



## Emotional expressivity among monolingual and bilingual populations

Prof. Dr. Muljaim Kacka<sup>1</sup> | [muljaim.kacka@kolegji-heimerer.eu](mailto:muljaim.kacka@kolegji-heimerer.eu) | [ORCID](#) | Kolegji Heimerer

Blerta Krasniqi<sup>2</sup> | [blerta.krasniqi@doktorant.up.krakow.pl](mailto:blerta.krasniqi@doktorant.up.krakow.pl) | [ORCID](#) | Uniwersytet Komisji Edukacji Narodowej w Krakowie and Kolegji Heimerer

Bardha Kika<sup>3</sup> | [bardha.kika@kolegji-heimerer.eu](mailto:bardha.kika@kolegji-heimerer.eu) | [ORCID](#) | Kolegji Heimerer

# e\_AOPL Journal of Social Sciences

## Volume 2 | Number 1

Received:  
**13.11.2023**

Accepted:  
**08.12.2023**

Published:  
**31.12.2023**

<https://www.africaopl.org/publications/categories/e-aopl-journal-of-social-sciences>



Gikondo, Kicukiro, Umujyi wa Kigali, Rwanda



[info@africaopl.org](mailto:info@africaopl.org)



+48727432772



[www.africaopl.org](http://www.africaopl.org)

**Abstract:** Supposedly, individuals learn their native language as their first language, followed by the acquisition of a second language. Bilingualism is known as the ability to use and speak two languages, and it is quite common in more than half of the world's population. Prior evidence argues that there is a link between emotion processing and bilingualism across individuals. To explore if such a difference is present among bilingual and monolingual samples, we administered a questionnaire to 124 participants. Our findings show that both monolingual and bilingual people express similar levels of impulsivity and positive and negative emotions; however, language proficiency has no bearing on their emotional expressivity. Thus, the paper concludes that bilingualism and monolingualism do not have a significant impact on emotional expressivity.

**Keywords:** monolingualism, bilingualism, emotional expressivity.

## 1 Emotions conceptualisation and specifics

Emotions are a universal response to an external stimulus by integrating physiological, cognitive, and behavioural components as a response to the given situation (Lorette and Dewaele 2018). Thus, emotions play a significant role in individual thoughts, beliefs, and actions by determining one's social relationships and interactions (Van Kleef et al. 2016). Therefore, how someone might feel also provides information about one's feeling state, expressions or social communicative signals, and behavioural reactions (Macintyre and Vincze 2017). Both affective and cognitive mechanisms have an impact on emotions. The affective mechanism is influenced by external stimuli (*feeling*), while the cognitive mechanism comes as a result of an objective and conscious evaluation (*thinking*) (An et al. 2017). As a result, their expression at the individual or group level is determined by all behaviours (and involuntary physiological reactions). In this way, the expression of emotion is conceptualised from the exchanged information within the interaction. In specific situations, specific behaviours and physiological reactions of individuals or groups are expressed as expressions of a certain emotion with a certain intensity. However, how individuals might express their emotions might vary across cultures and communities, due to how a specific culture might perceive and express different emotions (Alqarni and Dewaele 2018). Additionally, cultural norms can shape how emotions are expressed, leading to cultural differences in this regard. For example, some cultures do not value expressing anger or sadness in public, while in other cultures, emotional expressivity is encouraged and welcomed. Thus, it impacts emotional expressivity towards social interactions while misinterpreting the emotional cues that are prevalent in specific cultural contexts. Therefore, understanding such mechanisms with regard to emotional expressivity might be important for cross-cultural communication. Psychological research on the topic of emotions has provided sufficient evidence to claim that emotional experiences and expressions might be culturally dependent. Emotional frequency and intensity might vary from cultural context to cultural context, and in each context, the "perceived" central emotions are those that help individuals act in proper ways (Mesquita, Boiger, and De Leersnyder 2016).

## 2 Monolingualism and bilingualism interrelated processes

Monolingualism is defined as the ability to speak and have an active knowledge of only one language. A child's language development is primarily influenced by their environment, meaning that their native language is often learned before starting to speak a second language later in life (Pransiska 2016). In contrast, bilingualism refers to the ability to speak two different languages in everyday life, providing many social and communicative benefits, such as different cultural understanding, enriched social interactions, or professional advancement (Bialystok 2010).

Monolingual individuals tend not to have the same cognitive advantages as bilingual individuals; however, proficiency in one's native language is required for further achievements. Additionally, monolinguals have the opportunity to learn other languages, which provides additional benefits in adulthood (Antonioni 2019). Hence, speaking two languages provides various cognitive benefits, such as improved executive functions, better performance in problem-solving tasks (Díaz 2022), and conflict monitoring and resolution (Freeman, Shook, and Marian 2016).

Monolingual and bilingual individuals might perceive specific words differently, have different approaches to perspective-taking, and use different verbal and nonverbal cues. Interestingly, bilinguals report a higher level of self-esteem, stress management, and adaptability, which help with emotional expressivity in bilingualism (Panicacci 2014).

Bilingual individuals might also perceive emotional states differently, depending on the context and the language spoken (Pavlenko 2002; Ardila et al. 2017). According to (Harris, Gleason, and Ayciçeği 2006), a spoken first language is more likely to be used for encoding early life experiences. Also, emotional word labels are impacted differently from second language words learned later in life. Late bilinguals prefer to use their first language while facing different situations with increased emotionality. This is due to behavioural and physiological mechanisms in relation to emotion processing, such as an accurate activation of emotions, emotional stability while remembering one's past memories, and mental activation in the first language. Hence, bilinguals' responses during different behavioural paradigms are often slower, accompanied by fewer physiological and electrophysiological responses, meaning that first language tends to dominate for first language processing (Kazanas, McLean, and Altarriba 2019). Bilingual individuals' express emotions differently than monolinguals; therefore, language processing and cultural context can change emotional perception

and expressivity in the first and second languages (Kheirzadeh and Hajiabed 2016). However, bilinguals tend to have metapragmatic awareness, allowing them to reflect on their feelings and their language usage practices in different emotional situations (Dewaele 2011). Bilingual individuals tend to prefer speaking in their first language when communicating feelings, anger, performing mental calculations, and using inner speech. They consider their first language to be emotionally stronger than their second language, and this is also related to their expression of emotions, emotionality, and social traits (Dewaele, 2012). For instance, the first language is more emotionally charged (Bakic and Škifić 2017). Individuals in their first language can also say the word “I love you” more sincerely. However, expressing emotions in the first language, especially anger, is more dominant in the first language.

The results of a conducted a proficiency data analysis, revealed that emotion-related language was often linked to decreased accuracy in the first language and increased fluency in the second language (Kim and Starks 2008). However, emotion conceptualisation is influenced by individual experiences. Various linguistic categories affect the experience of emotions, emotional intelligence, and social sharing based on investigated therapists approaches to working with bilingual clients (Santiago-Rivera and Altarriba 2002). They discovered that emotional states affected clients’ language switching. Clients tended to switch to their native language to express negative emotions such as anger or worry. However, second language serves as a prompt when clients want to distance themselves from heavier emotional events or the perception accompanying those (Santiago-Rivera and Altarriba 2002). Bilingual clients switch to their native language spontaneously when recounting conflict-based experiences and discussing very early memories (Robinson and Altarriba 2014).

Taken together, after exploring the variety of emotions in terms of language processing, the main purpose of the study is to investigate the manifestation of emotions in monolingual and bilingual samples. The present study explored emotional states such as positive emotional expressivity and negative emotional expressivity. Additionally, we are investigating whether there are any variations in the level of impulsive emotions between monolingual and bilingual samples in the Republic of Kosovo. Based on the literature review, we hypothesise as follows:

- H1: Monolingual people express more negative emotions than bilingual people.
- H2: Monolingual people express more positive emotions than bilingual people.

- H3: There are significant differences in the level of expression of impulsive emotions in bilingual and monolingual persons (*non-directional effect*).

### 3 Methods

#### 3.1 Participants

This study included 124 participants ranging in age from 18 to 70 years old living in Kosovo ( $M = 26.5$ ,  $SD = 10.23$ ). The participants were divided into two groups based on the languages they speak; in total, of the 124 participants in this study, 63.7% were bilingual and 36.3% were monolingual. The majority of participants were female, 60.5%.

#### 3.2 Instrument

We used the standardised Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire (Gross and John 1997). The questionnaire was translated into Albanian for collecting the data. Most recent articles have also used the Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire, and they found that BEQ is a valid and reliable measurement for research purposes (Kupper, Duijndam, and Karreman 2020; Akan and Barişkin 2017). Accordingly, *positive emotional expressivity* includes the expression of positive emotions such as joy or happiness, while *negative emotional expressivity* includes the expression of negative emotions such as sadness or anxiety (Gross and John 1997). Additionally, in BEQ, there is also another facet known as the *Impulse Strength Facet*, which represents one's tendency to act impulsively when experiencing different positive or negative emotions. Higher scores on this facet indicate a higher impulsivity level when experiencing different emotions. Please note that in our study, we referred to this facet as impulsivity.

#### 3.3 Procedure

The participants were informed of their role in this study and the procedures and steps for completing the questionnaire. The ethical information, such as data confidentiality and withdrawal rights, was presented to them at any moment they wanted to complete their participation without any penalty. The questionnaire was administered online. The data was exported to IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences SPSS Version 21.0 (SPSS Software 2023) for statistical analysis.

### 4 Results

In order to test our hypothesis, we conducted a t-test to investigate if there are any differences between monolingual and bilingual individuals. We saw that there is no significant difference between our samples in terms of the emotional expressivity of positive and negative emotions, as well as impulsivity. Additionally, mean scores for each facet were very similar between both groups. More details of the descriptive data are shown in the table below.

**Table 1.** *Descriptive data of our samples*

	Monolingual – Mean	Bilingual – Mean	Monolingual – Standard Deviation	Bilingual – Standard Deviation
Negative emotions	20.54	20.82	2.87	2.70
Positive emotions	8.70	9.08	2.13	2.32
Impulsivity	14.44	13.64	4.29	4.25

**Table 2.** *Comparison of groups on emotional expressivity*

		F	Sig.	t	Sig (2-tailed)
Negative emotions	Equal variances assumed	.678	.412	-.528	.598
	Equal variances not assumed			-.537	.592
Positive emotions	Equal variances assumed	.324	.570	-.916	.361
	Equal variances not assumed			-.889	.376
Impulsivity	Equal variances assumed	.161	.689	.997	.321
	Equal variances not assumed			.998	.321



#### 4.1 Additional variables

We also analysed the relationship between our variables and found that there is a significant, moderate relationship between all our variables. All variables were positively related to one another. More details are shown in the table below.

**Table 3.** Correlation analysis between our emotional expressivity facets

	Negative emotions	Positive emotions	Impulsivity
Negative emotions	1	.375**	.304**
Positive emotions	.375**	1	.461**
Impulsivity	.304**	.461**	1

**Note.** *P* – value of the correlation between our variables is .01.

#### 5 Discussion

The main aim of the present study was to explore how emotions are expressed in monolingual and bilingual individuals. The results of the study figure out whether there are differences in the expression of positive and negative emotions, as well as impulsivity. Initially, the study hypothesised that monolingual individuals would express more negative emotions than bilingual individuals. However, the results obtained from the study show that there is no significant difference in the expression of negative emotions between monolingual and bilingual individuals. The study by (Kheirzadeh and Hajiabed 2016) supports the rejection of the initial hypothesis. Their research suggests that bilingual speakers process negative words more deeply in their second language because the unpleasant mood accompanying negative words is weaker in the second language than in the first language and thus more easily tolerated.

The second hypothesis of this study suggested that monolingual individuals express more positive emotions than bilingual individuals. However, the results obtained from this research do not support this hypothesis. (Kheirzadeh and Hajiabed 2016) conducted additional research that potentially might go in similar directions with our findings, based on the language specificity theory proposed by (Marian and Neisser 2000) regarding the transcription of happy memories in the first language. According to this theory, memories are more likely to be recalled in the language in which the event occurred. The participants in the current study consisted of both bilingual and monolingual individuals living in Iran, where the primary language is Persian. As a result, the second language did not significantly impact their recollection of happy



memories because the event occurred in their first language, Persian. Thus, the transcription of happy memories in the first language aligns with the language specificity theory above mentioned.

Therefore, while the third hypothesis is not supported by the results of this research, other studies suggest that there are differences in the expression of impulsive emotions between bilingual and monolingual people. Our findings can be prone to cultural factors. Kosovo is a collectivist country, involving many ethnicities such as Serbian, Bosnian, and Egyptian. In similar cases, historical and political circumstances can result in language barriers and cultural differences, thus impacting emotional processing and expressivity compared to homogenous communities. Additionally, research also noted that individuals from collectivistic cultures prioritise group harmony and interdependence, becoming more emotional restraint, while individuals from individualistic cultures prioritise autonomy and independence, hence valuing emotional expressivity (Matsumoto and Yoo 2006).

Our study has limitations, such as a relatively small sample size, and future research with larger and more diverse samples could provide additional insights into the cultural influence on emotional expressivity towards monolingual and bilingual samples. Additionally, future research can investigate whether the age of second language acquisition has an impact on producing and expressing specific types of emotions, or whether emotional intensity or frequency is different between monolingual and bilingual samples, and if so, if it varies depending on the context, such as in professional or personal settings or in different cultural contexts. Emotional processing in a second language might be different for some individuals compared to their native language (Ardila et al. 2017). Additionally, it is noted that second language anxiety can be influenced by culture-specific factors (Phongsa, Mohamed Ismail, and Low 2018). Therefore, further studies can also investigate and highlight the role of cultural context in relation to one's emotional expressivity towards monolingual and bilingual samples. Potentially, different cultures might perceive and express emotions differently, which is also affected by one's language abilities. This could shed light on further potential underlying mechanisms of culture towards language abilities such as bilingualism and emotional expression.

## **6 Conclusion**

The present study investigated emotional expressivity differences between monolingual and bilinguals' samples in Kosovo. Our findings showed no significant differences between the two groups. However, it is important to emphasise that our findings cannot be generalised to other cultural contexts since Kosovo is an environment where multiple ethnicities and languages are displayed, which might have influenced the results of our study. Further research can be conducted in collectivist and multi-ethnic cultures in order to provide further data. Taken together, our study suggests that further research is needed to explore the relationship between language abilities and emotional processing and expressivity in greater depth. Thus, more empirical support can be derived for a better understanding of the interrelationship of language, emotions, and cultural context.

## References

- Akan, Şebnem Tunay, and Elif Barişkin. 2017. 'Reliability and Validity Indicators of Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire in the Context of Culture and Gender'. *Turk Psikiyatri Dergisi* 28 (1): 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.5080/U13378>.
- Alqarni, Nada, and Jean Marc Dewaele. 2018. 'A Bilingual Emotional Advantage? An Investigation into the Effects of Psychological Factors in Emotion Perception in Arabic and in English of Arabic-English Bilinguals and Arabic/English Monolinguals'. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367006918813597> 24 (2): 141–58. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367006918813597>.
- An, Sieun, Li Jun Ji, Michael Marks, and Zhiyong Zhang. 2017. 'Two Sides of Emotion: Exploring Positivity and Negativity in Six Basic Emotions across Cultures'. *Frontiers in Psychology* 8 (APR): 253368. <https://doi.org/10.3389/FPSYG.2017.00610/BIBTEX>.
- Antoniou, Mark. 2019. 'The Advantages of Bilingualism Debate'. *Annual Review of Linguistics* 5: 395–415. <https://doi.org/10.1146/ANNUREV-LINGUISTICS-011718-011820>.
- Ardila, Alfredo, Anna B. Cieřlicka, Roberto R. Heredia, and Mónica Rosselli. 2017. 'Erratum to: Psychology of Bilingualism'. *Psychology of Bilingualism*, E1–E1. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-64099-0\\_13](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-64099-0_13).
- Bakic, Antonela, and Sanja Škifić. 2017. 'The Relationship between Bilingualism and Identity in Expressing Emotions and Thoughts'. *Íkala, Revista de Lenguaje y Cultura* 22 (1): 33–54. <https://doi.org/10.17533/UDEA.IKALA.V22N01A03>.
- Bialystok, Ellen. 2010. 'Bilingualism'. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science* 1 (4): 559–72. <https://doi.org/10.1002/WCS.43>.
- Dewaele, Jean-Marc. 2011. 'Reflections on the Emotional and Psychological Aspects of Foreign Language Learning and Use'. [http://www.winter-verlag.de/en/detail/t3687002/Anglistik\\_Bd\\_22\\_2011\\_Heft\\_1/](http://www.winter-verlag.de/en/detail/t3687002/Anglistik_Bd_22_2011_Heft_1/).
- Díaz, Vanessa. 2022. 'Minds in Action: Evidence That Linguistic Diversity Helps Children Build a Theory of Mind'. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* 25 (1): 70–80. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1366728921000109>.
- Freeman, Max R., Anthony Shook, and Viorica Marian. 2016. 'Cognitive and Emotional Effects of Bilingualism in Adulthood.' *Bilingualism across the Lifespan: Factors*

- Moderating Language Proficiency.*, June, 285–303.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/14939-016>.
- Gross, James J., and Oliver P. John. 1997. 'Revealing Feelings: Facets of Emotional Expressivity in Self-Reports, Peer Ratings, and Behavior'. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 72 (2): 435–48. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.72.2.435>.
- Harris, Catherine L., Jean Berko Gleason, and Ayşe Ayçiçeği. 2006. 'When Is a First Language More Emotional? Psychophysiological Evidence from Bilingual Speakers'. *Bilingual Minds: Emotional Experience, Expression, and Representation*, January, 257–83. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781853598746-012>.
- Kazanas, Stephanie A., Jared S. McLean, and Jeanette Altarriba. 2019. 'Emotion and Emotion Concepts'. *The Handbook of the Neuroscience of Multilingualism*, January, 313–34. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119387725.CH15>.
- Kheirzadeh, Shiela, and Mohammadreza Hajiabed. 2016. 'Differential Language Functioning of Monolinguals and Bilinguals on Positive–Negative Emotional Expression'. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research* 45 (1): 55–69. <https://doi.org/10.1007/S10936-014-9326-2/METRICS>.
- Kleef, Gerben A. Van, Arik Cheshin, Agneta H. Fischer, and Iris K. Schneider. 2016. 'Editorial: The Social Nature of Emotions'. *Frontiers in Psychology* 7 (JUN): 205474. <https://doi.org/10.3389/FPSYG.2016.00896/BIBTEX>.
- Kupper, Nina, Stefanie Duijndam, and Annemiek Karreman. 2020. 'Emotion Expressivity in the Dutch: Validation of the Dutch Translation of the Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire'. *Psychological Assessment*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/PAS0000812>.
- Lorette, Pernelle, and Jean Marc Dewaele. 2018. 'The Relationship between Bi/Multilingualism, Nativeness, Proficiency and Multimodal Emotion Recognition Ability'. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367006918808042> 23 (6): 1502–16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367006918808042>.
- Macintyre, Peter D., and Laszlo Vincze. 2017. 'Positive and Negative Emotions Underlie Motivation for L2 Learning'. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching* 7 (1): 61–88. <https://doi.org/10.14746/SLLT.2017.7.1.4>.

- Marian, Viorica, and Ulric Neisser. 2000. 'Language-Dependent Recall of Autobiographical Memories'. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 129 (3): 361–68. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0096-3445.129.3.361>.
- Matsumoto, David, and Seung Hee Yoo. 2006. 'Toward a New Generation of Cross-Cultural Research'. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-6916.2006.00014.x> 1 (3): 234–50. <https://doi.org/10.1111/J.1745-6916.2006.00014.X>.
- Mesquita, Batja, Michael Boiger, and Jozefien De Leersnyder. 2016. 'The Cultural Construction of Emotions'. *Current Opinion in Psychology* 8 (April): 31–36. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.COPSYC.2015.09.015>.
- Panicacci, Alessandra. 2014. 'Emotions from a Bilingual Point of View: Personality and Emotional Intelligence in Relation to Perception and Expression of Emotions in the L1 and L2'. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 17 (6): 727–30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2013.857505>.
- Pavlenko, Aneta. 2002. 'Bilingualism and Emotions'. *Multilingua* 21 (1): 45–78. <https://doi.org/10.1515/MULT.2002.004>.
- Phongsa, Manivone, Shaik Abdul Malik Mohamed Ismail, and Hui Min Low. 2018. 'Multilingual Effects on EFL Learning: A Comparison of Foreign Language Anxiety Experienced by Monolingual and Bilingual Tertiary Students in the Lao PDR'. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 39 (3): 271–82. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2017.1371723>.
- Pransiska, Rismareni. 2016. 'Benefits of Bilingualism in Early Childhood: A Booster of Teaching English to Young Learners'. In *Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Early Childhood Education (ICECE 2016)*, 390–93. Atlantis Press. <https://doi.org/10.2991/ICECE-16.2017.68>.
- Robinson, Crystal J., and Jeanette Altarriba. 2014. 'The Interrelationship between Emotion, Cognition, and Bilingualism'. *Yearbook of the Poznań Linguistic Meeting* 1 (1).
- Santiago-Rivera, Azara L., and Jeanette Altarriba. 2002. 'The Role of Language in Therapy With the Spanish-English Bilingual Client'. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice* 33 (1): 30–38. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0735-7028.33.1.30>.
- SPSS Software. 2023. 'SPSS Software | IBM'. IBM SPSS. 2023. <https://www.ibm.com/spss>.

Kim, S. H. O., and Donna Starks. 2008. 'The Role of Emotions in L1 Attrition: The Case of Korean-English Late Bilinguals in New Zealand'. *International Journal of Bilingualism* 12 (4): 303–19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367006908098573>.