

Beyond self-reports: real language use as a window into immigrants' psychological well-being

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Extensive research explored the relationship between language, culture, and psychological well-being (WB) in immigrant groups (Ward & Szabó 2023), with some works reporting positive links between bilingualism, biculturalism, and higher WB levels (Chen et al. 2008). However, most of these studies rely on self-reported measures of language competence and use, which do not capture what bilinguals actually do in interaction.

This paper addresses this gap by integrating real language use with self-assessed measures encompassing the linguistic, cultural, and psychological dimensions of acculturation. It examines whether interactional features of bilingual behaviour can serve as structural, linguistic indicators of acculturation and WB, without implying causal direction.

Analysing over 30 hours of authentic interactional recordings from 50 first- and second-generation Italians in Bletchley and Bedford (UK), alongside forthcoming questionnaire data on self-reported language competence and use, acculturation orientation, and WB indicators from the same communities, the study examines whether specific linguistic patterns—(a) the contextual distribution of monolingual use and (b) the forms and functions of code-switching (Gardner-Chloros 2009)—predict acculturation orientation and WB levels (e.g., life satisfaction, positive and negative affect). Specifically, we test whether more equivalent use of both languages across contexts and greater diversity in the forms and functions of code-switching predict a stronger bicultural orientation, more positive affect, and higher life satisfaction.

We discuss implications for both sociolinguistic theory, by exploring how concrete language use in real contexts reflects psychological states, and acculturation research, by assessing the value of observed natural linguistic behaviour in understanding acculturation and WB.

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Gardner-Chloros, P. (2009). *Code-switching*. Cambridge University Press.

Ward, C., & Szabó, Á. (2023). Acculturation, cultural identity and well-being. *Nature Reviews Psychology*, 2(5), 267–282.

