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Polish-French Bilingualism and Bicultural Identity: Cross-Cultural Studies on Immigrants in France and Belgium, and French Language Students in Poland

Łukasz K. Kmiotek

University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Warsaw, Poland, lkmiotek@swps.edu.pl

Joanna M. Kwiatowska

University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Warsaw, Poland

Paweł Boski

*University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Warsaw, Poland*Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/iaccp_papersPart of the [Psychology Commons](#)

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Abstract

In the present study, the authors applied the Cultural Values and Script Questionnaire, together with language measures (bidirectional translation, listening comprehension tasks), to explore the relationship between Polish-French bilinguality and bicultural identity among Polish migrants in France and Belgium and students learning French at a Polish University. We hypothesized that the Francophone acculturative context will lead to (i) integrated bicultural identity, as well as (ii) a balanced bilingual profile. Thirdly, we assumed there is a link between an individual's bicultural identity and his or her bilinguality. The data partially confirm the two first hypotheses. An unexpected contrast effect revealed that students in Poland identify more strongly with French cultural values than with Polish values.

Keywords: bicultural identity, language, values, Polish, French, acculturation

Polish-French Bilingualism and Bicultural Identity: Cross-Cultural Studies on Immigrants in France and Belgium, and French Language Students in Poland

Cross-cultural research shows that two components of culture, language and values, are related, and that the ability to use the language of the country of settlement and formation of a bicultural identity are the two main factors linked to a migrant's successful adaptation to a new cultural environment (Chen, Benet-Martínez, & Harris Bond, 2008; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013; Sam & Berry, 2006).

In this research project, the authors explore migrants' cultural identification and bilingual skills in two acculturative contexts: monolingual France (Lyon, the Rhone-Alpe Region) and the bilingual Brussels-Capital Region (Belgium). Students of French language and culture in Poland served as the comparison group. Based on this comparison across three countries, the authors are asking whether language proficiency is related to cultural identity formation. For the present study, cultural identity is conceived of as the distance between one's endorsement of cultural values and his/her perception of their importance in each of the two cultures (Boski, 2006).

Languages as Carriers of Culture

Wierzbicka (1997) argues that language imposes cultural constraints on its users. In other words, the acquisition¹ of any language is combined with the adoption of specific ways of thinking, styles and norms of behavior, and manners of expressing feelings. Consequently, the natural acquisition of a second language – like that of the first (native language) – involves one's inclusion into the second culture, rather than simply the assimilation of a linguistic code. Using any language implies “becoming” a member of a particular cultural group and participation in a variety of social interactions. Often, one's own identity is enriched and redefined through this process. The use of a language² ($L_1, L_2 \dots L_n$) in daily interpersonal interactions is closely related to identity at the personal, as well as cultural, and ethnic level (Hamers & Blanc, 2000). From the acculturative standpoint, communicative skills serve as an indicator of successful adaptation and adjustment (Hamers & Blanc, 2000). Since language and other aspects of culture (lifestyle, attitudes, beliefs, customs, values) are intertwined phenomena, the subsequent acquisition of languages² ($L_1, L_2 \dots L_n$) during migration should have corresponding behavioral consequences for the individual. This may concern lifestyle changes (including daily

¹ Linguists distinguish between “language learning” and “language acquisition”; the first process is teacher-led and classroom-based whilst the second denotes spontaneous child language development (Laskowski, 2013; Laskowski, Czelakowska, & Wiraszka, 2015; Wróblewska-Pawlak, 2014).

² L_1 denotes the mother tongue or first language; L_2 denotes the second language learned after the first.

practices and behaviors), self-representation, and self-construals (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

In the present study, the authors speculate that the French language carries values characteristic of the French culture and the Polish language, likewise. In the language learning process, a migrant acquires new norms of behavior, ways of being, and a system of meanings. A previous study by Boski and Iben Youseff (2012) on bilingual Arabic-French Tunisians has illustrated that certain cultural concepts or values can only be expressed in the language to which they correspond. Otherwise, the concepts are “lost in translation” (Wierzbicka, 1997).

Language Grammar and Cultural Values

Previous studies show that two cultural elements, language and values, are related. Study results indicate that cultures with “pronoun drop languages” (e.g. Polish, Spanish) tend to be less individualistic than cultures with “non-pronoun drop languages” (e.g. English, French; Kashima & Kashima, 1998). A link has been shown between the use of certain grammatical forms in a language, i.e. the first person singular pronoun “I,” and individualism on the individualism-collectivism cultural dimension (Uz, 2014; Nisbett & Miyamoto, 2005). Wierzbicka (1999) notes the status personal pronouns are given in a language through capitalization or lack of it. In written Polish (a pronoun-drop language), if used at all, the word “you” (*Ty*—singular/*Wy*—plural) and its possessives are capitalized, indicating respect towards the addressee, and implying a more collectivistic perspective. In English, the only pronoun which is always capitalized is the first person singular “I,” indicating the importance of the self, which suggests an individualistic perspective.

A parallel line of research is ongoing in political psychology, demonstrating a link between part-of-speech use and worldview or ideology endorsed by the speaker (Cichocka, Bilewicz, Jost, Marrouch, & Witkowska, 2016). Here, a correlation has been shown between socio-political conservatism and (i) preference for nouns in the Polish language; (ii) preference for nominal sentences in Arabic (sentences composed of nouns, or a noun and an adjective, in which the verb is implied); (iii) higher proportion of nouns in speeches of Republican presidents compared to Democratic presidents (US English). According to the authors, “Nouns convey greater permanence, stability of subjects and objects, as well as categorical perceptions of social actors and the world at large. As such, they are likely to address conservatives’ greater needs for order, certainty and predictability.”

Cultural Frame-Switching

The mono-cultural/linguistic framework may be extended to bi-lingual/cultural analysis. Here, the two languages being consecutively used may influence the behavior of a bilingual person, as an example of cultural frame switching. This mechanism is useful in daily life; it helps the bicultural person fulfill his or her multiple social roles and negotiate the hyphenated identity, e.g. Polish-French, or Mexican-American (Benet-Martínez et al., 2002; Benet-Martínez et al., 2006).

The exposure of a bilingual and bicultural person to an element of a specific culture should elicit a behavioral response appropriate for that culture (Benet-Martínez, Lee, & Leu, 2006; Benet-Martínez, Leu, Lee, & Morris, 2002; Chen et al., 2008; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). To test this, Benet-Martínez et al. (2002) developed the Bicultural Identity Integration (BII) scale. A bilingual and bicultural individual whose identity is well integrated (high BII score) is able to switch his/her cognitive functioning appropriately, in accordance with the cultural stimulus that is presented, giving assimilative responses. Nevertheless, this is not always the case. Only well-adapted bicultural and bilingual individuals seem to be able to switch their cognitive functioning harmoniously and congruently from culture A to culture B or vice versa, depending on which culture's symbols are presented (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005).

Some study participants consistently present paradoxical (contrasting) responses. It has been shown that their scores are on the low end of the BII scale, indicating a bicultural identity that is not integrated. This contrasting cultural frame switching behavior has been identified as an example of the *reverse priming* or *contrast effect*. We will return to this issue in the discussion section. For now, it is important to remember that the social context has been implicated in the occurrence of this phenomenon (Cheng, Lee, & Benet-Martínez, 2006).

Cheng, Lee, and Benet-Martínez (2006) tested the reactions of Asian-Americans to being exposed to one of four English language "word mazes," composed of "positive Asian words," "negative Asian words," "positive American words," and "negative American words." The reaction being tested was the participants' performance on the "school of fish inferential task" (Hong, Morris, Chiu, Benet-Martínez, 2000). In this task, respondents rate the degree to which in their opinion a single fish is acting independently or is influenced by the rest of the group (school of fish). Making more external attributions is characteristic of the Asian cultural frame of mind, in contrast to the American frame of mind (less external attributions).

The *reverse priming* effect was visible in the low BII individuals' Asian cultural frame of mind when exposed to positive American words and the American cultural frame of mind when exposed to positive Asian words. Meanwhile, high BII individuals adopted the Asian cultural frame of mind when exposed to negative American words and the American cultural frame of mind when exposed to negative Asian words.

Current Research

Integration Policies in France and Belgium: Contrasting Social Contexts

The two Francophone countries, Belgium and France, have implemented different models of integration. France, with its model of great universalist ideologies (*Fr. "creuset culturelle"* – melting pot) follows "*assimilationist citizenship requirements*." Belgium has included multiculturalism in its constitution, and regional communities are responsible for local integration policies (implementation of social programs, work, school and housing). This "*pluricultural non-participative insertion mode*" attributes to immigrants' social rights, at the same time limiting their political participation (Sabatier & Boutry, 2006).

Thus, a country's policy towards migrants may influence their decision to settle there. Since the accession of Poland to the EU in 2003 and the Schengen Zone in 2007, a significant number of Poles decided to move abroad (Goździak & Pawlak, 2016; Boski, 2013). For the year 2007, the Polish National Statistics Bureau (GUS) estimated the number of Poles who had temporarily emigrated (for more than 3 months) at 2.3 million (GUS, 2016). According to Laskowski (2013), between 700 and 800 thousand Poles lived in France in 2008, compared to 100 thousand in Belgium. In 2011, the French National Statistics Bureau (INSEE) estimated the number of Poles in France at 93,000, while in 2012 the number given by Eurostat was 350,000. Therefore, the number of Poles in France is only approximate. Apart from that, we observe a lot of cross-border temporary migration.

Hypotheses

The aim of the present study was to compare the relationship between identity – conceived of as the similarity between one's endorsement of cultural values and his/her perception of the values' importance in two cultures (Boski, 2006) – and bilingual proficiency among four categories of language users in four acculturative contexts: (1) The first generation (**G-1**) of Polish migrants living in Lyon, France; (2) secondary school students in the Polish section of *Cité Scolaire Internationale de Lyon* (**LYN**); (3) secondary school students of the Polish School in Brussels, Belgium, (**BRU**); (4) students of French language at a Polish university (**UWr**). We hypothesized that the group of secondary school students in Belgium (BRU) will identify more strongly with the set of values that they had earlier identified as shared Polish and French, compared to the migrants in France, or the students in Poland (**Hypothesis 1**).

The other question we posed was whether the acculturative context (respectively: living, and/or studying, in France or Belgium; studying the French language and culture in Poland) has an impact on cultural identity, as defined earlier, and if so, how is that linked to performance on listening comprehension and translation tasks in the two languages.

We predicted that the Poles in the Francophone countries (France and Belgium) would have more balanced bilingual scores than the students in Poland (**Hypothesis 2**). In other words, the difference between the respondents' Polish vs. French language scores in listening comprehension and bidirectional translation will not be statistically significant.

Lastly, we presume that there is a positive correlation between one's cultural identity index (PL Identity, FR Identity) and the respective language proficiency scores (Polish, French) (**Hypothesis 3**).

Methods

Participants

Our sample (N = 232; 174 women; four of the study participants did not reveal their gender) consisted of four groups presented below. We computed the percentage of

lifetime contact with each language by dividing each participant's declared length of direct and continuous exposure to the language by his/her age (Table 1).

Table 1

Acculturative Category by Gender, Age and Percent of Lifetime Contact with each Language

	N (women)	Age range	M _{age}	Polish %	French %
G-1	50 (42)	20-65	35.5	97	41
LYN	40 (30)	13-25	17.3	99	73
BRU	62 (29)	14-19	16.2	100	77
UWr	79 (73)	17-26	21.0	97	24
Overall	232 (174)	14-65			

Note: G-1: First generation of migrants in Lyon; LYN: International high school students of Lyon; BRU: Polish high school students in Brussels; UWr: University students of French language and culture from Poland.

Materials and Procedure

The tools we used were (1) a Polish-French version of Boski's (2006, 2008, 2009) Cultural Values and Scripts Questionnaire (CVSQ), and (2) the Polish-French Bilingual Proficiency Questionnaire which is composed of two parts: (i) listening comprehension and (ii) bidirectional translation.

The shortened and bilingual version of the CVSQ created for this study contains 39 items selected from the original 66-item pool (Boski, 2009, p. 409), and is adapted for administration to two generations of participants. The Polish version, which was adapted first, was translated by a bilingual and bicultural person into French. The two versions were then back translated by a French language teacher residing in Poland, fully bilingual in both languages. The final stage of verification was carried out by two Polish-French bilinguals residing in France. During the study procedure, participants selected which version of the CVSQ they wish to take: French or Polish, but this had no bearing on the results.

All survey items in the CVSQ refer to specific and context-dependent cultural values (e.g. *Humanism*). The tool measures cultural identification with values represented by 39 short statements, in two steps: (1) Locative – Assignment of a value to a culture/cultures (*Is the following value SHARED, POLISH, FRENCH, or NEITHER? "Highly valuing close, long-term friendships and caring for them."*), and (2) Evaluative – Personal endorsement of the specific value (*Indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statement: "I highly value close long-term friendships and care for them"*).

The study participants were asked to sort the 39 value items into one of four categories in a 2x2 matrix (Table 2): SHARED, POLISH, FRENCH, NEITHER. For example, if the respondent categorized an item (*“valuing close, long-term friendships”*) as FRENCH, then SHARED=0, POLISH=0, FRENCH=1, NEITHER=0.

Table 2

Cultural Values and Scripts Questionnaire: Value Sorting Matrix

		FR Culture	
PL Culture		Yes	No
Yes		Shared Set (PL,FR)	Distinctly Polish Set (PL,-FR)
No		Distinctly French (FR,-PL)	Neither Set (-FR,-PL)

Note. This matrix may be used for a pair of any selected two cultures (A, B), to assign a set of cultural values or cultural practices to four logical cultural categories: Culture A (A, -B); Culture B (-A, B); Shared by both cultures (A, B); Neither culture (-A, -B).

Next, we asked participants how much they personally endorsed the cultural values (e.g. *“I highly value close, long-term friendships”*) that they sorted in the previous step. Depending on the level of personal identification with each item, participants gave answers on a Likert scale from -2 to 2: *Strongly disagree, Disagree, I don't know, Agree, Strongly agree*.

Finally, we multiplied the score from the sorting matrix (FR=1) by the corresponding Likert scale response. Since the respondent had assigned the item *“friendship”* to the French culture, and strongly endorses *“friendship”* as his/her personal value (2 Likert points), the respondent's French identity score for this item only will be +2.

To obtain the participant's total French identity score, we added up all the products of items that were categorized as distinctly French and their corresponding personal endorsements. For each of the remaining components (SHARED, PL, NEITHER) we proceeded in the same manner.

Polish-French Bilingual Proficiency Questionnaire

In part one, there were two conversations chosen for the listening comprehension task: one in French, and another in Polish (Burkat, Jasińska, Szymkiewicz, & Małolepsza, 2008). The study participants listened twice to the recordings and responded to eight True/False questions. They scored 1 point for each correct answer.

The French recording was a conversation between a couple arguing in the car (sample French item: The woman wants Paul to turn right/*La femme veut que Paul tourne à droite*). The Polish recording was of a police officer questioning a witness of a car

accident (sample Polish item: The man was walking in the park at the time of the event/*Mężczyzna spacerował po parku w chwili zdarzenia*).

The second part consisted of translation: (i) from French to Polish, and (ii) from Polish to French. The short texts were retrieved from the textbook *AlterEgo 4* (Dollez & Pons, 2014). The French text (84 words) was a personal statement by a political party activist who is engaged in promoting an ecology-friendly lifestyle. The Polish text (75 words) was a brief letter of a graduate student, who interns at a television station, to a friend.

Translations were evaluated based on their quality; points were subtracted for mistakes made in the translation (e.g., omissions, repetitions, mistakes in: spelling, grammar, syntax). Faultless translation received the score of 100%. The correlations between results obtained through the listening and the translation method of bilingual assessment were positive and moderately low ($r = .19$).

Procedure

Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous; confidentiality was provided to encourage honest responding. Participants were recruited through French-Polish associations which serve as migrants' institutional support, Polish Catholic Mission, and Polish Consulate. The questionnaires were administered and completed in a quiet classroom. Participants also reported demographic data including: age, gender, nationality, duration of language contact, and educational level. Instruction was given at the beginning of the session.

Results

Cultural Identity

To test our **first hypothesis** concerning the impact of acculturative context on identity, a mixed model of analysis (MANOVA) was carried out. The first analysis was carried out in a 4x4 format: (Cultural Identity indices: Integrated vs. Distinctly Polish vs. Distinctly French vs. Neither PL nor FR, as repeated measures) by (Groups: G-1 vs. LYN vs. BRU vs. UWFr). The dependent variables were four cultural identity indices: Integrated vs. Distinctly Polish vs. Distinctly Francophone vs. Neither PL nor FR.

A significant interaction effect between cultural identity and respondent group was found, $F(9, 678) = 4.91, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.06$. A simple effect can be seen by looking at the mean integrated Polish-French identity score across the four groups of respondents. The mean is the highest in the sampled group of "BRU secondary school students." However, this difference is statistically significant only when comparing BRU with G-1 (first generation) and UWFr, but not with LYN. Also, it is important to keep in mind that while respondents from G-1 are significantly older, we did not control for age. Nevertheless, these results partially confirm our **first hypothesis**.

Table 3
Mean Identity and Language Results Across Groups of Respondents

	G-1		LYN		BRU		UWr	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Integrated PL*FR Identity	4.48	7.03	7.82	8.69	10.35	8.48	7.46	7.57
PL Identity	3.20	5.64	6.56	7.21	6.75	6.98	0.97	4.67
FR Identity	2.14	4.80	2.82	4.66	3.17	4.87	3.20	6.51
Neither Identity	2.10	6.56	1.10	4.77	1.17	4.03	0.32	3.33
PL Comprehension	5.78	1.48	5.40	1.54	5.39	1.41	5.89	1.22
FR Comprehension	4.86	1.77	5.32	1.16	4.88	1.23	3.72	1.32
PL>FR Translation %	89.90	8.38	83.04	13.10	64.00	21.50	76.86	15.57
FR>PL Translation %	90.76	6.47	95.12	4.77	39.03	19.20	85.43	7.14

Listening comprehension

To test our **second hypothesis** concerning the impact of the acculturative context on listening comprehension, we ran a two-factor analysis of variance (multivariate repeated measures – MANOVA). The study was designed in a 2x4 format: (Listening comprehension: French x Polish, as repeated factors) by (Groups: G-1 x LYN x BRU x UWr). The interaction effect between two variables, language (listening comp.) and acculturative category (group), was significant, $F(3, 227) = 15.31, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.17$.

In all of the groups, Polish listening comprehension scores were higher compared to French, but only among our sample of LYN students was this difference minimal and not statistically significant. This pattern of results suggests balanced comprehension skills among the LYN students and partially confirms our **second hypothesis**.

To test the **second hypothesis** in terms of translation skills, we ran a two-factor analysis of variance (multivariate repeated measures – MANOVA). The analysis was designed in a 2 x 4 format: Translation (PL>FR x FR>PL, as repeated measures) by Groups (G-1 x LYN x BRU x UWr).

In the three groups of students (LYN, BRU, UWr), translation scores (PL>FR vs. FR>PL) were unequal. Only in the case of individuals from the first generation of migrants (G-1), the difference in translation scores (FR>PL vs. PL>FR) was small and not statistically significant. This suggests balanced bilingual translation skills among the first generation of migrating individuals and also partially confirms our **second hypothesis**.

Cultural Identity According to Language Skills

To answer the research question concerning the cultural identity and language proficiency interrelation, we conducted Pearson's correlation analysis (see Table 4). These data do not confirm the **third hypothesis** concerning the correlation between individual identity indices (Polish, French) and the respective language skills.

Table 4

Cultural Identity and Language Proficiency Correlations

	Listening		Translation	
	PL	FR	PL>FR	FR>PL
Integrated PL* FR Identity	-.17*	-.04	-.06	-.18**
PL Identity	-.07	.13	-.01	-.16**
FR Identity	.13	-.05	.10	-.03
Neither Identity	.03	.00	.13	.02

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Discussion

The aim of the present study was to compare the relation between cultural identity and language skills among four categories of language users in four acculturative contexts, to the extent that it is even possible given such small samples chosen by the convenience sampling method. Our quantitative research first followed the qualitative work of Matczak (2008) in the field of language education and addressed bilingual proficiency (Polish and French) and biculturalism of Poles living in Lyon, France (first generation migrants and secondary school students). We then tested Poles living in Brussels, Belgium (secondary school students) and university students of French language and culture in Wrocław, Poland.

The study explored specific language skills operationalized as: (1) language comprehension, and (2) bidirectional translation. The conducted analyses reveal differences in the bilingual profiles, as well as in identity among our samples from the compared groups of migrants and French language students living in Poland.

The highest ratings of simultaneous proficiency in French and Polish were observed in the two groups in Lyon, France. These results partially confirm the **second hypothesis** concerning migrants' balanced bilingual profile. The secondary school students scored equally well on listening comprehension of Polish and French languages, while the first generation of migrants had the best and most balanced translation scores of all groups. Our sample of BRU students were the youngest respondents and scored the lowest on the

translation task. This may suggest that translation skills improve with age and with life experience in the bicultural environment. Thus, the results imply that, in a long-term perspective, being a migrant is a favorable condition for the learning of a second language.

The data we obtained confirmed our **first hypothesis**. Secondary students from Brussels had the highest mean integrated identity (French and Polish). On the other hand, as said above, their translation scores were unexpectedly low, especially from French to Polish. In a multicultural setting, young bilingual people may naturally successfully function as blended Polish-French individuals without giving it much thought. However, translation requires one to see the two languages and cultures as separate and to know how to bridge the differences between them.

The results we have obtained from our sample of Polish students of French language and culture at UW r were also unexpected because the students living in Poland identified more with the French cultural values than they identified with the Polish cultural values. Furthermore, unlike any other, this group had an exceptionally low mean Polish identity score (Table 3). This may be an example of what Cheng and colleagues (2006) have called the *reverse priming effect* or the *contrast effect*, which we have already discussed in the section on cultural frame-switching within the introduction.

Osińska (2007) also obtained a similar reverse-priming effect by using a shortened version of the CVSQ (20 questions) among Polish-American students at the ASW - American School of Warsaw (Boski, 2009). In the Polish language/cultural symbol priming condition, ASW students scored significantly lower on Polish value endorsement, as opposed to American value endorsement. In the American priming condition, identification with distinctly Polish and distinctly American values was equal.

In the past, contrasting results of the CVSQ have been interpreted as possibly resulting from respondents' feelings of inferiority towards the Polish culture, or their depreciation of it (Boski, 2009). Cheng and colleagues (2006) also suggest that biculturals may internalize one culture's negative stereotypes towards the other, or towards itself.

Lastly, we hypothesized that there is a positive correlation between cultural identity (PL Identity index, FR Identity index) and proficiency in the respective language (Polish, French). This hypothesis was not confirmed. On the other hand, there was a negative correlation between all four language tasks and the Integrated PL*FR Identity index. It was significant only for Polish listening comprehension and translation to Polish from French.

Limitations and Future Research

A bigger sample size would be needed to clearly demonstrate differences among groups referred to in this paper. Respondents in all of the groups needed to meet strict criteria (age- and language-wise), so convenience sampling was the only available sampling option. At the same time, we understand that this limits our ability to generalize. Thus, the labels describing our groups (G-1, LYN, BRU and UW r) are intended only to differentiate between them, rather than imply the generalizability of our results.

Using the same tools, Kmiotek and Boski (2017) have found no direct link between bilingual proficiency and bicultural identity (defined as cultural value endorsement) after

examining three of the four groups listed above. In the present study, we have added a new group (BRU) and decided to take a different approach, focusing rather on the differences between these four groups.

While a bilingual person may possess natural translation skills (Malakoff & Hakuta, 1991), this specific competence is the subject of translation studies, not bilinguality studies.

A translator needs to be bilingual to the extent required by his/her profession, but a bilingual teenager is not necessarily a good translator, particularly when the language is not spoken, but written. Therefore, translation skills are not necessarily a reliable measure of bilinguality. Future studies should apply other measures for assessing other linguistic skills not explored here (reading, speaking), as well as other methods of measuring identity (i.e., the harmonious vs. conflictual bilingual identity integration distinction; Benet-Martínez et al., 2002).

More research is needed to identify the cognitive and affective factors necessary for the contrast effect to take place. For this, the concept of identity may need to be redefined, taking into account not only personal identification with the ethnic/national group(s), but also whether the group(s) is accepting of the member (e.g., I am/not: Polish as viewed by other Poles, French as viewed by other French people, Polish as viewed by French people, French as viewed by Poles). Here, we focus on French-Polish bilingualism, but the possibilities to study other language pairs are still open.

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