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**Author(s):** Moate, Josephine; Ruohotie-Lyhty, Maria

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# The emotional journey of being and becoming bilingual

Josephine Moate <sup>a</sup> and Maria Ruohotie-Lyhty <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of Teacher Education, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland; <sup>b</sup>Department of Language and Communication, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland

## ABSTRACT

This article examines the foreign language learning biographies of six Finnish English speakers who reflect on their journey towards a bilingual identity. In this article language learning is examined as a process that is intrinsically emotional as emotion connects individuals with the world as well as being a movement within oneself. The data analysis is based on dialogical and narrative approaches. Through the analysis two key story types were named: *Bilingualism as striving* and *Bilingualism as a gift*. In the striving stories English was held up as an ideal, as a way of engaging with the wider world but moreover as a way of finding a better ‘me’. In the gift stories, English was experienced as a gateway to something other, whether a new community, sport, or music. The emotional intonation of these two story types varied considerably highlighting the importance of emotion within language education.

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Emotion; identity; bilingualism; FL learning

## Introduction

I can smell the tang of Wonderland to this day. There is always something really appealing in English. It is and I guess it always will be part of me. Sometimes I find it difficult to show that part, sometimes it's easy. [...] There are so many things that Alice hasn't found yet. All of them won't make me happy but I'll be taught by them. I hope I'd fall down the rabbit hole soon again.

(Marie 2013)

In this article we investigate the foreign language (FL) learning biographies of six Finnish English speakers reflecting on their journey towards a bilingual identity. FL identity refers to any aspect of an individual's identity that relates to ‘their knowledge and use of a foreign language’ (Benson et al. 2013, 2). As the participants in this study regularly use two languages in everyday activities, their experiences as bilinguals provide an important perspective on the relationship between language identity and emotion (Pavlenko 2006, 2). As the opening quotation illustrates, the journey of being and becoming bilingual can be alluring, deeply engaging and demanding. Marie connects her story with Alice in Wonderland suggesting that an English identity represents a gateway into something new and exciting, yet it is also fraught with difficulties as she tries to find the passage to this new identity.

We are interested in the complex interdependence of an individual with the world along the language learning pathway (Norton 2012). We recognize language learning occurs across different timescales and within a web of relationships (Hicks 1996), and moreover that language learning alters individuals' relationship with the world in different ways (Kubanyiova and Crookes 2016; Liddicoat and Scarino 2013). It is perhaps unsurprising that this deeply personal, yet fundamentally social

**CONTACT** Josephine Moate  josephine.moate@jyu.fi

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phenomenon is recognized as intrinsically emotional (Barcelos 2015) and a phenomenon that language professionals need to better understand (Swain 2013).

By engaging with the emotional journeys of being and becoming bilingual for our six participants we aim to increase understanding of the significance of emotion within or 'emotional intonation' of language learner identity development. This understanding acknowledges the complexity of language development and the emotional, as well as cognitive, struggles it involves (Swain 2013, 205). This stance recognizes that 'language constructs the historical sedimentation of meanings that we call our selves' (Kramsch 2006, 99). As selves are constructed so emotions shift and interact in relation to the social context, becoming attached to ideas, words, and objects (Benesch 2012). This suggests that language learning is as much a relational as linguistic phenomenon and language identity is 'constituted as a story, through which happenings in specific places and at specific times are made coherent' (Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000, 158), albeit an ongoing story that remains open-ended (Dewaele 2007). In the following section, we outline the key concepts of identity and emotion and the way in which they intertwine before outlining the methodology and findings.

### ***Notions of identity***

The notion of identity has received a significant amount of attention in education and language learning contexts, as well as in sociological and anthropological studies. It is widely recognized that identity is complex, multi-faceted and dynamic, contested and contextual, as well as performed (e.g. Akkerman and Meijer 2011; Lemke 2008). Many studies acknowledge the social nature of identity and the way in which different relationships affect identity development. Duff (2012) frames language learning as a social enterprise involving participation in turn requiring the development of different identities. This process is an agentic one, as individuals become motivated to reach their ideal L2 selves, drawing on internal desires and expectations considering their future proficiency in the foreign language (Dörnyei 2005). Learning an additional language has several effects on identity, as Pavlenko (2006) observed the 'acquisition and use of a new language ... is a much more challenging enterprise [than extending the range of one's first language] that may be further complicated by the need to negotiate new and unfamiliar surroundings' (2). In other words, additional language learning involves encountering more of the world and more of one's self in the world (Norton 2012, 3–4), yet whilst the range of encounters is extended, the 'tools' of engagement are less certain and can leave language learners less certain with regard to who they are or who they are supposed to be.

It is perhaps this uncertainty and sense of vulnerability that has led recent research in SLA to focus on the way in which second language identity intertwines with notions of power and resistance (e.g. Duff 2012; Norton 2012). However, to fully understand the process of bilingual identity development, we also need to understand the role and range of emotions that can be present in bilingual identity development. In many studies until now, emotions have been recognized as important for language learning, emotional expression (Pavlenko 2006) and teacher identity (Golombek and Johnson 2004). We still, however, need understanding of how it feels to develop as a bilingual person and how emotions mediate this process. This study seeks to better understand the role of emotions in language learning in order to develop language teaching practices and to generate awareness of the range of different emotions that can be associated with language learning.

### ***Understanding emotions***

Emotions have been present in applied linguistics research since the 1970s with earlier research focused on allaying negative emotions (e.g. Arnold 1999; Horwitz 1990) in order to facilitate learner participation in the learning process (Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope 1986). Later research suggested that negative emotions focus attention on hindrances and shortages in language learning process, whereas positive emotions can encourage people to go beyond their usual boundaries and accept new challenges (Dewaele and MacIntyre 2014). This development has led to more complex

understandings of emotion within the language learning process (e.g. Oxford 2015) and the emotionality of language identity and identity research (Prior 2016). In recent studies emotions have been framed as 'processes in which information generates emotional responses, which, in turn, generate new information' (Barcelos 2015, 314) suggesting that emotions do not only signal importance, but are the fundamental organizational device which transforms an event into an experience and an experience that can be communicated (Prior 2016, 206). As such emotions are integral in languaging (Jensen 2014, 2) and feelings, such as desire that recognizes an absence as well as an intention, can be 'simultaneously productive and oppressive' (Motha and Lin 2014, 335) evoking the desire of a learner to invest in or withdraw from the language learning process.

In identity development, emotions have recently been conceptualized in terms of vulnerability in which emotions can either cause a 'protective vulnerability' in which individuals refuse to reconsider their identities or 'open vulnerability' in which individuals take on the challenge of reconsidering their identities enabling transformation (Song 2016; Zembylas 2003). This conceptualization highlights the way in which emotions are centrally present in processes of identity development and that research into emotions should go beyond positive-negative dichotomies. In the following section we outline in more detail the way in which vulnerability plays out in bilingual identity development.

### ***Emotion in narrative identity development***

Although language and identity development are profoundly social, current research also recognizes the individual agency involved in the self-conscious process of identity development (Block 2007, 865). Whilst all events are potentially meaningful for learner identity, they only become meaningful when the process of individual sense-making involves emotions (Jensen 2014). Investigating language learner narratives is an important way of accessing and supporting this active process during teacher education (Johnson and Golombek 2011). In the study reported here, the active force of identity development is detected in the narrative accounts. In narrative accounts emotions are present as responses located within a particular place and time and are also reinterpreted according to their meaningfulness or contribution to language identity development. As Pavlenko (2001) suggested, language learning stories are 'unique and rich sources of information about the relationship between language and identity in second language learning and socialization' (167). In recounting an experience to an audience individuals present themselves across multiple timescales. This process results in the co-constitution of meanings and emotional significance in the narrative interaction.

We suggest that emotions intervene in language identity development in at least two important ways. Firstly, emotions are part of the immediate language experiences and, secondly, emotions are part of the reconstruction of self in the moment of telling the story (Lemke 2008). By retelling the past in the present individuals can construct a unified identity for the audience and themselves (Georgakopoulou and Goutsos 2000, 75). Meijers (2002) describes emotions in identity development as a tool for sense-making and meaning giving, in that emotions are present within an immediate experience as an intuitive response, as well as being present when we seek to understand the meaning of an experience. Moreover, the social context has a significant influence on the meaning ascribed to an experience and the subsequent emotions associated with the experience.

This model of identity development acknowledges that different emotions can be present within one moment and change over time. This suggests that emotional experiences, much like language, can be and become 'double-voiced' (Bakhtin 1981) creating different 'emotional intonations' (Sullivan 2012). As a concept 'emotional intonation' allows for the presence of multiple emotions and supports the identification of patterns of potential meanings across time avoiding the dichotomy of positive and negative emotions. Whereas earlier research has used the notion of emotional intonation to recognize the presence and range of emotion across learning experiences (Moate and Sullivan 2015), this study seeks a better understanding of the layers of emotion that can be added to one experience. Our aim is to use this model to investigate bilingual student narratives over a two year period in which the participants first share significant emotional experiences from their early

language learning (intuitive sense making) and reconsider the meaning of these experiences within the context of a bilingual teacher education program (meaning giving) (Meijers 2002). We refer to the relationship between the initial emotions and their discursive understanding as the ‘emotional intonation’ of a narrated experience.

### Research questions

The aim of this study is to better understand the presence and role of emotions as part of the journey to become bilingual. The research questions underpinning this study are:

- (1) What kinds of stories do the participants use to make sense of their bilingual identity development?
- (2) In what ways are emotions part of bilingual identity stories?

## Method

### Context for the study

This study belongs to a research project with pre-service class teachers in Finland specializing in English from the beginning of their university studies. The six participants, two males and four females, are Finnish student teachers aged 22–23 currently completing their bachelor’s studies in education. Details of their language backgrounds and the assignments that comprise the data for this study are presented in Table 1.

The dataset for this study comprised three autobiographical narratives from each of the six participants. The ‘red line’ unifying the narratives was the participants’ relationship with English as a FL. These narratives were written during two courses belonging to the participants’ minor studies in foreign language education. Narratives one and two were written at the

**Table 1.** Participants and data collection process.

Participant	School-language background	First year of university studies	Second year of university studies	Third year of university studies
Markus	English-medium daycare English-emphasis comp school Finnish high school with EFL lessons	Beginning of the year: Autobiographical narrative 1 ‘My relationship with English’	Absent for the spring term	End of the year: Autobiographical narrative 3 ‘My relationship with English as a global language’
Annie	Finnish comprehensive & high school with EFL lessons from grade 3 1 year of exchange during high school	End of the year: Autobiographical narrative 2 ‘XXX, English and me’	End of the year: Autobiographical narrative 3 ‘My relationship with English as a global language’	-
Niklas	Finnish comprehensive & high school with EFL lessons from grade 3		Exchange	End of the year: Autobiographical narrative 3 ‘My relationship with English as a global language’
Elisabeth				
Marie				
Hannah				

beginning and end of the first year of studies as part of a course on creative and cultural language development taught by the first author. The third narrative was the final assignment for a course entitled Varieties of English taught by another colleague and taken either during the second or third year of the participants' studies. The texts, however, narrate more than the participants' relationship with English during the first two-three years of teacher education. The different narratives draw on different timescales. The first narrative was a retrospective account that reached back to the participants' first encounter with English as a child, noting key moments until the start of their university studies (average length 2000 words). The second and third narratives were more contemporary accounts of their relationship with English, but these texts also included an anticipatory element looking to the future and critically considered what kind of relationship the participants would like to nurture between their own pupils and English. The second and third narratives averaged around 1200 words. The two- to three-year time period over which these texts were written provides a longitudinal perspective on the journey these young adults had taken to be and become bilingual.

### Data analysis

The data analysis was divided into two key stages and draws on a dialogical approach to qualitative analysis (Sullivan 2012; Ruohotie-Lyhty and Moate 2015) as well as an analytical approach to narratives (Barkhuizen, Benson, and Chik 2014; Barkhuizen 2017). The first stage focused on the individual narrations of the participants' bilingual pathways. This led to the development of individual intrapersonal dialogues for each participant as they recounted early language learning experiences and sought to make sense of these experiences as young adults and future teachers. Appendix 1 includes an example of an intrapersonal narrative. The only editing has been to shorten some of the extracts, marked with ... , and the location of each extract is provided in brackets, for example, (E1p2) represents 'essay 1, paragraph 2'. The second stage led to the development of imaginary interpersonal dialogues. The interpersonal dialogues are thematically related extracts simply placed next to one another as responses to the same 'question' (Sullivan 2012, 74). The different steps used in the analysis are presented in Table 2.

In the findings section, contributions from the participants are presented as interpersonal dialogues. As with the intrapersonal dialogues, the extracts were not edited, but thematically related 'turns' were placed next to one another creating the impression of a dialogue. In the findings we first outline the two story types that characterized the different pathways of the participants before presenting the ways in which the main themes were present in the two story types and

**Table 2.** Analytical stages and outcomes.

<b>Stage 1</b>	Seeking short stories	Identifying 'key identity moments' in the accounts, i.e. specific statements or questions around 'who I am' or what happened to 'make me me'. These key identity moments could come from the individual with reference to themselves or from the outside perspectives reported or interpreted by the individual.
	Who, where and when	Identifying the most meaningful characteristics of the short stories: the <i>theme</i> of the story, the <i>spatial, temporal and relational context</i> of the experience
	Sense-giving and sense-making	(1) Noting the presence of intuitive emotions in narrated key moments (2) Identifying the meaning and emotions participants ascribe to the experience in the retelling of events
<b>OUTCOME</b>	<b>Intrapersonal dialogues for each participant</b>	
Stage 2	Generating themes	A cross-case analysis of the short stories supporting the identification of significant themes running through and across the intrapersonal dialogues
	Recognising differences and similarities	Discerning the differences and similarities between the participants with regard to the themes
	Thematic responses	Selecting key moments connected to the main themes from different participants and arranging them into intrapersonal dialogues
<b>OUTCOME</b>	<b>Interpersonal dialogues illustrating each of the key themes</b>	

the different emotional intonations. Pseudonym names are placed at the beginning of each 'turn' and the original location of the extract is provided in brackets at the end of each contribution.

## Findings

The findings are organized into two main sections. The first section presents the two story types and their leitmotifs *Bilingualism as striving* and *Bilingualism as a gift*. After introducing the leitmotifs, we posit these story types next to each other and investigate how the core themes of identity development are constructed through the three essays written at different stages of the participants' language careers and the emotional intonations connecting these stories.

### *Bilingualism as striving*

The stories of Annie, Hannah and Marie, were interpreted as bilingual identity stories of striving. Although these stories come from different schools and different encounters, they all share the core element of desire and striving towards a distant-yet-near goal of being able to consider self as bilingual person present in Dialogue 1:

**Annie:** No matter how much I liked her lessons, English didn't come to me so easily. ... To me, it didn't made a difference whether it was 'I do' or 'I am' ... But I wanted to be good at everything so I studied a lot and tried to memorize the vocabulary. (E1p2)

**Hannah:** I was so jealous of people, who once heard something and then somehow miraculously learnt it right away. (E1p6)

**Marie:** There is always something really appealing in English. It is and I guess it always will be part of me. Sometimes I find it difficult to show that part, sometimes it's easy. [...] I hope I could climb higher up the steps of learning as a university student. (E1p19)

This story type represents bilingual identity as a rollercoaster with significant highs and lows. The emotion of these stories remains ambivalent with regard to belonging and not belonging to the community. In the first and second essays this journey is described as rewarding, although it demands a great deal of investment, and the ultimate goal of being a legitimate member of the English-speaking community remains beyond the protagonists' grasp. On some occasions the emotion is hopeful and very positive, but remains qualified by an intense sense of inferiority. The ambivalence present in the narratives of these participants appeared to be at least partially reconciled towards the end of their second and third essays.

### *Bilingualism as a gift*

Three stories, those of Elisabeth, Niklas, and Markus, were identified as stories of bilingualism as a gift. These stories as English speakers are intoned with greater continuity and stability. Being bilingual is connected to the immediate surrounding, family and school decisions that offer possibilities to be involved with the English language. The idea of bilingualism is accepted from early on and readily connected with other possible group identities as Dialogue 2 illustrates:

**Elisabeth:** Studying languages was never something I felt like I was forced to do, but more like something I really wanted to do for my own sake. (E1p7)

**Niklas:** I was a three-year-old kid and excited as any kid would have been opening the presents ... I found a Playstation one ... it was love at first sight. So as I went to school and started to study English at third grade, I was already quite a talent, thanks to our Playstation ... (E1p2-3)

**Markus:** Now that I think of it, it sounds really rough for a 4–6 years old kid, but I'm alive. Either way, nowadays I'm really thankful for my parents for putting me there [English speaking daycare]. (E1p1)

The emotion of this story type is strong, yet differs significantly from the former story type. Bilingualism is accepted as a natural and positive part of identity development. The emotional relationship with English remains positive throughout the first and the second essay and is questioned only in the



third essay where this personal relationship is critically reconsidered on the basis of the new information regarding English as a global language.

### *Being and becoming a bilingual person*

This section draws attention to important common themes present in the participants' stories, although the individual stories developed in different contexts. This section is divided into four parts. The first part, *Desire to belong*, displays the starting points of the two story types. The second and third section, *Doubt and confidence* and *Going beyond*, present two important tensions within the stories and the final section, *Awareness and acceptance of self*, describes a partial resolution of the identity tensions in the third essays.

#### *Desire to belong*

The desire to belong to a group was a driving force for the identity development in both story types, although the object of the desire differed significantly. In the striving stories, the desire to belong was more clearly aimed towards the native English speaker community conceptualized as a promise of a richer and more successful life.

**Annie:** I really wanted to learn and when I heard about exchange student possibilities, I didn't hesitate. I knew that it was the once in a lifetime opportunity I had dreamed of ... When there were hard times at school [...] I escaped to my secret world and dreamt of a [American] high school me; popular, beautiful and confident. (E1p4)

**Hannah:** The instant comment I got from the [American] kids when I was talking English for the first time, was, 'it's funny to hear such a strong Finnish accent'. I was embarrassed and became a passive listener in the discussions in English. (E1p13)

**Annie:** I could have just hidden but what kind of year that would have been? ... I hadn't come that far to let myself down again. So I had to ... try to leave the old me behind. ... Finnish began to sound strange even to my own ears and soon I caught myself thinking and dreaming in English! (E1p9)

**Marie:** Actually I'm a little jealous of the girl who I was that summer [in the States]. ... She didn't have the foggist idea why you should be ashamed of your language skills or fear to be misunderstood. (E1p9)

The imagined English language identity provided the participants with positive emotions helping them to face the challenges of daily life. An English-speaking identity was attached to positive future development. At the same time, this desire to belong to this imagined community made the participants emotionally vulnerable, potentially denying their legitimate participation. In their stories they do not present themselves as self-evident insiders of the English community, but as somebody striving to enter this identity. With regard to belonging this story type of striving suggests an ambivalent emotional intonation with negative and positive experiences simultaneously present. The participants included moments of great joy in their essays in which they had experienced a sense of acceptance by the community, as well as the painful negative emotions of not being accepted and doubting themselves. The participants positioned these successes and failures as contradictory proofs for themselves and others with regard to their right to claim an English language identity expressing hesitance as they wrote about this desire. Emotionally the question of their legitimate membership in this desired community remained unresolved.

In the bilingualism as a gift story type, the question of belonging was conceptualized differently. The ability to use English was not a question of self-worth; rather English appeared central in enabling other group memberships.

**Niklas:** The problem was, I wasn't that interested in Finnish sports, but the best leagues in the world and so if I wanted to know much and keep my information updated, I would have to read in English. (E1p4)

**Markus:** The fact that I used English on my free time also made it easy for me to be motivated in learning more of it ... (E1p3)

**Elisabeth:** ... I developed some kind of passion ... for British music and bands, ... and it felt pretty nice to be able to understand the lyrics of my favourite songs ... for me they were pretty significant tools for learning. (E1p3)

**Niklas:** Actually you could say that English itself have become one of those interests, instead of being linked to them. As English became easy, comfortable, fun and interesting it drove me to question myself, if I wanted it to become even more. Maybe I could even make others to see it the way I do. (E1p5)

In the gift stories, pleasure and positive emotions were attached to the participants' ability to connect with their hobbies, gradually increasing their interest towards the language itself and it became a more central part of their identities and also emotionally significant. Although the story of bilingualism as a gift also included a strong agentic component through which the participants consciously started to develop their English skills, the ambivalence of emotion in relation to belonging in the English speaking community was absent from this story type. The emotion was constructed in a more straightforward selection of stories illustrating free time activities, English as a mediator in activities and the gradual development of a relationship with the language itself. Typical to the emotion for this theme, former positive emotional experiences matched current involvement with the language. English was presented as a *lingua franca* rather than connected to a specific cultural setting and English language identity as a global identity that was directly available for the participants through English related activities.

### *Doubt and confidence*

With regard to the second theme, the two story types differed in the ways in which the participants conceptualized themselves as skilled language speakers. In the striving stories, doubt surrounding one's own language ability was exacerbated by the goal of being recognized as a member of the English-speaking community with native-like competence. The felt distance between self-doubt and the ambitious goal made these identities very sensitive to failure and negative emotions.

**Annie:** When I was in the sixth grade we had a nationwide English exam and I did poorly. ... I can probably never forget the strongly depressing feeling I got when the teacher returned my exam with that red grade written on the upper right corner. ... Tears were filling my eyes when I thought about what my mom would say to me. ... Nevertheless, this caused an increase in my motivation towards the English language. (E1p3)

**Hannah:** It was really a huge disappointment for both of us (me and my teacher), when I absolutely underachieved myself in the matriculation exam. ... At the time, it was extremely depressing thing to me. English had meant me so much and I thought my failure would close some doors from me. (E1p5)

**Marie:** It is difficult to explain why I feel like this, but I guess it is mostly because of my self-reflections: I am the one who is setting the goals, who is feeling awkward because I do not dare to participate at lessons and who tells me my English is super simple. (E2p2)

Even though Marie, Annie and Hannah all demonstrated remarkable progress in their English proficiency, their stories were intoned with self-criticism rather than delight at their success. Their achievements such as being accepted on student exchange or in an English-speaking university program prompted positive emotions that eased their self-criticism, however, only momentarily. Failure to meet their own and other people's expectations were key features in these stories intoned with emotions of sadness, guilt and despair. By going back to these depressing moments and positioning them next to the successes the participants illustrated a challenging emotional pathway. The emotion was constructed as they reminded themselves and the reader about their distant goal and slow progress. Recounting their pathways in these terms, however, also allowed the participants to depict themselves as committed and determined students whose investment was tested through their difficulties.

Whereas in the striving stories, doubt formed the undertow of the identity, in the gift stories the counterpart was confidence.

**Markus:** At this point I felt that I had kind of developed my own way of learning English – I never really learnt any grammar rules or such and just trusted on my ear for languages. (E1p8)

**Niklas:** Because English was easy for me I started to like it more and more. I also realised that it gives me an edge in many things compared to those less capable in it. (E1p3)

**Elisabeth:** Many times I have had to step out of my comfort zone and for example write about something I'm certainly not used to. However, I feel like using the language has rarely been the biggest problem ... (E2p7)

The positive emotion of the gift stories regarding their English capacity remain throughout the stories. This capacity appeared to foster emotions such as pride, enjoyment and satisfaction. The

emotion was constructed through a selection of stories in which the participants were active and independent in their free-time in developing their language repertoire. The participants also expressed confidence in themselves as judges of their own capacity and seemed to neither rely on nor fear the judgement of others. This independence made these participants less vulnerable to outside evaluation and no school grades or evaluations, for example, were mentioned in these stories.

### *Going beyond*

The theme of Going beyond refers to the participants as their existing capacities and conceptualizations of the world change. In both story types these are the most positively intoned moments linked with English. It is particularly striking that in these moments that FL identity is not separate from their other identities; rather the development that is taking place goes to the core of the individual. In these narratives emotions are keenly felt and at the heart of an individual, not merely a 'subsidiary self'. The two story types differ, however, in the ways in which these border crossing moments are interpreted as part of the story. In the striving stories, Marie, Hannah and Annie feel that they are able to go beyond their usual selves and gain a richer repertoire of self-expression through English.

**Marie:** The Canary islands, one of the most typical tourist resort, was my first trip abroad ... There were not lots of words but every single one had a huge meaning in my world. ... However, buying an ice cream made me pretty proud of myself. (E1p4)

**Hannah:** Somehow some interjections and expressions feel a lot more natural and meaningful in English. ... I feel that I'm able to express myself sometimes better in English – in certain situations English language is richer in phrases and expressions. (E1p7)

**Annie:** I fell in love with America and the language ... Now, I can't think of a life where English isn't involved ... (E1p13)

**Marie:** I in particular was inspired by the play ... which we acted at the end of the XXX course. ... Through the play I felt I could reach something familiar, enjoyable which connect to myself. (E2p4)

The moments in which English enables connecting with self or others in a new way served as an important resource for their identity development. These moments appeared to be intoned with positive emotions that support the bilingual identity development of the participants. In retelling these stories to themselves and the reader the participants constructed an alternative emotion that could inform their identity development process. They constructed the importance of English through the positive emotional significance of English in life encounters and a wider expressive ability. In these stories the ambivalence of belonging was momentarily resolved and the ambivalent emotional tension was tempered.

The gift stories also included a variety of moments in which the participants felt English enabled them to go beyond themselves and to reach for other people.

**Markus:** I enjoy discussing different topics [in English] and ideas as a group and the [university] program truly keeps me sated on that front. The environment for discussions feels very safe. (E2p7)

**Elisabeth:** I got more and more excited about the fact that I could actually speak a FL ... , it meant a lot to me to notice that I really am able to communicate in English at least on some level. (E1p2)

**Niklas:** As I said in the [university entrance] interview already English is an area in which I feel I have something to give to the children I am teaching. (E2p5)

For Markus, Niklas and Elisabeth the moments in which English enabled them to connect with other people and themselves were also accompanied by positive emotions including satisfaction, ease, excitement and contentment. In their identity development these stories serve the function of building the relationship with the English language in a natural way. For them achieving an English language identity is not their original goal and therefore the origins of their language identity rely heavily on these moments of experiencing significant things in and through English. The memory of the positive experience in relation to using English with other people matched with their perception of the current importance of English in their lives.

### *Awareness and acceptance of self*

The most significant change in relation to the participants' language identities was an increase in awareness of their identity during their university studies. This is clearly connected to the ways in which the university course aimed at encouraging them to reflect on their identities. What is of particular interest, however, is the different ways in which the participants' used their emotional experiences in actively challenging their previous identifications as language learners. In the first essay, language identity is mostly expressed through stories that illustrate the significant moments to its development whilst the second and especially the third essays include explicit consideration of their identities. These considerations vary in the two different story types with regard to contexts and topics.

In the striving stories the participants begin to explicitly question in the second essay what they wrote at the beginning of the first year at the university. This critical tendency is significantly stronger in the third essays.

**Hannah:** I consider myself to have good language skills ... Still, I do not feel myself good enough. Why I am trying to achieve something that is impossible? (E3p5-6)

**Marie:** I found myself thinking, really thinking, that line. Was I good at English? Why do I feel my self-esteem of English has become lower? Would it help to just accept my role, to take a deep breath and not to push myself too hard? How could I help myself to build up more confidence in my own abilities with English? (E2p3)

**Hannah:** This would require a change of attitude ... I will start by honoring my own accent, and being proud of my Finnish identity (E3p8)

**Marie:** Being non-native speaker gives me asset to look English in different point of view: what are the basic difficulties for children, ... Being a multilingual is important because I have experience of learning English and empathy with my students' struggles. (E3p8)

Studying through English at the university, encounters with different pronunciations of English and the critical perspective offered at the university towards the hegemony of English gradually challenges the participants' earlier identity and the meaningfulness of seeking native speaker competence. Instead of only rewriting their controversial emotional experiences, they actively start to question the origins of the emotional ambivalence and located it in expectations of native speaker ideals and high performance expectations. The emotion changed during this process and the negative emotional experiences were reconstructed as a resource for empathy. Reconstructing their emotional experiences this way seemed to make space for a more mature understanding of the participants' bilingual identities. The participants reclaim the right to call themselves bilinguals as their perspective on the English language community as a global community changed.

For the participants that experienced their bilingual identity as a gift the last essay also marks an important moment in their development and seems to challenge the participants' previous identities.

**Elisabeth:** I personally view English first and foremost as a lingua franca that can open new doors in life concerning seeing the world and meeting, connecting and working with people from different parts of the world.' (E3p8)

**Niklas:** Although English as a language is a harmless being when used as a tool to communicate it can make people forget about the less useful tools in this case their own mother tongues. Sadly there is more to a language than just communication. (E3p1)

**Elisabeth:** This made me think that perhaps as a Finn I have been too privileged to grow up seeing English only as a resource rather than as a threat for my own culture or identity. (E3p2)

**Markus:** In a way, the course made me rethink and rereason to myself why I believe English is even worth teaching to children in a country like Finland. It was a healthy experience and I do honestly believe that I'm able to do a much better job as a teacher as a result. (E3p2)

**Elisabeth:** Even though I find it important to acknowledge these issues, I still want to view my role as a teacher of English valuable. (E3p9) As the English language had until now been constructed as a gift and a passage, the more complicated picture of it offered as part of their university studies seems to destabilize the positive emotions attached to it. In their essays Markus, Niklas and Elisabeth try to make sense of the disjuncture between their own positive emotions and the critical perspective offered from outside. The emotion of these moments was more varied as their own positive emotional experiences were complicated by their

colleagues' experiences and literature. This made them question the significance of their investment with English and challenged their future identities as teachers of English. However, the original idea of English as a passage that they could also offer to their future pupils seemed to be emotionally so significant that the participants were still willing to invest in it, even with the growing awareness of possible downsides of the English language.

## Discussion

Through our participants' autobiographical accounts of being and becoming bilingual, we used the notion of emotional intonation to support the identification of two story types: *Bilingualism as striving* and *Bilingualism as a gift*. In the first story type, English was initially held up as an ideal, as a way of engaging with the wider world but moreover as a way of finding a better 'me'. The emotions of the striving accounts ranged from great delight, hope and excitement to uncomfortable struggles, envy, significant self-doubts and painful frustrations. In these stories the goal is of such great value that the participants are willing to endure emotionally painful trials to attain an idealized goal. As the participants recounted their emotions in their texts, they constructed ambivalent emotional intonations by adding further layers of emotion indicative of the way in which they themselves made sense of their experiences. In the gift stories, English was initially experienced as a gateway to something other, whether a new community, sport, or music. These global communities connect with different interests and various areas of the participants' lives, as well as providing opportunities to use the L2 (Dörnyei and Ushioda 2009). The emotional intonation of the gift stories was more stable, positive and less dramatic. In these stories, positive emotions maintain an active relationship with English without any clearly defined goal that motivates development. This suggests that their learning was not motivated by an ideal L2 self (Dörnyei 2005). The less dramatic emotional intonation in these texts suggests that the journey to being and becoming bilingual had been less painful for these participants.

As in earlier research, the ambivalence of identity was also a prevalent theme (Block 2007; Duff 2012; Norton 2012) in the autobiographical accounts. Our study includes individuals who willingly accept the possibilities offered by the new bilingual identity and do not problematize it as well as individuals that profoundly wrestle with a desired identity. The longitudinal perspective of our study provides insights into language learner identity development over a 2–3 year period. All of the participants' perspectives appear to mature over time as their language learning pathways intertwine with and illuminate different stages of their identity development. As the participants became more aware of who they are and wish to be, they appeared to be more able to exert greater agency in their identity development as Norton (2012) suggests. In the striving stories this awareness eases the emotional load of the gap between who I am and who I hope to be, and the ambivalence is resolved in their texts albeit momentarily. Emotions that were constructed in their first essays as proofs of their incapacity later transform into a resource for empathy. In the gift stories, greater awareness of the role of English in the world appeared to help the participants to critically reconsider their own relationship with English and to increase their understanding of the intersubjective nature of language learning.

The intersubjective nature of language learning is present in different ways in the autobiographical accounts. In the striving stories, in addition to the greater risk and reward, the participants appeared to feel responsible for their own development and accountable to others. Their environment seemed to encourage an overly idealized vision of the imagined community and greater vulnerability in attaining goals. In the gift stories, however, English was experienced as something given by others, with less emphasis on individual responsibility. In the gift stories over time, however, the participants took over the responsibility for their language development, but there was little sense of outside pressure or the fear of letting someone down. In this sense, the gift stories more akin to first language learning when community membership is not based on language competence nor is language learning based on individual effort.

The intersubjective nature of language learning connects with the role of community in language and identity development. Dewaele suggested that ignoring the emotional component in FL teaching results in ‘relatively emotion-free (and therefore often boring) classroom sessions’ (Dewaele 2015, 14). We would suggest, however, that FL classrooms are anything but devoid of emotion; moreover, the classroom community has a significant influence on the emotional intonation of the language learning journey. Our study highlights the relationship between emotions and conceptualizations regarding FL identity. If the FL classroom focuses too much on the idealized notion of a native speaker, evaluations and linguistic flaws, then the *being* of the student is sacrificed for an idealized *becoming*. As Annie wrote,

No matter how much I liked her lessons, English didn’t come to me so easily. I couldn’t understand the grammar and the vocabulary was hard as well. Most strikingly I remember struggling with the basic ‘be’ and ‘do’. Today it seems incredible how my little brains couldn’t comprehend such common words and their structure. To me, it didn’t make a difference whether it was ‘I do’ or ‘I am’. Also the articles in front of words were inexplicable. But I wanted to be good at everything so I studied a lot and tried to memorize the vocabulary. (E1, p2)

Annie is motivated to reach her ideal L2 self (cf. Dörnyei 2005) and strains to meet the demands of the immediate community – to memorize the words and grammar, without understanding and at a high personal cost. Her motivation targets an external community that is not part of the immediate experience (Dörnyei and Ushioda 2009). In the striving stories, the imagined native speaker community is framed as a goal and an ideal, but it is the immediate community that sows seeds of discontent as the best efforts of a student are continually judged as insufficient. Although the target language community can be an important motivator in FL learning, the classroom itself is the immediate community within which learning should take place. It is perhaps the failure to acknowledge this that allows emotions to be such significant players in FL learning. By acknowledging the presence, keenness and role of emotions, it is hoped that teachers can more sensitively, more pedagogically support pupils as they navigate through the complex and emotional demands of language learning (Kubanyiova and Crookes 2016) and language teacher education can provide constructive opportunities for future language teachers to reconsider the emotional significance of their own journeys.

This study contributes to the discussion around emotions and identity in language learning by highlighting the complex way in which emotions are intuitively present in language learning experiences as well as socially and discursively ascribed within the identity development process (Meijers 2002). We hope that being able to give positive meaning to painful experiences albeit at a later point in time can transform perceived limitations into generative experiences. The key moments included in the narrative accounts do not represent the entire journey nor the complex identity of each individual. In order to more deeply understand the emotional lives of learners, we suggest that diaries might provide useful ways of recording on a more moment-by-moment basis. The participants in this study represent successful FL learners, albeit through different pathways and individual experiences. Throughout the highs and lows, however, the conviction that English is something that is worth investing in carried the participants through. Further research should also be made on how language identities can fail to develop or remain limited. We wonder how many other potential bilinguals have lost their way on their pathways when self-doubt and fears of inadequacy are reinforced rather than tempered by the immediate community.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Notes on contributor

*Josephine Moate* is a senior lecturer in education. Her research interests include teacher development and the role of language in education and research. Josephine coordinates the JULIET programme which specialises in foreign language

pedagogy for younger learners. Maria Ruohotie-Lyhty is a senior lecturer in applied linguistics. Her research is broadly situated in the area of identity, agency and emotions in language learning and teaching.

## ORCID

Josephine Moate  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3530-4373>

Maria Ruohotie-Lyhty  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6972-5064>

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## Appendix 1. An example of an intrapersonal dialogue

Niklas

I was a three-year-old kid and excited as any kid would have been opening the presents ... I found a Playstation one ... it was love at first sight. (E1p2)

So as I went to school and started to study English at third grade, I was already quite a talent, thanks to our Playstation and parents who let me play it, ... I found out that when others continued to stumble with English, I didn't have any obstacles on the way. (E1p3)

As I grew older and my interests change, English must adapt to these new hobbies and interests. (E1p4)

Actually you could say that English itself have become one of those interests, instead of being linked to them. As English became easy, comfortable, fun and interesting it drove me to question myself, if I wanted it to become even more. Maybe I could even make others to see it the way I do. (E1p5)

Using English in the classroom seems nearly as normal as using Finnish. This approach has suited me very well (E2p2)

Working with English has not been much of a problem for me except for the sociology essay which gave me some headache. But I think it was more the structure and not the language that gave me challenges. (E2p4)

So my relationship with English has no doubt gone to positive direction during this year. English has not yet grown a deeper meaning in my life but I surely have had more fun with it than I thought. I am very happy to be capable of using it as well as I can right now and I'm looking forward to be even better ... I would like to apply to be an exchange student and maybe that would give English a deeper meaning. (E2p5)

Although English as a language is a harmless being when used as a tool to communicate it can make people forget about the less useful tools in this case their own mother tongues. Sadly there is more to a language than just communication. (E3p1)

Drawing from my own experience the emphasis on the mother tongue in Finnish school is strong enough to carry on the emotional bond that has emerged towards the language before the start of primary school. (E3p5)

But as their overall awareness of the essence of the language improves they could be introduced to other varieties so they could form their own path on the countless possibilities of English. (E3p7)