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Third Culture Kids in Denmark: Exploring code-switching patterns according to interlocutors and topic emotionality

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ABSTRACT

This mixed-methods study is among the first to explore code-switching (CS) patterns within the broader context of translanguaging in a unique multilingual population, namely Third Culture Kids (TCKs), who are extensively socialized in English through schooling and the expatriate community. Data were collected from 188 TCKs enrolled in the *International Baccalaureate* Programme at the same international school in Denmark. Participants spoke 60 different languages, with 42 first languages (L1s). English represented the largest language group, with 30% first language (L1) users, and 70% acquired later in life (LX). Results showed that TCKs diverged from previous studies regarding the frequency and direction of CS, reporting a decrease in use as the topic became emotionally charged, with a reverse direction in the switch from L1 to LX (English). Additionally, bivariate analysis and multiple regression models were conducted to explore the role of sociobiographical, language profile, and family language policy (FLP) factors in CS frequency according to interlocutors (family and friends, schoolmates, and strangers) and topic emotionality (non-emotional, emotional).This study not only enhances our understanding of TCKs' underexplored linguistic abilities, but also contributes to both micro- (TCK's household) and macro-level (expatriate community and international school) CS studies recognizing TCKs as unique multilingual individuals.

Keywords: Third Culture Kids, multilingualism, translanguaging, code-switching, emotions, international schools

Code-switching (CS) is bilinguals' "... ability to select the language according to the interlocutor, the situational context, the topic of conversation... and to change languages within an interactional sequence … without violating specific grammatical constraints" (Meisel, 1994, p.114). Research has demonstrated the complexity of this phenomenon owing

to its interdisciplinary and multidimensional nature. This study explores CS patterns in Third Culture Kids (TCKs), an underrepresented population in Second Language Acquisition research. According to Pollock et al. (2017), a TCK is "a person who spends a significant part of his or her first eighteen years of life accompanying parent(s) into a country or countries that are different from at least one parent's passport country(ies) due to parent's choice of work" (p.36). Namely, TCKs are raised in their parent(s)' dominant culture(s) while attending international schools in various host countries, leading to diverse linguistic, cultural, and social experiences. Consequently, this study examines TCKs' CS practices within an English-dominated context, considering the influence of interlocutors (family and friends, schoolmates, strangers) and topic emotionality (non-emotional, emotional). These dimensions enable an investigation of the intersection between multilingual backgrounds, social dynamics, and emotional expression. Additionally, the study investigates how sociobiographical, language profile, and family language policy (FLP) factors shape TCKs' CS behavior.

Theoretical background

Within this investigation, bilinguals are conceptualized as "those who use two or more languages in everyday lives" (Grosjean, 2010, p.22), complemented by Dewaele's (2018) neutral and non-hierarchical approach of "first language" (L1) and "foreign language" user (LX). Therefore, "L1" indicates the first language acquired, and "LX" refers to "any foreign language acquired after the L1, i.e., after the age of three, to any level of proficiency" (p. 238), whereas L2-L5 represent the language acquisition order.

Furthermore, since different languages fulfil unique social functions, TCKs' socialization patterns are crucial at two levels: the micro-level of the individual (TCKs' household), where parents often communicate in a non-societal language (De Houwer, 2020), and the macro-level of the expatriate community in the host country, including the international school, where English is the primary communication tool.

The study follows Grosjean's Complementary Principle (CP) (1997), by which bi-multilinguals "…acquire and use their languages for different purposes, in different domains of life, with different people" (p.165). This approach focuses on strategic and complementary language use to fulfill different communicative needs. It emphasizes TCKs' linguistic background, characterized by early bi-trilingualism, fluctuating language stability and competence due to their transient lifestyle, consistent English schooling, language use

centered around the household and international school, and a varying language mode continuum from monolingual to bilingual, reflecting their evolving socialization patterns.

Similarly, the notion of "different purposes and domains" is essential for examining language switching and its usage in this study. English is significant in multiple domains (e.g., friends, school), whereas other languages are often limited to specific areas (e.g., L1 use with close family members), leading to substantial implications for language dominance.

Additionally, the study examines the unique contributions of each language in the TCKs' repertoire, but contextualizes this analysis within the broader framework of translanguaging. This approach emphasizes the interconnected system of users' linguistic repertoires (Canagarajah, 2011) and highlights their agency in a dynamic communication process shaped by interpersonal interactions and societal contexts (García & Li, 2014). Therefore, the overlap between CS and translanguaging is seen in this context as a complementary illustration of how multilinguals seamlessly integrate language knowledge, creating unique linguistic trajectories or idiolects (Li, 2018).

CS research and the influence of interlocutors and topic emotionality

This study explores CS from a sociolinguistic perspective, focusing on social motivations and contextual factors influencing CS (Bullock &Toribio, 2009), which are significantly shaped by both interlocutors and conversation topics.

Different interlocutors can elicit distinct CS patterns based on their linguistic and social expectations, leading to conscious or unconscious use or suppression of CS. Research indicates that CS usage generally increases with familiar interlocutors (e.g., Dewaele, 2010a; Dewaele & Li, 2014a; Dewaele & Zeckel, 2016) as it effectively communicates messages when language knowledge is shared (Grosjean, 2010; Panayiotou, 2004). Conversely, with unfamiliar interlocutors, where shared language knowledge is limited, effective communication relies on selecting the safest language option. The current study is conducted in Copenhagen (Denmark), a highly international city with numerous international companies, a substantial expatriate population (51% of expats)[1], and diverse international education options (12 out of 26 schools in Denmark)[2]. Moreover, English holds an unofficial

[1] Source: The Oxford Expat Study 2020 https://oxfordresearch.dk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/The-Expat-Study-2020.pdf
[2] Source: Ministry of Children and Education https://eng.uvm.dk/primary-and-lower-secondary-education/private-schools-in-denmark/international-basic-schools-in-denmark

second-language status (Lønsmann et al., 2022), supported by its widespread presence in Danes' daily lives (e.g., English-language films and TV shown in their original version) and society's reputation for high English proficiency[3]. Therefore, TCKs in this study are expected to use English in social contexts when interacting with Danish locals.

Emotionality also influences CS patterns. Emotional discussions often require unique linguistic strategies to convey emotional states effectively. Research consistently links higher emotional intensity to increased CS frequency (e.g., Dewaele, 2010b; Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2016; Resnik, 2018) since CS is associated with a lack of cross-linguistic emotional equivalents (Altarriba, 2003; Pavlenko, 2008; Wierzbicka, 2004), prompting multilinguals to select the language that best channels their emotions. In this respect, the most frequent pattern is to move from LX to L1, which allows for greater emotional intensity (e.g., Dewaele, 2010a; Di Luzio, 1984).This pattern is often associated with an early onset of language acquisition (AoA) and a higher emotional context of acquisition (CoA) (e.g., naturalistic), resulting in an embodied language (i.e., *a language connected to the body*; Pavlenko, 2005, p.187). In the current study, L1 is a heritage language (HL) for most participants, playing a vital role in strengthening emotional attachments, reinforcing familial ties (Curdt-Christiansen, 2022), and facilitating communication with extended family members (Tannenbaum, 2012). Nevertheless, LX can become as emotional as L1 through extensive acculturation (e.g., De Leersnyder et al., 2011; Dewaele, 2004; Pavlenko, 2004).

TCKs' assessment factors

The study examines the role of the following factors in the self-reported CS frequency across interlocutors and topic emotionality:

Sociobiographical factors

TCKs' transient lifestyle (e.g., Grimshaw & Sears, 2008) and their disconnectedness from the host country (e.g., Benjamin, 2017; Fail et al., 2004) significantly influence their socialization.

[3] Source: https://www.ef.com/assetscdn/WIBIwq6RdJvcD9bc8RMd/cefcom-epi-site/reports/2022/ef-epi-2022-english.pdf

At the micro level, TCKs' households provide stability, with siblings often compensating for their lack of friends, while at the macro level (expatriate community and international school), TCKs' socialization is portrayed as fast-forming, shallow, and temporary (Lijadi & van Schalkwyk, 2014). The international school provides a familiar environment to normalize TCKs' transient status and rootlessness, fostering socialization with like-minded students who may share their L1(s) (Kwon, 2019; Lijadi & van Schalkwyk, 2017). In this scenario, CS may serve as a strategy for navigating the multilingual world (Danjo, 2021), fulfilling creative multilingual needs (Bathia & Ritchie, 2006), promoting inclusiveness (Rydenvald, 2018) and facilitating communication (Moradi & Chen, 2022). However, the international school hinders contact with the host country, functioning as an insular entity that fulfills all TCKs' academic and social needs (Benjamin, 2017), thereby perpetuating the *expatriate bubble* and linguistic reliance on English (Meyer 2021).

Language profile factors

Language proficiency and dominance have been recurrently identified as significant factors influencing CS frequency, with both positive (e.g., Reyes, 2004) and negative associations (Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2016). For example, Tannenbaum and Tseng (2015) found in their study on 54 adult TCKs aged 18-30, that proficiency did not correlate with AoA, and English (LX), not L1, was prevalent in daily social interactions and emotional expression. Additionally, a higher level of proficiency in L3 led to increased identification as multilingual individuals and greater emotional expression in that language, suggesting that mastery is necessary for emotional connections in a language (Dewaele & Nakano, 2013).

Conversely, CS can manifest as a loss of proficiency, determining which lexicon is accessed more quickly (Heredia, 1997; Heredia & Altarriba, 2001). The current research context suggests tension between TCKs' L1 (HL for most) limited exposure and LX English extensive exposure through schooling and mingling with peers at international school, leading to TCKs' heavy reliance on English (Lijadi & van Schalkwyk, 2014) to the detriment of their L1s (Bailey, 2015; Tannenbaum & Tseng, 2015).

FLP factors

Parents of international school students frequently embody high socio-economic groups with a strong appreciation for their L1 and cultural heritage (Grimshaw & Sears, 2008), bearing the primary responsibility for maintaining their home language (Curdt-Christiansen, 2022). Consequently, parental language regulation may substantially impact TCKs' language development (De Houwer, 1999) and language maintenance (King et al., 2008), thereby influencing CS behavior.

Parents can promote or suppress CS use. In the current multilingual context, linguistic dynamics may involve: (1) intercultural parents adopting the "one parent one language approach" (OPOL); (2) parents with a shared L1 adopting the "non-societal vs. societal" approach (i.e., parents' shared L1 vs. English), and (3) parents adopting a flexible approach where shared language(s) are used, and CS is welcome, the so-called "Happylingual Approach" (Kopeliovich, 2013). These approaches may translate into strict and controlled FLPs, where parents do not code-switch, promoting a monolingual mode, or a flexible approach, where parents use CS, promoting a bilingual mode (Grosjean, 2001, p.12), which children will mirror; hence, CS (Lanza, 1997; 2001). Furthermore, in intercultural families promoting multilingualism and language maintenance, CS practices increase (Dewaele & Li, 2014a; 2014b).

Nevertheless, FLP dynamics extend beyond parental behavior, with children's language behavior influencing parents' beliefs and strategies (De Houwer, 1999; King et al., 2008). This is intertwined with discrepancies between FLP implementation and actual home practices (e.g., Brown, 2011; Schwartz, 2008). For TCKs, this may manifest in home interactions, exhibiting some "leakage" (De Houwer & Bornstein, 2016) of English.

This study fills a gap in TCK research by integrating linguistic, social, and emotional dynamics; applying clear recruitment criteria to a larger TCK sample; avoiding biased retrospective methodologies; and employing a sequential mixed-methods approach (Johnson & Christensen, 2020), combining questionnaire data with supplementary interviews.

Research questions

The study aimed to examine the following questions:

1. Is there a difference in TCK's self-reported CS frequency according to the type of interlocutor and topic emotionality?

2. What is the role of sociobiographical, language profile, and FLP factors in TCK's self-reported CS frequency across interlocutors (family and friends, schoolmates, and strangers)?
3. What is the role of sociobiographical, language profile, and FLP factors in TCK's self-reported CS frequency considering the topic emotionality (emotional, non-emotional)?

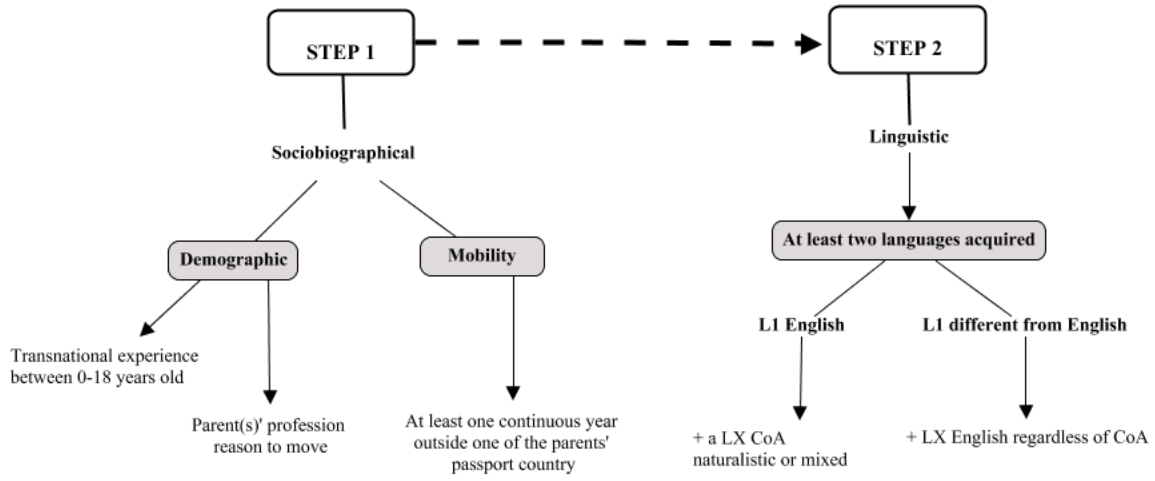
Method

Participants

To ensure standardization in the recruitment of TCKs (Tan et al., 2021), the study applied clear exclusion criteria and was organized in two steps:

Figure 1

TCK-sampling requirements



Sociobiographical requirements followed the definition of a traditional TCK (Pollock et al., 2017) definition of a traditional TCK. Linguistic requirements were based on Poplack's (1980) assertion that CS is performed by proficient multilinguals. Data collection included five languages, but L4 and L5, acquired later in life (after age eight: L4, 60%; L5, 98%),

mainly instruction-based (L4, 64%; L5, 92%), and with low self-reported oral proficiency (L4, *M* = 2.3; L5, *M* = 2.1 out of 5), were excluded.

Participants included 188 students, 89 males and 99 females, aged 15-19 (*M* = 17, *SD* = 0.8), enrolled in the *Diploma Programme* at the same international school in Denmark, but in different grades and academic years. Participants showed high international mobility (41% of the participants relocated between ages 0-2, spending over half their lives outside at least one parent's passport country (*M* = 9.8, *SD* = 4.9) while attending international schools (*M* = 8.7, *SD* = 4.2). Their households were also highly international, comprising 40% binational couples and 37.2% intercultural couples (see Table S1).

The participants represented 47 countries, spoke 60 languages, and had 42 different L1s. There were 23 bilinguals, 61 trilinguals, 71 quadrilinguals, and 33 pentalinguals, respectively. English L1 users represented the largest group (30%), followed by Danish (12.8%). As for L2s, English had the largest group of users (48.1%), followed by Danish (12.8%). L3 constituted 18.1% of French users and 16.5% of English users, including the school-taught languages (Danish, German, and Spanish). On average, the participants acquired four languages (*SD* = 0.9; range 2-5). The L2 AoA revealed that 46.8% were bilingual L1 users and 8.5% were trilingual L1 users. Moreover, 30.9% were dominant in their L1, 46.3% in two or more languages, and 22.9% were dominant in an LX, with English being the language in all cases, a common phenomenon of TCKs' enrollment in international schools (see Table S2).

Qualitative data included nine interviews (two males, seven females) organized into three pre-established groups: (1) strict FLP approach, (2) flexible FLP approach, and (3) LX English dominant: varying FLP approaches (see Table S3).

Instruments and procedure

Quantitative data were collected through a voluntary web-based questionnaire completed outside school hours. The first section collected sociobiographical data to validate the TCKs profiles. The second section used a modified version of the *Bilingualism and Emotions Questionnaire* (Dewaele & Pavlenko 2001-2003) to gather language history data and self-reported CS frequency scores across interlocutors and topic emotionality.

The study examined three factors:

Sociobiographical: Age at first move, intercultural couple, language(s) spoken at home, parent(s) L1 English, countries TCK resided (at least for a year), years in international school, years in Denmark, L1-L3 frequency of use, and degree of socialization in LXs. The frequency of language use had six categories but was recoded into three for analysis purposes (low [*never, yearly*], medium [*monthly, weekly*], and high [*daily, several hours a day*]. The degree of socialization in LX(s) was computed by subtracting the L1 frequency score from the LX (L2-L3), yielding varying degrees of socialization, with a negative signifying higher socialization in the LX (Table S1).

Language profile: Languages acquired, self-reported dominant language(s), L1-L3 subjective perceptions, average self-reported oral skills, English status in TCK's linguistic repertoire, AoA L1-L3, and CoA L1-L3: *naturalistic* (outside school), *mixed* (in and outside school), or *instructed* (in school). Dominant language(s) were grouped as L1, L1+LX, and LX. Subjective language perceptions were captured through the statements *My L1-L3 is useful/emotional;* responses included *not at all, somewhat, more or less, to a large extent*, and *absolutely*. L1-L3 self-reported oral skills scores ranged from 1 *(least proficient)* to 5 *(fully proficient),* and an arithmetic mean was calculated (self-rated score for speaking and listening divided by two). TCK English status was based on the AoA L1-L3 and self-reported dominant language(s) and grouped into: L1, L1+ LX, and LX (Table S2).

FLP: Household language mode data were grouped into *monolingual* (one language) and *bi-multilingual* (two or more languages); and *English spoken at home*, grouped into spoken and non-spoken households (see Table S4).

Two dependent variables were considered:

(1) Self-reported CS frequency according to interlocutors: family and friends, schoolmates, and strangers.
(2) Self-reported CS frequency according to topic emotionality: non-emotional or emotional.

Responses ranged from *never* to *all the time.* Reliability analysis revealed optimal internal consistency (Briggs & Cheek, 1986) for self-reported CS frequency across interlocutors (Cronbach's $\alpha = .58$) and topic emotionality (Cronbach's $\alpha = .70$).

The interviews were conducted in English and were tailored to the participants' questionnaire responses (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2014), lasting on average 45 minutes. They were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the university, school administrators, and the adolescents.[4]

Data analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS Version 28 (IBM Corp., 2021). Preliminary Pearson's correlation analysis, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), and independent sample t-tests explored the associations between outcomes and the sociobiographical and language profile factors. Significant variables were simultaneously included in multiple regression models with FLP factors to evaluate their ability to predict self-reported CS frequency across interlocutors and topic emotionality.

All tables report β unstandardized coefficients.

Results

Differences in self-reported CS frequency across interlocutors and topic emotionality

A one-way repeated measures ANOVA examined the interlocutor's impact (family and friends, schoolmates, strangers) on self-reported CS frequency. Results showed a significant effect across interlocutors (Wilks' Lambda = .61, (F (2,186) = 57.39, $p < .001$, η_p^2 = 0.38), eliciting a very large effect size (Cohen, 1988). Post-hoc comparisons (Bonferroni) revealed a lower CS frequency with strangers (M = 2.4) than with schoolmates (M = 2.6) or family and friends (M = 3.6), indicating an increased CS frequency with familiar interlocutors.

Interviews excerpts confirmed this result:

> Fatema (L1 Chaldean, L2 Arabic, L3 English, L4 Danish): *With my parents, it's a big mix with English and Chaldean; we basically switch back and forth.*

[4] In Denmark, the minimum consent age for research participation is 15.

However, some informants reported conflicted feelings, perceived personality changes, and experienced slower word retrieval when using their L1 around family members, particularly grandparents:

> Maaike (L1 Dutch, L2 English, L3 French, L4 Danish, L5 Spanish): *With extended Dutch family or my grandma …, I can´t switch languages, … I can't contribute fast enough…so I'm shyer because I can´t really say the things I want to say… I can't portray who I am.*

A paired-sample t-test analyzed the impact of topic emotionality (non-emotional, emotional) on self-reported CS frequency. A significant difference was found between non-emotional and emotional topic (t (187) = 3.04, p = .003, d = 0.22) eliciting a small effect size. Self-reported CS frequency was higher for non-emotional (M = 3.1) than emotional topic (M = 2.7), indicating a decreased CS frequency with emotional topic.

Interview excerpts corroborated this finding:

> Sarah (L1 Swedish, L2 English, L3 Chinese, L4 Danish, L5 Spanish): *When you're angry you're not really you. You lose touch with your rational side and automatically switch to what's easiest, what comes most naturally, and that's English*.

Associations between self-reported CS frequency across interlocutors, topic emotionality, and sociobiographical and language profile factors

The following section summarizes the preliminary association analyses. The full results are presented in Table S5 and S6.

Self-reported CS frequency across interlocutors

Sociobiographical. None of the factors were linked to schoolmates. The *languages spoken at home* (r = .18, p = .015) and *frequency of use L2* (r = .16, p = .034) were linked to family and friends, increasing the self-reported CS frequency. Conversely, *years in international school* (r = .18, p = .013) and the *countries TCK resided* (r = -.15, p = .034) were linked to strangers. More years enrolled in an international school increased CS frequency, but living in more countries decreased it.

Language profile. None of the factors were associated with strangers. Family and friends were highly significantly linked to the *languages acquired* ($r = .22$, $p = .003$) and associated with L2 perceptions (*useful* [($r = .16$, $p = .023$] and *emotional* [$r = .17$, $p = .021$]), whereas schoolmates were associated with L3 perceptions (*useful* [$r = .22$, $p = .004$], *emotional* [$r = 0.20$, $p = .008$]), and *L3 average self-reported oral skills* ($r = .20$, $p = .008$).

Self-reported CS frequency according to topic emotionality

Sociobiographical. None of the factors were significantly associated with topic emotionality.
Language profile. Non-emotional topic was associated with *TCK English status*, increasing the CS frequency (F [2,185] = 4.20, $p = .016$). Emotional topic was positively associated with *languages acquired* ($r = .18$, $p = .013$), perception *L1 emotional* ($r = .14$, $p = .047$), and *L2 useful* ($r = .17$, $p = .021$), and *emotional* ($r = .22$, $p = .002$), indicating that an increase in these variables increased self-reported CS use. Additionally, a strong correlation was found between *L2 average self-reported oral skills* and increased CS frequency with emotional topic ($r = .25$, $p < .001$).

The role of sociobiographical, language profile, and FLP factors on self-reported frequency according to interlocutors and topic emotionality

For conceptual clarity and to minimize redundancy, results are reported by factor.

Tables 1 and 2 show the results of the multiple regression analyses, including the significant sociobiographical and language profile factors, and incorporating the FLP factors for self-reported CS frequency across interlocutors and topic emotionality.

Table 1

Multiple regression with sociobiographical, language profile, and FLP factors for self-reported CS frequency across interlocutors.

		Self-reported CS interlocutors					
Factors		family & friends		schoolmates		strangers	
Sociobiographical	*n*	*β*	*p*	*β*	*p*	*β*	*p*
Years in international school	188	-.010	.663	.009	.663	.052	.006**
Countries TCK resided	188	.025	.785	-.109	.210	-.196	.012*
Languages spoken at home	188	.388	.011*	.168	.244	.041	.752
Frequency use L2	188	.127	.120	-.032	.680	-.063	.366

	F (4,183)		2.21	.070	0.90	.465	3.40	.009**
	R^2			.046		.020		.071
Language profile		*n*	*β*	*p*	*β*	*p*	*β*	*p*
Languages acquired		188	.313	.005**	.154	.150	.090	.368
English status TCK	L1+LX	95	.062	.790	.154	.489	-.050	.824
	LX	36	.357	.213	.133	.630	-.006	.981
Perception L1	emotional	188	.077	.333	.027	.724	-.080	.269
Perception L2	useful	188	.230	.058	.046	.690	-.037	.730
	emotional	188	.078	.366	-.020	.822	-.080	.307
Perception L3	useful	165	-.177	.056	.109	.219	.170	.041*
	emotional	165	-.073	.373	.077	.328	-.155	.036*
Average self-reported oral skills	L2	188	-.071	.646	.073	.622	.032	.814
	L3	165	.140	.194	.080	.440	.023	.812
	F (10,154)		2.38	.012*	1.57	.120	1.28	.243
	R^2			.136		.094		.080
Family language policy		*n*	*β*	*p*	*β*	*p*	*β*	*p*
Linguistic mode	monolingual	100	.640	.015*	.443	.075	.056	.806
	bi-multilingual	88						
English spoken at home	no	93	-.161	.533	-.393	.113	.057	.803
	yes	95						
	F (2,185)		4.36	.014*	1.70	.184	0.21	.806
	R^2			.050		.020		.002

*p < .05, **p <.01

Table 2

Multiple regression with sociobiographical, language profile, and FLP factors for self-reported CS frequency according to topic emotionality.

			Self-reported CS topic emotionality			
Factors			non-emotional		emotional	
Sociobiographical		*n*	*β*	*p*	*β*	*p*
Years enrolled international school		188	.027	.254	-.005	.840
Countries TCK resided		188	-.050	.612	-.020	.854
Languages spoken at home		188	.214	.191	.203	.240
Frequency use L2		188	.007	.938	.175	.061
	F (4,183)		0.83	.507	1.25	.292
	R^2			.020		.027
Language profile		*n*	*β*	*p*	*β*	*p*
Languages acquired		188	.066	.580	.289	.020*
English status TCK	L1+LX	95	.344	.167	.258	.318
	LX	36	.711	.022*	.632	.049*
Perception L1	emotional	188	-.002	.983	.137	.122
Perception L2	useful	188	-.008	.952	.040	.783
	emotional	188	-.114	.217	.100	.296
Perception L3	useful	165	.265	.008**	-.044	.670
	emotional	165	-.157	.076	-.039	.671
Average self-reported oral skills	L2	188	.262	.114	.309	.073
	L3	165	-.020	.878	-.022	.856
	F (10,154)		1.90	.048*	2.69	.005**
	R^2			.112		.150
Family language policy		*n*	*β*	*p*	*β*	*p*
Linguistic mode	monolingual	100	.713	.011*	.571	.054
	bi-multilingual	88				

English spoken at home	no	93	-.521	.060	-.465	.116
	yes	95				
	F (2,185)		3.34	.038*	1.91	.151
	R^2		.040		.020	

*$p < .05$, **$p < 01$

Sociobiographical factors

Languages spoken at home significantly predicted self-reported CS frequency (β = .388, p =.011) with family and friends, a multilingual household increased CS frequency with familiar interlocutors. For strangers, two significant factors were identified: *years enrolled in international school* (β = .052, p = .006) and *countries TCK resided* (β = -.196, p =.012); longer international school enrollment increased CS frequency, while more countries of residence decreased it. The model was significant (F [4,183] = 3.40, p =.009, R^2 = .071), eliciting a small effect size and explaining 7% of the variance (Table 1).

None of the sociobiographical factors were associated with topic emotionality (Table 2).

Interview excerpts confirmed that speaking multiple languages at home increased CS frequency with familiar interlocutors, especially when it was an established practice and when parents worked in an international environment:

> Liam (L1 Italian, L2 English, L3 French, L4 Spanish): *My parents speak Italian, English, and French…They switch languages at home, and so do I.*

> Mila (L1 German, L2 English, L3 French, L4 Greek): *As mom works at the WHO and dad at UNICEF, a lot of English words come into our German sentences.*

Extended international school enrollment enabled TCKs to acquire multiple languages, providing ample opportunities to socialize with other multilinguals, increasing CS frequency:

> Stella (L1 Danish, L2 Spanish, L3 German, L4 Swedish, L5 English): *With Spanish schoolmates, I speak Spanish, when I don´t remember a word I say it in English, but I also have Danish friends at school with whom I speak a mixture of Danish-English.*

Moreover, living in multiple countries boosted the view of English as the most efficient communication tool, decreasing the CS frequency, particularly in Denmark:

> Inge (L1 Danish, L2 English, L3 German): *I genuinely believe that English is useful in any country…everyone spoke English in the* (expatriate) *society I was.* (Participant lived in Korea, China, Japan, the Netherlands, and Denmark).

> Maaike (L1 Dutch, L2 English, L3 French, L4 Danish, L5 Spanish): *This morning I got some blood tests, the woman spoke Danish to me, but eventually I switched to English…everybody speaks such perfect English here…no need to try.*

Language profile factors

For familiar interlocutors, more *languages acquired* predicted an increase in self-reported CS frequency (β = .313, p =.005). The model was significant (F [10,184] = 2.38, p =.012, R^2 = .136), eliciting a small effect size and explaining 13.6% of the variance. Additionally, perceiving L3 as useful increased CS frequency with strangers (β = .170, p =.041), whereas perceiving L3 as emotional decreased it (β = -.155, p =.036) (Table 1).

Regarding topic emotionality, *English LX* (β = .711, p =.022) and perceiving L3 as useful (β = .265, p =.008) increased CS frequency for non-emotional topic. The model was significant (F [10,154] = 1.90, p =.048, R^2 = .112), eliciting a small effect size and explaining 11.2% of the variance. Regarding emotional topic, more *languages acquired* (β = .289, p =.020) and *English LX* (β = .632, p =.049) predicted an increase in self-reported CS frequency. This model was highly significant (F [10,154] = 2.69, p =.005, R^2 = .150), eliciting a small effect size, accounting for 15% of the variance (Table 2).

Participants' narratives confirmed the value of language diversity in interactions with familiar interlocutors, enabling them to switch languages creatively, enriching their emotional expression and leading to the development of their own idiolects:

> Mila (L1 German, L2 English, L3 French, L4 Greek): *During a fight at home, I feel I can reason better in English, so I might switch while angry in German…but in German there're high specific words that English doesn´t have…so, I may switch back…*

Other participants associated the switch with dominance and proficiency; specifically, interviewees described how with an emotional topic, they shifted from another language (L1) to LX English:

> Renata (L1 Portuguese, L2 Spanish, L3 English, L4 French): *Subconsciously, I just switch words* (Portuguese/English) *…but when emotions run high, I just switch less and stick to English…I know best what the words mean, I can find the right words for exactly what I'm feeling*.

LX English was also used in combination with other languages during non-emotional conversations:

> Renata (L1 Portuguese, L2 Spanish, L3 English, L4 French): *I switch words … in Portuguese there're words that are easier than in English like to put your shoes on, there's a verb, it's "calçar", so I just say "I'm gonna calçar."*

Other comments supported L3 as a useful communication tool with strangers and friends in non-emotional conversations, strategically compensating for the lack of dominance in languages acquired later in life:

> Fatema (L1 Chaldean, L2 Arabic, L3 English, L4 Danish, L5 Spanish): *In Spain, I was switching between English and Spanish, so I could understand pretty much what people said.*

L3 was also used in school, provided that it was a shared language:

> Pau (L1 Catalan, L2 Spanish, L3 French, L4 English): *Sometimes, while speaking with my French friends at school, I can´t find a word, and unconsciously, I'll throw it in English.*

FLP factors

FLP factors were only associated with family and friends. Specifically, *bi-multilingual language mode* predicted an increased self-reported CS frequency (β = .640, p =.015). The model was significant, F (2,185) = 4.36, p =.014, R^2 = .050, eliciting a small effect size and explaining 5% of the variance (Table 1). Regarding topic emotionality, a bi-

multilingual language mode was associated only with non-emotional topic, predicting an increase in self-reported CS frequency (β = .713, p = .011). The model was significant (F [2,185] = 3.34, p =.038, R^2 = .040), eliciting a small effect size and explaining 4% of the variance (Table 2).

The interview excerpts confirmed this trend. More languages spoken at home translated into a higher CS frequency for non-emotional topic with familiar interlocutors:

> Mila (L1 German, L2 English, L3 French, L4 Greek): *At home, we use German as the basis, but I think many English words come into the sentences, especially if we're talking about school or work.*
>
> Liam (L1 Italian, L2 English, L3 French, L4 Spanish): *With my dad is mostly English, with my mum, Italian, …during dinner, we switch languages all the time; once my mum starts, everybody follows.*

Discussion

Differences in self-reported CS frequency across interlocutors and topic emotionality

TCKs increased CS frequency with familiar interlocutors, following Grosjean's Language Mode Continuum (2001), but decreased it with emotional topic, following Grosjean's CP (1997).

With strangers, TCKs remained in a monolingual mode, suggesting no shared language knowledge (Cook 2016). However, with more familiar interlocutors, language knowledge was presumed, allowing TCKs to shift to a bi-multilingual mode, thus increasing CS use in an environment in which this behavior is presumably not stigmatized. Interview extracts supported increased CS frequency in households with parents and siblings, consistent with previous studies (Dewaele, 2010a; Dewaele & Li, 2014a; Resnik, 2018). Nevertheless, some TCKs struggled when conversing with certain familiar interactors (grandparents) who did not speak English, relying on their "weaker language", and resulting in personality shifts and fear of presenting an inaccurate self-image. This differs from other studies (e.g., Panicacci & Dewaele, 2018) where a reversed switch (L1 to LX) caused similar feelings. Slower L1 lexicon retrieval (Heredia, 1997; Heredia & Altarriba, 2001) was also observed,

with L1 typically being a HL (De Houwer, 2020), where parents are often the sole source of input (Curdt-Christiansen, 2022).

Regarding topic emotionality, the results diverged from previous studies (Dewaele, 2010b; Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2016) in both CS frequency (decreased self-reported CS) and switching direction (from L1 to LX). Emotionally charged conversations led TCKs to shift to a monolingual mode, becoming more self-centered and focused on message accuracy and emotional impact. Qualitative data supported this shift to LX English, consistent with previous studies (e.g., De Leersnyder et al., 2011; Dewaele, 2004; Pavlenko, 2004), and indicated the significant role of extensive acculturation.

Overall, these TCKs' CS behaviors demonstrated context awareness and adaptability through translanguaging. TCKs tendency to switch to LX during emotional conversations challenges the conventional immigration language-immersion framework. Here, the focus shifts from the emotional embodiment of L1 (Pavlenko, 2005) and "home" as the primary emotional context (Harris et al., 2006) to English LX, expat communities, and international schools. This illustrates how TCKs' linguistic behavior is influenced by their socialization and English usage, even without a formal immersion setting.

Role of sociobiographical, language profile, and FLP factors across interlocutors

Sociobiographical and language profile factors were linked to the ends of the familiar-unfamiliar interlocutor continuum, whereas FLP factors were exclusively associated with familiar ones. None of the factors were associated with schoolmates (continuum midpoint).

Research shows that TCKs' socialization mainly occurs in households and schools due to their nomadic lifestyles (Benjamin, 2017; Lijadi & van Schalkwyk, 2014). This may explain the blurred distinction between friends and schoolmates among the TCKs in this study, and the lack of significant factors associated with schoolmates. Interview excerpts confirmed the overlap of these two domains (Stella, *Danish friends at school;* Pau, *French friends at school*).

Moreover, the results showed that sociobiographical and FLP factors influence language profile factors, emphasizing TCKs' multilingualism trait. TCKs with multilingual home environments and longer international school attendance felt more international, mobilizing their entire linguistic repertoire (Danjo, 2021; Tannenbaum & Tseng, 2015) and increasing the likelihood of CS (Dewaele & Li, 2004a, 2004b). Interviewees confirmed switching languages in public and private domains to accommodate interlocutors' needs and

to enhance communication (Moradi & Chen, 2022). Similarly, attending international schools encouraged interactions with other multilinguals, fostering the display of diverse linguistic abilities and increasing CS frequency. Conversely, living in more countries reduced TCK's CS usage with strangers. More moves made socialization harder, with English as the only constant, enabling access to society wherever they relocated (Meyer, 2021). Interview excerpts supported English versatility and the unnecessary requirement of learning the host language, especially in Denmark, where English enjoys extensive social penetration (Muñoz & Cadierno, 2021).

Language-profile factors, *languages acquired*, and *L3 useful* predicted increased self-reported CS frequency with family, friends, and strangers, while *L3 emotional* predicted decreased self-reported CS use with strangers. These findings highlight TCKs' multilingual nature, consistent with previous studies indicating the strategic use of linguistic capital to convey messages (Bathia & Ritchie, 2006; García & Li, 2014; Panayiotou, 2004). Conversely, the negative association of *L3 emotional* with strangers further supports the notion of L3 as a functional communication tool distinct from emotionally charged conversations already covered by LX English. Both results align with the CP (Grosjean, 1997), in which certain languages are domain-specific. Interviews confirmed L3 use, but no association with emotional exchanges.

Regarding FLP factors, only *bi-multilingual language mode* predicted increased self-reported CS use with family and friends. This supports the assumption of shared linguistic knowledge in this interaction context and the notion that adopting a Happylingual FLP approach, which encourages multilingualism (Kopeliovich, 2013), enhances the likelihood of CS usage (Dewaele & Li, 2004a, 2004b).

Collectively, the results underscore that TCKs perceive themselves as international and CS (i.e., translanguaging) as a fundamental component of their identity. Interviews revealed how TCKs perceive both the international school and their households as "translanguaging spaces" (Li, 2011), where they fluidly and creatively use their linguistic knowledge with familiar interlocutors. However, this dynamic changes significantly when TCKs engage with the expatriate community and locals in the host country (usually unfamiliar interlocutors). Despite the impression that TCKs effortlessly navigate the globalized world, the core of their social patterns often remains within these expatriate bubbles, dominated by the monolingual ideology of English as a lingua franca and the safest language choice to engage with locals in new destinations. Thus, TCKs' CS patterns reflect varying degrees of linguistic freedom, determined by the diverse social contexts in which

they are immersed. These challenges limit their linguistic freedom and shape TCKs' acculturation process, which is ongoing and unique in that it is not a transitional phase, but an ongoing, cumulative process of adaptation in new host countries, while integration consistently occurs within a new expatriate bubble, as evidenced in the present study.

Role of sociobiographical, language profile and FLP factors according to topic emotionality

While sociobiographical factors showed no significant association with self-reported CS frequency across topic emotionality, FLP factors displayed a partial association (with non-emotional topics) and language profile factors indicated distinct language combinations for non-emotional and emotional conversations.

The absence of statistical significance for the sociobiographical factors may be attributed to unaccounted causal variables, as their relationships with topic emotionality are likely more complex (Dewaele & Zeckel, 2016). Nonetheless, sociobiographical factors, such as *years enrolled in international schools,* influenced language profile factors (*English LX*). Similarly, the *bi-multilingual language mode* (FLP factor) influenced the language profile factors (*languages acquired*).

Language profile factors indicated language distributions based on non-emotional (*L3* and *LX English*) and emotional (*LX English*) use. The emotionally neutral L3 use corroborates previous findings in this study of its usage when addressing strangers (i.e., a prototypical non-emotional state), whereas the inclusion of LX English in non-emotional and emotional topics confirms the versatility of the language. The absence of L3 emotional statistical significance can be explained by its limited network of interlocutors (see Table 7), later AoA (68% after the age of eight), and primarily instructed CoA (44.1%), which likely contributed to limited exposure to authentic emotional contexts and an overall lower language dominance.

Conversely, this study confirmed two aspects of emotionally charged conversations. First, the importance of having multiple languages to freely select the most suitable one for channeling emotions, given the non-equivalence of emotion concepts across languages (Pavlenko, 2008; Wierzbicka, 2004). Second, the importance of attaining language competence before effectively conveying emotions in a given language (Dewaele & Nakano, 2013; Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2016). TCKs in this study perceive the emotional domain as a serious matter, prioritizing control and clarity, switching to a language that effectively conveys their feelings, and naturally relying on their self-reported highest-proficiency

language: LX English. Participants' quotes corroborated this result, highlighting the natural, unconscious, and emotional use of LX English. These results align with Tannenbaum and Tseng's (2015) findings on TCKs' strong association with English, and the overall absence of statistical significance for L1 and AoA in the present study. Moreover, they support the significant impact of *frequency of use* and a *high degree of socialization in an LX* on emotional expression in an LX, surpassing factors such as AoA, CoA, and linguistic competence (Dewaele et al., 2023).

FLP factors revealed that a *bi-multilingual language mode* only increased the CS frequency in non-emotional conversations, reinforcing the decreased CS pattern in emotional conversations for these TCKs. Promoting a bilingual mode at home enhanced the likelihood of CS use (Dewaele & Li, 2014a; Grosjean, 2001), especially when parents engaged in CS practices (Lanza, 1997; 2001). Interestingly, participants with a strict FLP approach at home acknowledged using English within their households, indicating a "leakage" (De Houwer & Borstein, 2016) and behavioral inconsistencies among family members (Brown, 2011; Schwartz, 2008), particularly when parents worked in international environments. These inconsistencies confirm TCKs' pervasive English immersion, even when parents intentionally exclude its use from language family practices, demonstrating TCKs' agency influencing parents' language beliefs (De Houwer, 1999; King et al., 2008). Furthermore, the inclusion of *languages acquired* as a significant predictor increasing CS in emotional conversations and considering the lack of emotionality of L3 may have overshadowed the L1's emotional role alongside LX English. This would constitute a logical choice for TCKs, whose L1 is predominantly employed to strengthen family bonds (Curdt-Christiansen, 2022; Tannenbaum, 2012).

Generally, CS patterns according to topic emotionality, echo the extensive influence of English. Interview quotes evidenced fluid and creative CS at various levels, resulting in both intra- and inter-variability among the participants' CS patterns, but with a common thread: the predominant use of English. Interestingly, nearly 72% of parents in this study were not L1English users. Consequently, the shift towards LX English suggests that emotional input for these TCKs primarily occurs within the expatriate community and the international school, rather than in their households. The frequent interactions and extensive socialization in these settings may explain why LX English has heightened emotional resonance and embodiment.

Conclusion

Examining TCKs' CS patterns shed light on their distinctive multilingual nature and how their nomadic lifestyle shaped their social dynamics and emotional expression.

TCKs' CS patterns varied across interlocutors, exhibiting different levels of translanguaging and transitioning between monolingual and bilingual modes based on the interaction's needs and contexts. Furthermore, the boundaries between familiar/unfamiliar were somewhat blurred due to their transient lifestyle. Denmark, the research context in this study, indicated a trend wherein even in host countries without linguistic barriers, TCKs' socialization primarily remained confined to the expatriate community and international school.

Regarding topic emotionality, TCKs showed a decrease in CS frequency, predominantly favoring the use of English LX. In the absence of an English-immersion context (Denmark), this finding emphasizes the influence of the expatriate community and international school as prominent sources of emotional input, diminishing the role of L1 and *the home* environment. It emphasizes the importance of frequent use, a high degree of socialization, and a wide network of English LX interlocutors as crucial factors boosting its emotional resonance, but it also goes beyond, suggesting that LX English is an embodied language that accurately conveys TCKs' transient experiences, reflecting their individual and communal identity. This emotional bond to LX English appears to be the most logical choice since it is the most reliable and invaluable tool that consistently unlocks multiple worlds in their ever-changing reality.

Sociobiographical and FLP factors exerted a significant influence on TCKs' language profiles, implying the necessity for holistic multi-factor approaches that interconnect all relevant factors in TCKs' research.

In conclusion, these TCKs consistently navigated a dual-linguistic experience, inhabiting translanguaging spaces (the household and international school) and engaging with familiar interlocutors while creatively utilizing their linguistic skills to bridge the gap between their parent(s) culture and international identity. Simultaneously, they struggled with the constraints imposed by nomadic lifestyle, particularly evident in their affiliation with the expatriate community, which promotes English as a lingua franca, aligned with occasional feelings of underperformance when communicating with familiar interlocutors in their L1. This duality between their multilingual capabilities and monolingual expectations and norms shapes their complex and nuanced multilingual dynamics and their translanguaging identity;

In Fatema's words, "Being international, it´s never going to feel like you are 100% fitting into a mold".

This study has several limitations, including limited generalizability due to the strict TCKs' eligibility criteria and single-school data collection. Additionally, the negative perception attached to CS might have underestimated its use among some of the TCKs in this study. The question about participants' CS practices with others (*Do you switch between languages in a conversation with certain people? With friends and family, schoolmates, strangers)* was phrased in a way that portrayed Grosjean's language domains (2010) as inflexible; however, certain domains naturally overlapped. Future investigations should develop methods that allow for more flexible responses to ensure that these nuances are not overlooked. Longitudinal designs could be employed to assess the translanguaging in TCKs over time. Finally, considering parent(s)-TCKs mutual influence in CS practices, studies could incorporate parental and sibling linguistic data. Researchers may also incorporate observational data, such as psychophysiological data or neuroimaging methods (Harris, 2004; Toivo & Scheepers, 2019), to examine TCKs while they act emotionally.

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