

LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY:

THE SURVEY RESEARCH

Welcome to our language and identity project!

We are a group of students from three universities:

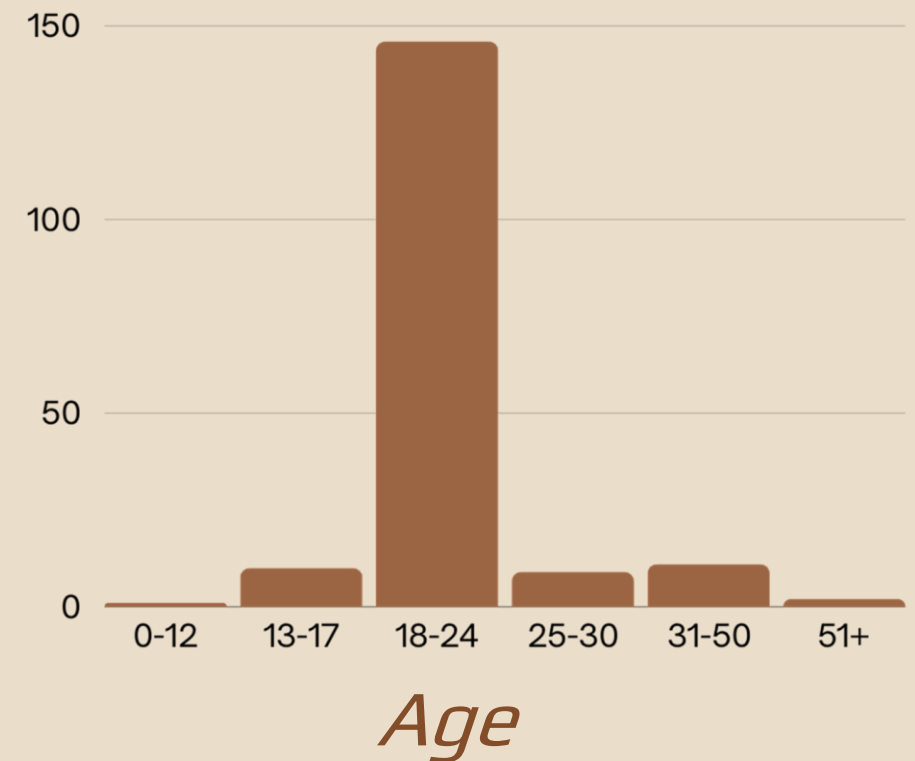
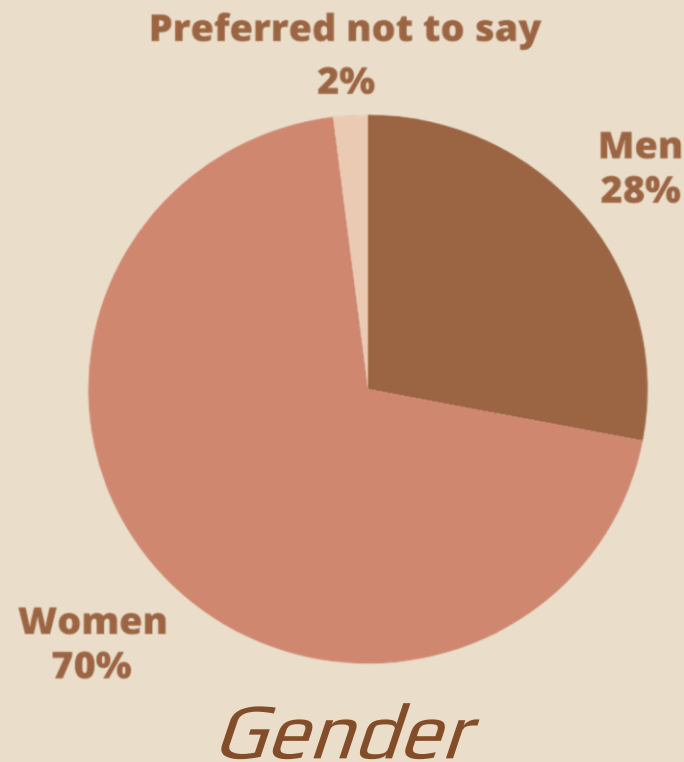
- Silesian University of Technology in Zabrze, Poland
 - Warsaw University of Technology
 - Lviv Polytechnic National University
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This project delves into the fascinating relationship between **language and identity**. Identity tells the story of who we are, where we belong, and how we perceive the world around us.

We wanted to check if the languages people speak affect their sense of identity. To explore this concept, we conducted a **survey** with targeted questions aimed at understanding how language influences respondents' perceptions of themselves and their place in the world.

The participants

Out of 179 responses, 70% were from women, 28% from men, and 2% preferred not to disclose their gender. The majority of respondents fell within the 18-24 age range.



Countries of residence

Most of our respondents are currently living in **Poland** or **Ukraine**. We also received some responses from participants residing in **Czech Republic**, **Germany**, and **Portugal**.

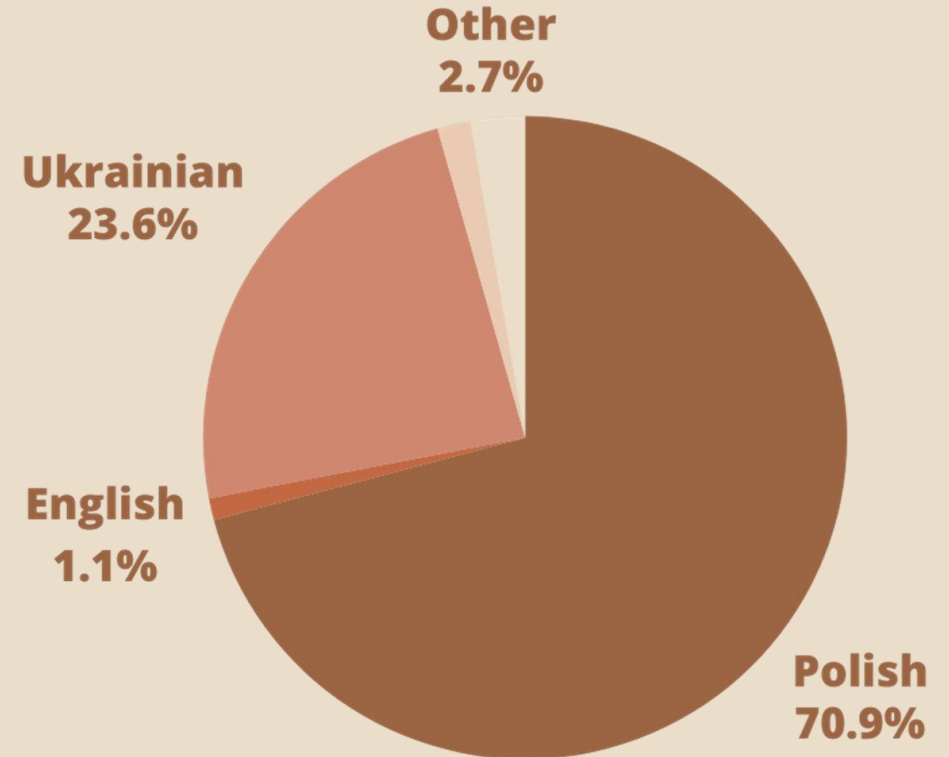


Native languages

71% of our respondents chose **Polish** as their native language, 24% chose **Ukrainian**. Smaller percentages reported **Russian** (2%), **English** (1%), and "other" (3%).

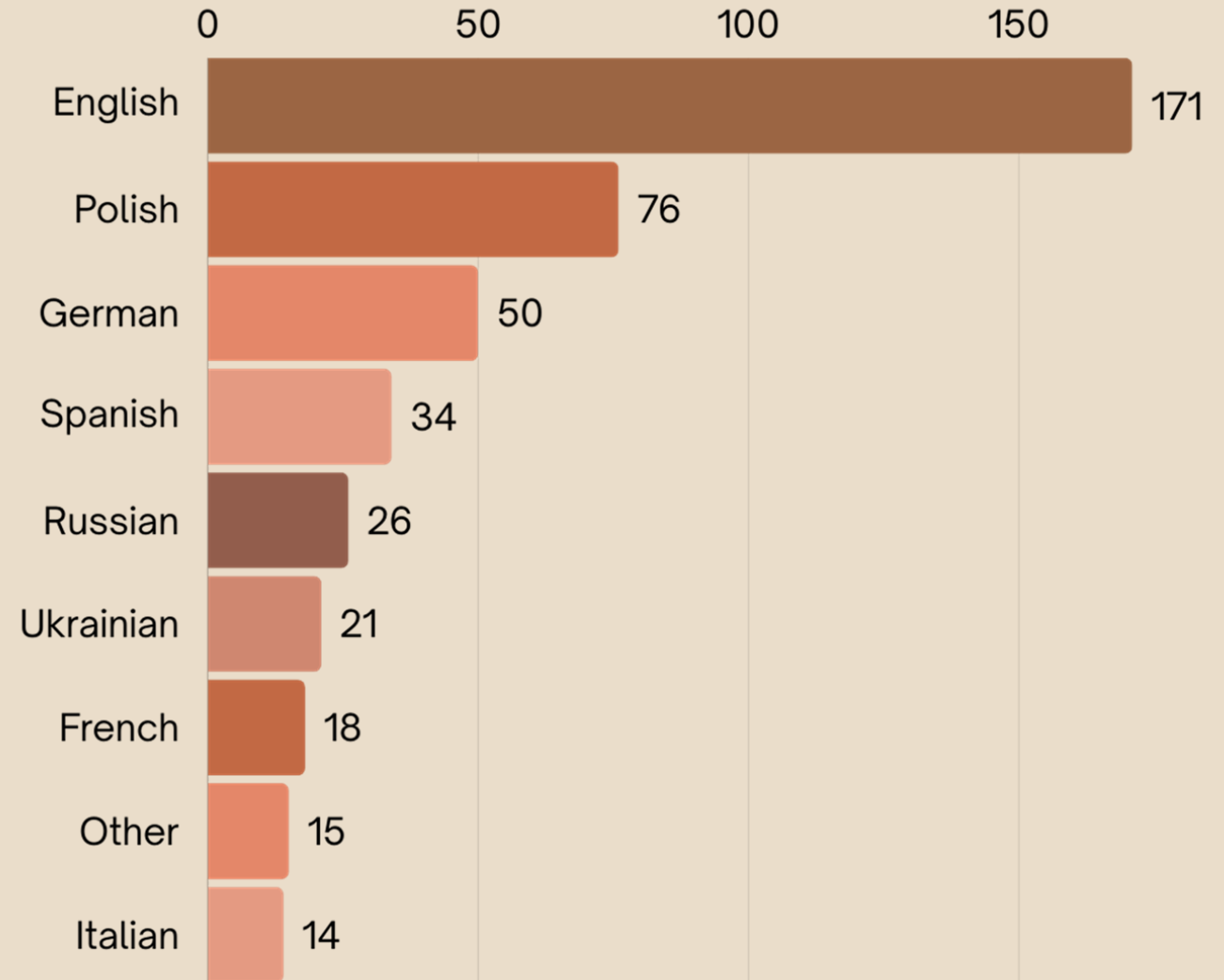
3 of our respondents identified as bilingual – their native languages were:

- Polish and English
- Polish and German
- Ukrainian and Russian

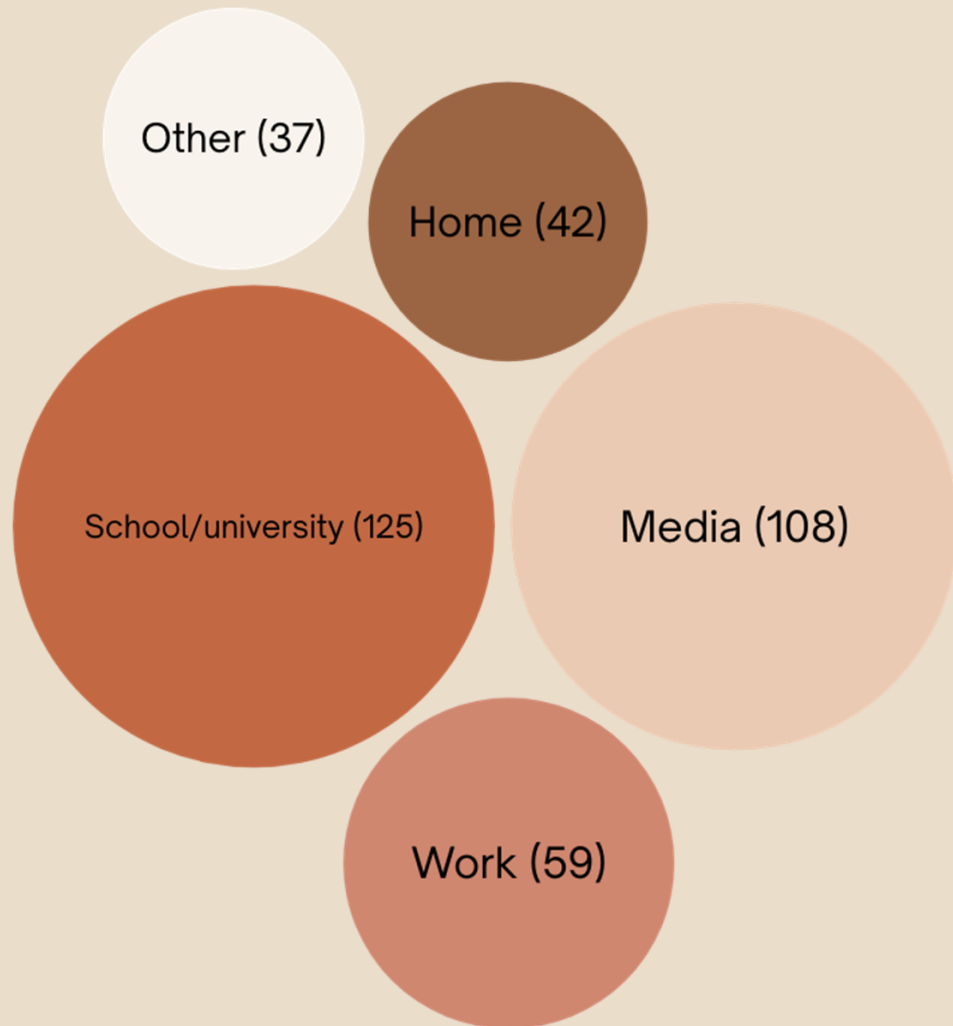


Other languages

We asked our respondents about other languages they speak. Here are the results:



Where do people use foreign languages?



We also asked in what settings the respondents use the other languages.

The most important question

We asked: **"What is identity for you?"** Here are some of the answers:

“
Приналежність до певної країни, можливість почуватися вдома, відповідальність перед вдосконалення цього місця.
(Being part of a certain country, feeling at home, responsibility for improving this place.)
”

“
Zbiór cech osobowości, ale także kultura i zwyczaje, które odróżniają mnie od innych narodowości.
(A set of personality traits, but also culture and customs that distinguish me from other nationalities.)
”

“
Моє самоусвідомлення як унікальної особистості та відчуття приналежності до певної групи людей.
(My self-awareness as a unique person and a sense of belonging to a certain group of people.)
”

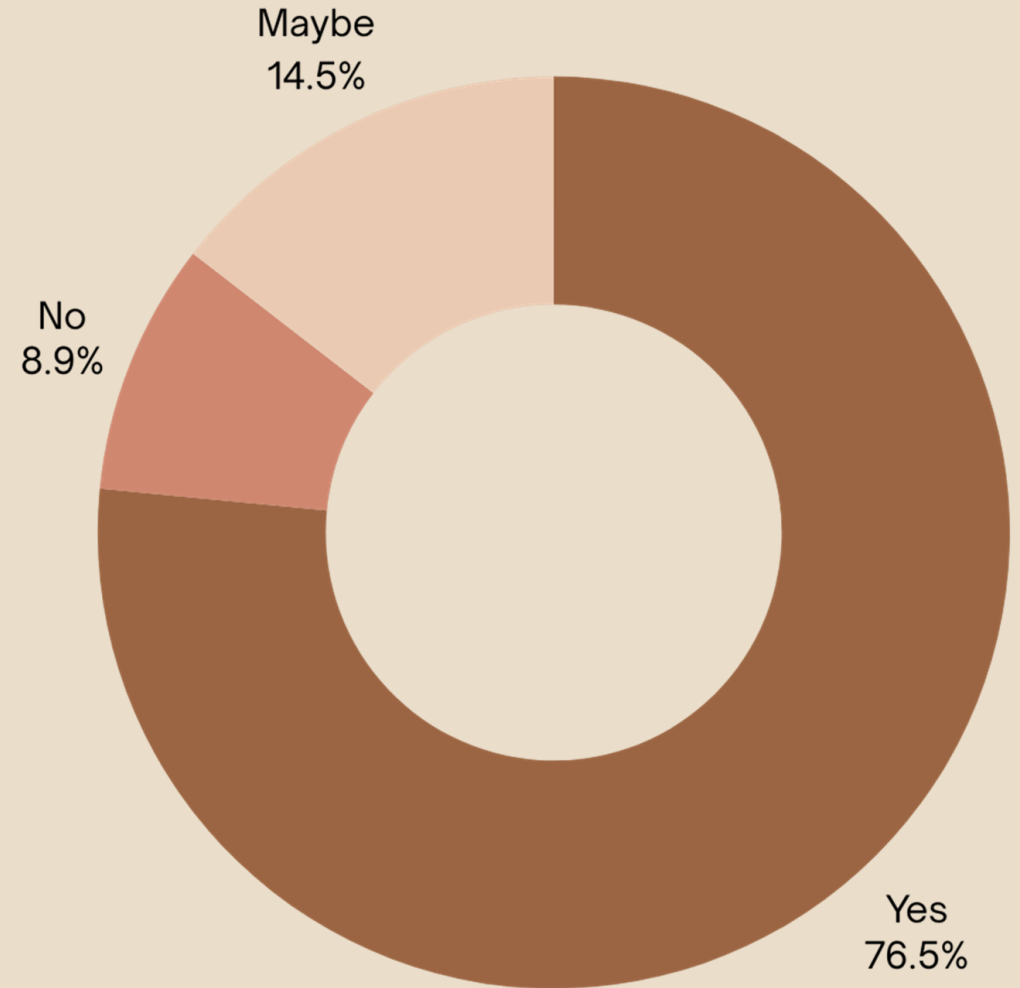
“
Coś z czym się identyfikuję, porostu ja i wszystko, co wpływa na to, że ja to ja.
(Something I identify with, just me and everything that makes me who I am.)
”

“
Identity is who I perceive myself as, my qualities, likes, dislikes, talents etc. and how I think other people perceive me.
”

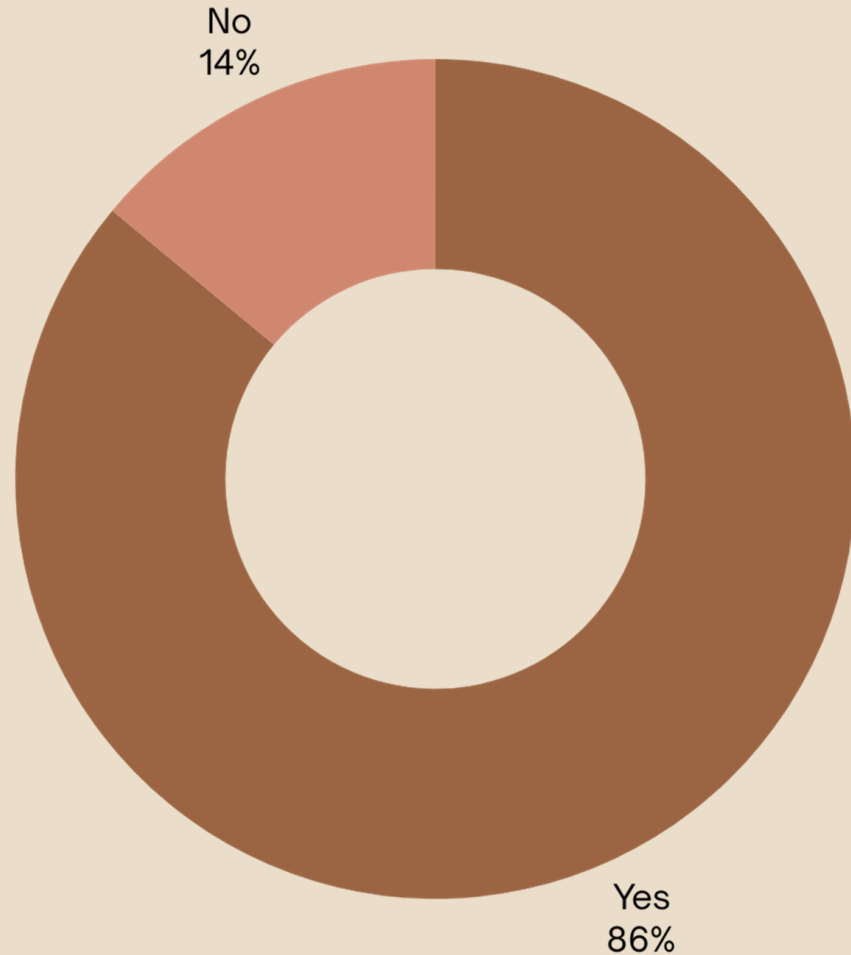
Does language affect identity and thoughts?

Here are the answers:

This result provides strong support for the hypothesis that language shapes identity and thoughts. A large majority of respondents believe there's a connection.



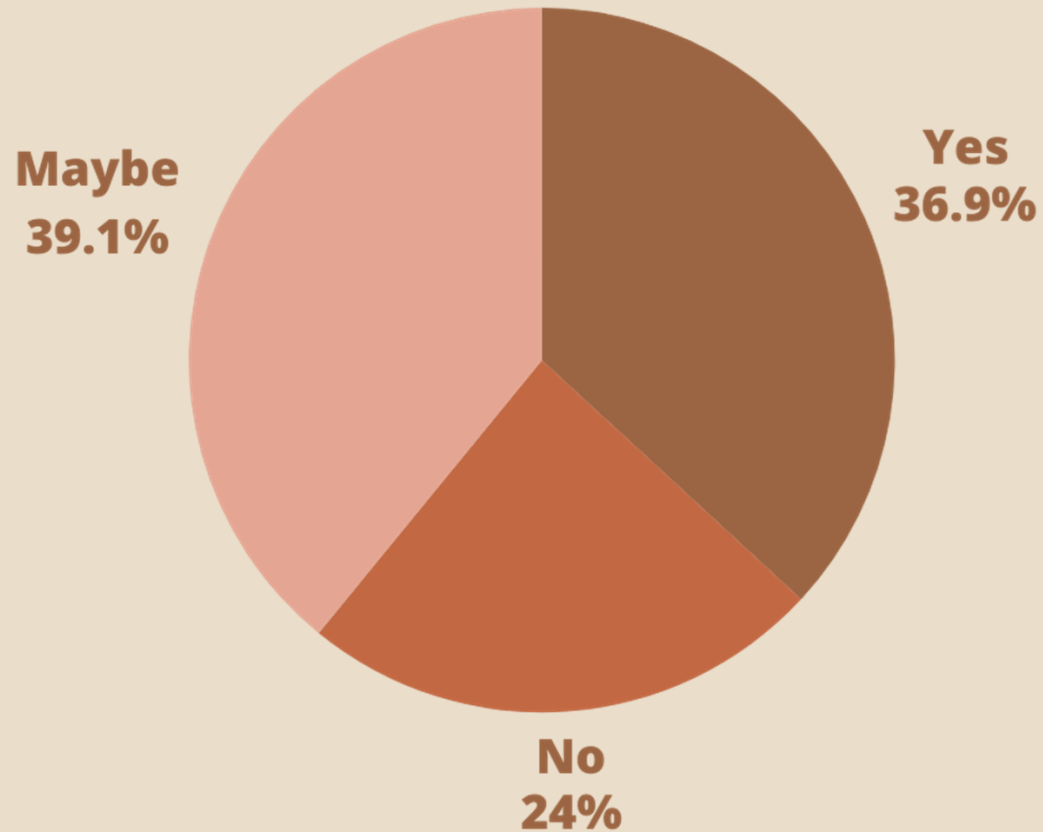
Does your native language reflect your national identity?



The results highlight the cultural significance of language. Language can act as a carrier of traditions, values, and shared experiences that contribute to a national identity.

**What about learning
other languages?**

Do you think that a person's identity might change after learning another language?

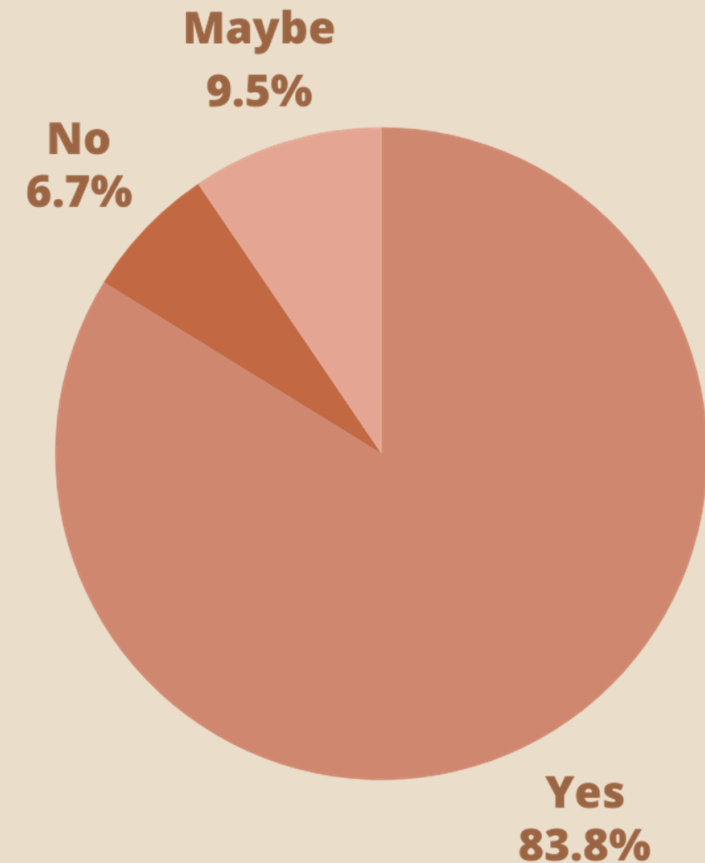


The high percentage of "maybe" responses (39%) highlights the complexity of the relationship between language and identity.

The concept of "identity change" is open to interpretation. Some might see it as a fundamental shift, while others might view it as a more subtle transformation.

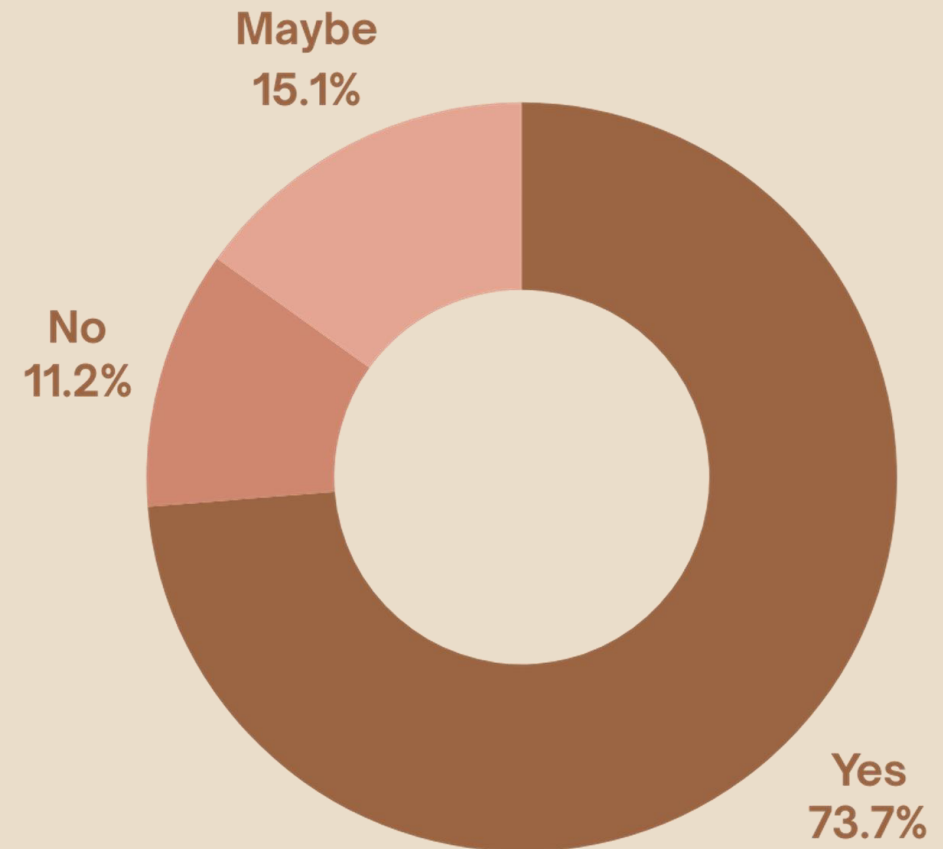
Do you think that learning another language influences your self-confidence?

The results show how important learning another language is for strengthening one's self-confidence. Only 6.7% of people don't feel the influence of learning a language on their self-confidence.



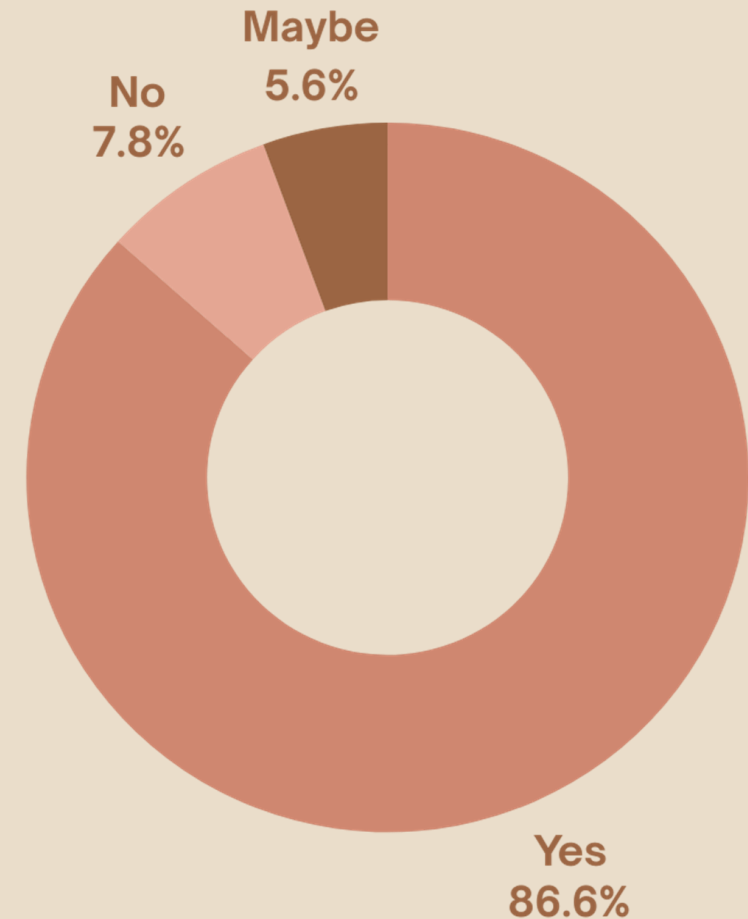
Do you think that not having a common language is a barrier in communicating with others?

Almost three quarters of the responders believe that having a common language with another person is a crucial aspect of communication. Only 11.5% of the responders think that they could communicate well with others without a common language.

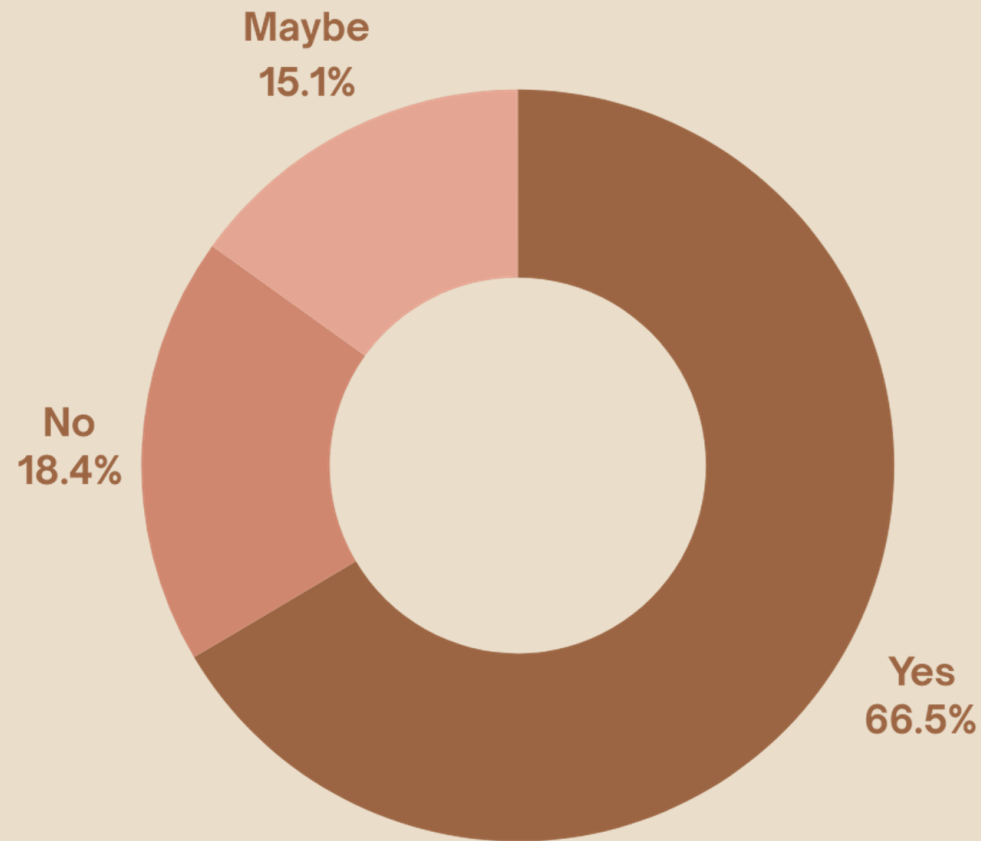


Has your language background influenced your educational experiences?

Almost nine out of ten respondents consider language background as an important factor in educational experiences. This highlights the importance of knowing languages as this can get us better, more diverse education.



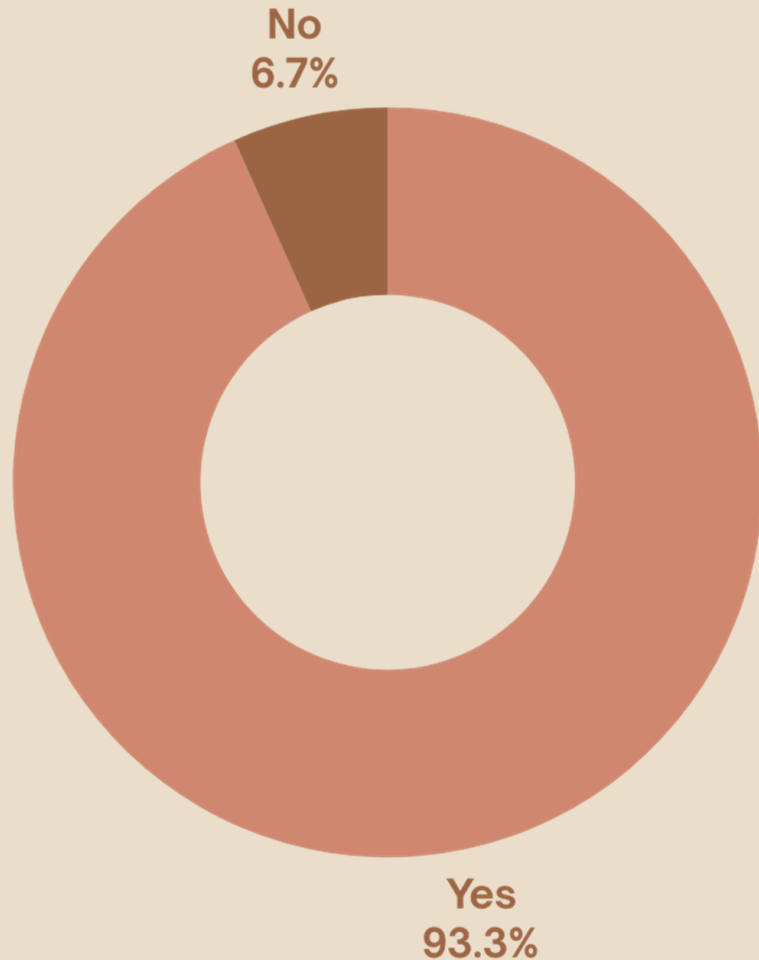
Does speaking different languages affect how you express emotions?



More than a half of survey participants express their emotions differently, depending on the language they speak.

This shows how vocabulary of a language or learning conditions can affect how we show our feelings.

Have you ever mixed your language with words/phrases of another language?



Almost all of responders mixed vocabulary between two languages. We can see, that different languages are not completely separate in our minds.

Dialects vs. Native languages

How many people actually speak dialects?

In our survey, 18% of respondents reported speaking a dialect, while 88% did not.

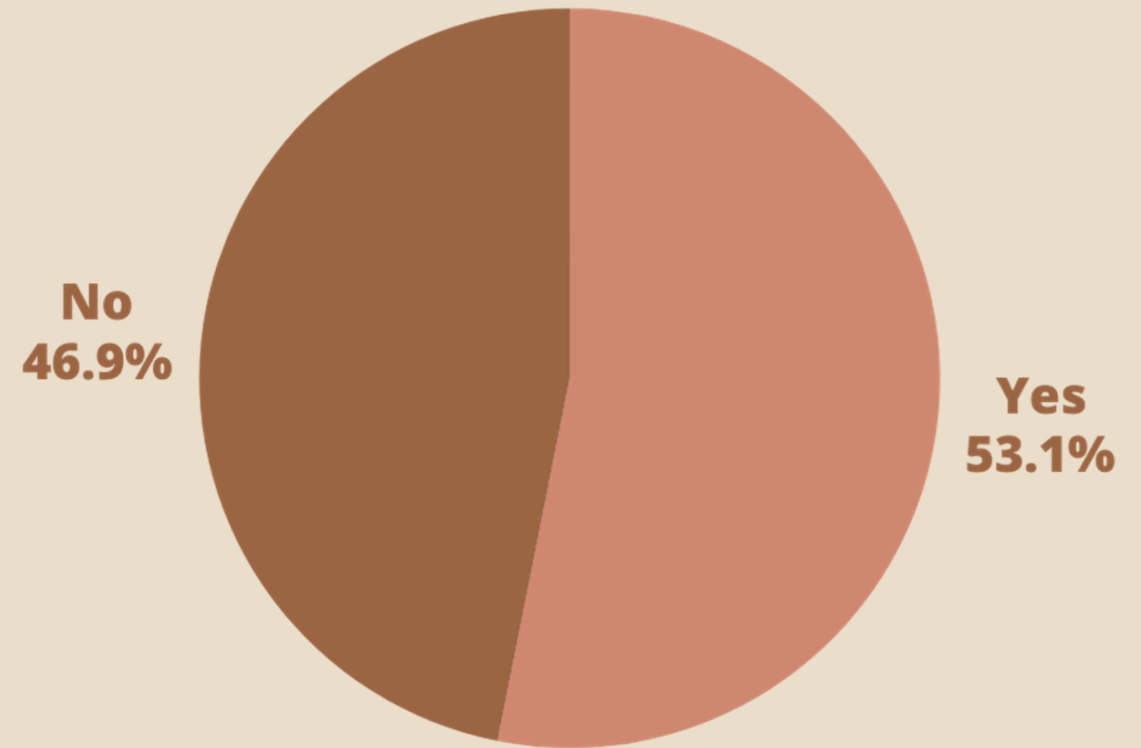
Some of the dialects mentioned were:

- Silesian (Polish)
- Carpathian (Ukraine)
- Galician (Ukraine)

Dialects speakers were asked additional questions to delve deeper into their language use.

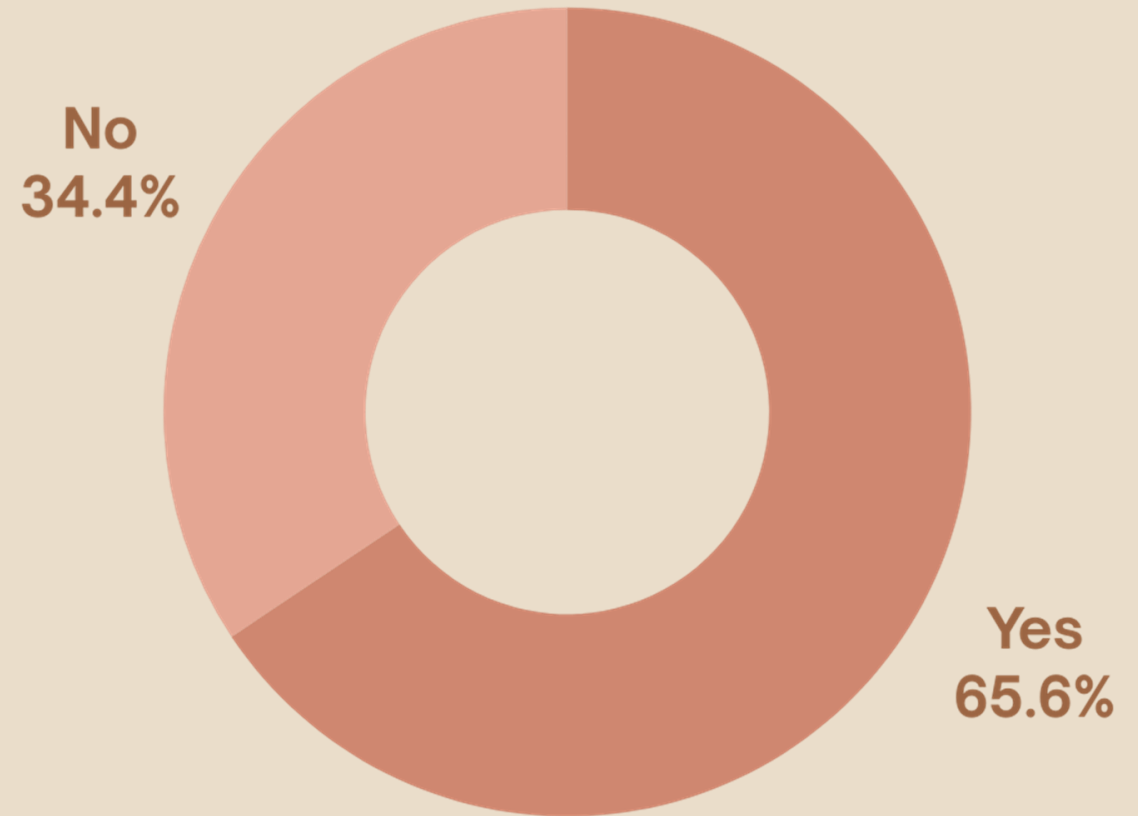
Do you feel more comfortable in speaking your dialect than in speaking your national language?

Majority of respondents, 53.1%, expressed feeling more comfortable speaking their dialect than their national language, suggesting that for many individuals, dialect serves as a more natural means of communication than the national language.



Do you feel different when you speak your dialect?

The findings suggest that using a dialect may influence individuals' self-perception during communication. The majority of respondents reported feeling differently, indicating that dialects may not only affect speech patterns but also impact overall self-awareness during communication.



Let's ask bilingual people

We interviewed two students of Silesian University of Technology. They were:

Konrad Nülken - he comes from Germany, but lives in Poland since 2020, so he's not actually bilingual, but he learnt Polish very quickly. Now he lives and studies in Poland.

Rafał Martin Raczyński - his parents are Polish, but he was born in the USA and he used to live there, so he is bilingual.

**In which language do you think?
For example, imagine a situation that you
speak to yourself. In which language?**

Konrad Nülken:

It depends on the situation. If the situation is connected with Polish people, I think in Polish. If there is a German context, I think in German language.

Rafał Martin Raczyński:

I was born in the USA, at the age of 5 moved to Poland, 5 years later moved back to the USA and at the age of 14 left the USA for the last time. Since then I've been living in Poland. From that experience I can tell that my language preference depends on what country I am in at a given time.

Are you more comfortable in any of the languages in particular situations?

Konrad Nülken:

It's more comfortable for me to talk about physics, mathematics and university stuff in Polish.

Rafał Martin Raczyński:

Since I was moved about from one country to another constantly, I don't think I ever truly became completely fluent in either language. I continue to make blunders in both as I attempt to clumsily gather and articulate my ideas. That was true first in Polish and is currently true in both languages.

Do you mix languages?

Konrad Nülken:

In general not, only if I am in Germany in the first day. Then I need this 24 hours to get used to the German language.

Rafał Martin Raczyński:

No, surprisingly I don't mix them at all, yet sometimes I have these certain situations where I know how to say something in one language but don't know how to express it in the other. Or even worse, sometimes I can't express myself in either language, and find myself grasping for words constantly.

Do you feel or behave differently when you speak a different language? If yes, give an example.

Konrad Nülken:

It's a difficult question. There are some small differences in behaviour. I'd need more time to analyse these differences.

Rafał Martin Raczyński:

Yes, I think that when I speak Polish, I come off as being colder than the Polish winter and more restrained, harsh, serious, and less emotional. In English I'm far more expressive, joyful, impulsive, and vibrant. I believe that the intonation of the aforementioned languages is primarily to blame. Polish has a rather flat intonation, but English has a more dynamic intonation that causes the stress to fall on different words, giving the English language a more lively sound in return.

Are there any things/thoughts/emotions that are easier to express in one of the languages?

Konrad Nülken:

I prefer to talk about my emotions in Polish. I talk about love, joy, sadness and anger in Polish. The reason is, that my best friends are from Poland. But also the language can be used very expressive.

Rafał Martin Raczyński:

It mostly depends on the situation, nonetheless it's important to keep in mind that not every joke and expression carries over well to another language.

Does being bilingual/speaking a foreign language very well and living in a foreign country affect your sense of national identity? In which way?

Konrad Nülken:

The Polish language is a part of the national identity. Speaking Polish and German allows me to understand situations on both sides of the border. Nations exist, to help organising the life of the citizens and to make it better and more fair. Since 2020 I live in Poland. 4 years I had time to see issues, common values and also conflicts. In this time I met many new friends. Today I feel that we are one community. That's why I identify myself as a Polish and German. The key role is the language.

Rafał Martin Raczyński:

Absolutely being bilingual in a foreign country affects your sense of nationality. Until this very day, I don't know exactly who I am, in contrast to my cousins that were completely born and raised in the US. I however got stuck in this weird gray area, as an effect of being brought up in two countries.

Have you ever had any unique experience connected with you being bilingual?

Konrad Nülken:

Yes, there was an elderly man in the train. He thought that I'm from Poland and he was complaining about the Germans. I told him: "Exactly, you can't trust the Germans" and he did agree with me:)

Rafał Martin Raczyński:

Actually, I had a couple, I would say. My bilingualism made it much simpler for me to make friends with foreigners living in Poland, so I now have both Polish and international friends.

Conclusions - part 1

People have a tendency to connect their sense of identity with languages they speak.

We can come up with this conclusion while reading answers to the questions in the survey, for example the answer to the question: *What is identity for you?*

Also, while looking at bilingual students' answers we can see that the fact that they speak two languages on the same, very high level, makes them feel a strong connection with the country they come from, even though they don't live there anymore; as well as the country they weren't born in, but they live in now.

Finally, most of our respondents (65.6%) who speak a dialect claim that they feel different when they speak the dialect (comparing to how they feel when speaking their national language), more than a half feels more comfortable when they speak the dialect.

Conclusions - part 2

Not only native languages might affect people's sense of identity and self-perception, but also those learnt later.

In the question: *Do you think that a person's identity might change after learning another language?* only 24% of respondents chose the answer "No".

What's more, the vast majority of them decided that learning new languages increases self-confidence and influences educational experiences.

Not to mention that 66% of respondents claim that speaking different languages affect how they express emotions.

The interesting thing is the answer of one of the bilingual students, Rafał:

In English I'm far more expressive, joyful, impulsive, and vibrant.

So, there is a difference, even though both Polish and English are his native languages.

The end

Thank you for your interest and attention.

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Julia Kolasińska, Mateusz Deptuch (Warsaw University of Technology)