Standard language ideology and multilingualism: Results from a survey among European students

Abstract: This article draws upon data from 1880 students across Europe, gathered through an online survey. It aims at identifying general trends regarding their beliefs about multilingualism: Are these still shaped by the dominant standard language ideology (SLI)? In the article, results from factor analysis that examined underlying dimensions of beliefs about multilingualism and language learning are presented. These dimensions are evaluated differently by subsamples of students. On the one hand, students are divided by national backgrounds; for instance, Central European students differ from Belgian students. On the other hand, variables such as geographical mobility play an equal role: Students who consider moving to another country differ in their beliefs from their peers who prefer to stay in their home countries.

Keywords: standard language ideology, multilingualism, university students, comparative European perspective, factor analysis


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erwägen, in ein anderes Land zu ziehen, unterscheiden sich in ihren Überzeugungen von ihren Kollegen, die es vorziehen, zuhause bleiben.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Standardsprachenideologie, Mehrsprachigkeit, Studierende, europäisch vergleichende Perspektive, Faktoranalyse

**Resumen:** Este artículo se basa en los datos de un cuestionario que fue completado online por 1880 estudiantes universitarios en varios países de Europa. El objetivo de esta investigación era identificar tendencias generales de los estudiantes, respecto a sus creencias sobre el multilingüismo. ¿Están aún influidas por la ideología de lengua estándar? Presento los resultados de un análisis factorial que examina las distintas dimensiones como base en el multilingüismo. Estas dimensiones son valoradas de manera diferente por varios grupos de estudiantes. Por un lado, los estudiantes se dividen según su nacionalidad de procedencia: por ejemplo, los estudiantes de Centro Europa son diferentes de los Belgos. Por otro lado, variables como la movilidad geográfica también juegan un papel importante: los estudiantes que tienen la intención de cambiarse de país tienen otras creencias sobre el multilingüismo que los estudiantes que prefieren permanecer en su país natal.

**Palabras clave:** Ideología de lengua estándar, multilingüismo, estudiantes universitarios, perspectiva comparativa europea, análisis factorial

### 1 Introduction

During the past decades, the context for learning languages has changed considerably, first, because of a shift in European Union (EU) language policy from an exclusive focus on the protection of national languages to a growing focus on individual multilingualism, under the catchphrase *Mother tongue +2* (cf. Barcelona European Council 2002: 19). Learning foreign languages is conceptualised as a prerequisite for Europeans to participate in knowledge-based society. Second, EU programmes such as the Erasmus credit mobility programme have boosted mobility of a specific group of Europeans, viz. students. Erasmus-Generation students can go to the country where the language is spoken more easily than generations before them. Additionally, with demographic changes that affect Europe, most nation-states are by now far from linguistically homogeneous.

Third, various forms of computer-mediated communication brought about a radical change in language learning: For present-day language learners, texts in any language are available at any time, at least for those who have access to new media and communication technologies. In addition, many forms of online
language courses are available in major standard languages, but also in minority languages and non-standard varieties.

Therefore, present-day students who engage in language learning are caught in between seemingly contradicting developments. On the one hand, foreign languages have become a commodity in an increasingly globalising world: This concerns mainly English, but also other standard languages that are ideally acquired in an institutional context. On the other hand, in practice, students are confronted with diverse multilingual interactions both in the real world — in big urban centres or while travelling abroad — and in the virtual world — for example, through social media.

This paper focuses on university students as language learners in the new millennium: What are their beliefs about multilingualism? The paper draws upon data gathered through an online survey, completed by 1880 students, who share at least three characteristics. First, with an age range from 18 to 29, they are part of Generations Y and Z — the first that have been familiar with new media and communication technologies from an early age. Second, they form a group with a high educational level (secondary education or higher). Third, they are European students, viz. they have the nationality of a European country and / or are enrolled at a European university or institution of higher education.

As shown by the recent European Commission (2012) Eurobarometer language survey, young Europeans are more likely than older generations to speak at least one foreign language. According to the Eurobarometer report, 76% of the youngest generation (15–24) and 64% of those from 25 to 39 can “hold a conversation in at least one additional language” (European Commission 2012: 5 & 18), compared to 55% of those aged 39 to 55 and only 38% of the oldest generation (55+).

As an educational elite of young Europeans, according to the Eurobarometer report, students are even more likely to know one (86%), two (45%) or three languages (16%) in addition to their mother tongues. The percentage of students who report themselves monolingual is rather low (14%), compared to an average rate of 46% monolingual Europeans. The 1880 students in this sample represent the multilingual group, viz. they have at least two languages in their repertoires.

However, students in the sample do not form a socially homogeneous group. First, they belong to 63 different nationalities: As Europe is still primarily organised as nation-states, different beliefs about language and multilingualism related to national contexts within which someone grows up can be expected.

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1 The term belief is used throughout this paper to refer to “what people think, or take for granted, about language and communication” (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994: 56). Theoretical and methodological choices for this study will be discussed in the following sections.

2 At the EU level, over one third (37%) of the population aged 30–34 had completed tertiary education in 2013 (cf. European Union 2015).
Second, they study different subjects: We can expect that students enrolled in arts and humanities subjects share language beliefs to which students of other subjects attach less importance. Third, students in the sample are either more attached to urban or to rural areas, and they either prefer to stay in the same place or to move to a different country in the future. In this paper, the role of the variables Mobility and Urbanicity will be explored. Regarding the variable Mobility, for example, Dewaele and Wei (2014: 244) presented evidence that respondents who lived abroad for a longer period of time were more inclined to rate codeswitching positively than less mobile respondents. Urbanicity is equally a factor worth exploring: In sociolinguistics, new interest has developed in the superdiverse character of metropolises and their dynamic language repertoires (cf. Vertovec 2010; Rampton et al. 2015; Siemund et al. 2013; Quist and Svendsen 2010). Possibly, students who prefer urban life have beliefs about language and multilingualism that differ from their peers’ beliefs. Thus, this paper focuses more specifically on how various subsamples of students (as part of the young European generation) differ from each other in their beliefs about multilingualism.

The paper is structured as follows: First, the theoretical concepts that provide the backbone of this study — multilingualism and standard language ideology — are reviewed. Second, this study is positioned within the framework of language ideology research (within research that examines what “speakers think about language and language use”). Then, the design of the empirical study is described, and the hypotheses are summarised. Subsequently, the hypotheses are tested with empirical data. The findings’ implications are discussed in the concluding section.

2 Theoretical background

2.1 Multilingualism and standard language ideology

There have been numerous attempts to define multilingualism from various perspectives, but no definition captures all facets of the phenomenon. This paper focuses on individual multilingualism: the ability of an individual to communicate in more than one language or language variety.

More specifically, the paper focuses on what people think about multilingualism. In other words, the focus is on beliefs, ideologies and attitudes. What people think about multilingualism is, in turn, shaped by what is regarded as “a language”. The common way of thinking about language in past centuries is referred

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3 See Section 2.2 for a discussion of the terms ideology and attitude.
to as standard language ideology (SLI). In a nutshell, this means that standard language has become an equivalent of language. It implies that when we speak, for example, of a multilingual individual, we think primarily of proficiency in more than one standard language, for example in German and French (and not in any other, non-standard variety) (cf. Vetter 2013; Jaspers 2009; European Commission 2012a).

In contrast, in practice, there “are strong indications that there are far more Europeans using different languages in everyday interaction than there are Europeans learning standard languages in an institutional context” (Vogl 2012: 31).

From a historical perspective, the invention of language as something “that presumes a very particular set of features” (such as stability and uniformity, cf. Milroy 2001) and as “not equivalent to the capacity to speak” (cf. Gal 2009: 14) occurred in the 18th and 19th centuries, with earlier roots in the 16th and 17th centuries, when vernacular varieties were gradually molded into uniform languages (cf. Burke 2004).

Over the centuries, language has become deeply entrenched as a marker of belonging—to a nation, an ethnic or cultural group or to different groups. Most importantly, standard languages have been instrumentalised as national languages: Since the end of the 18th century, a one-to-one-relationship between belonging to a nation and speaking the language of that nation has become the normal relationship. Even in the late 20th and in the 21st century, the nation as primary focus of cultural and ethnic identity is still an important factor, and language has an important symbolic function in this relationship.

At the same time, language skills have been instrumentalised as tools for economic and social participation. Having one specific standard language as mother tongue and being able to use it in the correct way has been made prerequisite for social mobility across Europe. Additionally, some languages—first and foremost English as the present global lingua franca—have become a commodity in an increasingly globalised economy (cf. Heller 2010).

This pressure to acquire the skill “foreign languages” is, for some, accompanied by the fear that proficiency in other languages might harm the mother tongue that is considered indexical for one’s roots. Heller et al. (2015) — in their study on contemporary forms of labour mobility in francophone Canada — appropriately speak of an ideological tension between language as a marker of belonging and language as a skill, more specifically the challenge that it poses to the ideal of one-language-one-nation.

In this paper, students’ beliefs about multilingualism are investigated: more specifically, students’ beliefs about the field of tension between language as a marker of belonging and language as a skill.

In the following subsection, a brief overview will be given regarding commonalities and differences in research on speakers’ beliefs about language. The present study will be positioned with regard to existing basic concepts and methodologies.
2.2 Language ideology research: Concepts and methods

Research into beliefs about language, viz. about “what people think, or take for granted, about language and communication” (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994: 56) is a rather young field. On the one hand, its rise can be related to growing interest in language ideologies in anthropological linguistics from the late 1970s onwards (cf. Silverstein 1979). On the other hand, there is an earlier tradition of research into language attitudes as a subfield of the social psychology of language (cf. Lambert 1967). Research on language ideologies and research on language attitudes are linked by the same basic interest: evaluations of language and language use. Accordingly, some researchers (cf. Gal 1992; Weber and Horner 2012) indicate commonalities between these research fields. This has to do with the fact, among others, that there has been a considerable shift in perspective in attitude research in the past decades — away from the originally predominantly individualistic and mentalist perspective towards a more holistic perspective, with closer attention to social norms and their links to people’s attitudes (cf. Vandermeeren 2005: 1321). Still, there are a few fundamental differences regarding basic concepts and methodological orientation. A thorough discussion of commonalities and differences between ideology and attitude research is beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, two analytical dimensions will be highlighted.

The first concerns the assumption that a specific view on language usually serves the interest of a specific social group. This perspective is more mainstream in language ideology research than in language attitude research (cf. Myers-Scotton 2006: 141). It manifests itself in a stronger focus on language ideologies’ role in processes of social inclusion and exclusion. Irvine’s (1989) definition exemplifies this more critical stance in language ideology research. According to her, language ideology refers to “the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests” (Irvine 1989: 255). Because of its impact on daily social life, the “standard language view” can best be tackled from a critical ideological perspective. SLI serves interests of specific social groups and leads to social exclusion of other groups — of those who have no access to the standard language because of a lack of schooling or economic resources (Jaspers 2012; Silverstein 1996). SLI is usually regarded as hegemonic ideology: According to Verschueren (2012: 12), hegemony “involves the internalisation of the authority one may be subjected to”. In other words, hegemony entails finding a way to reach consent also among those who do not profit from a certain ideology, by making it seem normal.

4 However, ideology research also has neutral approaches that focus, as for example Rumsey (1990: 346) does, on “shared bodies of commonsense notions about the nature of language in the world”.
Even a relatively privileged group within the younger European generation — the university students in my sample — are under pressure to strive for proficiency in standard language(s), which, as Kroskrity (2007: 503) indicates, are “commodified and presented as the only resource which permits full participation in the capitalist economy and an improvement of one’s place in its political economic system”.

The second issue where language ideology and language attitude research differ in their basic conceptions involves the question of stability of beliefs. Ideology research focuses clearly on the “dynamic and constructive process of social categorisation and social evaluation” (Garrett 2010: 30). In contrast, attitude research sees attitudes as, in principle, stable and durable. In past decades, however, dynamic aspects of attitudes have begun playing a role, with speakers as agents who take part in constructing attitudes (cf. Vandermeeren 2005: 1327).

Garrett (2010: 30) favours reconciling the two conceptions of beliefs about language. He stresses the importance of assuming trends towards stability and durability of attitudes at a more general level — without denying the social context of attitudes and the variety in attitudes that this (variable) context may produce. He also indicates that, especially language attitudes, tend to be more durable than other attitudes. This has to do with the fact that attitudes acquired at an early age are usually more enduring and that “many of our attitudes to language, like language itself, are acquired early in the lifespan” (Garrett 2010: 29–30).

The stability-versus-dynamics debate has repercussions on the choice of research method. In language ideology research, strong focus on ad-hoc construction of social evaluation, bound to very specific contexts, has led to a rather unfavourable climate for quantitative, large-scale studies. However, Garrett (2010: 30) stresses the importance of approaches that allow for generalisation of findings across larger groups of speakers. Soukup (2012: 219) equally refers to a strength of quantitative methods, viz. the possibility of eliciting reactions to stereotypes: “[Q]uantitative experiments [...] are typically used to and particularly good at, eliciting the average evaluative expressions of large groups of people — in other words, stereotypes. These are located on a general rather than a specific level of reference” (Soukup 2012: 219). Quantitative methods are therefore appropriate for research in which the “researchers follow a ‘meaning in general’ strategy” (Dörnyei 2007: 27).

Both named assets — suitability for making generalisations and for eliciting stereotypes — make a quantitative approach suitable for our purpose: first, because it was our aim to establish general patterns in present-day student attachment to SLI and, second, because stereotypes play an important role in SLI. In every hegemonic ideology, there are deeply rooted, widely held beliefs and general stereotypes that are internalised to such an extent that they seem “normal”. Referring to Foucault (1972: 128–129), Watts (2012: 587) suggests that there is a “discourse archive” in the form of “true” statements that constitute what
Foucault calls “the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events”. Such statements make up the “narrative” of a hegemonic discourse. In the discourse on multilingualism, for example, a recurring statement is that learning a foreign language can have a negative effect on proficiency in the learner’s mother tongue. Such a statement and other statements “that can be said” about multilingualism, are this study’s target.

3 Methods

3.1 Participants

For the reasons above, a quantitative approach was chosen for this study. More specifically, a quantitative direct approach (cf. Ryan et al. 1982: 7–8) was used, viz. a web questionnaire. Online questionnaires offer the possibility of reaching a large pool of potential participants with relatively little time, effort and money. It is therefore ideally suited for this research on students’ beliefs about multilingualism across Europe. Online questionnaires lend themselves to snowball sampling: Potential participants were approached through contact persons, and they were in turn asked to identify further potential participants.

As Dewaele and Wei (2014: 243) indicate, Internet samples are usually not representative of the general population. However, as Wilson and Dewaele (2010) have argued, in multilingualism research, having a sample representative of the general population does not have the highest priority. Instead, participants who meet specific criteria are needed: They have to be multilingual, and they must have a rather high metalinguistic awareness to be able to answer abstract questions on language use and beliefs about language. Accordingly, for this study, the aim was to recruit European university students who were multilingual in any form and who were willing to reflect on their multilingualism. The sampling strategy’s focus was on universities in Belgium (Flanders and Wallonia), Austria (Vienna), Germany, Great Britain, several countries in Central Europe (Czech Republic, Poland, Serbia, Hungary and Slovakia) and the Netherlands.

The Dutch- and the German-speaking areas have long traditions of linguistic standardisation and standard language culture: German and Dutch are so-called early standard languages (Vogl 2010). From a present-day point of view, Dutch and German are representatives of medium scale and big European languages respectively, both in numbers of speakers and in their spread as a foreign language. University students from Central Europe primarily served as contrast to student populations from the Low Countries, Germany and Austria. Of course, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Serbia each have their own language…
situation and history of linguistic standardisation. What the regions do share, however, as former Eastern bloc countries, is a rapid change regarding foreign language policy — from Russian (and partly German) to English as the most important foreign language. Moreover, statements from essays written by students from Central Europe (cf. Vogl 2014) showed that multilingualism was frequently framed in terms of a threat to the mother tongue and to national languages in general. Students from British universities were also selected to serve as contrast: more specifically, to assess how students living where the international lingua franca English is the national language, think about multilingualism.

A total of 1880 students completed the questionnaire (1476 females, 404 males). The majority, viz. 92% of respondents, ranged in age from 18 to 29 years. Of respondents, 74% were enrolled in a subject of the category arts and humanities. The remaining 26% were studying subjects from the Erasmus classification categories education (n = 151), social sciences, journalism and information (n = 103), business, administration and law (n = 68), natural sciences, mathematics and statistics (n = 63), engineering, manufacturing and construction (n = 32), information and communication technologies (n = 27), health and welfare (n = 22) and agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary (n = 17). Participants reported 63 different nationalities, including many with double nationalities. The sample was dominantly European, as only 68 of 1880 respondents had non-European nationality (mostly American and South African). The largest group came from Belgium (n = 469), followed by Austria (n = 304), Germany (n = 267), the Netherlands (n = 187), Britain (n = 147), the Czech Republic (n = 94) and Poland (n = 51). In decreasing order, there were smaller groups of Slovaks, Hungarians, Fins, Italians, Luxembourgers and Serbians (all 25 or more members) and 50 other nationalities.

### 3.2 Instruments

The questionnaire was an open-access survey, advertised through targeted emails to colleagues in academic institutions. It remained online from March to June 2015.

The questionnaire contained sociobiographical sections with questions about participants’ home university, nationality, gender, age and knowledge of languages. Moreover, it included a section with questions on the participant’s living situation. These questions were meant to assess students’ Mobility and Urbanicity, for example their preference for either a rural or urban living environment and their willingness to move to another country in the future.

Participants’ beliefs about multilingualism were elicited through a semantic differentiation scale. A multi-item scale was used, consisting of 16 items. Each item was a statement to which respondents were asked to show their agreement on a
scale from 1 to 6, with 1 standing for completely disagree, 2 for mostly disagree, 3 for slightly disagree, 4 for slightly agree, 5 for mostly agree and 6 for completely agree.

An important requirement for writing items was that they could be used in one questionnaire that addressed students from different language communities. Therefore, the same questionnaire written in English was used for all prospective respondents. As the target group were young language learning students, a good passive knowledge of English across the sample could be expected. Moreover, the written statements were specific enough to yield a reaction, but general enough to be answered from different linguistic and national contexts. However, respondents were asked to react specifically as representatives of the present-day student generation. For example, with regard to the statement For finding a job, you have to know at least one foreign language, respondents were reminded to answer from a student perspective and not for their whole generation or for their fellow citizens.

The 16 items of this scale represent 16 common assumptions about multilingualism and more specifically, about becoming multilingual, viz. about learning languages. Various SLI aspects feed into different assumptions. For example, the assumption that We should be able to communicate in the language of the country where we live is linked to the belief in essentialist relation between the nation-state, the citizen of a nation-state and the national language (following the principle of “the French live in France and speak French”).

Before proceeding to the empirical results, in the following section, the hypotheses are summarised.

4 Hypotheses

The present study aims to test the following hypotheses:

(1) The link between nationality and beliefs about multilingualism. Because Europe is still primarily organised by nation-state, different beliefs about language and multilingualism related to the national context(s) within which someone grows up can be expected. More specifically, students from Central Europe are expected to attach more significance to statements that stress the identity function of language (language as a marker of belonging) than other students. After all, these students have grown up either in young nation-states or in states with radical political changes in the past decades, and with it, new nationalist movements. Therefore, we expected that symbolic value of the mother tongue would be strong, and the fear of risking the integrity of its use and structure was a relevant factor.

(2) The link between field of study and beliefs about multilingualism. We expected participants enrolled in arts and humanities to score higher on state-
ments about the importance of language and culture than on statements stressing language’s functional perspective (language as a skill) than their peers from other subjects (e.g. natural sciences).

(3) The link between Mobility and beliefs about multilingualism. We expected participants who intended to move to another country in the future to attach less significance to statements that stress language’s identity function (language as a marker of belonging) than their peers who preferred to stay in their home countries.

(4) The link between Urbanicity and beliefs about multilingualism. The wish to live in an urban environment in the future could be linked to beliefs about multilingualism, but it is hard to predict that link’s nature. Most probably, participants who intended to live “in a big city” in the future were also inclined to attach less significance to statements that stress language’s identity function (language as a marker of belonging) than their peers who preferred to live in a rural environment.

5 Results

5.1 Factor analysis

Capturing trends based on students’ responses to 16 statements is difficult. Therefore, as a first step, a statistical procedure called factor analysis was applied to results from the multi-item scale, more specifically, Exploratory Factor Analysis.5 Within statistics, factor analysis is a part of multivariate correlational data analysis methods. Items that correlate strongly are summarised into one factor. Factor analysis helps to make visible which items belong together or are associated with each other. In the present study, factor analysis helped make visible which dimensions of “thinking about language learning” emerged from individual items.

For extracting factors from the multi-item scale, a principal component analysis with Varimax rotation was chosen. First, six factors were extracted. As a next step, factor scores for the six factors were constructed. For example, factor 1,

5 For statistical analysis, SPSS Version 21.0.0.1 was used. Before applying factor analysis, histograms of the 16 items were run: Values approached a theoretical distribution called normal distribution, viz. they more or less fit the normal distribution curve. Box and whisker plots revealed outliers and extreme values for 5 of the 16 items. In SPSS, extreme values are more than three box lengths from either end of the box. Outliers are values between one and a half and three box lengths from either end of the box. However, these numbers are quite small and with a sample size of 1880, 5 to maximally 21 outliers are no reason for concern.
which stands for a conceptualisation of language learning as a professional skill, was computed into a variable labelled Qualification. As a statistical method for factor score construction, *sum scores above a cut-off value* was used (cf. DiStefano et al. 2009), viz. scores of all items that loaded strongly on the respective factor were summed (with 0.4 as a cut-off) and averaged. Averaging them was necessary to allow comparisons across factors composed of different numbers of items.

The six factors were interpreted and assigned factor labels from the students’ perspective on language learning: What did students in the sample think of as useful or important? What bothered them about multilingualism and language learning? Table 1 provides an overview of labels for the six factors, with an explanation of each factor’s essence:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor label</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F1: Qualification</td>
<td>Thinking about language learning in terms of importance for the professional career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2: Functionality</td>
<td>Thinking about language learning in terms of communicating efficiently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F3: Rootedness</td>
<td>Thinking about language learning in terms of attachment to the home country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F4: Dedication</td>
<td>Thinking about language learning in terms of learning about language AND culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F5: Enjoyment</td>
<td>Thinking about language learning in terms of travelling and meeting new people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F6: Risk</td>
<td>Thinking about language learning in terms of threat to the native language</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Factor 1 was termed Qualification because it consisted of items in which students were asked about the importance of languages for their curriculum vitae. Factor 2 was called Functionality and united items with focus on understandability (irrespective of correctness). Factor 3 was called Rootedness because it was based on items with an underlying expectation that people “are rooted to place” (Heller et al. 2015: 3). These items stressed the importance of having roots in a specific territory and of knowing that territory’s language. As the term for factor 4, Dedication was chosen because its items captured the interest of learners in speakers of the language and their culture. Factor 5 was termed Enjoyment because it consisted of items on meeting people with different language backgrounds. Finally, Factor 6 Risk, was based on items that foreground questions of linguistic interference and indicate possibly endangering the mother tongue when learning a foreign language. These six factors can be related to the two dimensions introduced in Section 2.1: *language as a marker of belonging and language as a skill*. Over the centuries, language has been instrumentalised as either of the two for various political and
social goals. Basically, factor 1 (Qualification), factor 2 (Functionality) and factor 5 (Enjoyment) can be related to the language as a skill concept (which from now on will be referred to as skill factor), thereby contrasting with factor 3 (Rootedness), factor 4 (Dedication) and factor 6 (Risk), which are more in line with the language as a marker of belonging concept (which from now on will be referred to as belonging factor). See Figure 1 below:

![Figure 1](image)

For factors Qualification, Functionality, Rootedness and Dedication, this is quite a straightforward case. The factor Enjoyment, however, can be related to the skill factor, but also to the belonging factor: It is based on statements such as *Travelling is more fun when you speak foreign languages*, but also on a statement such as *It is exciting to communicate with people from all over the world in different languages*. This statement, however, does not convey the traditional view of identifying with a specific culture. It is rather about becoming part of a linguistically mixed group. Factor 6 (Risk) is also difficult to fit into this scheme: Fear of foreign influences on national languages has, on the one hand, to do with the idea of language as a marker of belonging. On the other hand, aiming for high proficiency in a certain language — without interference from another language — could also be related to the concept of language as a skill. However, aiming at speaking a pure language goes beyond language as a communicative tool. Thinking about multilingualism as a risk is usually linked to fear of compromising one’s (national) identity. In any case, it is important to note that the skill and belonging factors do not stand for a dichotomy, but rather for a continuum, from (more) skill to (more) belonging.

The following subsection shows how strongly students from the sample endorsed different aspects of multilingualism. Moreover, whether there was a trend towards the skill factor or towards the belonging factor is assessed.
5.2 Ranking of factors

Figure 2 below is a polarity profile. It is based on the median (the central value) for each factor. The median was chosen for showing central tendencies because it is not as strongly affected by extreme values and outliers as the mean, and it is very useful when comparing subsets of data. In the questionnaire, students were asked to rate each statement on a scale from 1 to 6, whereby 1 represents the lowest level of agreement (completely disagree) and 6 represents the highest (completely agree):

![Figure 2](image)

Figure 2 shows that the factor Enjoyment received the highest scores (median = 5.5), followed by Functionality and Qualification. Dedication had the same median score as Qualification. Rootedness scored lower (4.5), and Risk scored considerably lower, with a median endorsement of only 3. Overall, students showed higher endorsement of skill factors (the first three in Figure 2) than of belonging factors (the last three in Figure 2). Thus, results trended towards skill factors.

The next subsection focuses on effects of the variables Nationality, Field of study, Mobility and Urbanicity on students’ endorsement of the factors.
5.3 Variation across subgroups

5.3.1 Field of study

There were differences according to Field of study, manifesting themselves in Functionality and Enjoyment. Students enrolled in arts and humanities subjects were inclined to value correctness higher than understandability. Moreover, they showed higher endorsement rates for Enjoyment, that is, they enjoy talking to people from other linguistic backgrounds more than their peers from other subject areas. See Figure 3:

![Figure 3](image)

For both factors — Functionality and Enjoyment — the difference amongst students of arts and humanities and other subjects was significant: T-test results were significant at the 0.001 level.

Overall, a more functional approach to language learning is not surprising for students, for example, from fields of natural sciences, mathematics, statistics, engineering, manufacturing and construction as opposed to arts and humanities students. Many students from the arts and humanities subsample (86 %) were enrolled in a language subject, implying that they were likely more exposed to a tradition of language learning in which correctness and striving for native speaker
proficiency play an important role. A significantly higher endorsement of Enjoyment by arts and humanities students is not surprising either: After all, languages are at the core of their chosen university curricula.

5.3.2 Nationalities

Regarding the variable Nationality, we see that basically, within all national subgroups, skill factors were rated higher than belonging factors. What all nationalities also had in common was that endorsement for Risk was the lowest factor. More specifically, however, there were differences as to how strongly individual factors were endorsed by national subgroups. For example, when we contrast subsamples with Polish and German nationality, we see different levels of endorsement for all factors except Dedication. German students scored higher on Functionality than Polish students, while Polish students showed higher endorsement of the skill factors Qualification and Enjoyment as well as of the belonging factors Rootedness and Risk.

Overall, differences between national subsamples followed a certain pattern, viz. specific nationalities tended to cluster together. When we examined the factor Rootedness (cf. Figure 5), we saw that not only for German students, but also for Belgian, Dutch, Austrian and British students, the median is 4.5, while for students with Polish and Czech nationality, it is 5.0 and 4.7, respectively. The same holds true for students with Slovak and Hungarian nationality (4.7) and Serbian nationality (5.1) where the central value also exceeds the central value of the Belgian, Dutch, Austrian and British subsample.

Apart from differences in centrality, Figure 5 also shows differences in variability of subsamples. In the boxplot in Figure 5, lines extend from the minimum value to the maximum value; the box itself encompasses the lower quartile, the median (indicated by a horizontal line) and the upper quartile. Dots stand for outliers; asterisks represent extreme values.

While the median shows where the sample is centred (higher on Rootedness for the Polish and Czech than for other subsamples), the length of the box and lines indicates the data’s variability. In this regard, Polish students showed the least variability, compared to greater variability in answers from other nationalities, specifically from Austrian and German students.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated significant difference in endorsement of Rootedness amongst students of different nationalities (p < 0.001). The Tukey post hoc test showed that Polish students attached significantly more importance to Rootedness than all other nationalities, except students with Czech nationality, who showed a similar high endorsement of this factor (p < 0.05). Moreover, there was significant difference in the endorsement of Rooted-
ness amongst Czech (high endorsement) and Belgian students (low endorsement). Other nationalities did not differ significantly.
As Figure 6 shows, Risk again received higher endorsement rates in the Czech and Polish subsamples than in other national subsamples, viz. 3.5. Belgian, Dutch and British gave less priority to questions of interference and foreign influence (median = 3), and Austrian and German students regarded this aspect as even less important (median = 2.5). There was great variability in all subsamples, but the greatest was in the Czech subsample and the smallest in the Austrian.

ANOVA indicated significant difference in endorsement of Risk amongst students of different nationalities (p < 0.001). The Tukey post hoc test showed that Austrian students attached significantly less importance to Risk than all other nationalities (p < 0.05), except those with German nationality, who showed similarly low endorsement of Risk. Moreover, there was significantly higher endorsement of Risk amongst Czech students on the one hand and Austrian, German, Dutch and Belgian students on the other.

Figure 6

As indicated in Section 4, an effect of Nationality on beliefs about multilingualism was expected. More specifically, a significant difference between Central European students’ beliefs and those of their peers from other regions was presumed. Additionally, as stressed in Section 4, Europe is organised along lines of nation-states and therefore, differences related to the national context(s) within which someone grows up could be expected. Possible explanations include different ways of instrumentalising language and multilingualism in public discourse in nation-states. However, they also mirror different demands of the respective countries’ labour markets and possibly different traditions of language learning. In considering, for example, the factor Qualification, we saw (cf. Figure 4) that German
students were less ready to endorse the necessity of learning foreign languages (median = 4.7) in contrast with, for example, Polish students (median = 5.3). British students agreed even less with the necessity of learning foreign languages for their careers than all other students (median = 3.6).

Surprisingly, however, some national subsamples differed only marginally in their endorsement of factors: This involved the Austrian and German subsample with regard to Rootedness and the Belgian and Dutch subsample regarding Risk.

5.3.3 Mobility and Urbanicity

In the questionnaire survey, students were asked about their future living situation. On the one hand, this referred to the choice between staying in the home country and living or moving abroad (Mobility). On the other hand, the question referred to the choice between living in a big city and living in a less urban environment (Urbanicity). Our expectation was that statements that stress language’s identity function would be endorsed less by the mobile and urban-minded students in the sample. Figures 7 and 8 show the effect of the variables Urbanicity and Mobility on endorsement of Rootedness.

![Endorsement of factor “Rootedness” by the mobile and less mobile](image)

**Figure 7**

Students who preferred to stay in their home country in the future ascribed more importance to Rootedness (median 4.7) than their peers who considered moving to another country or already planned to move (median 4.5). Moreover, there was
less variability in the data of the home subsample. A t-test was conducted to compare endorsement of Rootedness by mobile students to less mobile students: Results were significant at the 0.001 level. The difference aligns with students’ characteristics in respective subsamples: students who preferred to stay in their home country could be expected to value higher the mother tongue’s role than students who planned to live in another country.

The explanatory power of the variable Urbanicity was less obvious in the data, however. Students who preferred to live in a big city did not differ from students who would rather not live in a big city or had not yet decided. At least, the central value was the same for all three subsamples. When we examine the boxplot below, however, we see that the subsample of urban-minded students shows greater variability than the other two, along with lower minimum value (2.0, as compared to 2.5 for the other two subsamples). See Figure 8:

![Endorsement of factor “Rootedness” by urban and less urban minded students](image)

Figure 8

ANOVA did not indicate significant difference amongst differently urban-minded students ($F(2,1877) = 2.9$; nearly, but not quite significant at the 0.05 level). The Tukey post hoc test revealed no statistically significant differences between urban-minded students (Yes, in a big city) and non-urban-minded students (No, not in a big city) ($p = 0.67$) and even less between undecided students (It depends) and the two other groups ($p = 0.116$ and 0.879, respectively).

Still, all in all, results of preliminary exploration of the variables Mobility and Urbanicity pointed in the direction that students who favoured living in a foreign country and / or in a big city in the future, differed somehow in their beliefs about language learning from their peers who tended to settle in their
home country or in the countryside. The former tended to be less inclined to endorse the importance of language as a marker of belonging.

6 Conclusion

The present article aimed to identify general patterns in students’ beliefs about multilingualism. More specifically, it investigated the effect of a set of variables — Nationality, Field of study, Mobility and Urbanicity — on the importance that students attach to specific aspects of multilingualism and language learning, more specifically, the six factors of Qualification, Functionality, Enjoyment, Dedication, Rootedness and Risk.

The most striking finding was a significant link between Nationality and the importance attached to respective factors. Overall, data suggested a division into British students, Central European students and students from the German- and Dutch-speaking areas. For example, Central European students attached more importance to Rootedness (which refers to the importance of having roots in a specific territory and of knowing that territory’s language) and to Risk (which refers to fear of linguistic interference) than their peers in Europe.

A second noteworthy finding was that students enrolled in an arts and humanities subjects were inclined to value correctness higher than understandability, viz. they endorsed Functionality less than, for example, their peers from natural sciences or engineering. Moreover, they showed higher endorsement rates for Enjoyment, that is, they enjoy talking to people from other linguistic backgrounds more than their peers from other subject areas.

A third noteworthy finding was a significant link between the variable Mobility and the importance attached to Rootedness. Students who either considered moving to another country or already planned to move were less concerned about having thorough proficiency in the national language of the country where they currently live than their peers who preferred to stay in their home country in the future. This first exploration of Mobility suggests that commonalities might reach beyond nationalities and linguistic groups, uniting mobile students across Europe. A similar effect was expected from the variable Urbanicity. However, the analysis revealed no significant difference between students who preferred to live in a big city and those who preferred the countryside, with regard to the factors Rootedness and Risk. The role of the variables Mobility and Urbanicity needs to be investigated further, however.

Although the data provided substantial evidence for language ideological variation, trends were also shared among present-day students from the British Isles, the German- and Dutch-speaking areas and Central Europe: First, they attached more importance to skill factors, that is, factors that stress functional and
instrumental perspective on language learning, than to belonging factors, viz. factors that lean towards language’s identity function. Second, however, belonging factors still played an important role. Questionnaire data analysis confirmed that SLI still influences students’ beliefs about multilingualism because assumptions based on the ideal one-nation-one-language (represented by Rootedness) were endorsed by students across Europe. The median was 4.5, which on the questionnaire’s Likert scale equals a position between slightly agree and mostly agree.

These findings contribute to a clearer picture of young Europeans’ beliefs about language and multilingualism. Results suggest that highly educated young Europeans are affected by “ideological tensions between language as a skill and language as a marker of belonging”, as put forward by Heller et al. (2015) and as asserted in Section 2.1. The data revealed that students had high expectations of both aspects: They agreed with the mother tongue’s importance for maintaining one’s roots, but they also fully engaged in acquiring skills in other languages to compete in a globalising Europe. The present article also demonstrates advantages of a quantitative approach to issues of language ideology. The data revealed general patterns that a qualitative approach, e.g. interviews, would not help produce. However, the article also shows limitations of a quantitative approach: To learn more about reasons underlying students’ endorsement of aspects of multilingualism and language learning, the desirable and necessary next step is to talk to students who learn foreign languages in the new millennium.

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