L2 users in many real life situations. It is little wonder that L2 learners find it difficult to express and recognize anger, sadness, shame, or happiness in theirs and others' speech (Dewaele & Pavlenko, 2002). Language teachers need to be conscious that the vocabulary of emotions and emotion scripts are different from language to language and to produce emotionally competent L2 communicators these differences and similarities need to be addressed. As Rintell (1984) explained, the ability to judge the interlocutor's emotional state is crucial for successful communication.

## **Literature Review**

There is a historical bias that cognition and emotion do not intersect in scientific study (Fox- Keller, 1985). Language became further disconnected from emotion in the mid-20th century, with the decline of behaviorism and the rise of the cognitive viewpoint. Led by Chomsky's theories, language was seen as a mental abstract focusing on structures disconnected and separate from cognition, rather than a system of communication. Subsequently, cognitive ideology has been turning away from this tight connection with abstract reasoning because of the rise of cognitive neuroscience of the 1990s fueled by technological advances in neuroimaging (Posner, Petersen, Fox, & Raichle, 1988). These new tools allowed an "emotion revolution" to occur in cognitive sciences two decades ago but Damasio (1994) posits this revolution has not carried over into language learning research. Most cognitive psychologists concur that emotion is an essential human cognition (Harris, Gleason, & Ayçiçeği, 2008; Panksepp, 1998). And while this viewpoint is slowly becoming more accepted it remains largely absent in interlanguage research where the focus has remained on speech acts such as requesting, complaining, apologizing and complimenting (Barron, 2003; Kasper & Rose, 2001; Lyster, 1994). A search of chapter titles and indices in handbooks and textbooks done by Caldwell-Harris (2008) revealed an almost complete lack of reference to

emotion. Studies in bilingualism/multilingualism and second language acquisition (SLA) have taken a step in this relatively new area of research during the past two decades and have begun to consider emotions as a legitimate area of enquiry. Emotions have been defined in 4 several ways. In this paper we will be following the concepts put forward by Averill (1982) who proposes a social constructivist framework where emotions fit into the broader scheme of behavior and are analyzed in relation to social systems. He sees emotions as defined by the social context, participants and their roles in the utterances. Averill (1982) states “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)” (p.19).

An equally important viewpoint is proposed by Markus and Kitayama (1994) who took a different angle in their research. They contend that different sociocultural environments produce different emotional experiences which are then communicated in different ways. Putting forward the idea that in Western cultures with an independent view of the self, emotions are openly displayed while in Eastern cultures overt expression of emotion are usually avoided. Similarly, comparing word associations to emotional concepts, including love, fear and happiness, Grabis (1999) found that monolingual speakers of Spanish and English differed in their preference of the type of association used and in specific words elicited. Native speakers (NS) of English preferred indirect (metaphoric and symbolic) associations with the word ‘love’, while NS of Spanish preferred sensory and referential associations. Other researchers have focused more on emotional lexicon. Using a word-priming paradigm, Altarriba and Santiago-Rivera (1994) investigated the representations of emotion words by bilingual individuals in their different languages linking them to the variables of cross-linguistic differences and language histories. In Altarriba (2003) concrete, emotion and abstract words were rated by adult Spanish-English bilinguals. For both monolingual and bilingual speakers, emotion words were found to be perceived different from abstract and concrete words. She proposed that L1 emotion words are more deeply encoded than the L2 equivalents because they have been used and experienced in more contexts creating more semantic representations in the memory. Hence, emotion words in the L2 activate less cognitive sources than the dominant language words. Dewaele and Pavlenko (2002) examined the frequency of use of emotion vocabulary by Flemish-French learners and Russian-English learners and found that the proportion of emotion words was smaller in L2 users than native speakers in similar tasks. Emotion vocabulary was found to be underused in the L2 and this discrepancy was linked to language proficiency, gender, extraversion and linguistic material type. The authors speculated that lower proficiency learners may consciously be avoiding emotional topics because of a lack of emotional vocabulary or limited emotional resonance for emotion words in their L2 interlanguage. Harris, Aycicegi, and Berko Gleason, (2003)

used electrodermal monitoring to compare reactivity for emotion word including taboo words, reprimands, positive and neutral words which were visually and auditorily presented in both the L1 and L2 of Turkish L1-English L2 bilinguals. They found that reprimand and taboo words in the L1 had a much stronger reaction than their translation equivalents in the L2. Harris (2004) followed up this 5 study with another using early Spanish-English bilinguals, finding that while reprimands elicited stronger responses in the L1 terms of endearment, the phrase 'I love you' did not produce significantly different responses in L1 and L2. Bilinguals who learned their L2 during middle childhood had similar reactions to all emotional words in both L1 and L2 causing Harris to conclude that emotional phrases in L1 provoked the strongest effects except when L2 was also acquired in childhood and that the age of acquisition plays a major role in establishing the emotional weight of words. Using a subsample of the Bilingualism and Emotion Questionnaire (BEQ) database (Dewaele & Pavlenko, 2001–2003) to look at language choice in emotional parent-child communication, Pavlenko (2004) found that language dominance was the key factor. Dewaele (2004a) utilized self-reported word choice when swearing amongst bi-and multilingual adults using a part of the BEQ corpus. His statistical analysis of the data suggested that swearing occurs most frequently in the dominant language. Natural early acquisition and instructed learners of the L2 who had the opportunity to use the L2 in outside interaction tended to use that language to swear more frequently than participants who learned the L2 later in life or had only formal classroom instruction. Dawaele (2004b) continued his study by analyzing the perceived emotional force of swear words in the participants' L1 and L2. These results revealed that the emotional force was higher in the L1 and gradually reduced in all languages learned later in life, reaffirming earlier research (Dewaele & Pavlenko, 2002; Pavlenko, 2005; Harris et al., 2003). These studies suggest that emotion words and emotion-laden words such as those dealing with fear, happiness, love and anger, represent a different lexical category from abstract or concrete words in terms of representation, processing and frequency of use by bilinguals. Additionally, they have been found to show various culturally and socially specific patterns of use. Furthermore, we have seen that bilinguals perceive and react to these words differently in their L1 and L2 and these differences have been linked to age of acquisition and socialization in both languages. Previous research has been carried out primarily on Western and Eastern cultures, excluding the few studies concentrating on Turkish individuals (Harris, 2004; Harris et al., 2003). There has been little or no research which focuses on the mid-eastern cultures where a combination of the extrovert Western emotional style and more introverted Eastern style exists. In this study we will concentrate on the emotion love, an emotion that is core to all humans but often resists exact cross-cultural translation.

## **Purpose of the study**

The objective of the present study is to analyze the perception and use of the phrase ‘I love you’ in Iranian bi and multilingual’s different languages. The aim is to identify which sociobiographical variables affect the perceived weight and use of this phrase. Many past studies calculate correlation coefficients between different languages and the use of emotion words but have not examined the relationship between L2 speaker’s social and psychological variables, learning history and the linguistic context of the L2 use of emotional words. Love is one of the emotions that all humans share but because of its uniqueness in verbal and non6 verbal expressions across languages and cultures may be difficult to translate (Altarriba, 2003; Derné, 1994). This characteristic may make communicating and recognizing love in the emotion script of a different language very challenging when translating from one language to another, particularly if those languages are not topically close. Love is expressed very differently in Asian and Western cultures (Besemeres, 2004; Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 1994) and may cause a shift in the emotional script from one language to another. Against this backdrop, the present study focused on the emotional valuation of the phrase ‘I love you’ in the different languages of bi and multilinguals.

To this end, the following research question was addressed:

1. Does the Iranian bilinguals' self-perceived emotional valuation of the phrase ‘I love you’ diverge in their different languages relative to:
  - a. social-biographical variables
    - (1) gender
    - (2) education levels
    - (3) self-perceived language dominance
  - b. L2 learning history
    - (1) acquisition of L2 context: natural, instructional, or mixed
    - (2) age of onset of L2 learning
  - c. social and linguistic of text of L2 use
    - (1) degree of socialization
    - (2) nature/size of L2 interlocutor network?

## **Method**

This study adopted both quantitative (statistical correlation) analysis and qualitative (open ended questions) to investigate the research question. What follows are the features of participants, instruments, data collection, and data analysis.

## Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 20 Iranian bi- and multilinguals. The gender was divided almost equally (M = 11, F = 9) with an age range of 23 to 52 years (mean age = 31.6). The participants were generally highly educated with two having a Bachelor's degree, 15 with a Master's and three with a PhD; the participants had a wide range of occupations from full-time students to a senior managing research scientist at a major corporation. The participants spoke a total of four different L1s. Farsi native speakers represent the largest group (n=13), followed by native speakers of Turkish (n=4), English (n=3) and last Gilaki (n=2). The most frequent L2 is English (n=10), followed by Turkish (n=4) and Gilaki 7 (n=2). The most frequent L3 is also English (n=6), followed by French (n=2) and Farsi (n=1). One participant reported an L4 of Arabic. The mean age of onset of learning for the L2 was 6 years old and for the L3 was 13 years old. A detailed examination of the age of onset of L2 and L3 revealed that five L2 users were in fact bilingual with two first languages learned from birth. This represents 25 % of the L2 group. Approximately 70% of the participants reported dominance in their L1 (n=14); a smaller proportion, 35%, reported dominance in two or more languages including the L1 (n=7) and none reported dominance in language(s) not including the L1.

## Instruments

The instruments used to gather data consisted of an emotional language valuation questionnaire.

*Emotional language questionnaire:* The questionnaire was adapted from a subsample of the Bilingualism and Emotion Questionnaire (BEQ) database (Dewaele & Pavlenko, 2001– 2003). It contained 24 items, reflecting emotional language use in different situations in the bilingual participant's different languages. The first section of the questionnaire consisted of 18 closed questions using either Likert scales or ranking to collected data on sociobiographical information: gender, age, education level, ethnic group, occupation, languages known to the participant, dominant language(s), chronological order of language acquisition, context of acquisition (naturalistic, mixed or instructed), age of onset, and frequency of use.

The second section contained five open-ended questions which allowed participants to comment on (a) the valuation of the phrase 'I love you' in the participants' respective languages, (b) linguistic preferences for emotion terms and terms of endearment, (c) the emotional significance of their languages, (d) the ease or difficulty of discussing emotional topics in languages other than the first, and (e) if the use different language changes the sense of personal identity (See Appendix one).

### *Data Collection*

The emotional language questionnaire was administered to two different groups of people. The first and majority of the participants were given the questionnaire in a lecture hall and completed it in their free time between classes. The second group who were professors and professionals also received the questionnaire and were allowed to take and complete it when time permitted. These were returned to author as they finished. Participants were given as much time as they needed to complete the questionnaire, taking approximately 15-30 minutes to complete the form.

### *Data Analysis*

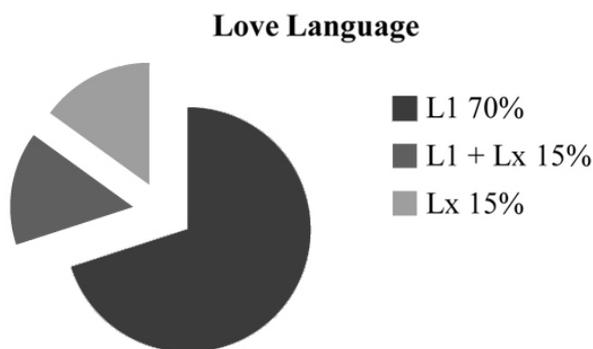
Data was analyzed in two ways. The quantitative analysis was conducted using data collected from the first section of the questionnaire and consisted of seven independent variables, separated into three different groups. The first group consisted of three socio-biographical variables namely (1) gender, (2) education level, and (3) self-perceived language dominance. The second group was made up of two variables that reflect the L2 learning history (4) L2 acquisition context and (5) age of onset of learning the L2. The third group reflected the social and linguistic context of L2 use: (6) degree of socialization in the L2 (or LX, any language other than L1) and (7) nature of the L2 network of interlocutors. A series of crosstabulations (Pearson chi-square analyses) were performed to establish whether the perceived emotional weight of 'I love you' was linked to any of these independent variables. The second section of the questionnaire contained open-ended questions which provided for the qualitative analysis of participants answers on the valuation of the phrase 'I love you' in their respective languages, any linguistic preferences for emotion terms and terms of endearment, any emotional significance of their languages, their ease or difficulty of discussing emotional topics in the LX, and if switching to a different language changes the sense of personal identity.

## **Results**

The purpose of the study was twofold: to investigate the participants' views on the emotional weight of the phrase 'I love you' in their different languages, and to statistically analyze the association between the socio-biological and linguistic variables to the use of this emotion script. To this end, the first qualitative phase of the study was devoted to identifying different patterns in the participants' use of the phrase 'I love you' in their different languages. The second phase of the study was concerned with the statistical analysis of the same sociobiological variables: 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. In this section, the results of analyses related to the two phases are presented below.

Seventy percent of the participants (n = 14) judged the sentence 'I love you' to have a greater emotional weight in their L1; about a fifth or 15% (n = 3) judged it to have similar weight in their L1 and an LX; and interestingly, 15% the same as the previous category, felt that the phrase has more weight in an LX (n=3) (see Figure1). These three different categories can be illustrated with a number of narratives from the participant.



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

*'I love you' has a greater emotional weight in the L1*

Participant #14 felt the phrase was strongest in her dominant L1, stating that it had a deeper effect. Participant #2 felt:

#2 (Turkish L1 and Farsi L2): "The deepest feelings are expressed in the mother tongue."

#13 (Farsi L1 and English L2): "Persian, I feel it better."

Participant #12 also stated that he liked to hear the phrase in his first language as it was not really effective in the L2. Several other participants used words such as *more effective*, *more proficient*, and *more preferable* to describe the reason it felt stronger in their L1.

#12 (Farsi L1 and Gilaki L2): In my first language it is more effective. My addressees take it more seriously."

#6 (Farsi L1 and English L2): "Farsi, I feel more proficient."

Participant #8 and #5 felt the phrase ‘I love you’ was stronger in their L1 despite their being equally proficient in both L1 and L2, the phrase somehow had more meaning in the L1.

#8 (Farsi L1 and English L2): “In Farsi, ‘I love you’, is stronger and has no equivalent in English so I usually use Farsi.”

#5 (Turkish L1 and Farsi L2): “I prefer Turkish because maybe I have received the same terms from my parents.”

Although, participant #9 stated that he felt more emotional weight for the phrase ‘I love you’ in his L1, Farsi, but preferred English for emotional terms and terms of endearment. Stating,

“...they express my feelings better.”

This sentiment was echoed by #16 (Farsi L1 and English L2) who also reported stronger feelings for ‘I love you’ in his L1 but preferred English for emotional terms and terms of endearment.

#16 (Farsi L1 and English L2): “I have been writing stuff in English whenever I am depressed or feel emotional for a very long time.”

*‘I love you’ has equal emotional weight in the L1 and an LX*

A considerably smaller percentage (15%) of the participants felt the phrase had the same weight in both the L1 and LX. Participant #15 (Farsi L1 and English L2) found no difference in emotional weight in the L1 and an LX but provided not examples for why he felt this way. And #10 (Farsi L1, English L2, and French L3) reported no difference in the weight but said,

#10 (Farsi L1, English L2, and French L3) “Sometimes I feel I can express my feelings better in English.”

*‘I love you’ has a greater emotional weight in the LX*

An equal number of participants (15%) reported that the phrase seemed stronger in the LX - which could be any language learnt after the L1, as did those who reported that ‘I love you’ had equal emotional weight in the L1 and an LX.

For participant #1, (Turkish L1, Farsi L2, and English L3) the phrase was strongest in the L2 because that is the language in which he experienced most of his social encounters (love) the most often:

#1: “Farsi has the most weight; I speak Farsi at parties, with girls and see it in films the most.”

Participant # 17 felt more at ease and comfortable speaking emotionally in his L3. But also mentions that he is bolder in his English personality, and mentions he is more comfortable doing “shameful things” which he might subconsciously

equate with fraternizing with the opposite sex (still looked down upon in traditional Iranian society).

#17 (Gilaki L1, Farsi L2, and English L3): “I feel another personality with English which is somehow bolder than my Farsi personality. For example, I want to request a shameful thing (could you give me a cigarette), I prefer English, unless the person do not know English. As I said, I feel more comfortable with English for expressing deep feelings.”

Participant #7 stated ‘I love you’ felt strongest in her L2 preferring it to her L1.

#7 (Farsi L1, English L2, and French L3): “I prefer to use this phrase in L2 because I feel easier.”

Often the feedback was difficult to classify and somewhat ambiguous when a distinction was made or not made between perceived weight of the phrase and the participant’ use of it. Some participants responded to the question of perceived emotional weight by referring to their language proficiency and extent of their emotional vocabulary. It must be noted that firstly, some narratives did not fit easily in the three categories selected while others were fairly straight forward. The strongest perceived weight was not automatically the dominant language or the language of the family. Secondly, these narratives were personal opinions and that even with these relatively homogenous participants who mostly shared similar language and culture there were conflicting ideas on the emotional weight of this phrase. To sum up, it seems the emotional weight of the phrase ‘I love you’ is linked to a wide range of socio-cultural and linguistic factors. Perhaps one way to gain a better understanding of these 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.

### *Statistical analyses*

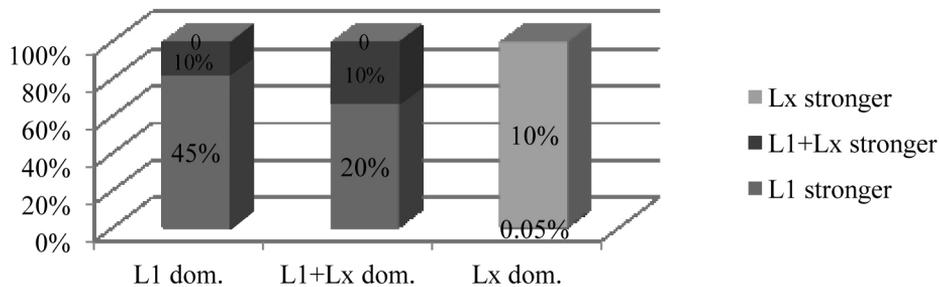
The present study focuses on the feedback to the following open question: Does the phrase ‘I love you’ have the same emotional weight for you in your different languages? Which language does it feel strongest in? This was considered the dependant variable. The answers to these questions were grouped in three categories: L1 – the phrase is perceived to be stronger in the L1; L1 + LX - the phrase is perceived to be equally strong in the L1 and one or more LX; and LX - the phrase is perceived to be stronger in an LX. This section statistically analyzed the data to establish a link between three groups of independent variables: (a) socio-biographical, (b) learning history and (c) social and linguistic variables to the dependant variable (the language participants found to have the most emotional weight for the emotion script ‘I love you’). A series of correlational analyses (Pearson Chi<sup>2</sup>) revealed if the perceived emotional script

weight is linked to any of a range of independent variables. In agreement with Dewaele (2008), neither gender, nor education level are significantly associated with the dependent variable, but language dominance is strongly associated to perceived emotional weight of the phrase (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Overview of the Effects of the Independent Variables on Perceived Emotional Weight of ‘I love you’ ( $\chi^2$  tests)**

Varuable	Pearson $\chi^2$	p	Cramer’s V
Gender (df = 1)	3.1	ns	0.395
Education (df = 3)	9.19	ns	0.582
Language dominance (df = 6)	76.04	0.005	0.164

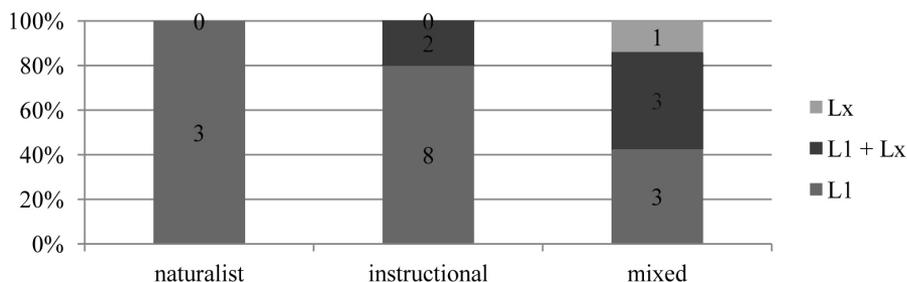
Figure 2 shows that those who feel the phrase is strongest in the L1 consist of 45% of multilinguals who are dominant in their L1. The proportion of L1 dominant participants drops to 10% among those who feel the phrase is strongest in the L1 and some other LX, and none of the L1 dominant participants felt the phrase is strongest in an LX. Of those participants who considered both their L1 and another LX to be equally dominant languages, 15% still found the felt phrase to be stronger in their L1, 10% perceived the phrase as equally strong in their L1 and another LX and again none found the phrase stronger in any single LX. Lastly and interestingly, 15% of multilinguals also felt ‘I love you’ has greater emotional weight in a language which is not their own dominant language.



**Figure 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.**

**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).

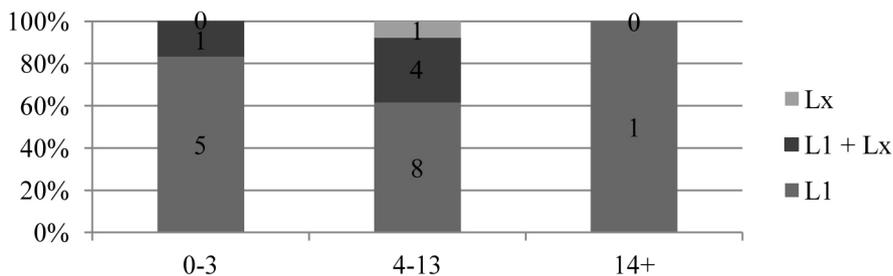
The L2 was learned naturalistically in 15%, solely through formal instruction in 50% of the cases, through mixed instruction in 35% of cases of cases.



**Figure 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.**

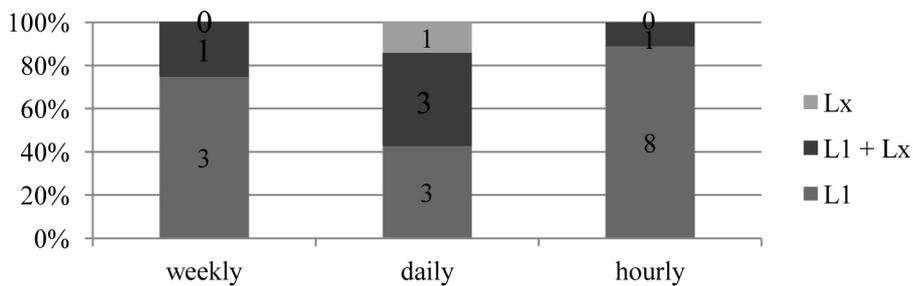
The second group of independent variables (acquisition context and L2 onset age) showed no significant correlation with the dependant variable but the acquisition context effect size was considered low (Cramer’s  $V = .196$ ) at while the effect size of L2 onset age was medium (Cramer’s  $V = .349$ ). Figures 3 and 4 show that smaller proportions of instructed learners (0%) and late starters (0%) feel the phrase is strongest in the LX than Figure 3 also shows that among those who feel the phrase is strongest in the L1 + LX there is a middle proportion of mixed and naturalistic learners (25%). Figure 4 also shows that the proportion of early and late starters is higher in the category of those who feel the phrase is strongest in the L1, compared to the proportion of mid-age starters in the category of those who feel the phrase is strongest in the L1.

**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 3, those who started before puberty (ages 4–13), and those who started as teenagers (age 14+). Thirty percent of participants started learning the L2 between birth and age 3, 65% started between the age of 4 and 13, and the remaining 5% started at the age of 14 or older.



**Figure 4. Proportions of early L2 starters, mid 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.**

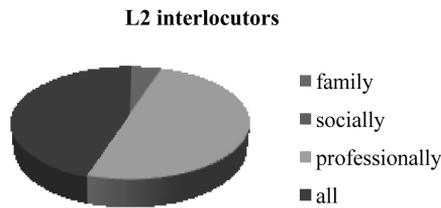
**Socialization in the L2.** The variable ‘socialization in the L2’ was collected through the following question: How frequently do you use the L2? Possible answers on a 5 point Likert scale included: (1) yearly (or less), (2) monthly, (3) weekly, (4) daily, and (5) all day. There were no scores for yearly or monthly and they were excluded from the figure.



**Figure 5. Proportions of weekly, daily, and hourly socialization or frequency of L2 use 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 (degree of socialization shown by frequency of use and the nature of the interlocutor network) reflecting participants’ current linguistic practices in the L2 show no significant correlation with the dependent variable. Figure 5 shows that even those participants that frequently used their L2 (70%) still considered the emotional weight of ‘I love you’ to be the strongest in their L1. Only 25% reported that they felt the emotional script evenly in their L1 and LX, and only 1 of these frequent users described the phrase to be strongest in a LX.

**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) strangers, (2) family/friends, (3) socially, (4) professional /work, and (5) all. This category deals with the type of interlocutor network rather than the size. The largest percentage of participants 50% reported using their L2 with colleagues (classmates or professors) at the university or with their students in the workplace. Only 5% of participants use the L2 with their family. And a large proportion (45%) stated that they used the L2 with interlocutors from all parts of their life. Inversely, 0% of participants used the L2 only with strangers. The quantitative difference between the three middle categories is somewhat subjective and prone to overlaps. Differences are more clearly pronounced at the extremes of the continuum: ‘‘strangers’’, and ‘‘all’’.



**Figure 6. Proportions of participants using the L2 with family/friends, only socially, professionally/work and all.**

Figure 6 shows that the participant’s largest type of interlocutor in their L2 was in the professional context. They reported using the L2 to speak with colleagues, classmates, professors and their own students. Both categories of strangers (little to no interaction in L2) and only in social situation were the smallest, both receiving no score. The other half of the participants reported interaction with interlocutors in their family (5%) and with all types of people in the all category (45%).

Table 2 is an overview of the crosstab correlation between the second and third group of independent variables with the dependant variable.

**Table 2. Overview of the Effects of the L2 Independent Variables on Perceived Emotional Weight of ‘I love you’ ( $\chi^2$  tests) Listed According to Effect Size**

Variable	Pearson $\chi^2$	p	Cramer’s V
Context of acquisition (df = 4)	4.86	0.301 (ns)	0.349
Age of acquisition (df = 2)	1.54	0.819 (ns)	0.196
Socialization (df = 4)	4.65	0.325 (ns)	0.341
Network of interlocutors (df = 4)	5.04	0.283 (ns)	0.355

Table 2 shows that although none of these independent variables have been shown to have a significant effect on the perception of emotional strength of the phrase ‘I love you’, the values for the measure of nominal association (Cramer’s V) is the smallest for the age of acquisition and are larger for the variables reflecting the context of acquisition, socialization or frequency of use and the type of interlocutors. This suggests that the perception of emotional force of ‘I love you’ is more strongly determined by how the L2 was learned and the social and linguistic context of the L2 use.

There are a couple of caveats that must be considered when reviewing the statistical analysis. The analysis consists of cross-tabulations which allow only establishing whether or not independent variables are associated with the dependent variables but provides no causation between the two. It must also be noted that the statistical evidence presented here must be viewed critically as in several instances the expected counts in the Pearson Chi2 analysis fell below five, this small participant number does not guarantee a high degree of accuracy in the statistical analysis in SPSS (this may have been avoided by collecting more data).

## **Discussion**

The initial hypothesis in this study was that given enough time and exposure to a L2/LX Iranian bilinguals would develop a sense of or a complete semantic understanding of the phrase ‘I love you’ in the LX and that it would eventually approximately equal the L1. Pavlenko (2005, 2008) argues that developing a complete representation of the concept involves 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.

Our research found that seventy percent of the Iranian bilingual participants in the present study reported feeling that ‘I love you’ had the greatest weight in their L1; they also stated that the native language has special emotional qualities that a later acquired second language did not have. According to Caldwell-Harris, Tong, Lung and Poo (2011) subjective impressions of most bilinguals affirm that speaking one’s native language has special emotional qualities that a later acquired second language does not have. Even the most proficient bilinguals of the study preferred their native, and in these cases dominant, language for the expression of love. This result agreed with previous research which found that even highly proficient bilinguals frequently report that they experience their second language (L2/LX) to be less emotional as compared to their native language (L1) and that – although they know the emotional meaning of words in L2 – they do not sense it as with words in L1. Bilinguals usually prefer to use their more proficient/more emotional language (Dewaele & Pavlenko, 2002; Pavlenko, 2005; Harris et al., 2003). It thus came as no surprise that selfreported language dominance turned out to have the only significant correlation of all the independent variables in this study.

Surprisingly, neither foreign language learning history, the age of the onset of acquisition, or the amount of authentic interaction in the LX revealed any statistical association to the valuation of the phrase ‘I love you’. This contrasts with Harris et al. (2003) who stated that emotional phrases in L1 produced the strongest effects except when L2 had been acquired in childhood, suggesting that age of acquisition plays an important part in establishing the emotional weight of words. But our narrative data does shows agreement with Harris’s Emotion contexts of learning hypothesis (2006) which states that language comes to be experienced as emotional when it is learned or used in an emotional context (Harris et al., 2006). Particularly the participant’s narratives reflected the findings that the context of childhood socialization with parents may be the most emotional context and there the strongest (Bloom & Beckwith, 1989).

Although, fifteen percent of participants felt that the phrase had acquired more emotional weight in an LX, these were linked to experiences of love in the LX, which reflected the finding of Dewaele (2004c) and Pavlenko (2008). Although due to the small sample size these could represent idiosyncratic exceptions to

an individual's situation and learning history. Interestingly, even strong socialization in the LX, with frequent use of the LX over a prolonged period with multiple interlocutors denoted by the "all" answer of network nature did not produce statistical significance refuting our initial hypothesis. Dewaele (2004a) found that increased socialization usually strengthens the familiarity the emotion script and as a consequence, the phrase 'I love you' or its near-equivalents will acquire strong emotional connotations. The author argued that "a frequent user of a language develops the correct perception of the emotional force of swear words and may at some point feel he/she is close enough to the in-group to dare using these powerful words" (ibid, p.102). The findings of this study were contradictory to the patterns uncovered in previous research on emotional script which inspected the valuation of expressions of anger and swearing, and for praising and disciplining children (Dewaele, 2004a,b,c, 2005a, 2006; Pavlenko, 2004, 2005). Our data did not reveal any statistical significance to indicate an association between the independent variables: age of acquisition, context of acquisition, or frequency of use of the language. Our findings that 'I love you' was preferred by the largest proportion of learners who acquired their L2 in both the natural and instructed context disagreed with a similar study on swear and taboo words contrary to Dewaele (2004a,b; 2005a,b) who found those who had learned a language in an instructed context used the target language 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. Our statistical results showed there was no significant correlation with frequency of use or the nature of the interlocutor network. Even participants who reported the highest level of use and an extensive network of socialization still preferred the phrase 'I love you' in their L1. This may be explained by the EFL situation of the participants. For the most part, they have not had an immersive experience in the L2 language or culture and typically used their L2 in a professional and work capacity. Grosjean (2008) crucially pointed out that bilinguals usually acquire and use their languages for different purposes, in different domains of life, with different people. The Complementarity Principle states that bilinguals may vary in level of proficiency in a language according to the different aspects of life for which the language is needed. A language spoken with a limited number of interlocutors in a reduced number of domains "may be less fluent and more restricted than a language used extensively" (ibid., p. 24). Fifty percent of our participants reported their LX network of interlocutors and interactions to take place in a professional context, either at the university with professors and classmates or job site with colleagues or their own students. The use of the LX in mostly working context where emotional script of this nature would not be normally used may help explain why the speakers did not attain a higher emotional sense of the phrase. Although they claimed to be ambilingual in general competence, they may actually be more proficient or at ease in one language in certain situation or with certain people. Altarriba and Canary

(2004) suggest that this may be linked to the fact that the bilinguals had learned and used English in educational and work environments, and that their English emotion words had fewer emotional connotations and therefore reduced affective priming.

Our results have overwhelmingly shown that even highly proficient and competent users of an LX have failed to extend this competence in emotional contexts. Emotions are a vital component to a successful mental and social life. Therefore a competent L2 communicator must be able to recognize and express these emotions with appropriate vocabulary and emotional scripts in the different languages they use. Perhaps this lack can be traced, in part, to the way learners' acquire their L2, specifically the material they may be using to learn. It is apparent that emotion-free course books cannot prepare emotionally proficient L2 users. But this emotional material is conspicuously absent in foreign language teaching material and consequently from EFL L2 user's interlanguage (Dewaele & Pavlenko, 2002). Foreign language materials typically present a sanitized picture of the target culture, where everybody is friendly, polite, quite without humor or emotion. We typically find a focus on non-emotional speech acts such as asking for directions, making reservations, apologizing, politely complaining. Often the closest one gets to emotional interactions is probably a complaint to the waiter in the restaurant about the fact that the soup is cold or contains an insect and this is expressed in a rationally and calmly and uttered in complete and grammatical correct sentences. Obviously this does little to prepare the learner for real-life situations in a L2 context.

Teaching emotions in a classroom is not without potential pitfalls and ethical questions. Which emotions are "safe" enough and how far should a teacher go to explain the different phrases and their context of use? Should a teacher warn against which swear or endearment words to use? Should these and other types of emotional words be given in course books with a rating of their intensity? How much emotion-laden vocabulary and expressions and to what extent should be taught to the learners? On the other hand, notwithstanding the potential minefield of teaching emotions in a classroom should we leave learners unaware of these vibrant and crucial emotion-laden words and expressions and simply let them experience them through authentic interactions or not at all in the case of many EFL learners whose interaction to the L2 sociopragmatic and sociocultural competence is often confined to the classroom? Nevertheless, it is possible to help prepare learners, not perhaps by explicit instruction, but through the use of material such as film extracts, TV serials, short stories, poetry, as well as, the myriad of opportunities found on the internet. Of course, as Evans and Fisher (2005) have shown a stay in the L2 country can lead to significant increases in the use of expressive language, but this is not always possible.

## **Conclusion**

The qualitative and quantitative analysis of 20 bi/multilingual Iranian adults who are maximally proficient in their L1 and L2 revealed some interesting systematic differences in the use and perception of their languages. There proved to be no statistical association between our independent variables: the relationship between L2 speaker's social and psychological variables, learning history and the linguistic context of the L2 use of emotional words, and the social and linguistic context of L2 use; and the dependent variable of the language or combination of languages that the phrase 'I love you' was most emotionally intense. One exception was found that of self-perceived language dominance which coincided with at least one of the participant's native languages. Although, almost half of the participants reported using both languages daily, they used their L2 less frequently for expressing their deepest feelings or their love. They also preferred their L1 for speaking terms of endearment and deep emotions.

This study was based very closely on research done by Deweale (2008). Our results will help to determine whether the pattern of results they obtained is relevant across a number of cultural groups; additional data provide a more legitimate base for identifying broad psychological mechanisms, rather than factors specific to a particular language or culture. We chose to study native speakers of Farsi because the Iranian language and culture differs along a number of dimensions such as language and culture with the previous studies. In addition, unlike many of cultural groups of these studies, Farsi has little in common with English, and has a different writing system, phonology and grammar. Iranian culture also has a different set of socio-cultural expectations about verbal expression, compared to U.S. norms. One last factor that sets this study apart was the participants had for the most part learned their L2 in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. The majority of the small set of participants had not had the opportunity to experience an immersion in the L2 language and culture. While this does not hinder the analysis, it does need to be kept in mind when interpreting the results.

This research was limited in a number of ways. The subject set was small and therefore we cannot rely on the accuracy of the statistical result or generalize beyond our participants from our findings. The data were obtained through a written questionnaire that asked respondents to rate, rank and describe their perception of feelings about words. But as with any such data collected in this manner (using pseudo-ordinal scales) it remains unclear how and what people are actually doing in real life. Emotion words have been shown to be categorically different from concrete and abstract concepts and consequently may need to be studied from a different analytical standpoint. The method used in this study, descriptions and reflections initiated by research questions administered through a questionnaire, will shift us to the referential and cognitive functions, hence, moving us away from the emotional lexicon research topic.

To conclude, the findings from the quantitative and qualitative data confirmed some findings from previous studies and highlighted some interesting new facts, namely that achieving emotional competence in an L2 is highly unlikely in the present EFL learner context. Given the way English is currently taught, even those who feel perfectly ambilingual have different perceptions of their two languages and specific language preferences when discussing certain topics with certain interlocutors. In sum, more work is needed to improve our knowledge of how to promote the acquisition of the expression of emotion in the L2. There are difficult ethical questions in deciding how instructed L2 learning should include the appropriate vocabulary and emotional script to produce optimum proficiency and competence in the language. More research needs to be done in these areas, however, as we do not have enough documented empirical knowledge to justify the legitimacy and problematic factors of including such language in designing materials or curricula. Research may provide new insights into the complex relationship between languages and emotions. Answers to these and similar questions will enrich the understanding of bilingualism and second language learning.

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## Appendix One

### Bilingualism and emotions Questionnaire

**Background information** (All information will be kept confidential).

1. Sex \_\_\_\_\_
2. Age \_\_\_\_\_
3. Education level (highest diploma or degree) \_\_\_\_\_
4. Which ethnic group/community do you belong to or most identify with \_\_\_\_\_
5. Occupation/Profession \_\_\_\_\_
6. Is your occupation related to your bilingualism or languages in any way?

**Linguistic information:**

7. Which languages do you know and what order did you learn them in?  
How old were you when you started learning each language? Was acquisition naturalistic (outside of school), instructed (at school), or both?

1st LANGUAGE (L1):

2nd LANGUAGE (L2):

3rd LANGUAGE (L3) if applicable:

8. Which one do you consider to be your dominant language or both? Explain if necessary.

9. How frequently do you use each of the languages and with whom?

Never = 0, every year = 1, every month = 2, every week = 3, every day = 4, several hours a day = 5) With whom Frequency

Farsi

---

English

---

Other

10. Which language (s) do you use for mental calculations/arithmetic (tick where appropriate)?

Never

sometimes

All the time

Farsi

---

English

---

Other

11. Here are some subjective statements about the languages you know. Please mark to what extent they correspond to your own perceptions. There are no right or wrong answers.(Tick where appropriate)

**Which is your first language?**

Not at all N/A	somewhat	more or less	to a large extent	Absolutely
My L1 is useful				
My L1 is colorful				
My L1 is rich				
My L1 is poetic				
My L1 is emotional				
My L1 is cold				

**Which is your 2nd language?**

Not at all N/A	somewhat	more or less	to a large extent	Absolutely
My L2 is useful				
My L2 is colorful				
My L2 is rich				
My L2 is poetic				
My L2 is emotional				
My L2 is cold				

16. If you are angry, what language do you typically use to express your anger?  
(Tick where appropriate)

**a) When alone**

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	All the time	Not Applicable
L1						
L2						
L3						

**b) In letters and e-mail**

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	All the time	Not Applicable
L1						
L2						
L3						

**c) When talking to friends**

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	All the time	Not Applicable
L1						
L2						
L3						

**d) When talking to parents/partners**

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	All the time	Not Applicable
L1						
L2						
L3						

**e) When talking to strangers**

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	All the time	Not Applicable
L1						
L2						
L3						

17. What language do you express your deepest feelings in? (Tick where appropriate)

**a) When alone**

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	All the time	Not Applicable
L1						
L2						
L3						

**b) In letters and e-mail**

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	All the time	Not Applicable
L1						
L2						
L3						

**c) When talking to friends**

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	All the time	Not Applicable
L1						
L2						
L3						

**d) When talking to parents/partners**

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	All the time	Not Applicable
L1						
L2						
L3						

18. On a scale from 1 (least proficient) to 5 (fully fluent) how do you rate yourself in speaking the L2?

19. Does the phrase "I love you" have the same emotional weight for you in your different languages? Which language does it feel strongest in?

20. Do you have a preference for emotion terms and terms of endearment in one language over all others?  
Which language is it and why?
21. Do your languages have different emotional significance for you? if yes, then how do you see this significance for each language? Is one more appropriate as the language of your emotions than others?
22. Is it easier or more difficult for you to talk about emotional topics in your second or third language (if you have one)? If there is a difference, could you tell us about that and perhaps provide some examples?
23. Do you feel like a different person sometimes when you use your different languages?

