**Abstract**

Multilinguals often report having different perceptions of themselves when switching languages, typically indicating their first language (L1) as the one in which they feel more authentic and describing a sense of detachment when using any foreign language (LX). This phenomenon amplifies in migration contexts, where the LX is the language of the host society. The present study approaches the topic in a holistic way, by interconnecting the L1 and LX dimensions and investigating their joint influence on migrants’ self‑perceptions. Data from 468 Italian migrants living in English‑speaking countries, supported by 5 in‑depth interviews, revealed that the maintenance of an emotional and cognitive bond with the L1 anticipated stronger perceptions of self‑change when speaking the LX. Conversely, higher levels of dominance in the LX and its use in social interactions predicted milder feelings of difference. Participants described their identity shifting as a reflexive sociolinguistic practice in response to their emotional and cognitive needs.