Investigating the role of affects in additional language learning in the context of mobility through a multimodal autobiographical approach

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Abstract

This study focuses on the role of affects in additional language learning in the context of mobility. The starting point is the discovery of Francophone migrant literature by intermediate-level learners of French at an international university in Bulgaria. It concerns in particular the encounter with the Hungarian-Swiss writer Agota Kristof and her autobiographical text "L'Analphabète" [The Illiterate], which reveals a polarized attitude towards languages that have marked her life and career. Brought to reflect on the tension behind the way the author qualifies languages as "enemies" or "friends", the learners share their own attitudes towards the languages of their repertoires through reflective drawings (language portraits), autobiographical narratives, and semi-structured interviews. Qualitative analysis of the collected data was conducted to examine in what ways students express their affects relating to languages with different status and how their attitudes are connected to the mobilities and other significant changes they have experienced. The results indicate that the participants express predominantly positive affects. All are attached to their initial languages, although this strong identification may be destabilizing in critical situations like mobilities abroad and significant life changes. English has an important place in the learners' identity and is related to fluency, comfort, desire, and various opportunities. French is cherished mostly for its aesthetic values, although pleasure is often mixed with anxiety due to the lower levels of proficiency. Students feel attracted to additional languages, which they connect to cultural and leisure activities but have omitted other languages from their repertoires since they do not feel strongly attached to them. It appears that both teachers and learners can benefit from the multimodal autobiographical approach as it allows to explore the complexity of the learners' plurilingual repertoires, the stories behind their construction, and the affects related to this process.

Keywords: *additional language, affects, language portrait, migrant literature, mobility, multimodality, plurilingualism*

Introduction

Research in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has increasingly focused on emotions in the last decade, shifting the focus from anxiety to positive emotions, such as enjoyment and flow, among others (Dewaele & MacIntyre 2022, Dewaele 2023, MacIntyre & Wang 2023). These large-scale studies based on surveys or questionnaires examine the relationship of emotions with academic performance and the language learning process. Their implications are important for the field of language learning and teaching to better understand the learners' needs, motivation, and behavior, as well as to adjust the teaching approaches aimed at reducing students' anxiety and increasing language learning enjoyment. Nonetheless, most of the recent studies have focused on English as a target language, leaving a gap for research on the affective factors involved in the learning of other target languages (Dewaele & MacIntyre 2022: 157). Indeed, today's multilinguals have diverse and complex language repertoires which are often connected to periods of mobility abroad. Research in language teaching and learning related to student mobilities has focused mostly on acquiring linguistic, social-interactive, pragmatic, and intercultural competences (Kinginger 2016, Dervin 2017, Bozhinova 2020, among others). However, the affective side of the encounters with new languages in such contexts also deserves attention, since language learners seek "physical, emotional, and social equilibrium" (Kramsch

2009: 75). Reflective teaching and learning practices seem necessary to raise students' awareness of their emotional responses to changes related to the expansion of their language repertoire, often connected to mobilities abroad.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, language autobiography has been studied in research and adopted in pedagogical interventions as a tool for promoting plurilingual/pluricultural education under the influence of the language policies developed by the Council of Europe in the last two decades (Molinié 2011: 145). It is a way to represent the language repertoire, which combines evolving "linguistic dispositions", including not only language varieties, but also emotions and desires related to the linguistic practices (Busch 2010: 284). Moreover, some experiences in foreign language classes focusing on literary texts by migrant authors have been carried out to encourage thorough reflection on the life trajectories of both writers and learners who may have gone through similar situations (Mathis & Tan 2019, Dompmartin-Normand 2016, Deraîche & Maizonniaux 2018). It is an indirect and less intrusive way to engage in dialogue with the learners without forcing them to share thoughts that they are not ready to express. Indeed, according to Perregaux (2002: 93), it is important to use the "detour principle", which requires a subtle preparation and situational activities at an earlier stage. Students may be exposed first to external sources, such as autobiographical texts of migrant authors in the target language to identify episodes that are close to or in contrast with their personal stories (id.).

In this context, the starting point of the present study is the discovery of francophone migrant literature by French learners at an international university in Bulgaria. In particular, it concerns the encounter with the Hungarian writer Agota Kristof (1935-2011) who moved to Switzerland, and her autobiographical text "L'Analphabète" [The Illiterate] (2004), revealing a polarized attitude towards languages that have marked her life and career. Building upon previous research in SLA on emotions and multilingualism and qualitative studies based on the autobiographical approach in language education, this paper aims to study the role of affects in additional language (AL)[1] learning. More specifically, it examines how students express their affects relating to their language repertoire through the choice of colors and embodied images in their language portraits (LP), as well as their attitudes towards languages in connection with the mobilities they have experienced.

Affects and additional language learning

In today's globalized environment, multilinguals face complex demands and opportunities, their attitudes, behaviors, and language usebeing influenced by socioemotional, sociocultural, sociopolitical and other factors (Narcy-Combes et al. 2019: 36). In general, human behavior can be explained better if we try to understand the underlying feelings, emotions, and motivations (Narcy-Combes et al. 2019: 38, Damasio 2003: 140).

In Damasio's terms, affect functions as a parallel world to our representations of the surrounding reality or the objects and events recalled from memory (Damasio 2018: 99). Emotions defined as "a complex collection of chemical and neural responses forming a distinctive pattern" play a regulatory role which is crucial for the survival or well-being of the organism (Damasio 2003: 53, Reeve 2015: 340). Feelings emerge from emotions in the form of mental images of the body, usually connected to pleasure or pain as a reflection of the bodily states of stability or instability (Damasio 2003: 124, Kramsch 2009: 68).

Research has shown that affects play an important role in situations of encountering an additional language. Pavlenko (2012: 458) emphasizes that "[i]nstead of seeing emotions as beliefs (motivation) or as individual somatic states (anxiety), recent scholarship views language-related emotions as social and

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[1]For practical reasons and to avoid confusion or some connotations related to other notions, such as mother tongue, home language, L1 and foreign language, L2, L3 etc., IL(s) and AL(s) will be used for initial language(s) of socialization and additional languages (Narcy-Combes & al 2019: xii).

relational phenomena, embedded within identity narratives and experienced from particular subject positions". Kramsch (2009: 53-55) found that both the attitude of the teacher and some language properties can provoke pleasure and confidence or, on the contrary, tension, anger, disgust, or even create an identity breakdown and physical discomfort. Interestingly, many learners share that they have transitioned from frustration to pleasure, the latter resulting from the appreciation of their trajectory accompanied by emotional and physical tension (*ibid*.: 63). In fact, we can refer to enjoyment as a more complex emotion in such situations, which occurs "when people not only meet their needs but exceed them to accomplish something new or even unexpected" (Dewaele and MacIntyre 2022: 160). Enjoyment was found to be independent from anxiety, the latter being caused by learners' "distress at their inability to be themselves and to connect authentically with other people through the limitation of the new language" (Horwitz 2017: 41). Dewaele and MacIntyre (2022: 161) found that some of the factors which lead to higher levels of enjoyment and lower levels of anxiety concern the higher number of languages learnt, confidence about performance in the AL, and higher proficiency, especially for adults. In addition, research related to the implementation of cognitive language learning strategies, aimed at raising language awareness, confirms that such strategies successfully complement the affective ones while reducing student anxiety in learning English as a target language (Ruzhekova-Rogozherova 2023: 470).

In her research based on language learning memoirs, Kramsch (2009: 29) also points out the importance of perception for learners of an AL, who describe their experience related to "taste, sight, touch, sound, triggered by the material nature of the language itself". These perceptions generate feelings based on the body adjustments to a "life in a foreign language" (id).Moreover, emotions, such as anger, anxiety, expectation, and pride have an impact on triggering or maintaining motivation, which is important for AL learning (Raby & Narcy-Combes 2009).

Migrant literature as a catalyst for autobiographical writing and self-analysis in the language class

In the field of language education, biography and autobiography have been explored recently as new avenues in research on didactic approaches for language teaching and learning. In her research on language (auto)biography used with both school children and university students, Perregaux (2002: 84) defines this term as "a story more or less long, more or less complete where a person tells him(her)self around a particular theme, the story of his/her relationship to languages, where he/she reports a particular experience, a memorable moment"[2]. People create their current language autobiography based on a selection of facts or clues in the cognitive-affective domains. At the same time, they are free to decide what to say or omit. Biographical and language information are often mixed in the narratives and include personal stories related to migrations. Thus, the (auto)biography functions as a powerful tool that enables individuals to reflect, express their affects, reconstruct their identity, and prepare for gaining new insights (Perregaux 2002: 84-85, Coffey 2015: 501).

Biographical approaches to multilingualism and mobilities allow for the multilingual subjects who have experienced migration to describe their trajectories in narratives and other forms of storytelling (Deraîche & Maizonniaux 2018: 87). In fact, emotions become particularly salient in situations "related to migrations, a minority position, discrimination and marginalization" (Kusters & De Meulder 2019). For example, bilingual writers have reported "selecting a 'stepmother tongue' in order to distance themselves from the memories, taboos, anxieties, and a visceral emotionality of the L1 and to gain control over their words, stories, and plots" (Pavlenko 2012: 461).

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[2]Author's translation from French: "un récit plus ou moins long, plus ou moins complet où une personne se raconte autour d'une thématique particulière, celle de son rapport aux langues, où elle fait état d'un vécu particulier, d'un moment mémorable."

In language education, autobiographical texts with a focus on multilingualism and experience with migration serve as a mediator to encourage the learners' reflection on their own experience, identity, mobility, and progress in language learning in general (Mathis & Tan 2019). Dompmartin-Normand (2016) emphasizes that the discovery of such texts, which reveal the authors' distress and suffering due to situations of exile and need of adaptation, triggers students' ability to express contradictory emotions in their own writings and raise their awareness of the connections among the languages of their repertoires.

Mollinié (2011: 144) reminds that researchers-practitioners using the (auto)biographical approach can use three types of tools to generate data, namely autobiographical texts, interviews, and reflective drawings. This research represents a process of establishing a space of trust and empathy with the multilingual subjects and serves as a means of semiotic mediation for the latter.

Multimodal language autobiographies and affects

According to the connectionist perspective, subjects base their thinking on analogies and metaphors. Our past experiences shape our perceptions of the world, and the brain reactions are conditioned by the existing connections (Narcy-Combes et al. 2014: 155). For example, Kramsch observes that analogy plays an important role in meaning making for language learners in their language memoirs, where "the reality they construct, based on their perceptions of the foreign symbolic forms, is both imagined and real" (2009: 34). Paquin (1997: 197-198) also notes that although we all possess a similar psychobiological perception mechanism, our perception, for example, of an image is subjective because of the different sensory data stored in our memory, as well as our cognitive and emotional reference systems (quoted in Muller & Borgé 2020: 59).

Multimodality is an inherent aspect of multilingualism, i.e. « now speech and writing are intertwined with other modes of meaning such as images, diagrams, picture, icons, video and color », and thus contributes to better communication without relying exclusively on written texts (Narcy-Combes et al. 2019: 22). Indeed, due to the often unconscious nature of the processes that influence language, it is not easy to verbalize one's thoughts or feelings (Bush 2010: 286). Therefore, reflective drawings used in educational research represent a tool to facilitate the expression of the learners' complex experience with different languages. Researchers and practitioners have invited language learners to draw their LPs, which reflect the current representations of their language repertoire linked with the authors' affects and body (Busch 2010, Blouët 2014, Coffey 2015, Manconi 2019, Kusters & De Meulder 2019). According to Busch (2010: 286), "[t]he switch in mode of representation from word to image helps to deconstruct internalized categories, to reflect upon embodied practices and to generate narratives that are less bound to genre expectations." She has found that "[t]he LP reinforces the use of body metaphors in structuring narratives about linguistic practices and facilitates the expression of emotions linked to language." (*ibid*.: 288) Regarding the colors, it is important to note that the interpretations and feelings they can generate are dependent on languages, cultures, and time periods (Pastoureau & Simonnet 2014), which is reflected in the representations of the learners' language repertoires.

Methodology

The present study is based on the multimodal autobiographical approach and was conducted with 18 learners of French who were introduced to Francophone migrant literature in a university-level French literature course. Table 1 summarizes the languages, which were present in the repertoires of the participants and the mobilities they have experienced. To preserve anonymity, students' names in this paper have been replaced by alphanumeric codes (S1-S18).

Table 1: Profiles of the participants.

Nationalities	14 Bulgarians (S1, S3, S4, S5, S6, S8, S9, S10, S11, S13, S15, S16, S17 & S18), 1 Macedonian (S2), 1 Kazakh (S7), 1 Russian (S12), 1 Ukrainian (S14)
Early bilingualism	4 students: Macedonian & Italian (S2), Bulgarian & French (S3), Russian & Kazakh (S7), Ukrainian & Russian (S14)
English	Language of instruction, level C1-C2
French	Target language, level B1-B2 (French literature course)
Other ALs	0 to 5 other languages (average 1.28)
Mobilities	- at least one year: Italy (S2), Canada (S3), France (S9), Vietnam (S8), Bulgaria (4 international students: S2, S7, S12, S14), - shorter periods (S1, S4, S5, S11, S13, S15)

The pedagogical intervention started with the encounter with the autobiographical novel "L'Analphabète" [The Illiterate] by the Hungarian-Swiss writer Agota Kristof. The text reveals her hatred towards German and Russian as the languages of historical enemies in Hungary during her childhood in the 1940s and her struggle to conquer French, which became a "new enemy" she started using for writing later, when she moved to Switzerland. The discussion on the tension behind the author's polarized attitude to these languages triggered students' reflections on their own representations. To understand better the role of affects in AL learning through a multimodal autobiographical approach, this study attempts to find whether multilingual students share similar attitudes towards the languages in their repertoires. It examines in particular, in what ways they express their affects relating to languages with different status and how their attitudes are connected to the mobilities and other significant changes they have lived.

The experience followed five stages based on previous studies on language autobiographies involving multimodal tools and discovery of migrant literature. Reading of the excerpts from Agota Kristof's novel was complemented with a discussion of interviews with the Canadian-born novelist Nancy Huston and the Afghan-born author Atiq Rahimi, both writing in French as non-native speakers. During the second stage, the students worked on their LPs: they were asked to choose a place (or places) and a color (or colors) to represent each language of their repertoire on a human silhouette drawing adopted from Manconi's study (2019: 115). The third step consisted of the composition of an explanatory text in response to questions given to guide the students' reflection concerning the importance of people, places, and moments that have shaped their repertoires. The fourth stage represented a small group and collective discussion of the LPs focusing mostly on the colors and body parts. Finally, four students with extended experience with mobility in their early childhood or later, agreed to participate in semi-structured interviews. The data collection for the purposes of this research obtained approval from the institutional Human Subjects Review Committee. All participants signed an informed consent to allow the researcher to use their works anonymously.

After the data transcription and coding, a qualitative analysis of all the LPs was conducted in parallel with student's narratives to find out how positive or negative connotations were related to languages with different status based on the symbolic of colors, shapes, and body parts (Busch 2010, Blouet 2014, Coffey 2015, Manconi 2019, Kusters & De Meulder 2019). At the final stage, the results of this analysis were crossed with the statements of the interviewed students by focusing on affects, although the latter are often intertwined with other phenomena related to their identity and relationship to languages (Perregaux 2002: 88-90, Dompmartin-Normand 2016, Mathis & Tan 2019).

The next sections present the results of the analysis of the LPs in parallel with their interpretation in the students' narratives and focus on the expression of affects through the choice of colors concerning the ILs, English as the strongest AL in this context, French as the target language, and other ALs. This analysis is followed by a discussion of the representation of these languages through the chosen places

and shapes in the LP. At the end, the impact of mobilities and other life changes on students' evolving attitudes to their language repertoires is examined.

LPs and embodied multilingual repertoires

To represent their**ILs** in the LPs, most of the French learners have chosen the red (*n* = 9) and green colors (*n* = 7). The others have selected blue (*n* = 3), yellow (*n* = 2), pink (*n* = 2) and grey (*n* = 1). Figure 2 represents the distribution of the colors, as well as keywords and phrases associated with each language, which appear in the narratives explaining the LPs. Some students have chosen two colors for the same language or for their two ILs.

**Figure 1**: Colors and keywords used for the ILs in the LPs.
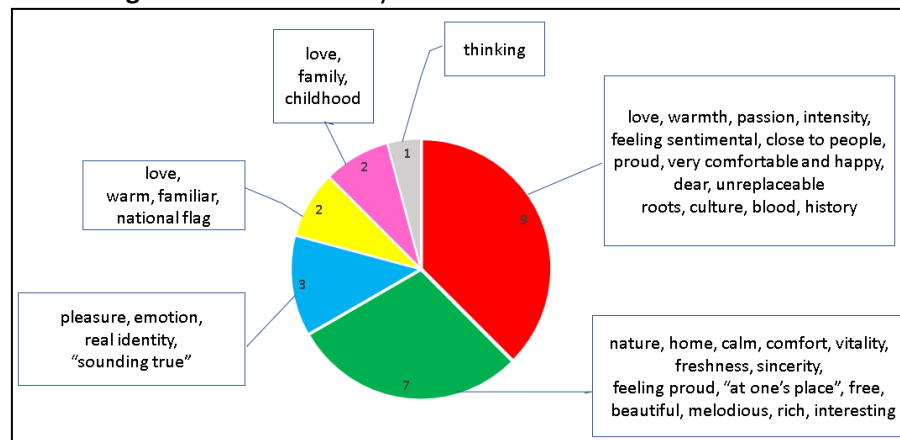
The colors are interpreted in various ways in the narratives. Those who have represented their IL(s) in red link them with love, warmth, passion, or intensity. Some feel emotional, proud, comfortable and happy when they use their language. Not surprisingly, green is associated with nature and represents the feelings or states of calm, comfort, freedom, pride, vitality, freshness, and sincerity. Students who have chosen this color qualify their language as beautiful, melodious, rich, or interesting. Those who have used blue, mention they feel pleasure and say that they can express their real identity or "sound true" only in this language. Yellow means love, warmth, or something familiar. Pink reminds of love, family, and childhood, while grey represents thinking.

The chosen colors actually depict a broader representation, which refers not only to affects ("love", "passion", "calm"), but also to perceptions ("warmth"), ideas ("reminds me about history"), or aesthetic judgements ("beautiful"). Similarly to Busch (2010: 288), we found that the initial languages are "emotionally important and closely linked with students' linguistic identity" as expressed by the keywords "roots", "culture", "blood", "history". The choice of most colors corresponds to their traditional Western interpretation (Pastoureau & Simonnet 2014) but not for all students. For example, love is represented mostly in red, which is the traditional color of passion, but some students have chosen pink and yellow for the same feeling, most probably because they connect it simultaneously to other close images, perceptions, and ideas, such as childhood (pink) and warmth (yellow).

The students have chosen mostly cold but bright colors to represent **English** (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Colors and keywords used for English in the LPs.
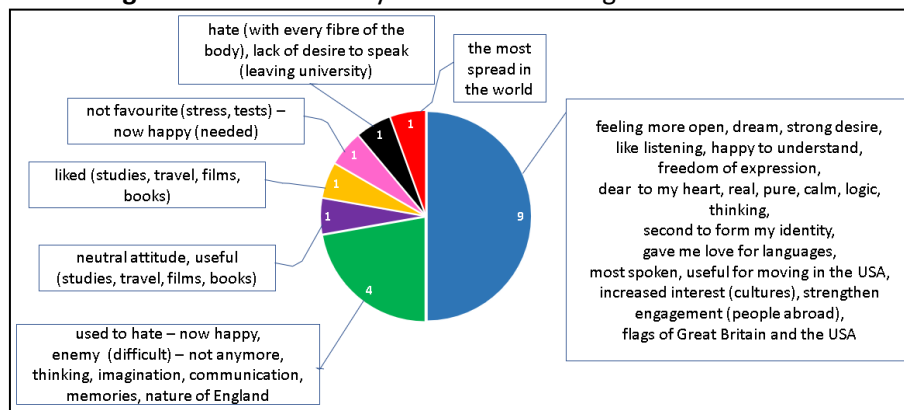
Half of the participants have selected blue to express satisfaction of being fluent in this language and a strong desire to learn dating back to their childhood. Some even consider it as their second IL and describe it as real, pure, calm, and logic. Four students have represented English in green and associated it with a change in their attitude towards the language. In general, everyone insists on its role as a lingua franca for both educational and leisure activities, which is a source of satisfaction and motivation. The only exception is the Russian student who has used black and expressed strong negative feelings, which may be due to sociopolitical reasons because her life was affected by the war in Ukraine.

Interestingly, warm colors are almost absent from the representations related to English (only two students used red and orange), on the contrary, more students have chosen red, yellow and orange to represent **French** (*n* = 8).

Figure 3: Colors and keywords used for French in the LPs.
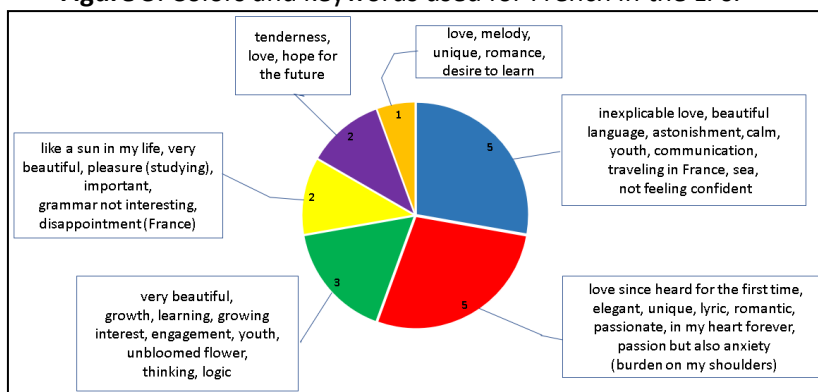
The idea about love at first "sound" is present in some LPs: students love how it sounds: "elegant", "unique", "lyric", or "romantic". The red color means that they are passionate, and some say it will "be in [their] heart forever". The keywords and phrases used to explain the yellow and orange colors are for example: "like a sun in my life", "pleasure" and "desire" to learn it, "melody", "romance", etc. However, for some students, the warm colors have negative connotations. For example, S1 has depicted French as a "burden on [her] shoulders" using red to express her anxiety. S12 has linked yellow to grammatical difficulties and her disappointment after she visited France.

The cool colors bear mostly positive connotations. French is linked to youth, communication, travels, the sea, hope for the future. At the same time, many mention they do not feel confident using the

language yet. The green color is related to growth, learning, and engagement. One student has used the metaphor of an unbloomed flower:

> *La couleur est verte car elle symbolise la jeunesse et me rappelle une fleur non mûre qui n'a pas encore poussé et fleuri, comme ma connaissance du français.* (The color is green because it symbolizes youth and reminds me of an unripe flower that has not grown up and bloomed yet, like my knowledge of French.) (narrative, S13)

As seen in Table 2, many students speak **other ALs** and have represented them in different colors.

Table 2: Colors used for the ALs other than English and French.

ALs	colors	n. of students
Spanish	yellow	5
German	blue, green, and purple	3
Italian	blue and orange	3
Bulgarian	green and yellow	3
Greek	purple and turquoise	2
Korean	purple and pink	2
Serbian Chinese Portuguese	red	1
Russian Finnish	blue	1
Arabic	green	1
Czech	none	1

For example, Spanish is in yellow for all the five students who relate it to the sunny and warm country. German is in blue, green, or purple and the students relate it to logic, freshness, or hardship. Italian is in blue and orange and represents freedom. Greek, in turquoise and purple, is associated with the sea and freedom.

Korean is an interesting case for some students who started learning it on their own just because they were very intrigued by Korean pop music and consider the language as special and unique:

> *Grâce à la musique et à la langue coréennes, j'ai pu rencontrer des personnes partageant les mêmes intérêts et, à ce jour, j'ai de bonnes relations amicales. J'ai utilisé les notes violettes, car le violet est considéré comme une couleur unique, et grâce à la K-pop, apprendre le coréen était une expérience spéciale pour moi qui a une place importante dans mon cœur.* (Thanks to Korean music and language, I was able to meet like-minded people and, to this day, have good friendships. I used the purple notes, as purple is considered a unique color, and thanks to K-pop, learning Korean was a special experience for me that has an important place in my heart.) (narrative, E2)

Sometimes, different nuances are used, the pale meaning that there is no strong connection with the language yet. It is interesting also that in the interviews, two students mention languages they had omitted in the LPs and narratives. These are mostly mandatory foreign languages at school which were not studied with enthusiasm.

Regarding **the place of ILs in the body silhouette**, the majority (*n* = 15) have chosen the heart and say that these are deeply engraved, have a special place, or are at the heart of their identity. In five LPs, this place is shared with English or French. Five students place their language in their head or brain as the highest position. The central body part or stomach is chosen to represent the core of their identity and also warmth, love, link with family and sometimes, gastronomy. Two students have chosen the

mouth for pleasant communication in a regional dialect and the hands. Examples of LPs are shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Examples of LPs.
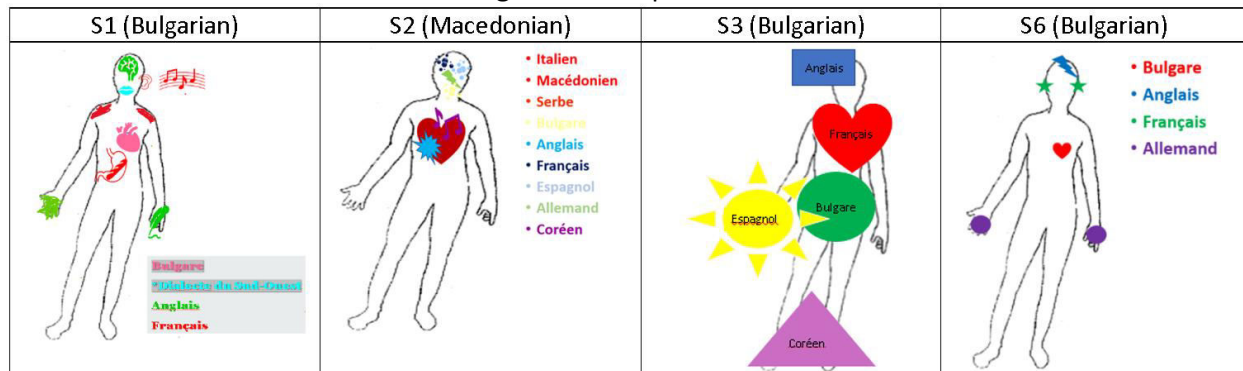
As regards the place of the ALs, **English and French** are represented in the central or upper body parts to symbolize love, passion, identity, youth, growth, pleasure, thinking, etc. **ALs other than English and French** occupy peripheral body parts in most LPs (hands, arms, shoulders, legs, feet, toes) and are linked to mobility, dances and music, gestures, but also difficulty or first steps in the language.

The examples below contain interpretations of the place of ALs referring to feet and hands:

Le grec marqué en violet, représente cependant une langue toujours bien inconnue, donc je la place sur le doigt de mon pied droit. (The purple for Greek, however, represents a language that is still quite unknown, so I place it on the toe of my right foot.) (S5)

Il [le portugais] se trouve sur mon cheville pour symboliser que j'y ai à peine mis le pied. (It [Portuguese] is on my ankle to symbolize that I've barely set foot on it.) (S16)

Pour moi, l'allemand est entre mes mains parce qu'il sonne très dur. J'associe les choses difficiles avec la force, donc c'est entre les mains. (For me, German is in my hands because it sounds very hard. I associate difficult things with strength, so it's in my hands.)(S6)

L'espagnol est une langue que j'aime et que je connais un peu, mais j'ai encore besoin de le pratiquer. C'est pourquoi je le mets sur la main qui fait le plus de mouvement dans le corps, ce qui signifie qu'il faut etudier plus. (Spanish is a language I love and know a bit about, but I still need to practice it. That's why I put it on the hand that makes the most movement in the body, which means I have to study more.)(S10)

Similarly to previous studies, it seems that the place in the body silhouette is often connected to widely spread metaphorical images, which can be found for example in idiomatic expressions and pictograms (Coffey 2015: 508, Manconi 2019: 117). Having used *MS PowerPoint* to complete their LP, many students have chosen shapes from the available tools and commented on their meaning. In addition to the heart, a cloud is used to represent unstable knowledge, freedom, or dreams. Lightning represents discovery. Sun is used for sunny, warm countries or people. Musical notes symbolize beautiful sounds, melody, and songs. Analogy with pictograms helps students formulate their ideas, perceptions, and feelings inspired by their experience with languages.

Mobility andother life changes affecting language use

Previous research has found that language repertoires are not static but represent "a bundle of linguistic dispositions subject to transformation or modification over time" (Bush 2010: 284). The two students who have lived abroad and started using an AL in preschool share some stressful situations from their childhood. In her narrative, S3 says about French she started learning in Canada that "*c'est une langue très passionnée qui restera toujours dans mon cœur*" (it's a very passionate language that will always remain in my heart). However, in the interview, she mentions that "it was a bit stressful because it was my first time speaking French and when all of the people around me started talking to me and I constantly shifted speaking to English because I was feeling uncomfortable." (S3, interview). In fact, she was trying to speak English in addition to Bulgarian (her IL) at home. The other student (S2) shared her difficulties with both speaking Macedonian (her IL) and learning Italian (her first AL). She recalls that she progressed in Italian by communicating in the kindergarten, with her landlords, and watching cartoons and culinary shows with her parents. She also struggled with Macedonian, which she learned to speak and write correctly in middle school later, when her family returned to her home country.

Furthermore, students who were not early bilinguals remember how they overcame their initial frustration and finally felt happywith their achievements. S9 recalls for example her difficulties with French at high school in Bulgaria and later, her progress thanks to the exchange year in France:

> And we wanted to be like in the English class. But I wasn't accepted, and then I was in French. It was really hard […] and one of the teachers before going to the exchange, told me that I won't learn any language with money. […] Yeah, it was really hard for me because I was 15 years old. […] But I had a good progression, and I was the first in class when I came back. I wasn't like learning only street French, but I went to school there, so I wrote, spoke […] I had the chance to be in a good family. From them I learned a lot. (interview, S9)

In this case, the transformation is triggered by strong emotions, the student trying to overcome her initial disappointment and to refute the opinion of her first French teacher in order to achieve internal harmony. Moreover, her experience with English also started with negative emotions as she did not have the chance to learn it well in her small hometown:

> So I continued to hate English till 12th grade here in high school because it was my second language here and we don't usually study enough the second language. […] (id.)

This feeling was reinforced later, due to stress related to the exam needed for admission to university. She finally succeeded and now sees it in green, which she compares to a green tick box for a successfully completed test. In both cases, frustration is related to the school setting (bad language choice, teacher's attitude, teaching conditions). Motivation, satisfaction, and pride are driven by opportunities related to mobility and educational goals but also the desire to overcome a past destabilizing experience, which may be connected for example with teachers' negative feedback and attitudes.

Sociopolitical changes also influence the attitudes towards languages. For example, the Russian and Kazakh students reported how they started feeling embarrassed, scared, and ashamed speaking Russian abroad after the beginning of the war in Ukraine:

> *Mais ce n'est pas que des émotions positives que la langue russe me fait sentir: après le début de la guerre entre Russie et Ukraine j'ai commencé à éprouver honte et peur en parlant russe dans les pays européens, car c'est la langue qui est associée avec un État terroriste.* (But it is not only positive emotions that the Russian language makes me feel: after the start of the war between Russia and Ukraine I began to experience shame and fear when speaking Russian in European countries, because this language is associated with a terrorist state.) (narrative, S12)

I mean, there is definitely some negative attitude towards Russia but over here it's not that bad, but in other places. [..]. Yeah, I have a friend who has been beaten just because he talked Russian […] it was in Spain. (interview, S7)

These examples illustrate "how languages become imbued with negative values in the process of *misrecognition*",the latter meaning that "languages and linguistic varieties become linked with character types and cultural traits, so that linguistic behaviors of others are seen as deriving from speakers' political agendas, intellectual abilities, and social and moral character" (Pavlenko 2012: 463). In this way, a language may symbolize oppression, domination, or exploitation in some regions of the world. It seems that our students have experienced situations, which are close to what they read in the autobiographical texts by Francophone authors studied in the French literature class. However, the situations seem more complex in today's globalized world. For example, although the Russian student shared her deep hatred towards English and even was planning to leave the university, she admitted that it was actually very helpful to know this language today.

Discussion and limitations

From this research, it becomes apparent that the emotional connection with the IL is very strong. The students represent it as the core of their identity, the majority using red and green colors in their LPs to express positive feelings such as love, happiness, or pride, best symbolized by the heart shape. This reflects the process of *identification*, in which "languages become symbolically linked to particular groups of people and emblematic of particular identities" (Pavlenko 2012: 463). However, for some students, a conflict with the process of *misrecognition* emerges, which concerns particularly Russian-speaking students whose internal stability was undermined in the context of the current war. This situation could also explain the mixed feelings one of them expressed towards English, probably associated with both enemy countries and, at the same time, bearing practical value.

As the strongest AL of the students, English has a special place between their ILs and the other ALs, shaping their identity and generating a state of flow[3], sometimes after a stressful period at school. These results are in line with other qualitative studies based on language autobiographies and LPs, in which most of the participants report a very positive experience with English or feel attracted to this language, often connecting it to its prestige as a global language, travels abroad, educational, cultural, and leisure activities (Busch 2010: 289, Blouet 2014: 58, 62).

Studying French after English is a source of intense positive emotions and feelings mostly attributed to the aesthetic appreciation of the language properties and hope to use it fluently in the future. At the same time, anxiety is often expressed due to the perceived difficulties related to the learning process and in some cases, stressful situations encountered during extended periods of stay and travel in France and Canada. As an explanation for the higher level of enjoyment related to ALs other than English, Dewaele and Macintyre (2022: 172) suggest that since English is usually studied early as a part of the institutional curriculum, the learners do not feel involved in an extraordinary activity, while those studying another AL understand that they need to invest "their full emotional commitment to be successful".

However, in our research, attitudes towards other ALs vary depending on the individual perceptions and experience with each language. They are represented in different colors in the LPs, the only recurrent image being yellow for Spanish linked with warm and sunny Spain. Despite their low proficiency, students feel attracted to these ALs, which they relate for example to freedom, freshness, or uniqueness. On the opposite, some ALs were excluded from the LPs, which seems to be a sign of

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[3] Defined as "an optimal state of intrinsic motivation, where the person is fully immersed in what they are doing" (Csíkszentmihályi 1990: 5, quated in Dewaele & MacIntyre 2022: 159).

indifference, a lack of connection to the language, or bad memories. Indeed, for some students it is impossible to draw a language, if they cannot connect it with someone close or do not feel any personal relationship to it (Perregaux 2009: 37, Kusters & De Meulder 2019).

With regards to the embodied language representations, this study corroborates to some extent the core-to-periphery pattern found by Coffey (2015: 506), where the mother tongue (English) is represented by the head or body trunk due to "hierarchical perceptions of comfort, centrality, and proficiency". However, it is important to consider the status of every language, as well as the learners' "emotionally and bodily lived experience of language" (Kusters & De Meulder 2019). English and French as ALs with specific status in this educational context appear close to the core for different reasons: English relates to proficiency, comfort, and desire, while French, to intensive emotions and aesthetic perceptions. The peripheral place of ALs other than English and French relates not only to lower proficiency but also to the ideas of movements and efforts.

Comparing their experience with Agota Kristof's attitude, the majority consider their languages as friends in the sense that they contribute to their personal development, open new opportunities, or find this polarization irrelevant today. Five students, who have agreed that sometimes languages can be enemies, refer to either difficulties related to the AL learning or hypothetical situations where a language is imposed by oppressors, as in the case with the writer's experience.

A limitation of this study is that part of the data reflects a static view on languages, given that as a tool, the LP represents a snapshot image of the author's language repertoire (Blouet 2014: 20, Kusters & De Meulder 2019: §59). The dynamic nature of affects is more evident in the narratives guided by specific questions and in the semi-structured interviews. While the narratives did not reveal rich reflections on changes due to mobility, the semi-structured interviews allowed for more substantial discussion of this aspect. Interviews with more students would be helpful to collect comprehensive data related to the research questions. Other tools could be for example, a creative writing task following the discussion of autobiographical texts by migrant writers (Deraîche & Maizonniaux 2018: 87), as well as asking the students to collect oral biographical accounts, which trigger reflection on their own attitudes to languages (Perregaux 2002: 86-87).

Conclusion

The research questions of this study were based on the reading of Agota Kristof's autobiographical text revealing her polarized attitude towards languages due to her encounters with sociopolitical changes in her home country and migration. Through the LPs and narratives used as tools to help the multilingual participants share their emotions, we found that they express predominantly positive attitudes towards the languages in their repertoires. The ILs are clearly considered "at the heart" of their identity. English is an important AL, which shapes their linguistic identity and brings satisfaction, both in terms of efforts invested to construct their skills, and as a base for future development. Learning French, the target language in this context, is perceived as a source of pleasure and aesthetic appreciation mixed with anxiety attributed to the difficulties. Furthermore, many students feel attracted to other languages, which are usually not part of the institutional curriculum and relate their amazement to cultural and leisure activities.

Being aware that languages bring them opportunities, these multilingual students are eager to travel abroad and use their languages for various purposes. However, most of them have not faced or do not remember situations where others have demonstrated a contrasting attitude towards their languages. Indeed, such situations may be destabilizing, as in the case with the Russian-speaking students in the context of the war in Ukraine. Having in mind how important previous experience is for plurilingual education, the multimodal autobiographical approach has the advantage to put this experience at the center of the learning process through dialogue with the students. Clearly, this approach has the potential to empower the language learners: they can become better positioned with respect to the

diversity of their plurilingual repertoire, reassess their past struggles, failures, and achievements, as well as current and future engagement in language learning. Further research may explore how mediation based on autobiographical texts used in the language classroom, including through virtual exchange with others, can foster decentering and prepare learners for mobilities abroad and to face challenges in other complex situations.

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