The Sociolinguistic Benefits of Multilingualism for the LGBTQ Community

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Abstract: It is well elucidated in the field of sociolinguistics that language is a key determinant in the way individuals interact with themselves and others and that multilingualism thus has implications in deepening personal expression. However, there is very sparse research done in the domain of how this linguistic fixture interacts specifically with LGBTQ expression, an oddity considering that much of contemporary queer pride is conveyed through linguistic expression, fostering a fortified sense of belonging and assurance within one’s own identity. My research examines not only how language itself can change queer expression, but also how LGBTQ multilinguals have a unique set of tools to shape their social interactions and promote community. In addition to consulting linguistics and queer historical/sociological research, I interviewed three multilingual queer undergraduates at Stanford University with a series of semi-structured, narrative questions. When combined, my investigation allows for this paper to focus extensively on the mechanistic particularities of multilingualism that beget sociolinguistic benefits for queer individuals. Namely, linguistic adaptation, cultural navigation, and socioemotional connection are key themes that presented themselves in the journeys of queer multilinguals. These findings underscore the possibility of linguistic diversity as a means to nourish greater inclusivity and understanding and have crucial ramifications for the amelioration and amplification of community, identity, and belonging.

Keywords: queer multilingualism, linguistic determinism, sociopragmatic transfer, LGBTQ, identity formation, adaptation

I grew up with two constants in my life: my love of languages and my queerness. Rooted into my personality at a young age, these fixtures shaped me in ways I could not comprehend until years later. Raised bilingual in English and Romanian, I readily found a proclivity for learning other languages—French, Mandarin, and Spanish to be exact—each of which revealed new and unique facets of my personality. This gave me the ability to interact with the world in an entirely new way, connecting deeply with people I otherwise never would have. Concurrent with my journey through languages, I was making strides in my gender identity. Realizing I was transgender was daunting, as aside from the innate physical incongruity I experienced, the prejudice from people in my life led to a loss of connection with them and the community I was born into. However, I realize retrospectively that because of the languages I learned growing up, I already had access to entirely new worlds of people to bond with and learn from. In a way, this did not only help me surmount the loss I had experienced, but it enabled me to derive pride from my identity in entirely new and unique ways. Languages saved my life, and I am now invested in understanding why and how they did it.

Beyond my own profound experiences, the existing scholarly research on the impact of multilingualism for queer individuals has revealed that my experiences are far from unique. Academics studying the separate fields of language and queerness have each arrived at similar conclusions: Speaking multiple languages enriches identity construction (Kasper, 1992), and identity itself is pivotal in navigating a queer journey, in the sense that having a label to assign to an identity makes the ability to explore oneself in their niche far easier (Pew Research Center, 2013). For example, having a term for existing outside of the gender binary (i.e., genderfluid or non-binary) facilitates the exploration of one's gender identity to comprehend where they comfortably fit personally and socially. Put simply, it has become evident that languages have a crucial role in shaping social interactions and fostering community bonds, something that can offer unique advantages to the queer community. I will argue that multilingualism allows LGBTQ individuals to navigate and bridge diverse social landscapes, thereby enabling them to more effectively consolidate, process, and heal from anti-LGBTQ perspectives and internalized biases. This is particularly true for queer English Language Learners (ELLs), as English has become the predominant language in many LGBTQ spaces (especially online) and is the primary language for most resources on queerness. This paper aims to display that language learning can serve as a powerful tool for resilience and self-affirmation in the face of discrimination, something of utmost importance for a community long fraught with considerable adversity.

In order to demonstrate why language acquisition affects queer expression and benefits the LGBTQ community, I use a sequential approach. First, exploring the current scholarly landscape on "queer multilingualism" will assist in understanding not only the relevant academic fields in this discussion, but also identifying opportunities for further exploration. Moving forward with this framework, the paper will break down this topic into its first principles, exploring it through the lens of linguistics, and separately through queer history and sociology. Beginning with the language portion, I will explore key language ideologies, such as linguistic determinism, the emergent identity theory, and sociopragmatic transfer. The implications of

these findings will be crucial when moving into the next section of queer history and sociology. This portion will unpack centuries of LGBTQ experience to help frame the socialization of this community in a contemporary context. Understanding the roots of anti-queerness is imperative, as it sheds light on the continued plight of the community, an awareness that is crucial to resonate with why the presented language ideologies are pertinent. This leads to the last section, which finally explores the specific ways in which multilingualism can shape and support queer identity. By interviewing three, queer multilingual undergraduates at Stanford University, I am able to identify and examine the key themes in their experiences, all the while calling upon concepts and frameworks established earlier in the paper. To conclude, I will use these findings to suggest potential implications in multilingualism being able to nurture stronger, more fulfilling communities amongst queer folks, an essential endeavor in a time when LGBTQ rights remain perpetually under threat.

Current Research at the Intersection of Language and Identity

The Field of Queer Multilingualism

Due to the specialized area of study this topic covers, there is limited research done specifically on "queer multilingualism." Furthermore, the existing scholarly work in the field is oftentimes very niche, focused on a particular identity or language subgroup. However, they do provide a sufficient foundational framework for the general disciplines involved in the conversation. Primarily, it became evident that literature with a linguistics-heavy focus is ideal for more concrete analysis of the correlation between expression of identity and number of languages spoken. For instance, a 2020 thesis paper from the University of Leiden titled "Multilingual LGBTQ+ Youth: Queer Language and Identity" articulates how English second language Dutch speakers interpret and express their identities. For example, when asked the question, "Do you feel that the language you discuss your identity in has an impact on how you communicate it?" only 6.6% of participants responded in the negative (Lambert, 2020, p. 55). The same source discusses how there are certain linguistic features that make it cumbersome to convey sentiments related to queerness, and in the same vein, the paper "Queer Identities and Expressions in Romance Languages" from the University of Pennsylvania focuses specifically on the limitation of Romance languages to queer expression (Floyd, 2020). Here, the researcher divulges the lack of standardized gender-neutral grammar due to strict binary gendering of nouns, adjectives, etc., and how this makes expression outside of the gender binary quite difficult (Floyd, 2020). This promulgates the recurrent theme that language itself can impede adequate self-expression, which is directly correlated to, and thus is a dictator of, the ways in which you can perceive yourself. Tying this principle back into the aforementioned concept of gender neutrality, in binary-gendered languages (i.e., Romance tongues), it is exceedingly more difficult for a gender non-conforming person to come to terms with and explore their identity in a concrete way without borrowing linguistic features from English (i.e., they/them pronouns).

Given these few sources, one thing is made abundantly clear: Language does impact the way queer people interact with their identities. However, these same sources often have a

tendency to overshadow the role multilingualism *itself* plays in these scenarios. Due to their heavy focus on queer ELLs, many researchers simply explain that multilingualism has to do with acquiring English as a pragmatic means to increase accessibility to queer resources and community (Floyd, 2020). Contrarily, my research aims to explore *how* specifically language is able to shape LGBTQ identity and what specific linguistic features make multilingualism a tool for resilience. To do this, we need to examine language independently of queerness to understand its mechanisms and the relationship between queerness and language.

Language as a Dictator of Identity

In the conversation about supporting queer identity, we must evoke such ideologies to first comprehend the nuanced interplay of language and one's sense of self. To begin, linguistic determinism is a widespread theory that explains how the structure and vocabulary of the language we speak can alter our thoughts and views (Cornell, 2024). Lena Boroditsky et al. (2009) pragmatically tested linguistic determinism by showing how Spanish and German speakers describe a "bridge" masculinely or femininely, respectively, due to its gendered classification in both languages. One caveat in linguistic determinism is that proponents of the theory often suggest that language can not only shape, but restrict what we think about, which is not entirely accurate. For one, many languages lack terms to describe LGBTQ identities, but evidently, this doesn't mean speakers of those languages cannot be queer (Gandhi, 2020). However, it does make it more difficult to actualize one's identity, indicating a pervasive effect of language on identity, albeit indirectly.

Thus, consulting more refined linguistic ideologies will help elucidate what specifically makes language such a powerful tool. Namely, in 2005, linguists Bucholtz and Hall introduced their "emergence principle" of identity formation. They argue that identity is not predetermined by the language one speaks, but rather by the way that language interacts with one's community, culture, and society (p. 588). In turn, this is a key proponent in cultivation of an identity. For example, Bucholtz and Hall (2005) interviewed a *hijra*, in which she describes her experience of being exiled from her family (p. 589). For context, *hijra* is a South Asian cultural identity which holistically includes trans, intersex, and non-binary people, for which a Western equivalent does not directly exist, making them a very unique social minority to conduct linguistic research with. With this particular interview conducted in Hindi, which has obligatory gendering of verbs, Bucholtz and Hall (2005) noticed how the *hijra* used the masculine verbiage when describing how her family spoke of her and in the feminine when speaking of herself (p. 590). This is a powerful show of how language must exist within context to build identity, in the sense that it can be used as empowerment in opposition of familial or societal perception. This elucidates how language does not, in fact, restrict how you can speak of yourself, but rather acts as a facilitator or detractor, depending on a variety of external factors (i.e., culture, society, etc.). As it pertains to queer identity, this implies that each language has an innate ease with which LGBTQ individuals can express themselves, which makes it more or less facile to cultivate an identity with, and thus feel fulfillment with.

Impacts of Multilingualism

While imperative for a general understanding of language's impact on us, the ideologies discussed above do not cover multilingualism, an important scope of this project. Fortunately, the effects of speaking more than one language have been greatly elucidated by other linguists, chiefly the work of Gabriele Kasper (1992). Many of his papers divulge the concept of linguistic pragmatism and its implications for multilingual individuals. Put simply, this is the phenomenon whereby the linguistic and cultural conventions from one's native language transfer over into their second language (Kasper, 1992, p. 206). The significance of this for the queer community includes the ability to transfer concepts and ideas from a language with more accepting terminology for LGBTQ to a language with more restrictive views. It is important, however, to note that no one language is an 'ideal' for queer expression, as many contain limitations and advantages that, when combined via the above mentioned transfer, can foster a more comprehensive way to express oneself effectively. More specifically, this transfer is foundational for queer verbiage in languages that lack adequate terminology. For one, in Tagalog, the common term for "transgender" is a slur, so the bilingual Filipino diaspora has adopted terms like "transpinoy/transpinay," which, while not grammatically standardized, are the culturally and pragmatically transferred from other languages (Gandhi, 2020). Equipped with a culturally and linguistically informed analysis of how identity and language interact, it then becomes important to more intimately understand the queer journey and how these linguistic features could be vital for the LGBTQ community.

Historical Perspectives on the LGBTQ Community and their Ramifications

For the LGBTQ community, forming connections is not just optional—it is essential. In times of societal ostracization, from the Buggery Act in the medieval ages which outlawed homosexual acts, to the 1980s AIDS epidemic in the USA, strength in numbers has been a guiding principle for queer people in order to ensure mutual protection. Evidently, both historical and contemporary accounts demonstrate that language serves as a crucial tool to achieve this vital connection. To fully understand the critical nature of such connection and bond formation, it is useful to turn to the history of the community and the sociological fixtures that arose from the widespread treatment of the community during various bouts of discrimination.

Homophobia's Effect on Queer Culture and Acceptance

Chiefly, it is important to understand that queerness has been well documented in history since the dawn of man. LGBTQ history in the Western world has its roots in Ancient Greece, where homosexuality was an open part of quotidian society. For instance, pederasty was the practice whereby older men enter into mentor, and often sexual, relationships with younger men, viewed as a key social player in the masculinization of adolescents (Hubbard, 2020). Moreover, communities in North America before colonial contact also show evidence of this same precedent in their culture and language. For instance, the languages of Cree and Ojibwe had words to describe men who dress/function as women, and vice versa (BigEagle, 2023) (see Appendix A for a comprehensive list of these terms and others). These open attitudes, however,

could not withstand the changing tides of an increasingly parochial world. The Medieval Ages saw a staunch rise in adherence to religious law, notably of Christianity in Europe and Islam in the Middle East, North Africa, and Southern Europe (Anderson, 2024). Interpretations of the major religious texts led to widespread attitudes that discouraged same-sex attraction and gender expression outside of the binary of male and female. Further, research done by queer anthropologists like Luiz Mott (2021) has found that the gender fluidity and more sexually expressive culture in Native populations was seen as "promiscuous" and "shameless" by the European colonizers. As a result, the cultural and social structures they implemented in the "New World" placed an emphasis on religious piety, enforced with strong attitudes of domineering masculinity, or "machismo" (Azevedo et al., 2021). Analogous attitudes were spread across many global cultures through European colonization, leading to a society where gender nonconformity and same sex attraction were made largely invisible to the public. Further on, codification of anti-queer sentiment began in the 16th century, with bills such as the aforementioned Buggery Act 1533 making homosexuality punishable by death (Martin, 2021).

Pride and Language in the Modern Movement

Though documentation of queerness between the 15th and 18th century is limited, the community persisted nonetheless in stealth, through secret societies or coded language, further underscoring how crucial communication is to the maintenance and survival of LGBTQ identity. A poignant showcase of said secrecy is Polari, a language invented specifically by gay men in the 19th century to be able to foster community in an era that prohibited it (Baker, 2019). Polari was of particular importance in the United Kingdom, where it was primarily used, as prior to 1967, laws made it nearly impossible to congregate with other queer individuals without facing persecution. Although perhaps not a distinct language in its own right, it drew from various languages to form a covert slang lexicon that could be considered a dialect of English (Baker, 2019). When considering this context, Polari exemplifies how identity is able to shape language by adapting rapidly at a colloquial level to meet the needs of marginalized communities. For these mid-century queer individuals, language was able to serve both as a shield and a tool, enabling for discreet communication in an otherwise hostile society and environment while simultaneously fostering a sense of solidarity and belonging. This illustrates that identity formation and language are inextricably linked, with linguistic adaptation emerging as both a response to and a necessity within the challenging sociocultural conditions faced by marginalized groups. Even after Polari fell out of use as societal attitudes improved through the 1960s, certain terms remain in queer spaces today—like "butch," "femme," and "drag"—emphasizing how a sense of community is passed along generations to maintain solidarity and identity (Baker, 2019).

On the other side of the Atlantic, the 1960s were a time of great social change for the LGBTQ population in the United States as well. Up until this point, analogous attitudes that pushed the formation of Polari made it so that queer gatherings took place away from cisgender, heterosexual society. In North America, this manifested in ballroom and house culture, a social scene earmarked by free expression, artistic liberation, and unabashed pride (Brathwait, 2018).

This spirit born from the underground gatherings of Black and Latino queer folks in nightclubs and bars, and it must be noted that people of color not only contributed to the formation of modern queer culture, but they also spearheaded major efforts for LGBTQ liberation. Most notably, New York City's Stonewall Riots on June 28th, 1969 marked the beginning of a slow but favorable shift in the legal, societal, and linguistic perception of the queer community (Metcalf, 2019). To elaborate on the latter point, it was during this era that terms like "slay," "werq," "spill the tea," "yas," and "shady" emerged, most of which remain prevalent in modern LGBTQ lexicon, similar to holdovers from Polari (Davis, 2023). In fact, as acceptance of the community has grown, some of these terms have made their way into layman verbiage, reflecting a turning point in tolerance for queerness in the mainstream. At any rate, these words, both at their inception and currently, serve as linguistic markers of queerness, reflecting pride in identity and fostering a sense of community that continues to thrive in LGBTQ spaces.

In 1970, the year after the Stonewall Riots, the first Pride parade was held in New York City, and in the eight years following, eight other countries had their inaugural parade (Arnett, 2016). Of these, five were countries where English is the official language, and the three others —the Netherlands, Norway, and Finland—have English speaking proficiency in the ranges of 75% to 90% (Babu, 2024). This trend is important to pinpoint because it intrinsically shows that resources and verbiage about queerness are more likely to be in English due to Anglo-centric roots of the most modern movements. This seems to be a primary reason behind why many ELLs find that English is dominant in their queer expression (95.1% to be precise) and thus turn to it in droves to be able to better understand and interact with their identity (Lambert, 2020).

However, while English is often touted as the "official queer language" because of its aforementioned accessibility of resources and verbiage, it was never inherently poised to take on this role—nor was any other language. Rather, this phenomenon underscores how historical precedent and decades of linguistic adaptation—enabled in part by relatively increased cultural tolerance, as seen with Polari and ballroom slang—have enabled anglophone communities to mold existing linguistic structures to meet the needs of LGBTQ expression. This reflects how such adaptation is possible for many other languages and how this process is not a subversion of linguistic rules, but rather a necessary evolution to suit the ever-changing needs of their speakers. For instance, francophone cultures globally have been slower to adapt to queer customs, and this is exemplified by a 2017 statement from l'Académie Française, the governing body of the French language. Herein, they suggest that inclusion of the gender neutral neopronoun "iel" and other progressive linguistic changes would "result in disunited language" and "create confusion that borders on illegibility" (L'Académie Française, 2017). The contrast between anglophone and francophone adaptability displays that changing a language is not merely a reflection of linguistic necessity, but also of sociocultural willingness to embrace change. This shows that the evolution of queer expression in any language is ultimately tied back to the political and cultural landscapes in which they operate.

Methods

In order to encompass the nuance of the queer multilingual community, it is necessary to consult them directly. Ultimately, the goal of this primary data collection is to be able to find throughlines in individuals' relationship between their linguistic practices and their identities. This is a unique feature that will shed light on the true impact of multilingualism on queer identities. For this paper, I interviewed three queer multilingual individuals, all undergraduate students at Stanford University. One, Alex, identifies as nonbinary with a Mandarin Chinese speaking background, while the two others identify as gay men with Spanish speaking roots: Kyle and Jeremy (these names are all aliases to protect the identities of those interviewed). These interviewees were chosen based on their LGBTQ identities, their ability to speak more than one language, and their willingness to participate in a ten-to-fifteen-minute sit down interview. In conducting an eight-question semi-structured interview, participants were able to respond narratively in as much depth as they desired (see Appendix B for full interview transcripts). These questions were carefully constructed in order to encapsulate the overarching themes explored by the secondary research portion of this paper. More specifically, they concerned themselves with the dynamic relationship between language and identity, in addition to the cultural landscapes wherein these dynamics take place in order to provide a more nuanced understanding of their interactions. Naturally, there was a large emphasis placed on queer and multilingual intersectionality to try and bridge the two topics that have largely been explored separately until this point in my research. With these methods, I was able to synthesize their responses and find three key themes in their stories as queer multilinguals: linguistic adaptation, cultural navigation, and socioemotional connection. These throughlines illustrate and exemplify both the linguistics and sociological research conducted prior, which further supports the notion that there may be an inextricable link between language and identity for LGBTQ people.

The Intersection of Multilingualism and Queerness

Linguistic Adaptation

Sociopragmatic transfer is defined as the ability to apply frameworks from one language (often a speaker's native tongue) into foreign ones, affording a richer ability to express certain concepts that are more difficult to convey in either one in isolation (Kasper, 1992). A common example is the tendency for many Japanese speakers to apply their complex honorifics system into English, begetting a more respectful dialogue in the latter language that is not as easily achievable to monolingual anglophones (Kasper, 1992). In the context of queerness, this becomes useful when trying to express ideas and concepts that do not exist in a certain language, which is often the case in a world where English is a sort of queer lingua franca. For example, Alex explained that, in written Mandarin there are distinct pronouns for men (他), women (她), and non-human objects (它), which causes problems for gender non-conforming (GNC) individuals. However, what many multilingual Chinese people have turned to is likening the terms for objects, "它," to the more widespread "they/them" used in English. Yet, as it pertains to oral usage, all three of these pronouns are pronounced the exact same, "tā", which in Alex's

words is “affirming because it doesn’t sound like you’re being gendered, which is great and the way I prefer it.” This is a highly unique linguistic fixture in Mandarin and in combination with aforementioned adaptations in the written language highlights the significance of bicultural exchange in sociopragmatic transfer. This case of recognizing strengths in one’s native language advantages and incorporating those with ideas from another exemplifies of how intermixing of various languages and cultures is essential for bridging communication gaps and bolstering a sense of belonging for queer people through shared terminology. Especially considering that the LGBTQ journey is innately tumultuous, going through it without the verbiage to describe how you think and feel can take an enormous toll. It is analogous to the widespread usage of Polari—cultivating a new style of communication in order to address limitations created by your society, culture, and language. In a time when strides in LGBTQ visibility are happening faster than ever, colloquial adaptations and formation of slang such as these ones can serve as a way to maintain personal expression while formal language has yet to catch up, which can take years, if not generations.

Cultural Navigation

Another benefit of multilingualism that came up in the interviews is the fact that language can serve as a method of compartmentalization. In both my personal experience and through these interviews, it is clear that speaking different languages is able to foster unique personalities, shaped by the various contexts in which each language is used. When it comes to queerness, this has significance not only in identity formation, but also as a means to safety. When Kyle spoke about his upbringing, he noted that because of the emphasis on masculinity in Cuban culture, Spanish is a way for him to assume that role in order to protect himself from discrimination. This is a form of linguistic code-switching, which is a well elucidated phenomenon whereby individuals are able to imbue the usage of their “multiple personalities” to better assimilate and benefit from a particular social group (Bullock et al., 2009). Regretfully, many live in communities that openly harbor anti-queer ideology, and in such cases, safety becomes a priority over identity. For Kyle, this manifests as using language to compartmentalize expectations from his different cultures. In English, he is able to connect with the gay community in a way that is effective and well established. As mentioned earlier in the paper, since many resources and slang for the queer community exist mainly in English, he is able to nourish this part of his identity with these terms in this tongue. In contrast, his familial use of Spanish, shaped by the intense expectations of “machismo” in Cuban culture, prompts him to code-switch, allowing him to align with and maintain a connection to the cultural values he was raised with. This, in return, shields him from backlash he may receive if he expresses his queerness as openly in Spanish as he does in English.

This also highlights how language, and its connections to various identities, is an intensely personal aspect of one’s life. Kyle, as a Cuban-American, is not connected to the queer culture present in his family’s home country, yet that does not inherently imply that there is not an LGBTQ movement in Cuba. Rather, it suggests that the languages people speak are tied more strongly to the context in which they learned them, insofar as they reflect the values, norms, and

social dynamics embedded within those contexts. For Kyle, this means that his connection to English and Spanish goes beyond mere communication, serving instead as a means of navigating and expressing different aspects of his identity within the cultural frameworks tied to each tongue.

Socioemotional Connection

Given the discussion about how varying cultural tolerances towards queerness impact individuals' ability to present and express themselves, it is important to clarify that there are no judgements being passed about these languages and their associated cultures. In fact, it aims to do the opposite. For one, even though Kyle's Cuban background is generally less accepting of his queer identity, it does not detract from the value it adds to his life for reasons independent from his sexual orientation. In his interview, he made it clear that "growing up bilingual has taught me the value of words, meaning, and communication as it truly alters [my] perspective," underscoring the importance of intersectionality for multilingual individuals, queer or otherwise.

Here, it must be stated that queerness and multilingualism do not exist in a vacuum, and LGBTQ individuals should be afforded the right to exist proudly at the intersection of their multiple identities, even if they may seem incongruous. Multilingualism is simply a means by which a mental compartmentalization of incongruous identities (i.e., ethnicity and queerness) can occur in order to navigate and harmonize these aspects of one's selfhood. Throughout this paper, examples of linguistic transfer and the invention of new ways to speak in order to protect one's integrity has highlighted how above all, the necessity to connect pervades all else. Human beings are innately social creatures, which is what makes the ability to bond with and divulge multiple communities through multiple identities is such an important player in self-fulfillment. For instance, in contrast to Kyle's experience, Jeremy spoke mainly about how his ability to speak Spanish allowed him to better connect with his Mexican culture, independent from its relation to his queerness. Having grown up in California, there was always a level of tolerance to his gay identity that precluded him from necessarily needing the same compartmentalization that Kyle cited as being important to him. Rather, bilingualism afforded Jeremy the opportunity to put another aspect of his identity at the forefront, underscoring how LGBTQ people do not have to monolithically identify only with their queerness, but rather appreciate and feel enriched in all aspects of their person. Either way, equipped with this unique ability, queer multilinguals can provide a pathway for non-LGBTQ people to learn about these experiences as well. As Kyle aptly put it, "I am also able to change the minds of those around me one conversation at a time," something that is only possible by maintaining and nourishing *all parts* of oneself, not just a few.

Significance and Conclusion

While current research focuses mainly on being multilingual as a means to accessing English language resources and community, this paper has explored the mechanisms behind multilingualism, informed by three primary interviews. These accounts in tandem with research of existing linguistic theory dictate how several facets of multilingualism contribute positively to the formation and maintenance of queer identity, community, and resilience. With linguistic

determinism and emergent identity theory, it is determined that language cannot ordain how you identify, but it can control how you express yourself, meaning queer people can access new forms of expression through new languages. Using sociopragmatic transfer as a lens, LGBTQ people can also use multilingualism to transfer frameworks and verbiage between languages, giving autonomy in self-articulation without waiting for standardized language to evolve. The ability to navigate identity through language is not just a tool, but a lifeline. Offering a pathway to inclusivity, community, and mental support, this area of academic research is urgently in need of expansion. Even outside the academic framework, given a recent and pervasive rise in anti-LGBTQ sentiment, this solution can be enacted once again to help the community weather another period of adverse sociocultural conditions.

Being queer is still an innately taxing experience, this much is undeniable. Whether internal turmoil or societal ostracization, some pains are universal and deeply difficult to bear the burden of. Now picture feeling all this pain without having the words to explain why. Without a community to rely on; to learn from. This is the reality of millions across the world, seen in case studies of languages without genderless terms, verbiage for certain identities, or cultures that enforce rigid social standards. Yet, time and time again, history has shown that our community surmounts the darkest hours with fortitude and strength in numbers. This kind of community, as explored with a variety of periods in queer culture, is truly only able to be fostered effectively with a strong enough linguistic basis. A basis that serves to uplift and allow LGBTQ folks to discuss, explore, and divulge their identities in the unabashed way characteristic of this community. After all, the movement that began the mainstream liberation of queer people is called *Pride*, so-named because of the community's ability to embody and celebrate this very concept for themselves and others. This paper has demonstrated that language and identity are inextricably linked, and in light of this, the ability to speak more than one language has shown benefits that can serve as tools for this community. Tools that not only nourish strength in identity, but also in connection, subsequently ameliorating bonds that have always been necessary for the proliferation of the LGBTQ movement.

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Appendix A
Queer Terminology in North American Indigenous Communities

Cree

- napêw iskwêwisêhot: A man who dresses as a woman.
- iskwêw ka napêwayat: A woman dressed as a man.
- iskwêhkan: One who acts/lives as a woman.
- napêhkan: One who acts/lives as a man.
- tasta-ee-iniw: A person in-between.
- înahpîkasoht: A woman dressed/living/accepted as a man.

Diné/Navajo

- nádleeh: The one that changes, who is at war.

Blackfoot

- ááwowáakii: Gay man.
- a'yai-kik-ahsi: Acts like a woman.
- ninauh-oskitsi-pahpyaki: Manly-hearted woman.

Mi'kmaw

- nekm: Gender-neutral pronoun.

Lakota

- wíŋkte: To be as a woman.

Ojibwe

- ininiikaazo: Women who choose to function as men; one who endeavors to be like a man.
- ikwekaazo: Men who choose to function as women; one who endeavors to be like a woman.

Adapted from

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Appendix B

Questions & Responses from Interviews with Queer Multilingual Individuals at Stanford University

Interviewees' Aliases*:

- Jeremy (he/him), *Mexican-American*
- Kyle (he/him), *Cuban-American*
- Alex (they/them), *Chinese-American*

** not all participants answered each question, as is the nature of these types of interviews*

Language and Identity

Can you tell me about your journey with languages and how they've shaped your identity?

1. Alex:
    - I kind of have a really standard, I guess, Asian American or at least immigrant relationship with language because I grew up in Irvine, a heavily Asian community. My parents spoke Chinese to me at home, but I always spoke English with them. By the time I got into kindergarten, English was my primary language. I never really questioned that until I went to Stanford and took Mandarin Chinese my first year. It was like, "Holy s***, I've been missing so much." The way I began to explain it starting spring quarter last year was that before I spoke Mandarin or learned it, my knowledge of my Chinese heritage was like a blank sheet of paper. As I started learning Mandarin, it's as if words started appearing on that sheet of paper.
2. Kyle:
    - I grew up in a primarily Spanish-speaking household as my parents and grandparents were immigrants from Cuba. While I quickly learned English in elementary school, I have held onto that part of my identity for connections with my family and my larger community of friends, city (Miami), and Latino people around the world. Growing up bilingual has taught me the value of words, meaning, and communication as it truly alters your perspective. Take that as you will, I don't know, man.
3. Jeremy
    - I learned Spanish from a fairly young age. My home was fully English-speaking, though my parents are Mexican and Italian. I first started learning Spanish in the first grade when my parents sent me to a dual-language Spanish-English K-8 school. There, almost all of the students were English-language learners and spoke only Spanish at home. However, the only person outside of school who I could communicate with in Spanish was my grandmother, who even then, spoke fluent English. Learning the language was difficult, but after a certain point

(probably around 4th grade), Spanish started coming naturally to me. The Spanish language allowed me to truly tap into my Mexican heritage. I was introduced to one of my strongest passions (Mariachi music) and began to fully immerse myself in my culture in and outside of the classroom. Though I had always wished I had attended a "normal school"--one with super competitive sports or kids who learned math in English–I have become so grateful for all that my primary education gave to me.

Cultural and Social Connections

How do your different languages influence the way you express yourself and connect with others?

- Alex:
    - I don't know because I mostly express myself in English. Sometimes I write poetry about China or my relationship with it, but I don't write in Chinese. English is the main language through which I express myself, but there's solidarity in being able to speak Chinese with another person and talk privately in a room without others understanding. It's great.
- Kyle:
    - To some extent, I have to act more masculine in Spanish: I deepen my voice and alter my mannerisms to ensure my safety when engaging with a community that is typically less accepting of homosexuality despite all the other benefits it brings to my life. However, I am also able to change the minds of those around me one conversation at a time. Lastly, I have been able to hold relationships with other people (usually fellow queers) even in different countries, which has broadened my awareness and understanding of the world.
- Jeremy
    - The Spanish language allowed me to express myself in ways I could have never expected. When I was 7, I enrolled in a Mariachi academy and began taking music lessons outside of school fully in Spanish. I was able to connect with people on more than one level–both through our love for music, our heritage, and our ability to form a linguistic enclave. Mariachi music soon became–to be somewhat dramatic–my entire life. I spent hours every day speaking in Spanish, listening to music in Spanish, singing in Spanish–it consumed my everyday life. The number of people that I was able to connect with through this medium I would consider to be immeasurable. Without it, I would be a completely different person than I am today.

Do you express yourself differently in each language? How does this affect your identity as a queer person?

- Alex:

        - I don't really have a personality in Chinese because I don't know enough of the language to have one. However, I find the relationship with pronouns in Chinese interesting because, although the characters for "he," "she," and non-gendered objects are different, they all sound the same. It feels affirming because it doesn't sound like you're being gendered, which is great and the way I prefer it. It would be cool if English had something like that, but whatever.
- Kyle:
    - In Spanish, I feel like I have to present myself in a more traditionally masculine way to navigate cultural expectations, which can affect how I express my queer identity. However, this also allows me to challenge and change perceptions within my community.

Personal Experiences and Challenges

Can you share a specific story where speaking a certain language had a significant impact on your life or relationships?

- Kyle:
    - There have been many conversations where speaking Spanish has helped me. From working with clients at work to communicating with my own family to flirting with foreign boys over the internet.

Have you faced any challenges or felt self-conscious speaking about your identity in a particular language? Can you share more about that?

- Kyle:
    - There are some Spanish phrases that I simply have not learned or used much because they are not taught or common enough. For example, conversations about mental health or self-expression are not really existent in Spanish households, but I am still able to bond with others who also face these challenges.
- Jeremy
    - I always feel somewhat self-conscious when speaking Spanish with native speakers, especially here at Stanford. Not because of any particular experience, or because I feel like they notice, but because I feel like I'm not able to express myself fully in the way that I'd like to. When I speak in Spanish to people from Latin America or Spain, I always feel like there is a disconnect in the way that we are communicating–like they know that I am putting in more effort to speak to them than they are to me. However, I think those barriers are ones I create for myself. It's simply something that you face when Spanish isn't your first language, or when Spanish is not the native language of the place you grew up.

Emotional and Social Impact

How does speaking multiple languages impact your emotions and sense of belonging?

- Alex:
    - Speaking Chinese generally just makes me feel kind of sad because I don't know much about it, and it's hard for me to express myself. However, it's interesting to connect my queer identity with my linguistic identity because it opens up new possibilities. It's like being both American and Chinese allows me to reframe things in unique ways.
- Kyle:
    - Being able to speak another language (and knowing basic phrases in even more languages) has allowed me to gain an entirely new community with people who deeply understand my upbringing. Specifically, I can connect with fellow queer Latino people who grew up in households that may not have held space for those types of conversations. Additionally, I've gained access to different knowledge and cultural wisdom, even through my own family as some of them only speak Spanish (e.g., my grandma).
- Jeremy
    - I think speaking multiple languages can create an extremely interesting dynamic in any space. For example, if I'm in a room with several international students from Latin America, I shy away from speaking Spanish and often react with laughs or head-nods so they know I understand. However, if I'm in a room with a bunch of native English speakers and a small group who learned Spanish as a second language, we feel excited to communicate with each other in Spanish. There's a certain amount of pride and bonding associated with being able to recognize that we both went through the time and effort to learn the language. I think speaking multiple languages in a group setting can either bring people into the space, or push people away from the space. I just wish that strange barrier between native speakers and bilingual learners didn't have to exist, and we could all share the beauty that is the language that we speak.

Reflections on Learning and Using Languages

What has been your experience learning and using languages in relation to your queer identity? Do you have any memorable experiences where language learning intersected with your understanding of yourself?

- Kyle:
    - There are some Spanish phrases that I simply have not learned or used much because they are not taught or common enough. For example, the entire Spanish language is gendered, so the concept of non-binary is non-existent. While modern phrases like "Latinx" have made their way around (which I disagree with because I find it very colonial given that the letter x is essentially obsolete in the Spanish language), I do appreciate that progress is trying to be made.

Do you find that some of your languages have limitations when discussing queer topics, and if so, do your other languages help to bridge those gaps?

- Kyle:
    - There are some Spanish phrases that I simply have not learned or used much because they are not taught or common enough. For example, conversations about mental health or self-expression are not really existent in Spanish households, but I am still able to bond with others who also face these challenges