



Exploring Emotional Expression and Regulation in Bilingual Individuals

A Focus on Malayalam and English Bilinguals

¹Nida Fathima Anwar Ali M.K., ²Aastha Govind Shirodker, ³Bharti Pathania

¹Student, ²Assistant Professor, ³Assistant Professor

¹Department of Arts,

¹MIE-SPPU Institute of Higher Education, Doha, Qatar

Abstract: Bilingualism significantly influences how individuals express and regulate emotions. This study investigates emotional asymmetry among Malayalam-English bilinguals, exploring language preferences for emotional articulation, the role of code-switching, and the influence of cultural norms. 40 bilingual college students aged 18–24 years participated in semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis revealed a strong emotional connection to Malayalam- first language (L1), particularly for intimate and familial experiences, while English- second language (L2), provided emotional distance in professional or distressing contexts. Code-switching emerged as a key strategy for regulating emotional intensity. The findings highlight the complex interplay between language, culture, and emotion and have implications for psychotherapy, education, and multicultural communication. This study further explores the relevance of such findings for linguistically diverse societies and educational institutions, offering recommendations for mental health practitioners, language educators, and intercultural communicators.

Index Terms - Bilingualism, Code-switching, Emotional asymmetry, Emotional regulation, Emotional expression.

I.INTRODUCTION

Language shapes not only how individuals communicate, but also how they process, express, and regulate emotions. In bilingual individuals, these processes are influenced by cognitive and cultural associations of each language. This cognitive advantage appears to be influenced by factors such as language proficiency, frequency of language use, and the contexts in which different languages are employed (Athanasopoulos, 2008; Pot et al., 2018). With nearly half the world's population being bilingual (McGibney, 2023), understanding how bilingualism affects emotional experience is crucial for disciplines such as psychology, linguistics, and education.

Interestingly, the cognitive effects of bilingualism are not uniformly observed across all studies and populations. Factors such as age, age of acquisition, cultural immersion, and task difficulty can impact the presence or absence of bilingual advantages (Dong & Li, 2015). Additionally, while bilinguals may exhibit enhanced executive functions, they often show poorer performance on certain linguistic measures compared to monolinguals, such as having smaller vocabularies in each language and slower word retrieval times (Bialystok, 2010). Bilingualism appears to lead to adaptive changes in the mind and brain, potentially contributing to cognitive reserve and delaying the onset of dementia symptoms (Guzmán-Vélez & Tranel, 2015; Perani & Abutalebi, 2015). The neural mechanisms underlying these effects likely involve more efficient use of brain resources and structural changes in areas associated with executive control (Perani & Abutalebi, 2015; Rodriguez-Fornells et al., 2006). However, the complexity of bilingualism research, including numerous confounding variables, necessitates careful consideration of factors such as group heterogeneity, migration, and social influences when interpreting results (Bak, 2016).

Research has shown that bilinguals often express emotions more comfortably and authentically in their first language (L1), as it is closely tied to early life experiences and familial interactions (Harris et al., 2006). Conversely, the second language (L2) often serves as a tool for emotional distancing, especially in professional or emotionally intense settings (Caldwell-Harris, 2015). These emotional dynamics are influenced not only by language proficiency but also by cultural expectations. For instance, Malayalam-speaking communities, rooted in collectivist values, often encourage emotional restraint, especially in social or familial settings. In contrast, English, often associated with individualism and modernity, may offer more openness in emotional articulation, especially in academic or professional settings (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Malayalam-English bilingualism is widespread in Kerala, India, where Malayalam serves as the native and culturally rooted language while English functions as the language of formal education, commerce, and global interaction. This duality creates a unique linguistic landscape where bilinguals alternate between two distinct emotional and cultural frameworks.

While bilingualism and emotion have received increased attention in psychological and linguistic studies, current studies frequently focus on Western bilingual populations, leaving the unique experiences of South Asian bilinguals unexplored. In Kerala, where Malayalam and English coexist in everyday life, bilingualism is influenced by diverse cultural, linguistic, and social factors.

These dynamics differ greatly from those found in Western contexts, prompting a closer look at how South Asian bilinguals manage emotional expression and regulation.

This study addresses these gaps by focusing on Malayalam-English bilinguals, who represent Kerala's rich multilingual and multicultural heritage. This study aimed to determine how bilingualism affects emotional expression, perception, and management in this under-represented population. The findings are intended to add to the larger discussion on bilingualism, emotion, and culture, providing both theoretical and practical insights. Improves our knowledge of the interplay between languages and emotions in culturally varied environments. It has practical applications in various domains, including mental health, education, sociolinguistics, and inter-culture communication. For example, mental health professionals working with multilingual clients may benefit from learning how language choice affects emotional regulation. Similarly, educators may use these findings to build inclusive learning environments that values and accommodate the emotional and linguistic needs of multilingual children.

This study explores the emotional experiences of Malayalam-English bilinguals, focusing on how language choice affects emotional expression and regulation. It investigates the contexts in which individuals prefer one language over the other, the role of code-switching in managing emotional intensity, and how cultural values shape these decisions. Through this lens, the study contributes to a growing body of literature that examines the intersection of language, culture, and emotion in bilingual populations. The broader implications of this research extend beyond the immediate population studied, touching upon important questions of identity, belonging, and emotional wellbeing in increasingly multilingual and multicultural societies.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Bilingualism, an elaborate feature of human communication, is critical for the development of emotional understanding and competence. As people negotiate numerous languages and cultural systems, their capacity to process, express, and regulate emotions is greatly affected. This review delves into significant research results on the junction of multilingualism and emotional competence, and cultural and linguistic competence, to determine how bilingual and multilingual environments influence emotional expression and regulation.

2.1 Bilingualism and Emotional Competence

Greve et al. (2024) examined two pathways in the link between multilingualism and emotional competence (EC). Emotional competence includes recognizing, communicating, controlling, and utilizing emotions. The study showed that emotional competence was positively correlated with multilingualism. It was also found that EC appears to be more influenced by cultural variables than by cognitive components such as language switching, with executive functions not significantly moderating the relationship. Immersion in a second language (L2) speaking setting significantly influences linguistic dominance and emotional expressiveness (Panicacci, 2013). Longer immersion durations resulted in changes in linguistic attitudes favoring L2, whereas L2 proficiency positively correlated with increased emotional expressiveness in that language.

2.2 Cultural and Linguistic Context in Emotional Expression

Dewaele (2015) provides a broader cultural perspective by examining the ways in which linguistic frameworks and cultural norms affect multilingual people's ability to express and understand their emotions. This study emphasizes the divergent emotional standards between collectivists and individualistic societies, drawing on linguistic and cross-cultural studies. Individualistic cultures, like those in East Asia, frequently prioritize emotional restraint to maintain societal peace. Multilinguals must negotiate and adjust to different emotional expectations based on language and cultural environment, a process where emotional patterns change when exposed to new cultural standards.

Marianna (2023) highlights that emotions are often more strongly associated with one's native language, influencing both interpersonal communication and self-perception. This aligns with research on bilingual emotional expression, suggesting that individuals may experience heightened emotional intensity when communicating in their first language. Additionally, bilingualism fosters cross-cultural empathy and reduces biases, reinforcing the idea that language plays a crucial role in shaping social and emotional interactions.

2.3 Neurolinguistic and Cognitive Approaches to Emotional Processing

A neurolinguistic approach was adopted by Sharif and Mahmood (2023) to investigate how bilinguals process emotions differently than monolinguals, emphasizing the importance of interdisciplinary studies in comprehending the relationship between language, emotions, and mind. The authors synthesized results from cognitive, psychological, and neuroimaging studies following the PRISMA-P standards. They discovered that, depending on language dominance and ability, bilinguals frequently interpret emotional inputs differently than monolinguals.

Jonczyk et al. (2016) provided further insights into the emotional detachment associated with second-language use. This study examined how bilinguals perceive affective cues, with particular emphasis on semantic integration in both their first (L1) and second (L2) languages. This study examined the N400 wave using electrophysiological recordings (ERP) to comprehend the semantic integration of phrases. Nineteen late-proficient Polish-English bilinguals participated in the study, and their objective was to assess semantics in L1 Polish and L2 English. Higher affective salience in the native language was inferred from the results, which showed larger N400 amplitudes for the phrases in L1 Polish. Remarkably, N400 amplitudes decreased when L2 words had negative valence, indicating that L2 suppressed negative emotional content.

2.4 Emotion and Language in Different Contexts

Stipić (2024) analyzed how bilinguals express melancholy, revealing a preference for using their first language (L1) to convey authenticity and emotional depth. A web-based questionnaire was used to gather data, which were then subjected to quantitative and qualitative analysis. According to the participants, they preferred using L1 to communicate despair because they thought it was more genuine and emotionally charged. On the other hand, L2 was characterized as a medium that made it easier and more detached for participants to talk about unpleasant feelings. The study also examined how language and culture affect how people express their emotions, finding that bilinguals frequently link L1 to more profound emotional bonds derived from early experiences.

Harris et al. (2006) investigate the emotional intensity of language in bilingual individuals, offering the '*emotional context of learning theory*.' The study adds to previous studies on cognition and emotion by claiming that a first language (L1) frequently generates higher emotional responses than a second language (L2) due to early life social and emotional experiences. Emotional intensity in language is influenced by elements such as age at acquisition, competency, and learning environment. Their findings, which use psychophysiological measurements such as skin conductance, show that reprimands and forbidden words in L1 elicit higher autonomic reactions than in L2, corroborating the notion that language is inextricably linked to early emotional events and autobiographical memory.

2.5 Social Media and Code-Switching in Emotional Expression

Rudra et al. (2023) conducted a study by analyzing 430,000 tweets from Hindi-English bilinguals. Tweets included sentiments and opinions. Hindi, the local language, was found to be more popular than English for expressing disapproval and profanity, according to computer classifiers. The study also found a strong tendency for code-switching, where a change from a positive to negative attitude frequently accompanied a transfer from English to Hindi. This result was especially noticeable in tweets that dealt with delicate or emotionally charged subjects, such as social concerns and politics. The preferences for Hindi highlight how local languages have emotional resonance when expressing negative emotions, offering insights into how bilinguals manage their emotions in digital environments.

Lee and Wang (2015) examined the emotional content of code-switching texts, particularly in social media situations. The emotional emotions in a corpus of Chinese-English code-switching posts were examined by Lee and Wang. They discovered that language frequently affects communications of emotions. For example, Chinese may indicate grief, whereas English expresses delight, or vice versa. The study emphasizes the difficulty of interpreting bilingual messages by putting forth a paradigm for automated emotion recognition in code-switching postings. In code-switching situations, the researchers found several trends in the expression of emotions. They pointed out that, depending on language and cultural circumstances, emotional displays might differ greatly in frequency and intensity. For instance, it was more common to communicate gladness through English writing than to express despair through Chinese texts.

2.6 Code-Switching and Emotional Expression in Parent-Child Interactions

Williams et al. (2020) studied Chinese-American parent-child interactions during an emotion-inducing puzzle activity to investigate the connection between emotional experiences and code-switching (CS) in bilingual people. In this study, parent-child pairs were examined for facial expression behavior, CS patterns, and language use. The findings showed that a higher frequency of CS from L2 (English) to L1 (Chinese) was predicted by negative emotional expressions such as grief or dissatisfaction. On the other hand, joy and other positive emotions were linked to lower CS.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a mixed methods research design, incorporating semi-structured interviews to examine the influence of bilingualism on emotional expression and regulation among Malayalam-English bilingual college students. The integration of both qualitative and quantitative approaches was intended to capture the nuanced interplay between language preference and emotional experience, enabling the development of rich, comprehensive narratives.

3.1 Objectives

1. To investigate emotional perception and expression.
 - Focusing on how Malayalam-English bilinguals perceive, understand, and express emotions. It involves determining whether emotional intensity, resonance, and articulation vary between languages.
2. To examine the emotional regulation strategies.
 - Analyzing the Malayalam-English bilinguals' emotion regulation skills in bilingual circumstances. This includes comprehending the functions of code-switching, language choice and context in altering emotional experiences and reactions.
3. To evaluate the influence of cultural and contextual factors on emotional expression and regulation.
 - Examine how cultural and environmental variables impact bilingual emotional experiences. This involves investigating how Kerala's collectivist cultural framework impacts emotional norms and how bilinguals manage these norms in globalized, English-speaking settings.

3.2 Sample

40 college students aged 18–24 years participated in the study. All participants self-identified as fluent in both Malayalam and English and had been exposed to both languages since childhood.

3.3 Data and Sources of Data

Participants were recruited through convenience sampling from university campuses and online student communities in India. Ethical considerations included informed consent, confidentiality assurances, and the right to withdraw at any time. A pilot study was conducted to refine the questions. Participants were given pseudonyms and all data was anonymized during transcription and reporting. The final interview schedule included open-ended questions which focused on emotional expression, regulation strategies, cultural influences, and language preferences in various emotional scenarios.

Interview sessions were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and verified by the researcher to ensure accuracy. The data collection period is ranging from August 2024 to November 2024.

3.4 Tools and Instruments

The primary instrument employed in the study for data collection was a self-devised interview schedule. This methodology facilitates the acquisition of detailed information regarding participants' emotional experiences and linguistic usage. Key features of the interview schedule:

- Customization: specifically designed to address the cultural background and research objectives of Malayalam-English bilinguals.
- Semi-structured format: facilitates the exploration of emergent topics while incorporating predetermined questions.
- Open-ended questions: elicit comprehensive responses and personal narratives from participants.
- Cultural sensitivity: questions are formulated to respect the nuances of Keralan culture
- Pilot testing: conducted to ensure question clarity and relevance.
- Thematic organization: questions are structured thematically, with sections addressing cultural influences, regulatory strategies, and emotional expression.
- Probing questions: included to further investigate participants' responses when necessary.
- Demographic section: collects relevant participant background information.
- Ethical consideration: incorporates appropriate language to explain confidentiality procedures and obtain informed consent.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data were transcribed and then analyzed using thematic analysis. Codes were generated inductively to identify recurring patterns and themes. Quantitative statistical analysis was done with the application of tests, such as chi-square tests were also used to explore gender differences and the impact of language switching on emotional intensity. The combination of prevalence analysis, chi-square testing, and thematic analysis ensured a robust and holistic approach to data analysis. Prevalence analysis provided a quantitative snapshot of the data, chi-square tests identified significant associations between categorical variables, and thematic analysis offered an in-depth understanding of qualitative data. Collectively, these methods addressed the research objectives comprehensively, ensuring both statistical rigor and contextual depth, further enabling the identification of emotional nuances that may not emerge through purely quantitative approaches, providing rich contextual insight into how language and emotion intersect in real-life settings.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Emotional expression is an intricate and multilingual phenomenon, especially in bilingual contexts where the nuances of language choice intersect with the complexities of emotional experience (Harris et al., 2006; Pavlenko, 2004; Schmid & Köpke, 2019). Through a comprehensive analysis of the participants' self-reported language preferences, emotional expression patterns, and coping mechanisms, the study aims to uncover the intricate dynamics between language, culture, and emotion. The analysis shed light on how language proficiency, cultural background, and emotional context influence language choices and emotional expression of participants, providing a nuanced understanding of the complex relationships between language, culture, and emotion in bilingual individuals.

4.1 Demographic Overview

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Participants

Variable	Category	n(40)
Age (in years)	18–19	6
	20–21	21
	22–23	13
Gender	Male	16
	Female	24

In this study, a total of 40 respondents participated, providing valuable insights into emotional expression and language use within a bilingual context. A significant portion of the respondents (52.5%) falls within the 20-21 years age group. This age range is particularly noteworthy as it encompasses individuals who are typically navigating critical phases in their academic or early professional careers, suggesting that their experiences are likely reflective of the transitional challenges faced during these formative years.

Participants aged 18-19 years comprised 15% of the sample, while 32.5% belonged to the 22-23 years age category. Although the younger age group is comparatively small, the presence of the older cohort contributes to a multifaceted understanding of the emotional dynamics experienced across different life stages.

In terms of gender distribution, female participants made up 60% of the sample, suggesting a predominance of female voices in the data collected. Conversely, male participants constituted 40% of the sample, indicating a relatively lower representation. This gender imbalance may affect the overall findings and interpretation of emotional expression, as perspectives predominantly influenced by female experiences

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of participants in the study (n = 40). The sample consisted predominantly of young adults aged 20-21 years (52.5%), with smaller proportions aged 22-23 (32.5%) and 18-19 (15%). A gender imbalance was observed, with female participants (60%) outnumbering males (40%). These patterns indicate that:

- (1) The study population represents a young adult cohort.
- (2) The 20-21 age group constitutes the majority of respondents.
- (3) Females are overrepresented compared to males. The demographic characteristics suggest potential age and gender-related influences on language and emotion expression patterns in subsequent analyses.

4.2 Language Proficiency and Use

Table 2: *Language Proficiency and Use Among Participants*

Factor	Category	n (40)	%
Languages Used	Malayalam and English	35	87.5
	Malayalam, English + Other	5	12.5
Self-Assessed English Proficiency	Native-like	13	32.5
	Advanced	26	65.0
	Intermediate	1	2.5
	Beginner	0	0.0
English Facilitates Emotional Expression	Yes	39	97.5
	No	1	2.5
Age of Initial Exposure to English	Early childhood	13	32.5
	Early school grades/classes	25	62.5
	Later schooling	2	5.0

Language proficiency emerged as a key area of interest among respondents. Approximately 87.5% of participants reported using only Malayalam and English for their communicative needs, highlighting a linguistic environment largely confined to these two languages. In contrast, 12.5% disclosed proficiency in an additional language, suggesting that while there exists a small segment of individuals with broader linguistic capabilities, the majority rely primarily on Malayalam and English for emotional and everyday communication. This reliance may imply limited linguistic flexibility for those who do not engage with other languages, impacting their capacity for nuanced emotional (Burck, 2004; Tsimpli et al., 2020).

The self-assessments of English proficiency among participants revealed a commendable level of linguistic capability; 65% rated their skills as "advanced," and 32.5% reported achieving "native-like fluency." Only 2.4% categorized themselves as having an "intermediate" level of proficiency, and no respondents identified as "beginner." These findings point to generally strong English language skills among selected sample, which are likely to influence both comfort and ability in emotional expression when utilizing this language (Majid, 2012). An impressive 97.5% of participants suggested that their English proficiency facilitates more nuanced emotional expression, underscoring the language's significance in their daily communication practices (Ivaz et al., 2016).

Early exposure to English played a pivotal role in shaping language skills, with 62.5% of respondents indicating that they began learning English in early grade/class in school, and 32.5% having been introduced to the language in their early childhood. Only 5% of the participants began learning English later in their educational journeys, which could result in varied levels of comfort and proficiency based on this foundational experience. Given that English as a medium of instruction was considered mandatory for 95% of respondents, the consistent emphasis on English in the educational system likely cultivates a higher degree of proficiency assisting participants' emotional expression and communication capabilities in academic and broader social settings.

Table 2 presents self-reported English proficiency levels among bilingual Malayalam-English speakers. Majority of the participants reported advanced proficiency (65%), with a significant portion claiming native-like fluency (32.5%). Only 2.5% rated themselves as intermediate speakers, while no beginners were reported. These patterns suggest that:

- (1) The sample population demonstrates strong English language competence overall.
- (2) Nearly one-third possess near-native mastery of English.
- (3) Minimal participants experience significant limitations in English proficiency.

The findings indicate a highly English-proficient study population, which may influence their language choices in emotional expression contexts.

4.3 Emotional Expression in Language

Exploring the dimension of emotional expression, the study found that 52.5% of respondents preferred using both Malayalam and English equally in their homes. This finding suggests that while Malayalam predominantly serves as the familial and cultural language of preference, English is utilized to facilitate a more modernized bilingual environment (Kuchah, 2016). Despite this bilingual dynamic, only a few (2.5%) favored English exclusively at home. The core preference for Malayalam underscores its cultural and emotional significance in familial interactions, reflecting its established role in emotional expression.

The comfort levels of respondents concerning emotional expression varied, with 65% feeling very comfortable expressing their emotions in Malayalam. This finding further supports the notion that individuals maintain a strong connection to their native language when articulating personal feelings (Hadjichristidis et al., 2019; Tannenbaum & Howie, 2002). Another 35% reported moderate comfort in using Malayalam, indicating that while the language is generally preferred for emotional expression, context may influence its application. It is noteworthy that no participants indicated discomfort expressing emotions in Malayalam, underscoring its efficacy as a medium for emotional communication.

Conversely, when evaluating comfort levels in emotional expression using English, 52.5% of participants indicated moderate comfort, while 32.5% felt very comfortable articulating emotions in English. While English serves as a functional means for many participants, the emotional resonance it provides appears to be less substantial than that of Malayalam. This disparity points toward the cultural and emotional significance attributed to Malayalam as the primary medium for expressing an individual's feelings.

Interestingly, 87.5% of respondents believed that they can express a wider range of emotions in Malayalam compared to English. This preference aligns with the notion that a native language often carries deeper emotional and cultural weight, thereby providing a more natural avenue for conveying feelings (García-Palacios et al., 2018; Harris & Gleason, 2006; Keysar et al., 2012; Shin & Kim, 2017). A smaller yet significant 27.5% of participants favored expressing emotions in English, indicating that it is important to view for specific contexts, particularly formal communication or encounters with non-Malayalam speakers (Andrade, 2009; Dockrell et al., 2010).

Table 3: Emotional Expression in Language Among Participants

Factor	Category	n	%
Language Preference at Home	Both	21	52.5
	Malayalam predominantly	18	45.0
	English predominantly	1	2.5
Comfort Expressing Emotions in Malayalam	Very comfortable	26	65.0
	Moderately comfortable	14	35.0
	Uncomfortable	0	0.0
Comfort Expressing Emotions in English	Very comfortable	13	32.5
	Moderately comfortable	21	52.5
	Uncomfortable	6	15.0
Language for Wider Emotional Expression	Malayalam	35	87.5
	English	11	27.5

Table 3 presents language preferences and emotional expression patterns among bilingual Malayalam-English speakers. The data reveal three key findings: First, home language use shows balanced bilingualism (52.5% use both equally), with Malayalam predominance (45%) far exceeding English (2.5%). Second, emotional comfort levels differ markedly between languages - while 65% report being very comfortable expressing emotions in Malayalam (with none uncomfortable), only 32.5% feel equally comfortable in English, with 15% reporting discomfort. Third, Malayalam dominates wider emotional expression contexts (87.5%), though a substantial minority (27.5%) use English for this purpose. These patterns suggest that:

- (1) While bilingual homes are common, Malayalam maintains stronger emotional dominance than English.
- (2) A significant comfort gap exists between languages for emotional expression.
- (3) Despite English's presence in the linguistic repertoire, Malayalam remains the primary vehicle for emotional communication beyond the home. The coexistence of these patterns highlights the complex dynamics of emotional bilingualism in this population.

4.4 Emotional Processing and Language Switching

When examining internal dialogue preferences, the data indicated that 42.5% of respondents primarily think in English when reflecting on emotions, while 30% preferred Malayalam. This observation suggests that both languages play significant roles in cognitive processes involving emotional reflection, emphasizing a complex interplay in the cognitive-emotional landscape of bilingual individuals.

To unveil the relationship between language switching and emotional responses, a chi-square analysis was conducted to determine the potential impact of switching from Malayalam to English on the intensity of emotional experiences among male and female respondents. The results indicated a statistically significant association ($p < 0.05$). Specifically, a majority of the female participants (66.6%) reported experiencing less intense emotions when switching to English, showcasing a notable trend toward emotional modulation. Conversely, male respondents exhibited a more evenly distributed pattern across emotional responses, with a significant number of participants reporting no change in emotional intensity (31.2%). These findings may hint at differences in emotional processing mechanisms between genders, suggesting that females may engage more readily in emotional regulation through language switching (Bremner et al., 2003; Domes et al., 2009; Lithari et al., 2009).

Table 4: Internal Dialogue Language Preferences and Effects of Language Switching on Emotional Intensity

Factor	Category	n	%
Primary Language for Internal Emotional Reflection	English	17	42.5
	Malayalam	12	30
	Both	11	27.5
Effect of Language Switching on Emotional Intensity	Females: Less intense when switching to English	12	66.6*
	Males: No change when switching	10	31.2*

Significant*

Table 4 presents data on internal emotional processing and gender differences in language switching effects among bilingual Malayalam-English speakers. For primary language of internal emotional reflection, English emerged as most common (42.5%), followed by Malayalam (30%) and equal use of both languages (27.5%). Gender differences in language switching effects revealed that females predominantly reported reduced emotional intensity when switching to English (66.6%), while males most frequently experienced no change (31.2%). These findings indicate that:

- (1) English serves as the dominant language for private emotional reflection despite Malayalam's prominence in outward expression.
- (2) Language switching effects show significant gender variation, with females being more likely to experience emotional modulation through code-switching.
- (3) Approximately one-quarter of participants maintain balanced bilingualism in their internal emotional processing.

4.5 Language Preference for Specific Emotions

To further explore the preferences regarding emotional expression, a chi-square test analyzed the relationship between specific emotional states (angry, stressed, happy, sad) and language preferences (English, Malayalam, or both). However, the analysis indicated no statistically significant association ($p = 0.592$). Although respondents reported a predominant use of Malayalam when expressing anger (60%), this tendency was consistent across other emotional states, including stress and sadness. The lack of significant variance indicates that while emotional states may influence language choices, comfort levels with both languages likely remain uniform regardless of the emotional context.

Table 5: Language Preference for Expressing Specific Emotions

Emotion	Malayalam Preferred (%)	English Preferred (%)	Both Preferred (%)
Anger	60	15	25
Stress	55	20	25
Sadness	57.5	17.5	25
Happiness	50	25	25

Table 5 presents language preferences for expressing four core emotions among bilingual Malayalam-English speakers. Malayalam emerged as the dominant language across all emotional states, with particularly high usage for anger (60%) and sadness (57.5%). English showed moderate use for stress (32%) and sadness (27.5%), while combined language use ("Both") was most frequent during happiness (27.5%). These patterns suggest that:

- (1) Malayalam serves as the primary language for high-arousal negative emotions (anger, sadness).
- (2) English assumes greater importance in stress contexts (potentially reflecting formal/ workplace usage).
- (3) Positive emotions like happiness show more balanced bilingual expression.

4.6 Coping Mechanisms and Language Choice

The examination of emotional coping mechanisms revealed that 60% of respondents preferred to communicate in Malayalam when seeking comfort. This strong attachment highlights how participants associate their native language with emotional safety and support during challenging times (Sivak et al., 2019; Tannenbaum & Howie, 2002). In contrast, only 10% indicated a preference for English in these contexts, suggesting that for most individuals, emotional solace is best garnered in their first languages (Pavlenko, 2005). An additional 10% reported using both languages when seeking comfort, indicating flexibility in emotional management linked to context-dependent factors (Matsumoto et al., 2008; Scherer, 2005).

The analysis of language switching during emotional expression unveiled that 62.5% of participants felt their emotions became less intense when switching to English. This tendency indicates a potential coping strategy for many respondents, wherein using English provides emotional distance and allows for more rational processing of feelings. Conversely, 12.5% of respondents reported that emotional intensity increased when expressing feelings in English, suggesting that for some individuals, a less familiar language may evoke deeper emotional responses or clarity.

Table 6: Language Preference for Emotional Comfort and Effects of Language Switching on Emotional Intensity

Factor	Category	n	%
Preferred Language for Seeking	Malayalam	24	60
	English	4	10
	Both languages	4	10
	No preference	8	20
Effect of Language Switching During Emotional Expression	Less intense when switching to English	25	62.5
	More intense when switching to English	5	12.5
	No change	10	25

Table 6 presents language preferences for emotional comfort and the effects of language switching among bilingual Malayalam-English speakers. Malayalam was the dominant preference for seeking comfort (60%), with English (10%), both languages equally (10%), and no preference (20%) being less common. When switching languages during emotional expression, most participants reported reduced intensity when using English (62.5%), while a minority experienced increased intensity (12.5%) or no change (25%). These patterns suggest that:

- (1) Malayalam remains the primary language for emotional comfort, reinforcing its role in intimate or vulnerable contexts.
- (2) English may function as a distancing tool, attenuating emotional intensity for many speakers, and
- (3) Individual differences in language effects highlight the complex interplay between bilingualism and emotional regulation.

V. CONCLUSION

This study emphasizes the complex connection between emotional expression and bilingualism, especially in the context of Malayalam and English. The findings indicate that, English is a useful tool for emotional regulation and distancing, but Malayalam is still the most used language for expressing strong emotions because of its cultural and emotional depth amongst the participants. By strategically modifying emotional intensity, code-switching enables bilinguals to successfully negotiate social and cultural expectations. Furthermore, the requirement for tailored considerations in multilingual emotional expression is further highlighted gender disparities in emotional control techniques.

Findings also revealed that, bilingual people use their linguistic adaptability to match their emotional expression to various social and cultural settings. While English, which is frequently learnt later, offers a sense of detachment that promotes self-regulation, Malayalam, as a first language, offers a deeper emotional connection. This confirms earlier findings that using a second language can lessen emotional intensity because of weakened affective bonds.

Additionally, bilinguals actively switch between languages according to the type and degree of their emotions, according to the study. Participants expressed a strong preference for Malayalam when talking about situations that were both personally and culturally relevant. On the other hand, because of its apparent neutrality and global practicality, English was favored in academic, professional, and international contexts. The results highlight the fact that, depending on the language environment, bilingualism can act as both a regulator and an emotional amplifier.

5.3 Limitations

Sample size and demographics: the study was conducted on a small sample of college students aged 18-24 years, restricting its applicability to broader age groups and professional contexts.

Self-reported data: emotional experiences were assessed based on self-reports, which may be influenced by social desirability bias and individual subjectivity.

Limited scope on code-switching: although code-switching was examined in connection with emotional expression, a more thorough investigation of situational and contextual factors that cause language switches would yield a more profound comprehension.

Cultural specificity: the results may not be immediately applicable to multilingual populations with diverse language and cultural backgrounds because the study focusses on Malayalam-English bilinguals in Kerala.

5.2 Implication of findings

This study's findings have important implications for psychology, linguistics, and education, among other fields. Mental health practitioners can create more culturally and linguistically sensitive therapeutic interventions by having a better understanding of how bilingualism impacts emotional expression and management. In multicultural societies, where people regularly switch between linguistic framework in emotional circumstances, this insight is especially pertinent.

Additionally, the results imply that bilingual people can profit from specialized emotionally sensitive instruction that takes into account their linguistic preferences. To help bilingual students better manage and regulate their emotions in both personal and academic contexts, educational institutions can implement language-sensitive emotional development programs.

5.3 Recommendations

Application in mental health: when treating emotional problems, therapists and counsellors should take bilingualism into account. This will enable the clients to switch between languages, which will help them explain themselves and regulate their emotions.

Educational policy: to assist students in navigating emotional articulation in both languages, schools and colleges should include bilingual emotional expression exercises in language curriculum.

Corporate communication strategies: companies should incorporate training programs that assist bilingual communication Strategies for emotional regulation in the workplace and acknowledge the emotional subtleties of bilingual staff.

5.4 Future research directions

The long-term effects of bilingualism emotional expression in various age groups and social circumstances should be investigated in future research. Furthermore, generalizability would be improved by broadening the scope of the study to encompass individuals from linguistic backgrounds other than Malayalam-English bilinguals.

Future research should explore the impact of bilingualism on cognitive functions related to emotional regulation, such as memory recall, attentional control, and emotional decision-making, as there is a gap in the existing literature. Deeper understanding of the cognitive benefits or difficulties connected to bilingual emotional expression could be gained by investigating the neurocognitive processes underpinning bilingual emotional processing using neuroimaging methods or experimental cognitive tasks.

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