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Culture, Language and Emotion

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Culture, Language and Emotion

Abstract

Culture, language and emotion all influence and affect our daily lives in their own manner. Although there is a large body of research suggesting that these factors interact with each other in intricate ways, they have traditionally been studied independently of each other. Furthermore, although biculturalism and bilingualism are not new phenomena, they are now prevalent globally to the extent that research investigating culture or language cannot be complete without taking them into account. Thus, in this paper, we discuss how culture, language and emotion may mutually influence one another in a globalized world where biculturalism and bilingualism are commonplace and suggest how future research could investigate these individual factors jointly.

"If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head.
If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart."

Nelson Mandela

Introduction

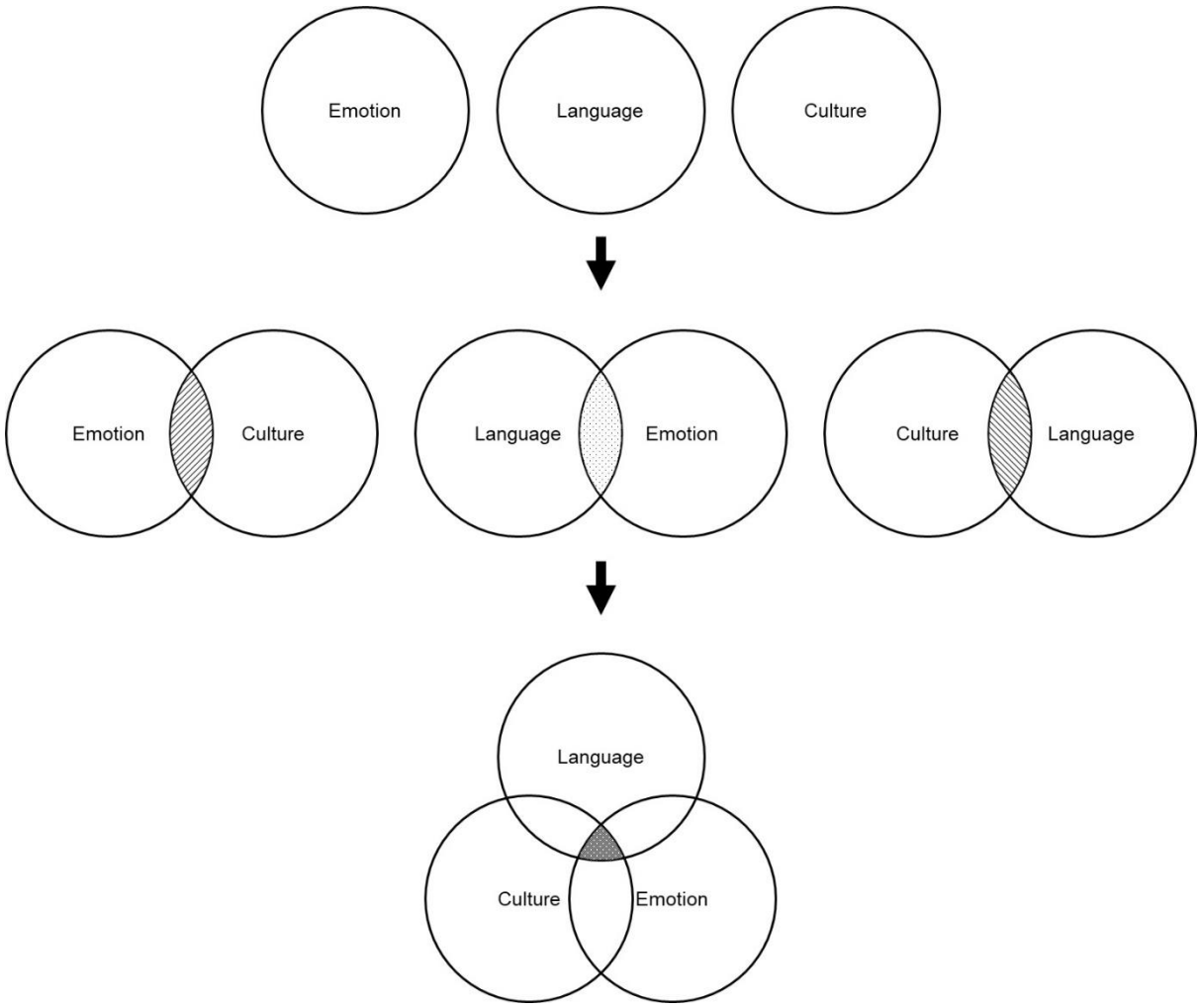
This paper will highlight the importance of considering the possible connections between language, emotion, and culture. We live in a multilingual society with increasing globalization where languages and cultures meet on a daily basis. How do these factors affect how we perceive the world? In an attempt to answer this question, three major aspects that affect our daily lives will need to be considered, namely our culture, the language(s) we use, and our emotions. How are they interconnected, and how do these factors affect each other? The fields of cultural psychology, psycholinguistics, and emotion have traditionally been studied primarily independently from each other (see top row in Figure 1), however, there is an increasing bulk of research showing noteworthy connections between them. In this article, we will summarize some of the research investigating the interactions between emotion and culture; language and emotion; and culture and language (see middle row in Figure 1), before finally discussing the interaction between all three areas (see bottom row in Figure 1) by presenting some research that has looked at this, and proposing future directions for research investigating the interconnections between culture, language, and emotion.

Emotion and Culture

A question that has instigated much debate in the field of emotion theory concerns the universality of emotion. Are emotions universal across cultures, or are there cross-cultural variations with regard to emotion? This section will lay out some of the research investigating this question by comparing and contrasting the major emotion theories, historically as well as concurrently.

Emotions are a broad concept which can be defined in several different ways and often includes the feelings that we experience within us, that we express through various channels (verbally, physically, etc.), and that we perceive, or at least infer, in others based on cognitive and perceptual processes. While defining emotion and the dimensions involved (and how these should be labelled) has been a matter of some debate throughout the years (for an overview see Barrett & Russell, 1994), a common approach to studying emotions is by defining emotion through the dimensions *valence* and *arousal* (see for example Bradley & Lang, 1994; Lang 1969; Russell, 1980).

Figure 1.
Disposition of the Current Article



How we express and interpret emotions, both internally and in others, varies in part as a function of our culture (e.g., Chentsova-Dutton & Dzokoto, 2014; Chung & Robins, 2015; Molina et al., 2014). Although we are quite skilled at inferring emotions in people from other cultures based on, for instance, their facial movements (e.g., Prado et al., 2013), their body language (e.g., Pavlenko, 2002; Sogon & Masutani, 1989) or even their tone of voice (e.g., Gendron et al., 2014; Kurbalija et al., 2018; Pell et al., 2009), we tend to be more accurate when inferring the emotional state of people from our own culture. Basic, or universal, emotion theories (e.g., Ekman, 1992 & 1993; Ekman & Friesen, 1971; Izard, 1971; Izard & Malatesta, 1987) explain our ability to identify emotions in others across cultures by suggesting that there are a limited number of basic emotions (traditionally happiness, anger, sadness, fear, surprise, disgust, and even contempt) that are universally and innately recognized. More recent work has proposed a greatly expanded set of basic emotions, such

as Cowen and Keltner (2017) who reported 27 distinct categories of emotion. However, basic emotion theories are sometimes argued to fall short of explaining why we nonetheless are better at inferring emotions within our own culture (see Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002, for a meta-analysis).

The dialect theory of emotions, which also postulates that there is a finite number of basic and universal emotions, explains such cultural differences by suggesting that emotions should be thought of as a universal language with several regional dialects (Elfenbein, 2013; Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002; 2003; Elfenbein et al., 2007; Hess et al., 2013). In the same way that we are better at understanding someone speaking our language with our own dialect, we are better at perceiving emotions expressed by people sharing our "emotional dialect" (Elfenbein, 2013; Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002; Elfenbein & Ambady, 2003; Elfenbein et al., 2007; Hess et al., 2013). More recent work has also explored historical migration patterns and has found that ancestral migration patterns can account for some of the current cultural variation in emotional expressions (Niedenthal et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, the basic emotions perspectives are sometimes criticized based on methodological concerns and conceptual issues (e.g., Gendron et al., 2018; Russell, 1994). One point that is raised as being problematic is the basic emotions theories' idea that there are so few emotions (Russell, 1994). Appraisal theories, on the other hand, suggest that there is a much larger number of basic emotions (Ellsworth, 2013; Mesquita et al., 1997; Scherer, 1999). Furthermore, appraisal theories posit that the boundaries between discrete emotions are not as definite as basic emotions theories suggest, and that an appraisal of internal and external factors is required in order to experience a specific emotion (Ellsworth, 2013; Mesquita et al., 1997; Scherer, 1999). Appraisal is believed to be a continual and dynamic process, which, in turn, implies that the emotion that is perceived or felt at any given time is subject to constant changes (e.g., Ellsworth, 2013; Mesquita et al., 1997; Scherer, 1999). As for cultural differences, appraisal theories explain by suggesting that culture is a major factor that influences how we appraise situations and, consequently, that culture affects our emotional experiences through this appraisal (e.g., Ellsworth, 2013; Mesquita et al., 1997; Scherer, 1999).

However, none of the theories above can satisfactorily account for the large amount of evidence suggesting that emotions, just like any other abstract concept, are not basic but rather learned during early childhood (e.g., Castro et al., 2016; Gross & Ballif, 1991; Morton & Trehub, 2001; Widen, 2013; Widen & Russell, 2002, 2003, 2008, 2010; Zieber et al., 2013). This body of research does not imply that newborns and toddlers cannot feel anything, but rather that what younger children can experience is different combinations of varying degrees of (positive or negative) valence and of (high or low) arousal. Around age four, however, children begin to conceptualize these experiences of valence and arousal as discrete emotions (e.g., Gross & Ballif, 1991, Székely et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2014; Widen & Russell, 2002, 2003, 2008, 2010). Interestingly, this coincides with a stage of language development when children incorporate emotion words into their vocabulary.

Meanwhile, these empirical findings are more easily accounted for by another type of emotion theory, namely constructionist theories. Several constructionist theories posit that words are a necessary ingredient for understanding and perceiving emotions (e.g.,

Lindquist, 2013; Lindquist et al., 2014, 2015; Wilson-Mendenhall, 2017). Constructionists do not suggest that we cannot otherwise experience various sensations, but rather that words are one of the key elements that groups together disparate experiences and sensations into concepts of discrete emotions (Lindquist et al., 2015). In other words, emotion words are more than mere labels that we use to break down a continuum of sensations into discrete emotions. Rather, they are the glue that holds together a panoply of experiences, which otherwise would not necessarily have much in common, into a discrete emotion (Lindquist, 2009). Developmentally, this would explain why children before age 4 find it difficult to tell apart emotions from the same valence, such as anger and sadness (e.g., Champoux-Larsson et al., 2019, Russell & Bullock, 1986; Russell & Widen, 2002), even though these discrete emotions sometimes have no or only a few features in common. Culturally, given that language and culture are deeply intertwined, this could explain why an in-group advantage is found in emotion inference (e.g., Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002; Wickline et al., 2010). While different languages and cultures share many emotion words (which could explain some of the consistency found across cultures), their meaning can nonetheless be different across different languages and cultures (e.g., Goleman, 1995; Fontaine et al., 2013). Furthermore, some emotion words are so unique to a language and/or culture that they cannot be directly translated. For instance, the Japanese concept of *amae*, the Portuguese word *saudade*, the German feeling *Fremdschämen* or even the Dutch sensation of *gezellig* all lack a direct translation in English. These constructionist theories recognize the importance of culture and language in the study of emotions (e.g., Gendron & Barrett, 2009), which, therefore, may provide a framework for investigating the relationship between culture, language and emotion. Finally, there are theoretical perspectives that combine the appraisal approach with the constructionist, such as the model proposed by Ortony, Clore, and Collins in 1988 known as OCC model (Clore & Ortony, 2013; Ortony et al., 1988), which incorporates aspects from both theoretical accounts and proposes a list of ideas about the construction of emotions, including language and context.

Language and Emotion

In order to better understand the above-mentioned connection between emotion and culture through the role of language, we need to better understand the connection between language and emotion. This section will review the literature on language and emotion focusing mainly on the empirical work in the field of bilingualism preoccupied with investigating emotional reactivity in bilinguals' first- vs second language.

A steadily increasing number of studies have found that we experience stronger emotionality in our native language compared to a second language (e.g., Caldwell-Harris, 2014; Pavlenko, 2005). For example, multilinguals experience emotional phrases such as "I love you" as being the strongest or the most emotional in their first language compared to their second language (Dewaele, 2008). Likewise, the emotional force of swear words and taboo words are also rated as higher in the first language compared to the second language (Dewaele, 2004; 2018). Psychophysiological data have shown higher emotional arousal

(measured as skin conductance levels) for emotional words and phrases (including childhood reprimands) in the first compared to the second language (Harris, 2004; Harris et al., 2003). There is also an array of psycholinguistic studies investigating emotion word processing in a bilingual context, including the acquisition of emotion words in a second language (e.g., Altarriba & Basnight-Brown, 2011) and processing of emotion and emotion-laden words in bilinguals' first- and second languages (e.g., Altarriba, 2003; El-Dakhs & Altarriba, 2018; 2019; Kazanas & Altarriba, 2016). These studies have employed various tasks (such as free recall, ratings of various parameters and characteristics of emotion and emotion-laden words, word associations, etc.) and have observed differences in processing depending on various aspects such as whether the words are in the participants' first- or second/foreign language, the emotional content of the words, and second language exposure, to mention just a few.

Furthermore, Bond and Lai (1986) found that Chinese-English bilinguals seemed to have less difficulty discussing embarrassing topics in their second language English, compared to their native language. There are even case studies reporting that some therapy patients have refrained from using their native language during counselling as a mechanism of reducing emotionality to allow them to speak about their negative experiences (Buxbaum, 1949; Krapf, 1955). There is also more recent work that has investigated the emotional distance of a second language during therapy sessions, by interviewing bilingual therapists about their bilingual sessions (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2009). Santiago-Rivera et al. (2009) found that both the therapists and their clients switched between languages for various reasons; the therapists as a means of bonding with their clients and establishing trust, and the clients as a means of expressing certain emotions. Research has further shown that PTSD symptoms and traumatic memories are experienced as more intense and vivid in the first language compared to the second language (Schwanberg, 2010). Recently, Dylman and Bjärtå (2019) showed that using a second language to process negative texts read in the native language leads to decreased levels of distress, suggesting that purposeful second language use can reduce distress following negative events encoded in the first language.

These above-mentioned findings and the general phenomenon of larger emotionality in one's first compared to second language have been explained in terms of bilinguals having a larger emotional distance in a second language compared to the native language, which has been proposed to be a consequence of the context in which the languages were acquired (e.g., Ivaz et al., 2015). The idea here is that the native language is acquired in emotionally rich and varied contexts, which increases the links between the words and labels, and the experienced emotions associated with them. In contrast, a second language, in particular a foreign language, is typically acquired in classroom settings which tend to be more neutral and less emotionally varied. This connection between language acquisition and use, and experienced emotionality seems to be a key factor in determining the level of emotionality experienced in a multilingual's different languages. For example, Dewaele and Salomidou (2017) investigated experienced emotionality in cross-cultural/cross-linguistic romantic relationships, and found that many in a romantic relationship with someone speaking a different language reported that emotional communication was difficult, particularly in the beginning of the relationship. However, Dewaele and Salomidou also

found that *affective socialisation* increased with time and that "the partner's language often became the language of the heart" eventually (Dweaele & Salomidou, 2017, p. 116). This supports the notion that the context of language acquisition and language use is crucial to the level of emotionality experienced.

This emotional distance hypothesis has also been proposed to explain the so-called *foreign language effect* in decision making whereby bilinguals make more rational decisions and are less affected by decision making biases in the context of their second language compared to the native language context. For example, Keysar et al. (2012) found, across several different groups of bilinguals, that framing a problem-solving scenario (such as the Asian disease problem) in a certain way (that is, changing the wording of the text) affects decision making when the bilinguals reason about problems and make decisions in their native language. However, when they do the same task in their second language, such framing effects disappear. This has also been found for other types of decision making processes, such as financial decisions (e.g., Costa et al., 2014a) as well as moral dilemmas (e.g., Corey et al., 2017; Costa et al., 2014b).

An example of a moral dilemma is the trolley problem, where the following hypothetical scenario is presented to the participants:

> A train is about to run over five people. You have the power to pull a lever and redirected the train to a different track where it would run over one person. There is no time to get anyone off the tracks. Do you pull the lever?

This, and other similar problems, can be responded to in two ways: One can either choose the *utilitarian* option (i.e., choosing to sacrifice the life of one to save those of many) thereby maximizing the global benefit, or one can choose the *deontological* option (not killing one but letting five people die), thereby adhering to the moral code "do not kill". The moral code of not killing is so deeply rooted that the vast majority of people tend to choose the deontological option when faced with these types of moral dilemmas (Greene et al., 2001). However, a comparably larger proportion of participants choose the utilitarian option when faced with moral dilemmas in their second language, compared to when faced with the same dilemma in their native language (e.g., Corey et al., 2017; Costa et al., 2014b). This has, again, been interpreted within the framework of emotional distance, where the larger emotionality in the native language makes it difficult to overcome moral codes (such as "do not kill"), resulting in a larger proportion of respondents choosing a deontological choice in their first language, while being more likely to make the utilitarian choice in their second- compared to their first language.

In summary, there is a vast and continuously increasing amount of research showing differences in emotional reactivity in bilinguals' different languages. That is not to say that we are heartless and cold-blooded in our second language – rather, the point is that the level of experienced emotionality seems to be higher in the native language. As demonstrated, however, various situations can lead to a decrease in this so-called foreign language effect, such as when the second language is the language of communication in a long-term romantic relationship where the second language is the language of

communication (Dewaele & Salomidou, 2017). There are even some studies showing that the foreign-language effect in moral dilemmas can disappear in the case of long-term immersion in the second language country, such as was the case in a study investigating moral decision in Croatian-German bilinguals living in Germany (Čavar & Tytus, 2018).

The question that remains, however, is to what extent culture plays a role in the acquisition and development of the links between language and emotionality. Harris et al. (2006) highlighted the importance of incorporating multiple dimensions, including cultural aspects, when investigating bilingualism and emotionality, and several studies have indirectly incorporated cultural aspects whilst investigating various aspects of emotionality and language. Thus far, however, relatively few studies looking at the interaction between language and emotion have also simultaneously examined culture specifically. There are notable exceptions, of course, as this research topic is increasingly heeded (see for example Altarriba & Kazanas, 2017; and Basnight-Brown & Altarriba, 2018). Furthermore, Dylman and Champoux-Larsson (2020) recently investigated the foreign language effect in decision making and moral judgments whilst incorporating a cultural aspect. Specifically, they found that when the second language is culturally influential in the home country, the foreign language effect diminishes, and participants make comparable decisions and judgments in both their first- and second language.

Culture and Language

How culture and language influence psychological phenomena has long been an issue for research. However, various sub disciplines in psychology conceive these constructs in different ways, and there have been scarce attempts to integrate various views (Imai et al., 2016). Culture can be defined as a set of shared meanings, practices, and products, which facilitate social coordination, clarify group boundaries, and tell people what they are expected to do and how they should do it (Kitayama & Park, 2007; Oyserman, 2017). Through history, often over several generations, collective meanings and common practices function as references and shape normative expectations for people, for the conception of self, as well as for personal motives to take part in certain behaviors (Kitayama & Park, 2007). Within this frame of reference, language is considered to be an inseparable collection of linguistic elements evolved through culture and as a medium in which specific cultures are reflected (Imai et al., 2016). For example, in personality psychology, the lexical paradigm assumes that all stable individual differences in behavior that are of social importance within a cultural context are encoded into everyday language (Goldberg, 1981). For people within a certain culture to be able to interact efficiently with each other, they need to have common words for their differences in important features of personalities. For example, translation equivalents which may seemingly express identical concepts, such as “marriage”, or words for different emotions, may have different connotations across cultures (Kitayama & Park, 2007).

In other lines of research, predominantly in cognitive psychology, the focus has generally been on the influence of particular segments of language on perception,

categorization, and knowledge, but how linguistic categories are embedded in a broader cultural system has not been considered (Imai et al., 2016). Research in this vein has studied how non-linguistic representations are processed as compared to linguistic, how psychological and linguistic processing develop during childhood, and by comparing cognitive processing between monolinguals and bilinguals (e.g., Bialystok, 2011; Bialystok & Barac, 2012; Bialystok et al., 2012; Paap & Greenberg, 2013; Paap et al., 2014). The question remains whether it is the language elements themselves that shape thought or the cultural connotations behind the linguistic categories. Culture may influence not only what is considered as psychological phenomena, but also norms for how to use language for certain experiences and in certain situations. If there are commonalities across cultures in terms of labels for emotions, cognitions, and behaviors, they may differ in how such experiences are expressed and to what degree (Heine & Buchtel, 2009; Mesquita et al., 2016). The by far most studied cultural dimension is the individualism-collectivism dimension. This refers to the extent to which the individual is seen as a separate being or embedded in the social context (Heine & Buchtel, 2009; Kitayama & Park, 2007; Mesquita et al., 2016; Wood et al., 2016). Indeed, this individualism–collectivism dimension has also been researched in relation to emotion, including the substantial study by Matsumoto et al., (2008) who investigated emotional display rules across different cultures by measuring them on the individualism-collectivism dimension.

One of the most influential, and culturally extended theories of personality is the Big Five (McCrae & Costa, 1987). The lexical paradigm states not only that any stable individual difference in behavior is reflected in everyday language, but also that personality differences of utmost importance are universal (Goldberg, 1981). Extensive research has come to an agreement of five dimensions, namely Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional stability, and Openness to experience (Heine & Buchtel, 2009). Regarding structure, all, or almost all, five have been reproduced in a number of countries around the globe. Less convergence has been found for the dimension which is today most often labelled Openness (Hendriks et al., 2003), which has, across time, also been labeled “culture”, “intellect”, “creativity”, or “autonomy”. Originally, cross-cultural studies were conducted using translated versions of instruments originally developed in English. This has led to discussions regarding to what extent cross-cultural similarities is an expression of universality or transference of Western culture through the way personality is discussed and connoted in English (Heine & Buchtel, 2009). Later, this issue has been addressed by the development of instruments originating from local sources (novels, dictionaries, etc.). These have shown both similarities and differences in structure, fewer or more dimensions, that overlap more or less with the Big Five dimensions (Allik et al., 2017; Heine & Buchtel, 2009; Saucier, 2003). Differences in levels of the five dimensions could be reflections of real cultural differences, but also of different interpretations of the items, differences in the way they respond to these items, or whether people from different cultures compare themselves with different standards. Thus, it is evident that studying cross-cultural differences in personality separately from language is difficult. Given that most research on personality originates from Western culture and Western languages (most often English), can we draw conclusions on cross-cultural aspects of personality without imposing a Western mindset?

(In fact, these types of English centric approaches are generally widespread in psychological research, and this may obscure meaningful variation in numerous psychological effects, given the global role English has throughout the world.) Translating Western personality inventories into non-Western languages exports a pre-set personality structure, a certain understanding of the items, a certain way of responding to them, and a given standard to which compare oneself, which may likely affect the outcome of the study. People in most corners of the world are aware of and knowledgeable of the Western culture even if they do not adhere to it, something which may become even more salient by using translated Western personality inventories.

There exist at least two ways in which to deal with this problem. One way is to start with within-culture personality structures from non-Western societies. Based on identified similarities in a seven-factor personality structure between Hebrew and Filipino personality descriptors, Saucier (2003) used a set of these markers translated into English, and an additional set of Big Five markers, and collected data from an American sample. The rationale between this was that if two so disparate cultures as Hebrew and Filipino, with neither geographical proximity nor language similarity, seemed to share personality patterns (therefore not likely to be culture-specific), perhaps this is also generalizable to other contexts. The results showed that this was the case; the two sets of personality markers, Hebrew and Filipino, converged within an American sample. Furthermore, this structure partly overlapped with the Big Five. Similar methodology has been used subsequently (Saucier et al., 2013), identifying a basic bivariate structure of personality attributes using samples from nine cultures representing eight language families. In this study, salient markers for the two most important factors in within-culture investigations were translated into English, and then the frequency with which these terms appeared across languages was counted. The result was a distinct pattern in each study with two factors labeled Social Self-Regulation and Dynamism.

The other way that this issue has been addressed is by investigating bilingualism. Increasing levels of education and access to different media, as well as increasing mobility, be it either temporary or permanent, voluntary or involuntary, all serve to expose people to additional languages than their native tongue. Having access to two languages is assumed to enable people to switch between not only two languages, but also between their accompanying cultures, a phenomenon referred to as cultural frame switching (Hong et al., 2000). A study where English-Spanish bilinguals responded to the Big Five Inventory found that when answering the questionnaire in English, participants described themselves in a more American manner, as more extraverted, agreeable, and conscientious, and less neurotic compared to when answering in Spanish (Ramirez-Ezparza et al., 2006). It was concluded that this was not due to translation effects, or self-enhancement, but rather that a cultural shift took place appropriate to the cultural context that language implicated.

How and when a second language is acquired may also be of importance for this matter. Acquisition of a second language can either be coordinate or compound (Chen, 2015). Coordinate bilinguals learn their first and second language sequentially in separate cultural environments (for example when emigrating or sojourning), while compound bilinguals acquire their two languages simultaneously in the same cultural environment (for

example when learning a second language in school, or as second-generation immigrants). It is suggested that cultural accommodation takes place in an analogous way. Thus, among compound bilinguals there would be more cultural blending, while the two cultures of coordinate bilinguals would be distinct and compartmentalized (Nguyen & Ahmadpanah, 2014). In a study where English-Spanish bilingual Mexican Americans indicated their degree of bicultural blending, this is indeed what was found, even when controlling for generation status.

Research in this area has most often been conducted by using self-report measures. Chen and Bond (2010), however, went further by including actual conversation, thereby studying language use in action. They studied compound English-Chinese bilinguals in Hong Kong, with access to both Chinese and Western culture. In addition to self-report measures and ratings of prototypic traits of English and Chinese persons, either in English or Chinese, they also included conversations in either English or Chinese with either an English or a Chinese partner, which was evaluated by external judges. The results supported the influence of perceived cultural norms, language priming, and ethnicity of conversation partner on several personality dimensions. This suggests that the linguistic context activates appropriate expressions of personality depending on the situation.

These research examples illustrate the interplay between culture and language. Language is most often seen as a carrier of culture. However, language also signals other forms of social identities than culture – social class, status, occupation, gender, and so forth. Language must thus be seen as both a carrier of culture and a marker of group identity (Chen, 2015). Language is the connecting point between culture and context. Research thus needs to incorporate both cultural and other social categorizations at the same time, in order to be able to separate cultural influences from other contextual factors. Furthermore, language has most often been studied as an expression of cultural identity – but language is also a tool for communication. As such, it can be used either to enhance communication, to include other people (from other groups and cultures), or to limit communication, to exclude other people. What would the interaction between culture and language be in a social context of either cooperation or competition?

Culture, Language, and Emotion

Finally, we want to discuss the interaction between the three aspects hitherto raised. How are they connected and why is this important? As we have laid out, there are many studies investigating various sub-aspects of the mentioned areas. For example, there are studies looking at cross-cultural differences of emotion, but few emotion theories incorporate language as an integral part of (cross-)cultural aspects of emotion (with the exception of constructionist theories). Likewise, there is a large bulk of research investigating the links between language and emotion, but where culture is not commonly explicitly incorporated. Clearly, the mentioned studies all give us an important piece of the puzzle. Nevertheless, can we truly see the bigger picture if we only focus on one piece of the puzzle at a time? There are a few notable publications that have explored the relationship between all three

themes, namely emotions, culture and language (e.g., Altarriba & Kazanas, 2017; Basnight-Brown & Altarriba, 2018; also see Altarriba et al., 2003, for another review on emotion across cultures). Ogarkova (2013) also presents research relating to how emotion words in different languages may be "thought to be referents of culture-embedded cognitive categories, or 'folk' emotion concepts" (Ogarkova, 2013, p.2), and goes on to present this notion, saying that "language plays an important role in establishing categories, both culturally and developmentally (Neisser, 1987 : vii), and […] the ways in which emotions are represented in language can provide an insight on emotion conceptualization, categorization, and even experience in different cultural groups" (Ogarkova, 2013, p.2). There are also studies that have argued that the various empirical findings of stronger emotional reactivity to emotional words and phrases in a first- compared to a second/foreign language may, in fact, reflect social and cultural norms (e.g., Gawinkowska et al., 2013), further calling attention to the importance of incorporating all three themes when investing the intricate interplay between culture, language, and emotions.

One of the challenges we face going forward is a methodological one. How can these questions be investigated further? What methodological aspects need to be considered? For example, how can we disentangle language from culture when they go hand in hand? Recently, Jackson et al. (2019) attempted to map the semantics of emotion terms in close to 2,500 languages across the globe, in order to examine the universality of emotions in different cultures. Investigating the co-lexification (i.e., the extent to which semantically related concepts map onto the same words across different languages), they found large variability, indicating cross-cultural (and cross-linguistic) variation in the linguistic network of emotion terms. At the same time, they also found indication of universal structures within these networks.

Another methodologically relevant question regards the definition of emotion, whether it refers to core affect, mood, perception/expression of emotion through facial expression or emotional prosody, words (with the distinction between emotion and emotion-laden words; see for example Altarriba, 2006), or any other aspect. We have refrained from selecting one specific definition (and potentially excluding others) in the interest of giving a broader perspective. However, it should be noted that how emotion is defined, and which aspects or sub-aspects of the concept are investigated, will inevitably affect both the methodology and potential findings. Therefore, this is another aspect (and potential challenge) to be considered going forward.

To summarize, the interest in the interaction between culture, language, and emotion has rapidly increased in recent years, but more research is needed. Some conceptual and methodological aspects discussed above need scientific attention (see Table 1). As language is an integral part of not only communication with others, but also govern all internal thoughts, we are always within the context of language. Therefore, given the alleged role of language in the perception of emotions, we cannot study human emotion devoid of language. Likewise, language is learnt within a cultural and emotional context, which means that we cannot investigate human language without also studying culture and emotion to some extent. Therefore, if we are to truly understand any of these three areas, we need to understand how they interact with and affect one another.

Table 1.
Important Aspects to be Considered in Future Research

Category	Examples
Conceptual:	Integration of different theoretical perspectives on culture, language, and emotion Culture, language, and emotion all have both expressive and communicative functions, integral research needs to take that into consideration
Methodological:	Separation of cultural specifics from universals in language, especially regarding emotion aspects, also regarding different definitions of emotion Identifying cultures that either share or do not share a common language, for example different sub-cultures Experimental studies on emotion that simultaneously vary language and culture

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Questions for Discussion

1. Why would a larger emotional distance (such as has been proposed for foreign language contexts) affect decision making?
2. Identify cultures/languages along other cultural dimensions than individualism – collectivism.
3. What might we find out by comparing the same language in different cultures (for example Portuguese in Portugal vs Brazil, Spanish in Spain vs. Mexico, or English in the UK vs the USA)?
4. What might we find out by comparing different languages within same culture? Can you think of any such cultures with multiple languages?
5. How might communication be used as a means of self/social expression, for cooperation/competition?
6. What methodological aspects need to be taken into consideration when researching this area?

7. In a globalized world, how does the interaction between culture, language and emotion affect how we interact with people from other cultures and/or using a different (possibly second) language?
8. Contact with other cultures and languages is possibly easier and more common today than ever before. How can this contact with other cultures and languages affect the way we learn a foreign language and use it? Will this context, which can be much less sterile than a classroom setting, influence the way we experience emotions in a second language?