

Foreign Language Usage and National and European Identification in the Netherlands

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Diana Cárdenas¹  and Maykel Verkuyten²

Abstract

Multilingualism is considered a pathway to European identification but might also undermine national identification. We examine regular foreign language usage and two psychological constructs that can explain the relationship between multilingualism and European and national identification in the Netherlands: greater mental openness and a deprovincialized worldview. Using structural equation modeling, the results of two studies conducted with national Dutch samples show that foreign language usage predicted greater mental openness (cultural in Study 1, and cognitive in Study 2), which then predicted greater European identification. Foreign language usage also predicted greater deprovincialization which, in turn, predicted lower national identification.

Keywords

multilingualism, European identification, national identification, foreign language usage, subtractive identification pattern, additive identification pattern, deprovincialization

Increasing and improving [foreign] language learning and teaching could strengthen the European dimension in education and training. It could foster the development of a European identity in all its diversity, complementing local, regional and national identities and traditions and a better understanding of the Union and its Member States. (Council of the European Union, 2019)

¹Australian National University, Canberra, ACT, Australia

²Utrecht University, The Netherlands

Corresponding Author:

Diana Cárdenas, Research School of Psychology, Australian National University, Building 39, Room 203, Science Road, Canberra, ACT 2601, Australia.

Email: diana.cardensa@anu.edu.au

At the 1984 Fontainebleau meeting, the European Council decided that it is essential for the European Union (EU) to adopt measures to strengthen and promote European identity. The EU should become “a people’s Europe” in which the population feel a sense of being European. The desire to promote European identification continues to be an important aspect of the European Union’s cultural policy (Calligaro, 2013) and the European Council supports efforts to invest in “language education with activities that promote shared identity” (Lo Bianco, 2009, p. 43). As indicated in the quote above, the ability to speak more than one language is considered to contribute to the development of European identification, and the emphasis on multilingualism is partly guided by the desire to shape a shared sense of European identity (Zappettini, 2014). This is echoed by EU citizens themselves, who generally support EU’s efforts and policies to know, learn and respect Europe’s multiple languages (European Commission, 2014; see also Gnutzmann et al., 2014),

Learning and using foreign European languages is thought to stimulate European identification because it enables “people to both discover foreign cultures and to broaden their perspectives” (European Commission, 2019). Multilingualism could stimulate cultural openness and a less parochial or ‘provincial’ national outlook which assumedly are both associated with stronger European identification. Critics, however, point out that the native language is a major cultural source and marker of national identity and that the spread of foreign languages in the country undermines national identity. Speaking one or more foreign languages might contribute to European identification but at the same time could lead to subjectively distancing oneself from the national community with negative implications for the functioning of the nation state.

In two studies among representative samples of the Dutch native population we examine whether regular foreign language usage is associated with European identification and with national identification, and whether openness and a less provincial outlook are two psychological processes that explain these associations (Mephram & Martinovic, 2018).

Language and Social Identity

Language and language behaviors (e.g., accents and expressions) often form key aspects of a positive and distinct group identity (Giles & Maass, 2016; Klebusek et al., 2017). There is a plethora of research demonstrating that language behaviors play an important role in (re)creating, molding, and enacting group identities in intergroup contexts (Hogg & Giles, 2012), ranging from sexual (Fasoli et al., 2016) to cultural identities (Bourhis, 2001, 2008) and ethnic identities (e.g., Kang & Kim, 2012; Phinney et al., 2001).

Additionally, migrants who regularly use (Cárdenas & Verkuyten, 2019) and are competent (Hochman & Davidov, 2014) in the language of the receiving country show stronger national identification. This indicates that foreign language usage may go beyond ethnic and cultural identities (Dörnyei, 2009). For instances, those with a greater motivation and willingness to use foreign languages tend to have a stronger international orientation, that is, a willingness to live, work, and have relations with

people from other countries (Yashima, 2009). Similarly, English language usage and proficiency is associated with identification with Western culture among Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students (Chen et al., 2008). Similarly, Kyrgyz students of the American University of Central Asia who often used English in their interaction with professors identified more as Americans as the academic year progressed (Cárdenas et al., 2018).

In relation to European identification, a few empirical studies have examined and found that identification with Europe is stronger among people who are able to speak more languages (e.g., Fuss et al., 2004; Medrano, 2018). For example, using data from the Eurobarometer, Medrano (2018) found that greater number of languages known predicts greater European identification even when controlling for demographic variables such as age and education. However, and as will be detailed further, these studies (1) focus on self-reported language ability or number of languages known rather than regular foreign language usage, (2) do not simultaneously consider national identification, and (3) do not test the psychological mechanisms that might explain the relationships between multilingualism and European and national identification.

Foreign Language Usage and European Identification

Multilingualism can be conceptualized in different ways, such as in terms of knowledge, ability, proficiency and frequency of usage. Research on multilingualism and group identification tends to ask participants how many foreign languages they are able to speak (Fuss et al., 2004; Medrano, 2018; Mephram & Martinovic, 2018). This measure appears to be weakly associated with European identification (e.g., Medrano, 2018) and one possible reason for this is that knowledge of foreign languages might be less important for superordinate (i.e., European) identification than the actual regular usage of these languages. Regular language usage might represent a sense of investment and genuine desire for development and edification, while number of languages known can reflect pragmatic considerations and requirements of a country's education system. Moreover, the regular usage of a foreign language visibly demonstrates to oneself the enactment of the related foreign identity and this can instill a sense of belonging (Cárdenas et al., 2018; Cárdenas & Verkuyten, 2019).

Following the intergroup communication (Hogg & Giles, 2012; Keblusek et al., 2017) and related social identity (Klein et al., 2007; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987) perspectives, we focus on the actual usage of foreign languages. According to the intergroup communication perspective, the way individuals adapt to and adopt communication styles reveals to others their group membership. Language usage can be used to claim and change group membership. This is in line with the social identity perspective and the conceptualization of foreign language usage as a form of identity enactment that affects one's self-understanding (Hogg & Giles, 2012; Klein et al., 2007). Linguistic behavior communicates to others who one is and also reveals and confirms to oneself how close one is to what is considered prototypical of the relevant group (Cárdenas & de la Sablonnière, 2018). This process can be expected to also apply to the superordinate European identity.

In addition, foreign language usage can stimulate openness to new ideas (Mepham & Martinovic, 2018). Openness is a necessary and distinct characteristic of the “diverse-yet-united” European identity ideal, as it attempts to create an umbrella identity under which diverse national groups and cultures can live in peace. Given how foreign language usage involves two typical characteristics of EU citizens (European multilingualism, European Commission, 2012; and openness, European Union, 2020), people might attach more importance to their European identity when they regularly use European foreign languages in their daily lives (Medrano, 2018). More regular foreign language usage can be expected to make people more aware of being European and more inclined to self-identify as European.

Foreign Language Usage and National Identification

Language tends to be a key building block and an important symbol of national identity (Safran, 1999). One of the explanations for why national language usage is often strongly linked to national identification is that it is an observable and often distinctive characteristic shared by most (if not all) members of one’s nations (e.g., Keblusek et al., 2017). Further, individuals are socialized in their mother tongue and tend to identify with the speakers of their language, wishing to maintain that identification (Liebkind, 1999).

Given the overlap between language and identity, learning and using a second language can change one’s sense of identity (e.g., Rubenfeld et al., 2006). Specifically in this context, foreign European language usage can trigger either a subtractive or an additive identification pattern (de la Sablonnière et al., 2016; Giles & Johnson, 1987; Lambert, 1977). The process is subtractive if using a foreign language results in stronger distancing from one’s national culture, and thus from one’s national identity. This process is similar to subtractive bilingualism, in which learning a new language is accompanied with gradually losing one’s mother tongue (Lambert, 1975; Landry & Allard, 1992). If foreign language usage is subtractive, people who regularly use a European language other than their mother tongue will not only more strongly adopt a sense of being European (as multilingualism is a typical European characteristic) but also distance themselves from their national identity. This would mean that European language usage stimulates European identification at the expense of national identification (de la Sablonnière et al., 2016). This subtractive identification is more likely to occur when the group of origin (e.g., the national group) has lower status than the new group (e.g., European group; Cárdenas & de la Sablonnière, 2020; de la Sablonnière et al., 2016). This parallels findings on subtractive bilingualism, which occurs when one’s language of origin has low linguistic vitality (e.g., Wright et al., 2000). A group with low linguistic vitality — relatively low status, low number and distribution of speakers, and few formal and informal institutional support — is not able to use language as a rallying point to unite its members (Giles et al., 1977). Therefore, learning a new language is likely to result in gradually losing competence on the language of origin (subtractive bilingualism).

However, it is also possible that national and European identification are not contradictory or subtractive. Additive bilingualism (Lambert, 1975; Swain & Lapkin, 1991) and additive identification (de la Sablonnière et al., 2016) occurs when gaining a new language/identity has no aversive implications for the language/identity of origin. Additive processes are more likely to occur when the national group (along with its language and identity) has a relatively high status or strong linguistic vitality (Giles et al., 1977). An additive conceptualization of foreign language usage might be expected when considering the European identity since this identity is explicitly presented as a complement to local, regional and national identities (see quote at the beginning). This is also reflected in recent results from the Eurobarometer (European Commission, 2014), which indicate that 65% of the European population feels attached to Europe while national identification also remains strong. Moreover, both identifications tend to be positively associated (e.g., Agirdag et al., 2016; Medrano & Gutiérrez, 2001; but see Carey, 2002). As a higher-order social category, the European identity functions as a superordinate identity, encompassing or nesting different nations and whereby a stronger European identification can go together with a stronger national identification.

Psychological Mechanisms: Openness and Deprovincialization

Speaking more languages can trigger various social and psychological processes that lead individuals to develop new identifications. One common assumption is that foreign language fluency increases opportunities for international social contacts and thus facilitates social interactions with people from other European countries. These contacts and interactions would increase positive attitudes toward other nationals as proposed by contact theory (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), and thereby contribute to a shared culture and a growing sense of Europeanness (Medrano, 2018; Recchi, 2014). However, a large-scale research testing this theoretical proposition concluded that social interactions (and more specifically transnational experiences) do not appear to be the main mechanism explaining the relation between multilingualism and European identification, and that psychological factors “need to be brought back to the center of explanation” (Medrano, 2018, p. 430).

Multilingualism might ‘unfreeze the mind’ by questioning stereotypical expectations and making people more aware of and open to various cultural options (similarly to cultural diversity, Crisp & Turner, 2011). For example, research suggests that knowing and learning foreign languages is associated with greater intercultural competence, or the ability to manage interactions between people with different worldviews (Spitzberg & Chagnon, 2009). This intercultural competence may be improved by practicing the behavior that develops such skills. In line with this, we argue that frequent and everyday usage of foreign languages has the potential to promote two specific forms of intercultural competence which can be expected to be related to European and national identification, namely openness and deprovincialization (Arasaratnam, 2016; Gudykunst, 2003). Specifically, we examine openness and deprovincialization

as psychological mechanisms while controlling statistically for foreign European country experience as a proxy for contact (in line with Medrano, 2018).

First, research has demonstrated that multilingualism stimulates individuals' ability and tendency to think in open and flexible ways (Kozulin, 1999). Speaking multiple languages requires the ability to adapt to the situation and to use alternative ways of presenting the same message, depending on the audience and the language (e.g., Martin & Rubin, 1995). Research on cognitive flexibility in bilinguals has found that they have a greater ability and willingness to understand information in different ways than monolinguals (e.g., Kharkhurin, 2008). In a research among Czech, Slovak, German and Spanish participants, a positive association was found between the number of foreign language skills and valuing openness to change (Fuss et al., 2004). This openness gained by foreign language usage should be particularly useful in promoting European identification given how the European identity (based on EU goals: European Union, 2020) encompasses openness and respect to the different European nations and cultures united under the broader supraordinate category. Thus, we expected openness to be higher in those individuals who show greater degree of foreign language usage. This greater openness (cultural in Study 1, and cognitive in Study 2) should in turn predict stronger European identification. Greater openness does not necessarily undermine one's primary national attachments and therefore we will explore the association between openness and national identification.

Second, multilingualism might not only relate to more flexibility and openness, but also to a less in-group-centric, parochial outlook. The notion of deprovincialization as put forward in social psychology (Pettigrew, 1997, 1998), signifies a reappraisal of the in-group culture and a nuanced view on its traditions and ways of life. In essence, putting one's own taken-for-granted cultural standards into perspective. Deprovincialization is positively associated with a willingness to see things from other perspectives and negatively associated with social dominance orientation and right-wing nationalism (Boin et al., 2020; Verkuyten et al., 2016). It implies a more multicultural orientation (Verkuyten et al., 2010), less ethnic boundary drawing (Green et al., 2018), and a more inclusive understanding of the national community (Verkuyten et al., 2016).

Speaking several languages provides access to knowledge of other cultures and the integration of different cultural aspects which might stimulate a less parochial, in-group centric view (Mepham & Martinovic, 2018). Such experiences promote the creation of more complex social identities (Schmid et al., 2013), possibly inducing people to identify as part of the same superordinate community as those who speak those different languages (e.g., Gaudet & Clément, 2009; Noels et al., 1996). Considering this, we expected deprovincialization to be stronger in those individuals who show a greater degree of foreign language usage and, in turn, deprovincialization to be related to stronger European identification and weaker national identification.

Context and Overview of Studies

In two studies and using existing datasets we tested two hypotheses among national samples in the Netherlands. First, regular use of a European language other than one's

mother tongue is expected to predict greater openness, which, in turn, results in stronger European identification. Further, we will explore whether foreign language usage and openness are related to national identification. Second, foreign language usage is also expected to be associated with greater deprovincialization and, in turn, with stronger European identification and lower national identification. The purpose of Study 2 was to provide a conceptual replication of Study 1 by focusing on general cognitive openness rather than the more specific cultural openness that is examined in Study 1. Furthermore, in Study 2 we measured yearly foreign language usage (as opposed to monthly usage in Study 1) and used a more extensive measure of national identification, allowing us to better model the latent variable (in line with the other variables in the predicted model).

The two studies were conducted in the Netherlands, the second most bilingual country in the European Union, with many citizens being able to speak three languages (European Commission, 2012). Unlike in other European countries, most international television series and movies are not translated, meaning that the Dutch population is exposed to many different languages through television, particularly to English. In addition, its small size and strategic position in Europe (between continental Europe and the United Kingdom) has historically favored international trade, along with the development of multilingual skills that favor trade. English in particular is omnipresent, with up to 90% reporting being able to converse in English. When asked what has contributed to their current levels of English, more than 50% of Dutch participants reported a wide variety of sources, including school English lessons, media, English in higher education, traveling, and foreign friends and acquaintances (Edwards, 2014). This makes the Netherlands an ideal context for examining how variation in foreign language usage is related to European and national identification.

Study 1

Method

Participants and procedure. A national sample of 606 native Dutch people were recruited via an online polling agency (as part of a larger study involving a total of 822 participants). The polling agency targeted adult Dutch people without a migration background, and had a 50% response rate. Of the 606 participants, 63 participants reported knowing no second language and therefore were not presented the question on frequency of foreign language usage. These participants were not considered in further analyses given that for them frequency of usage is confounded with lack of knowledge or ability to use a foreign language (but see note 4). Most participants reported English (82.5%), followed by German (16.1%; other European languages 1.4%), as the foreign language they knew best. The average age of participants was 48.48 ($SD = 17.09$), and men and women were similarly represented in the sample (47.6% were women). In terms of education, most participants had achieved secondary education based on the broad ICSED levels of education (primary education = 23.8%; secondary education = 45.5%; tertiary education = 30.7%).¹

Measures

Foreign Language Usage. In order to measure foreign language usage, participants were asked how often per month (using a unipolar scale; 1=Never; 5=Often) they communicated in the foreign language they know best, via SMS, via email, in their work place, and outside their workplace (see Hoksbergen & Tillie, 2016).² These four items formed an internally reliable scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$).

Cultural openness. Cultural openness was measured with three items drawn from the cultural openness subscale of the Cosmopolitan Orientation Scale (Leung et al., 2015). The items were: "I enjoy learning more about different cultures in the world," "It is exciting to be immersed in a foreign culture," and "I want to travel to experience many different cultures." Participants answered using a Likert-scale ranging from 1 (Totally disagree) to 7 (Totally agree), and the internal reliability for these items was good (Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$).

Deprovincialization. To measure deprovincialization three items from previous research (e.g., Martinovic & Verkuyten, 2013) in the Netherlands were used: "Dutch culture is certainly no better than other cultures," "How we in the Netherlands look at the world is but one of many possibilities," and "One must always nuance one's own worldview and not declare it sacred." They were answered a Likert-scale ranging from 1 (Totally disagree) to 7 (Totally agree). The scale had an acceptable internal reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .76$) and has been shown to have divergent and convergent validity in previous research (Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2015; Verkuyten et al., 2016).

European Identification. Four items were used to measure European identification in line with social psychological research assessing group identifications. The items were: "I feel like a European"; "I feel connected to Europeans"; "I feel related to Europeans"; and "Being a European is an important part of who I am." The scale was measured with a Likert-scale (1=Totally disagree; 7=Totally agree; Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$).

National identification. To measure national identification, a single item scale was employed: "How strongly do you identify as a Dutch person?" Participants answered with a Likert-scale (1=Not at all; 10=Totally). This single item scale has been shown to be a reliable and valid measure of group identification (Postmes et al., 2013).

Control variables. In examining the hypothesized associations, we controlled for age and gender main demographic variables. We also controlled for education given its association with cognitive abilities (Ritchie & Tucker-Drob, 2018) and general openness (Franchow et al., 2013). Furthermore, we controlled for foreign contact by considering the number of times that individuals traveled in Europe per year ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 10.57$).

Results

Measurement Model. Since the proposed model has four latent variables (language usage, cultural openness, deprovincialization, and European identification), it was first

examined whether these formed four separate latent constructs. A first model was tested in which all the items loaded on a single latent factor and the fit indices of this model were below acceptable standards, Chi square (77)=2377.71, $p < .001$; RMSEA=.235 [.22 to .243]; CFI=.44; SRMR=.18. Following this, we tested whether three factors best captured our measures by combining the two mediating variables (cultural openness and deprovincialization) under the same underlying factor. Although this model had acceptable fit indices, Chi square (74)=314.37, $p < .001$; RMSEA=.077 [.069 to .086]; CFI=.94; SRMR=.05, an examination of the R^2 shows that the three items measuring deprovincialization loaded poorly on the common “mediator” factor ($R^2 < .34$) while the three items on cultural openness loaded strongly on it ($R^2 > .70$). Furthermore, this three factor model had a worse fit than the four-factor model that distinguishes between cultural openness and deprovincialization, Chi square (71)=126.16, $p < .001$; RMSEA=.038 [.027 to .48]; CFI=.99; SRMR=.03. Thus, languageusage,culturalopenness,deprovincializationandEuropeanidentificationformdistinct latent constructs and are treated as such in the following analyses.³

Descriptive statistics. Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations and correlations between the main variables. On average, participants indicated that each month they ‘sometimes’ use a second language. Furthermore, while Dutch identification is fairly strong, European identification is close to the middle point of the scale. Participants generally had high levels of openness towards other cultures, as well as a rather deprovincialized view of Dutch culture.

The correlations offer initial support for our hypotheses, as second language usage is positively correlated to both cultural openness and deprovincialization. Language usage is also positively correlated with European identification but negatively related with national identification. Cultural openness and deprovincialization are negatively related with national identification, but positively related to European identification. European and national identification are positively related.

Structural model. A mediation analysis was conducted using structural equation modeling in Mplus, with an ML estimate while also accounting for the control variables into account (Muthén & Muthén, 2012). In this model, language usage predicts greater cultural openness and stronger deprovincialization, with both in turn predicting European identification and national identification. The control variables were set to predict the dependent variables and to covary with the mediating variables. The fit indices of the mediation model indicate that the model had an acceptable fit, Chi square (121)=287.14, $p < .001$; RMSEA=.050 [.043 to .058]; CFI=.96; SRMR=.033. As expected and shown in Figure 1 (see also Table 2), foreign language usage predicts greater cultural openness, and openness, in turn, predicts stronger European identification (standardized indirect effect=.104, 95% CI=[.050 to .177], $SE=.03$, $p < .001$), but not national identification (standardized indirect effect=.010, 95% CI=[-.045 to .078], $SE=.04$, $p=.656$). Second language usage also predicts greater deprovincialization, which in turn predicted lower national identification (standardized indirect effect=-.065 95% CI=[-.098 to -.007], $SE=.03$, $p=.027$), but in contrast to the

Table 1. Study 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations.

Variables	Mean (SD)	1	2	3	4
1. Second language usage	2.56 (0.93)	—			
2. Cultural openness	5.04 (1.12)	.36***	—		
3. Deprovincialization	5.51 (0.79)	.21***	.68***	—	
4. European identification	4.82 (1.12)	.12*	.33***	.25***	—
5. National identification	8.33 (1.55)	-.21***	-.17***	-.22***	.23***

Note. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

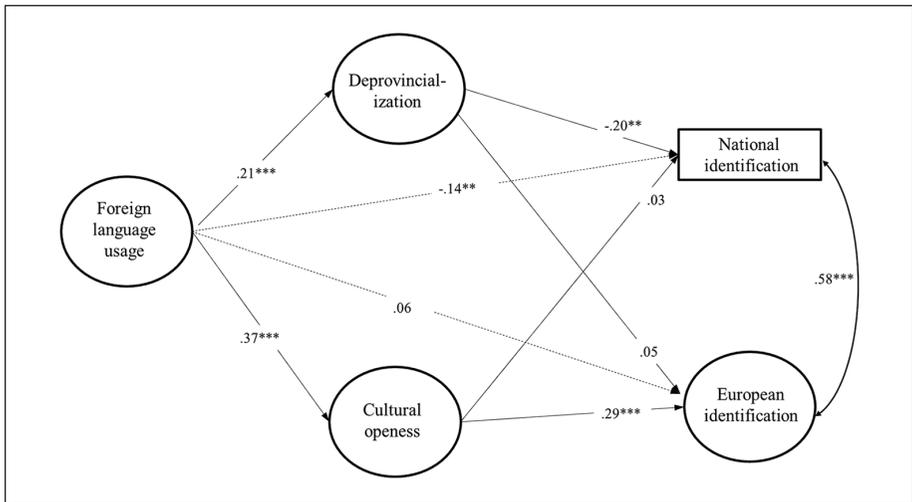


Figure 1. Mediation model for Study 1.

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

hypothesis, not stronger European identification (indirect effect = .010, 95% CI = [-.029 to .049], $SE = .02$, $p = .550$).⁴⁻⁶

Study 2

Study 1 established for the first time an association between regularly using a second language and European and national identification, along with two psychological mechanisms explaining these relations. More frequent foreign language usage was associated with higher European identification through higher cultural openness, confirming hypothesis 1. At the same time, second language usage was associated with lower national identification via stronger deprovincialization, partially confirming hypothesis 2, as deprovincialization was not related to European identification.

Table 2. Study 1: Results of the Mediation Analyses.

Independent variables	Dependent variables															
	Cultural openness (M1)			Deprovincialization (M2)			European identification (Y1)			National identification (Y1)						
	Std. Beta	SE	p	Std. Beta	SE	p	Std. Beta	SE	p	Std. Beta	SE	p				
1. Second language usage (X)	<i>a₁</i>	.37	.04	<.001	<i>a₂</i>	.21	.05	<.001	<i>c₁'</i>	.06	.05	.268	<i>c₂'</i>	-.14	.05	.007
2. Cultural openness (M1)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	<i>b₁</i>	.29	.07	<.001	<i>b₃</i>	.03	.07	.655
3. Deprovincialization (M2)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	<i>b₂</i>	.05	.08	.546	<i>b₄</i>	-.20	.08	.009
4. Age	.03	.05	.472	.03	.05	.472	.20	.04	<.001	.20	.04	<.001	.11	.04	.009	
5. Traveling in European countries	.01	.05	.827	.06	.05	.255	-.03	.04	.469	-.03	.04	.469	-.05	.04	.217	
6. Education	.15	.04	.001	.27	.04	<.001	.01	.54	.877	.01	.54	.877	.00	.05	.962	
7. Gender	.17	.04	<.001	.12	.05	.011	.02	.04	.641	.02	.04	.641	-.02	.04	.644	

Note. Std = standardized. Covariances in the table are in italics. Covariances not presented in the table are as follow. Cov M1/M2 = .67, SE = .04, $p < .001$; Cov Y1/Y2 = .31, SE = .04, $p < .001$; Cov usage/age = -.25, SE = .04, $p < .001$; Cov usage/education = .32, SE = .04, $p < .001$; Cov usage/traveling in Europe = .06, SE = .05, $p = .165$; Cov usage/gender = -.19, SE = .04, $p < .001$; Cov education/age = -.27, SE = .04, $p < .001$; Cov traveling in Europe/age = .03, SE = .04, $p = .510$; Cov traveling in Europe/education = .00, SE = .04, $p = .902$; Cov gender/age = -.01, SE = .04, $p = .772$; Cov gender/education = -.12, SE = .04, $p = .004$; Cov gender/traveling in Europe = -.23, SE = .04, $p = .537$.

A second study was conducted to provide a conceptual replication of these findings (by further analyzing data used by Mepham & Martinovic, 2018⁷) with two changes. First, Study 1 focused on cultural openness while Study 2 focused instead on cognitive openness (or cognitive flexibility), as knowing multiple languages has been associated with greater cognitive openness (e.g., Crisp & Turner, 2011). Additionally, cultural openness is close to the concept of deprovincialization (as evident by the high inter-correlation in Study 1), which makes it more difficult to assess the separate mediating roles of openness and deprovincialization. Study 2 hence assessed cognitive (as opposed cultural) openness.

Second, in Study 1 European identification and national identification were measured differently, with a multiple item scale and a single item, respectively. This makes it difficult to fully compare the two identifications and to assess whether there are two parallel mechanisms for European identification and national identification. Therefore, in Study 2, we used similar multiple-items scales to measure both European and national identification.

Third, in Study 2 we focused on the frequency of second language usage in the last year rather than the last month. This provides a broader range on when foreign language is employed and thus may be better able to differentiate between those who regularly use a foreign language and those who do so less.

Method

Participants and procedure. A national sample of 810 Dutch native people were recruited via a polling agency, of which 679 participants reported knowing a second language. Participants reported which foreign languages they knew, and English was again the most common foreign language participants reported knowing (97.6%) followed by German (77.3%).⁸ In the current sample, the average age was 49.40 ($SD = 16.92$), with women composing 49.5% of the sample. Most participants had a secondary education degree based on the broad ICSED levels of education (primary education = 3.6%; secondary education = 67%; tertiary education = 29.5%; missing data = 1%).

Measures

Foreign language usage. To measure foreign language usage, participants reported how often in the past year they had (1) written/spoken, and (2) read in a foreign language. They answered using a unipolar response-scale (1 = Never; 2 = Once a year; 3 = A few times a year; 4 = Once per month; 5 = A few times per month; 6 = Once per week; 7 = A few times per week; 8 = On a daily basis; correlation between the two items, $r(679) = .75, p < .001$). The scale was recoded to regroup answers of the same time span (merging “Once a year” and “A few times a year”; “Once a month” and “A few times a month”; “Once a week” and “A few times a week”), resulting in the following scale: 1 = Never; 2 = At least once a year; 3 = At least once a month; 4 = At least once a week; 5 = On a daily basis. This was done because the original scale resulted in a non-normal distribution, with fewer participants selecting the options phrased as “Once a [year/month/week],” as opposed to the options phrased “A few times a [year/month/

week].” The correlation between the recoded scale and the original scale was very high ($r(679) = .99, p < .001$).⁹

Cognitive openness. Six items (adapted from Martin & Rubin, 1995) were used to measure individuals’ ability to think in open and flexible ways: “I am always open to alternative ways to tackle a problem,” “I’m always capable of adapting my behavior to situations,” “I can explain an idea in multiple ways,” “I like to search for creative solutions to problems,” “In every situation I can behave as one should,” and “I avoid new and unfamiliar situations.” (reverse coded). The Likert-scale ranged from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree) and the alpha levels were acceptable (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .77$).

Deprovincialization. Deprovincialization was measured with the same three items (7-point scales) that were used in Study 1 and with one additional item (“One must always try to have a broader view than only the Netherlands”; Cronbach’s $\alpha = .86$).

European identification. To measure European identification, three items (7-point scales) derived from previous research were employed (e.g., Meier-Pest & Kirchler, 2003): “I feel I am a European,” “I feel engaged towards Europe,” and “I feel connected to Europe” (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .94$).

National identification. To measure Dutch national identification, four items (7-point scales) were used: “My Dutch identity is an important part of who I am,” “I strongly identify as Dutch,” “I feel like a real Dutch,” and “My Dutch identity is important for how I see and feel about myself” (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .93$).

Control variables. The same variables used in Study 1 were controlled for: age, gender education and number of times that individuals traveled in Europe per year (ranging from 1 = Never to 7 = Several times per month; $M = 3.47$; $SD = 0.95$).

Results

Measurement Model. As in Study 1, we first examined whether we could consider the five latent factors as different empirical constructs. An initial measurement model was tested in which the items for language usage, cognitive openness, deprovincialization, European identification and national identification loaded on a single factor. This model was found to have very poor fit indices (Chi square (153) = 7637.65, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .262 [.257 to .267]; CFI = .100; SRMR = .25). Following this, a second measurement model was tested with a single mediating factor (combining cognitive openness and deprovincialization) and a single dependent factor (European and national identification), in addition to the language usage factor. This three-factor model also fitted the data poorly (Chi square (150) = 3594.19, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .172 [.167 to .177]; CFI = .62; SRMR = .14). Lastly, a measurement model with the five latent factors had an acceptable fit (Chi square (143) = 376.60, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .048 [.042 to

Table 3. Study 2: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations.

Variables	Mean (SD)	1	2	3	4
1. Second language usage	2.97 (1.03)	—			
2. Cognitive openness	5.10 (0.67)	.15**	—		
3. Deprovincialization	5.47 (0.87)	.15**	.51***	—	
4. European identification	4.47 (1.40)	.12**	.21***	.21***	—
5. National identification	5.49 (1.11)	-.15**	.08	-.18***	.11**

Note. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

.054]; CFI=.97; SRMR=.04), indicating the empirical distinctiveness of the five constructs.¹⁰

Descriptive statistics. Table 3 presents the means and correlations of the main variables, which are similar to those of Study 1. In general, participants used foreign languages ‘somewhat often’ throughout the year, with the mean slightly below the midpoint of the scale. Participants had generally mid to high levels of deprovincialization and cognitive flexibility. European and national identification were around the mid-points of the scales and both identifications were positively associated. Further, second language usage was positively related to cognitive openness, deprovincialization and European identification, but negatively to national identification. Cognitive openness and deprovincialization were positively related to European identification, but, again, only the latter was negatively associated with national identification.

Structural analyses. The same analysis as in Study 1 was conducted using structural equation modeling in Mplus, with an ML estimation. The fit indices of the mediation model indicate that the model had an acceptable fit, Chi square (199)=503.79, $p < .001$; RMSEA=.047 [.042 to .053]; CFI=.96; SRMR=.037. Figure 2 and Table 4 show that the hypothesized relations were confirmed. Specifically, second language usage predicted greater cognitive openness, which in turn predicted stronger European identification (standardized indirect effect=.020, 95% CI=[.003 to .048], $SE=.01$, $p=.033$). Cognitive openness also mediated the relation between second language usage and stronger national identification (standardized indirect effect=.035, 95% CI=[.014 to .071], $SE=.01$, $p=.005$). This relation, however, was not found in the initial correlations (see Table 3), implying that it exists only when accounting for the shared variance of the other independent variables and the control variables. As for deprovincialization, second language usage predicted greater deprovincialization which, in turn, predicted lower national identification (standardized indirect effect=-.050, 95% CI=[-.086 to -.025], $SE=.01$, $p=.001$), but again was not a significant predictor of European identification (standardized indirect effect=.015, 95% CI=[-.003 to .040], $SE=.01$, $p=.106$).

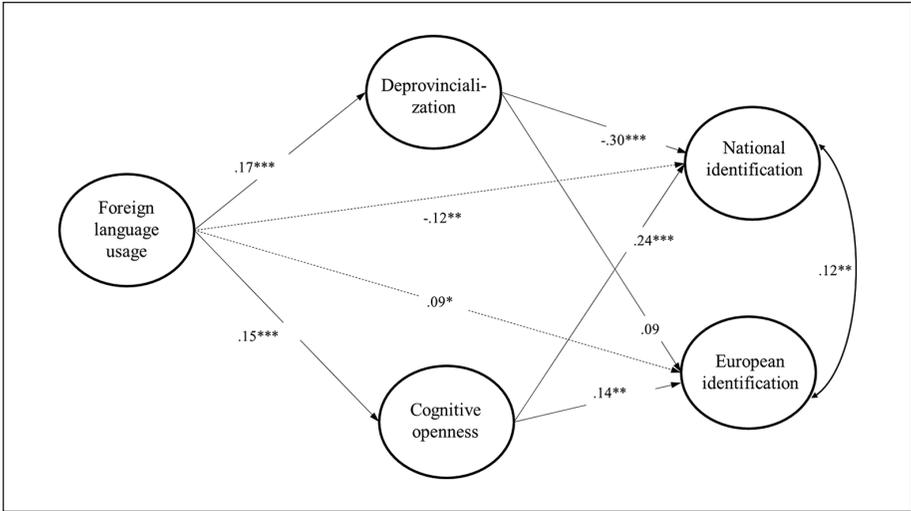


Figure 2. Mediation model for Study 2.

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

General Discussion

European citizens having a sense of Europeanness is seen by many as a necessary condition for a successful European Union (Bellucci et al., 2012; Kaina & Karolewski, 2013; Van Klingeren et al., 2013). Following claims and suggestions of the Council of the European Union (2019) and the European Commission (2019), we investigated whether multilingualism is associated with stronger European identification. With two studies among Dutch national samples, we went beyond previous research (e.g., Medrano, 2018) by focusing on *foreign language usage* (as opposed to the number of languages known) and examining two psychological mechanisms that might contribute to European identification. The results of both studies show that more frequent European foreign language usage was associated with greater openness to other cultures (Study 1) and other ideas (Study 2), and a less parochial ('provincial') worldview. However, European language usage was associated with European identification only via higher cultural and cognitive openness. As a superordinate category, the European identity emphasizes the importance of opening up in order to fit multiple groups and thus multiple perspectives under the same social category.

In contrast, we found that a less parochial perspective on one's national group was not associated with European identification but was associated with lower national identification. According to the integrative model of subgroup relations (Hornsey & Hogg, 2000), superordinate identities (i.e., European identity) receive greater support when the subgroup identities (i.e., national identity) are respected and not threatened. While deprovincialization is not a threat to national identity and does not require emotional distancing for the national in-group (Pettigrew, 2009), it does reflect a less

Table 4. Study 2: Results of the Mediation Analyses.

Independent variables	Dependent variables															
	Cultural openness (M1)			Deprovincialization (M2)			European identification (Y1)			National identification (Y2)						
	Std. Beta	SE	p	Std. Beta	SE	p	Std. Beta	SE	P	Std. Beta	SE	p				
1. Second language usage (X)	a ₁	.15	.04	.001	a ₂	.17	.04	<.001	c ₁ '	.09	.04	.037	c ₂ '	-.12	.04	.003
2. Cultural openness (M1)		—	—	—	—	—	—	—	b ₁	.14	.05	.007	b ₃	.24	.05	<.001
3. Deprovincialization (M2)		—	—	—	—	—	—	—	b ₂	.09	.05	.078	b ₄	-.30	.05	<.001
4. Age		.00	.04	.958		.15	.04	<.001		.19	.04	<.001		.19	.04	<.001
5. Traveling in European countries		.17	.04	<.001		.15	.04	<.001		.06	.04	.139		.06	.04	.139
6. Education		.06	.04	.148		.16	.04	<.001		.02	.04	.626		.02	.04	.019
7. Gender		-.11	.04	.009		.08	.04	.052		.03	.04	.460		-.05	.04	.218

Note. Std = standardized. The covariances not presented on the table are as follow. Cov M1/M2 = .50, SE = .04, p < .001; Cov Y1/Y2 = .12, SE = .04, p = .002; Cov usage/age = -.12, SE = .04, p = .001; Cov usage/education = .23, SE = .04, p < .001; Cov usage/traveling in Europe = .23, SE = .04, p < .001; Cov usage/gender = -.14, SE = .04, p < .001; Cov education/age = .06, SE = .04, p = .154; Cov traveling in Europe/age = .17, SE = .04, p < .001; Cov traveling in Europe/education = .18, SE = .04, p < .001; Cov gender/age = -.13, SE = .04, p < .001; Cov gender/education = -.04, SE = .04, p = .293; Cov gender/traveling in Europe = -.16, SE = .04, p < .001.

in-group centric and more nuanced view of one's culture. The items used to measure deprovincialization reflects this view and this might explain why stronger deprovincialization was associated with weaker national identification. Thus, foreign language usage was associated with a more critical reflection on one's culture which was related to lower national identification, but not stronger European identification.

Two additional findings concerning national identification are worth highlighting. First, the results of both studies suggest an additive pattern of foreign language usage via openness, as openness was associated with stronger European identification but not with lower national identification. This is in line with original conceptions of additive bilingualism (Lambert, 1975) and additive identification (de la Sablonnière et al., 2016), which occur when a new language/identity does not disrupt the original one. However, our results also suggest that a subtractive process can simultaneously occur because foreign language usage was associated with stronger deprovincialization, which was exclusively associated with lower national identification. Thus, the pattern of findings indicate that more frequently using a foreign language adds to European identification without disrupting national identification via openness, but is also associated with lower national identification via deprovincialization. These results suggest that foreign language usage can best promote an additive identification pattern by stimulating openness without challenging the ingroup-centric outlook of individuals. In the context of foreign language usage, stimulating openness towards others without having to nuance one's cultural worldview may be the best way of promoting European identification while maintaining national identification.

Second, the strong and positive link between national identity and European identity (see also Medrano & Gutiérrez, 2001) indicates that these two identities are not incompatible or subtractive. This pattern of findings suggests that the processes by which individuals identify with a specific group might result in subtracting from other social identities, but that the relation between the identities can remain positive. Thus, European identity and national identity may well be compatible and successfully complement each other (i.e., an additive pattern), and yet some of the factors that strengthens the one may weaken the other (i.e., subtractive pattern).

Limitations and Future Research

The findings were obtained by using data from two national samples of Dutch nationals rather than small convenience samples. We can thus have confidence in the reliability and ecological validity of the current results. Nevertheless, given the cross-sectional nature of the data, it is not possible to assess the (mutual) direction of influences. Our model was theoretically derived and based on previous research, but future research with longitudinal data should determine the extent to which regular foreign language usage, language competence, and other forms of cultural integration (Fuss et al., 2004) influences mental openness and deprovincialization and the impact that these have on European and national identification. Longitudinal models would be particularly useful for disentangling the psychological processes

we have proposed and found. Unfortunately, longitudinal designs are rare in research on foreign language usage.

Another limitation is that language usage was assessed with self-report measures, which may lead to over- or underestimating how often participants actually employ foreign languages. Behavioral assessments of language behaviors or using a diary methodology would offer a closer assessment of foreign language usage and its implications for identification processes. Additionally, international contact was assessed as the number of times that individuals traveled to another country. A direct measure assessing the frequency and quality of contact with other Europeans would be a better reflection of direct contact and therefore a more adequate control variable.

It should also be noted that the effect sizes in the results are relatively small which is not unusual with online population data, but which indicates the need for more extensive measurement and a focus on additional constructs that might explain differences in European and national identification. Relatedly, there was a direct negative association between foreign language usage and national identification in both studies despite the inclusion of the two psychological constructs. This also suggests the need for further research to examine other psychological mechanisms activated by foreign language usage. For example, the regular use of foreign languages could reduce the salience and relevance of the national identity (Stryker & Serpe, 1994). Foreign languages usage is typically done in relation with foreign cultural content and foreign people which could make national identity less salient and less relevant as a guiding self-construct.

Our findings demonstrate that the regular use of foreign languages is associated with greater European identification (via openness) and weaker national identification (via deprovincialization) and future studies could examine various conditions under which foreign language usage is less or more clearly related to European identification and national identification. For example, language vitality (Bourhis & Giles, 1977; Esteban-Guitart et al., 2015; Giles et al., 1977) is an important determinant of additive versus subtractive bilingualism and might be relevant to consider as most of our participants reported English as the language they knew best. English is increasingly the *lingua franca* for international relations, communications and politics which confers it a cosmopolitan status. This may make English particularly useful in promoting the subtractive pattern of identification, given how this pattern is associated with a strong status of the new group identity. Studies with samples that are proficient in other languages (such as German and Italian) will be able to distinguish the effect of knowing a cosmopolitan foreign language versus other foreign languages. Future research that examines the conditions under which foreign language usage promotes European identification without decreasing national identification would highlight the potential benefits of foreign language usage in creating a complementary, diverse and united European identity.

Additionally, research in less multilingual European countries could elucidate the strength of the associations found between multilingualism, the psychological constructs, and the group identifications. The Netherlands is a small, internationally

oriented country that has a relatively high level of foreign language usage (particularly English). In other European countries foreign language usage is lower because these countries are, for example, less internationally oriented, are more protective of their language (e.g., France; Gallix, 2013), or are less required to speak another language (e.g., the UK). However, for those individuals in these countries who do speak a foreign European language regularly, language usage can also be expected to be associated with greater deprovincialization and openness, and in turn lower national identification and greater European identification.

Conclusion

The current findings provide correlational empirical support to the Council of the Europe's Union (2019) recommendation to encourage foreign language learning for the promotion of European identification. Policies and interventions that promote the use of foreign languages might contribute to a stronger sense of European belonging which has beneficial implications for EU support (Boomgaarden et al., 2011). Additionally, policies and interventions that promote cultural and cognitive openness might go together with stronger European identification, and in turn support for the EU and its policies.

At the same time, promotion of foreign languages should be done carefully as our findings suggest that there can be drawbacks. Foreign language usage can be associated with lower national identification, in particular via a more critical perspective on one's national culture. Such a finding is not only against the policy aims of the EU but can also strengthen those who fear the loss of their national culture and argue against foreign language usage. Fears of undermining the national language and of losing the national culture are important negative predictors of EU support (Carey, 2002). Thus, foreign language promotion might backfire and result in lower support for EU policies making a careful and balanced approach necessary when promoting foreign language usage. Such an approach may include national identity affirmation policies and interventions along with the promotion of foreign languages. These national affirmation interventions could be framed in terms of a broader multilingualism policy that promotes foreign language usage while advocating for the continuation and vitality of national languages (Rocher & White, 2014). By simultaneously promoting national and foreign languages, multilingual policies could mitigate (fears of) cultural loss and national identity threats while stimulating European identification.

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ORCID iD

Diana Cárdenas  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2714-5889>

Notes

1. The datasets for Study 1 and 2 can be accessed at 10.5281/zenodo.4278269.
2. These questions were part of an experimental study. The goal of the experiment was to explore whether presenting multilingualism as a typical characteristic of Europeans would result in greater similarity with Europeans when participants spoke foreign languages. This manipulation did not have any effect in the variables presented in this study.
3. We also tested whether a formative (versus reflective) latent variable of language usage best fitted the data for this final measurement model. For Study 1, the fit indices for this model were overall poorer (chi-square (121)=686.12, $p < .001$; RMSEA=.093, 90% CI [.86, .99], CFI=.83; SRMR=.225) than the original model, with three fit indices not satisfying the minimal standard (RMSEA, CFI and SRMS). Similarly, for Study 2, fit indices of a model with foreign language usage as a formative latent variable showed poorer fit, with some fit indices below accepted standard (Chi square (238)=7670.93, $p < .001$; RMSEA=.076 [.071 to .080]; CFI=.89; SRMR=.195). Therefore, in both cases a reflective latent variable best fits the data.
4. Additional analyses were conducted controlling for English as the foreign language reported. The results remained the same.
5. The same analyses were conducted controlling for competence in foreign language and the pattern of findings was the same. Greater usage was still related to greater deprovincialization ($b=0.18$, $p < .001$) which was related to lower national identification ($b=-0.35$, $p=.020$). Greater usage was also related to greater openness ($b=0.40$, $p < .001$) which was once more related to stronger European identification ($b=0.34$, $p < .001$).
6. We examined whether the pattern of results was similar when adding to the analysis the 63 participants who reported not knowing any foreign language (score of 0 in foreign language usage). The results were very similar. Language usage was again associated with greater openness ($b=0.37$, $p < .001$), which in turn was associated with greater European identification ($b=0.39$, $p < .001$), with a significant indirect effect (indirect effect=.14, $SE=.03$, $p < .001$). Concerning the mediation on national identification via deprovincialization, language usage significantly predicted greater deprovincialization ($b=0.19$, $p < .001$) which marginally significantly predicts Dutch identification ($b=-.24$, $p=.092$), but the indirect effect was not significant (indirect effect=-.05, $SE=.03$, $p=.105$). However, when comparing the two standardized betas of deprovincialization on Dutch identification in a model with versus without individuals who did not speak any foreign language, we found that their confidence intervals overlapped (β without non foreign language speakers=.19, 95% CI [0.03, 0.34]; β with non-foreign language speakers=.12, 95% CI [-0.02, 0.26]. This indicates that the estimates with and without the non-foreign language speakers are not significantly different.
7. The measures for deprovincialization and cognitive openness in this dataset have been used in a previous study (Mephram & Martinovic, 2018). However, the other variables and the analyses are novel and make a unique contribution to the literature.

8. Additional analyses were conducted adding as control variables the number of foreign languages reported and whether English was the foreign language reported. The results remained the same when controlling for these variables.
9. The analysis were also conducted with the untransformed variables of usage (with the variables ranging from 1 to 8 instead of from 1 to 5), using the MLR estimate given its lack of normality. The pattern of results was the same.
10. The measurement model also showed that the residual variance of the second item on foreign language usage had a negative variance. This was resolved by fixing the variance of this item to zero, in accordance with recommendations by Muthén and Muthén (2012).

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Author Biographies

Diana Cárdenas is a postdoctoral fellow at the Australian National University. Her main research interests lie on testing how behavioral participation increases identification with various groups. Her current fellowship explores interventions that increase school identification. Her research interests also involve identity denial and other forms of identity contestation.

Maykel Verkuyten is a professor in Interdisciplinary Social Science at Utrecht University and former academic director of the European Research Centre on Migration and Ethnic Relations (ERCOMER). His main research interest is in ethnic identity and interethnic relations, including interethnic ideologies (e.g., multiculturalism, interculturalism and assimilationism). His most recent research project is on Intergroup Toleration for which he received an European Research Council advanced grant in 2017.