

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF MULTILINGUALISM ON TOLERANCE TOWARDS AMBIGUITY AND DIVERSITY

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Abstract

This research intends to assess the impact of multilingualism on the tolerance towards ambiguity and diversity within societal frameworks. A structured questionnaire, featuring Likert scale responses, was formulated to glean insights into individuals' multilingual proficiency, comfort with ambiguity, and openness to diverse perspectives. The anticipated outcomes of this study are expected to reveal intricate connections between multilingualism and the ability to tolerate ambiguity and diversity. The findings of the study have broader implications for educational and social policies, emphasizing the need for fostering linguistic diversity as a means to enhance societal tolerance and acceptance. The research aims to contribute valuable insights to the ongoing discourse on the dynamics between multilingualism, tolerance, and diversity within diverse societal contexts.

Keywords: tolerance, ambiguity, diversity, multilingualism

I. Introduction

In our contemporary world, marked by unparalleled connectivity and cultural heterogeneity, the significance of language, particularly multilingualism, transcends mere communication—it serves as a catalyst shaping societal attitudes. Nowhere is this more crucial than among the younger generation, who navigate a global landscape where diversity and ambiguity are inherent features. This research embarks on an exploration of the profound interplay between multilingualism and the bedrock elements of societal cohesion—tolerance towards ambiguity and acceptance of diversity, with a specific focus on the perspective of young individuals. The youth of today stand at the forefront of societal change, inheriting a world where interactions span languages, borders, and cultural nuances. The ability to communicate in multiple languages not only equips young people with a versatile skill set but also positions them as torchbearers for inclusive and tolerant societies. This study recognizes the imperative of understanding how multilingualism influences the attitudes of young individuals, fostering acceptance of ambiguity and an embrace of diverse perspectives. As we navigate an era characterized by unprecedented interconnectedness, young people, with their adaptability and open-mindedness, play a pivotal role in shaping the future landscape of tolerance and acceptance. The exploration into the nexus between multilingualism, tolerance towards ambiguity, and acceptance of diversity is not merely an academic pursuit; it is a venture into understanding how the evolving linguistic landscape shapes the worldview of the youth. This research, employing a structured questionnaire and anticipating nuanced outcomes, aims to unravel insights crucial for policy-makers, educators, and social advocates. By shedding light on how multilingualism contributes to the propensity of young individuals to embrace diversity and navigate ambiguity, the findings of this study may inform targeted strategies to nurture a generation that values linguistic diversity as a pathway to

enhanced societal tolerance and acceptance. In essence, this research seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the intricate dynamics between language, tolerance, and diversity within the specific context of young people—an integral force in molding a more inclusive and harmonious future.

II. Literature review

Multilingualism can be defined in various ways, but fundamentally, it pertains to the proficiency in using more than two languages. When examining bilingualism and multilingualism, a key differentiation is made between the individual and societal levels. On an individual level, bilingualism and multilingualism signify a speaker's ability to use two or more languages. On a societal level, these terms refer to the utilization of two or more languages within a speech community, without necessarily implying that all members of that community are proficient in more than one language. Multilingualism at the societal level is more prevalent than at the individual level, though even in this context, it is highly commonplace (Gorter, 2007). The term "multilingualism" encompasses both the language proficiency of an individual and the language dynamics within an entire nation or society. Nevertheless, when considering the individual level, it is often categorized under "bilingualism." This classification may stem from the perception that, despite there likely being more bilingual individuals globally than monolinguals, there is a perception that habitual use of more than two languages is not as widespread (Clyne, 2017). Dewaele & Wei (2013) claim that significant degree of both multilingualism and multiculturalism constitutes a lasting sociocultural impact capable of influencing personality. This, according to them, brings the discussion whether being multilingual and navigating situations that require functioning in a foreign language and culture for an extended period fosters an increased tolerance for ambiguity in individuals. Certain studies show that multilingualism is an enduring factor with a small effect on some personality traits (Korzilius, Van Hooft, Planken & Hendrix, 2011; Dewaele & van Oudenhoven), including here the trait of being tolerant and more accepting of ambiguity, or openmindedness (Furnham, 1994). Tolerance towards ambiguity is defined by Budner (1962) as “the tendency to perceive ambiguous situations as desirable” (29). People are usually close to the culture of the language they speak, which increases their cultural awareness. Culture is encoded in the linguistic sign (Kramsch, 2014), which leads to the opinion that one learns a foreign language and with it, it gets closer to that culture too. The idea of being more tolerant, and accepting of diversity is hard to grasp in countries with complicated political past and present. There have been constant disputes with neighboring states, followed by internal tensions concerning the rights of minority groups within North Macedonia (Mustafai & Zeqiri, 2023). Based in these evidences, the paper aims to see whether our young people are more accepting of diversity, even though they have been brought up in a country with lack of peace for a long time.

III. Methodology of research

This study focuses on young individuals aged 15 to 30 in North Macedonia, representing both Macedonian and Albanian communities. The choice of this age group is strategic, recognizing the formative years during which attitudes towards diversity and ambiguity are often shaped. A mixed sample of Macedonian and Albanian respondents ensures a diverse representation, capturing varied perspectives within the youth demographic. The research employs an online

questionnaire distributed via a survey link. Utilizing the snowball sampling technique, the survey link was disseminated among young high school and college students. The respondents were encouraged to share the questionnaire with their peers, thus expanding the reach of the survey organically. This approach aims to tap into diverse social networks, ensuring a more comprehensive and varied sample. The structured questionnaire incorporates Likert scale questions designed to gauge multilingual proficiency, comfort with ambiguity, and openness to diverse perspectives. Additionally, demographic questions capture essential information about age, gender, educational background, and linguistic preferences.

Research Questions:

- ✓ Does proficiency in multiple languages influence an individual's tolerance towards ambiguity and uncertainty?
- ✓ To what extent does multilingualism correlate with an individual's acceptance of cultural diversity and mixed marriages?

Main Hypothesis:

Multilingual individuals exhibit higher levels of tolerance towards ambiguity, diversity, cultural acceptance (Open-mindedness) and Miscellaneous - Tolerance towards Differences in comparison to monolingual individuals.

Results

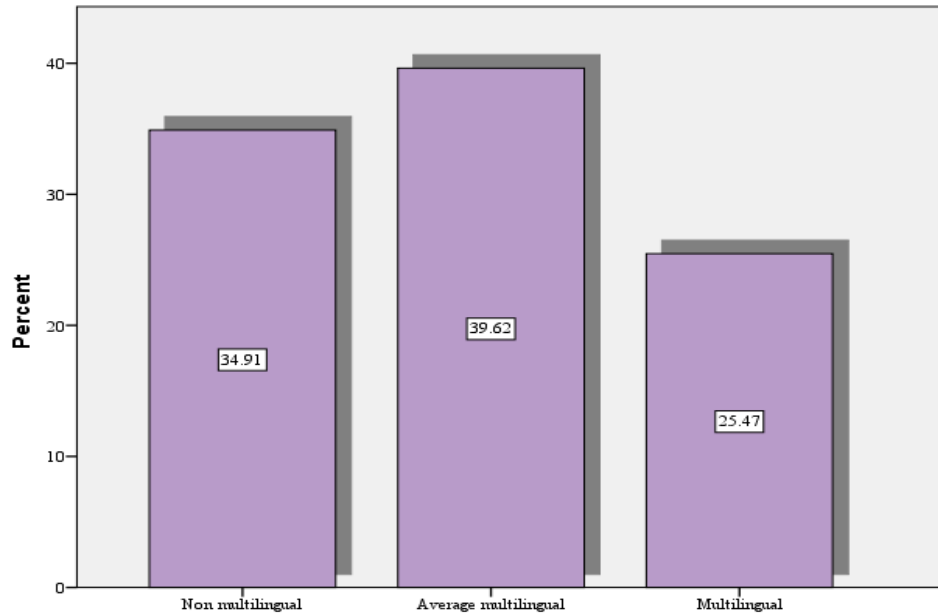
As we emphasized above, this research focuses on young individuals aged 15 to 30 in North Macedonia, representing both Macedonian and Albanian communities and the others, where after processing the data from the questionnaire applied with google forms, it resulted that a total of 212 individuals responded, from of which 160 are Albanians (119 women and 41 men), 46 Macedonians (36 women and 10 men) and 6 (3 women and 3 men) others. According to age, it turned out that 150 respondents are in the age group of 18-24 years, 59 under 18 years and 3 subjects in the age group of 25-30 years.

Table 1. Subjects surveyed according to educational level and social status

		Ethnicity		
		Albanian	Macedonian	Other
Education	Less than High School	22	18	0
	High School Graduate	87	25	5
	Some College/Technical Training	35	2	1
	Bachelor's Degree	16	1	0
Occupation	Student	155	45	6
	Employed	3	1	0
	Unemployed	1	0	0
	Other	1	0	0

According to the educational level and social status, it turned out that the majorities are students and that only 17 respondents have bachelor's level, others are in the process of graduation (Table 1).

After processing the data, it turned out that close to 40%, apart from their mother tongue, also know another language at an average level of communication, then 35% of the respondents declared that apart from their mother tongue, they do not have enough skills and knowledge to communicate in another language (non-multilingual) despite 25.47% of respondents who declared that they have knowledge and ability to communicate in languages other than their mother tongue (multilingual) (Graph 1).



Graph 1. Subjects surveyed by level of multilingualism

As we emphasized above, the questionnaire in the methodological aspect consisted of 4 groups of attitudes, also according to Attitude for multilingualism, Attitude for Tolerance for ambiguity, Attitude for Cultural acceptance and Open-mindedness and Miscellaneous - Tolerance towards differences and ambiguity. Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of these four research variables. As for the Attitude towards multilingualism variable, the result was an average of $M=18.80$ ($sd=2.96$), which is greater than the theoretical average of 12.5, which in other words means that most of the respondents have positive attitudes towards multilingualism, and according to the values of skewness and kurtosis this variable has a normal distribution like all social phenomena.

Tabela 2. Descriptive statistics of variables

	Attitude towards multilingualism	Tolerance for Ambiguity	Cultural Acceptance	Miscellaneous
Mean	18.80	16.96	18.4906	24.7028
Median	19.00	17.00	18.0000	25.0000
Mode	19	18	18.00	21.00
Std. Deviation	2.964	2.616	3.04234	4.57081
Skewness	-.830	-.727	-.277	-.287
Kurtosis	.519	.334	.213	.323
Minimum	5	5	5.00	7.00
Maximum	25	23	25.00	35.00

Also, regarding the Attitude for Tolerance for ambiguity variable, the average result was $M=16.96$ ($sd=2.616$), which is greater than the theoretical average of 12.5, which in other words means that most of the respondents have positive attitudes about Tolerance for ambiguity, and according to the values of skin and kurtosis, this variable has a normal distribution like all social phenomena. The same situation applies to the variable Attitude towards Cultural acceptance and Open-mindedness and Miscellaneous - Tolerance towards Differences and Ambiguity with averages greater than the theoretical average of 12.5 and 17.5, as well as according to the values of skewness and kurtosis, these variables also have a normal distribution as social phenomena. After the statistical analysis of the demographic characteristics of the subjects and the analysis of the distribution of the variables, the statistical analysis of the difference for the interpretation of the hypotheses follows:

Table 3. The differences of the averages of the variables according to the level of multilingualism of the subjects

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		F	Sig.
						Lower	Upper		
Attitude towards multilingualism	Non multilingual	74	18.16	2.750	.320	17.53	18.80	2.877	.059
	Average multil.	84	19.02	2.513	.274	18.48	19.57		
	Multilingual	54	19.33	3.706	.504	18.32	20.34		
	Total	212	18.80	2.964	.204	18.40	19.20		
Tolerance for Ambiguity	Non multilingual	74	16.61	2.498	.290	16.03	17.19	1.379	.254
	Average multil.	84	17.30	2.512	.274	16.75	17.84		
	Multilingual	54	16.93	2.900	.395	16.13	17.72		
	Total	212	16.96	2.616	.180	16.61	17.32		
Cultural Acceptance	Non multilingual	74	16.23	2.954	.343	17.55	18.91	2.909	.041
	Average multil.	84	18.27	2.552	.278	17.72	18.83		
	Multilingual	54	18.19	3.737	.509	18.17	20.21		
	Total	212	17.49	3.042	.209	18.08	18.90		
Miscellaneous	Non multilingual	74	24.15	4.666	.542	23.07	25.23	1.072	.344
	Average multil.	84	24.79	4.243	.463	23.86	25.71		
	Multilingual	54	25.33	4.914	.669	23.99	26.67		
	Total	212	24.70	4.571	.314	24.08	25.32		

As for the main Hypothesis: *Multilingual individuals exhibit higher levels of tolerance towards ambiguity, diversity, cultural acceptance (Open-mindedness) and Miscellaneous - Tolerance Towards Differences in comparison to monolingual individuals*, according to the significance values in Table 3, we find that there are no statistically significant differences ($sig=.059$ $.254$ $.344$, so $p>0.05$) in the attitudes of the subjects for the three variables, including that for multilingualism, Attitude for Tolerance for ambiguity and Miscellaneous - Tolerance Towards Differences and Ambiguity according to their knowledge and multilingual skills (knowledge and communication in languages other than the mother tongue).

As for the variable cultural acceptance (Open-mindedness) according to the values for $F=2.909$ with $sig=.041$ ($p<0.05$) we find that there are significant differences in the attitudes of the surveyed subjects for Cultural Acceptance (Open-Mindedness) according to knowledge and skills their multilingual (knowledge and communication in languages other than the mother tongue).

There are also differences between the two groups, where the non-multilingual subjects are listed in group I (M=16.23 sd=2.96) with less positive attitudes (mainly negative) in contrast to group II where the average and multilingual subjects are listed (M= 18.27 and M=18.19 with sd=2.55 and sd=3.74) with positive attitudes for cultural acceptance (Open-mindedness). In the course of this finding, the content of the items for the evaluation of this variable is also attached, where according to their semantics, the acceptance of cohabitation and mixed ethnic marriages was also meant, which clearly we can conclude that not knowing the other's language (non-linguality) represents a determinate key to the acceptance of the other's cultural values and also the acceptance of cohabitation and interethnic marriages.

So the main hypothesis partially holds.

For scientific correctness, in the following we also reflect the potential differences of the attitudes of the subjects in the cemetery depending on the gender (Table 4) and ethnicity (Table 5) of the subject himself.

Table 4. The differences of the averages of the variables according to the gender of the subject

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig.
Attitude towards multilingualism	Male	54	19.35	2.512	1.585	.114
	Female	158	18.61	3.088	1.753	.082
Tolerance for Ambiguity	Male	54	17.65	2.112	2.253	.025
	Female	158	15.73	2.734	2.554	.012
Cultural Acceptance	Male	54	18.57	2.703	.233	.816
	Female	158	18.46	3.158	.252	.802
Miscellaneous	Male	54	24.13	3.802	-1.068	.287
	Female	158	24.90	4.801	-1.196	.234

According to the significance values in Table 4, we find that there are no statistically significant differences (sig=.114 .816 .287, so $p > 0.05$) in the attitudes of the subjects for the three variables, including that for multilingualism, Cultural acceptance (Open-mindedness) and Miscellaneous - Tolerance Towards Differences and Ambiguity according to the gender of the subject. As for the variable tolerance towards ambiguity according to the values for $t=2.253$ with sig=.025 ($p < 0.05$) we find that there are significant differences in the attitudes of the surveyed subjects according to their gender. Also, male subjects (M=17.65 sd=2.11) have more positive attitudes towards tolerance towards ambiguity, in contrast to female subjects (M=15.73 sd=2.73) with less positive attitudes towards tolerance towards ambiguity.

Table 5. Differences in the means of the variables according to ethnicity

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval F for Mean		F	Sig.
						Lower	Upper		
Attitude towards multilingualism	Albanian	160	18.74	2.895	.229	18.29	19.20	.972	.380
	Macedonian	46	19.17	2.946	.434	18.30	20.05		
	Other	6	17.50	4.764	1.945	12.50	22.50		
	Total	212	18.80	2.964	.204	18.40	19.20		
Tolerance for Ambiguity	Albanian	160	16.87	2.763	.218	16.44	17.30	.999	.370
	Macedonian	46	17.39	2.027	.299	16.79	17.99		
	Other	6	16.17	2.483	1.014	13.56	18.77		

	Total	212	16.96	2.616	.180	16.61	17.32		
Cultural Acceptance	Albanian	160	18.45	3.089	.244	17.97	18.93		
	Macedonian	46	18.72	2.818	.415	17.88	19.55	.280	.756
	Other	6	17.83	3.817	1.558	13.83	21.84		
	Total	212	18.49	3.042	.209	18.08	18.90		
Miscellaneous	Albanian	160	24.39	4.433	.350	23.70	25.08		
	Macedonian	46	25.76	4.922	.726	24.30	27.22	1.636	.197
	Other	6	25.00	5.020	2.049	19.73	30.27		
	Total	212	24.70	4.571	.314	24.08	25.32		

Table 5 presents the analysis for the potential differences of the subjects' attitudes according to their ethnicity. According to the significance values in Table 5, we find that there are no significant statistical differences (sig=.380 .370 .756 .197, so $p>0.05$) in the attitudes of the subjects for the four variables, including the Attitude for Multilingualism, the Attitude for Tolerance for Ambiguity, Attitude for Cultural acceptance and Open-mindedness and Miscellaneous - Tolerance Towards Differences and Ambiguity according to ethnicity.

Conclusion

Summarizing the findings above, we conclude that less than half of the respondents did not have the knowledge and ability to communicate in a language other than their mother tongue, which reflects a reality in everyday life in North Macedonia. On the other hand, this shows that multilingualism is on the rise, based on the relevant studies highlighted above. Also, as a result of this finding, from the results, we found that most of the respondents have positive attitudes towards multilingualism, that often such findings can be subjective, knowing the fact that ethnic tensions are often the burden of everyday life in North Macedonia, but for due to the publication of data, individuals are often deprived of declaring the reality. In this direction, it was found that most of the respondents have positive attitudes about Tolerance for ambiguity, Cultural acceptance and Open-mindedness and Miscellaneous - Tolerance Towards Differences, so being aware of the nature of everyday life in North Macedonia, individuals tend to have tolerance and understanding of the other's ambiguities.

We found that there were no significant differences in the attitudes of the subjects depending on the level of their multilingualism, also regarding multilingualism, Attitude towards Tolerance for ambiguity and Miscellaneous - Tolerance Towards Differences and Ambiguity according to their knowledge and multilingual skills (language knowledge and communication other than the mother tongue), an expected result if we are based on the above conclusions about multilingualism.

On the other hand, we found that there are significant differences in the attitudes of the subjects surveyed for Cultural Acceptance (Open-Mindedness) according to their knowledge and multilingual skills (knowledge and communication in languages other than their mother tongue), non-multilingual subjects with less attitudes positive (mainly negative) despite the average and multilingual subjects with positive attitudes for cultural acceptance (Open-mindedness). In this context, it is worth emphasizing the fact that the acceptance of cohabitation and mixed ethnic marriages was also implied, that we can clearly conclude that not knowing the other's language, represents a key determinant for the acceptance of the other's cultural values and also the acceptance of cohabitation and interethnic marriages.

All these attitudes did not have significant differences depending on the ethnicity of the subjects as well as their gender, except for males who had more positive attitudes towards tolerance towards ambiguity, in contrast to female subjects with less positive attitudes towards tolerance towards ambiguity.

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Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are paramount in this research. Participants are provided with informed consent information before engaging in the survey, emphasizing voluntary participation and confidentiality. The study adheres to ethical standards, ensuring the anonymity and privacy of participants. Collected data will undergo rigorous statistical analysis using appropriate tools, with a focus on uncovering patterns and correlations. The results will be interpreted to draw meaningful conclusions regarding the impact of multilingualism on tolerance towards ambiguity and diversity among young individuals in North Macedonia.